

Policy of Investigation

The project explored Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) focusing on the Saskatchewan context and on migrant farm workers from Mexico. In order to discover the deeper implications of a food system built on migrant labour, the project included investigation of broader topics such as what were/are the assumptions guiding Canadian policy-making in this field, how Canadian agriculture, trade and labour policy affects communities internationally, where the root of the economic struggle in both Canadian and Mexican rural areas originates and whether food sovereignty policy initiatives offer positive alternatives. The project also began to uncover the social, cultural and economic changes and impacts on communities in Mexico, where the workers come from.

Activities Conducted

- Attended *Migration Nation* workshop and *Labour and Vulnerable Workers* workshop at *Community Organizing to Make Poverty History* conference – Saskatoon, SK, September 16, 2006
- Center for Second Languages community Spanish class –September 20 to November 22, 2006
- Technical support to Vía Campesina North American Regional Meeting – Mexico City, Mexico, November 13-18, 2006
- Presentation on Food Sovereignty in Canada at international forum – Mexico City, Mexico, November 16, 2006
- Met with a variety of groups working with migrant farm workers in Ontario –Toronto, ON, January 31-February 2, 2007
- Preparation for *Nyeleni* conference in Mali including logistics for Canadian delegation of farmers, indigenous people, fisher people and NGO's
- Attended *Nyeleni: Food Sovereignty Conference* and worked as part of staff team –Selingue, Mali, February 18-28, 2007
- Research into Saskatchewan rationale for joining the SWAP and the Saskatchewan Action Committee on the Rural Economy process
- Research overview of the SAWP and related topics and survey of recent media on migrant workers
- Interviewed by Making the Links Radio and CBC Saskatchewan –June 21 and June 30, 2007 respectively
- Travelled to El Paso, Texas to work with mentor Carlos Marentes' Border Agricultural Workers Project and learn the realities of the borderlands – July 25-August 12, 2007
- Travelled to Chihuahua, Mexico City, Tlaxcala, and Oaxaca, Mexico (with Food First "El Camino del Migrante") to conduct interviews and film farm leaders, indigenous leaders, peasants, and elected officials on the causes of migration, the economic, social and cultural impact of migrant labour on Mexican communities and potential solutions; to research food

- sovereignty projects; and, to further improve Spanish language skills –July 25-August 12, 2007
- Wrote article to Briarpatch Magazine for November Precarious Labour issue –August, 2007
 - Published article in *Union Farmer Monthly* -September, 2007
 - Created video essay –August-September, 2007

Key Findings/Learnings

I have learned a great deal throughout the Fellowship year. Perhaps the most important learning for me was the realization that on the micro level this policy issue is complex, multi-faceted and open to many debates, but on the macro level I am now firm in the belief that forced migration is not an inevitable outcome of a globalized world. It may be true that Mexican workers coming to Canada need the work and Canadian farms need the labour, yet it is not true that this system is irrevocable. Certain conditions and policies have created a reality in which thousands of Mexicans must look to the North for employment and where Canadian agriculture is more and more reliant on temporary labour from abroad. In many cases Canadian agricultural and trade policy have been at the forefront of creating a more industrialized and liberalized food economy around the world. It follows then that a shift in Canadian policy has the ability to have an immensely positive impact in the area of migration and that these policy shifts should not necessarily be limited to internal labour or immigration policy.

I have also found that the movement for food sovereignty is gaining momentum in many parts of the world, both at an international policy level and at a local, practical level. However, it is not an easy challenge for Canada to take up. It will take courage and a strong belief in the importance of vibrant rural communities, the value of self-sufficiency, and Canada's role as promoter of equity and justice around the world.

Possible Follow-ups

- Continue to submit articles for publication on experience and knowledge gained throughout Fellowship activities
- Interview other Saskatchewan farmers currently enrolled in the SAWP
- Create specific policy recommendations for the Saskatchewan provincial government and meet with Lon Borgerson, Minister of Regional and Economic Development and David Forbes, Minister of Labour to present ideas
- Hold public event on the issue of migrant labour in my own community and use video essay as introductory tool
- Use video essay to apply for funding to produce longer documentary to further develop various aspects of the project (ie explore in greater detail the gender and racial dimension of migration or the Saskatchewan angle)