In Defense of a Livelihood: Ontario Growers and the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program Debate

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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IN DEFENSE OF A LIVELIHOOD: ONTARIO GROWERS AND THE SEASONAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS PROGRAM DEBATE

Monograph

by

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Graduate Program in Anthropology
and Collaborative Graduate Program in Migration and Ethnic Relations

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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Abstract

This research examines how growers engage in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) debate in Ontario. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2012 and 2013 and data collected from media sources, growers were found to employ two different thematic narratives – functional and philosophical – to defend the program and to drive attention towards a broader narrative of socioeconomic decline in agriculture. Functional narratives focused on the economic and political advantages of the program and portrayed growers within a restrictive triangular power structure consisting of growers, the Canadian state, and SAWP workers. Their philosophical and emotional arguments are built upon images that romanticize farming and valorize farm work. These appeals, whether pragmatic or emotional, are key to understanding the growers’ worldviews. This thesis concludes by arguing that program critics, as well as growers, must more seriously engage and come to terms with these narratives for the SAWP debate to move forward.

Keywords: Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, farming, Southwest Ontario, temporary migration, migration policy, growers, agriculture, community, rural studies, narrative, image, debate
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All of this would also have been impossible without the support, encouragement and advice from my supervisor, Dr. Sherrie Larkin. I cannot even start to capture the amount of gratitude I feel for everything you have done, so I will keep my message short and sweet, thank you. I would also like to thank my advisor Dr. Kim Clark, for her insights and for challenging me in my coursework and in my writing. A special thank you as well to my thesis committee; Dr. Dan Jorgensen, who was instrumental in helping me find my way in the early days of the M.A. program, Dr. Andrew Walsh, for giving me the opportunity to lead a tutorial as a T.A. and for his insights and support, and Dr. Stephanie Bangarth, for always bringing great ideas and good humor to many of the MER meetings. To all of you, thank you.

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Introduction

In 1966 a group of 264 Jamaican men came to Ontario for the first time under a new program called the Seasonal Agriculture Workers Program, now commonly referred to as the ‘SAWP’. In the months and years prior to this program, Canadian growers and farmers had been lobbying the government to help solve an ongoing labour crisis that had only worsened after the end of the Second World War. T.N. Hurd once wrote that at almost any point in time, “every farmer has a labour problem” (1949: 378). This never ending search for good workers should have signaled to growers and policy makers alike that the introduction of the SAWP would never really solve the labour crisis in Canadian agriculture, as a number of new issues would in time arise from its introduction.

The uneven economic and political structures that facilitate – or arguably necessitate – the seasonal movement of workers from developing countries to Canada have only further solidified in the last few decades. Since 2000 alone, academic and critical debate on the SAWP program, and other temporary foreign worker programs in Canada has reached new levels, with the media and a number of academic researchers focusing on the issues around migration and migrants. The aim of this thesis is to move the focus of attention from the employees in the program, temporary foreign workers, to the employers, Ontario fruit and vegetable growers. In doing so, I hope to answer the question: how do growers negotiate the tensions, contradictions, and challenges of their role within the SAWP while also constructing a public-facing, positive narrative on their place in the program? I aim to address this two-part question by exploring the ideas and narratives I heard in conversation with Southwest Ontario growers and by exploring social media and traditional media sources for grower perspectives on issues surrounding the SAWP.

In this introduction I will outline the ethnographic setting of my fieldwork and then the methods used to collect and organize my research data for this thesis. In this section, I will also address some basic issues related to terminology, critical inquiry and the anthropology of highly politicized topics, and finally the positionality and limitations of the researcher and qualitative data in ethnographic fieldwork respectively. Next, I will
outline the history of the SAWP from 1966 to present, and will include a number of key
data points for the recent changes in the program and its relation to other temporary
foreign work programs in Canada. To extend the context of my research further, I will
then widen the historical review to explore the story of Ontario agriculture in terms of the
recent economic and social changes which have shaped the landscape of Canada’s most
populated province.

In the next chapter, I will review the body of academic literature on the SAWP, focusing
on the key streams of thought, which have, over time, created a number of important
theoretical and methodological holes in current SAWP research. I will also explore the
most recent public debate on the program, employing a chronological approach that
follows the debate from 2011 – the years I started my Masters and my data collection – to
present. To conclude, I will outline a number of key concepts that will surface throughout
the following two chapters that are based on my ethnographic fieldwork. My intent is to
clarify both the boundaries of my research focus and to define a number of key terms and
theoretical frameworks with which I analyze and synthesize my research findings.

1.1 The Setting

My fieldwork was conducted in a number of towns throughout Southwestern Ontario.
Southwestern Ontario is defined by The Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport
as the area that encompasses Oxford, Norfolk, Elgin, Chatham-Kent, Essex, Lambton,
and Middlesex counties. These counties include the larger city centers of Windsor, Sarnia,
London, and Woodstock and smaller cities like Leamington, Chatham, Strathroy, St.
Thomas, Tillsonburg, and Simcoe (see Figure 1.1). All of these cities played a role in my
research as I was based in London, Ontario, but travelled throughout the region to meet
growers, attend food festivals, explore agricultural equipment stores, and, on the odd trip,
rummage through rural antique stores in search of unique agricultural memorabilia.
The official Southwest Ontario tourism website’s slogan for the region is “Shaped by Nature,” which is a fitting title for an area with a unique geography that has supported and fostered agricultural development for thousands of years (Southwest Ontario Tourism). As Frans Schryer (2006) points out, The Huron, Petun, and Neutral Indigenous groups practiced slash-and-burn cultivation in the sixteenth century, capitalizing on the fertile lands between Georgian Bay and Lake Ontario (2006: 51). Fast-forward a few thousand years, to the mid-eighteenth century, and we find European settlers beginning to permanently settle and farm – using European practices but many local plants – in what eventually became Ontario in 1867 (2006: 53). The considerable variation in topography and soil types has in time enabled a great variety of crops and different agricultural practices to flourish in the region. Modern cash crops include, but are not limited to: corn, soybean, wheat, sorghum and other grasses. In the fruit and vegetable industry – which employs the majority of SAWP workers – you can find tomatoes, peppers, cucumber, broccoli, apples, peaches, wine grapes, and many others. In other words, there are few foods that are not grown in some part of Southwestern Ontario.

The primary areas of focus for my research were the towns and regions of intensive fruit and vegetable growing. Leamington, Ontario was one of those places, as it is the site of
the largest concentration of hothouses in North America. In my research, I also travelled to Wallaceburg, near Lake St. Clair, to visit other hothouse and field operations as well as to Chatham, Stratford, St. Thomas, Aylmer, Delhi, Simcoe, and the area south of Tillsonburg. All of these towns are historical and modern sites of rural life and agricultural tradition, with the rhythms of town life still determined largely by the process of growing, processing, and shipping food to other towns and cities around the province, country, and the world.

My fieldwork took place over the summer and fall of 2012, with a number of follow up interviews and research trips occurring during the early part of 2013, when the fields and small towns of Southwestern Ontario were mostly dormant under the winter ice and snow. Other data, as I will discuss below, was collected and analyzed both before and after the primary ethnographic fieldwork period.

1.2 Methods

This thesis is based on a variety of sources, including fieldwork experiences and the collection of social media, traditional media, and other relevant online, archival, and published academic sources. During the course of my fieldwork, I conducted six scheduled, semi-structured interviews with unique individuals, five unscheduled, informal interviews in which I had a chance to discuss various aspects of agricultural work and migrant labour, and a multitude of smaller interactions and observations that have been equally useful in shaping my ideas for this research. Five of the total of eleven interviews were taped with the use of a digital audio recorder. The remaining interviews were recorded by hand at the request of the interviewees. Participants who gave consent to participate in my research are anonymized via the use of pseudonyms – as directed in the approval for this project by Ethics Research Board of The University of Western Ontario (see Appendix A). Every effort has also been taken to anonymize and alter other place names or references to identifiable landmarks to keep confidential the identities of those who took part in my research.
The collection of additional sources of data, including social media, traditional print media, and other sources started in September 2011, when I began my Masters program. During the period prior to the summer of 2012, I saved any relevant news article or publically shared information from social media sources like Twitter and Facebook. The articles I collected during this period pertained mostly to news involving seasonal agricultural workers, as I had yet to finalize my research focus on Ontario growers. From the summer of 2012 till the spring of 2013, I began to shift my efforts to saving any news or publicly available information pertaining to the lives, livelihoods, and perspectives of Ontario growers. While much of the information was collected via the use of my own personal computer, I also conducted two trips to the St. Thomas public library to visit the George Thorman Archive Room, home to census reels and newspaper clippings from local sources. These historical sources, combined with the aforementioned media sources and published academic and other materials, make up the voices and perspectives that have helped shape my understanding of agricultural life and work for growers in the SAWP.

I feel it is also important for me to briefly mention a few housekeeping items that will help the reader understand the usage of some of the terminology and of the scope of the claims and conclusions reached as a result of this work. The first important order of business is to define and explore the differences between farmers and growers. In this thesis, I will use the term grower more often in reference to those who work in the fruit and vegetable industries, as this is the commonly used term in those industries – for example, the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. I will also use the term farmer at times, which will most often pertain to those who work in cash-crop and mechanically intensive industries. However, I cannot argue that these terms are mutually exclusive and will, at times, use farmer as an inclusive term that brings under its umbrella all of those people who grow food in one shape or form. In its application here, however, the term grower denotes a more professional, industrialized structure of food production. A grower is more often one who oversees the operation of his or her farm, with the most important asset of the farm being the employees – in many cases from the SAWP. The term farmer, conversely, brings up images of the family farm and the plaid shirt and jean-
wearing worker who is of the land and directly tied to it through his or her own hands-on work.

Having taken into account the advise of Dr. Larkin, my supervisor, and the self-messaging of the growers themselves, there is arguably a clear reason why growers use this term. Farming, and being a farmer, is seen as a more traditional, and simple, role. By using the term grower, I believe they are trying to separate themselves as professionals and managers. This is not to say that they view farmers – or more simply the term ‘farmers’ – as inferior, but that they see themselves as different. Part of this division reflects some of the self-messaging and identity politics of modern food production. By calling themselves growers, they convey a certain level of professional success and scale of business. I will concede that this division between farmer and grower is often blurry; as one grower put it to me, he doesn’t care which word you use (Personal Interview: January 2013). Some do care, others, clearly, do not. However, for the purposes of this thesis, assume that I use the term growers very specifically, aware of its limitations but also of its potential for demarcating a more modern, commercial structure and vision of food production and management in Southwestern Ontario.

In a later section of the introduction, I will explicate further some of the key terminology and issues that will surface throughout this thesis, but for now I wish to briefly turn the attention to another difficult aspect of this research project, specifically the pursuit of ethnography and critical inquiry in a highly politicized context. The SAWP program has seldom gone without some sort of crisis, debate, or criticism surrounding it. The seasonal flow of workers into and out of rural Ontario has for decades been the subject of tensions between various groups; rural residents and workers, growers and academics, politicians and activists, the list goes on. What I did not anticipate, or should I say, what I underestimated was the highly charged nature of these debates. Indeed, what struck me in almost every conversation I had was the deep-rooted skepticism and distrust with which I was usually met. Despite the fact that I was conducting ethnography “in my backyard,” I was and continue to be an outsider to the growers of Southwestern Ontario. I admittedly did not grow up on a farm and while I did spend many childhood summers visiting the
farms of family and friends in the summers when I travelled to Canada from my home state of Florida, those experiences were brief.

That is why I must be careful to fully lay out both my own limitations as a researcher and the limitations of what my ethnographic, qualitative data can say. This is not an attempt to preemptively make excuses for shortcomings, but it is a chance to say that I am but one person and my data does not represent a systematic, or statistically significant sample of Southwest Ontario growers. While this point is painfully obvious, it must be made for it serves as a reminder that this thesis is part of a larger conversation. I cannot say or cover everything about the SAWP program and its related debate, but I can say contribute something. Qualitative ethnographic research is inescapably subjective to a large degree. However, by applying thorough analysis, historical grounding, and a bit of humility, I hope to do my research participants and the topic justice. Ideas, structures, and beliefs are after all, in a constant state of becoming – as Gilles Deleuze (1995) believed and as eloquently expressed by Biehl and Locke (2010) – reminding us that life is always open to new relations and trajectories (Biehl and Locke 2010, 317). This thesis is hopefully another trajectory in which we can approach this topic by highlighting and analyzing the perspectives and opinions of the growers who hire workers in the SAWP.

1.3 The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program

There are two useful approaches with which to explore the history of the SAWP. The first is a fairly simple and straightforward reading of the important dates, facts and figures relating to the SAWP since its inception in 1966. The other, and perhaps more revealing, is a look at the behind the scenes story of the SAWP’s creation and subsequent transformation into a privately administered temporary foreign work program in Ontario under the Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Service (FARMS). I will, of course, explore both, as it will help situate the SAWP in historical terms, in relation to other temporary foreign work programs, and in the wider context of Ontario agriculture, which I will explore more deeply in the following section.
The SAWP began in 1966 as a bilateral partnership with Jamaica and allowed workers to travel to Canada between six weeks and eight months at a time. Over the next few decades other nations joined the program: Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados in 1968, The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in 1976, and finally Mexico in 1974 (Preibisch and Binford 2007, 9). The SAWP falls under the Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), and is administered in Ontario by a not-for-profit grower organization called the Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Service (FARMS). FARMS oversees the movement of approximately sixteen thousand workers into Ontario as of 2011, with just over half (7,431) coming from the Caribbean and the rest (8,281) coming from Mexico (Davidson, *The Grower*, 2012, 5)\(^1\).

Irving André (1990) describes in detail the history of the SAWP while also outlining the statutory and administrative framework of the program. His central argument, that the “program approximates much of the control (although not the brutality) inherent in slave labour but avoids the universal opprobrium attached to that system of labour,” is compelling and important in that it set much of the tone for future research (André 1990: 246). However, one of the most important aspects of his argument at this moment is that agricultural labour has for a long time been treated separately under the law, and thus any interpretation and analysis of the program must bear that long history of legal distinction in mind. It is also important to keep in mind the intersection between immigration and political economy; as André writes, labour migration must be “viewed as the logical outcome of a historical process or, indeed, the result of conscious rational policy rooted in the political economy of a country or region” (244).

Accordingly, Preibisch and Binford (2007) note that the SAWP is best seen as part of a larger temporary foreign worker scheme in Canadian immigration policy. Building on the work of Nandita Sharma (2002), they argue that the SAWP, which began after the deracialization of Canadian immigration policy in 1965-66 was in a sense a part of creating a new racialized scheme of temporary foreign labour under the Non-Immigrant

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\(^1\) Ontario has the largest number of farm employees in Canada, with 28.5%, followed by Quebec and
Employment Authorization Program (NIEAP), passed in 1973 (Preibisch and Binford 2007, 10). Subsequently, the SAWP then provided Canadian employers “with easy access to developing country labour markets [while serving] as a mechanism to control the racial/ethnic mix of the Canadian body politic” (10).

Structurally, the SAWP is therefore part of a larger shift in Canadian immigration policy that makes immigration to the country more responsive to the needs of business while providing for the simultaneous exclusion of potential permanent residents who threaten the dominance of European-Canadians. Kerry Preibisch (2010) continues her earlier argument by stating that this shift is reflected in changes within the agricultural and low-skilled temporary labour systems. She argues that the SAWP is actually quite unique, in that it is bilateral, an equal agreement between two countries that allows those countries to dictate the shape and structure of the program while also building in ostensible protections for Caribbean and Mexican workers in the form of a liaison based in Canada – in Ontario, typically in Toronto – who works for their respective home countries. She distinguishes this bilateral structure from that of the Low Skilled Pilot Program, in which the governments on both sides play a diminished role and private industry a higher one (Preibisch 2010, 412). Preibisch compares the number of temporary foreign workers entering Canada under these two programs in Figure 1.2 on page 10.
The majority of SAWP employees fall under crop production, with a small remaining percentage employed in food manufacturing and animal production. In total, by 2007 the SAWP was bringing in close to 25,000 workers per year, with the LSPP (also known as the lower-skilled levels C & D of the National Occupations Code) bringing an additional 11,160 workers (Preibsich 2010: 410). Compared to the larger temporary foreign worker context in Canada, which includes skilled temporary workers, the Live in Caregiver Program and in 2007 brought in a total 163,543 workers, it is clear that the SAWP is a relatively small part of the temporary foreign worker scheme in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada: A). However, the SAWP is unique because of its bilateral structure and because of its longevity in the immigration system. The SAWP actually is one of the more stringent and formally organized temporary foreign labour systems in the Canada. HRSDC and FARMS play a large role in maintaining the rules and regulations of the program, including the contract signed between the workers and the employers. The contract has remained largely unchanged since the start of the program, so its details are worth fleshing out here.
FARMS, the not-for-profit administrative body that runs the SAWP in Ontario, outlines the process for hiring workers on their website. FARMS instructs growers to first submit their application for a Labour Market Opinion (LMO) to FARMS, so that FARMS can edit the application “for completeness” before it is submitted to Service Canada for review (FARMS: A, see Appendix 3 for LMO Application). For a grower’s application to be successful, they must prove that all necessary steps have been taken to hire Canadians before applying for SAWP workers. If the employer, the grower, is determined to have a genuine need for labour, their LMO is approved. As outlined in the rules and regulations below, each grower must then provide housing for SAWP employees. According to FARMS, Service Canada “may approve a request for foreign worker no later than 4 weeks prior to the job start date” (FARMS: A). When growers apply for workers, they are responsible for selecting from which country he or she wants their workers to come. If a grower is applying for the first time, his workers are considered ‘un-named.’ If the growers, in subsequent seasons, request specific workers who have worked for that grower before, the worker is considered a “named” worker. It is important to remember this ‘named’ vs. ‘un-named’ distinction for two reasons. One, this suggests that over time relationships are forming between growers and workers, as the growers see a benefit in their repeated use of certain workers that have experience and that they are familiar with. Two, workers have the right to not accept a named request, meaning that they can choose to go to a different farm before they travel to Canada. Once in Canada, however, workers need approval from their employer to switch to another farm.

For reference, here is a list of the primary rules and regulations of the program:

- Workers have access to Employment Insurance Benefits and WSIB
- Workers contribute to and can collect limited benefits from the Canada Pension Plan (CPP)
- Workers are covered under the provincial labour standards and Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA)
- Each country has a liaison officer in Canada who is there to assure worker safety and protect their interest in the country.
• Growers must guarantee a minimum of 240 hours of work, with an average over the period of employment of 40 hours/week.
• Growers must provide proper clothing and attire to workers
• Growers must extend time for medical attention, shopping, etc. to the workers
• Growers must provide housing accommodation plus cooking utensils, laundry facilities, etc…
• Growers may recover expenses (ex. for employee work clothing and partial travel costs) though payroll deduction as stipulated by the contract (FARMS: B)

With the wider temporary foreign labour context and the SAWP structure in mind, I will now return once again to the story of the SAWP’s creation and subsequent devolution over time. The story of the SAWP is quite revealing in wake of the focus on growers in this thesis, as Canadian growers played a large role in shaping the program and other temporary foreign work programs for years to come.

While the SAWP program started formally in 1966, its story reaches much further back into the late 1940s (Satzewich 1991, 179). During that period, growers felt increasing pressure from the lack of reliable labour during planting, pruning, and harvest times. In the wake of Second World War, many European immigrants, who had once made up the majority of agricultural workers, were leaving rural areas to move to burgeoning urban centers like Hamilton, Toronto, and Montreal (147-149). Charles Brown, a broccoli grower in Wentworth County, near Hamilton, said his father had faced these challenges on his farm:

My father went to the house of one of his Portuguese workers and he told [my father] that he and his wife didn’t need to work anymore on the farm. They had saved up and bought a house, they were happy, and they didn’t want to do this kind of work anymore (Interview, June 2012).

This story is indicative of this larger shift in population from rural areas to urban cores during the mid twentieth century. This shift, combined with increasing cost-pressures and demands from an increasingly international food market in the 1950s, pushed many
growers in a more proactive stance on sourcing labour. A number of ideas and plans experienced false starts in this period, including an idea to hire Jamaican workers who seasonally travelled up to Michigan to work after the sugar cane harvest in Florida was over (Satzewich 1991, 152-156). After that plan, and a number of others, fell through, the push was on for a bigger change to Canadian immigration. This was, as I mentioned earlier, a great period of transition in Canadian immigration policy, in which the policies were deracialized and new avenues began to open up to developing countries. The SAWP was one of the first programs to take advantage of this change in policy, as the farm industry had been eagerly awaiting a plan to solve their ongoing labour crisis.

What is perhaps most interesting about this period is the way in which growers were involved in shaping the direction of immigration policy. One of the earliest stories of their efforts is described by Vic Satzewich (1991), in which a small group of Ontario growers went on vacation in the 1950s to Barbados during the winter. A few months after their trip, the government of Barbados sent a request to the Canadian government, suggesting that they start a farm worker partnership to alleviate labour shortages that they had heard about (1991:148). The growers increased their push for control over the future of the program in the 1980s, when the Canadian federal government determined that it no longer wanted to administer the program, as it had been deemed too expensive in the Wilson White Paper on taxation in 1987. The growers took this opportunity to garner more control over the program; negotiating a new structure for the SAWP in which Ontario growers themselves would administer the day-to-day operation through FARMS (Interview, June 2012).

Since the early 1990s, FARMS has maintained almost complete control over all aspects of the SAWP in Ontario. FARMS has its own travel agency that books flights for SAWP employees in the province, it employs a public relations firm to deal with the media on behalf of growers, and it is involved with the political relationships between partnership countries. It is, in other words, arguably the ultimate realization of Ontario growers’ wish to have a supply of good workers on demand and without a great deal of bureaucratic hassle. However, as the last few years have demonstrated, this system is built on sandy
soil, as many of the political, social, and economic repercussions of the SAWP and temporary foreign labour have been exposed as part of changes to Canadian social attitude and the global economic landscape. It is in this context of upheaval, debate, and uncertainty, that I have undertaken my study of grower experiences, attitudes, and narratives within the SAWP. But, before I turn to this debate and some of the key concepts and issues with which I will work, I want to widen the historical review once again to talk about the recent history of Ontario agriculture. This is a necessary task, as it will help contextualize the lives, business, and ideologies of Southwestern Ontario growers who continue, in some ways, to see their industry as one in crisis, or at least, in a time of great uncertainty as to what lies ahead.

1.4 Modern Agriculture in Ontario: Recent History & Trends
Agriculture has been – and will arguably continue to be – a critical part of Canada’s and Ontario’s economy. The work of growing food has of course changed drastically over time, but the importance of the image and ideal of tending the land, raising livestock, and feeding one’s neighbors has continued to live on, separate in some ways from the modern reality of industrial agriculture. According to Tony Weis (2010), the rise of industrial agriculture is defined by an increased use of machinery, heavy inputs, a preference for monocultures, and the control of both inputs and the resulting crops by large transnational corporations (28). The representative figures of these changes in North America overall are striking:

\[
\text{With some 5 percent of the world’s total population (just 1 in 400), the US and Canada produce 14 percent of world agro-exports by value, account for 15 percent of the world’s agricultural GDP, and absorb roughly 12 percent of all agro-imports} \ (28, \text{figures from FAO, 2007a, Tables C.1, C.2}).
\]

In other words, the dominance of North American and other industrialized nation’s agricultural systems means that the world’s poor are inextricably tied to the economic activities of richer countries (Weis 2010: 38). The migration, both temporary and permanent, of people from developing nations to industrialized ones is part of this connection and the results are unique in each situation. In one case study, Amani Ishemo et. al. (2006) found that migration had a contradictory impact on small farming in the Rio
Grande Valley of Jamaica. Temporary migration, they found, had a “profound positive impact” on the survival of small farms, as farmers who worked in the USA and Canada had been able to improve the capitalization of their farms (Ishemo et. al. 2006: 328). Longer term migration had more “conflicting impacts” as the loss of available labour supply was mitigated only slightly by the remittances sent back home (328).

There is, then, a level of instability within the food system both here in Ontario and between the Canadian and international markets. However, the numbers cited above do not fully reveal the local-level changes in farm structures and rural communities that are connected to these larger trends. To get an idea of what these changes look like, it is best to turn attention back to the Canadian context, then to Ontario more specifically.

According to the latest Statistics Canada census of agriculture in 2011, the total number of farms in Canada dropped from 229,373 to 205,730, a decrease of %10 from the last census in 2006 (Statistics Canada: A). During the same period, the average farm size grew by 6.9%, with the average Canadian farm now covering 778 acres (Statistics Canada: A). In Ontario, the recent changes in agriculture are largely in line with national trends. For reference, the number of farms in the province decreased by 9.2% (to 51,950) and the average farm size increased by 4.7% between 2006 and 2010 (now at 244 acres) (Statistics Canada: A, Table 1).

Another important trend is the increase in leased or rented farmland, as opposed to individually or corporately owned land. This shift in tenure arrangements is reflected in the past few censuses, with the overall proportion of owned farmland decreasing steadily since 1976 (Statistics Canada: B). As noted by Statistics Canada, “land rental is a less capital-intensive means of expanding an operation to take advantage of rising commodity prices,” meaning that the returns on rented land can exceed that of owned land, with the cost of land prohibitively expensive for many growers to begin with (Statistics Canada: B). It should also be noted that many retiring growers in the 2011 census appeared to be holding onto their land by renting it, in anticipation that land value will only increase down the line. This trend is particularly important, as the average age of Ontario growers
is on the rise. Between 1996 and 2006, the percentage of farm operators under the age of 35 dropped from 14.3% to 8.6%, while the percentage of operators over the age of 55 rose from 34.2% to 42.5% (Statistics Canada: C). FarmStart, an initiative incorporated in 2005 and backed by the provincial and federal governments, is one of the organizations trying to fight this change. Their website highlights the aging trend in farm operators in it’s “Our Context” section: “Over the next 10 years,” they point out, “over half of the countries farm assets are expected to be transferred, but three-quarters of our retiring farmers do not have a named successor” (FarmStart). Their mission is to “see a new generation of farmers: young farmers, new farmers and more farmers” (FarmStart).

While their mission may seem daunting, additional Statistics Canada numbers may provide some hope. While the narrative has undoubtedly been one of decline, in terms of rural population development and well being, there is a great amount of optimism that new artisanal food movements, environmental activism, and food-safety scares may have a positive adverse effect on rural populations. A newspaper article from August 2012 highlights some of the efforts being made by young women and immigrants to enter into farming for the first time, highlighting the opportunities that lie in efforts to find alternatives to the polarizing and destabilizing industrial agriculture model which has had profound impacts on the shape of rural life and the lives of growers (Toronto Star, August 12, 2012). It is interesting to note that contrary to common perception, the ratio between people living in rural and urban areas in Ontario has remained relatively constant in the past few decades. In 1911, the ratio was roughly 50/50, but by 1961 over 75% of Canadians lived in urban areas, representing a 25% change during the first half of the 20th century (Statistics Canada: E). Since the 1960s, the ratio has moved only slightly, with around 85% of Canadians living in urban areas since 1996. This consistent population level belies some of the more dramatic changes in the agricultural industry and in rural towns. On farms, there is the increased presence of SAWP and other temporary foreign workers. Machinery has also played a large role in reducing the number of people required to work on Ontario farms. Corporate influence in the form of fertilizer and seed

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2 Statistics Canada notes that “since 1991, up to three farm operators could be reported per farm.” A farm operator is defined as any person “responsible for the day-to-day management decisions made in the operation of a census farm or agricultural operation” (Statistics Canada: D).
companies has also had a tremendous impact. In fact, if you drive down any rural road that borders corn, soy, or wheat fields, you will likely see small white signs labeled with the different seed and fertilizer supplier names.

The story of rural towns and cities has been almost more variable than the changes that have taken place in the agricultural industry. Many Ontario towns have seen a decrease in government services and an increase in the number of unemployed and unengaged, especially youth. Other towns and cities, like Stratford, have benefited from their proximity to larger city centers and a gentrifying in-migration, as urbanites seek refuge from the rat-race of cities like Toronto in the smaller, idyllic and historical small towns of rural Ontario.

Overall, the history of rural Ontario and the provincial agricultural industry is best described as uneven. It is uneven in the sense that many growers and cities have benefited from the rapid transformation of rural economies, while other farm operations and towns have seen their better days pass them by. In my experiences in rural town across Southwestern Ontario I have seen both the good and the bad. In many towns, there is a startling contrast between the new reflective metal silos and greenhouses on the edge of town and the worn, tired looking original brick structures that flank either side of the main road through town. Some rural towns have turned to tourism and have, as a result, benefited from the influx of vacationers in the summer. Others have changed little, save for the construction of a new Tim Hortons or Walmart to serve their area and further push out many of the smaller businesses that were barely surviving. Is it a clear-cut story of decline and industrial domination? Well, no, the truth, as always, lies somewhere in between. I had the chance to see a number of CSA farms and to meet some growers and farmers who had comparatively small operations and still felt close ties to their local town and community. During the school year, I would see buses zigzagging from concession to concession, from farmhouse to farmhouse, dropping off children at the end of their driveways. This at least suggests that there is hope for rural communities and for a future where youth may choose to and live and work on their families’ farm when they get older.
The food system, as it stands today in Ontario, has created an immense amount of wealth for some growers, and put others out of business. In many cases, the cost of business means that they are pushed to renting land, finding second jobs, and facing the ever-present notion that in the industrial agricultural system you either “get big, or get out.” This is, of course, just one side of the story. Just as the unevenness of agricultural development has left some people and places behind, it has also created pockets of opportunity. As organizations like FarmStart and some of recent food and ecological activists movements show, people in rural and urban areas are not passively sitting by as the food system hurries to keep up with the global industrial food competition. Indeed, what I hope becomes clear in this historical review is that trends can change, as heavy and inflexible as they may seem. The sense of unevenness, uncertainty, and of the unknown thus forces many growers to react in different ways and forces them to effect change in their own ways. One of Weis’s (2010) biggest points is that agriculture has become disarticulated from rural communities, meaning that the gains in the sector have not led to similar gains for rural communities in terms of social and economic well being. As I suggested above, I do not believe that this disarticulation is complete or inevitable. While the strength and momentum of industrial agriculture is beyond doubt, the complete picture is a little more complicated. In this thesis, I ask specifically how do modern activist movements – whether they are environmentally or labour focused – fit into this picture? How does the individual grower – as a singular person and as a public persona – fit into this industrializing equation, especially those growers who hire migrant workers under the SAWP?

Luckily, I am not the first person to think of questions like these and to turn a critical eye towards our food system and the SAWP in particular. In the next chapter, I will provide a thorough review of the current body of academic research on the SAWP, cover the recent events that have shaped the SAWP debate and finally, will explore a number of key concepts and theoretical issues that are important to this thesis.
Chapter 2
Background

2.1 Literature Review & the SAWP Debate

In depth social-science research on the SAWP and the implications of migrant agricultural labour in Southwestern Ontario did not begin in earnest until the late 1980s, early 1990s. In 1991, Vic Satzewich published his seminal work, *Racism and Foreign Labour*, in which he analyzed the social and political-economic dimensions of foreign labour in the agricultural sector following World War Two. Perhaps his greatest contribution was his application of a blended Marxist and Critical Race Theoretical approach to understanding how the state integrated a new racialized supply of temporary, “un-free” foreign workers into the Canadian economy. In essence, Satzewich argues that the Canadian state’s immigration reforms are a political project aimed at protecting conflicting interests—the economic imperative of securing reliable labour and the protectionist desire of maintaining an idealized, white Canadian state.

Satzewich’s work would become the cornerstone of future research on state policy, immigration, and globalization for other important authors cited in this literature review—research that largely blossomed after 2000—but there were other researchers who were working during this same period on different problems and dimensions of the SAWP. In 1991, Bob Cecil and Eddie Ebanks, a geographer and sociologist of The University of Western Ontario respectively, published an article focused on examining the human condition of offshore workers in the SAWP program. Their goal was to examine workers’ day-to-day lives, in hope that it would give “insights into the place of West Indian farm labourers in the Canadian mosaic” (1991: 390). In conjunction with the efforts of many research assistants, one of whom wrote her Master’s thesis on the lived-experiences of the workers (Larkin 1989), Cecil and Ebanks collected surveys from 25 growers and interviews with 300 offshore workers, as they were generally referred to then (Cecil and Ebanks 1991; 389). They were not seeking to explain or explore the economic and political dimensions of the program, like Satzewich, but were rather concerned with the inter-personal and social relationships both on the farms and within rural communities.
This is not to say that they did not explore some themes similar to those in the work of Satzewich, as race and race-relations was a large part of their analysis of community-worker relationships. They go on to compare the plantation style farm structure that was historically common in the Caribbean with Ontario farms, concluding that “paradoxically, plantations offer poor economic choices within a culturally relevant farm system, while Ontario farms offer good economic opportunities within a somewhat culturally irrelevant, sometimes unfriendly, farming-community system” (401). In other words, they found that the SAWP system implanted a foreign element of black men unto an unwelcoming and distrusting white rural community that proved to be exclusionary to the workers. This, interestingly, contrasted with the plantations system that reinforced – and reified – the social relationships and hierarchies that extended beyond the plantation farm and into Caribbean society.

This article was, in a way, a call for a more grounded, qualitative and individually orientated research approach to offshore labour and the SAWP. This approach helped lead them to this conclusion, which I repeat here in full to emphasize the importance and prescience of their work:

*The human condition is not bad, but the workers’ total humanity is not expressed in Ontario... Ontario offers a peaceful, reasonably decent working environment with economic opportunities but, even after more than twenty years, the workers are collectively strangers in a land where many spend a good part of their lives* (Cecile and Ebanks 1991; 401).

This work was important for it set up another stream of thought within SAWP research, namely the efforts made by future scholars to try to rethink space and place as new borderlands of social exclusion. Cecil and Ebanks followed up on this article with a 1992 article that theorized the SAWP as an expansion of the economic space of the West Indies, thus rethinking the differentials of power and geography that seem to separate the two. They argued that “while colonial powers had once mapped and earmarked their overseas holdings as part of their domains, the situation had reversed, with the West Indian islands now mapping and earmarking Ontario as an adjunct economic space”
In other words, they realized that workers came to Ontario under the SAWP as an alternative to permanent emigration, as they sought ways to strengthen their economic and social well being while remaining in their own countries, at least seasonally (1992:19).

In many ways, these three scholars set the stage for all future research on the SAWP program in Ontario. In the 1990s, a number of other authors began to study and publish on migrant workers, including Josephine Smart’s (1998) article entitled, “Borrowed men on borrowed time.” Smart’s focus was the experiences of a small group of Mexican migrant workers in Alberta. In her conclusion, Smart took issue with the common discourse on the SAWP that framed the system as a structure of hyper-exploitation and corporate conspiracy aimed at the complete subordination of the working class and migrant workers (Smart 1998). Similar to Cecil and Ebanks (1991), she found that Mexican workers were articulating a clear understanding of the economic benefits of their employment in the program. While we have to bear in mind the limited context within which Smart conducted her research – there were less than 150 Mexican workers in all of Alberta at that time – she believes that more attention should be paid to the individual opinions of the people involved in the program, in this case the workers.

In 2000, Tanya Basok of the University of Windsor published an article on the issue of migrant workers who deserted their agricultural jobs to illegally stay in Canada or the US. Comparing the US Bracero program and the SAWP in Canada, she finds that administration of the programs is the largest determining factor for the rate of job desertion. She found that in the US, the majority of Mexican migrants worked for larger, agribusiness operations, where they were more likely to abandon their jobs. In the Canada, she found that the program often fostered paternalistic relationships that the Canadian-bound workers would less likely desert (2000: 215). Combine these factors with the chaotic and business-first administration of workers in U.S. vs. the highly structured bilateral SAWP program in Canada, and it becomes obvious that the Canadian agricultural system has found a way to supply a steady stream of obliging workers, who see the U.S. alternative as untenable (2000: 232).
Two years after Basok’s article, other important articles and books were published. Basok herself published *Tortillas and Tomatoes*, perhaps the most important intellectual successor to Satzewich’s (1991) *Racism and the Incorporating of Foreign Labour*. In her book, Basok argues that seasonal migrant workers from Mexico and the Caribbean have become a structural necessity to the Ontario fruit and vegetable industries.

Another influential work that came out the same year was Nandita Sharma’s (2002) *On Being not Canadian*, an article that helped to define and clarify how migrant workers were socially and economically organized within Canada. Sharma continued this argument in a later 2006 book called *Home Economics*, in which she interplays the ideals of home, homelessness, and nationalism to further explain how migrant workers have become categorized as part of nationalist practices and nationalized imaginations (Sharma 2006; 4). In both books, Sharma is problematizing the notion of civil society, of belonging, and how people come to embody certain categories of being in relation to borders and notions of being not Canadian. Her work becomes another important intellectual stream within research on migrant workers. While it is not focused on the SAWP in particular, it informs later research on migrant agricultural workers and their relationship to and place within both Canada and their countries of origin.

In 2002, Leigh Binford’s work entered the conversation with the publication of an article that critically analyzed the SAWP, using interviews carried out in Tlaxcala, Mexico as his main research data. He finds that the SAWP program, by design, keeps workers “frozen at the bottom of an artificially depressed rural wage scale,” thus leading some to “use their Canadian earnings to finance entry into the more lucrative,” but more risky U.S. labour market (Binford 2002: 14). However, he notes that SAWP remains popular because of the program’s low cost of entry, legality, the benefits of free housing, the reliable contract, the fixed wage rate, health insurance, and the promise of support from the Mexican consulate (2002: 14). Nevertheless, he believes that it is not just the beneficial aspects of the SAWP that draws workers, but rather the context at home in Mexico, in which their extreme poverty and lack of domestic job alternatives drives their
desire to travel out of country for work (2002:14). He, like Cecil and Ebanks, and Basok as well, finds that the ultimate issue is that Mexicans are in a socially and economically weak position both at home and while at work in Canada, “leading to a labor market segmentation along racial/ethnic lines” (2002:14).

Two years later, Kerry Preibisch (2004) began to approach the issue of exclusion and inclusion in migrant labour and rural communities. While she found in her qualitative research in 2002 that the integration of migrant workers was still lacking, she believed that new ties were forming between rural communities and migrant workers. Specifically, she found that regionally based support groups were springing up in Leamington, Simcoe, and Bradford, and while many community members still avoided migrant workers, some were making efforts to make the workers feel more included during their time in Ontario. She concludes that the SAWP system will, as time goes one, face increasing contestation, as the needs of Canadian businesses and civil societies’ newfound consciousness of the ills of the program collide.

Another three years later, Preibisch followed this article with one that takes inspiration from her earlier work, as well as the work of Basok (2002) and Sharma (2002, 2006), to argue the labour supplied by the SAWP “secures a flexible workforce for employers and thus improves Canada’s trade competiveness in the global agrifood market” (Preibisch 2007; 418). The important aspect of this argument is that she is broadening the sphere of analysis and explanation to include broader international trends, describing how farm operators seek out more flexible labour solutions in an attempt to remain competitive in a global environment (2007:444). Farmers and growers alike have therefore depended on global movements of workers to fight in a food market that is now itself globalized. It is almost a self-fulfilling, tautological process, in which North American markets grow at the expense of foreign ones, and the people in those foreign markets must then migrate to North American to find work. This is, of course, the same problem articulated by Tony Weis (2010), in his analysis of the contradictions of the global food system and the food system here in Canada. Overall, in this work, and in publications that follow, we begin to see an effort within migration and labour studies to relink the problems of the food-
system and the problems of our labour-system under one critical lens. It is not, however, a completed project, as much progress must still be made in understanding how farms and farming work in the 21st century.

Preibisch and Binford’s (2007) “Interrogating Racialized Global Labour Supply” tackles a slightly different aspect of the SAWP system, namely the internal shift within the system that saw many growers move away from Caribbean workers and towards Mexican ones. Preibisch and Binford, continuing, in my view, the work of Satzewich (1991), believe that the shift to a predominantly Mexican workforce for many growers is built on top of Ontario grower’s demands for the “most hardworking, reliable, and flexible work force” (2007:5). This quest for “good workers” is further supported by racialized understandings of both groups. Black Caribbean workers are often portrayed as hypersexual womanizers, and different groups are also attributed with certain physical and mental dispositions towards certain kinds of work (2007:5). Preibisch and Binford are quick to point out that racism takes many forms, it is sometimes overt, but often more subtle and, to a degree, structural.

In 2010 and 2013, Preibisch and Binford, respectively, published new works based of their prior collaborations and their own individual research. Preibisch (2010) shifted gears from her work on racialization and social inclusions, and turned the lens towards comparing the SAWP, a bilateral international agreement, with other temporary work programs in Canada, specifically the Low Skilled Pilot Project (LSPP), a program implemented in 2002 to help employers in the agri-food industries find temporary visa workers (410). As highlighted in an earlier section of this introduction, the SAWP exists in contrast to many new programs in Canada that have little government involvement in both managing the recruitment or monitoring working conditions of the migrant workers in Canada. While Preibisch turned in a slightly new direction, Binford (2013) recently published a book entitled Tomorrow We’re All Going to Harvest, which is a broad overview of his prior work and an attempt to look at the SAWP system in a broad North American and globalized context.
Preibisch’s (2004) prediction that the SAWP would not continue without controversy has come to pass. What we can see from the earliest research in the late 1980s to today is that scholars are increasingly concerned with a number of different dimension of the migrant labour system; mainly race and community, economics and instability of the food system, international and domestic politics, and migration and development. In the last decade, the majority of the focus has been on the experiences of those who migrate within the SAWP system, with a couple notable examples of local analyses of worker-community interactions. It is in this context that, like Smart (1998), I want to turn attention to the people who take part in and shape the program, specifically the growers who employ SAWP employees. To preface this turn, the next step here is to pick up where much of the literature on the SAWP left off and begin a short review of the recent time-line of SAWP related stories and incidents that have drawn much of the public focus on migrant labour here in Ontario.

Our journey through this recent history begins on April 29, 2011. While millions of Canadian watched the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton at Westminster Abbey in London, England, the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) released their decision in *Ontario (Attorney General) v. Fraser* (2011 SCC 20). This case was an important moment in agricultural labour rights history, as a group of migrant workers and the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) became respondents to an appeal to the SCC from the Attorney General of Ontario. A lower court decision had found that the Ontario Agricultural Employees Protection Act (AEPA) – which limited the collective bargaining rights of agricultural workers – was in violation of section 2d of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms\(^3\). The respondents in the SCC case, Fraser et. al., argued in front of the SCC that the growers who employed the migrant workers in this situation had not bargained “in good faith\(^4\),” which was a fundamental component of the collective bargaining process. While the SCC had moved in *Dunmore v. Ontario*

\(^3\) Section 2d of the *Charter* states that everyone has the fundamental “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication.” (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s2)

\(^4\) According to the UFCW and the workers, the employers had failed to listen to or even discuss issues with workers and union representatives when in meetings.
(Attorney General) (2001 SCC 94) and Health Services v. British Columbia (2007 SCC 27) towards providing more labour protections for agricultural workers and collective bargaining respectively, they determined in Fraser that agricultural worker’s rights were not violated under current law and that the law only supported a collective right to assembly, not full collective bargaining. The differential treatment of agricultural workers under labour laws in Ontario was thus upheld, as the SCC sided with the arguments of the Attorney General and the agricultural sector that agriculture was an especially vulnerable sector that could not afford works stoppages of any kind. The distinct legal framework that exists around agricultural work – and its differential treatment under the law – is important to note once again as it is a key component of grower defenses of labour practices under the SAWP in Ontario.

While this case did not apply to just migrant workers, but to all agricultural workers, its effect on workers in the SAWP was undoubtedly profound. The UFCW obviously found the decision “troubling” (UFCW 2011). Paul Cavalluzzo, the lead counsel for the UFCW believed that “the farm workers’ case [was] unfortunately… lost in a larger political battle beyond their control” and that the SCC had been led astray by the arguments of “big business and governments [used] the farm workers case to argue the Health Services case had gone too far in its protection of collective bargaining rights under s. 2(d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms” (UFCW 2011). Fraser was thus a pivotal moment in labour rights and migrant worker activism and debate, as it set the stage for further discussion on the limited rights of temporary foreign workers. This tension flared up twice again in the following year. In November 2011, a group of Mexican workers sued their employer and the federal government for what they argued was a wrongful early termination of their contract with Tigchelaar Berry Farms in Vineland, Ontario (CBC News, November 24, 2011). The workers and their lawyers argued that because the SAWP was a federal program, Charter protections applied in this case, as the workers’ contracts were terminated without an opportunity to respond (CBC News, November 24, 2011). This was the first lawsuit of its kind, and to my knowledge is still in the courts waiting for trial as of June 2013.
In February 6th, 2012, a van carrying thirteen migrant workers collided with a flat bed truck in Hampstead, Ontario, west of Waterloo. The crash killed ten workers and the driver of the truck and served as a shock to many who had so far ignored the presence of migrant workers in Ontario (CBC News, February 6, 2012).

In the immediate wake of the crash, many questions were asked about the workers and their lives in Canada. The workers were Peruvian and had entered temporarily into Canada not under the SAWP but under the low-skilled workers streams highlighted earlier in the Introduction. However, Ken Forth, President of FARMS, was later cited in the media defending the SAWP program and refuting what he referred to as “myths” about the program and the limited worker compensation benefits of the workers (CBC News, February 8, 2012). In some of the interviews conducted during my fieldwork, I would hear similar themes, with a few growers expressing their discontent with the lack of knowledge about the SAWP and the misconception that every agricultural worker in Ontario was part of the SAWP. One grower, in particular, recalled a time when one CBC reporter did not know the difference between the SAWP and the low-skilled streams of the TFWP going into their interview with this grower (Interview, June 2012).

In response to the Hampstead crash and the growing public awareness of migrant workers in Canada, a number of other organizations became increasingly involved in supporting agricultural workers and/or increasing public knowledge of their lives in Ontario. The most notable group was Justice for Migrant Workers (J4MW). J4MW has been incredibly active over the past two years (2011-2013) and has turned to social media to share the stories of migrant workers and to address their concerns with the system as it stands. In many instances, major media outlets like the Toronto Star and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) have interviewed J4MW activists, demonstrating how effective their media campaign has become (Toronto Star, July 4, 2012, as an example). Their campaigning has focused on four main demands, including “the right to Employment Insurance, the right to apply for citizenship in Canada, the right to be treated with respect and dignity, and the right to appeal” (J4MW). As part of these demands, J4MW has shared the stories of the poor working conditions that workers face and the situations in
which the employers have sent workers home early or neglected their needs and rights. Other similar groups, including Students Against Migrant Exploitation (SAME), No One is Illegal, and Live Free Niagara, have driven much of the public debate and dialogue on migrant workers and minority groups of all kinds in the Canada.

2013 has so far also been an important year for migrant worker issues in the media. As we saw earlier, no matter what program temporary foreign workers enter into Canada, they are often lumped together in the media with little distinction between the SAWP, or the TFWP, or the LSPP. In other words, many Canadians simply see just temporary foreign workers, and the media maintains a similar wide-sweeping brush. Accordingly, temporary foreign workers came under the spotlight beginning in April, 2013 when news broke that a number of Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) employees were being fired and then replaced by temporary foreign workers from India, which was in violation of federal rules that temporary workers cannot be brought into Canada if that means Canadians will lose jobs (CBC News, April 6, 2013). The reaction to this story was, unsurprisingly, severe. CBC News highlighted a number of reactions from the public in a news article two days after the story broke:

*It is, quite simply, outrageous that insanely profitable RBC is laying off Cdns and being allowed to replace them with temp foreign workers* (Douglas Hunter, Twitter, April 6, 2013)

*@RBC, I am appalled that you would fire Canadian workers & replace them with foreign ones. Your profits mostly come from Canada. #ShameOnYou* (Karen Bass, Twitter, April 6, 2013).

The story garnered much scrutiny and debate over the next few days and weeks, and eventually RBC acquiesced and reversed their decision to use temporary workers. However, what is most notable in the RBC story is the strong reaction from the public when it was Canadians being displaced by foreign workers. This situation contrasts with agricultural work, where the number of Canadians who do work in the sector has decreased over the years, especially in the most physically demanding jobs that seasonal agricultural workers now fill.
In summary, the past two years have seen a consistent rise in the tension surrounding temporary foreign workers in Canada, especially in the agricultural industry. While the public attention ebbs and flows with the news cycle, the overall academic and activist attention has not let up, with many individuals and groups making inroads in their efforts to change the overall structure of the SAWP program in an effort to increase migrant worker rights. It is in this context of critical debate and negative press that I set out to talk with Southwest Ontario growers to hear their perspectives on the program and to try to understand – or begin to grasp at least – the ways in which they deal with the inherent tension and differentials of power within the SAWP program. Conversely, there is the possibility that the tensions I see, and that academics and activists see, do not exist for many growers, as their experiences in the program may have altered their perception of what best-practices look like in the agricultural labour system.

It is this lack of understanding of the growers’ perspectives, and assumptions about their ideologies and motivations, which troubles me and in many ways drove me to explore the SAWP program for their perspective. While Cecil and Ebanks (1991), Smart (1998), and Preibisch (2004), rightly called for further exploration of the migrant workers experiences, I believe that this same individual, qualitative attention must be paid to the growers and so far has not been pursued adequately. The increasing debate on the SAWP and academic attention over the past few years has only served to distance growers, who, as we shall see, feel misunderstood and misrepresented in the public, the press and in the academy. However, their feelings and opinions of others are not the most important facts. What is important is the means by which they talk about their experiences; what images do they create and share to support their side of the debate? In what ways are they positioning their participation to the program? How do they talk about their workers and their relationships to their workers? In all, how do they negotiate the experience of being a Southwestern Ontario grower in the SAWP program? These questions are complex, and the answers, perhaps even more so.

Accordingly, there are a number of key issues and concepts that must be explored before I begin the analysis of my research findings. In the next section, I will explore three
conceptual and investigative categories for consideration. First, I will discuss the dimensions and implications of the current methodological and theoretical trends in migration studies and anthropological approaches to agriculture. Second, I will approach concepts related to language and representation that are relevant to this thesis, drawing heavily from literature studies and sociology for inspiration. Lastly, I will touch on the issue of power and politics in the SAWP. Here, I will lay out the key frameworks and approaches I will take to understand the macro and micro level position of power of Southwest Ontario growers who employ workers in the SAWP.

2.2 Key Concepts & Issues

*Ethnography, Migration, and Agriculture*

From my experiences in the Migration and Ethnic Relations Program at the University of Western Ontario and from my background research on the SAWP, it is clear that the study of migration has become and will continue to be an important topic across many disciplines. Anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, economists and health scientists alike have turned their attention to the causes and effects of international and internal migration. This focus on movement and transnationalism stems from theoretical shifts across the social sciences. In anthropology in particular, Appadurai’s (1990) work on global “‘scapes,” as he called them, called attention to the ways in which technology, media, culture, finance, and ideas were connecting people across the world in what he termed a new “global cultural flow” (1990:6). Appadurai’s focus on this “new condition of neighborliness” signaled what I view as the globalization of migration and cultural studies themselves; as technology and cultures collided and became, for lack of a better word, globalized, so did our focus as researchers. In other words, current research seemed to privilege the *newness* of migration, the macro-level, sociological forces which were now forcing people to move across borders and oceans to navigate their way through life.

I do not wish to suggest that this focus on transnationalism and movement is erroneous. In fact, it is exciting to see so many researchers from so many different disciplines talking about migration and immigrants, effectively critiquing and questioning the political, economic, and social structures that shape their experiences. However, my approach is
slightly different. Early in my research, I asked myself if instead of focusing on the overall process of migration and on the people who migrate, what could be gained by looking instead at particular configurations and spaces of migration? Could a particular spatial component help to better understand the SAWP system? By extension, could talking with the people who facilitate and largely drive the demand for migrant workers tell us more about the nature of migration process and social structures both within and around the SAWP system?

George Marcus (1995) argues that in order to address the complexities of global cultural processes, like migration, we need to take a multi-sited ethnographic approach. He continues by saying that any object of study that is mobile and fluid must be met with an ethnographic method of similar dimensions and character (1995:102). There is the potential, however, for “multi-sited” to suggest instead a multi-situated approach. It is an ethnographic method that is grounded in a particular subject or place, but that views a place in terms of its connections and not its boundaries. In contrast to Marcus, Candea (2007) argues that drawing limits in one’s methodology and analysis can gain some benefit for the anthropologist. He criticizes the approach taken by Appadurai (1990), Latour (1991), and Marcus (1995) for its emphasis on unboundedness and grand-scale holism, before suggesting that boundedness and the focus on “arbitrary locations” can actually become an explicitly “partial and incomplete window into complexity” (2007:167).

Candea’s criticisms are, in his own words, sympathetic, and I believe that we cannot view these two opinions as mutually exclusive. Similar to Mintz’s (1998) critique of modern migration studies and the focus on transnationalism and the newness of globalization, the schools of thought that Candea and Appadurai and Marcus represent are to a degree intra-disciplinary debates over the shape of the ethnographic method and the often arbitrary ways in which anthropologists choose their field-sites and their topics of study. While the process of ethnography shapes our research, there is undoubtedly a set of frameworks within which we work and it is the debate over these frameworks that is largely being played out here.
I present these two schools of thought to highlight not only what frameworks other scholars have adopted but also the framework and concepts with which I am working. In this thesis, I adopt an approach that is perhaps closer to that of Candea and Mintz, believing that boundary making can actually help to clarify and focus my analysis of grower narratives and representation in the SAWP debate. My physical boundary is Southwestern Ontario, and my ethnographic boundary is the growers themselves. However, I cannot pretend that this focus somehow eliminates the complexity of the SAWP and historical contingencies that have shaped the experiences of growers and workers alike. Following Candea (2007), my focus on the growers is but one window through which to see the SAWP in its totality. In this introduction and in my discussion at the end of this thesis, I take care to present the relevant context to my research, filling in the frame, the curtains, and the wall that surround my little window.

My cognizance of the limits and shape of the ethnographic method is also influenced by the field of agricultural studies within anthropology. A cursory glance at any search result involving farming in North America provides a great deal of research stemming from agricultural institutions across the continent, with much of the focus being on the economic issues, genetic research, and politics of farm subsidies, to name a few. Chibnik (1987) had similar findings when he first approached the field of agricultural research, especially in the context of the decline of family farms in the United States that was accelerating in the 1980s. Referring to many articles and books on the crisis, he found that few had “looked at [the family farm crisis] from an ethnographic standpoint” (1987:11).

*Some are dry, statistic-filled explanations of the underlying causes of the restructuring of American agriculture; others are emotion-laden human interest stories about individual farmers. Such accounts provide little information about the ways in which technological and economic changes have affected social institutions and cultural patterns in particular in rural communities* (1987:11).

His comments come from an introduction to a series of articles on topics like the matrifocal farm, ethnicity in rural communities, the social implications of mixed-farming methods, and so on. In other words, this collection was part of another shift within the
discipline of rural studies in which numbers and statistics were proven to be only partial explanations of rural life and the changes to rural communities in late 1970s and onward. It is in this context that we first saw researchers like Cecil and Ebanks (1991, 1992) pursue their ethnographic project on West Indian worker experiences in the SAWP. Later, authors like Basok (2002), Preibisch (2007, 2010), and Binford (2004, 2013), would continue this ethnographic turn within agriculture and migration studies.

It is in deference to this turn and to the predominant methods of anthropology itself that I take this same approach. Anthropology gives me the toolbox with which I can collect, synthesize, and interpret my observations of and conversations in the everyday lives of other people. It is an odd discipline, in that we study ourselves as humans, but that self-reflexivity can have tremendous benefits for the researcher and for the analysis of the project as a whole. Ethnographic methods and the basic social theory frameworks from within the social sciences more broadly have helped me to keep my focus on Southwestern Ontario growers, to pay attention to the small details, and to ensure that I do not discount experience, feelings, and intuition in my work. These methods and ideas can help me understand agriculture better, to feel it and sense it as much as read and write about it.

Language and Representation

The ethnographic method is indeed a strong, and I believe underutilized, approach to agricultural studies, but it is not without its complications. Perhaps most troublesome is the basic idea that language and action can often be disconnected. Or, at least, the social and individually located processes that shape human life can distort the connections between actions, ideas, and language. While the implication and nature of such distortions is the subject of much debate, in this thesis the main issue has to do with the careful consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of the personal interview and of media sources. At the most basic level, I ask: how should I deal with the idea of perspective and politics, or, in other words, how can I account for individual agendas and the positionality of my research participants and myself? This is not simply a speculative point; in fact it calls into the question the place of researcher and the limits of the
ethnographic method. As a researcher, it is important to pay attention to the role I play in asking questions. I must consider the way in which I ask people questions, the open or closed nature of those questions, and the implications of my own ideas and thoughts that I might share in the course of an interview or other interaction. The best way, it seems, and the best approach that can be taken is to split my analysis into two parts. First, I, as anthropologists and ethnographer, highlight and repeat many of the ideas and quotes that were shared with me. Second, I then analyze them piece-by-piece. This is not to say that criticism is the primary goal, but remaining critical must surely be so.

Within the social sciences there is a great deal of precedent to this kind of approach. Namely, I want to focus on a few key authors and concepts that will prove useful going forward. The first author is Raymond Williams, whose works The Country and the City (1973), and Keywords (1985), have shaped much of the analysis in this thesis. In the first work, Williams (1973) reflects and expands on the idea and image of the city and the country. “On the country,” he says, “has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning communications, light” (1973:1). Williams is quick to note that the idea of each place is much simpler than the actual reality, with the actual boundaries between the two being, at best, blurry. However, he notes that “in and through these differences, all the same, certain images and associations persist” and it is his goal to describe and analyze these differences (1-2). Much of his analysis is based on English literature and it is through these works of fiction that he draws us to the very real, non-fictitious power of imagery and ideas in social life. Later, Williams (1985) published Keywords, in which he pursued a similar mission to analyze and deconstruct language, this time by focusing on a number of individual keywords that have had a certain level of agency and plasticity in their usage and meanings over time. Williams focuses on the problems of word meanings, the ways in which words can connect people and ideas, and, conversely, the way words can be used in alternate ways that can open up other issues and problems (1985:15).
These two works by Williams thus help serve a similar purpose in my analysis, where I can repeat words, through interviews and media content analysis, but not reify them. Using this approach, I can dive into the meanings, contradictions, and inherent implications of the stories and ideas growers share with me about the SAWP, farming, and rural life in general. This framework is especially useful when talking about the way in which growers talk about people and places that are distant to them. How do growers talk about the city? How do they construct and represent the media and academia? In other words, by focusing on language construction and implications of words and meanings, we can delve deeper into the SAWP debate and the grower’s place within it.

Building on Williams’ approach, I want to turn from a focus on individual discourse to a focus on social interaction. Sociology provides a number of useful frameworks that complement the ethnographic approach, especially the way Irving Goffman (1959) approaches social interaction and what he referred to as the performative, theatrical nature of social life. Goffman is concerned primarily with the way in which people act in public, as opposed to private. For Goffman, there is an on-stage and back-stage persona or character to each person. Thus, it is important to consider in this thesis that growers are in a sense acting a part in their lives, perpetuating and personifying an image of Ontario growers that they have internalized and thus become through their own action and beliefs. It is a nuanced argument, but the implication is that ethnography is a similarly performative act. I, the researcher, play a part and ask questions, while then respectively listening to and writing down the on-stage answers from growers and other interviewees. By recognizing that growers are in a way on-stage, I can help situate my critique in a more sympathetic, but contextually aware manner. This Shakespearian notion that “all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players,” is also reinforced by the work of Vanclay et. al. (2007), who found that farming identity, farming styles, and rural identity are reinforced though the use of scripts and parables (or rather narratives), idioms and stories that are repeated by multiple stakeholders to reinforce their sense of belonging and identity within rural communities. These stories are not false or somehow disingenuous, but rather a part of individual efforts to make sense of and find their place within the world. The interesting part of Vanclay et. al.’s work is that it provides for
diversity within these scripts and parables, in that different people can apply them in different ways. Nevertheless, there is the common link of the scripts or story itself, or perhaps even the underlying value system that can connect growers and farmers from diverse communities and backgrounds (2007:15).

Together, the authors and frameworks highlighted above – Williams, Chibnik, Goffman, and Vanclay et. al. – provide a balanced foundation for criticality analyzing language and representation in the SAWP grower community. Through their work, ethnography can be balanced with theory, and theory with ethnography. A multi-faceted framework like this can help to tie up loose ends and balance out potential weakness in one method or approach. To conclude this review of important concepts and issues, I will next turn to how power and the politics of image plays an important role in this thesis.

*Power and the Politics of Image*

The issue of power is not explicitly under analysis throughout much my analysis, but it is certainly an element that ebbs and flows throughout every aspect of the SAWP. For a long time, I have repeated the line in my head, to my department peers and professors, and at conferences, that in the SAWP, the workers are not completely powerless and the growers not completely powerful. In other words, we cannot treat the situation of the workers as one of complete helplessness on their part. Neither can we look to the growers as the sole agents of control and exploitation in the agricultural labour system. Instead, it is important to view power as relative, meaning that yes, growers do have more power and privilege than workers, but they do exist within the system, not on top of it. Anthony Giddens (1984) explores issues of power and agency through the concept of the “dialectic of control,” which he defines as “the two-way character of the distributive aspect of power (power as control)” and “how the less powerful manage resources in such a way as to exert control over the more powerful in established power relationships” (Giddens 1984: 374). Essentially, Giddens provides a useful way for us to understand power within the SAWP. While workers have *less* power, they still have *some* power in that their very presence in relation to the grower affects the grower in some way. Power is thus two-way, or relational, and is constantly undergoing processes of transformation and evolution.
Growers may emphasize the idea of relativity themselves, though for them it is often through discourses of victimhood and powerlessness. Indeed, it must be recognized that the SAWP is part of a larger political and social context and much of what I am told by growers can be seen as part of a political project in which they present themselves in the most positive light possible. Just like in my review of language and representation concepts, this is not to say that their rationales are somehow dishonest or purely political, but that they are influenced by the politics of the situation. Similarly, the politics of image play a large role in my analysis of the SAWP growers. Growers are embodying and portraying an image for a purpose, whether it is for themselves or as part of a larger media campaign to “get the message out” and correct “myths” about the SAWP and Ontario agricultural more broadly. In time, I will reference the work and relevant political, economic, and social theories of Laura Nader, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Joe Painter and T.J. Jackson-Lears to help delineate and make sense of the triangular power structure of the Canadian state, SAWP growers, and seasonal agricultural migrant workers.

In the next chapter, Chapter 3, I will explore the functional explanations and grower narratives in the SAWP debate, starting with the commonly repeated phrase: “somebody’s got to do the work.” Next, I will analyze the politics of image and the contrasting views of growers as villains or heroes. Starting with an analysis of grower representations in the media, I will bring in a number of current and historical examples of how growers continue to appeal to the practical and philosophical aspects of their work in order to justify the current agricultural landscape. In Chapter 4, I arrive at perhaps one of the strongest elements of my research experience and grower’s philosophical narratives, that is the divide between the city and the country. The idea of this divide has force, in that it is at once physical and ephemeral, splitting people in some ways but also drawing connections within and between individuals and communities.
Chapter 3
The Politics of Image and Perspective

In this chapter, I will analyze the political, economic, and structural justifications that growers use to explain their participation in and support of the SAWP. Using the idea of function will help to group these often disparate justifications under a single explanatory rubric that seeks to emphasize, above all else, the practical necessity of the SAWP that is expressed in such commonly used phrases like, “somebody’s got to do the work.” Conversely, an exploration of what growers do say will help reveal the omissions, and to some degree distortions, inherent in their explanations and stories. It cannot be stressed enough that this critical approach does not dismiss their words based on an assumed malevolence or disingenuousness. Instead, it allows for a sympathy based on context and on the recognition that complexity begets ambiguity, especially as growers attempt to grow and sustain their business in an increasingly complicated global market. As a result, the growers’ stories are seen as part of a larger structure of realities and forces that pushes and pulls on each individual in different ways.

In second half of this chapter, I will explore issues relating to grower representations, both those expressed by the media and by the growers themselves. Understanding the negotiation of grower identity and image will help to situate the discussion of community, space, and place in and power in Chapter 4. Before I move forward however, I feel it is important to clarify some terms that I am using throughout this thesis. The most important, and potentially tricky terms are narratives and rationales. Here, I use narratives in a basic sense to refer to the common stories and corresponding ideas that are shared by growers and other key players in the SAWP. For growers, I am exploring common functional and philosophical narratives that both contextualize and justify their participation in the SAWP system. Similarly, I use the term rationales to refer to the individual thought processes and ideas that feed these narratives or, perhaps more accurately, underlie them.

With these definitions in mind, the next step is to begin to explore the stories and experiences that have been part of my research experience in Southwestern Ontario.
agriculture. In the first section, I will examine the common economic and development narratives that growers often use to justify the SAWP’s existence and explain its complexity. However, I wish to first highlight some relevant theoretical points that are at issue. Kearney (1986) argues that anthropological migration theory has gone through three major theoretical shifts, going from modernization to dependency and finally to articulation (1986:332). Modernization refers to the idea that migration is part of a process of civilizing and developing poor nations, therefore framing migration as a humanitarian process of ongoing development and progress (1986:333). Dependency, on the other hand, flips this idea on its head, instead viewing migration as part of the “development of underdevelopment,” the continuing process of suppressing development and wealth creation in poorer nations by extracting their human-capital and undercutting their own economic and social marketplaces (A.G. Frank 1969: 3). Articulation finds a middle ground, framing migration within a more locally aware, situated context that “overcomes the former liabilities of conceptualizing migration either as a socioeconomic and cultural isolate or as a dependent tail wagged by the capitalist dog” (Kearney 1986:344). The lens of analysis is thus not pointing to the individual and the household, but from their position and perspective.

3.1 Development and Economic Narratives

The big question in this section is thus: How do we tackle narratives of development and economic necessity, which have an inherent macroeconomic bias, in the context of ethnographic research? An articulation perspective helps to solve this, as it gives us the locally aware perspective on larger, global processes. However, my focus is not on the home and place of migrant and their household, but rather on the employer on the receiving end of the temporary migration system. How do growers think about the SAWP in relation to these bigger economic and social forces? Also, how does that impact grower interaction with the workers and the way in which they structure work on the farm?

The growers appeal to development narratives in their own explanations of the system, giving moral and economic credentials of the program. Charles Brown, who we met
earlier in the Introduction, talked at length about the good that came from the SAWP program:

One of my guys who has been coming here for years was able to send his daughter to school with the money he was able to earn here. He wouldn’t be able to make this kind of money back home. He was even able to save up enough to build a new home back in Jamaica. (Interview, June 2012).

He also expanded on how important the program was on a higher level.

The program means so much to so many people. For Jamaica, for example, it is a big part of their economy. The money from the SAWP is so important to the program, the current Prime Ministers of Jamaica (Portia Simpson Miller) was once the Minister of Labour and Welfare, she knows how important the program is and believes in it as much as I do. (Interview, June 2012).

Charles, it must be said, has a vested interest in the SAWP program and in FARMS itself, as he was at times taken part in the leadership of FARMS itself. While speaking with him, I got a sense of his emphatic support for the program, as his stories always seemed to be so emotional and, at times, dramatic. Before speaking with him, I knew that he had spent a lot of time speaking with the media, so his precision in his story telling was not surprising. Either way, his experience as a broccoli grower, as an employer of Jamaican workers, and as a de-facto spokesperson for the program, gave his insights particular weight.

Donald Speers, a grower in Kent County, Ontario, echoed similar thoughts regarding the good the program did for his workers back home. In my notes from the interview, he recounted the practice of “juggling” to me. Juggling referred to when workers would buy supplies of various kinds – toilet paper, tools, and the latest trend, gasoline powered generators – in Canada, have them shipped back to Jamaica ahead of their departure, and then sell them in Jamaica for a profit. Donald told me how he would go the local equipment store or grocery store to buy all these items or place large orders. Presumably,

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5 Donald Speers declined to have the interview recorded, but allowed written notes to be taken.
6 Later, Dr. Sherrie Larkin, my supervisor, would tell me that the term in the Caribbean is not “juggling” but “jiggling,” whether this discrepancy is down to language differences or something else I cannot say.
the owners of those stores did not want to sell large amounts of generators or other equipment to SAWP workers. This story of juggling helps to signify the benefits of the SAWP and, in turn, helps to move the focus away from the negative aspects of the program and towards the “good” it does.

Mr. Speers also discussed at length the drive his workers had to work as much as possible while here in Canada. While he said his workers did enjoy some down time to fish on a nearby river and to rest, most of the time they felt that they were here to work and to make as much money as they could to bring back home. He would, however, have to find a careful balance of providing lots of work and of respecting their downtime. He explained the differences between setting a piece-rate and an hourly wage on worker behavior, emphasizing that workers would often be tempted to lie or find crafty ways of upping their counts under the piece-rate system. While that was problematic, he admitted that it did give workers an incentive over hourly wages. He also pointed out that the workers could effectively bring the operation to a halt and “mess with things” by slowing down their work or not effectively picking and loading the various types of vegetables he grew, including tomatoes, broccoli and peppers to name a few (Interview Notes, November 2012).

This careful dance of maximizing productivity and minimizing work disruptions is situated in a language of giving the workers what they want. Mr. Speers, similarly to Mr. Brown, portrays the tough, long hours put in by his workers as an act of individual and diplomatic altruism, doing the best for the worker (giving him lots of work) and for the workers’ country (bringing money back into the country). Grower and industry publications portray the SAWP in a similar light. In a 2012 article in The Grower online newspaper, the Minister of Labour for Grenada is quoted in support of the program; “this program is paying for the education of children, payment of houses and small business” (Minister Glynis Roberts, in The Grower, January 2012). The permanent secretary for the Ministry of Labour of Jamaica, Alvin McIntosh, is also quoted:

“While global GDP has increased, this development has not been translated into employment for us… We need a more sustained effort at employment,” he says,
noting the positive impact on family and community life from Canadian remittances (The Grower, January 2012).

The article – which is titled “Caribbean countries want to send more farm workers to Canada” – includes a photo all of the participants of a review meeting of the SAWP that features representatives from each participant country, flanked on either side by two RCMP officers in their distinctive red uniforms. The image captures the formality of the meeting and the business focused, development-minded vision that each participant undoubtedly brings to the table. It is not surprising that the meeting of labour ministers and industry officials would be focused in this way, but I think it reinforces the growers’ views shared directly with me. The narratives surrounding development and international relationships are perhaps the strongest part of the growers’ defense of the program. Framing the program in this larger context thus helps to explain its complexity and uneven power structure. By referring to the economic inequalities inherent in their relationship to these other countries, they can at once justify the imbalances and seem to want to get rid of them.

Harald Bauder of the University of Guelph has in his work also analyzed the implications of newsprint and online media for the SAWP debate. Unlike my own work, where I have focused on growers, he has paid particular attention to the construction of offshore farm workers and the exclusionary narratives used in the media to discuss SAWP employees. He found that the media employed similar development narratives to legitimize what he views as the “exploitive and coercive labour practices experiences by migrant worker on Ontario’s farms” (Bauder 2005: 52). He highlights one particular news article which talks about many of the luxuries one Jamaican worker enjoyed in Jamaica because of his job in Canada, including a television, VCR, and refrigerator (2005: 52). He points out that one accompanying photo describes Mr. Brown, the worker, as “standing in ‘Canadian-style’ clothes in front of his motorcycle in his native Jamaica” (2005: 52). In short, he argues that the discourse of offshore labour exists on different scales, with the economic scale being the highest as it “represents Canada as a superior workplace, offering an explanation for the attraction of migrant workers to Canada” (2005: 53). Simultaneously, he writes, “the economic inferiority of the country of origin justifies poor working
conditions as “economic opportunities for the workers and as development assistance to the origin countries” (2005: 53).

As we see in the case of SAWP growers and in the case of Bauder’s work, articulation, as a theoretical perspective, thus has a double application. In the case of the SAWP, growers are explaining, or articulating, their vision for the SAWP as a system of economic development for individual workers and foreign countries. In the media discourse on the SAWP, the negative parts of the system are justified because they are relatively better than the conditions worker face at home.

Economic justifications are another key element of the functional grower narratives surrounding the SAWP system. There are a couple key components to their thinking that I will explore. First, there is the idea of the “cost-squeeze”, namely the pressure growers feel from the high cost of farming on one side and the demand for lower food prices on the other. Second, there is the notion of bettering the local, national, and global economy. The global-economic component is defined in large part by the development narratives covered earlier, but the local Canadian context needs to be explored further.

To begin, attention must be turned to the idea of the cost-squeeze, and of the perception of and reaction to the economic forces that push and pull on growers. The cost squeeze essentially refers to the phenomena where food prices are too low for farmers to make money while input costs remain consistently high. The solutions to this problem are variable – government support, supply boards, and commercialized farming practices to name a few – one of the biggest parts of helping to ease the pressure of the “squeeze” is to find cheaper, and crucially more reliable labour. Perhaps the strongest statement that I heard time and time again from growers was, “Canadians don’t want to do the work.” Canadian Immigration Minister Jason Kenney echoes this statement, saying in an April 2013 news report that, “Quite frankly, Canadians are not willing to…go work in agricultural jobs” (CTV News, April 29, 2013). In other words, since we cannot source enough people locally, we must use offshore workers in order to survive and sell our products at a competitive price. Basok (2002) argues that this really is not the case, and
that many larger operations could afford to pay higher wages and attract Canadians. However, she points out that these growers do not do so because what they really want is a reliable work force, one that is always ready and willing to do tough tasks and long hours. Arguably, the competitive advantages afforded to growers by employing SAWP workers precludes them from being the first to not use the worker or pay Canadians more. In a competitive and price-conscious market like agriculture, a grower would not usually opt for any new business practice that would give him a competitive disadvantage.

In my view, Basok’s argument could be extended further to argue that the SAWP is built-upon a self-fulfilling logic, by slowly moving to temporary foreign workers as their key source of labour, SAWP workers become the only workers that are seen as a good fit. Other growers hear some success stories, and decide to employ SAWP workers themselves. In time, there would be no other way to go. The economics also change, prices and cost-structures align themselves around the SAWP model and things simply repeat and continue from there. This analysis, of course, does not capture the preference growers have for SAWP workers and the selection process of naming workers and it also does not capture the fact that some Canadians still do work along side SAWP workers.

When Charles Brown said the phrase in this chapter’s title, “somebody’s got to do the work”, he was reinforcing the logic that the presence of SAWP workers is now simply an inevitable part of Canadian agricultural and horticulture. If someone has to do the work, then we must have SAWP workers. Temporary foreign workers are thus the only reasonable answer to that difficult question. Mr. Brown, continuing on his earlier point, shared some thoughts on the Canadian labour and immigration system as a whole, “In my opinion, they’re letting in too many ‘highly educated’ people and not enough people to do the work” (Interview, June 2012). This was perhaps the most direct criticism I heard of immigration in any of my interviews. The criticism was never of the SAWP but always of the idea that we somehow need less temporary workers. In fact, the most notable thing about many of my interviews was that the need of the SAWP was not really questioned at all; it was just how things were. In the view of the growers, like Charles Brown and Donald Speers, the SAWP is the only way large parts of Canadian agriculture can survive.
When I asked Mr. Speers what would happen if the SAWP didn’t exist, he said simply, “well, Canadian horticulture, as we know it, would cease to be” (Interview, November 2012). The self-fulfilling logic that fostered the SAWP’s growth also underlies the food system as a whole; any technology or source of labour that helps to keep costs low and risk to a minimum thus becomes crucial to the industry and to Canadian growers. When you ask growers what they think about the criticisms of the program, they constantly point to the idea of price and pressure. James Smith, another grower in Kent County, spoke pointedly about the pressure of food prices and the relationship to people in the cities who may criticize labour practices on farms while not connecting those concerns to the consumer end of the food system:

*Most people don’t know what goes into the food they pick up at the store. They just go in and look for the cheapest price and that’s as far as it goes* (Interview, January 2013).

Throughout my whole conversation with James in a small Tim Hortons, I sensed a great deal of skepticism towards issues around activism and what he would later call a lack of understanding of what growers do and how hard things can be for them. James not only farmed himself, but he also worked for an “ag company”, or agricultural supply company, where he said he met many growers who felt the same way and spoke at lengths about the pressures they felt in their work (Interview, January 2013).

In the spring of 2012 I attended a recruitment seminar by Frontier College for their Labourer-Teacher program. In this program, Canadians work during the day alongside SAWP workers and then at night provide English language teaching and recreational opportunities for workers. I was the only person who attended the presentation. I had a good conversation with the presenter and watched the whole presentation, learning about the origins of the program back when Chinese immigrants helped build the Trans-Canada railway. What struck me was the response the presenter gave when I asked him about the difficulty of recruitment. Looking around the empty room, he admitted that recruitment

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7 Donald last name uses the word horticulture to specify fruit and vegetable production, the industries he is in, as those industries are most reliant of seasonal agricultural workers.
was tough, as few people were willing to do such a tough job. Many college students, he pointed out, had never worked in labour intensive jobs like agriculture and were unlikely to sign up for whole summer of back-breaking, intensive work. This idea that “Canadian won’t do the work” is analogous to what the growers were talking about with me. Not necessarily because they cannot do it, but because that kind of work has become foreign to them and is now mostly the domain of “imported workers”. I do not feel that these two scenarios are perfectly parallel, but the similarities are interesting to note nonetheless.

Beyond the growers’ views on the economic inevitability of the SAWP, there are also other economic narratives that help to drive the program. The development narratives outlined earlier help to situate the SAWP as part of a process of international wealth and job creation, but there are also a number of more national and local justifications that help growers articulate their opinion and defense of the SAWP program. On the national level, the SAWP is seen as part of the Canadian federal government’s efforts to make immigration policy more responsive to business needs. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, in a web page describing recent changes to the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP), describes the spirit of the new policy direction:

*Where there are acute needs in the labour market that are not easily filled by the domestic labour force, temporary foreign workers are an important resource for Canadian businesses. To meet employer demand and improve the responsiveness of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), the Government of Canada reduced the paper burden on employers and shortened processing times…. Going forward, the Government will continue to consider additional measures to ensure that the TFWP supports Canada’s economic recovery and growth by better aligning the program with labour market needs.* (Citizenship and Immigration Canada: B).

While the TFWP is much larger than the SAWP, the political and economic justifications that underlie its structure are often one and the same. The SAWP was and continues to be an important part of supporting Canadian agriculture and business.
The political dimension of the SAWP is also very important. As we saw in *The Grower* newsletter story earlier, there is intense pressure on the SAWP system, and the FARMS leadership as well, to foster the international political relationships between Canada and the other participating countries in the SAWP. At the bureaucratic level, employees, liaison officers, and the member-state consulates in Canada have a vested interest in keeping the program going, as it sends large amounts of money back into the sending countries’ economies. At a higher political level, there are also instances where the program plays a large part in aligning partnering countries. In a speech before the House of Commons in 2010, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper welcomed Mexico’s President Felipe Calderón by highlighting the close economic, social, and political ties which link the two countries. In the speech, Prime Minister Harper confidently stated that the SAWP was “widely recognized as a model for international labour mobility arrangements” (Government of Canada, 2010).

The SAWP is subsequently many things to many people. For growers, the SAWP is simultaneously a benefit to them, to their workers, to Canada, and to the workers’ home countries. What we see is that narratives around the “good” the program does are often embedded within international development ideologies that support the uneven contours of global food system and emphasizes how temporary foreign work programs give work to those who would otherwise not have work. The Canadian federal government, in seeking to keep Canadian businesses afloat in the recent economic recession, also makes attempts to shift immigration policy towards a more business-centric model. The bigger question left unaddressed for now is to ask whether these economic rationales are tenable. Can a simple cost-benefit analysis be morally applied to migrant work and the Canadian food system? How do we balance the genuine good the program does, the work and food it provides, with the knowledge of the structural conditions that partially express themselves temporary foreign labour? These questions are, to a degree, academic, but as we will see next they are a part of the broader public discussion on the SAWP. Growers, in their conversations with me and in the ideas and stories they share in the media, engage with these issues through a discourse that is shaped by notions of community and interdependence between the city and the country.
3.2 Farmers Feed Cities

In between my research outings and other schoolwork, I have had a few opportunities over the past couple of summers to tend my own garden and, on some weekends, to pick strawberries at a local you-pick farm outside of London, Ontario. What always strikes me in my experiences on this particular farm is the intense awareness of smell that defines my experience. On strawberry farms, the scent is undeniably sweet, with the smooth, grassy scent of hay woven amongst aroma of the berries. The process starts when I park my car, pick up a basket (if I forgot to bring my own) and then walk or take a small tractor ride out to the strawberry rows in the distance. As it was for me when I was younger, kids are exuberant in their triumph of picking each little berry. When not searching for berries, they are playing with the hay on the ground, or perhaps hopping over each row to find their friends or their mom or dad, who are already hunched over another row.

The question I often asked myself as my legs and back strained from the crouching was, ‘why do people do this?’ The simple and perhaps most obvious answer is that it is an excuse to get outside and to take home many, delicious, local strawberries for under two dollars a pound. People seem to travel all the way out to this farm because it is fun, it is practical – if they require lots of berries for jam making – and it gives them a chance to get their hands dirty and sit down in the hay. Perhaps, above all else, they want to reconnect with their food and with where it comes from. I often think about how the natural setting and gritty tactility of the farm contrasts with the clinical sterility of the grocery store; perhaps this is why people more often trust food from a known source. If we can see where it grew, we just might have more reason to trust it, to connect with it, and to enjoy it more.

What is interesting is that these sentiments of connection and trust that I feel towards this local part of the food system resemble many of the ideas drawn on by growers and industry organizations in their efforts to support and share the story of Ontario agriculture. As we will see, growers understand that food is both economic and emotional currency. Growers thus capitalize on this idea and make sure to draw connections between what
they do on the farm and the well being of their local community and their neighboring city centers. The functional aspect of their argument is that farmers and growers sustain life in cities, that what they do is important not just for their own well being but for the economic and individual health of their neighbors, their community, and to cities.

Farmers Feed Cities, an ag-industry funded organization and movement that started in 2005, has come to symbolize farmer and grower efforts to get the word out about the importance of their work. I feel that their name deserves scrutiny, as it directly states that farming sustains people in cities. It is also the idea that cities could not live without farming. The organization, and the slogan it is based on, thus serves at once as a wake up call to cities and a call to action for farmers.

Farmers Feed Cities has become an important movement in the public relations campaign waged by Ontario agricultural industry groups. In public events and online, they have spearheaded efforts that are both all encompassing, in that they capture many parts of agriculture and can be employed by different groups, and consistent, in that the messaging and bright-yellow branding is predominant. While not SAWP specific, I paid particular attention to their work as I saw many of their stickers on SAWP farms and at many rural events. On the Internet and on social media sites like Twitter, they have continued to share and spread their message:

*An industry that feeds you is an industry worth fighting for #farmersfeedcities*

(Twitter, Beejuz, retweeted by Farmers Feed Cities, June 24, 2013).

*Farmers don’t just feed you, we help you get places too!*

(Twitter, Farmers Feed Cities, June 20, 2013, ethanol fuel graphic omitted)

*Sometimes you need a doctor or a lawyer, everyday you need a farmer! If you ate today #thankafarmer.*

(Twitter, Farmers Feed Cities, June 4, 2013).

These are just a few examples of the pragmatic discourses that drive much of the media campaign by groups like Farmers Feed Cities and by individual growers themselves. In earlier quotes from growers I spoke to, we see that a common complaint is that people in the city ‘don’t get it’, they do not understand how complex farming is and how much work goes into the food they eat everyday. The argument here is that cities could not
survive without the country and as a result more attention needs to be paid to grower and farmer issues.

Similarly, when growers told me about the difficulty of the job and the important work they do to feed the city (which includes me, the researcher coming from the city), they are obviously practicing a form of self-advocacy. Are all of their efforts out of pure self-interest? Well, that is perhaps too much of an overstatement. Instead, it is important to realize that they can maintain two mutually supportive trains of thought in their arguments. On one side there is the self-interest that growers and industry groups alike possess in the campaigns. On the other, there does seem to be a genuine desire to remain connected and committed to other parts of the local, provincial, and nationwide community, as that is the only way they will survive in the long run. Community is of course a complex term and can be mobilized and constructed in many different ways. As Williams (1985) puts it, community is a kind of keyword whose meaning is “inextricably bound up with the problems it [is] being used to discuss” (15). In other words, community is at once the explanation and the problem, in that growers, in their advocacy and in their everyday experiences, are constantly negotiating what it means to grow food in the modern food system. The connection I alluded to earlier between local food and community well-being thus becomes an abstracted connection, as the food leaving each SAWP farm I visited is more likely to end up anonymized through processing or global distribution channels than it is to end up on wholly the tables of Ontario families.

When Donald Speers spoke to me about the few local women and men he hired for his farm, he spoke with a real sense of connection to them. He knew where they lived, they had their inside jokes that I did not quite understand, and I knew, from his tone as much as his words, that it meant something to have them on his farm year after year. In another unplanned, but serendipitous experience at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) in Toronto, Ontario in 2012, I felt that same level of familiarity between a number of growers and dairy farmers that I spoke with. These farmers were part of an exhibit that can best be described as a cross between a petting-zoo and a mock-farm. Each farmer, from the dairy farmers to the goat farmers, were enjoying their time, engaging with the
crowds of children an anxious parents who were weary of their child’s interaction with animals. When I spoke to the farmers about what I was doing, studying the SAWP from the growers’ perspective, I received a thumbs up from two different people and one unexpected “thank god” from Sarah, one of the dairy farmers at the exhibit. I understood from my short conversations at the CNE that what was missing, in their view, was this level of familiarity between growers/farmers and everyone else. There was, in a sense, a feeling of alienation between the city and the country. They all had the knowing, tired look on their faces when working with each other. They understood the intricacies and difficulties of each other’s work. For them, it is this feeling that underlies a loosely knit, but distinct agrarian community.

More broadly, what I see are layers of community: on the farm, between farms, between farms and rural communities, and finally between the city and the country. This idea of a multitude of flexible, but somehow instantly coherent “imagined communities,” as suggested by Anderson (1982), enables growers to engage with the right people at the right time. By criticizing people in the city for not understanding what they do, they also reaffirm their importance to those people. By showing up at the CNE with a number of cattle, pigs, chickens, and horses, they are trying to teach and educate people in the cities about what they do and how they do it. Community thus becomes flexible and affirmative, inclusive or exclusive, able to encompass different groups and define sub-sets as well.

Farmers Feed Cities is the perfect example of this process. By defining the relationship as almost paternal and nourishing, they relink the country and the city in an inseparable physical bond. And by appealing to the idea that people in the cities don’t understand and need to know what rural life and farming is like, they again affirm the importance of what they, the farmers and growers, do. By extension, the SAWP becomes this misunderstood system that is simply caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. As increasing media attention is paid to temporary foreign workers more broadly, the SAWP becomes enveloped in a larger political and moral debate about the use of migrant workers in a weak Canadian economy and increasingly uneven global economic system. As we have seen, the facile argument first employed by growers in the SAWP in interviews with me
and in their media engagement, is the functional, pragmatic narrative centered on the idea that “somebody’s got to do the work.”

3.3 A Few Bad Apples: Images and Representations of Growers

So far in this chapter, I have explored three different, but intertwined concepts relating to the style and content of Southwest Ontario growers’ defense of the SAWP and of agricultural practices more broadly. The overarching concept and theme is that of function or pragmatism, or the ways in which the SAWP can be defended and supported on the sole ground of its practical application and current function. Pragmatic, matter-of-fact statements of fact and opinion by growers support this functional thinking, as they seek to explain the logic behind the SAWP system on the grounds that it serves a clear and necessary purpose. The functional framework is supported by a number of different shared narratives and individual rationales, which make up the last two conceptual issues that I am dealing with here.

We have explored development and economic narratives on the SAWP that seek to explain its existence and structure by appealing to larger, macro-economic and macro-political forces. By appealing to these larger forces, I believe the growers are in a sense deflecting blame and criticism away from the farm and towards the food system as whole. Put simply, growers feel misunderstood and, as a result, feel that change in the SAWP system is impossible without a larger change in how we grow, transport, and consume both fresh and processed foods. Growers also point out that the system “means a lot to a lot of people” and that it does a great deal of good for individual workers and for their home countries through remittances (Interviews, June 2012, November 2012). At a larger level, some growers who have been directly involved in FARMS have said that the SAWP is also an important part of international relations between Canada and partnering countries (Interview, June 2012). Similar notions of diplomatic importance have also been shared in growers’ newsletters as well (see The Grower newsletter highlighted earlier). The last dimension explored so far in this chapter has to do with narratives and rationales relating to community, and the connections between various groups within the rural community and between the city and country. As I argued earlier, community is a
term that can be mobilized and constantly redefined for different purposes. In some cases, it becomes a tool for reaffirming identity amongst growers – as is the case with growers’ organizations like the Ontario Federation of Agriculture – or between growers and Canadian cities, like Farmers Feed Cities. Community is thus an expression of a desire to connect in different ways and to appeal to different, flexible sentiments and notions of belonging when dealing with complex issues in the SAWP debate.

Implicit in the negotiations of what drives and necessitates the SAWP are issues pertaining to image and representation. When growers say something like people ‘don’t get it’, it follows that what people currently do get is a skewed representation of what rural life and farming is like. In fact, I would argue that the issue of image, or perhaps more accurately, the active process of imaging is one of the most important elements to understanding the current state of the SAWP debate. By focusing first on the initial functional arguments employed by growers, we can follow with an analysis of the dysfunctional narratives and representations that have impacted the debate. In this section, I will explore the current view and image in the media and in activist groups about who growers are what farming is like. I will then contrast this negative view, or what I call a ‘villain’ view, with that of the ‘hero’ grower, the latter of course being the image that growers and farmers are themselves trying to share and capitalize upon.

One of the most fruitful sources of data for my research has been the social media service Twitter. On Twitter, people from all around the world can share 140 character thoughts, ideas, and links to stories on any topic imaginable. I see Twitter as virtual space for ethnographic observation, a place where you can watch ideas grow and spread, and, in the case of the SAWP debate in Ontario, a place where you can begin to find the strongest voices and most interesting perspectives available.

Early in my research, it became clear that one of the strongest voices in the campaign for migrant worker’s rights in Ontario was the organization Justic (or Justicia) for Migrant Workers (J4MW). According to their website, JFMW “is a volunteer run political non-profit collective comprised of activists… based in Toronto, Ontario and now in
Vancouver, BC” (J4MW). Through research, I found that many of the most active J4MW participants are graduate students as well at schools in Ontario like York University. Their mission is to “promote the rights of migrant farmworkers [in the SAWP and the Low Skilled Workers Program]… and farmworkers without status” (ibid.). Their mission is to improve the lives of migrant workers, ultimately striving for “a movement that is led and directed by workers themselves” (ibid.).

J4MW has taken to Twitter as a part of their efforts to raise awareness of migrant worker issues in Ontario and Canada as a whole. They have shared the stories of migrant workers online, focusing on the issues and every-day injustices that the workers face in their experience in Canada (see list of tweets below for a few examples). However, I believe that these stories have a side effect, mainly that they construct a vision of the Canadian grower (the employer) as neglectful, or worse, abusive. The predominance of this image is problematic, in that elides the variability of experiences in the program. Inevitably it seems that the byproduct of constructing a landscape of oppression for the workers is the creation of a powerful villain figure – the grower, employer, or manager – that serves as the face of this oppression. Here are just a few examples of J4MW tweets demonstrating this phenomenon:

“Canada’s agricultural guest worker programs are indeed models of exploitation and regimes of power and labour control…” (Twitter, J4MW December 29, 2012).

“Migrant workers are NOT second class human beings, they deserve full social protections-EI, Regular/Parental Benefits + #cdnpoli #cdnimm” (Twitter, J4MW December 10, 2012).

“Seasonal agricultural workers treated well says program spokesman | Better farming” We beg to differ along with… (link removed)” (Twitter, September 23, 2012).

It is important for me to also point out that the J4MW twitter account is not only filled with commentaries and critiques like these, it is also filled with many messages of solidarity and respect with the seasonal farm workers they work with. In fact, their account is one of the best ways to stay abreast of current events and issues in the rural communities where media is scarce and outsider access often scarcer. However, the overall impact of their politically critical tweets, and their participation in interviews with mainstream media organizations like the CBC and the Toronto Star, have had a tremendous impact on the SAWP debate and on the image of Ontario agriculture and Ontario growers.

In other news articles, representations of growers cast a similar shadow. The headline of a Toronto Star article covering the release of the Metcalf Foundation report on migrant workers in Canada authored by Fay Faraday – an adjunct law professor at Osgoode Hall Law School in North York, Ontario – reads:

Abuse of migrant workers ‘endemic’ in Canada, new study says. It is bad laws, not just bad employers that expose Canada’s temporary migrant workers to abuse and exploitation (The Toronto Star, September 17, 2012, bold emphasis added)

A November 2011 article from the CBC covers the first case of SAWP workers filing suit against the SAWP, the federal government, and their employer for what they claim was wrongful early repatriation. The article quotes Stan Raper, a national coordinator for the Agriculture Workers Alliance, who has also been involved in advocacy and union politics for many years. Mr. Raper argues that the SAWP system has changed little over the past half-century and that “someone eventually has to be accountable for how the program is built and how these workers are treated” (CBC, November 24, 2011). This article also helps to highlight a similarly negative picture of the migrant worker’s employment

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situation, particularly when highlighting the portion of the plaintiff’s statement of claim in which they state that on “Aug. 30, 2010, Tigchelaar [farms] fired all three men, and repatriated them to Mexico one day later without explanation” (ibid.). The exact circumstances of the workers’ firing are still unclear, as the defendants in the case, Tigchelaar farms, have yet to publicly discuss the situation as of June 2013.

As you can see in the short tweets and news stories above, the workers lives are described in terms of “exploitation” under “regimes” of power and control (Twitter, J4MW December 29, 2012). By describing workers as “second class citizens” who are dispensable, the questions then becomes, who is in first class? (Twitter, J4MW December 10, 2012). Arguably, the first class is made up of the employers and rural community members who, in the view of many workers and of activists, benefit from the exploitation and control over migrant workers. I will turn to this debate in my discussion, but the point here is that these kinds of narratives are helping to construct and maintain a negative image of Ontario growers in the SAWP. My task is not to figure out whether the image is correct, but rather to explore the effect this representation has on Ontario growers and, in turn, on their participation and response within the SAWP debate.

In my interviews and fieldwork, I felt a constant tension arising from the dominant negative representations of growers in the SAWP. Many of my calls to contacts went unanswered and unreturned and many interviewees took more than a few minutes to fully relax and share their story. There was a surprising consistency to what I heard in my independent conversations with a diverse group of growers. Vanclay, Silvasti, and Howden (2007) refer to this phenomenon as the adoption of cultural scripts to reinforce farming identity and farming styles. More specifically, it is a way for farmers to deal with heterogeneity through homogenizing discourse. Within this discourse, you can find a variety of parables, or shared stories, labels, and rhetorical strategies with which farmers can reinforce certain aspects of their shared and individual identity or suppress others (Vanclay, Silvasti, Howden 2007, 3, 15).
One small, but telling, common element of the growers’ responses in the SAWP debate was the use of a particular phrase to describe growers who, in the view of other growers, had done wrong with their workers; the growers would refer to them as “a few bad apples”\(^9\). It’s a simple, almost benign sounding phrase that captures the same positive-imaging responses you get from growers when talking about other aspects of the SAWP program. After hearing this phrase in three separate occasions, I felt that it was not a coincidence but rather a possible sign of a concerted effort within the SAWP grower community to set a new narrative and minimize the problems that are highlighted in the media. The full phrase, “a few bad apples can spoil the bunch” reveals two possible uses of the phrase. The first being that a few bad apples, or in this case a few bad growers, undermine the integrity of the SAWP. The other use, and the one that I feel is at play here, is one that minimizes the instances of abuse by growers, those “bad apples”, by minimizing the impact those few bad employers have.

“A few bad apples” is a useful turn of phrase for growers that dehumanizes and transforms negative issues into an image of sweet, if partially rotten, soft-fruit. How harmful can one or two bad apples be after all? This is, though, a small pathway through which we can relink and rethink the interplay of the representations of the grower as hero and villain. For the growers, the smart way to change the narrative is to push it back towards the positive, wholesome image of nourishing foods and moral conviction. I will not suggest that activists have purposefully attempted to paint a negative image of growers, but their struggle to get the story of migrant workers “out there” has conversely led growers to believe that that particular story is inaccurate and potentially damaging to their self-image.

The emergence of diverging and contrasting representations points towards what I believe is an important point of trouble in activism and political debate around the SAWP over the past few decades. I believe that the debate has actually made things worse by making growers reluctant to talk, isolating them further and perpetuating a status quo in

\(^9\) See Hennebry (2010), in which the same phrase came up in another researcher’s work.
which key players have tuned out and turned inward in the face of constant, arguably over simplified criticism. In the past few years, however, FARMS and individual growers have started to reengage in the SAWP debate. Through conversations with a few growers, I learned that FARMS had recently hired a public relations firm – Enterprise Canada[10] – to handle both their campaign to spread the ‘good word’ on the SAWP and to handle crisis situations, such as the Hampstead, ON motor vehicle crash in which a van carrying fifteen migrant workers was involved in an accident, killing 11 people, including 10 migrant workers. Even though the workers had not come to Canada under the SAWP but under another temporary foreign work program, Ken Forth, the president of FARMS, was quoted in the press defending the use of migrant workers in Ontario. He hit out at "myths" emerging in the wake of Monday's accident that migrant workers killed or injured on the job in Canada [didn’t] receive the same insurance benefits as Canadians,” pushing back against criticism from Stan Raper, who me met earlier, and others (CBC, February 8, 2012).

A year after the crash, it was still a topic that struck a cord with many growers I spoke to. Donald Speers, who I interviewed less than a year after the crash, lamented how the media usually reacted after events like the Hampstead crash:

> Every time something happens with migrant workers, the media sticks a microphone in the faces of the OFA [the Ontario Federation of Agriculture] to ask ‘What’s going on with these workers?’

(Interview, November 2012)

Mr. Speers spoke only briefly about the crash then quickly turned the conversation towards his contact with the FARMS leadership immediately after the crash in which he was asked to write Op-Ed pieces that highlighted the good parts of the program that could then be shared in newspapers across the province. That way, FARMS would not respond to the tragic event in Hampstead directly but instead move the ensuing controversy in a positive direction. My notes from our interview recount the story:

One story was with Donald’s brother in law’s church. One of the workers attended the church, and one of his brother’s workers had died and something

happened a year later with his house back in Jamaica. So the church raised money and his brother in law went down in the off-season to Jamaica and helped rebuild a house for the worker’s wife, who was now by herself. (Interview notes, November 2012)

The story, while anecdotal, does at least reveal a problematic part of both the media and activist narrative on growers in the SAWP and worker’s living and working conditions. Namely, what happens when you meet a grower who treats his workers well and who, in some cases, becomes a close friend, a participant in his worker’s weddings and in his worker’s family’s funerals (and vice-versa)?

This point was a difficult one for me until I attended a photography show and lecture in February 2013. The show covered the photographers’ trip to Leamington, Ontario, in which his team visited farms where the workers toiled and visited workers at home, in the bunkhouses owned by the employers. The photographs were striking; some were in stark black and white and others vibrant with the colors of ripe tomatoes and endless blue skies. However, there was a definite hesitation in the speaker’s initial critiques of the program. Instead of a show that exposed the terrible conditions that the speaker had anticipated, the show, and his words, mainly problematized the rhetoric of oppression and suffering. In my notes from the show I highlighted this sense of self-crisis:

What do you do when the farmer who you expected to be mean and untrustworthy of photographers who were “out to get him” was welcoming and really nice? The speaker only answers with, “I don’t know,” as he winces and peers hesitantly up at the audience, unable to produce a clear answer. (Personal Notes, February 2013).

Interestingly, it was the audience who were most vocal with their criticisms; with most questions focusing on the tough working conditions, their limited rights, racism in the Leamington community, and so on. The speaker was sympathetic but nevertheless at a loss, unable to produce the definitive, stark reality that the audience members had anticipated going in and that many had hoped to rally around. They had anticipated a damning photo documentary and were instead faced with someone who was struggling with the simple, but profound, notion that the reality of agricultural life and social
relations within the SAWP is more complicated than commonly thought. This is complicated further by my own experiences. In those moments when I spent time on farms, in the sun, sharing a drink with a grower and hearing him fondly recall his own story and the stories of his employees. While my own reconciliation is perhaps best described as, “evolving”, I can say that growers are well aware of the complexity of the SAWP and of the difficulties both their workers and other growers face in their lives and in their work. One of the strongest things that many growers hold onto though is the idea that the work they do is important, if not heroic in some basic sense.

3.4 Cultivating Heroes

So far, I’ve looked at the common ideas and representations of growers in the SAWP debate, focusing on the negative images that have become predominant. Now, I turn my attention from the public criticisms to the growers’ responses to the criticisms and examine the ways in which growers mobilize ideas to support their self-image and public-facing campaign to portray the SAWP and SAWP growers in a positive light. Ideas do possess force in that they invoke and illicit emotional responses. In the case of the Canadian growers, we see that images related to agrarianism and rural tradition all have some sort of power, as malleable and individual situated as it may be.

Raymond Williams (1973) argues that the “contrast of country and city” is part of our reckoning with “a central part of our experience and the crises in our society” (Williams 1973: 289). He argues that the images of country and city, whether good or bad – depending on each person’s perspective and aspirations – are transformed through different stages: “religious, humanist, political and cultural” (Williams 1973: 12). These stages are not necessarily consecutive, but neither are they concurrent. Rather, the idea of the country and the city is itself a persistent force (290). In his analysis, Williams found that the image of the city, at different periods in time, was associated with money and law, wealth and luxury, mob and masses, and mobility and isolation (290). The idea of the country, at different stages, invoked notions of rural retreat, honest cultivation, and a wild or unspoiled country (290). Each idea was embedded within unique historical circumstances, circumstances that determined the many alternative uses seen in his
analysis. What is interesting in many of the themes related to the country is that they are often responsive to outside conditions. To have an “unspoiled” country, the city must then be “spoiled.” Similarly, to have a retreat, there must be a place from which to retreat. How does Williams’ analysis of English literature help in the context of the SAWP debate? As it turns out, growers are caught within a similar process of defining and mobilizing ideas to support and explain their lives and livelihoods. The question is then: what ideas do they use and what are implications of them doing so?

To answer this question, we have to step back a few years and a few hundred miles to 1978, and the Future Farmers Convention of America held in Kansas City, Missouri. During the convention, conservative talk show host Paul Harvey delivered what is now a famous speech on farming in America, entitled “So God Made a Farmer” (FFA Proceedings, November 1978). The speech spoke strongly to religious themes and the story of Genesis, starting with the line, “And on the 8th day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, "I need a caretaker." So God made a farmer” (The Atlantic, February 2013). His speech continues with this structure, filling each paragraph with an extensive list of duties and struggles in rural life and ending with, “So God made a farmer” (ibid.). Two notable sections of his speech are worth including here:

*God said, "I need somebody willing to sit up all night with a newborn colt. And watch it die. Then dry his eyes and say, 'Maybe next year.' I need somebody who can shape an ax handle from a persimmon sprout, shoe a horse with a hunk of car tire, who can make harness out of haywire, feed sacks and shoe scraps. And who, planting time and harvest season, will finish his forty-hour week by Tuesday noon, then, pain'n from 'tractor back,' put in another seventy-two hours." So God made a farmer...*

*God said, "I need somebody strong enough to clear trees and heave bales, yet gentle enough to tame lambs and wean pigs and tend the pink-combed pullets, who will stop his mower for an hour to splint the broken leg of a meadow lark. It had to be somebody who'd plow deep and straight and not cut corners. Somebody to seed, weed, feed, breed and rake and disc and plow and plant and tie the fleece*
and strain the milk and replenish the self-feeder and finish a hard week’s work with a five-mile drive to church. (ibid.)

Harvey’s words were used in February, 2013 for a television commercial featuring Dodge Ram trucks; associating the tough, dedicated life of farming with the multi-tonne vehicles ostensibly made by Dodge to serve the needs of American farmers. The video is full of images of American farms and farmers, hay bales and silage silos, young chickens and soil-dusted cattle, farmers praying at church and around the table with their families. The video ends with the tagline, “For the farmer in all of us” (YouTube).

Today, the Future Farmers of America’s creed includes overtures to the themes and pictures of agricultural life and work included in Harvey’s speech. The creed ends with this:

I believe that American agriculture can and will hold true to the best traditions of our national life and that I can exert an influence in my home and community which will stand solid for my part in that inspiring task. (Future Farmers of America)

This belief, that farmers can and should uphold their tradition for the betterment of their nation, carries over to the Canadian context. If you visit any Canadian agriculture website, from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) to the Grower.org (an online Ontario agriculture newsletter), you will find similar themes presented. On the OFA website, there are links to photo galleries which include many bucolic images of farms, farm animals, food, and agricultural events (Ontario Federation of Agriculture). On the website for Farmers Feed Cities, an advocacy group funded by Ontario Grains and Oilseeds Associations, their mission statement includes a commitment “to increasing the understanding of the value that farmers contribute to Ontario’s economic physical and social health” (Farmers Feed Cities). This mission statement, which reads very much like the FFA’s, is included just to the right of an image of a grower holding his little daughter in his arms as he walks through a sun drenched field of wheat (Farmers Feed Cities).
From this idyllic image to the OFA mission statement, it seems that growers across Ontario are sharing their story and cultivating a positive image of Canadians agriculturalists. For growers, the problem is not only that people in the city “don’t get it”, the problem is that they should recognize the importance of the work farmers do. I had a chance to talk to a young farmer named Will Edwards at a Farmers Feed Cities booth at a farmer’s market in Stratford, Ontario in the fall of 2012. Will eagerly spoke about the miscommunication and misunderstanding that, in his view, existed between people “in town”, as he put it, and farmers and growers. To him, and to many others who support the organization through purchasing bumper stickers, shirts, hats and tote bags, the mission is clear; family farming is in decline and we need to save it by highlighting the good it does for everyone, farmer and non-farmer alike. His booth was flanked on either side by a row smaller farmers, some grew garlic, others specialty peppers and ginseng. But this booth stuck out, as the bright yellow branding that read “Farmers Feed Cities” and “Hug a Farmer” served as the metaphorical pillar of the market.

This message is, of course, one that helps the funders of the campaign. The Ontario Grains and Oilseeds Associations have an interest in engaging in a public relations campaign in support of the farmers under their umbrella. Nevertheless, it is interesting how they make their argument, highlighting the value and tradition embodied by Ontario farmers. Growers who hire workers under the SAWP use a similar method to make their case to me and to the press when engaged in discussion over the SAWP. The growers who spoke to me largely kept things positive and constructive, pushing my often pointed questions over workers’ treatment and living conditions into answers that seemed to address a higher question, that of the place of Ontario agriculture in the local economy and Canadian society.

In my second conversation with Charles Brown, he was careful to correct me when I used the phrase “migrant workers”, instead preferring that we call them “seasonal agricultural workers”\(^\text{11}\) (Interview, June 2012). Similar efforts to shift the conversation in a positive

\(^{11}\) One farmer who manned a stand at a Stratford, Ontario farm market described his Mexican employees as “legal imports.” To me, it seemed as if he was afraid to use the word “migrant workers” as well while
direction happened with Donald Speers as well, when he constantly referred to his workers’ “hard work” and willingness to go above and beyond to get the job done and to make a bit more money when working under a piece-rate structure (Interview, November 2012). Together, I see the positive-leaning responses of growers as an effort to reset the conversation on the SAWP, appealing to a higher, nobler image of agricultural work for themselves and for their workers.

There is something more to the idea of the importance of the work itself; namely that getting your hands dirty, growing food, and doing so in teams is a fundamental component of one's character. The mundane act of planting, pruning, and picking is thus made profound and important. The cultivation of the hero image and aesthetic is built in part on this ethic of agricultural work and it is an important element that deserves further exploration. However, caution must be taken with this analysis of ideas and images. As Williams (1973) pointed out, ideas of the country are often subject to the whims of personal nostalgia, which is “universal and persistent” in life (12). While it easy to dismiss nostalgic ideas – as Williams puts it, “only other men’s nostalgias offend” (12) – I believe it is more important to explore their meanings and, most importantly, their uses. The hero vs. villain dichotomy is interesting because of the nuances and overlaps, not because the dichotomy itself is necessarily clear. As a result, growers are trying not only to make sense of their own identity, but the perception of who they are by others. Tied up in this process are discourses of power, risk, and uncertainty, as well as issues of place and community. As we will see in the next chapter, growers, seeking to make sense of the world and in their defense of the SAWP, rely on a multitude of ideas that expand upon and complement the image of the city and the country.

also differentiating the SAWP from the American agricultural system, which relies heavily on migrants who enter the U.S. without visas or work permits (Fieldwork Notes, November 2012).
Chapter 4
Locating Meaning & Belonging in Ontario Agriculture

“Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.” – Studs Terkel (1974)

4.1 The Work They Do

The idea that work is central to who we are as adults is at once simple and profound. It points us to the larger notion that we cannot fully understand each other, as adults, without thinking about work in one form or another. In the case of Ontario growers, I believe we have failed, in part, to understand how their experience in agricultural work – in all of its physicality and symbolism – underlies their rationales for hiring seasonal workers and for fighting for the SAWP system in the face of public and academic criticism.

For the growers I spoke with, their work is not just a means to an end, but also an end in itself. It is about the continued fight to survive, to carry on, and to sustain the character not only of themselves, but also of their families and the larger community of which they see themselves as part. For Charles Brown, the starting point in his story was before his father’s time, linking his story as far back as the American Revolution to the fleeing of his British-sympathizing ancestors from the American colonies and into Canada (Interview, June 2012). For Donald Speers, the lineage was similarly important, with the story of his operation linked back to when his father had first immigrated to Canada from Holland in the 1950s (Interview, November 2012).

These references to a distant history point towards an underlying desire of the growers to continue what their family had started and to fulfill a trajectory of agricultural life that started long before their time. This desire explains why farming for them is not just a means to make money, but something that is in fact personally sacred. Many of my conversations were filled with this theme of a larger cause. Whether it is family tradition,
local tradition, or the health of the food system as a whole, the motivations always
seemed larger than the individual. This larger space, or set of goals, thus defines not only
their own identity but the identity of the community as a whole, a community of growers
who all face similar struggles while all working towards similar objectives.

This is not to say that there is not discord between growers, or that the pressures of
business do not push and pull on growers just as they do any other business. In many
cases, the goal to survive can override the sense of community that often defines rural
Ontario. James Smith described to me at length the strict competition for land leases, with
potential lessees fighting for the best rates by bidding at very high and unprofitable levels
just to secure land for the long term (Interview, January 2012). So it seems then that this
Weberian higher calling is not without it challenges, as growers seek to maximize their
competitiveness while struggling to survive the negative aspects of that competition. The
overarching element, however, is that many of them do the same work. Almost any
grower can drive along a rural concession and tell you exactly what is happening on any
farm just by quickly glancing at the fields. The same goes for hot-houses where many
SAWP employees work, where I heard stories of growers sharing advice and checking in
on their colleagues, partly as a ploy to get competitive advantage, but also as a part of
that community built on the common link of the work they do.

In my fieldwork, I found that the work of agriculture – the planting, the harvesting, in the
open air and in the hothouses – gives growers a sense of pride and purpose. Of course, in
many contexts, growers no longer do the physical labour of actually planting, maintaining,
and harvesting plants. But, what is interesting is that no matter which grower I spoke with,
from the large operation manager to the family farmer, there was a common reference to
the physicality and toughness of their work that served to set them apart from everyone
else. In some circumstances, the relationship to their work and to their workers was
defined in terms of camaraderie, with the common theme of “hard work”:

You build respect with these guys by getting right in there with them to their level.
Like when we’re loading tomatoes using the water pump system, sometimes I got
to get in there to help (Donald Speers: Interview, November 2012)
This kind of hands on participation in the hard work of growing food is what gave the growers I spoke with a smile to their face. In the interview quoted above, and in an a few others, I could almost always see their eyes open up a bit wider and their hands fling up wildly, gesturing into the space in front of them as if they were picking the harvest of vine tomatoes right out of the air.

So what does this mean in the context of identity and a sense of community as it relates to agricultural work? I argue that being a grower is a unique experience that takes place in work contexts that are vastly different from the spaces inhabited by many of the people who take part in the debate over the SAWP program. I believe that this divide in experiences and viewpoints serves to pit growers against non-growers in a debate in which the fundamentals of everyday life are vastly different for the different participants. This divide leads to a potential misunderstanding of the terms of debate and a continued disagreement over the solutions for labour and other problems that exist today in our food system. As we have seen, part of this divide is an issue of the politics of image, of how growers are represented and how they self-represent in the SAWP debate. However, another part of this puzzle is the issue of power and grower discourses surrounding risk and uncertainty in agriculture.

4.2 Power, Risk and Uncertainty in Agricultural Life

Basok (2002) argues that Mexican workers under the SAWP have become the preferred and predominant form of agricultural labour in Ontario because of their malleability and limited freedoms under the program. In her conclusion, she summarizes by saying that:

... it is not the vulnerability of farming that makes growers dependent on offshore labour but the need to secure labour that is not only unfree to change jobs but that is available for work on demand. Since such unfree labour does not exist in Canada, it is vital for Canadian agriculture to have access to unfree foreign workers (144).

The concept of "unfree" workers is powerful both theoretically and in practical policy terms, for it captures the strict legal and physical conditions under which seasonal agricultural workers are employed in Canada. Nandita Sharma (2001) also explores this
concept from a different angle, weaving the idea of "unfree" labour with the social and political construction of migrant workers as "non-Canadians" who are subject to different levels of rights and expectations in their work and personal lives while in Canada.

The categorization and arguable segregation of migrant workers from general Canadian society is important to keep in mind, but there is another level to which we can extend our scrutiny when approaching the debate over the SAWP. Implicit in the categorization of migrant workers as "unfree" and "non-Canadian" is the belief that Canadians themselves - and in particular the growers who hire and oversee the workers - are free and 100 percent, true Canadian. In defining non-Canadians we specify what it is to be Canadian - to have to full labour rights, to speak English or French, and to hold power through our economic and political privilege. This, in time, leads to the easy assumption that growers are completely powerful and workers completely powerless. Like most ideas in the social sciences, it turns out that the day-to-day experiences fall somewhere in between, in the murky grey of individual agency acting in a web of structures and ideas that hold power as well. In the case of the SAWP, it appears that the discourse of the powerless worker and inimical grower has become pervasive, lying sometimes at the forefront but most often on the subtle underpinning of academic and public criticism (See section 3.3 for more on this point).

It is precisely at this time of a dominant negative narrative on the grower's role in the SAWP that I set out to do my fieldwork in 2012 and try to figure out why the debate took the form it did and why many growers had decided to either step out of the debate or increase their advocacy in support of the SAWP. I sought not to disprove the idea of the "unfree" worker or the abusive grower, but rather to problematize these narratives in the face of what I saw as contradictory experiences and perspectives..

In my experience over the past year, what I saw was a varied field of individual and group power amongst growers in Southwestern Ontario. There are many variables that influence the decisions growers make and the ways in which they respond to the debate over the SAWP and seasonal workers. Impacting their power are a number of risk factors,
or vulnerabilities, that push and pull on their business operations and personal lives. I believe that the presence of risks for, or pressures on, growers can tell us a lot about why the SAWP program came to be, why it works as it does, and why the debate and attention given to the SAWP has failed to effect change in the system. I agree with Basok (2002) that economic risk factors cannot fully explain the reliance on SAWP workers in Canadian agricultural, but, conversely, I do not believe that it is solely the demand of industrial agriculture - as a system of exploitive labour and material relationships - for flexible labour that can fully explain the relative stability and continuing success of the program.

Industrial agriculture, while economically dominant in contemporary times, does not make up the totality of the agricultural system or the Canadian agricultural ethos. In fact, the system of labour and material relationships that make up industrial agriculture are often in direct contradiction with the importance growers place on risk, uncertainty, and tradition in the stories they share with the media and in the broader debate on the SAWP. Relevant to this discussion is the focus on risk and strategies to minimize and overcome it, including efforts by growers to fight their way through what they see as being "caught" in the middle of so many forces, big and small. Growers can be caught between low market prices and high input costs, between labour shortages and the politics of temporary foreign migration, or between bad weather and delivery quotas for processor contracts.

James Smith, the young grower from Kent County who we met earlier, referred to this last aspect of uncertainty in fairly fatalistic terms:

*There's a lot of hoping and praying that has to happen before everything turns out and to get a crop that you're happy with... We're only one big rainstorm or hail storm away from having nothing, absolutely nothing...* (Interview, January 2013)

For growers who still plants crops outside and not in climate controlled greenhouses, there will always be a tremendous amount of uncertainty as to what the end of the growing season will look like. As James and other pointed out to me, agriculture is always fighting a state of decline and subtle despair as the industry struggles to find its way in a complex, modern world. Farming continues to be an industry that evades
regularity and complete human control. As reliable as pest control, input selection, price control boards, etc… have become, there is still the chance that one day a solid frost or rain storm could take it all away. In the spring of 2012 we saw just that in Southwest Ontario, with the majority of apple and soft-fruit industry being wiped out in a few short hours on frosty spring night (CBC News, June 6, 2012). The weather is perhaps the simplest embodiment of uncertainty and risk in growers’ lives. Talking about the weather was, for the growers I spoke with, a way to deal with uncertainty and reaffirm their sense of place on the farm. The knowledge James Smith had of the weather on the north shore of Lake Erie was incredible, with this memory of the last few growing seasons and winters planted firmly in his mind, ready to aid in his business decisions for the next growing season. He could easily tell me about the wind patterns in March, or the typical rain fall amounts in the late Summer, just when his crop needed it most.

Donald Speers, who owned a larger operation in Kent County that included greenhouses and a dozen or so Jamaican and Guatemalan workers, still spoke at length about the weather risks he faced for the fields on the western edge of his operation, not far from the St. Clair River in Kent County. In one particular growing season a couple years ago, his organic tomato crop was hit by a late blight that moved across Ohio, Michigan, and then Ontario. He lost a quarter of his crop in the field and during transport had lost another half, as the tomatoes were too soft to support their own weight while in transit to the Leamington area for processing. At first blush, this is a story about the failings of an organic tomato crop - he has since stopped growing organic tomatoes because of the low price demanded by the buyers - but it was also a story about how things can so quickly go wrong when nature decides to move in a different direction than growers would like.

So what do these tales of bad weather and lost crops tell us? On their own, they are simply the risks of doing business for growers across Ontario. Every industry, from cattle, to chickens, to vegetables, has its risks and its rewards. These elements are more than just risks though; they are elements of identity formation both for the individual grower and for the community as a whole. This is not to say, however, that the ‘whole’ of the community is homogenous. There are arguably two different streams of agriculture; what
we could call the family farm and the industrial farm. While the line between the two is often blurry, these categories do tend to affect some sense of identity between different growers. The weather, then, can be seen as an element of identity formation and cohesion making in the smaller, non-industrial grower community that hires migrant workers under the SAWP. Interestingly though, this discourse of risk and uncertainty vis-à-vis nature extends into the larger scale operations, where control over the smallest details becomes paramount to the success of their business.

In fact, I would argue that the hothouses on Southwestern Ontario embody the ultimate form of resistance to the uncertainty of the forces of nature. Never are growers more aware of the struggle with weather when they are largely immune to it inside these vast, plastic and metal shrouded spaces. At this level of food production, the pressure is so high for each individual involved to make all of that capital investment worth it. Owners stress the bottom line, the headaches of management, and the competition they see from thousands of miles away in states like California and nations like Chile, Argentina, South Africa, and China. Managers struggle against the difficulty of making sure the operation runs smoothly, that their crews are productive, and perhaps most importantly, that their boss is happy. Workers are faced with the heavy pressure of the whole business on their tired shoulders. They work long hours in isolation and in the ever-moving world of industrial production. The industrial farm is thus not immune to the forces of nature, as its whole existence is built upon a firm resistance of it. Perhaps this is why growers, even in this sterile, modernized food context, still appeal to these environmental aspects of risk when talking about the problems they face in the SAWP debate.

Beyond weather, growers also feel caught in many ways between the environmental and economic regulations on one side and the operations of their business in another. On one level, this reinforces the sense of community that growers have in that they share a common experience. It also helps to demarcate who is a member of the community, and who "gets it", from the outsider, in this case the politicians and bureaucrats who make bad policies that impact the grower's efforts to make good food. James, the grower in Kent County who spoke earlier about the perils and intricacies of weather earlier, simply
had this to say when asked whether he felt the government was helpful or a hindrance: "Some of the programs the government tries to come out with to help growers, they don't work" (Interview, January 2013). He spoke at length about some of price insurance systems put in place by government to protect growers against the variability of yearly crop yields. James explained how, in some cases, growers were given a disincentive to produce larger crops, as it was more worthwhile for them to trigger the “minimum and get a payout” than it was to expand the crop (Interview, January 2013).

James struggled here to find a balance in his criticism. While he was thankful that the government was there to support growers who needed help, he often felt that agriculture was a "bit left behind because [government has] got things geared towards something that is a little more powerful" than the growers and their industry (Interview, January 2013). Donald Speers echoed this same sentiment in an earlier interview. When asked if the government was supportive, he said that yes, they overwhelmingly were because "they know [the SAWP] has to happen" (Interview, November 2012). However, he was careful to point out that the operational and bureaucratic side that he found supportive was very different from the political side of things. Donald felt that politicians and activists would hear of one bad story or piece of criticism and run with for their own political ends. It's important to recognize that his criticism, as he later put it, was more with the federal government – and larger trade and economic policies – and less with the provincial side (Interview, November 2012).

Again, as with the weather or with price constraints, we see growers positioning themselves in this larger, pressure filled context. While there is a certain element of commonality to any person telling you their troubles before their triumphs in an interview on a difficult topic like the SAWP, growers are telling these stories and sharing these critiques in an effort to assert their case. Their argument is that they too, like the workers in the SAWP, face pressure from many sides. While it is not accurate to equate their struggles with those of the workers, there is still something to be said for the fact that their power is relative and that they too are at the mercy of larger forces that are out of their control.
I believe that the struggle against these forces is what drives the growers in their work, in their daily lives, and, most importantly, in their sometimes spirited response to SAWP criticism. It is what keeps them up late at night and wakes them early in the morning. Whatever one’s stance is on temporary foreign work, it is important to pause and consider why growers would go to such lengths to recruit, house, manage, and, in many cases, develop relationships with men from thousands of miles away both socially and economically. The growers, through their conversations with me and through their political advocacy in the SAWP debate are trying to tell their story. Their story asks us to consider the limits of their privilege and of our own privilege, as observers, critics, and researchers.

The idea that their privilege is limited is linked to a broader concern in this thesis with the limits of power, specifically the mobilization of ideas surrounding risk, uncertainty, and work ethic to help support the SAWP. Although I remain sympathetic to the issues growers face, it is perhaps more fruitful to balance this sympathy with an acknowledgement of how power is wielded in the SAWP. Growers do not always wield this power directly, but they certainly benefit from it. Laura Nader (2013) describes power as part of a larger system of “controlling process” that both centralize and decentralize power and hegemony (Nader 2013). Thus, the SAWP is better understood as a unique configuration of power, with no one grower responsible for its totality, and thus no one grower seeing himself or herself as completely powerful. It is then not unreasonable for growers to engage in discourses of victimhood, as they do not see themselves significant elements of control in the SAWP, but rather as participants in it.

It is at times like these that a feeling of despair is quite possible. How then do I approach my research when, for the growers I speak to, they do not see the problems that I, or others, see? How do I deal with ideas and debates that seem so divided? In a 1985 article on cultural hegemony, T.J. Jackson Lears suggested that the only way to deal with binary schemes and debates that seem to divide ideas and historical narratives is to not reify them for the sake of simplicity, but to seek out the human voices, however “dissonant and confused” they may be, to give issues life and clarity (Lears 1985: 593). In a sense, just
as Nader (2013) suggest, the goal is not to come up with a quick explanation of how things work, but to work out the “how” of things.

4.3 Belonging in Rural Ontario: Issues of Inclusion and Exclusion

The focus of this section is to critically analyze and unpack the idea of a divide between those who work in Ontario agricultural and those who do not. It is an idea that there are those that have learned about agriculture and agriculture life through experience, generational transmission and exposure to the rural way of life and there are those others who have not. The most pertinent examples of the ‘others’ in this case are those who participate in activism on behalf of seasonal agricultural workers and those who have been vocal critics of the structure and regulation of the SAWP in Canada. The ‘other’ can also be SAWP workers themselves, as they inhabit a liminal space of exclusion through their living arrangements and of inclusion in their close work with growers. In the span of just a few dozen pages, it is nearly impossible to address the total character and identity of all of those who have a stake in the SAWP, which is why I am concerned here only with the perspectives and experiences of the growers. Accordingly, I believe it is important to focus on the self-defining nature of those who call themselves growers and on the nature of rural communities and the scope of community membership.

The idea of community belonging and the creation of insiders and outsiders is a particularly interesting one. Despite the prevalence of a common agrarian self-identity in my research, I have found that there is a great deal of ambiguity when it comes to defining who is ‘in’ the community and who is ‘out’. In other words, it is not always easy to reconcile the narratives of my interviewees, who can in one breath speak about their workers in a distant, ‘othering’ way, but who in the next sentence speak to the striking commonalities between themselves and the workers. A similar ambiguity exists when growers are speaking about people from “out-of-town” or the city; in some cases there is a clear disregard for ‘city’ views and a belief that people from ‘in-town’ just do not understand how difficult and complex rural life is. In the next breath, the growers may recognize the great things many business partners and friends are doing in cities, whether
it is local food advocates or friends and family who come to help out on the farm from time to time.

As I spoke about earlier, I do not believe that the divide between the city and the country is the center of attention here, but rather the idea of a divide does exist and it does have force. Similarly, I have found that space is an important concept used by growers to articulate their moral and ethical beliefs and their responses to SAWP criticism. The literal soil beneath their feet is thus constitutive of their identity, as it both divides people and unites them. But before I talk about space I want to talk about relationships and community. Community is both a framework for analysis and a subject for study itself, as its definition are up for debate. In the case of the SAWP, community seems to start in the relationship between the grower and workers in the program.

The idea of a divide between the worker and the grower is an especially interesting one, for it highlights many of the contradictions and tensions that exist in the relationships between the growers and the workers and between the workers and rural Ontario communities. Bob Cecil and Eddie Ebanks (1991) found that these two relationship circles, on-farm and off-farm, were unique, and argued that the real issue was not so much with the relationships on the farm, i.e. between workers and the growers, but with workers and the broader rural community. However, the relationships between growers and workers are complex and I believe it is important to explore them further.

There appears to be an interesting dissonance between the ways in which the growers can see their workers as simply fellow human beings and in how they can view the workers and their lives as economic assets. In the case of my interview with Charles Brown, the tone fluctuated from one of caring and respect for workers, to defending their hard working conditions by pointing out how lucky they are to have work when there is so much poverty in their home countries:

*You get more out these guys with respect than with a 2 x 4 [piece of wood]...*

Later: *This program [the SAWP] does so much good for their countries and for these guys...* (Interview, June 2012)
Donald Speers had similar things to say regarding the willingness of the SAWP workers to work hard and about his relationship with his employees. He told to me about how his workers, who at the time were mostly Jamaican, would often babysit his two sons when they were younger (Interview, November 2012). His sons would spend time in the workers’ bunkhouse that was located just across a small gravel clearing from the grower’s own home.

In both cases, these growers are oscillating between a narrative of familiarity and one of distance from their workers. There are a number of ways to interpret these parallel narratives – including racialized belief systems and economic rationales for the uneven power relationship between workers and growers – but what is important for my argument vis-à-vis community and belonging is that seasonal workers live in a liminal state between the outside world of the larger Canadian society and the sometimes insular world of Ontario agriculture.

Many scholars (Cecil and Ebanks 1991, Basok 2002, Preibish 2007) point out that the workers spend most of their time, both working and living, on the farm and are essentially under constant supervision, therefore creating a space of exploitation and intentional segregation from the broader Canadian community. While this segregation is very problematic in terms of the workers’ rights and privacy, there is something to be said about their close proximity to the growers’ families and their daily lives as well. As much as workers are indeed kept separate, they are also living in very close proximity to the growers who employ them. The workers are then both outsiders and insiders. In some smaller operations, they are trusted with the use of equipment, can borrow vehicles, and, as we saw in the quote above, sometimes even trusted to take care of a grower’s own children. The ‘named’ vs. ‘un-named’ technical aspect of the SAWP is also important in this context. ‘Named’ workers return to the same farm year after year, meaning that both parties have some control in their living and working situation. Growers actively chose workers, and workers are also able to actively choose to return to the same grower. In this way, the interplay of inclusion and exclusion is easier to interpret. In the case of ‘named’ workers, there is definite sense of connection and familiarity. For new workers, or other
‘un-named’ workers, their experiences from year-to-year can be more variable and potentially exclusionary.

It is thus not difficult to see how the instances of good employers and bad employers, and happy workers and unhappy workers could exist. Contrary to what the common narrative in the academic literature and public media would have you believe, it appears that the relationships between workers and growers is in some cases a good one. In my experience, what seems to explain this odd relationship is the nature of the work, and the bonds that are formed in the long, tedious processes of growing food. As much as the relationship brings together people from different places, there continues to be an understanding that they share an identity as hard workers, committed to performing a difficult task that is neither prestigious nor easy to understand. I refer here less to the corporate owned large scale hot-house operations, and more to the many medium to small scale operations where SAWP employees often work side-by-side with the owners of the farm during the whole growing season. Nevertheless, similar themes came up in my interviews with former greenhouse managers and can be found in the growers’ responses to criticism in the media (as seen in many of the news articles quoted throughout this thesis).

Beyond the farm, we begin to see that this process of defining the insider and the outsider may expand to define whole communities. The relationships that small towns like Blenheim, Delhi, and Wallaceburg have with other communities and with more urban areas are interesting and I believe worth exploring further. In the case of modern Ontario agriculture, it is reasonable to suggest that there is no single experience or characteristic that defines all rural communities. In fact, many of these communities have tremendously varied histories. Some communities are historically Dutch, others German, and some French. But what does link all of the communities together is the process through which rural life and work helps to define “us” vs. “them”, or the country and the city in this case.
4.4 Community

I raise these ideas of inclusion, exclusion, and “us” vs. “them” because they came up frequently in my research. As a local food reseller in London, Ontario put it:

*The thing is, people in the city assume rural life is simple. Then they plant a tomato plant in their backyard and go, ‘holy shit this is hard!’ Farming is immensely complex, hard, hard work...* (Fieldwork Notes, July 2012)

This sentiment, that the work of farmers and growers is misunderstood, is similarly reflected in comments from Donald Speers that related to how people view or think about agriculture, or, in this case, how they do not:

*...Most people only care about one thing, the sticker price on that piece of fruit or veggie in the store* (Interview, November 2012).

The common thread here is that there is a fundamental difference between life “on the farm” and life “in the city.” The important point is that this narrative of difference underscores the commonality felt by many of those in rural communities and reinforces common ties throughout both the agricultural industry and rural social networks. The grower community is thus, in the Weberian sense, partly *associative*, in that the definition of the group is based on explicit personal interests and volition (Nisbet 1966: 81). This sense of community is not, however, completely based on the commonality of calculative self-interest of growers in the SAWP. Arguably, community, in the SAWP and in the broader rural community, is built upon a wider *communal* sense that is built upon kinship, tradition, and emotional ties that bind people together (81-82).

In his discussion of the concept of community and the works of Tönnies, Durkheim and Weber, Nisbet (1966) reminds us that community can be both a tangible thing and an idea, it can demarcate definitions of character and belonging while also helping individuals and groups makes sense of their place in the world (1966: 82). This is why the *idea* of the divide between the city and country can have so much force. In the case of Ontario growers and the communities they live in, there does seem to be an undercurrent of defending a tradition against the progress and whims of the “city”, and all that progressivism can bring. In other words, what is shaping identity is a sense of ruralness
and a distinct agrarian toryism that captures a common sense of belonging into which many growers and seasonal migrant workers alike can fit.

This sense of ruralness is, in my view, a part of the growers’ defense of the use of migrant workers in Ontario agriculture and a discourse in which growers can reconcile their sense of historical belonging and agrarian ethics within a rapidly changing world. There is, as we shall see next, another element that helps to ground growers in their work. What helps to define their work and way of life is the sense of stewardship they feel towards their land. Their work is tied to the soil, and it is this soil that feeds them and continues to be a vital part of their lives and the community.

4.5 Tending to the Land

In my first interview with James Smith in the summer of 2012, I spent much of my time awkwardly squished into the small passenger seat of a large combine as we went about cutting soybeans in the over 400 acres of fields that were split between three concession lines behind his home. As is often the case with growers, they have very little down time during the growing season, so it was important that even as we talked for our interview, he kept working. I asked him why he did it, why did he work as hard as he did – he had a regular salaried job in town in addition to his farm – when you have so much other stuff going on? He had previously worked in the hot-house industry as a manager, why trade in a job like that where you can manage other workers, many of them SAWP workers, to then start doing almost everything yourself on your own farm?

His response was that he simply liked being out there, even if sometimes he would work under the headlights of his dusty combine until midnight or one o’clock in the morning. He spoke about how important it was for his two young daughters, who he would often take with him for combine rides up and down his farm. His father had bought that land when he was a kid and he remembered being out there and thinking that he too wanted to be a grower. He enjoyed his time working for the larger hot-house operations, but he knew that he wanted to get back to his own family land and give it a go to see if he could make his family’s operation bigger.
Growing soybeans is a much different process than growing tomatoes, with a heavier reliance on machines and less physical labour involved. However, his story made me think of the land and his ties not only to the space itself but also to the many cycles of agricultural life his father had presided over previously within its boundaries. Looking back on my experience, I also felt that sense of time and ritual process that defined his farm and gave the old bean silo and green barn on his property a distinct and hard-earned weathered patina. Even though land tenure practices have changed drastically over the last century, and many farmers are now indebted in their businesses, the sense of belonging and stewardship over the land and soil appears to have shifted little.

Many growers now lease their land from others, but the high cost of ownership does not seem to inhibit many growers’ drive to continue their work on the land. It is the kind of work where they have to get their hands dirty and pay close attention to the details; to the soil, the rain, the wind, the bugs, etc…. In few other jobs are people responsible for so much yet in control of so little. Just like the work itself, I believe that this extreme sense of one’s surroundings and an awareness of one’s place and presence on the land are an important sustaining element of individual identity and community belonging in rural Ontario. Charles Brown similarly loved his work and felt that the biggest issue with the criticism the SAWP faces was that too many “armchair” academics had failed to understand what agricultural work was like, and did not “get their hands dirty” (Interview, June 2012). The soil, the dirt, is indeed the key to understanding everything.

This attachment and attention to the land is often in opposition to dominant environmentalist narratives of backwards people in rural communities, and specifically growers, who stand in opposition to sustainable ecological practices. Shoreman-Ouimet (2010) found that growers in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta were wrongly seen as anti-environmentalist; their resistance was not anti-environmental but rather anti-regulation (2010: 53-54). Their fear was that increasing state regulations would negatively impact their livelihoods, whether it was through altering their growing practices or through new kinds of taxation. Shoreman-Ouimet concludes with this thought:
...what is unfortunate is the number of communities and therefore storehouses of cultural and environmental knowledge that are ignored when a community is categorized as anti-environmentalist by government or environmental organization (2010: 63).

In other words, growers were not trying to make things worse and destroy their land, they simply wanted to protect what they viewed as theirs. The soil underneath their feet was everything to them, it was their place of residence, their source of income, and their investment in the future. This is not to say that growers always know best, but they are certainly at least more aware than most about the topography of the land, the drainage qualities of their soil and the peculiarities and interactions of the seeds, fertilizers, and other crop inputs. Admittedly, their stewardship is based on the maintenance of intensified agricultural practices that are arguably unsustainable, but to them, it is still a form of stewardship. The land is important, getting your hands dirty is important, and above all else, understanding that is key to understanding them.

Parts of both Chapter 3 and this chapter, Chapter 4, have been dedicated to examining various components of the philosophical, moral, and emotional narratives growers employ in their construction and defense of the SAWP. All of these components – including the contestation of imagery and public imagination, the importance of the agricultural work ethics, and construction of community – have a certain weight and unique driving force behind them. I have attempted to capture both their presence and their force, in the hope that these ideas can help to situate my discussion of the SAWP debate and the growers’ place within the system in the discussion and conclusion. It is crucial that we continue to see these ideas as part of a broader negotiation of what it means to be a grower in the 21st century and that these ideas work in tandem with the functional narratives I examined in earlier parts of Chapter 3.
Chapter 5
Discussion & Conclusion

In the Introduction, I stated my central goal for this thesis, which is to move the focus of attention in SAWP research from the employees in the program to the growers who hire them, in the hope that doing so would elucidate a number of key challenges and problems within the program and current research on the program. I also asked the two-part question: how do growers negotiate the tensions, contradictions, and challenges of their role within the SAWP while also constructing a public-facing, positive narrative of their place in the program? In subsequent chapters, I continued to ask questions relating to how growers position themselves in the SAWP debate, how they use images or resist representations in the media, and how growers reconcile the inequalities of power in the program. What I have found through my own interviews, observations, and analyses is that the story of the SAWP is complex and the views and perspectives of those involved are accordingly complex as well.

Perhaps that is the story of any ethnographic project. Our views as researchers at the beginning of our projects inevitably shift, as the people we talk with reshape and test our preconceptions. The growers I had the chance to work with in Southwest Ontario are few – in relative terms to the many thousands who live and work in the industry – but their views are nonetheless important and relevant to a broader discussion on the SAWP debate and the program itself. Through conversations with them, and through my analysis of media content, I have found that growers of many different types – and who operate different scales of farms – use similar ideas and narratives in their defense of the SAWP and agricultural practices. This is in part a political project, as their engagement in the media is purposely designed to paint their position in the best possible light. It is, however, not purely political, growers see themselves as under threat and under attack, from the vagaries of the weather to the constant criticism from academic researchers and activists alike. This feeling of being “under attack” has impacted their participation in media interviews and in research projects like my own, as I struggled often to earn trust with growers. In my initial conversations with three growers in particular, I was first asked who was funding my research, if I was working for the unions, and what I wanted
to know about their workers. It was difficult at times to get the point across to the growers that the workers were not the focus of my questions, they were. Once I did, though, things opened up, and I am thankful for their willingness to tell me their stories and opinions on the current state of things in the SAWP. To do my due diligence in this discussion, I will return to many of the themes discussed throughout this thesis, including some of the key concepts described in Chapter 2. Doing so will help to summarize and clarify a number of these key points, and hopefully will help the reader understand the bigger story that emerges from the many pages and words contained in this thesis.

Central to my analysis and interpretation of my data has been categorization of the types of narratives and ideas employed by growers when they defend or simply discuss the SAWP. In the half of Chapter 3, I explored what I described as the functional, or pragmatic logics, the economic and practical justifications growers use to say that the SAWP must exist, essentially because it serves an important role in their businesses and in the Canadian food system. The second type, or category, of narratives is the philosophical and emotional one. These ideas, which range from notions of community to the valor of agrarian work, help to soften the somewhat blunt functional explanations that focus on and embed the logic of the SAWP within the stark reality of the status quo. However, as I briefly touched on in my discussion of power, risk, and uncertainty in Chapter 4, growers do not necessarily see themselves as the most powerful players in this status quo. Growers view themselves as part of the system and as trying to keep up with the industrial, modern rat race, not as the ultimate wielders of power and control in the SAWP. However, this hides the fact that historically growers have had an immense impact on the direction and growth of the program. Individual growers took part in policy negotiations in the transfer of program management to FARMS in the late 80s, and today are in constant contact with policy officials in Canada and in the sending countries of the program.

Returning then to functional narratives and the key concept of power, I will say that to some degree, the situation of the growers is best described as a triangular power structure between growers, SAWP workers, and the Canadian State. The Canadian State, in terms
of both the federal and provincial governments, most often appeals to the same functional narratives when defending the SAWP and temporary foreign workers in Canada more broadly. Government officials and growers alike speak to the economic relationship fostered between countries, the importance of remittances to the sending country’s economy, and to the idea that Canadian citizens and residents simply will not do agricultural work. The line between the state and the grower, and those who hold power over policy and those who do not, is thus blurry. Many growers, through their individual actions and participation in the media or through their lobbying via industry groups, play a large role in determining the structure and nature of the Canadian immigration system. Therefore, I believe that what we see is that difference between state and a non-state actor is in this case unclear, if not completely blurred. Joe Painter (2006) refers to the various ways the state impacts daily life in terms of the “prosaic geographies of stateness,” or the configurations of state control and involvement that lead to the “intense statization of social life” (755). His focus on practices, often small and mundane, thus helps to reveal the “heterogeneous, constructed, porous, uneven, processual and relational character” of state involvement in everyday life (754). In essence, Painter’s work leads me to think of functional narratives and grower appeals to practicality as expressions of both the capitalist self and the capitalist state. Growers can be viewed as articulating the goals of the state, as their own desires for success in the face of competition drive them to employ temporary labour and immigration regimes such as the SAWP.

Of course, it is easy for me, as a researcher and as someone who does not work in agriculture, to be critical of their decisions to support and rely on the SAWP for the supply of workers. From academia, our historical focus and theoretical models lead us to see systems like the SAWP as part of broader ideological, economic, and political shifts in the global economy. In anthropology itself, our fight can often be against the hegemony of the status quo, and the sometimes subtle but more often explicit forward charge of neoliberalism across the globe. In the case of the SAWP, it is easy to suggest that growers are taking advantage of their privilege and that they are complicit in a great injustice towards migrant workers who are forced to come to Canada to earn a living and support themselves and their families back home. However, it is harder to think about
growers also as embedded within the great imbalances of our food system as a whole, as many of them fight to survive and either ‘get big, or get out.’ Therefore, some of the central themes that growers appeal to – including function, practicality, risk, tradition and powerlessness – are tacit nods to their sense of a constantly looming decline in family farming and to an overall sense of precariousness in the agricultural industry. In a sense, activists and growers in the SAWP debate are having two conversations simultaneously; reformers are focused on what they see as necessary changes to how migration and work should be structured in the Canadian economy while growers are stepping back from that discussion and attempting to remind people that, as they see it, all is not well in their lives and livelihoods. As a result, their constant discussion of decline, or of risk, is embedded in the logic of everyday agricultural life – from the small-scale farm to the large greenhouses – and in the logic that drives the SAWP program.

However, I do not wish to equivocate between the different kinds of farming in Canada and within the SAWP itself. Namely, there are important distinctions to be made between family, or traditional farming, and corporate, or industrial farming. As Sherrie Larkin (1989) notes, family farming is commonly viewed to be in opposition to “business farming”, or corporate farming, as this categorization separates the “good and bad aspects of producing one’s living” (80-81). Family farming, Larkin argues:

... is thought to be a ‘clean,’ ‘wholesome,’ ‘back-to-basics’ way to live, in which farmers are the ones who have ‘stuck it out’ on the farms, while others around them, including their brothers and sisters and often even their own children, have ‘thrown in the towel’ and left for the city. (Larkin 1989: 81).

This contrasts with business farming, where the focus is on maximizing profit at all costs (81). However, as Harald Bauder points out, the divisions between the two are often blurry, as the “family farm/corporate farm dichotomy also elides the fact that most farming operations, regardless of size and surface appearance of independence, are integrated into agribusiness” (Bauder 2013: 196). So, it seems that while there are indeed different types and sizes of farms, it is difficult to neatly divide them into two categories. Even though it is difficult, I argue these two categories – especially the idea and image of the family farm– do hold weight and are important because of the distinct aspects of their
potential emotional and moral appeal. As Raymond Williams (1973) found, the rural imaginary, or idea of the country, has resonance far beyond its true reality (whatever that may be).

As a result, the image of the family farm, of the traditions and customs upheld by farmers and farm families alike, is a powerful component of the philosophical and moral logics employed by growers in the SAWP and in agriculture in general. As I argued earlier, the idea of the family farm has emotional currency, as it represents an antidote to many of the tensions and contradictions that have plagued modern life. The idea that farms and farmer nourish the land and their community is an important elements of their engagement with the public and especially with those people in the city who may know little about where their food comes from and how it gets from the field to the plate. This stands in contrast to the alienating effects of urban life and the relatively recent trends in local food movements. Growers also talk about the negative aspects of farming, the risks and hazards, to strike an emotional chord and to contextualize their actions, including hiring migrant workers, within a web of pressures. Again, these narratives and discourses are not wholly political, but they do serve as part of a means to that end in that they help to suggest that growers are simply trying to survive as businesses and that participating the SAWP is a just part of doing so.

Taken together, functional and philosophical narratives are part of a process of public engagement and personal reconciliation; growers are attempting to at once tell their story and make sense of it. One of the best pieces of advice from my peers and department faculty is to listen to the things that come up multiple times and to pay attention to the things that are routinely ignored. What growers have told has been detailed here and I think it is best to think of their stories and ideas much like Vanclay et. al. (2007) did when they suggested that farmers in rural areas adopt and use similar parables and linguistic styles and scripts to reinforce individual farmer identity and to create a cohesive vision of what the farming community looks like. These ideas and images do have force that is often separate from the people that use them. In this thesis, I hope that that notion has itself become clear. For growers, it is the idea of farm work and the
grounded, day-to-day realities of the farm that drives their discourse on the SAWP. It is maybe too simple an argument, but one I am willing to stand by for it points towards what is perhaps the greatest area of opportunity in current academic research and criticism of the SAWP.

So far, the SAWP debate has been characterized by a growing tide of research on the injustices and politics of Canadian temporary immigration. Organizations like J4MW, No One is Illegal, and researchers like Tanya Basok, Kerry Preibisch, and Harald Bauder, have led this charge and have been a large part of raising public awareness and critical attention towards the SAWP and other social and economic issues in Canadian society. However, while their work has been incredibly important, I feel that there is room for a different perspective. Namely, I have continued to ask myself throughout the past year or so: with so much critical attention and academic research during the last twenty years, why has there been little change in the program? Why has the program continued to grow? Initially, I thought it was because the research and criticism was lacking, that the arguments being made against the program were not strong enough or accurate enough. However, I realized that it was not the weakness of the criticism but the antagonistic dialogue that had maintained the current state of the program. I realized that the academic research and common representation of Canadian growers as abusive and more often complicit in the injustices of the program was a polarizing force. This drove many growers away from the SAWP debate and in many cases hardened their defense of the program.

To bridge this gap, I believe what we need is an understanding of the grower perspectives and the discourses growers use to advocate for the program and in defense of themselves. It is, basically, a call for a sympathetic and open criticism. The SAWP does indeed have its problems, but the current approach to advocating for reform is only alienating the growers whose lives and livelihoods depend on the program. I feel that there are thus two parts to a reformed debate on the SAWP. First, growers must begin to reengage with the SAWP debate and with those activists and academics that have been critical of the program. It is important that the growers share their story while taking seriously the
opinions of other people invested in the program and in the future of Canada as a whole. Secondly, as I have called for throughout this thesis, academics and activists must attempt to change their approach to analyzing the program and engaging with the SAWP debate. While it is important to remain critical, I believe it is important to understand all sides of any story. In practical terms, I believe it would be helpful to invite growers who hire workers under the SAWP to academic conferences and to engage, through our writing, in a more balanced and cohesive analysis of the program. This means we must keep in mind the unique legal, political, and economic factors that shape the SAWP and agriculture more broadly. Most often, it seems that the growers’ frustrations with their critics are with the lack of understanding of the details of agricultural life and business. As a result, it is important that we widen our analysis, including thinking about labour and food as part of a single, complex system. Future research could focus on the legal dimensions of temporary foreign labour in agriculture (perhaps comparatively with other nations), the political context of the programs inceptions and continued survival, and the recent socioeconomic story of family and commercial farming in Canada. This last area of research, the economic one, is perhaps the least explored at the moment, as little is currently understood about how temporary foreign labour, family farms, farming traditions, and rural economies interact today and into the future.

In this thesis, I have explored what growers say about the SAWP and how they say it, with the goal of critically analyzing the common discourse and narratives employed in their defense. By understanding what lies underneath their words, I believe we can begin to understand how ideas, emotions, and beliefs can have material force and can help situate and explain actions and behaviors. This is not an attempt to explain everything growers do, but to understand their worldview and thus to find where the misunderstanding and tension lies in the current SAWP debate. By sharing some of their stories, experiences and some of their ideas, I hope that this research can help move the debate forward in both tone and substance, allowing those involved to better understand and shape the future of seasonal agricultural migrant labour in Canada.
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Appendix A

Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sherri Larkin
File Number: 102535
Review Level: Full Board
Approved Local Adult Participants: 35
Approved Local Minor Participants: 0
Protocol Title: Fields of opportunity: Understanding the lives and livelihoods of Southwestern Ontario farmers and their relationships with seasonal agricultural workers, 189855
Department & Institution: Social Science/Anthropology, Western University
Sponsor: Graduate Thesis Research Award
Ontario Graduate Scholarship

Ethics Approval Date: May 10, 2012 Expiry Date: August 31, 2013

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

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This is to notify you that the University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board (REB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NREB.

The Chair of the NREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB00000941.

Signature

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This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

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