



**Organizational Profile:** Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW) is a volunteer based community group that advocates for the human rights of migrant farm workers who produce the locally grown food we consume. Most migrant farm workers come from impoverished rural communities in Mexico and the Caribbean through the government run Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program. In the last two years the Canadian government has implemented the Temporary Foreign Workers Program which allows growers to hire workers from other countries such as Thailand, Guatemala, Indonesia and China to perform work for wages that Canadians prefer not to. These programs grant temporary work visas to over 20,000 migrant workers who cannot stay permanently in the country. Although wages are relatively low in comparison to what Canadian workers would obtain,

wages go a long way back in workers' home communities. However, their temporary visa status grants them few rights and protections in Canada. Many face deplorable living and working conditions and if they complain they get sent home on the first flights back. Living and working in rural Ontario, long work days, and linguistic barriers means that migrant workers are isolated and marginalized. There is no government monitoring of health and safety on the job or if their housing is up to par. When workers become injured on the job, oftentimes employers and consulate officials force them to go back to their countries without adequate medical attention or financial support. As temporary migrants and not immigrants, local community agencies do not have the funding mandate to provide them any support. Migrant farm workers are becoming more of a necessity to grow our food and perform various forms of labour but the Canadian public knows little about the conditions and impact of this work on migrant farm workers.



**What We Do:** J4MW strives for the dignity and respect for the human rights of migrant farm workers. J4MW provides emergency support to migrant farm workers in crisis, conducts workshops for workers on all issues pertaining to their life and work in Canada, organizes migrant farm worker so that they can collectively build their capacities to fight for their rights and lobbies the Canadian government and local communities in which they work to be more accountable to workers' basic needs.

**Main Demands:** *Right to Employment Insurance:* In 2001 it was estimated that migrant farm workers put into the EI fund over \$11 million a year yet they are denied to apply for returns from this program. The federal government must create a regime whereby migrant farm workers can claim employment insurance.

*Right to regularization:* Workers must have the right to apply for citizenship in Canada. Since 1966 workers have been simply seen as a labour force that is brought and then returned after their contract is over. Many workers win the right to apply for Canadian citizenship. The government must listen to their needs and implement a process whereby workers can apply for status in Canada.

*The Right to be treated with respect and dignity:* Workers consider themselves to be part of an invisible workforce with little clout when dealing with either employers or governmental officials. It is essential that migrant farm workers are covered by legislative protection that guarantees minimum labour standards. This must include full coverage under Ontario's Employment Standards Act, Fair and decent housing, the right to form unions and the right to social and economic mobility in Canada. It is crucial that migrant farm workers speak and decide for themselves, win the right to unionize and be able to choose the union of their choice or to create their own representative structures.

*Right to Appeal:* Workers have complained that they work in virtual bondage. Several workers have documented cases where their colleagues have faced reprisal for standing up to demand better work and living conditions. Reprisals take the form of premature repatriations where workers are sent home usually at their own expense. An appeal process must be implemented to guarantee that migrant farm workers have the right to a fair and impartial process where they can tell their side of their story.

**J4MW Funding:** J4MW's work is made possible by the dedication and passion among its volunteers. Due to a limited budget no one in J4MW receives a wage for this tireless organizing work. J4MW volunteers are constantly on call for any emergencies workers may have, such as the death of someone in their family back home and they need someone to take them to the airport to provide emotional and interpretation support, taking workers to the hospital or doctor because their employers refuse to, and intervening when workers are going to be sent back home unjustly. The majority of our expenses stem from renting cars, gas and long distance charges. Our important work is dependent and only made possible by community donations.

**Contact:**

info@justicia4migrantworkers.org  
Organization's Mailing and Donations Address:  
Justice for Migrant Workers  
c/o Workers' Action Centre  
720 Spadina Avenue, Suite 223  
Toronto ON, M5S 2T9

Visit our website for more information about our work and our history:

**<http://www.justicia4migrantworkers.org>**

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