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## For migrant workers, injury often means a one-way ticket home

Published on Thursday August 09, 2012

**Nicholas Keung**  
Immigration Reporter

After Eloid Drummond was hit by a car in Exeter, Ont., and suffered a dislocated shoulder, he was declared “AWOL” by his employer — and Canada — because he refused to quietly go home to Jamaica.

Unable to continue farm work, he was terminated from Canada’s [Seasonal Agricultural Workers’ Program](#), and hence lost his social insurance card and health coverage for his injuries.

Being labeled AWOL (absent without leave) also meant he couldn’t be rehired within the program, which each year brings in 25,000 foreign farm workers from Mexico, the Caribbean and Latin America.

On Friday, after fighting repatriation ever since the May 2010 accident, Drummond, 39, will finally get badly needed surgery on his right shoulder at Humber River Regional Hospital.

Had it not been for Drummond’s stubborn determination, he would have become just another number on Service Canada’s AWOL list.

According to government statistics, 3,709 migrant farm workers were deemed AWOL in the program between 1996 and 2011. A further 1,198 were sent home for medical reasons during that period, and 2,923 were flown back due to “breach of contract.”

Chris Ramsaroop, of [Justicia for Migrant Workers](#), a grassroots advocacy group, said injured workers may be covered under workers’ comp. But there are generally no modified jobs available on farms, and farmers are under no obligation to rehire the worker for the following season. It’s easier to simply send injured workers home, where they may find it difficult to get proper treatment or to communicate with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. Often they end up not getting the compensation they’re entitled to.

“Rather than provide full access to healthcare in Canada, migrant workers are repatriated, or unilaterally sent to their home country,” Ramsaroop said, describing the situation as a catch-22.

“If they decide not to return home and seek medical and legal support here, they are then determined to have gone AWOL.”

Drummond, a fisherman and farmer from St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, came to work at a greenhouse in Exeter in 2005. Since then, he has spent eight months each year in Canada, harvesting and packaging sweet peppers.

On May 28, 2010, Drummond was on his way to his bunkhouse after sending money home to his family in Jamaica when a vehicle hit his bicycle at an intersection on Exeter’s Main St. He was thrown off and landed on his back.

Drummond claimed the driver ran a stop sign. But police charged Drummond instead and slapped him with a \$110 fine for not riding within the marked lane (Drummond says there was no marked bike lane).

“He gave me two weeks to pay the fine, but I said, ‘I’m not wrong. I’m not going to pay the ticket. It’s not my fault,’” Drummond recalled.

While recovering at his bunkhouse and working reduced hours with modified duties, Drummond said, he was called into his boss’s office in July 2010 and handed a one-way ticket to Jamaica.

Although the charge was dismissed and Drummond has managed to remain here legally on a visitor’s visa, he is unable to work and has had to fight to get his shoulder fixed.



Two years after being hit on his bike by a truck in Exeter, migrant farm worker Eloid Drummond finally will get surgery to fix his dislocated and separated right shoulder in Toronto. Drummond was presented with a one-way ticket back to Jamaica by his employer after the accident, but insisted on staying in Canada despite the cancellation of his work permit and OHIP.

CARLOS OSORIO/TORONTO STAR

He finally got the driver's car insurance company to foot a \$5,000 bill for the complex reconstructive shoulder surgery he needs.

But the road to recovery will be long, said Drummond, who has been living on meagre savings, help from friends and small payouts from the insurance company.

"I need six weeks of physiotherapy and it's going to take another six months for recovery," he said. "I don't know what I'm going to live on."