Rock Stars and Bad Apples: Alternative Food Networks and Precarious Farm Worker Regimes in British Columbia

by

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B.Sc. (Global Resource Systems), University of British Columbia, 2011

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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Abstract

This research explores how sustainable food initiatives in British Columbia have engaged with social protection and political inclusion for farm workers. Specifically, I consider two groups facing precarious employment: migrant farm workers and un(der)paid agricultural interns. Some members of alternative food networks idealize farm employers as “rock stars” while characterizing disaffirming cases as anomalous “bad apples.” Based on qualitative research, I find that alternative food actors have addressed farm worker social protection through three broad avenues: a moral economy, consumer-driven regulation, and a tenuous engagement with the state. I argue that some of the assumptions underlying these three approaches reproduce precariousness for farm workers; they thus constitute a barrier to the achievement of alternative food networks’ vision of food system transformation. I conclude by considering how a food sovereignty framework might involve farm workers, alternative food actors and other stakeholders in defining human-intensive food systems based on dignified livelihoods.

Keywords: alternative food networks; farm workers; food movement; migrant workers; precarious employment; unpaid internships
Dedication

To the many teachers who have encouraged me to recognize linkages between social and ecological crises, and to build committed relationships that parallel the openings these linkages present for collective change; in particular to Dave Perry, Roger Rajotte and Art Bomke.

And to those who are struggling for a food system that enables all human and more-than-human communities to thrive.
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List of Acronyms

AFNs  Alternative Food Networks
AS    Agricultural Stream (of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program)
AWA   Agriculture Workers Alliance
BAWP  Border Agricultural Workers Project
BCFSN British Columbia Food Systems Network
CIW   Coalition of Immokalee Workers
CSA   Community-Supported Agriculture
EI    Employment Insurance
HSO   Higher-Skilled Occupations (of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program)
J4MW  Justicia for Migrant Workers
LSO   Lower-Skilled Occupations
NAFTA North American Free Trade Agreement
NIEAP Non-Immigrant Employee Authorization Program
RAMA  Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture
SAWP  Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program
TFWP  Temporary Foreign Worker Program
UFCW  United Food and Commercial Workers Union
### Terminology

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<td><strong>Alternative food networks</strong></td>
<td>Groups of people involved in efforts to create a counterpart to modes of food production and distribution that generate social and ecological harms. These efforts are often centred around localization, direct marketing, and small-scale, ecological methods of food production (Goodman et al. 2012).</td>
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<td><strong>Community-supported agriculture</strong></td>
<td>An alternative, localized model of food distribution in which members pay farmers up front in exchange for a weekly amount of produce throughout the season. Some CSAs allow in-kind exchanges of labour from members or invite volunteer labour contributions (Pole &amp; Gray, 2012; Ravenscroft et al., 2013).</td>
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<td><strong>Farm worker regime</strong></td>
<td>A particular constellation of employment terms and conditions, as well as the ways in which government and industry actors recruit farm workers (Candland &amp; Sil, 2001; Tjandraningsih &amp; Nugroho, 2008).</td>
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<td><strong>Food system</strong></td>
<td>The systematic linkages between food production, processing, distribution, consumption, recycling and disposal. A food system analysis may include consideration of the ecological, economic, political, social and cultural support systems in which food is embedded (Gliessman, 2007).</td>
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<td><strong>Minimum wage</strong></td>
<td>The 2014 legal minimum wage in BC is $10.25. A living wage indicates the amount two earners in a specific area would each need on a full-time basis to support themselves and two children. This wage would be $17.02/hour in BC’s Fraser Valley, $18.93 in Greater Victoria, and $20.10 in Metro Vancouver. More ambitious wage-related proposals include an unconditional basic income (UBI) (Wright, 2010). For the purpose of better understanding how alternative food networks have addressed farm worker social protections within the context of existing wage regulations, I mainly focus on minimum wage provisions.</td>
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<td><strong>Neoliberalism</strong></td>
<td>An economic and political doctrine that proposes to optimize human well-being through laissez-faire government policies that facilitate entrepreneurial capitalist freedom. Proponents of neoliberalism advocate privatizing public services, removing regulations that constrain markets, eliminating protectionist trade tariffs, and minimizing public sector spending in order to promote economic growth. In practice, neoliberalism frequently involves introducing market regulations that subsidize capital accumulation (Harvey, 2005; Pechlaner &amp; Otero, 2010).</td>
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<td>Oppression</td>
<td>A relationship in which a dominant group categorizes a subordinate group based on some identifying characteristic, and then systematically benefits from treating that group or individual member of that group in a degrading, inhumane or inequitable manner. I understand hierarchies of oppression such as race, gender and class as operating in interlocking, rather than additive ways (Collins, 1993; Dalrymple &amp; Burke, 1995; Johnson, 2000).</td>
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<td>Political inclusion</td>
<td>Peoples’ collective capacities to meaningfully identify and address decisions that affect their lives (Wright, 2010), and based on cultural approaches they deem appropriate.</td>
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<td>Precarious employment</td>
<td>Lower levels of the following: wages, integration into social security benefits and statutory entitlements, employability, and employment stability (e.g. casual, temporary and seasonal contracts) (Tangian, 2007; Vosko, 2007).</td>
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<td>Racialization</td>
<td>Racialization involves a process of constructing people as Other on the basis of their country of origin, physical traits, cultural practices and social characteristics. Racialized people are often defined in opposition to whiteness, a socially constructed racial identity that tends to confer various forms of social, political and cultural power and privilege to people with pale skin colour. Referring to a person’s national origin or immigration status often acts as a euphemism for race (Satzewich, 2011; Sharma, 2006; Slocum, 2007).</td>
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<td>Social protections</td>
<td>Laws, policies and programs intended to ensure workers’ protection from poverty and work-related injury (Gray 2004; Sabates-Wheeler &amp; Feldman, 2011), including wage-related provisions and access to occupational health and safety coverage.</td>
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1. Research context

Although they are estimated to constitute more than 40% of the 1.1 billion people in the agricultural workforce worldwide, farm workers are frequently overlooked for their vital contributions to production agriculture and their potential role in more sustainable food systems (Hurst, 2007). As distinct from farmers, farm workers generally do not own or rent the equipment or land on which they work. Rather, they are hired in exchange for a wage to labour in fields, greenhouses, orchards, livestock production units, and primary processing facilities. This labour force includes sharecroppers, volunteer farm workers, seasonal migrant farm workers, as well as workers who receive in-kind wages such as rent and food (Gray 2014; Guthman, 2004; Hurst, 2007; Wells, 1996).

Farm workers are among the world’s most marginalized labourers. This is due to factors such as the informal and temporary nature of many farm employment arrangements, the challenge of labour organizing and enforcing workers’ rights in remote rural areas, and many ‘undocumented’ or migrant workers’ fears of repatriation (Hurst, 2007; ILO, 2004; Murphy 2006). Dynamics like peasant land dispossession and the undercutting of traditional livelihoods by trade liberalization prompt many former farmers to seek waged employment on farms other than their own (Adam, 2013; Binford, 2009; Li, 2010; Minkoff-Zern, 2014; Otero, 2011). Often, they will migrate within their own countries, undertake highly dangerous border crossings, or enlist in temporary migration programs to higher-income nations in search of paid farm work (Gertel & Sippel, 2014; Holmes, 2013; Hurst, 2007; Walia, 2013).
Increasing input costs in the agricultural sector, along with pressure from food processors and retailers to reduce prices – a “cost-price squeeze” – often compels farm employers to adopt a low-wage labour strategy in order to remain competitive (Barnetson, 2009; Murphy 2006). Because cheap food costs enable lower wages and capital accumulation across all industries, the Canadian state has traditionally cultivated a legal environment that permits precarious labour as a way to subsidize food costs (Barnetson, 2009). This is based on the premise that low-cost food serves the national best interest (Skogstad, 2007). Even on farming systems where mechanization has largely replaced human labour, farm workers are often required for activities like the harvesting and packing of sensitive fruits and vegetables (Gray 2014). A dependence on hired farm workers is also prevalent on many diversified and organic farms, which commonly use labour-intensive techniques as substitutes for agrochemical inputs and mechanization (Alkon, 2013; Getz et al. 2008; Gliessman, 2007; Guthman, 2004; Walker, 2012).

In the face of the contemporary food system’s extensive impacts on ecosystems and human communities, social movements and civil society-led initiatives worldwide have sought to reverse the destructive impacts of food production, processing, distribution and to create more sustainable alternatives. Many of the successes of North American alternative food projects have resided in the realms of environmental and human health (Allen, 2004; Goodman et al. 2012). In order to make good on food movements’ stated social justice goals, food studies scholars have also called for critical attention to the conditions of farm workers (Alkon, 2013; Allen, 2004; Brown & Getz 2008; Harrison, 2008; Pilgeram, 2011; Shreck et al. 2006).

British Columbia (BC), Canada has been recognized as a hub for initiatives focused on local agriculture and ecologically regenerative food systems (Connelly et al. 2011; MacRae & Donahue, 2013; Wittman & Barbolet, 2011; Wittman et al. 2012). At the same time, agricultural workers in highly precarious employment conditions grow many of the province’s local crops. In this thesis, I explore how alternative food networks in BC have engaged with social protections and political inclusion for two groups of hired agricultural labourers whose labour regimes exhibit features characteristic of ‘precarious employment.’
1.1.1. Precarious employment

Precariousness in contemporary employment relationships refers broadly to a high degree of insecurity, unpredictability and risk for workers (Anderson 2010; Kalleberg, 2009). It generally involves low levels of regulatory protection, low income, low access to social benefits, little control over the labour process, and a lack of assurance regarding the continuity of employment (Rodgers, 1989). Feminist political economy scholar Leah Vosko (2010) explains that precarious employment is also shaped by a person’s social location, which includes interactions between that person’s legal status, political status and social relations. Accordingly, inequalities and patterns of alienation arising from precarious employment tend to unfold with particularly harmful impacts along intersecting lines of gender, citizenship and racialization, as will be discussed in the case of migrant and recent immigrant farm workers in BC. In the case of interns, an Ontario survey indicated that 73% of underpaid interns were female (Attfield & Couture, 2014), which parallels the gender findings of a larger U.S. study (77% female) (Gardner, 2011). The rationale underpinning precarious employment proposes that collectively held risks and benefits, such as poverty and political inclusion, should be devolved to the level of rational, self-interested individual responsibility (Vosko et al., 2009).

Scholars of labour studies underscore that neoliberal globalization and its associated policies and sociocultural processes, which prioritize the needs of economic agents abstracted into the idea of a ‘market’, are driving the contemporary restructuring of precarious work (Kalleberg, 2009; Wilson & Ebert, 2013). Since the early 2000s, BC has witnessed the kind of weakening of state regulatory and policy protections for workers that generates labour market ‘flexibility’ (Fairey, 2005). This flexibility enables employers and the self-employed to respond rapidly to changing market conditions and remain competitive (Bolton et al. 2012; Kalleberg, 2009; Morgan et al. 2013; Wilson & Ebert, 2013). The importance of this competitive flexibilization has been documented in small firms with highly tailored production systems (Morgan et al., 2013) as well as larger companies and public sector employers (Weinkopf, 2009). As explored in the study by Morgan et al. (2013) of young Australians employed in creative industries, for some workers, employment flexibilization may be welcomed as a way to maintain personal
autonomy and 'keep one’s options open.' Here, perhaps a key distinction that can be made between precariousness and desirable forms of flexibility is a worker’s ability to assert control over labour process factors such as wages, working conditions and employment stability. Because labour market regulations have been relaxed in numerous political contexts worldwide, many scholars anticipate that widespread (albeit heterogeneous) patterns of flexibilized, precarious employment arrangements will persist and intensify (Arrowsmith, 2007; Bolton et al., 2012; Vosko, 2007).

1.1.2. Introduction to precarious farm worker regimes

I consider two groups of farm workers engaged in precarious forms of employment: migrant farm workers and un(der)paid agricultural interns.

In Canada, migrant farm workers are employed through one of several streams of the federally administered Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). While the majority are from Mexico, some also come from Jamaica, Guatemala, the Philippines, and other countries (McLaughlin & Hennebry, 2013). The vast majority are male, and they generally work in Canada for between eight months to two years (Preibisch & Grez, 2013). Migrant farm workers face considerable barriers to changing employers while in Canada, engaging in labour organizing, or applying for permanent residency (Hennebry & Preibisch, 2010; McLaughlin, 2010; Weiler & Otero, 2013). Their institutionalized vulnerability, social exclusion and political marginalization situates them in one of the country’s lowest paid, most hazardous, and least regulated occupations (Binford, 2013; Fairey et al., 2008; Perry, 2012).

By ‘un(der)paid’ interns, I am referring to agricultural interns who are unpaid or paid less than minimum wage. Un(der)paid agricultural internships primarily occur on farms that are small-scale and organic, or urban (Endres et al. 2010; Kalyuzhny, 2011; Pilgeram, 2011; Schutzbank, 2012). As with farm interns elsewhere, (Hamilton, 2011a; Kalyuzhny, 2011), farm interns in BC often exchange their labour for training and experience, food and housing, and sometimes a stipend. Interns on sustainability-oriented farms typically have not grown up on a farm and are often post-secondary students or recent graduates (Endres et al., 2010; Hamilton, 2011a; MacAuley, 2014). In
terms of ethnic representation, Lorien MacAuley’s (2014) study of apprenticeships\(^1\) in Virginia indicates a highly disproportionate degree of whiteness among both apprentices and apprentice host farmers, at least in that particular U.S. state. All of the 45 surveyed apprentice host-farmers were white, and 93.9% of the apprentices they had ever hosted were white. This high degree of whiteness is at odds with ethnic diversity in Virginia as a whole. Interns' involvement in local food activism, university classes and popular food authors often “fire their passion to be involved with food and farming and the politics of both” (Hamilton, 2011b, p. 130). Un(der)paid farm interns tend to be already immersed in alternative food efforts, and they often share many of the same interests and social privileges as other proponents of local, organic, and sustainable food systems (Pilgeram, 2011). Because farm internship arrangements are often informal and 'under-the-table,' as I explore further in this thesis, interns may not have access to basic employee social benefits such as parental leave or coverage with standard occupational health and safety insurance.

Taken together, my comparative analysis of these two farm worker regimes constitutes a study that interlaces the perspectives of farm workers, employers of farm workers, food movement participants, and migrant worker advocates. This research offers insight into challenges that alternative food networks face in realizing their potential for countering forms of oppression and exploitation in the food system, as well as opportunities for these networks to help make dignified agrarian livelihoods more widely viable. It also explores how alternative food networks reconcile their agrarian goal of transforming the food system through human-intensive agriculture with the context of precarious forms of farm employment, and how they might pursue this goal through decent forms of agricultural employment.

\(^1\) The terms “internship” and “apprenticeship” tend to be used interchangeably in reference to informal labour and training arrangements on farms that are typically small-scale and organic or urban. Farm apprenticeships are not included among formally recognized trades-related apprenticeship programs (e.g. pipe fitting). While I mainly use the term intern in this study, I occasionally use it synonymously with the term apprentice.
1.2. Research objective

Grappling with farm workers’ lack of access to political power and social protection has proved to be a challenge for many North American advocates of sustainable food systems. In part, this challenge may reflect the popular impulse to ensure social and environmental protection through market mechanisms that enable ‘shopping for change’ (Johnston & Szabo, 2010; Roff, 2007). As I will explore in Chapter 2, romantic agrarianism has also had significant political bearing by cultivating support among alternative food networks and the broader public for policies that exempt farm workers from standard social protections, and that enable producers to maintain lower operating costs.

Most research to date on farm workers and alternative food networks concerns migrant or racialized newcomer farm workers in the U.S. context (Allen, 2004; Brown & Getz 2008; Getz, 2008; Getz et al., 2008; Shreck et al., 2006). Unlike the United States (Minkoff-Zern, 2014), most Canadian farm workers do not have an immigration status constructed as ‘undocumented’ (Basok et al. 2013). The Canadian context of both legalized temporary migration programs and informal internships sheds light on the challenges of grappling with food system transformation within both idealized, prefigurative spheres and in spheres occupied by the non-alternative majority.

My purpose here is not to imply that un(der)paid farm interns and migrant farm workers experience the same working conditions, severity of precariousness, access to political power, experiences of intersecting oppression, and ability to access the means to a flourishing life. Rather, considering migrant farm workers and un(der)paid farm interns in tandem offers an analytical juncture into how alternative food networks engage with social protections affecting ‘their own’ members (i.e. interns), as well as people they perceive as network ‘outsiders’ (i.e. migrants). In turn, this sheds light into how alternative food networks address precarious labour in modes of agriculture they perceive as ‘alternative’ and desirable, and also in those framed as conventional, industrial and objectionable.

To this end, the following research questions steered my data gathering and
analysis: **How have alternative food networks in BC engaged with access to social protection and political inclusion for precarious farm workers? What challenges and opportunities do alternative food networks face in rethinking the role of precarious employment in food system transformation?**

By focusing my analytical gaze on abstract categories like ‘labour,’ ‘worker,’ and ‘employment,’ I recognize the risk of essentializing what is considered ‘work’ and its relative importance to a person’s existence. In relation to migrants, the discursive construction of migrant workers as ‘workers’ risks reifying the idea that the most important of their contributions are necessarily economic. This obscures the social, cultural, spiritual, musical, political and other projects they pursue in Canada and elsewhere (McLaughlin, 2009b). With regard to interns, on the other hand, I contend that greater clarity around what is considered ‘work’ can help to avoid conditions in which they may lack adequate compensation and social protection. On the whole, a better understanding of precarious employment, along with the social and political relations that enable it, can advance livelihood relationships that support the social recognition of a person’s full humanity, their political inclusion, and access to the material stuff of life (Fraser, 2003).

1.3. **Analytical framework**

To understand some of the dynamics in BC alternative food networks’ engagement with social protection for precariously employed farm workers, I draw upon an analytical framework of critical agrarianism (Carlisle, 2013). Critical agrarianism calls for an analysis of the political economy structures and historical factors that have led to contemporary forms of oppression affecting people who produce food. However, it also challenges researchers to consider how agrarian land-based livelihoods and associated political practices might be radically reimagined in ways that do not reproduce such forms of oppression. A critical agrarian analytical approach is appropriate for the questions I explore in this study because it evaluates food system sustainability efforts on their own terms, while linking the micro-practices of BC alternative food networks to broader issues of precarious employment in human-intensive food systems.
Under the framework of critical agrarianism, I link the concepts of agrarian romanticism and agricultural exceptionalism, precarious employment regimes, and a moral economy. Whereas agrarian romanticism involves an idealization of farmers and farming, agricultural exceptionalism involves exempting agriculture from conventional policies and regulations in order to ensure ongoing processes of capital accumulation (Barnetson, 2009). Agrarian romanticism often provides social legitimation for this exceptionalism (Getz et al., 2008; Skogstad, 1998). In addition, I integrate E.P. Thompson’s (1991) concept of a moral economy to highlight some of the specific ways in which participants in alternative food networks normalize or contest existing precarious labour regimes on the basis of ostensibly reciprocal, ethically-based obligations between employers, farm workers, and occasionally the state. I further explicate the history and relevance of these sets of analytical approaches and concepts in Chapters 2 and 3.

Finally, turning to the question of political inclusion for all farm workers in BC, I propose the concept of food sovereignty as a guide for possible future relationship-building between those who are concerned with dignified farm worker livelihoods and those who are focused on realizing a food system that is at once human-intensive, socially supportable and ecologically sound. Food sovereignty explicitly confronts power inequalities in the global food system, calls for democratic control over the means of production, and supports people’s capacity to ensure that food-related policies are appropriate to the diverse social and ecological contexts in which they occur (Desmarais, 2007; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; Patel, 2012a). Although food sovereignty activists may strategically engage at the level of the nation-state (e.g. by claiming rights-based entitlements from governments to provide access to food) (Schiavoni, 2014), the ‘sovereignty’ component of food sovereignty does not imply a defensive, nationalist and state-centric organizing frame. Rather, food sovereignty asserts numerous layered levels of democratic jurisdiction, which includes transnational agrarian organizing (Patel, 2010). Food sovereignty is also attentive to conjunctural moments for confronting oppressive power relations in civil society. For instance, it names oppressive processes such as patriarchy and racism in order to reverse the ways these interact with economic and political oppressions to disproportionately marginalize
certain people in the food system (Etmanski, 2012a; Patel, 2012a), including precariously employed farm workers.

1.4. Methodology

In engaging with this qualitative study of alternative food networks and farm worker regimes, I have adopted Michael Burawoy’s (1998) extended case method. An extended case study approach combines ethnographic techniques with social theory to consider the social structures that impinge upon a field site, but that may not be available to a researcher’s direct scrutiny. This involves ‘extending’ firsthand observations to geographical and historical processes, reflexively considering how the observer is implicated in the lives of research participants who are being studied, analyzing micro-level processes within the context of macro-level social structures and forces, and linking ethnographic insights to broader social theory (Burawoy, 2009). The reflexive scientific approach espoused in the extended method is appropriate to this study because it considers granular, contextual data as windows onto sites for eliminating forms of oppression that colonize the life world (Burawoy, 1998; Habermas, 1984).

As a researcher who has been woven into her study at multiple layers, reflexivity was particularly important for attempting to maintain both analytical rigour and accountability toward the people and institutions I was investigating. The social location from which I pursue my research, activism and advocacy includes privileges based on a white-settler social position, Canadian citizenship, being considered able-bodied and cisgendered, a middle-class upbringing, and a university education. This social location underpins one of the major limitations of this study; my ability to build participatory research relationships with migrants, in particular, was very limited. Some of the barriers to fulfilling this type of research included my limited Spanish proficiency, constraints on my time and financial resources to complete this study, migrant advocacy organizations that were overwhelmed with meeting the needs of migrants and were not always positioned to welcome new volunteers or researchers, and the effectiveness of farm worker regimes that socially and geographically isolate migrants from other people in Canada. In my future scholarly pursuits, I intend to address these barriers with greater
effectiveness and involve migrants and other participants more directly in establishing my research questions, methods and analysis.

On the other hand, my prior employment as a (paid) farm worker, along with my involvement in various forms of advocacy and activism to advance both food system sustainability and justice for migrant farm workers proved vital to understanding the kinds of questions that were relevant to this study. This study was, in part, informed by numerous informal conversations with other actors in alternative food and migrant justice initiatives. Even more important were the relationships I was fortunate to have cultivated outside of my studies; many of my personal friends and colleagues were vital in connecting me with interview participants, as were relationships developed by my study supervisors. I feel that personal and political immersion in my topic of inquiry did not compromise the integrity of the research. On the contrary, the occasional tensions that arose from my rootedness in the context of the study reinforced my commitment to avoid reductive analyses, and to consider the relevance of my study in both formal academic contexts along with other spaces of learning and social change.

1.4.1. Methods of Data Collection

Fieldwork for this extended case study took place between the late summer of 2013 and winter of 2014. My study site encompassed the traditional Indigenous territories of the Pentlatch, Lekwiltok, K’omoks, Syilx, Squamish, Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Snaw-naw-as Nations. In settler colonial terminology, these locations are known as BC’s Lower Mainland, the Okanagan Valley, Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. Whereas treaties between First Nations and other Canadians were historically the main instrument for the Crown to acquire land from Indigenous peoples, treaties have not been signed with First Peoples in most of BC (Alfred, 2001; Woolford, 2005). This is significant for the purposes of my study because contemporary food production that takes place in BC occurs almost entirely on unceded Indigenous territories. Recognizing the neo-colonial context, some non-Indigenous farmers have sought the blessing of the Nation on whose traditional territories they are growing food.
In order to understand farm worker regimes and alternative food networks in the province, I aimed to capture a rich picture from multiple angles. This involved seeking perspectives from a wide range of food system actors and triangulating data from several types of sources. In studies that pursue a multi-faceted understanding of a given social phenomenon, data triangulation acts as “a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin, 2012, p. 82). The bulk of my data collection involved 25 semi-structured interviews (including one re-interview and one interview with two participants) with people involved in diverse aspects of farm work and food movement advocacy, and in both rural and urban areas (Table 1). Study participants included un(der)paid interns, people employed as TFWP migrant farm workers, employers of both, people involved in alternative food networks, and people involved in advocacy for migrant farm workers.

Table 1. Breakdown of interview participants by their role in the food system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Un(der)paid farm intern</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant farm worker</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un(der)paid intern employers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant employer</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative food network activist/advocate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant activist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Some of the categorizations in this table are necessarily artificial. There was considerable overlap between alternative food network activists/advocates, un(der)paid farm interns, and all employers (e.g. many employers of interns had previously been interns themselves, many interns and employers of both group were members of alternative food organizations, etc.). I considered intern employers as those who had hired un(der)paid interns at any time.

Prior to every interview, I sought informed consent (written or audio-recorded) from each participant. While the SFU Office of Research Ethics approved this study as minimal risk, I explained to participants that I would do my utmost to ensure their interests were safeguarded, which mainly pertained to assuring their confidentiality. All of the names I use are pseudonyms, except in cases where participants specifically requested for their or their organization’s real name to be published. As an incentive to participate and small thank-you for participants’ time, I offered interviewees $20 cash, which most accepted. Nearly all of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed,
although in a few instances I took handwritten notes instead. Following an interview, I shared a copy of the transcript or notes with each participant and invited confirmation that the notes reflected their statements accurately, in some cases subsequently revising the notes slightly based on their feedback. In order to avoid asking migrant participants for their personal contact information, which might reduce their level of comfort with participating in the project, I offered them the option of contacting me if they desired a copy of the transcript. Many participants expressed interest in receiving a final copy of the study findings and analysis. My preference would have been to share a preliminary version of the findings and analysis with participants, invite input, and report on their feedback in the final published version of the study. However, due to time and logistical constraints (including a cross-country move), I will simply be sharing the final version of the study report with interested participants.

Although I tailored the interview questions to a given interviewee’s role in the provincial food system, in general I asked participants about their particular interests, challenges, and experiences in BC agriculture and/or migrant advocacy, and the kinds of changes they wished to see. Interviews with migrant farm workers were conducted with the support of two native Spanish speakers and, later, a Spanish translator. With a view to safeguarding participants’ confidentiality, I did not interview workers and employers from the same worksite. Most interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

As a way of complementing interview data with naturalistic observations, I engaged in observation at several key alternative food network sites and events. For example, I attended food-related festivals, farmers’ markets, and public presentations on food justice issues at the various sites where interviews took place. This enabled me to draw linkages and comparisons between sites and the perspectives of interview participants. I took handwritten jottings in the field to record descriptions of scenes, dialogue, people and ideas I encountered during these observations (Emerson et al. 2011).

An analysis of relevant documents allowed me to further triangulate between data sources and to ‘take the pulse’ of unfolding discussions on alternative food networks and farm workers in BC. Document analysis included following several email
listservs of non-profit food societies and networks whose discussions focused on issues pertaining to provincial food policy and food system sustainability issues. I also analyzed popular media articles, audio broadcasts, job postings and employment contracts that discussed migrant farm workers and un(der)paid interns in relation to food system sustainability efforts.

After digitizing all of the empirical materials, my data analysis process involved line-by-line coding and memo-writing as a way of identifying emergent themes and ‘mini-concepts’ (Snow et al. 2003; Van den Hoonaaard, 2012). This approach to data generation and analysis was iterative. For example, I occasionally revised my interview schedules based on responses from participants. By following an inductive approach to data analysis and theory-generation, I aimed to stay attuned to themes that related to broader social processes. Shedding light on these processes underpinned my overall goal of contributing to conversations in scholarly and activist circles by highlighting opportunities to change the conditions that lead to farm worker exploitation, and to advance dignified, economically supportable rural livelihoods.

1.5. Overview of thesis

This chapter outlined the context and methodology for my inquiry, along with the analytical and practical contributions I aim to offer. In the chapters that follow, I demonstrate how the repertoire of strategies and norms that participants in BC alternative food networks often adopt in relation to precarious labour – including a moral economy and an impulse toward market-based approaches – are often focused on rewarding idealized individual farm employers while neglecting structures that create precarious employment for farm workers.

My review of the literature that informs my research questions spans Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of food system sustainability advocacy and activism, discussing both the challenges alternative food networks have faced and directions they have taken in addressing precarious farm worker employment in North America. In Chapter 3, I outline the history and development of migrant farm worker
regimes in Canada and BC and highlight the debates around contemporary un(der)paid farming internships. I then describe the specific factors that create precariousness for these two farm worker regimes. Chapter 4 encompasses the main empirical contributions of this research, in which I present the three main avenues through which I observed BC alternative food networks addressing issues of social protection for farm workers. In the fifth chapter, I evaluate these avenues and their implications for food system transformation, concluding with a discussion of food sovereignty and possibilities to advance political inclusion for all farm workers.

My thesis argues that forms of precarious farm employment are founded on denying basic social protections allotted to other workers. As such, these labour regimes constitute an obstacle to alternative food networks’ vision of transforming the food system through socially sustainable human-intensive agriculture. Precarious farm work is also at odds with alternative food networks’ key stated goals, including social justice, encouraging more people to pursue viable farming livelihoods, and scaling out regionalized food systems. Through this research, I contend that the three approaches through which I observed members of BC alternative food networks addressing social protections for farm workers – a moral economy, consumer-driven regulation, and state engagement – often do not extend to those who are least able to protect themselves from neoliberal market-based pressures. Some of these approaches also involve forms of paternalism that entrench precarious forms of farm work. Nonetheless, all three approaches offer certain strategic opportunities to reduce precarious aspects of farm employment, and many study participants proposed both critical analyses and innovative proposals for such reimagining these opportunities. While I highlight the importance of social protection throughout this thesis, I conclude by arguing that social protection for farm workers cannot be ensured merely through traditional legal and policy channels that rely on a model of a strong, protective and sovereign state. I conclude by considering how a food sovereignty approach might advance new, more deeply democratic and egalitarian forms of ensuring social protection and political inclusion with and for all farm workers.
Chapter 2.

Alternative food networks and labour in North America

2.1. Cultivating sustainable food systems

The dominant global food system has generated a multitude of intersecting ecological and social crises. Climate change, for instance, is predicted to have impacts on “all aspects of food security” (Porter & Xie, 2014, p. 3), and agriculture itself contributes 14% of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (Barker et al., 2007). The international free trade agreements dominating the contemporary ‘food regime’ (McMichael, 2009) have failed to promote food access for approximately 868 million people who are undernourished (FAO, 2013; Rosin et al. 2012), while as much as one third of the world’s food produced for human consumption goes to waste each year (Cloke 2013; Gustavsson et al. 2011). Amidst these crises, the capacity of smallholder producers to define their own food systems is being further undermined by governments and private investors who speculatively invest on land, biofuels and ‘flex crops’ in the Majority World (Borras et al. 2013; McMichael, 2012). Further, corporate agribusiness consolidation of ownership over productive resources like seeds, water and land poses a threat to cultural continuity for many agrarian communities (Bezner Kerr, 2013; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; Otero, 2008; Plahe et al. 2013). Through industrial livestock production, the current food regime generates widespread and intense non-human animal suffering (McLeod-Kilmurray, 2012).

In order to grapple with these crises, individuals and organizations throughout the world have focused on defending and developing more sustainable ways of producing, procuring, processing, packaging, marketing, distributing, consuming and disposing of food. They often mobilize around efforts to promote small-scale, diversified and
ecologically-based farming systems that center on regional markets (Goodman et al. 2012; Holt-Giménez, 2011). Given humanity’s universal need for nourishment, alternative food initiatives often envision food as a point of common ground that can bring people together and generate social change. The diverse forms of social change they aim to achieve through alternative food systems include cultivating environmental stewardship (Kloppenburg et al. 1996), community food security (Allen, 1999; Hamm & Bellows, 2003), democratization (Hassanein, 2003; Levkoe, 2006), decolonization (Morrison, 2011; Mundel & Chapman, 2010), queer-positivity (Sbicca, 2012a; Tunnicliffe, 2010), racial and economic justice (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010), and food sovereignty (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Wittman, 2011).

### 2.2. A social movement perspective

Ongoing debates in academic literature and among activist circles themselves question how to characterize efforts focused on changing the food system (Levkoe, 2014; Starr, 2010). Some authors characterize the sum of these efforts as a social movement, often with a prefix (e.g. local, alternative, sustainable, organic), or simply as “the food movement” (e.g. Allen, 2004; DeLind, 2011; Gibb & Wittman, 2013; Mares & Alkon, 2011; Noll, 2013). Some of the farmers and interns I interviewed were ambivalent as to whether they considered themselves part of a social movement (I unfortunately neglected to pose this question to migrants). At the Vancouver launch of a film about connecting urban and rural food movements, one panelist joked, “You know as a farmer, harvesting carrots, I think, am I connected to ‘the movement?’” She went on to underscore how she considered farming a privilege, and that it allowed her work to be connected with the broader efforts such as those of ecofeminist Vandana Shiva and La Via Campesina, the international peasant movement for food sovereignty:

I can do what I’m doing because of a history of 40 years that was not necessarily called ‘the food movement,’ we just called it ‘feeding people.’ Now we need to call it a food movement because there’s so much corporatization, we need to reclaim that space.

(fieldnotes, October 26, 2013)
While this farmer emphasized the linkage between local food movements in Canada and the Majority World, it remains an open question whether it is empirically accurate and analytically useful to characterize diverse array of initiatives as a singular, collective, organized, and sustained movement (Snow et al. 2004; Wieviorka, 2005) to enact or defend against food-related social change. In particular, there may be a risk of collapsing critical strands of food activism, which are often oppositional and focus on generating radical change, with advocacy-based efforts focused on food consumption. Examples of more critical food movement strands include Indigenous food sovereignty (Morrison, 2011; Rocha & Liberato, 2013; Thompson et al. 2012), anti-capitalist freeganism (Barnard, 2011; Edwards & Mercer 2007), and Brazil’s Landless Rural Workers Movement (Wittman, 2009). As a contrasting example, more popularly recognized ‘foodie’ efforts in North America, Western Europe and Oceania usually converge on advocating the consumption and preparation of high-end local, organic and niche foods as a way to achieve social change (Johnston & Baumann, 2010). However, they often do not address the structural barriers that make it unfeasible for most eaters to exercise their politics through ethical consumption, let alone question whether substantive social justice outcomes or more viable food producer livelihoods can be realized through politicized consumption practices (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2008a; Johnston & Szabo, 2010). I contend that these advocacy-based – rather than activist-based – efforts are more characteristic of alternative food networks.

2.3. An alternative food networks (AFN) perspective

For the purposes of this study, I consider ‘alternative food networks’ (AFNs) as my unit of analysis rather than social movements. Based on my own involvement in alternative food initiatives in BC, and as confirmed by the fieldwork for this study, I contend that it is more accurate to characterize the predominant strain of food-related social change efforts in the province as AFNs. I consider AFNs as encompassing individuals, members of civil society organizations, industry actors such as farmers, scholars, and governmental or extra-governmental bodies such as municipal food policy councils (see MacRae & Donahue, 2013) focused on cultivating a more sustainable food system. These networks include varying degrees of connectedness, ranging from
relatively isolated initiatives to formally linked organizations like provincial food networks connected through the national organization Food Secure Canada (Levkoe, 2014).

AFNs involve relational “communities of practice” among producers, consumers, suppliers and retailers who horizontally share “new ways of knowing, growing and organizing food” (Goodman et al. 2012, p. 248). They tend to exemplify the four traits that geographer Lucy Jarosz (2008) deems distinctive of AFNs: a) a concern for social, economic and ecological aspects of sustainable food systems; b) shorter distances between producers and eaters; c) smaller-scale farms that draw upon organic or agroecological farming methods, as compared to industrial-scale farms; and d) the presence of food provisioning venues focused on foods considered sustainable, including food co-ops, local farm-to-school partnerships and farmers’ markets (p. 232). Several food studies scholars have recently pointed out that a rigid differentiation between the alternative (i.e. ‘good’) and conventional (i.e. ‘bad’) food system is neither accurate or productive in advancing social and ecological sustainability in the food system (Alkon, 2013; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006).

As an illustration of the range of farms that might be characterized as part of AFNs, the farms associated with the interns and intern employers whom I interviewed exemplified each of Jarosz’s (2008) key AFNs traits. For their part, all three of the migrant employers whom I interviewed described their farms’ agroecological practices in detail. Two of the farmers articulated the importance of the local, sustainable food movement for how they operated their business, even if some of their products were shipped abroad and they occasionally used non-organic methods. For instance, one of these latter two farms belonged to several sustainability-oriented direct marketing initiatives, including the local farmers’ market board. The other of the two farms primarily relied on farm gate sales. The third farm was a considerably larger business that grossed nearly $1 million in sales each day and encompassed 220 acres of greenhouse production in Canada and the United States. The farm owner co-coordinated the farm’s marketing and was not involved in primary production. He specified that his business pursued relationships with “foodies” such as BC chefs, along with community charities, as a marketing strategy to encourage consumers to associate its products with healthy lifestyles and healthy eating (interview #20, December 18, 2013). I draw attention to
these details to illustrate the continuities with and divergences from ‘alternative’ modes of food production. Whereas the first two of the aforementioned farms owned by migrant employers conformed more readily with Jarosz’s (2008) 4-criteria description of AFNs, the third drew on some AFN elements (e.g. agroecological practices), but its size and greater focus on international exports made it less typical of an ‘alternative’ production system. AFNs can thus be understood as a continuum of perpetually changeable initiatives to generate innovative ways of nourishing communities (Goodman et al. 2012).

But which communities, specifically are nourished by AFNs? How do alternative food efforts relate to the ‘dominant’ food system? Who gets to define what counts as alternative, and how is this decided? Contemplating these key critical questions, which AFN members themselves often pose reflexively, offers insights into how they have engaged with the marginalization of farm workers, a subject to which I now turn.

2.4. Attending to farm worker precariousness in alternative food efforts

Reflecting the multiplicity of efforts to generate a more socially and ecologically supportable food system, AFNs and food movements in North America have attended to labour concerns for agricultural workers in several ways. These include neglecting to address farm worker concerns (either by intent or omission), struggling to address them and, to a lesser degree, directly confronting the conditions that prevent farm workers from accessing means to social recognition, political participation and material well-being. I begin by considering some of the challenges among alternative food efforts that have shaped their neglect of or tenuous attention to farm worker labour conditions. This neglect contrasts with AFNs’ affirmed commitment to social dimensions of sustainability (e.g. Howard & Allen, 2010). Several authors have characterized these challenges as revolving in interrelated ways around a faith in the ability of the market to resolve complex social justice issues, the relatively privileged positionality of many food movement participants, and an uncritical adherence to influential ideologies such as localism and agrarianism (Allen, 2008; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Getz et al., 2008; Gray 2014). After considering each of these in turn, I highlight some of the ways in which
food movements and AFNs have addressed farm worker social protection and political inclusion through the frameworks of food justice and food sovereignty.

2.4.1. Market-centric strategies for social change

Critical food studies scholars have argued that alternative food efforts often overemphasize market-based strategies. These authors contend that ‘shopping for social change’ conforms with neoliberalism as an organizing principle for society. This strategy envisages political change as being achieved through shifts in spending patterns that generate particular market signals (Allen & Guthman, 2006; Guthman, 2008b; Roff, 2007; Turje, 2012). This includes, as cases in point, farm-to-school procurement programs designed to provide fresh, local vegetables in school institutions (Allen & Guthman, 2006), and the widely-heard exhortation for individual consumers to ‘buy organic,’ ‘buy local,’ and ‘support Fair Trade’ in order to redress the social and environmental harms generated by the agri-food system (Guthman, 2007). The analog for addressing farm worker exploitation has been ‘domestic fair trade’ food-labeling and third party monitoring schemes. In Canada, the Local Food Plus ‘Local Sustainable Certification’ voluntary certification scheme incorporates criteria for farm employers to ensure “safe and fair working conditions for on farm labour.” The certification does not mandate any employment conditions beyond those already required by law. Compliance is ensured through independent third-party inspectors and random spot checks. Although Local Food Plus is no longer expanding the number of farms it certifies, it continues to support over 200 certified farmers and processors across the country. This includes a very small but undefined number of farms employing migrant farm workers (Cole, 2012; Local Food Plus, 2014).

Labeling strategies of this kind can draw consumer attention to the existence of widespread concerns with poor working conditions for farm workers, while rewarding employers who comply with existing laws. However, one of the key concerns with voluntary employer labeling schemes is that they are often more attentive to meeting the ethical preferences of a subset of consumers than to creating capacities for farm workers themselves to lead the changes they would like to see (Allen, 2008; 2010; Brown & Getz 2008; Howard & Allen, 2010). In addition, they may offload state
responsibilities for employment standards enforcement to private, undemocratic third party entities (Brown & Getz 2008).

2.4.2. Whiteness and class privilege

The social location of many participants in North American AFNs has often acted as a barrier to practicing solidarity with farm workers and their labour advocates. A disproportionate degree of whiteness, middle-class affluence and other forms of social privilege in popular alternative food advocacy tends to shape the priorities, strategies and relationships that sustainable food advocates pursue (Alkon, 2012; Gibb & Wittman, 2013; Guthman, 2008b; Sbicca, 2012b; Slocum, 2006; 2007; Turje, 2012). Accordingly, their efforts often take the form of purchasing food that is perceived to benefit the environment, farmers, animal welfare, and advocates’ own health (Alkon, 2012; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Gray 2014). Furthermore, many enthusiasts of ethical and sustainable food are geographically distanced and socially buffered from the complex realities of farm labour. A lack of understanding of how structural and systemic racism shapes the lives of many people of colour, including many farm workers, often prompts white-dominated food and environmental campaigns to adopt language and practices that are racially insensitive or based on 'colour blindness,' which assumes racism does not exist or that acknowledging its existence is unconstructive (Guthman, 2008b; Salazar & Hewitt, 2001). These include popular food movement axioms such as “getting your hands dirty in the soil” that may unintentionally alienate people of colour (Guthman, 2004; 2008b), who have disproportionately endured forms of indentured servitude on farms in the past and present (Carrasquillo, 2011). For instance, racialized forms of “modern-day slavery” persist in Florida agriculture (Asbed & Sellers, 2013; Sellers & Asbed, 2011).

A lack of intentional collaboration between white-dominant alternative food initiatives and food practices led by people of colour also foregoes key opportunities for sharing cross-cultural knowledge regarding sustainable food practices. For instance, Natalie Gibb and Hannah Wittman’s (2013) study of Chinese-Canadian local food networks in BC indicates that interviewed Chinese-Canadian farmers paid their hired workers at least minimum wage and were largely economically viable (the authors point
out that minimum wage is nonetheless inadequate for farm workers). Accordingly, well-established Chinese-Canadian farms might offer an important model for local sustainability-oriented farms, which have normalized unpaid or stipended interns and often struggle to gain economic viability. However, the authors argue that Chinese-Canadian local food production systems in the Metro Vancouver region tend to be under-recognized by the mainstream local food movement.

2.4.3. Agrarianism and agricultural exceptionalism: Toward a critical agrarianism?

A brief history of romantic agrarianism

Closely tied to the issue of racialization and class in mainstream North American agri-food advocacy is the ideological clout of agrarianism. Inspired by writers like Thomas Jefferson, agrarian philosophy proposes that humans are inherently adapted to live in the countryside rather than the city and that compared to urbanites, farmers are more honest, politically stable, morally upright and independent (Buttel & Flinn, 1975; Holowchak, 2011; Kelsey, 1994). Eighteenth-century English philosopher John Locke (1690) asserts that farmers fulfill a biblical duty of improving the land. By virtue of ‘mixing their labour with the land,’ Locke feels that farmers inherit the rights of private property, along with the responsibility to leave whatever they cannot use for the benefit of others. French-American writer de Crèvecoeur (1782) adds that with this natural property right comes natural political citizenship rights. Notwithstanding its inherently moral qualities, the farming lifestyle is often low paying and exhausting, and farmers’ livelihoods are largely at the whim of the market (Kelsey, 1994; Paarlberg, 1980). For this reason, “farmers are felt to be owed a social debt by others because they suffer so that a democratic society might prosper” (Kelsey, 1994, p. 1172).

Even among city dwellers who have little direct experience or understanding of agriculture, powerful agrarian symbols such as the idyllic family farm serve to generate popular public support for high-cost state interventions that ostensibly protect agrarian culture. In the United States, this includes subsidies for crops that favour industrialized modes of production, a federally subsidized crop insurance system, and the Chapter 12 Bankruptcy Code that applies only to producers designated as “family farmers” (and
Agricultural economics researcher Timothy Kelsey (1994) argues that nostalgic agrarianism is a myth because it does not accurately represent the complexities and ambiguities of present-day family farming. While the justification for agricultural exceptionalism is premised on safeguarding an imagined small or medium scale, socially embedded family farm that contributes significant public goods, many contemporary family farms are very large-scale, industrialized corporate entities whose characteristics are less consistent with nostalgic agrarianism (Kelsey, 1994; Schneider, 2009). More to the point, the agrarian myth is often marshalled to resist the “heavy and unthankful hand of government… trying to squash the spirit of independent family farmers” (Kelsey, 1994, p. 1174) by instituting occupational health and safety regulations for farm workers, including in Canada (Aguiar et al. 2011; Barnetson, 2009).

**Agrarianism and alternative food movements**

Even among city dwellers who have little direct experience or understanding of agriculture, powerful agrarian symbols such as the idyllic family farm serve to generate popular public support for high-cost state interventions that ostensibly protect agrarian culture. In the United States, this includes subsidies for crops that favour industrialized modes of production, a federally subsidized crop insurance system, and the Chapter 12 Bankruptcy Code that applies only to producers designated as “family farmers” (and fishers) (Kelsey, 1994; McBride, 2012; Molnar & Wu, 1989; Schneider, 2009). Agricultural economics researcher Timothy Kelsey (1994) argues that nostalgic agrarianism is a myth because it does not accurately represent the complexities and ambiguities of present-day family farming. While the justification for agricultural exceptionalism is premised on safeguarding an imagined small or medium scale, socially embedded family farm that contributes significant public goods, many contemporary family farms are very large-scale, industrialized corporate entities whose characteristics are less consistent with nostalgic agrarianism (Kelsey, 1994; Schneider, 2009). More to the point, the agrarian myth is often marshalled to resist the “heavy and unthankful hand of government… trying to squash the spirit of independent family farmers” (Kelsey, 1994, p. 1174) by instituting occupational health and safety regulations for farm workers, including in Canada (Aguiar et al. 2011; Barnetson, 2009).
Aagrarianism and alternative food movements

A nostalgic agrarian vision has nurtured the belief among many alternative food supporters that small-scale, family-owned, organic and local farms are inherently more socially just than the supposed binary opposite of large-scale, corporate-owned, conventional and geographically distant farms (Getz et al., 2008; Gray 2014; Guthman, 2004; Holmes, 2013; Shreck et al., 2006). The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2006) defines “decent work” as including a fair income, security in the workplace, and the capacity for workers to participate in decisions that affect their lives. The evidence on whether modes of farming promoted as environmentally sustainable, such as organic agriculture, necessarily translate into more decent work for farm workers is ambiguous. For instance, Cross et al. (2008) found no significant differences between migrant farm workers’ physical well-being on organic compared to conventional farms in the U.K., although those on the organic farms tended to score higher on measures of happiness. Similarly, Cross et al. (2009) compared the self-reported health of farm workers in localized and globalized supply chains in the U.K., Uganda, Kenya and Spain. Their results “suggest that globalised supply chains can provide social benefits to workers, while local food systems do not always provide desirable social outcomes” (p. 1004). To cite a Canadian example, in September 2010, Jamaican SAWP workers Ralston White and Paul Roach died of environmental asphyxiation from exposure to gas in a confined space while attempting to repair a vinegar vat on Filsinger’s Organic Foods and Orchards near Ayton, Ontario. Although proponents often perceive them as inherently safer (e.g. Getz et al., 2008), farms that are organic and embedded in localized supply chains pose many of the same hazards as other farm types.

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2 While four of the employers in question were initially charged under Ontario’s Occupational Health and Safety Act, the charges were later dropped in lieu of a fine against one supervisor of $22,500. Migrant justice activists and workers’ safety advocates argued the court decision sent employers the message that health and safety violations would not be met with harsh consequences, and that Ontario’s Ministry of Labour had failed to inspect the workplace and avert an obvious hazard (Grossman, 2012; Toronto Star, 2012).
In addition to fetishizing particular modes of food production, romantic agrarianism tends to encourage its adherents to idealize farm owners while de-emphasizing or ignoring their hired workers. Proponents of local and organic food often associate farm workers with industrial and ‘unnatural’ forms of agriculture, which they envisage as being in sharp opposition to alternative food systems. It is often presumed that a farm owner (frequently stereotyped as white and male) manages the farm labour requirements independently or with family support, and that the farm owner does not rely on hired labour (Alkon, 2013; Allen, 2004).

Agrarian ideology has real political consequences and material bearing on the lives of farm workers. A study by environmental researcher Christy Getz and colleagues (2008) in California describes how organic farmers and their urban supporters allied with conventional agribusiness to stridently oppose to legislation that would have reduced the risk of musculoskeletal injury from farm worker stoop labour (cultivating for a long period of time in a stooped position). Contrary to the perceptions and assertions of many organic food promoters, musculoskeletal injury may present a greater risk to California farm workers than agrochemical exposure (Villarejo, 2003; Villarejo & Baron, 1999). Even though organic farmers would largely have been exempt from the legislation, they and their urban supporters joined with non-organic agribusiness actors to successfully lobby against the legislation and misrepresent it as a threat to small-scale and organic growers. Interpreting the position of the organic movement, Getz et al. (2008) suggest that the legislation represented an effort to step-up prosecution of labour violations in California agriculture at large, but the organic sector preferred voluntary ‘beyond organic’ certification of better labour practices to the traditional enforcement of labour regulations. The authors comment that voluntary certification and labeling schemes enable organic producers to adapt to consumer critiques of labour practices in organic farming, but unlike traditional forms of state regulation, growers can largely maintain control over the labour process. Getz and colleagues assert, “Because hired labor on organic farms is largely ‘the immigrant other,’ it is much easier to obscure labor’s role and presence, thus reinforcing the agrarian ideology on which the organic movement thrives” (p. 486). They go on to reason that since agricultural exceptionalism characterizes farmers as “different” than other employers, “they are less likely to be held accountable for exploitative practices” (p. 499).
Critical agrarianism

As described above, much of the scholarly literature on agrarianism underscores the ways in which agrarian ideology and discourse have been mobilized to legitimize problematic ends, including white-centric, exclusionary private property relations and exploitative regulatory exceptions that help to ensure capital accumulation. However, geographer Liz Carlisle (2013) points out that agrarianism need not be dismissed outright based on its historical antecedents. In contrast to both unreflexive romantic agrarianism and also what she calls ‘cynical agrarianism,’ Carlisle calls for a form of critical agrarianism that draws lessons from the ways in which agriculture has historically and contemporarily been a vehicle for environmental destruction, racial exclusion, and economic injustice. She proposes, “Agrarianism is subject to multiple articulations, even radical retellings. It need not be co-constituted with a defense of 19th-century American property systems and power structures” (p. 138). According to Carlisle, a reimagined, critical agrarianism would not be founded on Lockean private property rights, de Crèvecoeurian citizenship rights, or appeals to exceptionalism. Rather, it would take, as its starting point for material and social community-building, the land-based practices of people who are currently engaged in food production and their related political activities (see also Wittman, 2009).

Carlisle asserts that farm workers complicate the traditional agrarian narrative a) because they do not own the land and b) because industrialized agriculture has, in some cases, intensified farmers’ dependence on exploitative farm worker labour. To this, my study contributes a key additional dimension to critical agrarian theorizing by assessing the forms of farm worker precariousness that are persisting in both so-called ‘conventional’ and ‘alternative’ forms of agriculture. Along these lines, critical agrarianism offers an incisive, historically situated framework for relating the agrarian visions of alternative food initiatives with the practices and politics of precarious farm worker employment in BC.
2.5. Promising directions: Food justice and food sovereignty

Demonstrating what critical agrarianism might look like in practice, a growing number of alternative food movements are explicitly targeting forms of institutionalized racial, economic and political inequality affecting farm workers. These efforts are often described under the overlapping umbrellas of food justice and food sovereignty. Food justice focuses on the disproportionate burden on farm workers of environmental harms and uneven distribution of benefits (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). In the case of farm workers, uneven harms include pesticide exposure (Harrison, 2011). Uneven benefits include – rather paradoxically – access to healthy food (Brown & Getz 2011; Hill et al. 2011; Minkoff-Zern, 2014). A food justice lens is instructive in, for example, illuminating how regulations designed to protect farm workers in California have been based on the universalizing assumption that farm employers are white. Food justice researcher Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern and colleagues (2011) demonstrate that as a consequence of this white-centric legislation, agricultural labour practices among small-scale immigrant Hmong farmers, who traditionally engage in reciprocal familial labour exchanges, have been framed as racialized criminal problems. The strength of a food justice approach in advancing justice for hired agricultural labourers, then, may lie in its attentiveness to racial inequities and their lived consequences for farm workers.

With a greater focus on political economy compared to food justice, food sovereignty explicitly confronts structural inequalities of power in the food system, calls for democratic control over the means of production, and supports people's capacity to ensure that food-related policies are appropriate to the diverse social and ecological contexts in which they occur (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; Patel, 2012a). The seven pillars of food sovereignty, as established collectively by grassroots organizations at international forums, are as follows: (1) A focus on food for people; (2) Building knowledge and skills; (3) Working with nature; (4) Valuing food providers; (5) Localizing food systems; (6) Putting control locally; (7) Food is sacred (Food Secure Canada, n.d.).
As an example of a farm worker-focused food sovereignty initiative, the Border Agricultural Workers Project (BAWP) – a member of La Via Campesina – organizes farm workers and their communities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border to call for improved health, housing, wages and workplace conditions. While the BAWP allies with numerous other organizations, its membership structure is based on the tenet that farm workers themselves must be authors of the changes they wish to see (Fairbairn, 2011; Farmworkers, n.d.). In rural Vermont, members of the grassroots Huertas project coordinate kitchen gardens to promote food access and reduce social isolation for Latino/a migrant dairy workers, most of whom do not have formal legal status. In the context of transnational migration prompted by neoliberal policies that shattered many of these farm workers’ former rural livelihoods, this kitchen garden project illustrates “that working toward food sovereignty is a slow and difficult process” (Mares et al. 2013, p. 17). However, like similar garden projects to promote food security and food sovereignty with migrant farm workers in Florida (FWAF, n.d.) and California (Minkoff-Zern, 2014), Huertas demonstrates that modest food sovereignty initiatives of this kind may draw upon activities, like coordinating kitchen gardens, with which AFN actors have a great deal of experience to share. As Minkoff-Zern (2014) maintains, such initiatives mark concrete starting points and interstitial spaces that “provide opportunities for those who are currently exploited by the industrial agro-food system to fill in some of the cracks, while reinforcing their own agricultural knowledge systems” (p. 216).
Chapter 3.

Precarious farm work in Canada

3.1. Canada’s migrant farm worker regimes

After outlining the history and evolution of ‘circular migration’ farm worker regimes in Canada and BC, I describe the regulatory context and debates regarding contemporary un(der)paid farming internships. I conclude this chapter by identifying some of the specific features of precariousness in both migrant and un(der)paid intern farm work regimes.

3.1.1. History and evolution of Canada’s agricultural TFWP

Founded in 1966, the Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) pilot initiative was established as a bilateral agreement between Canada and Jamaica. This pilot project was later institutionalized and extended to Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago (1967), and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (1976-1982) (Preibisch, 2007; Vosko, 2013). A Mexican SAWP branch was established in 1974, and Mexico and Jamaica remain the primary source of migrant farm workers in Canada (e.g. in 2006, 61% of SAWP positions were filled by Mexicans, and 28% by Jamaicans) (McLaughlin, 2009b; Satzewich, 2007). Historically, permanent residency was the federal government’s favoured approach for facilitating immigration to traditional Indigenous territories in the land commonly referred to as Canada. The category of ‘migrant worker,’ formalized in 1973 through the Non-Immigrant Employee Authorization Program (NIEAP), has enabled people constructed as migrant workers to contingently live, work, pay taxes and sometimes die in Canada (Sharma, 2006). However, it excludes them from many of the rights, entitlements and social recognition associated
with citizenship, and it often denies them a route to permanent residency. The SAWP was one program of the NIEAP (Satzewich, 1991).

Initially, the establishment of the SAWP was spurred by extensive lobbying on the part of growers. They claimed that amidst increasing global competition, they were no longer able to fulfill their labour needs reliably through Canada’s domestic labour pool (Fairey et al., 2008; McLaughlin, 2010; McLaughlin & Hennebry, 2013; Preibisch, 2007). Dating back to at least the 19th century, Canadian farmers’ historical lobbying efforts to procure socially marginalized, readily exploitable farm workers have generally been met with an obliging response from the federal government. At various points in its agrarian history, the Canadian state has facilitated farmers’ access to British orphans, interned Japanese Canadians, German Prisoners of War, and conscientious objectors (mainly Doukhobors and Mennonites) (Barnetson, 2009; Basok, 2002; Preibisch, 2007; Satzewich, 1991). Swift industrial growth in the post-World War II era drew many young people from rural regions to more lucrative jobs in cities, which meant that many farming families could no longer rely on their children as sources of labour. Some of the ensuing labour shortages were filled by seasonal workers from underdeveloped areas of Québec and the Maritimes, along with newcomers from postwar Europe (Binford, 2009). Indigenous people, who remain among Canada’s most impoverished and oppressed

3 A notable exception is the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP), which offers a path to citizenship. During the interim period prior to receiving permanent residency, people employed in the LCP work and live in Canada under conditions that scholars and migrant activists have characterized as precarious (Sharma, 2006; Walia, 2010).
groups (e.g. Adelson, 2005; Mundel & Chapman, 2010), have historically been key sources of migrant farm labour (Laliberte, 2007; Laliberte & Satzewich, 1999).^4

The Canadian state has also been implicated in some of the neoliberal economic ‘push’ factors that prompt some migrants to seek employment elsewhere. An example of this is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), to which Canada was a co-signatory. NAFTA widely undermined food self-sufficiency, traditional livelihoods, and associated labour sovereignty for corn-based economies in Mexico (Binford, 2013; Gray 2014; Otero, 2011). Researchers estimate that because of NAFTA, upwards of 2 million farmers in Mexico were dispossessed of their land-based livelihoods and pushed to seek jobs in Mexican cities and in the United States (Arighi, 2000; Patel, 2012b). As sociologist Gerardo Otero (2011) explains, this constituted a loss of Mexican ‘labour sovereignty,’ which involves a nation’s ability to provide employment with liveable wages for most of its citizens. Following NAFTA, the United States intensified restrictions on its border with Mexico in order to deter displaced Mexican people from migrating north (Minkoff-Zern, 2014), which made legal temporary migration to Canada a comparatively more appealing option for some migrants. Cultural anthropologist Leigh Binford (2009) comments that the “structural violence” (p. 514) of neoliberal trade liberalization acts as one of many means of disciplining migrant farm workers in Canada.

Two federal departments are responsible for jointly overseeing the TFWP: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) arranges matters related to the migration status of the worker, while Employment and Skills Development Canada (ESDC) coordinates with employers to arrange the employment authorization (Fudge &

^4 For instance, to meet the needs for hand labour during peak months of the Alberta sugar beet season, from the mid-1950s until the early 1980s the Canadian state secured Indigenous workers by terminating social assistance benefits on northern reserves and Métis communities (Laliberte, 1994). This left members of these Indigenous communities with little choice but to migrate to the southern Alberta sugar beet farms. Because they were no longer able to reproduce their existence outside of capitalist relations, they were effectively proletarianized through coercion to sell their labour power (Laliberte & Satzewich, 1999). Avis Mysyk’s (2002) research on hired farm labour in Manitoba suggests that SAWP workers from Mexico have at least partially displaced Indigenous farm workers in Canada today.
MacPhail, 2009). As summarized in Table 2, since 2012 the TFWP has encompassed four agriculture-related streams, including the SAWP (Preibisch & Otero, 2014). Unlike the SAWP, farm workers hired under the Lower-Skilled Occupations (LSO), Higher-Skilled Occupations (HSO) and Agricultural Stream (AS) may come from any country, and some have come from Guatemala, Thailand, and the Philippines (McLaughlin et al. 2014). Newfoundland and Canada’s three territories do not participate in the SAWP, but all provinces may receive agricultural workers from the three other streams (Hennebry, 2012). The HSO stream encompasses markedly distinct criteria (e.g. employers have no obligation to provide housing or transportation), and the number of workers in these positions is much smaller than the other streams. This study focuses on the other three streams of the agricultural TFWP. When I use the term ‘migrant farm workers’ or ‘migrants,’ unless otherwise indicated I refer to people employed in the SAWP, AS, and LSO of Canada’s TFWP.
Since being introduced nearly 50 years ago, Canada’s agricultural TFWP has grown from 264 farm workers in 1966 to nearly 40,000 in 2012 (ESDC, 2014c; Satzewich, 2007). The program’s steady, tremendous growth coincides with broader immigration and labour recruitment trends in Canada that increasingly favour temporary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stream</th>
<th>SAWP</th>
<th>Agricultural Stream</th>
<th>Lower-Skilled Occupations</th>
<th>Higher-Skilled Occupations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating Countries</td>
<td>Mexico, Barbados, Trinidad &amp; Tobago, Organization of Eastern Caribbean States</td>
<td>Any</td>
<td>Any</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop</td>
<td>Crop must be included on National Commodities List</td>
<td>Crop must be included on National Commodities List</td>
<td>Crop is NOT included on National Commodities List</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position type</td>
<td>Activities must be related to on-farm primary agriculture. Can be lower- or higher-skilled positions.</td>
<td>Activities must be related to on-farm primary agriculture. Can be lower- or higher-skilled positions.</td>
<td>Activities can be related to any lower-skilled agricultural position</td>
<td>Activities can be related to any higher-skilled agricultural position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/ formal training required for the position</td>
<td>No requirements from Cdn govt. Mexican Consulate indicates requirement for applicants to have completed at least 3rd year of primary school education, and at most 3rd year of secondary school.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>At most a high school diploma or 2 years of job-specific training</td>
<td>University education, college diploma, vocational education, apprenticeship training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>Must meet or exceed wages on National Commodities List (greater than provincial minimum wage). For unionized workers, wage is established under collective agreement.</td>
<td>Must meet or exceed wages on National Commodities List (greater than provincial minimum wage).</td>
<td>Prevailing (median) wage set by ESDC/Service Canada for the specific occupation and geographical region. For unionized workers, wage is established under collective agreement.</td>
<td>Prevailing (median) wage set by ESDC/Service Canada for the specific occupation and geographical region. For unionized workers, wage is established under collective agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average # of people hired/year 2005-12</td>
<td>25,746</td>
<td>1,230</td>
<td>4,447</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 2. Comparison of the four agricultural streams of Canada’s Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP)\(^a\)

\(^a\) Based on data from Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC, 2013b; 2013a; 2014c; 2014d) and the Mexican Consulate (Mexico, 2013).

\(^b\) Averages are based on the number of TFWP positions on positive Labour Market Opinions (LMO).

\(^c\) Averages for the Agricultural Stream, which was introduced in 2011, are based on positive LMO data from 2011-2012.
migrants over economic immigrants who can become permanent residents, and ultimately Canadian citizens (Faraday, 2012). By 1993, this had declined to 30% (Sharma, 2006). Significant changes to the TFWP in June, 2014 left all of its agricultural streams, along with the Live-In Caregiver Program, unaffected (Hahn, 2014; Strauss, 2014). This absence of change for migrant farm workers arguably reflects the premise that agriculture is an exceptional industry and that meeting agricultural labour needs through a low-wage, racialized migrant labour force is an acceptable status quo.

Since being introduced nearly 50 years ago, Canada’s agricultural TFWP has grown from 264 farm workers in 1966 to nearly 40,000 in 2012 (ESDC, 2014c; Satzewich, 2007). The program’s steady, tremendous growth coincides with broader immigration and labour recruitment trends in Canada that increasingly favour temporary migrants over economic immigrants who can become permanent residents, and ultimately Canadian citizens (Faraday, 2012). When the NIEAP was introduced in 1973, 57% of the total number of (im)migrant workers entering Canada had ‘landed’ status. By 1993, this had declined to 30% (Sharma, 2006). Significant changes to the TFWP in June, 2014 left all of its agricultural streams, along with the Live-In Caregiver Program, unaffected (Hahn, 2014; Strauss, 2014). This absence of change arguably reflects the premise that agriculture is an exceptional industry that depends on low-wage workers, and that a racialized migrant labour regime is an acceptable status quo.

3.1.2. “Permanently temporary”

Without viable routes to permanent residency, most migrant farm workers remain, in effect, “permanently temporary” (Hennebry, 2012). Some SAWP participants have been working in Canada for 30 consecutive years, often for up to eight months of the year (Preibisch, 2012; 2007; Verduzco & Lozano, 2003). Many scholars have thus contested the premise that Canada’s TFWP exists “to fill temporary labour and skill shortages when qualified Canadian citizens or permanent residents are not available” (CIC, 2012). With regard to the putative temporariness of the labour shortages, it is clear that the labour needs the migrant farm worker program fulfills are persistent, and that the program itself has become an enduring fixture in Canadian immigration and employment (Barnetson & Foster, 2013; Faraday, 2012; Sharma, 2001).
The existence of a labour shortage in agriculture bears closer scrutiny. It may be the case that migrant farm workers occasionally help to relieve absolute labour shortages (Hennebry & Preibisch, 2010). However, according to labour market logic a long-term domestic labour and skills shortage would be resolved by raising farm worker wages, restructuring working hours, improving workplace rights and protections, and offering relevant training (Barnetson & Foster, 2013; Hahamovitch, 1997). Given that temporary migrant regimes circumvent these workplace improvements, farm worker labour shortages are socially constructed insofar as manually skilled agricultural labour has been designed as low-paid, dangerous, poorly protected, socially disregarded and arduous (Hahamovitch, 1997; Hennebry & Preibisch, 2010; Massey et al., 1998; Sharma, 2006). Those with Canadian citizenship tend to have other job options or potential access to social assistance, and thus are better positioned than migrants to demand improved farm wages and work conditions, or else to refuse these jobs (Sharma, 2001). In his review of Canada’s migrant farm worker program and its lack of social protections, Olivier de Schutter (2012), U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, synopsises, “a marginalized category has been created essentially in order to compensate for the increased concentration in the farming sector and for the failure to ensure that farming remains attractive to Canadians” (p. 9). However, as will be noted in the case of BC, citizenship alone does not ensure dignified livelihoods for farm workers in Canada.

3.1.3. Migrant farm workers in British Columbia

Next to Ontario and Quebec, BC is the third largest employer of migrant farm workers in Canada (ESDC, 2014c). It has a particular demand for hired labour in the fruit, vegetable and nursery production sub-sectors (Otero & Preibisch, 2010). Having introduced the SAWP in 2004 with 47 Mexican SAWP workers (Preibisch & Otero, 2014), in 2012 BC employers hired 6,045 of the country’s 39,700 agricultural TFWP migrants (ESDC, 2014c). In their study of health and safety issues for BC farm workers, sociologists Kerry Preibisch and Gerardo Otero (2014) found that migrant farm workers in BC were generally Mexican, young, married and overwhelmingly male. The Okanagan region hosts a large number of migrant farm workers from Jamaica (Elise Hahn, January 21, 2014). These demographic patterns in BC parallel the dominant migrant farm worker
demographics in Canada\textsuperscript{5}, and migration scholars have accordingly characterized the agricultural TFWP as highly racialized and gendered (e.g. Sharma, 2006). Mexican government recruiters preferentially select males on the basis of whether they are married or in a common-law relationship with dependents. They preferentially select females on the basis of being single with dependents (Otero & Preibisch, 2010; Preibisch & Grez, 2013). Selecting on the basis of workers’ marital status creates a disincentive for them to seek longer-term residency in Canada through marriage to a Canadian or settlement without formal legal status (Preibisch, 2007). Migrant farm workers’ protracted separation from their families encourages them to accept employer requests to work long hours and on weekends (Basok, 2002; Preibisch & Binford, 2007). Because domestic partnerships often follow a more complex cultural pattern in Jamaica, the Jamaican government does not recruit migrants on the basis of their marital status (McLaughlin, 2009b).

Migrants often work alongside racialized recent immigrant farm workers who have immigrated to BC from the Punjab in, and who constitute about half of the province’s farm workers (Fairey et al., 2008; Otero & Preibisch, 2010).\textsuperscript{6} They are predominantly female, middle-aged and older, and they often come to Canada as family class immigrants having been sponsored by a husband, son-in-law or son. Punjabi tends to be their first language, and many have little or no English proficiency (Fairey, 2005; Fairey et al., 2008; Preibisch & Otero, 2014). As Preibisch and Otero (2014) explain, while having a route to citizenship offers improved access to social protections for

\textsuperscript{5} For example, in 2011 males constituted approximately 96% of SAWP workers. Participants in the Low-Skill Pilot constituted just less than 85% of participants in twelve agri-food occupations (Moral del Arbona, 2011; Preibisch & Otero, 2014).

\textsuperscript{6} There are no firm data on the number of racialized immigrant farm workers employed in BC each season. The best available approximation is the number of employees bonded for Licensed Farm Labour Contractors (Otero & Preibisch, 2010). This figure was 6,143 people based on the most recent government data (Ministry, 2014), which compares with 6,045 migrant farm workers in 2012 (based on TWFP agricultural positions on positive labour market opinions) (ESDC, 2014c). The proportion of migrant farm workers initially appeared to be overtaking the number of domestic workers after the SAWP was introduced in BC in 2004 (Otero & Preibisch, 2010). However, in recent years this proportion, along with the province’s absolute number of farm workers, appear to have stabilized.
immigrant farm workers compared to migrants, immigrant farm workers face a distinct set of precarious citizenship and labour circumstances. Immigrant farm workers reported, for example, a sense of obligation to repay family members who sponsored them, gendered family obligations, occupational vulnerabilities related to older age, and forms of coercion that arise from being employed through a farm labour contracting system. The introduction of ethnic competition between migrants and immigrants, both of whom are impacted by forms of precariousness, acts as a tool for labour disciplining and dampening wages (Preibisch & Otero, 2014). This phenomenon has also been noted by medical anthropologist Janet McLaughlin (2010) as being fostered between Jamaicans and Mexicans migrant farm workers in Ontario.

While some BC farmers surpass the minimum requirements as employers of hired farm workers and endeavour to treat workers with fairness and respect, research suggests a great deal of inconsistency between farms and widespread causes for concern (Tomic et al. 2010). Preibisch and Otero (2014) found that 14% of surveyed BC migrant and immigrant farm workers had no access to worksite toilets, and 23% cited a lack of worksite hand-washing facilities. Their interviewees reported withholding excretory functions for prolonged periods and being reprimanded for visiting the bathroom outside of scheduled breaks. Researchers have reported a lack of quality migrant farm worker housing in at least one BC agricultural municipality (Hendriksen, 2011), along with widespread instances of overcrowding, a lack of heating and refrigeration, and inadequate plumbing in BC SAWP workers’ accommodations (Aguiar et al. 2011; Otero & Aguilar, 2013; Tomic et al., 2010). Migrants are generally housed on their employers’ home property, which enables a great deal of employer influence over workers’ lives on and off the job (Aguiar et al. 2011; Otero & Preibisch, 2010).

Many of the concerns with housing, occupational health and safety for migrant farm workers in BC accrue to ad hoc enforcement of regulations by the municipal, provincial and Consular bodies who are responsible (Fairey et al., 2008; Hendriksen,
In the early 2000s, the province witnessed extensive neoliberal roll-back (Peck & Tickell, 2002) of its already weak employment protections for farm workers. This included resource cutbacks to employment standards enforcement, with a move from a monitoring-based system toward a complaint-based system that assumes employers’ voluntary compliance. It also introduced the exclusion of all farm workers from the Employment Standards Act’s provisions for statutory holidays, overtime, and hours of work (Clark, 2013; Fairey, 2005; Fairey et al., 2008; Ministry, 2013). Researchers have noted that the federal government’s failure to coordinate with provincial ministries and agencies generates ambiguity in cross-jurisdictional duties to protect migrant farm workers, resulting in a lack of enforcement of their social protections (Fairey et al., 2008).

Canada’s system of “managed migration” through the TFWP is often compared favourably to the United States, where anywhere from 55-85% of migrant farm workers may have an immigration status denoted as ‘undocumented’ or ‘illegal’ that limits their access to social benefits, upward social mobility and civic participation (Hennebry & Preibisch, 2010; Minkoff-Zern, 2014). While Canada has very few farm workers with a status constructed as undocumented (Basok et al. 2013), migration scholars McLaughlin and Hennebry (2013) point out that compared to farm workers who are constructed as undocumented, migrants employed through the TFWP have more rights but fewer freedoms. For instance, migrants without formal legal status might have a greater ability to move to locations of their choosing with their families. Appendix A summarizes the key exemptions migrant farm workers face in theory and practice from standard freedoms for wage-labourers in Canada, along with the barriers they face to accessing their legal rights.

7 For an earlier history of exceptionalism applied to BC agricultural workers from 1937-1975, see Jensen (2014).
3.2. Un(der)paid farm internships

3.2.1. The regulatory context of un(der)paid agricultural internships in BC

While they tend to occupy remarkably different social spheres and, indeed, are rarely even discussed in the same sentence, the same provincial Occupational Health and Safety Regulation and Employment Standards Act that govern the employment of migrant farm workers also govern agricultural internships in BC. I use the neologism ‘un(der)paid’ to denote internships that involve unpaid work or work that is paid considerably less than minimum wage. Based on the provincial Employment Standards Act, all people who are hired, receive training and work for an employer are entitled to at least the provincial minimum wage ($10.25/hour for the majority of employees). The Interpretation Guidelines Manual (Ministry, n.d.) indicates that an internship may be categorized as “work”:

An ‘internship’ is on-the-job training offered by an employer to provide a person with practical experience. Often internships are offered to persons who have completed a diploma or degree program and are seeking employment. Completing an internship does not itself result in an academic certificate or diploma. If the duties performed by interns fall within the definition of ‘work’ contained in the Act, the intern falls within the definition of ‘employee’, and the agency using the services of an intern falls within the definition of ‘employer’, internships will be considered ‘work’ for the purposes of the Act.

The Interpretation Guidelines Manual clarifies that “work” involves “The labour or services performed by an employee and; Being on call for an employer at a location designated by the employer, except the employee’s residence” (original emphasis). Thus, if a BC business hires a person to do “work” and characterizes the position as a “volunteer internship” compensated at less than minimum wage, this would be considered an employee misclassification unless there is an explicit statutory exclusion. Specifically, BC’s Employment Standards Act has an exclusion for academic practicums, which it distinguishes from internships: “A practicum is ‘hands-on’ training that is required by the curriculum, and will result in a certificate or diploma. It is not considered ‘work’ for the purposes of the Act” (Ministry, n.d.). In Canada, ‘Canada Summer Jobs’ (available to students) and ‘Career Focus’ (available to recent graduates) are examples
of wage subsidies that some BC farm businesses or non-profits draw upon to legally hire and train formally employed interns/workers paid at least minimum wage (Government of Canada, 2014). However, given the contrast between the formal administrative requirements of federal wage subsidies and the under-the-table nature of many farm internships, some farm internship arrangements may be ineligible for these subsidies.

As noted earlier, un(der)paid agricultural internships primarily occur on farms that are small-scale and organic, or urban (Endres et al., 2010; Kalyuzhny, 2011; Pilgeram, 2011; Schutzb, 2012). BC farmers who draw upon interns often describe themselves as hosts of volunteer or educational opportunities, rather than as employers, even in cases where hosts require interns to work fifty hours each week over a growing season. While there are no rigorous statistics available on un(der)paid farming internships in BC, Stewards of Irreplaceable Land (SOIL), a directory that connects aspiring apprentices with farmers, had 61 farm apprenticeship hosts in BC in 2013 (SOIL, personal communication, 2014). Worldwide Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF) Canada, which generally involves shorter volunteer work homestays, indicated that out of 8,000 annual WWOOF-stays in Canada, half of its registered hosts were in BC (WWOOF, personal communication, 2014). Many internships are also arranged informally between farmers and interns without any intermediary organizations.

Recently, urban and organic farms in BC have come under scrutiny for relying on un(der)paid agricultural interns (Shore, 2013). In 2013, two former SOIL apprentices sought and received back-wages from a Vancouver Island organic farm (Yanko, 2013). According to the farm owners, the apprentices had been living and working there in 2012 through an informal arrangement with a view to potentially buying the farm (Panel Discussion, 2014). Similar legal concerns with farming internships have arisen in the U.S. context (Canny, 2005; Endres et al., 2010; Hamilton, 2011a; 2011b; Kalyuzhny, 2011), and likewise with arrangements facilitated by WWOOF (Shore, 2013). With its eco-tourism focus, WWOOFing arguably exhibits qualities that are similar to the concept of "liquid leisure" that Ravenscroft et al. (2013) discuss in relation to short-lived, inconsequential volunteer labour on a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm. My focus in this thesis is on internships rather than WWOOFing, given that the former tend to involve labour arrangements that are less transient and include activities that are
more consequential for a farm’s productiveness. I consider internships as placements lasting at least one growing season and involving a minimum weekly commitment upwards of twelve working hours, which interns are expected to fulfill at a specified date and time.

3.2.2. Support for un(der)paid internships

Scholars have expressed contrasting perspectives on how to approach labour standards in farming internships. Proponents of un(der)paid internships in agriculture argue that the unique value of experiential education that farmers offer distinguishes an internship from a mere labour arrangement, and that “the interns do not deserve a full wage because they are essentially trainees” (Hamilton, 2011a, p. 558). They reason that this education serves as a significant compensation for interns’ labour, and that farmers might otherwise be unable to justify the time spent on training if the interns were simply hired farm hands (Kalyuzhny, 2011). Thus, for proponents, the prevalent blurring of volunteerism, educational training and employment in un(der)paid farming internships (Endres & Armstrong, 2012) underpins an argument for “exempting agricultural internships from minimum wage requirements under the longstanding doctrine of 'agricultural exceptionalism'” (Kalyuzhny, 2011, p. 147).

With a view toward the ageing farmer population in Canada and the United States, those who are concerned with issues of food security and sustainability often highlight the distinctive opportunities that farm internships offer for promoting literacy in sustainable agriculture and food systems politics, and for training aspiring organic farmers from a non-farming background (Etmanski, 2012b; 2012a; Kalyuzhny, 2011; Levitte, 2010; Schutzbank, 2012). Unpaid farming internship supporters like U.S. agricultural law scholar Jennifer Kalyuzhny (2011) assert that the food, housing, and potential stipend for which interns exchange their labour “makes agricultural internships quite accessible to all socioeconomic classes,” (p. 153), and potentially even more accessible than having to pay tuition at formal agricultural training schools (Endres et al., 2010; Kalyuzhny, 2011). From a food security perspective, Kalyuzhny (2011) adds that “the unpredictable financial risk [of hiring interns without laws to support unpaid farming internships] is causing many farmers to discontinue internship offerings altogether, with
potentially disastrous long-term consequences for the nation’s agriculture” (p. 140). Given the absence of data on how many unpaid interns are employed in agriculture, and considering that organic cropland in the United States comprises less than one per cent of the country’s total (USDA, 2013), Kalyuzhny’s assertion that eliminating unpaid internships in organic agriculture would “quickly lead to food shortages” (p. 144) is likely overstated.

3.2.3. Critiques of un(der)paid farming internships

Although Neil Hamilton, another U.S. agricultural law-scholar, shares a concern for educating new farmers in ecologically sound farming methods, he argues, “The reality is – we need new models focused on the education and training needs of new farmers rather than the labor needs of existing farms” (p. 131). To this end, Hamilton advocates following existing labour laws but creating policy opportunities and legal innovations to support agrarians in training, such as the legally sanctioned farm internship program piloted in Washington state (Hamilton, 2011a; 2011b). He points out the need to improve the consistency and quality of education “while limiting the ‘exploitive’ potential” (2011a, p. 559).

In relation to the potential for exploitation, scholars have pointed to a contradictory pattern within alternative farming employment arrangements in which both self-exploitation and relative class privilege co-exist. In her study of young sustainable farmers, racial and class inequality, and self-exploitation in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, rural sociologist Ryanne Pilgeram (2011) argues:

This [the farm interning process] seems to be another example of the ways that sustainable food is subsidized by those who believe deeply in the importance of growing food, giving away their labor to make it available. And while there are no reliable demographics on sustainable-farm interns, the ability to spend time interning at an extremely low wage in order to learn about sustainable farming is a classed privilege, making one of the primary means of training for sustainable agriculture highly restrictive beyond those able to make such a sacrifice.

(p. 390)

In analyzing self-exploitation among CSA farmers, geographer Ryan Galt (2013) reported statistically insignificant but nonetheless intriguing data suggest that having
unpaid interns is in fact negatively correlated with farmer earnings. Taken together, Pilgeram and Galt's analyses suggest the importance of simultaneously recognizing alternative rationalities in which earning an income is not a high priority for some farmers, the ways in which farmers’ sense of obligation to community and ecological ideals can normalize self-exploitation, and the broader political economy in which the self-exploitation of both farmers and interns subsidizes the food system. Before exploring the specific factors that structure interns’ and migrants’ precariousness in the food system, I sketch out the context of this broader political economy of precarious farm employment in Canada and BC.

3.3. Precariousness in BC farm employment

3.3.1. The political economy of precarious farm work in Canada

A political economy perspective of Canadian agriculture provides useful insight into the incentives of farmers, agribusiness interests and the state to avoid promoting safer working conditions and better wages for farm employees. As an illustration of the Canadian agriculture context, public policy scholar John Shields (1992) conceptualizes waged farm workers as sitting at the bottom of a three-tiered structure. At the top is agribusiness, which includes retailers and suppliers of farm machinery and inputs. In the middle are farmers, who compete with one another to sell their goods through the quasi-monopolies that determine prices and constrain farmers’ market power. Some claim that farmers have a disincentive to invest in preventive activities or safety equipment because their profitability is dictated by fluctuating weather patterns and market conditions over which they have little control (Frank et al. 2004). Nonetheless, similar arguments could be made for the uncertain economic circumstances and sensitivity to weather and market conditions among many non-agricultural enterprises. Meanwhile, the Canadian state is positioned to manage the tension between capital and labour, “to ensure the capital accumulation process operates without impediment,” (Barnetson, 2009, p. 52). The Canadian state essentially subsidizes capital accumulation through weak wage and safety regulations that cheapen farm worker labour, keeping food prices
low so that the cost of Canadian workers’ social reproduction also remains low (Barnetson, 2009; 2012).

Confronted with “globalization and the cost-price squeeze,” (McLaughlin, 2009b, p. 529), curtailing labour costs is one way in which farmers frequently seek to eke out a profit (Barnetson, 2009; Skogstad, 1979; 1987; 2007). In Alberta, for instance, farm workers have been excluded from the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act, and Ontario had similar OHS exclusions for farm workers until 2006 (Barnetson, 2009; 2012; Tucker, 2006). In most other Canadian provinces, farm workers are excluded from statutory rights that apply to non-farming industries, such as minimum wage, overtime pay, working hours, and rest periods (Barnetson, 2009; BC Employment Standards Branch, 2011; Clark, 2013; CLC, n.d.). Farm workers in Ontario and Alberta are excluded from the legislation that governs union certification and collective bargaining rights, which means that in effect they are unable to unionize in these provinces (Table 3, Appendix A).

3.3.2. Precarious farm work in BC

The structure of wages, hours, and social protections for farm workers in BC exemplifies a strong degree of occupational precariousness. All farm workers in the province are exempted from provisions for overtime and statutory holiday pay, minimum and maximum hours of work, and guaranteed hours off between shifts (BC Employment Standards Branch, 2011; Brown 2013). Employers cannot legally require farm workers to work “excessive hours.” The BC Employment Standards Act and Regulations defines “excessive hours” as “detrimental to an employee’s health and safety” based on the determination of the Employment Standards Director (BC Employment Standards Branch, n.d.). However, because this does not involve a specific upper limit on hours, in

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8 For example, farm workers in the following provinces are exempted from the standard minimum wage: Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Ontario, Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan (CLC, n.d.).
practice, employers have considerable capacity to arbitrarily determine what constitutes “excessive.” Besides TFWP migrants, who are paid on an hourly basis in accordance with their contracts, BC farm employment does not usually involve contracts. Salaried full-time positions are scarce (Preibisch & Otero, 2014). Hand-harvesters who are residents of BC may be paid less than minimum wage at a standard piece rate that varies by crop type (BC Employment Standards Branch, 2011; Brown 2013). Piece rate wage systems have been identified as a self-disciplining labour tool that encourages immigrant farm workers to work prolonged hours in order to gain eligibility for Employment Insurance (EI) during the off-season (Fairey et al., 2008). Preibisch and Otero (2014) found that during the peak season, South Asian immigrant farm workers averaged 55-hour work weeks. Migrants averaged 76 hours, which may nonetheless technically conform to the Employment Standards Act. These prolonged hours elevate farm workers’ risk of workplace injury or working while their health is poor.

Farm work in the province clearly exhibits the elevated risks of ill health that typify precarious forms of employment (Vosko, 2007). Echoing labour conditions for agricultural workers in many other parts of Canada and the world (Barnetson, 2009; Frank et al., 2004; Murphy & Lee 2009; Sharpe & Hardt, 2006), in BC farm workers engage in one of the lowest-paid, most hazardous and least protected occupational categories (Fairey et al., 2008; Otero & Preibisch, 2010; Saar et al. 2006). Based on a comparison of injury rates9 averaged from 2008-2012, agriculture (2.6) is higher than the average for all BC subsectors (2.44), but it appears less dangerous than, for instance, the high-risk occupations of warehousing (6.6), forestry (5) and general construction (5). However, when comparing relief-adjusted, short-term disability duration10 averaged for the same period, agriculture (72.6) is higher than the average for all subsectors (56.4) as well as warehousing (44) and general construction (69.6), and based on this measure it

9 WorkSafeBC (2013) measures “injury rate” based on “the number of claims per 100 person-years of covered employment (one person-year is the equivalent of one person working all year on either a part-time or full-time basis)” (p. 66).
10 WorkSafeBC (2013) measures “relief-adjusted, short-term disability duration” as the “total days lost per claim on disability claims, including days lost in years beyond the year of injury” (p. 71).
is somewhat more comparable to forestry (80.6) (WorkSafeBC, 2013).

Agricultural work at large poses a wide range of hazards. These include exposure to agrochemicals, dust, bacteria and sulphur, motor vehicles and machinery accidents, animal-related trauma and extreme temperature variation (Frank et al., 2004; Pickett, 2001; WorkSafeBC, 2012). Musculoskeletal injuries are also common among farm workers in general, and they often arise from heavy-lifting, climbing, slipping, repetitive physical motions and working for an extended period of time in an uncomfortable ergonomic position (Getz et al., 2008; Villarejo, 2003; Villarejo & Baron, 1999).

3.3.3. Structured precariousness for migrant farm workers in BC

Like other BC farm workers, people hired through the agricultural TFWP are subject to many of the same exceptions from wage-labour standards applying to most workers in Canada, with some important distinctions (previously summarized in Appendix A). Below, I consider five of the major factors that compound precariousness for migrants in an occupational category that is already precarious. I draw these key factors from several authors’ definitions of precarious employment (Morgan et al., 2013; Tangian, 2007; Vosko, 2007).

1. Employment stability and mobility

Constraining the labour mobility of migrants helps to ensure that each growing season in Canada, there is a dependable (and expendable) farm work force that is prepared to accept a particular set of wages and working conditions (Basok, 2002; Sharma, 2006; Walia, 2010). Technically, migrant farm workers could change employers if conditions were poor, but in practice this is often unfeasible (see ‘Labour Mobility’ in Appendix A). SAWP migrants may only work in Canada for eight months at a time. However, migrants in the LSO or AS streams may work in Canada for up to two years at a time for a maximum of four consecutive years, followed by four years of ineligibility for the program (‘the 4/4 rule’) (Preibisch, 2012). Receiving a favourable end-of-year evaluation from their employer and being “named” to be rehired by a specific employer is a worker’s primary means of seeking year-to-year job security (a worker who is not
“named” may still be accepted on another farm). A precarious legal status (Goldring & Landolt, 2012), which in the case of migrant farm workers’ involves being tied to an employer, intensifies the precariousness of migrants’ employment. Given the consequences of hinging migrants’ citizenship status on an employer, scholars have variously characterized Canada’s migrant farm worker regimes as “unfree” (Basok, 2002; Satzewich, 1991; Sharma, 2006), as “indentured” (Choudry & Thomas, 2013; Perry, 2012; Walia, 2013), and even as a form of “apartheid” that involves legislation to politically and economically marginalize a racialized group within a nationalized territory (Galabuzi, 2006; McDonald, 2009; Sharma, 2006; Walia, 2010).

2. Remuneration

Wages for migrant farm workers in the SAWP, LSO and AS streams tend to be low. Migrants’ earnings are subject to automatic tax deductions for social benefits, which they may not be eligible to access, and to insurance (discussed later in this chapter). Depending on the stream under which they were hired they may be additionally deducted for accommodations, food, and transportation (Appendix A). The mandatory wage for SAWP workers is negotiated annually between Canada and migrant sending countries (Hennebry, 2012). For SAWP workers and those hired through the AS stream, the wage must meet or exceed wages on National Commodities List table. For instance, the 2014 wage for farm workers in BC engaged in ‘fruits, vegetables, flowers, Christmas trees’ (including on-farm canning/processing and greenhouses/nurseries) is $10.33/hour (this compares to the provincial minimum wage of $10.25/hour). For LSO workers, the prevailing (median) wage is set by Employment and Skills Development/Service Canada for the specific occupation and geographical region (e.g. the 2014 wage for a ‘general farm worker’ in the Thompson-Okanagan region is $12.00/hour). For unionized workers, wages are established under collective agreement (ESDC, 2013). As noted earlier, all farm workers in BC are excluded from overtime pay provisions (ESDC, 2013a). Labour researcher David Fairey and colleagues (Fairey, 2005) observe that the standard remuneration for SAWP migrants flattens farm worker wages to a low minimum, which is arguably also the case for migrant farm workers in the other streams. These standardized wages are not designed to reward migrant farm workers’ skills, experience or seniority (McLaughlin, 2009b).
3. Control over the labour process

With regard to a worker's ability to challenge the conditions at their specific workplaces, provincial employment standards in BC are based on a worker complaint-driven model that assumes an employer's voluntary compliance (Fairey et al., 2008; M. Thompson, 2009). However, the structure of the migrant farm worker program fosters under-reporting of complaints. The power that employers wield through their end-of-contract evaluation of each worker acts as a disincentive for farm workers to report incidences of exploitation or injury, to rightfully refuse dangerous work, or to decline invitations to work overtime or on weekends (Binford, 2009; Fairey et al., 2008; Hennebry, 2012). After consulting with a worker's Consulate, employers have the contractual right to repatriate workers for "non-compliance, refusal to work, or any other sufficient reason" (ESDC, 2014a; 2014b). While actual repatriation rates are low, many migrant farm workers state that they avoid reporting injuries or poor job conditions based on the risk that this might lead to repatriation, a 1-2-year suspension or even expulsion from the program. This would undermine their ability to continue supporting their families through remittances (Binford, 2009; Fairey et al., 2008; McLaughlin, 2009b; Preibisch & Grez, 2010).

Migrants often seek to maximize the number of hours they work. However, their long working hours and labour-intensive conditions frequently occur within a coercive employment context in which employers control much of the labour process. Many migrant farm workers in BC have stated that they have accepted long working hours or dangerous conditions out of fear that they would lose their jobs. Preibisch and Otero (2014) report that 48% of surveyed BC Mexican migrant farm workers agreed with the statement, “On my farm there are coworkers who work when they are ill because they are afraid to tell the boss.” Being typically housed on an employer’s home and workplace property creates an environment in which migrants are made immediately available to fulfill an employer's requests for long or unusual working hours. The migrant employer participants in this study indicated that on-farm accommodations allow them to facilitate recreational activities for migrants. One participant noted that he included workers in some of his own family’s leisure outings. At the same time, however, researchers have noted that on-farm accommodations tend to create an environment in which migrants are highly dependent on employers for transportation and other practical needs.
Employers may set curfews, monitor migrants’ non-work activities, and restrict visitors, and as such on-farm accommodations enable a high degree of employer surveillance and paternalism (Aguiar et al. 2011; McLaughlin, 2010; Otero & Preibisch, 2010; Preibisch, 2012).

4. Access to political participation and representation

Because they do not have citizenship status, migrants cannot vote. As McLaughlin (2009b) has pointed out, migrant activist movements such as Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW) in BC and Ontario have faced challenges involving migrants themselves as lead organizers in advocating for their own needs. These challenges include workers’ contingent contracts, long working hours, limited mobility, and cases in which workers have been repatriated after taking on leadership in opposing workplace conditions. McLaughlin highlights that many workers have nonetheless taken part in voicing the changes they would like to see through venues such as conferences, public gatherings, documentary films and research. For instance, in October, 2010 J4MW organized a “Pilgrimage to Freedom: Breaking the Chains of Indentureship,” described on its website as follows:

Support migrant workers and allies who will be marching from Leamington to Windsor, Ontario to call attention to the living and working conditions of migrant workers who grow and process our food this Thanksgiving.

Migrant workers are marching to demand status, an end to exorbitant recruitment fees, better housing, safe working conditions and an end to racism and sexism in the workplace. Allies will be walking alongside workers in solidarity with their call for justice.

(J4MW, 2014)

While a small number of migrant farm workers in Canada have formed unions, they face challenges to exercising their legal capacity to organize around their work-related interests through unions (Fudge, 2011). After the first time Mexican SAWP workers in BC voted to unionize on a specific farm, the following season their farm employer only rehired 12 of the initial 35 migrants while hiring 28 new Indo-Canadian immigrant farm workers. The migrants subsequently filed to withdraw from the union certification (Russo, 2011; Sandborn, 2009). In a distinct case, in 2011 the Mexican
Consulate in BC was found to have illegally blacklisted a group of Mexican migrant farm workers for having joined a union (UFCW, 2014; Vosko, 2013). The official role of the Consulate is to assist with workers’ transfer as appropriate, mediate conflicts with employers, coordinate workers’ repatriation, and provide support for workers to access their rights and benefits. However, McLaughlin (2009b) points out that workers widely experience the Consulate as a hostile, punishing entity, and that there are no mechanisms for monitoring or appealing Consulate decisions to ensure their practices are fair and reasonable.

5. Integration into social benefits

Part of migrant farm workers’ wages are automatically deducted to pay into state social benefits schemes such as federal EI, income tax and Canada Pension Plan, and provincial or private health insurance. Each year, they contribute an estimated $3.4 million to the EI system (Keung, 2012). Nevertheless, they often face legal and practical constraints to accessing these benefits. In December 2012, the federal government announced that those who did not work in Canada year round could no longer claim access to special EI parental, maternal and compassionate benefits. The government’s rationale was that migrants’ previous access to special EI benefits was “inconsistent” with the function of the EI system to encourage people to transition back into the labour market (Keung, 2012; Salamanca, 2013). Junior Sylvester, a man from Trinidad who had worked through the SAWP program for 13 years, responded to the special EI eligibility changes by querying, “Canadian workers can access the special benefits and spend time with their children, but how about our children back home?” (Keung, 2012).

Migrants are ineligible for government-funded newcomer support services, such as English-language training, designed to promote cultural integration and social inclusion (Rajkumar, Berkowitz, Vosko, Preston, & Latham, 2012). A lack of orientation to their health and safety-related rights, long working hours, language and cultural barriers, reported delays in employers responding to migrants’ health concerns, and a dependence on employers for transportation are among many obstacles migrants face to accessing health care (Otero & Preibisch, 2010). In addition, Preibisch and Otero (2014) found that some BC clinics and hospitals would not recognize the private health insurance that covers SAWP migrants for the period before they become eligible for
public coverage. These health care providers either required a prepayment that migrants were reluctant or unable to pay for, or else refused treatment to migrants.

3.3.4. Precariousness in un(der)paid sustainable farming internships

Compared to migrants, farm interns are arguably much less constrained as far as entering freely into an internship, asserting their workplace interests on an individual basis and leaving a position. Nonetheless, both types of precarious farm employment arrangements exemplify what Wilson and Ebert (2013) describe as “a peculiarly asymmetrical distribution of power and information between employers, employment agencies and workers” (p. 267). As follows, I demonstrate how some un(der)paid farming internships exemplify how an employment relationship can be deeply embedded in a community of ethically-driven sustainable food proponents while simultaneously exhibiting characteristics of precariousness.

1. Employment stability and mobility

The purpose of farming internships tends not to be directed toward long-term employment with the farm host, and thus arrangements are often seasonal and relatively short-term. Nonetheless, some intern participants described instances where a host had employed them or a previously trained intern for a subsequent season as a paid employee, or had hired an intern during the same season for additional hours of formally paid work. This suggests that in some cases internships may be viewed as unpaid or un(der)paid extended training periods for waged farm work. In other sectors, training periods typically involve at least minimum wage (BC eliminated its lower-than-minimum wage training rate in 2011) (CBC News, 2011). Theoretically, farm interns do not face general barriers to leaving their internships or changing intern hosts, although students, for example, might depend on completing a full farming internship in order to receive academic credit and remain eligible for student loans.

2. Remuneration

By the definition I used in this study, un(der)paid interns’ labour is either unwaged or low-wage. While they may exchange their work for goods other than wages
(e.g. room and board, discounted or second-quality farm produce, education, and potentially a stipend), at present there is no standardized system of accountability for ensuring the fairness of the exchange or stipend. Nor is there a system for ensuring that informal intern accommodations meet provincial standards or any criteria established internally by the sustainable farming community. One intern participant noted that her hosts had recently built a separate apartment for the group of interns it hosted each season. She described this as “pretty exceptional” compared with other intern housing arrangements she had encountered in the process of seeking an internship, which had included accommodations in an intern’s own tent (interview #15, November 17th, 2013).

One organic farmer, who himself had undergone two un(der)paid farming internships, outlined the range of informal intern housing arrangements:

> Generally speaking [chuckling], the intern is given four walls. Rarely is the intern expected to live in a tent, okay? So the range tends to be a trailer or other type of basic dwelling, all the way to living with the host family in the house. Some internships require the interns to do all the cooking on their own, although the food is generally paid for. Others, they do all their eating with the family. So that's sort of the range that exists. In my second internship that I participated in, I basically was required to cook my breakfasts and dinners. Lunches were provided, and I lived in a very rudimentary room in the barn that was converted over to my bedroom. So it was fairly barebones.

(interview #12, November 5th, 2013)

3. Control over the labour process

Interns generally do not face the same barriers as migrants in asserting their workplace interests through the complaint-driven model of employment standards enforcement. This is illustrated by the earlier-mentioned case of the farm apprentices on Vancouver Island who received back-wages after approaching the Employment Standards Branch. In terms of control over the labour process at the level of the workplace, intern and intern host participants in this study described variations in interns’ capacity to define their workplace activities, hours, and time off. Some interns commented that their hosts offered them a great deal of autonomy in initiating side-projects of their choosing, the pace of work, and the timing of breaks. Most interns and intern hosts mentioned that they established a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at the beginning of the season that set out their mutual expectations and
responsibilities. Some intern hosts were unaware that an MOU of this kind does not have legal bearing (e.g. Shore, 2013). After some initial ambiguity regarding the hourly commitment each week, the employers of one participant requested that its apprentices sign an “Apprenticeship Job Description” (Appendix B). The same urban farm also hired paid staff members. From this “Job Description,” the apprentice participant learned that the employers were asking apprentices to commit to working approximately 50 hours/week, arriving at 6:45am, and providing two weeks notice prior to vacations. In exchange, interns would receive a stipend of $300/month and assistance with obtaining university/college credit when relevant. Recalling the process of the ‘contract,’ she observed:

The supervisors made the whole thing [the apprenticeship] out to be a huge privilege. Like everyone is SO LUCKY THAT THEY ARE HERE DOING THIS. And that at any second it could all be taken away. At our group meeting everyone had to sign what I guess is an ‘informal’ contract of behavioural responsibilities. It was maybe supposed to be motivating? But it wasn’t supportive; it was scary.  
(interview #19, December 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2013)

When she asked whether it would be possible to renegotiate the hourly commitment, the farm managers indicated this would not be feasible. Another intern participant at a different farm reported a conflict concerning time off: “They essentially just went back on their word; told me I could have a day off, and then a day or before said I couldn’t. And then there was just really evident tension. And an argument essentially ensued because I stood up for myself, and they did not like that” (interview #15, November 17\textsuperscript{th}, 2013). These accounts suggest that the sometimes-ambiguous terms of un(der)paid farming internships can, in some instances, place interns in a weak bargaining position.

4. Access to political participation and representation

If farm interns have Canadian citizenship and are at least 18 years old, then they are eligible to vote in government elections. With regard to participating in voluntary political associations, the National Farmers Union (NFU) of Canada is a non-partisan, direct-membership organization that enables all members of a Canadian farm family (including children ages 14-21) as well as non-farmer Associate Members to vote and
participate in agricultural policy-related advocacy (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014). However, the NFU, like other agricultural policy-related organizations in Canada in which interns may participate, does not currently focus on advocacy for hired farm workers. With regard to unpaid internships in North American businesses and non-profits more broadly, there is a lack of focus on collective labour organizing in general, and unions may perceive unpaid interns as too difficult to organize (Perlin, 2012, p. 39). Some unpaid interns in sectors such as social media have volunteered with the Canadian Intern Association. This not-for-profit organization focuses on advocating against the exploitation of interns and improving the quality of internships for both interns and employers, and it often engages at the level of policy and the law (Canadian Intern Association, n.d.).

5. Integration into social benefits

Finally, despite being engaged in one of the province’s most dangerous occupational categories, some un(der)paid interns may have low integration into social protections granted to those doing comparable farm work. For instance, they may lack access to special EI benefits that are intended to protect people from the risk of poverty. At a panel discussion on farming apprenticeships at a BC organic agriculture conference, one intern host warned of the drawbacks of ‘under-the-table’ apprenticeships and expressed deep regret at one of her previous apprentice’s lack of access to special EI benefits:

Years ago, with my very, very first apprentice – it was under the table, it was, you know, it was consensual. But she had an unexpected pregnancy. And it killed me that she couldn’t get EI. . . . And so that was the last time I did anything under the table.

(Panel Discussion, 2014)

Registering the apprentice as an employee through Revenue Canada would have enabled her to access EI parental benefits (Panel Discussion, 2014). EI benefits also include, for example, sickness benefits for individuals who are unable to work due to work-related sickness or injury.

In terms of health coverage, the majority of people (e.g. Canadian citizens, permanent residents and most people with a temporary work permit or a student visa)
who have lived in BC for at least three months are eligible for provincial public health coverage. However, completely unpaid farm interns who are not working for formal school credit would be considered “volunteers” and would not be eligible for WorkSafeBC coverage. WorkSafeBC is a no-fault insurance system intended to protect workers, their dependents and employers (i.e. protection from lawsuits) from financial hardship if a work-related injury or disease occurs. If such an incident does occur, WorkSafeBC offers coverage for items including compensation, health care benefits (e.g. fees not covered by BC’s medical services plan), permanent disability benefits, and return-to-work rehabilitation.

Non-student interns paid on a stipend basis might be eligible for WorkSafeBC insurance; their eligibility would depend on how closely their stipend matched the legal minimum wage of someone considered a “worker.” This would be the case regardless of whether a farm was registered with WorkSafeBC. While my fieldwork indicated some farms that hire stipend-based interns on an ‘under-the-table’ basis are registered with WorkSafeBC, others are not. WorkSafeBC may share information with Employment Standards if asked (WorkSafeBC personal communication, May 4, 2014). In this way, intern hosts whose employment practices are inconsistent with the Employment Standards Act face a disincentive to register with WorkSafeBC because details about their employment practices might be shared with Employment Standards. In the event an intern is injured while working for a farmer who is not registered with WorkSafeBC, the more closely that farmer's stipend approximates minimum wage, the more liable is that farmer to being required to pay full back-dated work-related injury costs (that farmer would also receive a penalty fine for not having registered in the first place). In theory, this policy perversely discourages farm hosts who are not registered with WorkSafeBC from offering interns a stipend that is minimum wage or close to it.

No data yet exist on the number of intern hosts who are registered with WorkSafeBC. When I inquired with SOIL, the farm apprentice-host matching organization, about the extent to which farm hosts addressed this form of social protection, a SOIL volunteer suggested:

I can only shed a bit of light, and it's anecdotal. . . . My own sense is that not very many farms address the risk of injury. Most just engage
in wishful thinking. I haven't heard of a SOIL farm getting into a pickle in that regard—i.e., there aren't any instances I know of an apprentice getting hurt, not being covered, and suing.

(personal communication, March 11, 2014)

In sum, certain un(der)paid internships in sustainability-oriented agriculture exemplify several defining characteristics of precarious employment. It may also be the case that the statistical risks of farm work are under-emphasized in un(der)paid farming internships and that hosts/employers engage in “wishful thinking.” Having established that both migrant farm worker regimes and un(der)paid sustainable farming internships exemplify various forms of precarious employment, I now consider how those engaged in BC alternative food initiatives have addressed precariousness for both groups of workers.
Chapter 4.

BC alternative food networks and precarious farm employment

On the whole, all of the groups of participants I interviewed tended to share the view that addressing labour concerns has been a “big gap” (interview #18, December 2, 2013) in BC alternative food efforts. This is consistent with findings from Environmental Studies researcher Kirsten Cole (2012), who explored barriers faced by sustainable food initiatives in Ontario to addressing migrant farm worker issues. One of the four categories Cole used to describe these barriers was “tensions in the local sustainable food movement” (p. 79).11 Some of the specific tensions she identified within the local sustainable food movement included pressures on non-profit organizations’ time and financial resources, a lack of familiarity with labour issues, a lack of consensus regarding specific labour-related goals to work toward, and a sense among food movement participants of being overwhelmed by food system sustainability issues other than labour (e.g. a community food security organization expressed that because its priority was to make fresh food affordable for low-income Torontonians, it was unable to purchase higher-cost produce from certified ‘ethical employer’ farms).

Rather than further chronicling this apparent gap, I explore how BC AFNs have engaged with forms of precarious farm work. I found that members of AFNs addressed

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11 The other three categories Cole uses are “the global neoliberal economic system,” “Canadian state policies and complicity with corporate agribusiness,” and “tensions within the labour movement” (93). Whereas I employ the terminology of alternative food networks, Cole characterizes southern Ontario sustainable food initiatives part of a broader, singular social movement.
farm worker social protections through three broad avenues: a moral economy that conceives of precarious farm work arrangements as largely unproblematic, consumer-driven regulation through the market, and much more tenuously, through engagement with the state. I now consider each of these in turn.

4.1. Moral economy

As an alternative to a food system dominated by free-market logic, the concept of a moral economy has been a powerful animating force for many alternative food efforts. A moral economy involves goods and services being produced and exchanged on the basis of non-capitalist cultural norms of human goodness, fairness and social justice. Socialist historian E.P. Thompson (1991) developed the concept of the moral economy to explain the protests of poor, 18th century English peasant movements against merchants and large farmers who attempted to profit from food shortages by raising food prices. The peasants’ protests were rooted in a belief that the economy should be based on a non-capitalist “just price” that prioritized community needs, rather than a free-market price that prioritized profit-making. Notably, the particular ethical values that embed a moral economy are chiefly based on cultural tradition, rather than being decided upon through open, democratic deliberation. Accordingly, moral customs do not necessarily conform with contemporary interpretations of ethical norms (e.g. Van Tassel, 1994).

In the context of farm worker employment, an agrarian moral economy tends to assume that individual farm employers and their hired workers operate on the basis of moral values rather than capitalist logic. For example, characterizing internships as teaching opportunities invokes a moral economy in which voluntarily given labour is a ‘gift’ (Boyd & Sandell, 2012; Gaertner, 2009). This gift is exchanged for favours such as education, a stipend, food, housing and, as I observed in my fieldwork, social inclusion in a community of local food producers.

To the extent that AFNs promoting local, sustainable agriculture are influenced by the idea of a moral economy, I observed an implicit assumption among some AFN participants that the strength of farmers’ ethical adherence to food system sustainability
obviates much of the need for state regulatory intervention or other formalized accountability systems. Proponents of small-scale, local and organic food often consider that farmers producing these goods should be given special ethical consideration because of their low incomes. For instance, while one organic farmer and local food security leader agreed she was concerned with the dependence of many small-scale organic farmers on un(der)paid interns, she qualified, “I wouldn’t criticize farmers, though. They’re often not making much money” (interview #18, December 2, 2013). Some local, sustainable food proponents also believe that sustainability-oriented farmers follow more ethical labour practices than conventional farmers (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Getz et al., 2008; Gray 2014). Within the moral economy framing of agricultural internships and migrant employment, I found that members of AFNs tend to de-emphasize problematic qualities of both arrangements. Rather, this lens focuses on how farm work arrangements contribute to the greater good through education or jobs. It also juxtaposes farmers’ sacrifices with workers’ low wages, and characterizes problematic or inconsistent employment arrangements as anomalous issues of an individual’s moral character, instead of highlighting systemic concerns in the political, economic and regulatory structure of these labour regimes.

4.1.1. Contributing to the greater good: Sought-after education and jobs

That farmers are contributing to the greater public good by educating future sustainable farmers, or at least more informed eaters, is one of the key ways I observed BC members of AFNs framing un(der)paid agricultural internships. One organic farmer I interviewed was critical of unpaid internships and engaged in what he described as an uncommon practice of paying his interns the minimum wage. He felt that while some farmers are taking advantage of the opportunity to use free labour in an otherwise unviable business, “some people simply look at it as part of a larger moral economy that they’re contributing to by teaching people how to farm” (interview #16, November 21, 2013). Another farmer, who had shifted from using stipends to paying his interns minimum wage, expressed concern that many intern hosts were citing morally laden defenses to muddy the waters of what he felt could in some cases be exploitative labour arrangements. For him, an internship risked being exploitative if there was a stark
contrast between how much time an intern contributed to the productivity of a farm and that intern’s financial compensation, particularly if the intern’s labour was essential to the scale of a business. He observed:

I think that there is sort of a maxim being repeated among a lot of small-scale farmers, ‘that I can't afford to pay minimum wage to my employees, and that I shouldn't have to afford it because I'm in some sort of special situation, I'm doing something for the good of the planet and therefore [I shouldn’t have to pay minimum wage]…’ I just don't buy into that line of reasoning.

(interview #12, November 5, 2013)

Proponents of either migrant or intern farm work arrangements often pointed to the enthusiasm or gratitude of individual workers as indicative that the arrangements were ethically sound. Some of the interns I interviewed highlighted their own autonomy and enthusiasm for entering into an opportunity they felt was educational, fair, and personally meaningful. One graduate student who interned on a rural organic farm with her partner declared, “We couldn't have asked for a better apprenticeship program.” She described how their hosts made particular efforts to involve them in decision-making and to give them a sense of ownership over farm production, such as overseeing their own livestock trial. Her case illustrates that internships do not necessarily entail stark power asymmetries between interns and hosts in the realm of decision-making over the labour process. She compared their internship very favourably to what they might have paid for room, board, and tuition had they attended a formal farm school program, and she added:

I just want to emphasize that I don't think it's fair to look at only the stipend and say that we're being paid less than minimum wage, or to include us in a group of ‘internship programs paying less than minimum wage’ – we feel like it was a very fair exchange and that we were not exploited in any way – it's just that we were paid for our work and time in largely non-monetary ways.

(interview #3, October 2, 2013)

Compared to endorsements of un(der)paid farm internships on the basis of offering sought-after educational opportunities, employers of migrant farm workers tended to highlight the economic opportunities that the TFWP provided to migrants who were enthusiastic for work. They often contrasted the opportunity for work in Canada
with poor workplace conditions and low wages in Mexico. For example, one farmer described that although migrants faced some unfair tax requirements, they had the opportunity to arrange their family planning in a way that drew upon paternity benefits through Canadian EI, which amounted to a considerable sum by Mexican standards. He, like many employers of migrants and interns I interviewed, articulated the view that young Canadians were not willing to do demanding physical labour jobs:

You can't get somebody [a Canadian] that wants to get up at 3am to milk cows, but Mexican workers are happy enough to do it, because you know what? It's a job! And they're getting paid for it! And you know, they get quite often better housing here than what they have in Mexico.

(interview #5, October 7, 2013)

The migrant employers I interviewed also emphasized their appreciation for migrants as valuable labour assets to their businesses. Indeed, researchers have pointed out that despite the precariousness of Canada's migrant farm worker regimes, many migrants express pride and gratitude at being able to legally generate an income at higher wages than they would receive in their sending countries (McLaughlin, 2009b). Mainstream media and Canadian farm industry organizations often stress particularly morally laden economic dimensions of the agricultural TFWP in order to justify an expansion of the program. Their claim is that because the agricultural TFWP enables migrants to send remittances home to their families who often live in low-income communities, the program can be portrayed as a type of foreign aid, or as contributing to poverty alleviation in poorer countries (Bauder, 2008; Binford, 2006; McLaughlin, 2009a; Preibisch, 2012).

12 Although they continue to pay into EI, as discussed earlier, since 2013 migrant farm workers have no longer had access to parental benefits (Salamanca, 2013).
4.1.2. We can't afford to pay more: Juxtaposing the high cost of farm labour against farmers’ own sacrifices

Employers of both un(der)paid interns and migrant farm workers stressed that they – and the province’s agricultural industry as a whole – were highly dependent on the labour of each respective group of workers, but were not in a financial position to pay them more. A farmer who had been hiring migrants for nearly a decade observed that in light of the TFWP’s growth, removing the agricultural TFWP in BC would “cripple agriculture” (interview #5, October 7, 2013) because consumers would not be prepared to accept the cost of increased food prices ensuing from higher farm worker wages. He commented, “So if you were to remove that labour source, and try and source it with local people, it’s impossible. It wouldn’t happen. And most of us now have built what we do in agriculture based on that cheap source of labour.”

Employers of migrant farm workers mainly voiced a utilitarian economic rationale for fulfilling their labour needs. Un(der)paid internships, on the other hand, were described both in terms of practical labour needs and within the context of ethically-driven sacrifices and farming as a lifestyle choice. During a panel discussion on apprenticeships at a BC organic farming conference, one audience member agreed with a panelist’s suggestion that labour costs should be treated in the same way as other costs of operating a farm business, such as buying seeds. However, she added an argument for considering agriculture as an exceptional business:

> I think anyone needs to be paid a fair wage, but we’re trying to impose this very standard business model onto a system that is a lifestyle… It’s much more challenging than a lot of other businesses out there. You have so many other variables that aren’t typical of other businesses.  
> (Panel Discussion, 2014)

Some study participants who were organic farmers underscored their own considerable economic and physical sacrifices in pursuing organic farming as an ethical commitment to environmental sustainability and community values. One such farming couple who had been hosting WWOOFers and unpaid interns for nearly two decades asserted, “Officially we are below the poverty line. We would be the kind of people you would see in line-ups at food banks, except we grow our own food. Look at our house!” (interview #6, October 9, 2013). This account lent weight to their later response to my
question about the feasibility of hiring paid farm workers; “There is no way we could afford to hire people.” Another organic farmer gave critical voice to a sentiment I heard from several food system sustainability activists, in which farmers’ own ethically driven economic sacrifices were juxtaposed with the acceptability of not paying their interns:

Look, I don’t want to downplay how difficult it is to make a living as a small-scale farmer who is trying to farm with sustainability, environmental stewardship and sustainability in mind, it’s very, very difficult. But I think because of that difficulty, the high cost of labour seems scary, it also seems almost unjust because the farmers themselves aren’t making that much.

(interview #12, November 5, 2013)

This farmer felt that inadequate remuneration for farmers and farm workers was tied to low food costs that did not reflect the ‘true cost’ of labour, and to insufficient wages for Canadian consumers in general. He asserted: “I really want food to be as accessible as possible to all socioeconomic classes, but not at the expense of maintaining your intern in that low socioeconomic class in order to do so.” Another organic farmer who paid his interns minimum wage agreed that, “the cost of food needs to represent what it actually costs to pay people to do the work.” Citing a case in which BC (im)migrant farm workers had been hired under duplicitous circumstances and left unpaid, he felt it was unethical and contradictory for organic farms to “subsidize” food through un(der)paid internships:

It doesn’t give you a lot to stand on in saying ‘that’s unacceptable’ if you run your business off of free labour in another context. Like, that it’s okay if it’s WWOOFers or unpaid interns, but it’s not okay if it’s new immigrants. So we just said from a moral point of view, we really want to make sure that our cost of operating represents what it actually costs to pay someone. Even if it’s only minimum wage, there has to be a minimum baseline that people are operating from.

(interview #16, November 21, 2013)

4.1.3. Rock stars and bad apples: “They all have different mentalities”

“You almost want to reach out and touch a farmer at the farmers’ market. They’re like rock stars” (fieldnotes, October 16, 2013). This half-joking remark from a presenter at a Vancouver ‘right to food’ event describes how some members of AFNs have
constructed as self-evident the idea that farmers are to be celebrated, and particularly those farmers engaged in small-scale, local and organic food production. Consumer-driven local food initiatives in BC and elsewhere have invested considerable resources in ongoing campaigns to promote the social standing of local farmers and recognition of the public goods they generate like food security and ecological stewardship. Notably, hired farm workers tend not to be included in initiatives such as the BC Association of Farmers’ Markets’ annual Farmers Appreciation Week, which encourages greater public regard for farmers through venues such as a poetry contest, social media, public events, and free “I ‘Heart’ BC Farmers” temporary tattoos (BCAFM, 2013). An explicit or implicit narrative about farmers’ basic moral uprightness, along with the importance of valuing farmers, pervaded many of the rationales that I observed for maintaining the status quo in both un(der)paid internships and the migrant farm worker program.

In my interviews and analysis of popular sustainable food publications, AFN participants often expressed that exploitative un(der)paid internships were rare or even unheard of. While some participants felt that un(der)paid internships were less than ethically ideal and posed risks in terms of occupational hazards and liability, they expressed that organic and small-scale farmers were people who could generally be counted on to arrange fair exchanges and not to exploit interns as mere low-cost labourers. They felt there was less inequity in internships on small organic farms compared to unpaid internships in more lucrative industries such as software and hospitality, in part because there was less ostensible disparity between farmers’ incomes and those of their interns. Numerous interns’ own enthusiasm and satisfaction with their experience were often used as further evidence that the arrangements are generally unproblematic. Indeed, several intern participants described having highly positive relationships with their hosts.

For those whose experiences with farmers are not wholly positive, however, local and sustainable food movement efforts to promote the valuation of farmers can generate unintended effects. A student and migrant justice activist described how a culture of romanticizing farmers as an ideal type can conflict with addressing the poor treatment experienced by many people hired through the agricultural TFWP. She described an
encounter with a fellow student who was presenting on her research about local sustainable agriculture as “very awkward:”

During the presentation, I was talking to one of my poli sci friends, and I kept telling him, ‘Labour is a sustainability issue, labour is a sustainability issue, labour is a sustainability issue!’ He replied, ‘No, you’ve got yourself so far up your own research...’ And I said, ‘No, I’m sure it is a sustainability issue.’ After the presentation, I approached the presenter and explained some of the solidarity work I was doing as part of my own graduate research with migrant farm workers in the community. The woman received me very welcomingly, but she told me that we need to ‘focus on the good, and not the bad’ and suggested that poor treatment of farm workers was anomalous. My understanding was that she was concerned that criticism of bad employers would reflect poorly on the ‘farming community’ as a whole and therefore she did not want to talk about it.

(interview #13, November 4, 2013)

One of the migrant employers I interviewed articulated a similar impression that the vast majority of migrant farm worker employment arrangements in BC were unproblematic. This farmer employed the same two migrant farm workers each season, and had once traveled to Mexico to visit with one of the men and his family during the off-season. He noted that one of the aspects he enjoyed most about farming was a sense of support from fellow growers: “Obviously I’m probably biased, but I think farmers are definitely one of the more genuine, hardworking, sincere people I know” (interview #24, January 28, 2014). Identifying his farm as part of the local food movement, he expressed puzzlement regarding how labour relations were at all relevant to efforts to promote local and sustainable food: “I know what you’re asking. I have a hard time to put local [food] movement and labour together, how it actually relates.” He felt that problems with the agricultural TFWP program were uncommon: “I’ve definitely heard of them. It’s more or less being too dense living conditions, out of anything. But it’s so rare. I’ve probably heard of two since we started the program in ’07”. This farmer’s impression contrasts with the study by Preibisch and Otero (2014), in which 37% of surveyed BC SAWP workers surveyed disagreed with the statement, “The state of my housing does not present any risk to my health.”

As with the accounts from interns, the migrants interviewed for this project described employment arrangements that ranged from highly problematic to cases in
which an employer would monetarily reward long-time employees and agree to attempt to secure permanent residency for them. They might also express appreciation for workers by buying pizza and luxury appliances for their homes. One participant from Guerrero repeatedly emphasized that his boss was a “good guy” in terms of interpersonal communication and not pushing employees to work beyond their limit, but that despite being a “good guy” he neglected to uphold his contractual obligations (interview #8, September 29, 2013). The participant described living in a house with holes in the floor through which rats and water would enter, and he expressed frustration above all at his boss’s failure to provide a washing machine. The Mexican Consulate (SRE, 2013) indicates that employers of SAWP workers are required to provide either adequate on-site laundry (i.e. no-charge washers and dryers proportionate to the number of workers) or weekly access to a local laundromat.

Other migrant participants echoed the sentiment that there was little consistency across employers. One man who had spent nine seasons in the SAWP noted that while he had no concerns with his then employer, he had previously worked for a farmer who repeatedly refused to take him to the doctor when he had an ear infection, up to the point when a blood vessel burst in his ear. It was then that his employer finally took him to the doctor. He asserted, “There are some who are concerned for the person and some who aren’t, there are some who evade the law that is stipulated. If we pay [health] insurance, I don’t know why they wouldn’t provide us with insurance if it’s a right.” He also remarked:

Well, the fact is that they all have different mentalities. As long as you are useful for the boss and do your work well, he’s going to keep choosing you [to return each season]. When they [the bosses] realize that you are not useful, they won’t choose you. One is like a machine, if one doesn’t work, they replace you with another.

(interview #11, September 29, 2013)

The foregoing accounts suggest that some AFN participants – including interns, intern hosts, migrant employers and food system sustainability advocates – may invoke a moral economy in various ways in order to justify both precarious forms of sustainability-oriented farming internships as well as migrant farm worker regimes. However, these justifications are tempered by critiques from members of AFNs.
themselves and accounts from migrants and migrant activists, who draw attention to the ways in which justifying precarious employment through the language of a moral economy can be oppressive.

4.2. Consumer-driven regulation

The second major avenue through which I observed BC members of AFNs engaging with farm worker social protection was by advocating consumption practices among individual consumers that are attentive to farm working conditions. Unlike the moral economy approach, consumer-driven regulation acknowledges the widespread issues at hand in BC farm worker arrangements, and it presents market mechanisms as means for addressing concerns. The two main proposals I observed in the consumer-driven regulation approach were ethical labeling schemes and consumer surveillance.

4.2.1. Ethical labeling

One popular idea among North American local and sustainable food proponents for addressing farm worker labour issues is the use of voluntary food labeling schemes, such as ‘domestic fair trade’, to signal to ethical labour practices to consumers. These labels generally function through a price premium that is paid by consumers or retailers. Part of the revenue generated from product sales covers the cost of a third-party certifier, which is responsible for monitoring implementation of the certified practices on each participating farm (Brown & Getz 2008; Guthman, 2007; Howard & Allen, 2010). This approach to addressing farm labour concerns appears to resonate with some BC AFNs. Elise Hahn, an activist with the Okanagan-based group Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture (RAMA), noted that on more than one occasion sustainable food proponents had encouraged RAMA to develop an ‘ethical employer certification.’ The proposed label would offer economic rewards to employers who voluntarily engage in migrant labour practices deemed ethical. Members of RAMA were, however, averse to singlehandedly spearheading such a label. Besides the tremendous amount of volunteer resources that would be required to develop a certification system, they were concerned that promoting the economic interests of farm employers might undermine RAMA’s relationships with farm workers. Hahn added:
The other reason we do not envisage ourselves proceeding with a ‘stamp’ system such as this is that it obscures the greater structural injustices that are occurring at the national and international levels including but certainly not limited to racialized immigration policies, the proliferation of free trade, the securitization of borders, etc. An ‘ethical’ employer, while great, doesn’t fix this!

(interview, January 21, 2014)

4.2.2. Consumer surveillance

In addition to voluntary food labeling schemes, food system localization efforts in BC have encouraged direct marketing relationships between food producers and eaters as a way to generate transparency and trust around farmers’ production practices (Beckie et al. 2012; Connelly et al. 2011; Wittman et al., 2012). This includes, for instance, farm gate sales, CSAs and farmers’ markets. For some of the farmers I interviewed, direct marketing relationships served as a way to communicate with customers about their employment of either migrant farm workers or interns. They noted that this open line of dialogue was an important venue to justify the ‘true cost’ of labour-related price premiums to consumers, or to respond to queries about their hiring of farm workers through the TFWP.

The three employers of migrant farm workers I interviewed echoed the local food movement maxim of transparent ‘know your grower’ relationships, of prioritizing direct communication (often through email and social media marketing), and informing their customers in greater detail about their practices. One of the three farms’ websites included detail on how much the farm owners valued their seasonal Mexican migrant workforce. When I asked the owner of this farm why his business emphasized transparency about its TFWP labour arrangements while many other BC farms were less forthcoming, he remarked:

Well there’s a couple things, really. Again, I'm dependent on positive public perception, so if people find out you’re hiding things or keeping information, it's not going to play out well for you in the long run. . . . For us, a lot of our catch-flow [visitor flow] is through the front door, and we're encouraging people to come here. They're going to see Mexican workers coming in and out of the fields, and they're going to want to know, right? So you may as well just be forthcoming about it from the get-go, for sure. I mean, you do get the occasional person who says, “Oh, well they're stealing Canadian jobs.” And if you sit down and actually say to them,
"Well no. There's no Canadians that are willing to do the job. It's different, right? So, a lot of it is just about an educational approach.  
(interview #5, October 7, 2013)

Highlighting the business case for candidness with customers who could observe farm labour practices themselves through on-site visits, this farmer also called attention to the rationale of avoiding negative publicity through unfavourable customer reviews on social media platforms.

By contrast, one intern participant described how exercising consumer oversight on the farm's labour practices could be challenging, even in the case of an economic relationship between consumers and a farm business that was deeply embedded in social and ecological values. The intern worked in exchange for $5/hour (minimum wage at the time was $8.75/hour), food, and shared accommodations with his employer for the four days he worked at the small organic farm each week, which amounted to 40-56 hours/week over the course of six months. While a sole operator managed the farm, members of the farm's 120-share CSA belonged to a society that participated actively in various farm-planning decisions. Describing how members responded to the internship arrangement on their farm, the intern commented that it could be uncomfortable for members to ask the farm operator pointed questions such as how much he paid his hired worker:

It's kind of like it's an uncomfortable question to ask him [the farm operator]. But I mean, you kind of have the right to know if you're part of the community farm, and you're paying, and everything else. But I don't think too many people did ask him and did find out.

After CSA/board members became aware of the farm’s employment arrangement, they disputed the matter with the farm operator:

I know for sure that he lost one member straight up, because that guy told him he needed to pay me minimum wage. And he [the farm operator] said, 'You don’t know the economics of farming. If I want to pay somebody minimum wage, I could pay a Punjabi lady to do three times the work that he does. I can't afford that.' And it got into basically a fight where I think he [the farm operator] said, “Well if you want to tell me how to run my business, then here's your money back.” And that guy was a member for like 15 years.  
(interview #2, October 1, 2013)
Notwithstanding the pressure from CSA/board members, the intern indicated that his internship that season remained informal and that his pay remained the same. The following season, the intern was formally hired at minimum wage on the same farm. During the interim period between the intern’s first and second season on the farm, he thought the farmer received “a phone call” regarding the farmer's failure to file taxes for many years. A CSA member then urged the farmer to file his taxes and volunteered to assist with bookkeeping and arranging the business “above the board.” Farmers who follow ‘above-board’ practices with interns would, for instance, be required to calculate and deduct part of their interns’ earnings for EI overheads, provide monthly pay stubs, register their interns as employees through Revenue Canada and file their taxes accordingly, provide formal yearly employment records for interns’ own tax-filing purposes, and pay WorkSafeBC premiums in case of interns’ work-related injury. Based on comments from one of my intern host participants (interview #12, November 5, 2013), some farmers are deterred by the significant amount of time involved in following these protocols and may be disinclined to engage with what they perceive as bureaucratic state requirements.

4.3. Engagement with the state

The third and least evident approach by which I observed some BC AFN members addressing farm worker social protection was through state engagement. Study participants tended to agree that BC organizations promoting food system sustainability have undertaken little intentional engagement with state actors, policies or legislation vis-à-vis regulations for migrant farm workers or un(der)paid interns. This apparent gap encompassed both farmer-friendly regulatory change and farm worker-oriented social protection.

Among BC AFNs, active support for farm worker social protections often hinged on the efforts of individual advocates. For instance, a director of the BC Food Systems Network (BCFSN), a province-wide food security organization with over 300 members, noted that in her personal capacity she attended a rally against the blacklisting of BC migrant farm workers by the Mexican Consulate. She commented that migrant farm worker advocates in the Lower Mainland had difficulty getting media coverage of
problematic employers in the region because of the prominence of the farms in question. Consequently, through her role with the BCFSN, she helped generate media coverage by raising the issue of “questionable” labour practices among BC employers of migrant farm workers at the Richmond City Council. The BCFSN has also hosted presentations by the Agricultural Workers Alliance (AWA), a union-funded migrant farm workers support network, at two of its Annual Gatherings. Given the widespread lack of knowledge regarding migrant farm workers in BC, the director felt that building awareness “is probably one of the biggest things that BCFSN has done for that issue” (interview #4, October 7, 2013).

4.3.1. An aversion to “one-size-fits-all regulation”

Many participants engaged in AFNs as farmers or volunteers with food system sustainability organizations expressed a strong belief that the various layers of state structures in BC – municipal, provincial, federal and transnational – have been concerned above all with large-scale, non-organic commodity production. They felt the state’s stance toward small-scale agroecological farmers had been dismissive, hostile and favouring agribusiness, and that provincial regulations around internships exemplify the state’s unsupportive stance. For instance, one food producer at an ecovillage expressed:

Benito Mussolini said fascism should really be called corporatism because of the merger of state and corporate power. I think that the corporations will bear the responsibility for this. I think the state is pretty much powerless these days. The state has been bought and paid for. So I think that one-size-fits-all regulation is really an attempt by large corporations to take control of everything they can.

(interview #1, September 15, 2013)

The director I interviewed from the BCFSN also argued that the “huge gaps” in addressing the province’s food-related policies stemmed in part from the “gutting” of the provincial Ministry of Agriculture (interview #4, October 7, 2013). Summarizing this common sentiment among AFNs regarding state regulatory and funding apparatuses in BC, another small-scale organic farmer declared, “It's a system that does not really recognize the value of what we do from a policy perspective, and often from a market
perspective as well. It’s just we sort of have to look out for ourselves quite a bit” (interview #16, November 21, 2013).

In response to the aforementioned 2013 incident in which interns sought retroactive wages from the organic farm on Vancouver Island, one of the two farm owners described receiving support from sympathetic fellow farmers: “The farming community came to us and said, we will help you fundraise, we will fundraise for you to hire a lawyer if you want to fight this” (Panel Discussion, 2014). Ultimately, the owners opted to settle through mediation. She felt that while many apprenticeship arrangements were “absolutely fabulous” and there were “many, many success stories,” in the case of her and her husband’s farm, “we just maybe got the bad apple.” Noting that the total cost they incurred after paying back-wages, lawyer’s fees and extra accounting costs was $15,000, she cautioned that farmers should be aware of the legal risks of hosting apprentices. Referencing the incident, one farmer and alternative food participant expressed:

It almost sounds like sabotage. . . . I can’t imagine doing that to someone – quasi-intending to buy a farm, and then coming back to seek back-wages. It breaks the sense of trust in the organic farming community; They [the apprentices] exemplify the attitude that it’s okay to kind of try to work outside the system until you decide you don't like something, then to revert to legal or state recourse.

(interview #25, March 2, 2014)

This grower gave voice to the tensions between operating a farm business within an informal, trust-based moral economy and workers’ inalienable, state-based social protections. Another organic farmer similarly articulated an aversion among some AFN participants toward “one-size-fits-all” farm worker social protection. In order to address concerns regarding migrant farm worker employment, he felt that more enforcement of labour regulations was called for:

I think that, personally, just like a farmer hosting interns can be a responsible host or a sh*tty host, I think a farm that's hosting a migrant labourer can be a really good host and provide a good experience and a fair exchange to their migrant labourers, or, provide a terrible one. My own personal view is, have as much enforcement as possible. That’s what appears to me to have been lacking, and there’s been too much room for exploitation to take place.
The same farmer felt that many growers were inappropriately using interns as inexpensive labour. However, when I asked him whether he felt punitive measures to enforce labour regulations would be desirable, he responded:

No, I wouldn’t . . . I do think there is this ideal internship where education is enough of a focus that the farmer shouldn’t need to feel that they have to pay minimum wage . . . I think there are contexts in which what’s happening in the internship represents a grey area between an academic education and a purely farm labouring kind of position. And I kind of want that grey area to exist.

(interview #12, November 5, 2013)

A better arrangement, in his view, would be for farmers to clearly distinguish between times spent educating an intern and hours when an intern was purely contributing to the productivity of the farm, and to charge a separate, above-board fee for the former while paying interns at least minimum wage for the latter. Reflecting a theme I had heard from an intern, this farmer also commented that some farm hosts likely had an “ideological opposition” to formal employment arrangements because of the associated bureaucratic tax requirements.

4.3.2. Looking out for yourself

Amidst some AFN participants’ disinclination toward state-based social protections for interns, several interns articulated that formal social protections were not essential for them to feel comfortable with their internships. In their view, because they freely consented to the terms of the internship and often had a trusting, highly positive relationship with their hosts, they felt that potentially not being covered for insurance against workplace injury or disease (e.g. by WorkSafeBC or EI) and forgoing standard wage rates were reasonable risks based on their individual voluntary choice and responsibility. When asked to describe what he would have done in the event of a workplace injury, one man stressed his own responsibility in the internship arrangement:

I don’t think I would have tried to do it officially. Because I mean, I was complicit in the whole arrangement also. You know, I guess if it was something really bad, then I could have gone, like the legal route on him. But as long as it wasn’t something really bad, then I mean I just probably wouldn’t have been working. Like I wouldn’t have had workers comp. And maybe, maybe, maybe he’d slip a bit of money my way or something like
that if it was something that happened on the job, but… I don’t really know what I would have done, but handled it as informally as possible.

(interview #2, October 1, 2013)

My intern participants generally expressed that at the time, and in some cases after their internship, they perceived their manual labour, livestock management and use of small tractors as very low risk. One woman who interned at an urban farm described becoming more concerned in retrospect about a potential absence of worker’s compensation in the event of an injury:

We didn’t sign any waivers saying that we were holding our own liability… It made me think, “Holy f***. What if I would have gotten really hurt or something?” I don’t think there was much coverage there for me… I’m sure they would have just said it was my own fault, I’ve done something wrong. And we were on ladders, we were using power tools, we were working in the extreme cold and then the extreme heat. There was lots of room for dangerous things to happen.

(interview #19, December 8, 2013)

While the migrants I interviewed conveyed a similar sense of ‘looking out for yourself,’ as if it were all their individual responsibility, this perception was based on what they characterized as an absence of state support or consistent employer compliance with their contractual responsibilities, rather than a belief that their work was low-risk or that they were voluntarily complicit in workplace mishaps. One of the men referenced the AWA as an important source of assistance for workplace issues. While the Mexican Consulate is officially responsible for ensuring many of migrants’ rights while in Canada (see p. 52), the man declared:

If you make a call to the Consulate, it is useless because they will not see you. And if they go to see your boss, well it’s nothing more than talk. He will plead and will tell them things, and blah blah, but nothing is resolved. So what you have to do is watch for your own well-being, worry yourself about your health, spend your money, buy medicine and look out for yourself, because supposedly the Consulate watches out for Mexicans but no, never.

(interview #8, September 29, 2013)

In contrast to some BC AFNs members’ preference for informal, case-by-case approaches to social protection, one farmer who hired migrant workers felt that it was inadequate to assume most migrant employers were sufficiently morally upright to
ensure decent working conditions. From his perspective, the growth of the agricultural TFWP had not kept pace with the enforcement of employment standard regulations. He proposed:

I don’t know if maybe the program [should] cost more, so maybe the federal government can afford to have more employees in place to do those sorts of things. I’m not sure, maybe it's a provincial government thing, maybe it's almost even a private company that [could be] paid by the government to do these sorts of audits . . . I do think that it's probably a necessary. Because you look at the growth, it’s been exponential in the years we’ve been bringing in foreign workers. There’s no way anything could possibly keep up with in its policies for looking after, making sure it's done right. I mean, I guess you just hope that people are, at the end of the day, honest enough and humane enough to do a good job of things. But, as I said, you're always gonna have a certain percentage that are not.

(interview #5, October 7, 2013)
Chapter 5.

Discussion and Analysis

Having outlined three broad avenues through which I observed some members of BC AFNs addressing farm worker social protections, I turn now to a critical appraisal of each. My contention is that forms of precarious farm employment are founded on denying basic social protections allotted to other workers. These include access to social insurance benefits (e.g. EI parental benefits, WorkSafeBC compensation, practical access to provincial health services) as well as freedom from poverty (e.g. in theory, the minimum wage is meant to ensure this). As such, these labour regimes constitute an obstacle to the AFN vision of transforming the food system through socially sustainable, human-intensive agriculture. I argue that in their current forms, all three approaches to addressing farm worker social protections are inadequate. The three approaches weave together moral paternalism and farmer-centrism in ways that – however inadvertent – disproportionately impact those who are least able to protect themselves from neoliberal market-based pressures. All three approaches, however, also offer practical potential for strengthening anti-oppressive forms of social protection at overlapping scales: interpersonal, market, and radically democratic forms of governance. Accordingly, I suggest some of the ways these approaches might be reimagined.

5.1. Refining the moral economy and expanding critical agrarian possibilities

At its core, the moral economy of farm work proposes voluntary human goodwill as a way to mitigate against workers’ and employers’ exposure to market-based pressures such as exploitative working conditions. Trust, fairness and reciprocity are laudable norms upon which to ground the exchange of goods and services. However, by basing social protection on individuals’ voluntary moral fibre, I contend that the moral
economy offers an ambiguous, patchy and difficult-to-scale fabric of farm worker social protection.

5.1.1. Double standards for interns and migrants

The examples from my fieldwork suggest that some members of AFNs in BC invoke a moral economy in ways that legitimize a lack of social protection for all in favour of apparent individual freedoms for a few. These apparent freedoms include the capacity for farm employers to pursue particular kinds of food production systems, for interns to pursue experiential learning, and for migrants to pursue income-generating opportunities. That internships are often premised on education, and potentially a sense of belonging to a value-based community, whereas migrant regimes are framed as chiefly economic suggests a double standard in the moral economy of precarious farm work. Migrant farm workers cannot access educational services such as government-funded English-language training available to many other newcomers (Rajkumar et al., 2012). This reinforces the way in which the TFWP structures migrant farm workers’ contributions to Canadian society on the basis of the functions they fulfill in commodity production, rather than recognizing the social and cultural contributions they make (McLaughlin, 2009b), and the life projects they might pursue in the absence of current barriers.

My findings suggest that agricultural internship arrangements are often explicitly based on training potential future farmers and furthering AFN goals of realizing agroecological, human-intensive food systems. A critical agrarian lens, however, probes deeper into questions about who else is currently engaged in land-based agricultural labour, and about the political terms of their relationship with the land. One of the
migrants interviewed for this study, a 33-year old man who spoke Spanish, Tzotzil,\textsuperscript{13} and a little English, expressed that besides earning money, it was very important to him to use Canada’s migrant farm worker program as a way to learn new production techniques that he could apply in Mexico to build upon his existing agricultural knowledge. However, he contrasted his experience with the use of agrochemicals on the Canadian farm where he had worked for two seasons with his experience of agriculture in Chiapas, a state in southern Mexico:

They [the BC farm where he worked] use a lot of chemicals and I haven’t seen anything organic, not like in Chiapas, where I come from, where you can find something that is really organic. For example, a clump of cilantro, or coffee grounds, or for example chicken manure. . . . Housewives cook with wood so we can make organic fertilizers with the ashes – coffee grounds, chicken leftovers and leaves that we find, and with that we make organic fertilizers. You sow a seed of cilantro or a radish, a carrot, an \textit{epazote} bush... it’s organic. But here, I see that a lot of chemicals are used.

When asked whether he would have a desire, in the hypothetical, to bring his family to Canada and own a farm, the participant responded:

Well for starters I would have to work, but you have a hope to be successful in life. You have to start at the bottom, but if I could come here and be with my family and have the freedom and all, why not!? Why not think of a project in the future and extend a hand to all colleagues who come and like me who start from the bottom – I know how it is – and employ more employees.

(interview #9, September 29, 2013)

The account of this migrant, along with the double standard of an agricultural training program for interns but not migrants, tentatively suggests that AFNs in BC may be overlooking migrants as potential partners in developing a critical agrarian vision of

\textsuperscript{13} Tzotzil is a language spoken by the Indigenous Maya people of Chiapas, Mexico. Speaking one of Mexico’s Indigenous languages is a strong indicator of Indigeneity. Preibisch and Otero (2014) found that half of the migrant farm workers they surveyed in BC spoke an Indigenous language.
dignified, human-intensive agriculture. Migrant farm workers often have a great deal of experience in various modes of agriculture in Canada and their own countries and, in some cases, have an interest in pursuing agroecologically-based forms of food production on their own terms. I qualify this suggestion as “tentative” because for one, no research yet exists in British Columbia on how many migrant farm workers would be interested in this hypothetical possibility. Further, I do not intend to imply that racialized migrant farm workers are somehow ‘naturally’ suited to agricultural work; I am simply asserting that many migrants bear a great deal of knowledge and experience in agriculture and, occasionally, an interest in pursuing agrarian livelihoods that have affinities with AFN ecological sustainability goals. Minkoff-Zern’s (Fudge, 2011; McLaughlin, 2009b) research with Mexican migrant farm workers who are now pursuing their own small-scale, biodiverse and family-run farms in the United States suggests similar possibilities.

In one of its discussion papers, the grassroots organization Food Secure Canada (2011) indicated a recognition of this opportunity, calling for citizenship rights for farm workers along with laws and enforcement to ensure humane working conditions, arguing that “Canada would gain farmer citizens and a diversity of expertise in alternative approaches to food production, all at a minimal cost” (p. 14) (Appendix C). Food Secure Canada’s proposal for migrant farm workers to gain access to citizenship rights is consistent with the demands of some migrants and campaigns of migrant advocacy groups. These include J4MW, No One is Illegal, and the BC Employment Standards Coalition, which variously call for a route to permanent citizenship, an inclusive, unconditional and ongoing regularization program, immediate landed status upon arrival for all migrants and their families, and/or challenging the basis of state citizenship as a legitimate means of controlling people’s right to leave or stay in a given geopolitical location (McLaughlin, 2009b; Walia, 2013; Weiler & Otero, 2013).

5.1.2. Ambiguous reciprocities and moral paternalism

Given that both migrant employment and internships were variously framed as a “privilege” (e.g. pp. 55, 63) for workers, the labour relations they involve can be interpreted as a form of a gift-based moral economy in which workers are expected to
return the favour of the privilege with their labour. For migrants, the ‘privilege’ or ‘gift’ in question was usually framed as the opportunity to work in a country with higher wages and greater employment opportunities than they might expect in their sending countries. Two migrant employer participants also contrasted the apparent widespread corruption in Mexico with better working conditions in Canada. For interns, the gift was the opportunity to gain experiential knowledge and training in sustainable agriculture, and perhaps a sense of membership and identification with the alternative food community. The respective workers often receive both sets of gifts with gratitude. However, the implicit, unspoken nature of the exchange means that boundaries around how much, and what kind of labour is adequate to reciprocate the gift may be ambiguous. The case of the intern who was initially given unclear information about the weekly commitment, and subsequently asked to sign a “contract” or Job Description (Appendix B) committing to working two hundred hours per month for $300/month at an urban farm demonstrates how employers may maintain much greater power to define the precise terms of the exchange. In that instance, the farm managers had been unwilling to renegotiate the terms of the internship once the Job Description was presented to interns (see p. 52). When the terms of a labour-exchange relationship are vague and situated within unspoken assumptions in a moral economy, there may be potential for parties who typically have greater power in an employment relationship (i.e. employers) to define what counts as fair. Discussing the imprecise parameters of internships in general in the United States, writer and linguist Ross Perlin (2012) characterizes this as a “useful ambiguity” for intern employers (p. 186).

My findings illustrate that the sometimes-ambiguous, unequal power dynamics of this gift-based moral economy can take place on sites that AFNs often idealize, including small-scale, local and organic farms with interns, as well as farms with migrants, which may also employ AFN strategies such as extensive sustainability techniques and direct marketing. While my sample size was too small to draw any conclusions about the impact of scale on labour relations in a moralized gift economy for migrants and interns, political scientist Margaret Gray (2014) offers important insights in this regard. In her 10-year study of (im)migrant farm workers in New York’s Hudson Valley, Gray points out that by virtue of their high employer to worker ratio, small, local farms can foster labour
control through complex forms of paternalism in which workers owe the favour of hard work and complaisance to their employers.

Although many members of AFNs expressed that internship arrangements ought to be regarded on a case-by-case basis, this leaves a significant opportunity for arbitrariness on the part of an employer. Notably, some of this study’s intern employer participants remarked that besides the liability risks associated with hosting interns informally, they felt uncomfortable making the kind of workplace demands of interns as they would with above-board paid employees (e.g. arriving to work for an early start-time). A critical agrarian approach avoids characterizing farmers as inherently virtuous, recognizing that, like anyone else, farmers may exhibit qualities of a proverbial ‘rock star,’ a ‘bad apple,’ or more likely something in between. My findings suggest that mutual clarity and enforceable social protections standards around workers’ utilitarian contributions may help to reduce not only the potential for worker exploitation, but also paternalistic labour relations, and liability risks for employers like the apprentice hosts on Vancouver Island.

On a practical and policy level, as suggested by one of the study’s farmer participants (p. 22), the core positive functions of internships could be preserved through a utilitarian approach in which interns were paid for their work and employers were paid separate, above-board fees for education services. Further, the director I interviewed from the BCFSN suggested that public funding to support the public good of newly trained farmers could help to promote accessibility for those who might otherwise be unable to intern for little remuneration. The Canada Summer Jobs and Career Focus wage subsidies are existing examples of this type of wage subsidy, which could be tailored more specifically to support farming internships (Government of Canada, 2014). Developing an explicit monetary value for in-kind forms of internship remuneration, particularly food and housing, could help to facilitate clarity, fairness, standardization and monitoring, which I assert would be critical for scaling up the training of sustainability-oriented farmers. Rather than eliminating the moral economy, an "above-board" approach could help to elucidate the nodes at which inequalities and forms of oppression may persist in internship arrangements, while strengthening and critically refining how norms of fairness and reciprocity apply in these employment relationships.
5.1.3. Denaturalizing self-exploitation in agricultural work

While my focus in this study has been on social protections against the risk of poverty for farm workers, many farmers are all-too familiar with this risk as well. Some people involved in BC alternative food initiatives expressed that because there was less disparity between farm employers’ incomes and those of their interns, un(der)paid farming internships were less problematic than those in other sectors. However, this does not account for the imbalance between interns’ and farmers’ investments in farm infrastructure, land ownership or leasing arrangements, marketing and business relationships, and so on. Furthermore, some actors within BC AFNs proposed that because farm hosts may have very low incomes, farmers should not be criticized or held to harsh standards for paying their interns less than minimum wage or no wage. My concern is that defending low-wage or no-wage labour serves to perpetuate the apparent naturalness of inadequate incomes for many farmers and farm workers. This process of normalizing inadequate incomes for farm owners has ideological consequences for migrant farm workers because it fails to contest the way migrants’ devalued work and the sacrifices of their families act as a subsidy to the food system. Gray (2014) describes a parallel ideological constellation of cheapened work in New York’s low-wage apprenticeships during the 19th century: “Employers fueled their own agrarian dreams by hiring cheap labor, while the farmworkers [apprentices] rationalized their low-wage ‘training’ in the name of their futures, a dream of upward mobility that is still very much alive among immigrant farmworkers today” (p. 30).

The self-exploitation that is naturalized as part of many un(der)paid farming internships – and, to be certain, in farming in general (Errington & Gasson, 1994; Galt, 2013; Pilgeram, 2011) – may be appealing only to those who have enough economic privilege to make concessions in terms of social protections such as decent wages, the ability to advocate for one’s rights as a worker, and a robust occupational health and safety net; or, on the other extreme, for those who have no other viable livelihood opportunities in the formal economy. To the degree that un(der)paid farm internships are mainly accessible to people who can afford to make such concessions (Pilgeram, 2011), efforts to legitimize un(der)paid internships may be offloading the public responsibility for inclusive social protections onto private, exclusive social privilege. On the other end of
the spectrum, were un(der)paid internships to be greatly scaled up in their current form, they might conceivably dampen wages and access to social benefits for farm workers who are at a considerably greater risk of poverty, including both migrants and recent immigrant farm workers. To be clear, I do not think it is imminent that internships would be scaled up in this fashion. My point is simply to illustrate that allowing for the flexibility proposed by the moral economy perspective undermines the possibility that farm work can be a livelihood that offers living wages to all farm workers.

As a way to contest the apparent naturalness of undervalued, under-recognized farm labour, alternative food efforts to improve the social standing of farmers serve a critical function. My contention, however, is that some AFN members’ idealization of farmers – and particularly those who operate organically, on a small scale, and through local distribution – as inherently moral and honest can stymie critical discussions about precarious farm worker regimes. Elevating local farmers to the status of ‘rock stars’ perpetuates the idea that problematic farm worker employment are reflections of inevitable and anomalous cases of individual “bad apple” farmers with insufficient moral fibre (Hennebry, 2010; McLaughlin, 2009b). Idealizing farmers or fixating on high-profile extreme cases of migrant abuse, which tend to elicit public and media attention, both elide the broader issue at hand: precarious farm worker regimes involve weak accountability mechanisms and unreliable channels for farm workers to assert their own interests.

Campaigns to promote the social recognition of local farmers can also stymie frank conversations about the systemic social and political exclusion of hired migrant farm workers, as the account from the student migrant justice activist suggests (p. 67). Following the logic of agricultural exceptionalism that some food movements have reproduced (Getz et al., 2008; Gray 2014; Guthman, 2004), critiques of farm employment arrangements are rendered tantamount to disloyalty toward farmers and ingratitude for the exceptional role they play in society. Ostensibly innocuous food movement efforts like the BC Association of Farmers’ Markets “I ‘Heart’ BC Farmers’ campaign can, along these lines, become oppressive when they are woven into a discursive context of positivity-washing that stereotypes local farmers as innately blameless employers. As one migrant participant implied, even “good guys” engage in
problematic labour practices. As someone who has been deeply involved in alternative food initiatives, I share the sustainable food movement’s vision of scaling out diversified, knowledge-intensive and human-intensive food systems (Gliessman, 2007). However, I maintain that grounding this vision on antiquated agrarian assumptions about farmers’ virtue does not provide it with a strong ethical or practical foundation.

5.2. Market-based impulses and collective political possibilities

Employers’ moral voluntarism also forms the basis for some AFNs’ market-focused approaches to addressing farm worker social protection. As noted earlier, local and organic AFNs have cleaved tightly to the idea that social justice values such as farm worker protections can be realized through consumer education and the sum of individual ethical consumption practices (Guthman, 2008b). Food writer Michael Pollan (2006) popularly dubbed this idea, “voting with your fork” (but see also Platt, 2013). There are considerable drawbacks to relying on strategies that financially reward employers who engage in labour practices deemed ethical. Nonetheless, market-based strategies may offer practical entry-points for AFNs to engage in collective, longer-term change with and for farm workers. Farm worker-led organizations in the United States, for example, have enlisted popular pressure from food justice-oriented consumers in order to generate policy change in areas such as the use of agro-toxic pesticides (Alkon, 2014).

5.2.1. Voluntary food-labeling schemes as an entry-point to political change

Certified-product food labels such as fair trade, domestic fair trade and organic have been some of the key strategies in the “market-as-movement” (Pollan, 2006). Labels act as a way of implanting the extrinsic quality (i.e. a quality that cannot be perceived simply by looking at a product) of ethical labour practices into a fetishized commodity (Guthman, 2007; Mutersbaugh, 2005). For some authors, voluntary food labeling schemes – despite their paradoxes – can serve as protections against the market’s erosive impact on labour in an explicitly or implicitly Polanyian sense (Allen,
Guthman (2007) acknowledges the potential of such labels as individual gateways to encouraging more effective collective political solutions. However, she is wary of how these labels function as a neoliberal technique in which state regulatory functions are devolved onto consumers at the site of the cash register. She points out that political economist Karl Polanyi envisioned civil society organizing through the state, and not the market, in order to ensure social protection (see also Burawoy, 2003).

Focusing on the trajectory of such food-labeling efforts in California, Brown and Getz (2008) describe how ‘social accountability’ certification efforts designed to contest neoliberalism in the food system do little to address unequal power relations between farm workers, farm owners, and the state. Amidst neoliberal neoregulation (Pechlaner & Otero, 2010) of state labour protection and a weakened farm worker union movement, they underscore how transferring a regulatory function to private non-governmental organization certifiers and consumers depoliticizes farm labour issues, while systematically omitting farm workers’ own voices in the certification process. Moreover, as sociologist Patricia Allen and environmental studies researcher Martin Kovach (2000) observe, in many cases market pressures gradually erode voluntary certification standards that hamper capital accumulation, which limits their usefulness as standalone tools to transform the food system.

Notably, domestic fair trade or ethical employer food-labeling schemes tend to reward employers for voluntarily following established legal standards that are not meant to be voluntary. Considering, for example, standards that govern BC migrant employer-supplied housing; one of the migrant employers I interviewed pointed out that, “a lot of guys [employers] really push it right to the limit . . . if somebody's struggling to make the minimum requirements, I would question whether or not anybody should be living in that house” (interview #5, October 7, 2013). In light of the foregoing, even rewarding those employers who ‘go above and beyond’ begs the question of why employment standards and – crucially – enforcement would not be raised to ensure all employers are held to an ethically supportable baseline. The price premium typically associated with specialty-label foods might mean that they are inaccessible to many eaters, although they might be made more accessible through institutional food procurement policies (e.g. hospitals
and universities) and, as an area of ongoing need, raising wages for all. Finally, in the case of Canada’s agricultural TFWP in particular, I would argue that voluntary food labels “misframe” (Fraser, 2013) the scale of social protection as a matter of economically rewarding or punishing individual ‘ethical’ or ‘unethical’ employers. The scale of migrants’ exposure to exploitation does not merely reside at the level of the workplace; it ranges from the domestic to the transnational sphere (e.g. migrants are injured on the job in Canada, are legally repatriated with the endorsement of their Consulate before receiving medical treatment, and are subsequently unable to access medical treatment in their home countries).

Highlighting the drawbacks of the ‘market-as-movement’ in food activism is not to suggest that a neoliberal capitalist rationality dictates all market-related activities in agri-food activism (Galt, 2013). Nor is it to discount the possibility that even within the context of neoliberalism, AFNs can leverage the market to achieve substantive political outcomes with those who have been most oppressed by the neoliberal logics of the food system. Alkon (2014) highlights, as a case in point, how the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) in the U.S. has harnessed the power of major food retail chains in order to address highly exploitive conditions for immigrant farm workers, including those without formal legal status. Multi-billion dollar corporate buyers like Walmart who sign onto the CIW’s Fair Food Program pay slightly more per pound of produce in order to ensure higher wages for farm workers, a workable complaint resolution system, and a code of labour conduct that includes zero tolerance for modern-day slavery. While the CIW is a farm-worker driven organization, its allies include community and religious groups, students, and labour organizations (CIW, n.d.; Estabrook, 2011; Sellers & Asbed, 2011). Partnering with a corporation like Walmart, which is known for engaging in other highly exploitative labour practices (e.g. Featherstone, 2004; Journal of India, 2010), demonstrates both the possibilities for scaling up market-based strategies that challenge neoliberalism, while also underscoring the contradictions of partnerships between “strange bedfellows” in these approaches.

Although I think domestic fair trade food-labeling schemes focused on large corporate retail chains should be approached with a great deal of circumspection, strictly on the basis of generating economic incentives for growers through shifts in purchasing
power, they likely have more capacity than efforts focused on changing the buying habits of individuals. The strength of the liberal, individual consumer-focused strand (Noll, 2013) within sustainable food initiatives might be characterized in more modest terms: certified-product labels can raise awareness about the existence of problematic labour conditions even among individual consumers who do not purchase the products. Informed individuals might then be more likely to support calls for systemic changes to the conditions that often make farm employment precarious. To the extent that voluntary labeling schemes are led by or involve farm workers themselves (e.g. Brown & Getz 2008), they can be used to carve out inclusive, collectivist political spaces that no longer rely heavily on capitalist markets and hierarchies of individual ‘consumer-citizen’ privilege for generating social change.

5.2.2. From ‘looking out for yourself’ to looking out for all

With regard to some participants’ aversion to ‘one-size-fits-all’ farm worker regulation, my concern is that there may be a trend in which some AFN actors’ justifiable hostility toward state bureaucracy translates into a belief that formal systems of accountability are no longer necessary or desirable. The BC context of weakened agricultural employment standards and enforcement capacities (Fairey, 2005; Fairey et al., 2008; Otero & Preibisch, 2010) may indeed allow farm entrepreneurs the flexibility to experiment with alternative, non-monetized forms of exchange such as internships. However, as noted earlier, a system with weak accountability mechanisms to ensure social protections for all penalizes those who are most vulnerable to market-based exposure, such as injured workers or migrants who cannot easily advocate for themselves. It also fails to consistently reward employers who engage in better labour practices.

Turning to food movement proposals for consumers to monitor farm labour practices through direct marketing relationships, my assertion is that individual consumers are ill equipped to assume the systematic monitoring or enforcement of social protections for farm workers. To be clear, in the course of my fieldwork I did not hear explicit proposals that state monitoring and enforcement functions should be devolved onto individual conscientious consumers. However, socially embedded direct
marketing relationships were raised prominently whereas more organized forms of ensuring workers’ social protection were all but absent from proposed solutions for change. Farm business owners clearly maintain a great deal of gatekeeping power in shaping information that is presented to the public through venues like social media and farmers’ market conversations. Moreover, a dependence on face-to-face interactions would present a barrier to scaling up trust-based monitoring relationships (Wittman et al., 2012). The case of the CSA-society members, who unsuccessfully insisted that the organic farmer pay his intern more adequately, illustrates that while socially embedded marketing relationships may strengthen a culture of ethical labour practices, they are not viable surrogates for systematic, democratic accountability mechanisms. While casual observations by concerned individual consumers could conceivably help to reduce the most visibly manifest forms of farm worker exploitation, many of the problematic aspects of farm worker employment arrangements are neither immediately perceptible to consumers or under the purview of individual employers (e.g. the barriers interns and migrants may face in accessing basic social benefits).

5.3. Conclusion

5.3.1. Political inclusion: A missing link

Through this thesis, I sought to explore how AFNs in BC engaged with both social protection and political inclusion for two groups of farm workers engaged in precarious forms of employment. I presented evidence for three general avenues through which members of AFNs have engaged with social protections: a moral economy, consumer-driven regulation, and engagement with the state. I argued that because precarious forms of work are founded on denying basic protections allotted to other workers, such as wages and coverage for work-related injury, precarious forms of migrant and intern employment constitute an obstacle to the vision articulated by AFNs of transforming the food system through human-intensive agriculture. I further discussed how the three avenues through which some AFN actors addressed social protections were limited in addressing the conditions that structure employment precariousness, but
that each avenue could be a springboard for fostering decent working conditions and farm worker livelihoods.

However, I found fewer direct indications of how AFNs addressed issues of farm workers’ political inclusion and participation. In the case of interns, I demonstrated that a potential sense of inclusion in the value-based community of sustainability-oriented food systems does not necessarily entail an ability to meaningfully, consistently negotiate greater control over the labour process. In the current context of complaint-based provincial labour enforcement bodies and an absence of concerted intern labour organizing efforts, not-for-profit organizations like the Canadian Intern Association have attempted to fill the gap through advocacy for improved intern working conditions. In the case of migrants, the structure of migrant farm worker regimes in Canada continues to marginalize workers’ social inclusion in communities as well as their access to political participation, for which some migrants have courageously advocated (e.g. McLaughlin, 2009b). Organizations like RAMA, No One is Illegal-Vancouver, the AWA, the BC Employment Standards Coalition, and J4MW are all engaged in critical initiatives to build relationships of solidarity with migrants, and to carve out channels through which migrant farm workers can more easily articulate and direct their own priorities.

One of the limitations of this study is the lack of baseline data on the number of un(der)paid agricultural interns in BC and elsewhere, along with details such as the number of interns who are registered with WorkSafeBC and EI. Future research to elucidate these details would be beneficial. At the level of institutional policy, the disincentives for intern hosts to formally register their employees with WorkSafeBC and pay interns a stipend close to minimum wage (discussed on p. 54) represent two key areas for amelioration. Another limitation is that this study did not focus on strengthening the capacity of occupational health and safety regulations to ensure the rights of marginalized workers, rather than simply relying on weak and weakly enforced standards (Reasons et al., 1981). A better understanding of the power relations involved, and the ongoing struggles to ensure that workers’ voices inform both standards and their enforcement (Tucker, 2013), would speak to labour concerns beyond the agricultural subsector alone.
5.3.2. A proposal for a food sovereignty approach

In this thesis, I demonstrated that participants in AFNs sometimes invoke a moral economy, market-based approaches and hostility toward state-based labour enforcement in ways that explicitly or implicitly reify moral paternalism and individual consumer ‘choice’ as viable means to ensure decent labour conditions for all farm workers. However unintentional, these three alternative food repertoires obscure the need to address structural conditions that prevent farm workers from access to social protection. The aforementioned case of farm worker regulations in California, and their criminalizing impacts on traditional familial labour arrangements among Hmong farmers, offers a cautionary tale in this regard. Failing to attend to the ways well-intentioned regulations driven by relations of white racial dominance, and failing to meaningfully involve farmers and farm workers themselves in developing regulations, can generate new forms of racial and economic marginalization (Minkoff-Zern et al., 2011).

To this end, ‘social protection’ through a sovereign state brings to mind a traditional, bureaucratic, capitalist and top-down government model of enforcing standards that are imagined to be for the benefit of democratic citizens. As feminist critical theorist Nancy Fraser (2011; 2013) points out, this model of ensuring access to social protection risks invoking a paternalistic state-subject relationship in which existing forms of oppression in civil society, including racialization and segregation through precarious citizenship, may be magnified. Furthermore, migrant justice activist and writer Harsha Walia (2010; 2014) asserts that much of the Canadian welfare state is founded on the extraction of Indigenous lands locally and abroad. Far from advocating a traditional or neo-colonialist ‘nanny-state,’ I argue that there is potential for participatory, radical egalitarian forms of democratic governance (Wright, 2010) that subordinate the state to collective, decolonizing organizations based in civil society, and would strengthen all farm workers’ capacity to meaningfully shape the conditions of their work and lives.

Food sovereignty offers a potentially transformative vision in this regard. Along with food justice, food sovereignty also offers useful precedents for practicing solidarity with farm workers, as discussed earlier in the cases of the CIW, BAWP, and Huertas. A food sovereignty approach would be less concerned with legitimizing the extrinsic quality
of an ethically produced food product through either certification processes or interpersonal exchanges. Rather, food sovereignty would seek to equalize the capacity of farm workers to participate in defining their own workplace relations and democratically deciding how surplus from their labour is distributed. In the BC context, the Indigenous food sovereignty movement that is allied with the BC Food Systems Network offers a useful guide for naming and acting on collectively-identified, culturally-relevant priorities in the food system (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Morrison, 2011). Whether farm workers themselves in Canada – including interns and migrants in BC – would broadly share this orientation toward food sovereignty remains undetermined and worthy of future exploration.

In terms of executing a food sovereignty approach to governance in BC that responds to existing calls made by farm workers and their advocates, a formally recognized, deeply democratic agency based in civil society – which would include migrant farm worker representatives – could be established (e.g. Otero & Aguilar, 2013). This agency could draw upon strategies such as random workplace spot-checks to verify that social protections are upheld for interns and migrants both regionally and on a transnational basis. As suggested by a Mexican SAWP participant in the study by Fairey and colleagues (2008), political participation in defining working and living conditions for migrants in Canada might take the form of a “debate roundtable” similar to that practiced in Mexico. This participant asserted, “If we are united, we are a little stronger, and they have to listen to us a little more” (p. 61). Likewise, members of BC AFNs concerned with internships could identify their preferred approaches to participatory farm worker governance, which could help mitigate against the concern many participants cited that existing state agencies were indifferent or hostile to their interests.

Individuals and organizations involved in AFNs could potentially leverage their strong commitment to ethical food by helping to lay the groundwork for developing a food sovereignty-focused governance process and dynamic institution of this kind. An agency along these lines might funnel the energy behind AFNs’ concerns with ethical food production toward institutions to ensure food system workers’ social and political inclusion and, conceivably, help to cultivate political subjectivities among AFN actors that move beyond the limitations of market-based approaches to social change. This would
necessitate challenging the practices of oppression that AFNs can reproduce, including moral paternalism, farmer-centrism and privileging individual freedoms over collective benefits. Some AFN participants are conscious of and critical of these practices within their own networks, and have suggested innovative proposals to improve dignified working conditions for interns and migrants. In light of this, I am hopeful that the existence of such internal critiques can help to prompt timely change. Given its commitment to food sovereignty and existing relationships with migrant advocacy organizations, the BCFSN may be particularly well positioned to initiate some of these changes. My sense from this research is that many people concerned with food system sustainability recognize the need to contend with farm worker social protection and political inclusion both in their own right, and for their essential roles in generating sustainable food system transformation.
References


Binford, L. (2013). *Tomorrow we’re all going to the harvest: Temporary foreign worker programs and neoliberal political economy.* Austin: University of Texas Press.


Appendix A.

A summary of migrant farm workers’ key rights, freedoms and exclusions – in theory and practice – from Canada’s immigration laws and employment standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour mobility</th>
<th>Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)</th>
<th>Lower-Skilled Occupations (LSO) &amp; Agricultural Stream (AS)</th>
<th>In General</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workers cannot change employers while in Canada unless they receive prior written approval from their sending-country Consulate in Canada, ESDC/Service Canada and their current employer. For workers from the Caribbean, the employer and worker must additionally sign a transfer contract.</td>
<td>Workers can only transfer jobs if they locate an employer with a valid Labour Market Opinion.</td>
<td>Workers in both programs who desire to change employers are frequently unable to switch.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Immigration status</th>
<th>Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)</th>
<th>Lower-Skilled Occupations (LSO) &amp; Agricultural Stream (AS)</th>
<th>In General</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>The SAWP does not provide a route to permanent residency, regardless of the number of consecutive years a worker has been employed in Canada. The Mexican government preferentially recruits married/common-law workers with dependents, which discourages permanent residency through marrying Canadians or remaining in Canada without legal status. Workers’ families cannot visit them through visitor’s visas or open spousal work permits. After consulting with the associated Consulate, employers have the contractual right to repatriate workers.</td>
<td>Workers have theoretical access to the Provincial Nominee Program, but they usually do not meet the income eligibility requirements. In theory workers’ spouses &amp; children may accompany them. However, the requirements that they cover their families’ travel costs and demonstrate to an immigration officer they can cover their families’ expenses in Canada are generally prohibitive. Workers’ spouses are ineligible for unrestricted work permits (unlike the high-skill stream).</td>
<td>Workers are not permitted to visit their family members without forgoing their work permits, even in cases of medical emergency. Access to citizenship through refugee status is rare for agricultural TFWs.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Hiring practices</th>
<th>Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)</th>
<th>Lower-Skilled Occupations (LSO) &amp; Agricultural Stream (AS)</th>
<th>In General</th>
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<tr>
<td>Migrants may work in Canada for up to eight months between January 1st and December 15th. Participating countries include Mexico and Caribbean Commonwealth countries, all of which Canada has bilateral agreements.</td>
<td>Migrants may work in Canada for up to two years at a time, for a maximum of four consecutive years, followed by four years of ineligibility for the program (“the 4/4 rule”). They may come from any country.</td>
<td>Employers may hire on the basis of gender &amp; country of origin (i.e. ‘race’). Workers’ experience or skills are not accounted for in the selection process, except when an employer requests a specific worker to return. These hiring practices are inconsistent with Canada’s Employment Equity Act &amp; Human Rights Act.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)</td>
<td>Lower-Skilled Occupations (LSO) &amp; Agricultural Stream (AS)</td>
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<td><strong>Social benefits</strong></td>
<td>Having paid into the provincial public health care. In BC, they must wait 3 months before eligibility for provincial health care and have a minimum 6-month contract. During that period employers must provide private health care. They may deduct from workers’ wages to recoup non-occupational medical coverage. Employers must pay for provincial workplace safety insurance (or private if provincial is unavailable). Alberta is the only province in which farm workers are excluded from occupational health and safety legislation.</td>
<td>Workers often lack clear information about their health coverage, and sometimes their employers do not pay for coverage as required. Migrants’ earnings pay into federal social benefits (e.g. income tax, Employment Insurance &amp; Canada Pension Plan), but their access to these benefits is constrained (e.g. that workers often cannot accumulate enough hours to qualify for a pension because they work in Canada for only part of the year, and older workers face age-based discrimination).</td>
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<td><strong>Housing</strong></td>
<td>Employers must provide AS workers with on-farm or off-site housing (approved by municipal/private housing inspection service) and may deduct $30/week from worker’s salary unless provincial standards dictate a lower amount. Employers must help LSO workers find affordable &amp; suitable housing.</td>
<td>Migrant farm workers generally live on employers’ properties. Employers are permitted to set curfews, screen visitors, monitor workers with security cameras, and require them seek permission to leave the premises. In practice, accommodations are often not inspected and approved on an annual basis.</td>
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<td><strong>Transportation</strong></td>
<td>Employers must pay a worker’s round-trip transportation costs to/from Canada, along with in-country travel to and from work. Employers can deduct partial transportation costs from a worker’s salary (except in BC).</td>
<td>Workers are often geographically isolated and dependent on employers for transportation. Some LSO workers have been promised non-existent jobs by private recruiters and remain in Canada without legal status in order to repay debts from recruitment and transportation fees.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labour organizing</td>
<td>Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)</td>
<td>Lower-Skilled Occupations (LSO) In General &amp; Agricultural Stream (AS)</td>
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<td>Migrant farm workers under all streams can join unions and collectively bargain. The exceptions are Ontario and Alberta, where all farm workers are excluded from the legislation that governs union certification and collective bargaining rights. Ontario law does prohibit interference with farm workers’ freedom to establish and participate in unions, but this is not the case in Alberta. Migrants face pressure not to unionize even in provinces where the law supports doing so.</td>
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| Recruitment | Sending-country governments are responsible for recruiting workers. | Employers may use private recruiters to hire LSO/AS workers (some use sanctioned employer associations). An absence of federal regulation governing private sector recruiters leaves workers with little protection from recruiter extortion. Charging a fee for securing a job violates some provincial laws & international human rights codes. Provincial legislation in Manitoba mitigates against recruiter extortion. |

Appendix B.

Apprenticeship job description

Welcome to [redacted]. Outlined here is the job description for the apprenticeship position. It is our intention to begin the season with clear expectations so that there is a good understanding of the responsibilities of both apprentices and farm management.

We have a diverse innovative urban farming operation, which requires a wide range of skills: greenhouse seedling production, field planting, weeding and harvesting, produce deliveries, and building an repairing infrastructure. Be prepared for physically demanding work.

The time we spend working is determined by the work that needs to be done and not by schedule. Work is done as a team – if fieldwork still needs to be done at the end of the day we all everyone works to get the work done together. With that in mind, you are expected to work quickly and efficiently, to keep up with the paces set by others and work quickly on your own. If this seems difficult at the beginning of the season, don’t worry you will get faster! And while conversation is always good to have out in the fields, remember to keep your hands moving when you talk. If a task is completed before you have been assigned something else to do, seek out another task – find a manger or look at the priorities for the day on the master task list in the shed. If you have a only a few moments in between tasks use that time to clean up your packing area, weed the end of a bed, or put away boxes. It will save us time at the end of the day!

We work in an urban context in a neighbourhood that is experiencing significant social/economic challenges. You will encounter people with significant mental illness and addiction issues. Be as patient as possible, of a situation feels out of your control notify a supervisor immediately.

Training

We aim to provide you with a well-rounded training in urban bio intensive agriculture and farm operations, and expect you to pursue this learning. We will aim to explain to you why we do things the way we do, provide additional information concerning alternative theories and help you develop the tangible skills to become a proficient farmer. Besides the informal training that happen each day we will provide classes on various topics to explore topics in depth.

Work Schedule

- The apprenticeship begins May 1st and ends October 31st. We cannot make commitments for work beyond the end of October.
- Your time commitment is approx. 50/hrs/week, Monday through Friday, with some room for flexibility if help is needed at the farmers markets or weekend chores.
• The midseason work schedule starts at 6:45am with one-hour lunch breaks. We aim to end by 5 or 6pm every day. The exception may be on harvest days or for special projects.
• We will go over the duties classes and chore schedule at the beginning of the season.
• Be punctual; be prepared to work at the designated time, with the necessary tools, and proper clothing. Closed toed shoes are required at all time on the farm.
• Take care of your health – take breaks as you need them, especially in the hot of the summer. It is a very good idea to wear a hat and sunscreen and have a water bottle handy when doing fieldwork in the summer.
• Two weeks advance notice are required for Vacation breaks.

Compensation

• Your stipend is $300/month
• Paydays are every second Friday.
• When appropriate we will help you obtain university/college credit.

Communication and Feedback

• Apprentices and farm managers will check in with each other as needed. Two performance evaluations will take place over the course of the season. This is an opportunity for the apprentice to provide feedback. If an issue arises please bring it to the attention of the supervisor.

Safety

• Safety is of utmost importance at [redacted] and proper safety equipment is provided for specific jobs.
• Use caution around machinery. Wear proper protection at all times, and only use if you have been properly trained to do so.
• No smoking is permitted on [redacted] sites.
• Do not walk alone after dark always get try to leave site in pairs and know your route home.

Visitors and Volunteers

• Please take the time to greet all visitors and volunteers even if you are in the middle of a task.
• Keep work areas clean and pick up trash and tools associated with your task to keep the farms inviting places for everyone. The farms are open to the public 9am-8pm, seven days a week.
• Be considerate to workers and visitors even if it’s your day off.
Appendix C.

Food Secure Canada Discussion Paper statement on farm workers

FARM WORKERS

More and more food production and processing work is being done by foreign workers—both legally documented and undocumented. The abuse and inequality experienced by many such workers is incompatible with the values embodied in Food Sovereignty or Fair Trade. If we are to have a food system that nourishes not only our bellies but also our sense of justice, we need to:

- Create and enforce laws to ensure that non-citizen workers on farms are fairly treated; given decent housing and wages; enjoy safe and humane working conditions; and have access to health care; all without reprisals.
- Enable foreign farm workers to become citizens and farmers.

What?
Respect and protection for foreign farm and food-plant workers, and citizenship for the people upon whom we depend for food production and processing.

Who?
Federal agencies, local authorities, and all employers.

How much?
Canada would gain farmer citizens and a diversity of expertise in alternative approaches to food production, all at minimal economic cost.