

INFORMATION BRIEF

Building Public Library Access for Migrant Farm Worker Community Members

FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development, setting forth libraries' international vision for the development of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically notes the needs of migrants (International Federation of Library Associations, 2014): "Inequality is reduced by the empowerment, education and inclusion of marginalized groups, including women, indigenous peoples, minorities, migrants, refugees, persons with disabilities, older persons, children and youth." (Lyon Declaration, 2014, 2.a)

CONTEXT:

Nearly half a million migrant workers live and work in Canada each year, with thousands employed at Ontario farms and greenhouses. In Ontario, over 40% of employees in crop production were migrant workers.

Public Libraries have an important role to play in supporting migrant workers access services, information and stay connected while in Canada. Migrant workers, however face many unique challenges in accessing library services. Public libraries must be proactive to adapt their services and outreach to meet the needs of migrant workers in Canada.

While this information brief focuses on the context of migrant farm workers, migrant workers live in all types of Canadian communities, working in diverse industries including manufactory, caregiving and food services. Library systems in all types of communities must find ways to be proactive, local outreach to migrant workers.

CHALLENGES FACED BY MIGRANT FARM WORKERS ACCESSING LIBRARY SERVICES:

- **Fear**
 - o Farm workers are discouraged by their employers and home country governments from getting involved in local activities and groups. Because of their temporary immigration status, there is a valid fear that if they access local services, they will be fired, deported, and/or blacklisted from the program in the future.
- **Racism**
 - o Public libraries have traditionally been created and maintained to serve and prioritize white anglophone citizen users, while employing largely white anglophone staff

members, particularly in rural areas; BIPOC im/migrant community members do not want to access or return to spaces where they feel unwelcome or face discrimination. (See for example, [OLA Statement on Libraries and Anti-Racism](#))

- **Lack of outreach**
 - Public libraries have traditionally overlooked marketing to this segment of the population and as a result, most farm workers are not aware of the library's existence and/or that library services are available to them.
- **Lack of relevant materials, services, and programming**
 - Because public libraries have neglected this population, farm workers are not considered during development of collections, services, and programs; workers will not want to access materials that aren't useful to them, or services that present too many barriers.
- **Lack of reading & library literacy**
 - Some workers are from countries where education is not accessible for economic reasons, and have limited/low/no levels of literacy. Many workers are not familiar with libraries as they likely did not have them in their schools or communities.
- **Inaccessible operating hours**
 - Work schedules conflict with regular operating hours; "free time" is usually in the evenings or Sunday afternoons when rural libraries are typically closed.
 - Workers' "free time" is often spent running errands, doing laundry, resting, cooking, and connecting with family, leaving little time for anything considered leisure or recreational.
- **Inaccessible physical location**
 - Farm workers often live in isolated rural areas, on the farm property, and rely on bicycle transportation which means library buildings are largely inaccessible. Rural areas have limited or no public transportation available.

HOW CAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES BUILD ACCESS FOR MIGRANT FARM WORKER COMMUNITY MEMBERS?

Note: These are suggestions based on feedback from migrant farm workers. Not all will be possible considering COVID-19 safety measures, limited staff, & constrained budgets. If your library has an adaption or additional ideas you'd like to discuss, feel free to contact Kit Andres at kit@migrantworkersalliance.org.

- **First things first**
 - External environmental scan - find the individuals, groups, agencies, churches, and organizations who are already connecting with & working alongside migrant farm workers in your area. This connection is key and will ensure that work is not being duplicated. Public library resources are limited - collaboration is your friend!
 - If you're having trouble finding or making connections in your community, contact the Migrant Rights Network for assistance.



- **Addressing, affirming, & alleviating fears**
 - Have a list of local migrant worker resources available to distribute - health care, legal clinics, food & clothing programs, advocacy groups, churches, women's shelters. This will demonstrate that you are connected with a broader network of local support and will help build trust.
 - Be clear about the library's privacy and confidentiality policies; ensure them that the services & materials they access will not be shared with their employer, government agency, or law/immigration enforcement. Review patron confidentiality policies with them and print out a copy for them to take home and review.
 - Assure migrant patrons that by using the library, their immigration status and employment will not be at risk in any way. This needs to be stated explicitly and repeated regularly.

- **Cultivating an anti-racist culture**
 - Regular anti-racism education for all library staff and board members is a great place to start. Some organizations offer workshops and presentations specifically about migrant workers, racism, and immigration. Contact a local PIRG (Public Interest Research Group, often based at universities) or the Migrant Rights Network which has developed public education materials.
 - If staff are unionized, check with your union about anti-racism education materials. Contact the Migrant Rights Network about connecting union members with the network's labour solidarity working group. This can be an action item for all unionized libraries, not just those who service migrant workers.

- **Increasing outreach to farm workers**
 - Connect with local migrant worker groups or community groups that work alongside the farm worker population and discuss how you can collaborate; they can help spread the word about relevant library services.
 - Post flyers at local grocery stores, banks, and convenience stores.
 - Have a WhatsApp number that workers can call or text with questions and have this number listed with the Whatsapp logo on all outreach materials.
 - Find out when local workers have their shopping night (usually a Thursday or Friday) and set up a table outside of the bank or grocery store to advertise services and sign up workers with library cards; have something to give away with library branding (masks, hand sanitizer, string bags, sunglasses, & neck gaiters are the most useful).
 - YouTube video tutorials about how to use the library, its collection, and online resources (including audiobooks, video streaming services like Kanopy, free music downloading resources like Freegal)
 - Create Facebook posts and WhatsApp messages that specifically address migrant farm workers (platforms like Instagram, Twitter, & TikTok are less popular). Local community members with worker connections can help spread the word.
 - Once a few key farm workers find out that the library is a friendly, useful place that won't risk their job or immigration status, word of mouth will travel quickly - establishing trust first is crucial

- **Developing relevant & useful collections, services, & programming**
 - Connect with local migrant worker groups or community groups that have contact with the farm worker population (health care providers, churches, etc.) and ask what the needs are; some

libraries try to start from scratch with a time- and labour-intensive needs assessments process when the groundwork has already been done by other groups in the community. Libraries can save time, effort, & resources by consulting with groups who are already established in the community.

- o Diversity in materials is important - in terms of race & nationality of creators and language.
 - o Many workers arrive in communities for the first time without knowing where they are, so engaging materials and interactive resources about local history - especially Black history - and geography (such as local road maps) are helpful.
 - o Internet access is a basic need as workers rely on it to connect with loved ones back home, send money to their family, and access support and health care information. Despite this need, not all farms provide wireless internet connection and workers are stuck with large data costs. Lending out wireless hotspot devices is a popular request, so if resources are limited, this is the best service to invest in.
- **Literacy support**
 - o Create outreach materials that are accessible to differing levels of literacy. Prioritize marketing the library collection and services in multiple languages - especially Spanish - and convey information with more simple and visual approaches, rather than relying solely on text descriptions that can often act as a barrier to access.
 - o Provide adult literacy and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) materials and services.
- **Extended hours**
 - o When public health guidelines permit in-person browsing and services, consider offering extended hours one night a week to accommodate workers' schedules. If your library is in a more central location, make it a night when local workers regularly do their shopping. Connect with local migrant worker groups to learn what days and times work best.
- **Hit the road!**
 - o Connect with local organizations and service providers who regularly visit the farms and discuss how you can safely combine visits. During stay-at-home orders in Ontario, exemptions include providing services to support economically disadvantaged & vulnerable community members (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-provincewide-shutdown>)
 - o An example of often requested services on the farms include mobile mini-offices with laptop, scanner, printer.
- **Beyond borders**
 - o Build relationships with library associations in farm workers' home countries. A list can be found here: <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/iro/intlassocorgconf/libraryassociations>
 - o Connect with public libraries in farm workers' communities. For example, Jamaica Library Service lists its public libraries here: <https://www.jls.gov.jm/>

GOING BEYOND THE LIBRARY

Migrant workers face significant systemic barriers in Canada related to their precarious status. To learn more about ongoing advocacy efforts and how you can support the push for full immigration status for all, visit Migrant Rights Network <https://migrantrights.ca>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

This document was developed by Kit Andres at the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, with suggestions based on feedback from migrant farm workers. If your library has an adaption or additional ideas you'd like to discuss, feel free to contact Kit at kit@migrantworkersalliance.org



APPENDIX: ABOUT THE SEASONAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS PROGRAM

Ontario issued 28,805 temporary work permits in 2017, the majority of which were under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (The Canadian Council for Refugees' Provincial Report Card for Ontario in 2018).

WHAT IS THE SEASONAL AGRICULTURAL WORKER PROGRAM?

The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) is a program through which Canadian employers (ie Farmers or farm companies) can hire migrant workers for up to 8 months at a time, when they are unable to find Canadians for the roles. SAWP workers come from Mexico; the Caribbean countries of: Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; Barbados; Dominic; Grenada; Jamaica; Montserrat; St. Kitts-Nevis; St. Lucia; St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Trinidad and Tobago.

This program has been in place since the 1960s, and worker organizing has taken place for almost as long as the program.

Workers and advocates have pointed to a number of problems inherent to the structure of the SAWP program design. Most notably that through the program work permits are "tied" to one employer - meaning a worker's immigration status is contingent on their employment with a particular farmer or farm company. This creates an inherent power imbalance that leaves migrant workers disproportionately vulnerable to abuse. Additionally, until recently, workers under the SAWP had no access to permanent residency - meaning that workers could live and work in Canada for decades without ever having the opportunity to immigrate permanently. Thanks to decades of advocacy, in the last couple of years have pathways to permanent residency been introduced on a pilot basis, though these remain limited. Workers have also documented the inadequate housing provided by their employers and systematic difficulties in accessing services including healthcare.

Consult resources below to learn more about temporary foreign worker programs in Canada.

WHAT REGIONS IN ONTARIO HAVE THE MOST SAWP WORKERS?

Norfolk County; Essex/Kent/Lambton; The Niagara Peninsula; Holland Marsh (*Source: Employment and Social Development Canada. Data comes from 2016 Labour Market Impact Assessments for temporary foreign workers in agricultural positions).

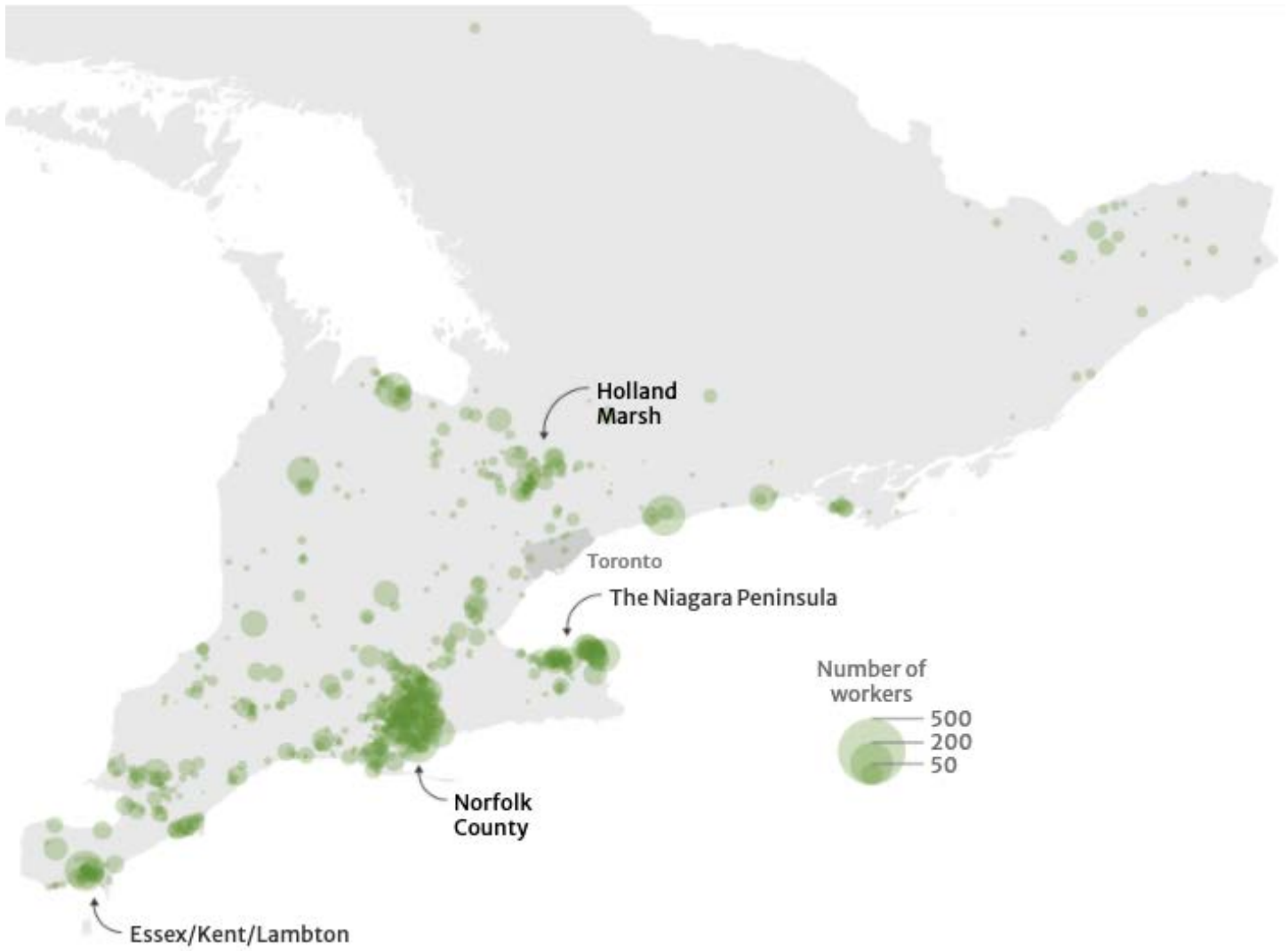


Image Credit: (Keung, The Toronto Star, 2017)

LEARN MORE

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