

# Farm [Workers] to Table



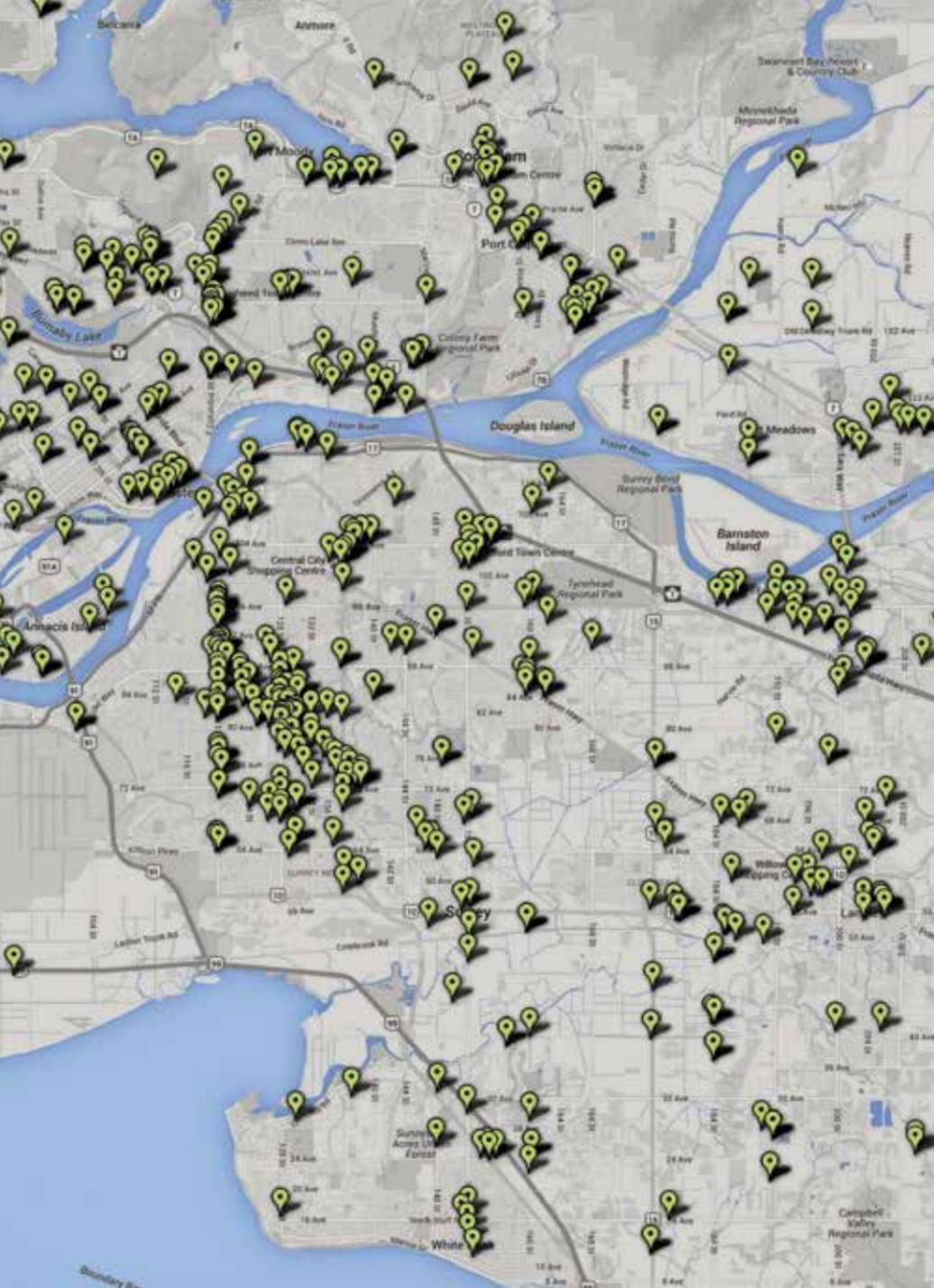
This document was created by members of Dignidad Migrante Society, who were then operating under the name Migrant Workers Dignity Association.

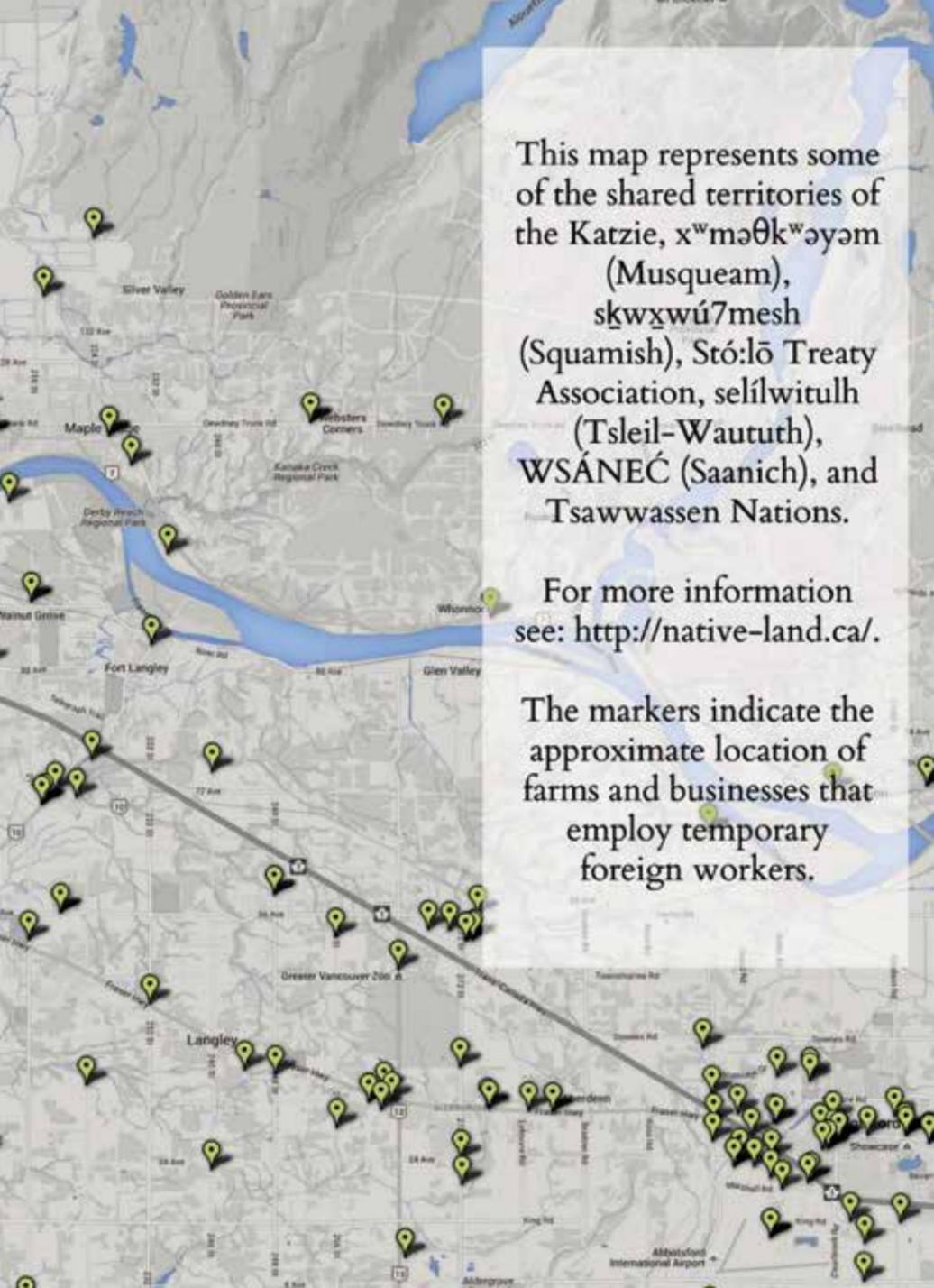
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# Acknowledgements

The contents of this book have taken shape on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the hən̓q̓əmi̓nəm̓ speaking x̣<sup>w</sup>məθḳ<sup>w</sup>əỵəm (Musqueam) people. As a cohort of students of diverse ancestries—some “local” non-Indigenous, some Indigenous to other places, and others, neither—moving to and from this campus, across territories, and between homelands, our understanding of place is further informed by our unbidden presence upon the lands of the sḳẉx̣ẉú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations. We are grateful for the opportunity to learn here and for their continued care of these lands.

Many additional hands supported the making of this book. We would like to thank, firstly, the migrant farm workers who so generously shared their time and stories with us; Raúl Gatica for your continued support and interest in this project, as well as for providing the short story, “Irresponsables” (“Irresponsibility”); Dr. Juanita Sundberg for your encouragement and guidance; Luz Rosas for offering your beautiful photographs; and Mathew Arthur for your digital, cartographic prowess.



A map of the Greater Vancouver area, including Silver Valley, Maple Ridge, Fort Langley, Langley, and Abbotsford. The map features numerous yellow pushpin markers indicating the locations of farms and businesses that employ temporary foreign workers. The Fraser River is visible winding through the region. Major roads like Highway 1 and Highway 7 are shown. Labels for various locations and parks are present, such as Golden Ears Provincial Park, Kanaka Creek Regional Park, and Derby Reach Regional Park. The map also shows the locations of the Stó:lō Treaty Association and WSÁNEĆ (Saanich) and Tsawwassen Nations territories.

This map represents some of the shared territories of the Katzie, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), s̓k̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō Treaty Association, selilwitlh (Tseil-Waututh), WSÁNEĆ (Saanich), and Tsawwassen Nations.

For more information see: <http://native-land.ca/>.

The markers indicate the approximate location of farms and businesses that employ temporary foreign workers.

# Preface

As uninvited guests upon others' lands, our project sets out with the following question, what does it mean to eat the products of temporary migrant farm workers on unceded territory? Answers, of course, will be multiple; as a necessarily broad point of departure, then, we might consider the unbalanced relationships between different groups of people: Indigenous, and non-Indigenous, and temporary foreign workers. How are these relations unequal? How are these relations conceived? In Dr. Juanita Sundberg's *Geography 495 (Social Movements in the Americas)*, and in collaboration with the Migrant Workers Dignity Association (MWDA), under the guidance of Raúl Gatica, we examined contemporary food politics in North America (specifically Vancouver), in the context of ongoing processes of settler colonialism where imaginaries of freedom, equality, and multiculturalism are forged through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and unequal modes of inclusion for migrant workers.

Fifty years ago, the Canadian and Jamaican governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding, thereby establishing the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). Since then, the program has expanded to include Mexico, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States including Anguilla. By the government's own statistics, in 2012, there were 74,216 TFWs in British Columbia, alone.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Canada, "Preliminary tables – Permanent and temporary residents, 2012: Canada – Temporary foreign workers present on December 1st by province or territory and urban area, 2008–2012," <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2012-preliminary/04.asp>.

The program, according to the Canadian government, is designed to support farm labour shortages during growing and harvesting periods, with some seasons lasting for as long as ten months each year. As the official argument runs, year after year the Canadian labour pool is, increasingly, unable to meet the needs of industrial agriculture.

When we consider the longevity of Canada's temporary foreign worker (TFW) programs and, knowing that some men and women return annually—often for a majority of months out of the year—two obvious questions arise: How are these men and women foreign? How are they temporary?

We have only a brief comment to make as to a definition of temporary. Taking for granted that (annually) men and women work *here* longer than they rest *there* then, isn't temporariness also located over there? Rhetorical designations of temporary and foreign work together. What are we to make of the foreigner? For Jacques Derrida, the question of the foreigner always arises out of an unequal relation of power between host and foreigner. And the relation between the two is dictated by the rule of hospitality. As the administrator of TFW programs, the Canadian state is positioned as host, the profferer of hospitality; and, as articulated by the program, the worker is positioned as foreigner, the receiver of hospitality.

To offer hospitality, one must first have the power to host. Is the relationship an hospitable one? There are, we propose, at least two ways to think about the relationship between host (and here, let's extend this designation to all Canadians) and foreigner (those men and women who, through international agreements, labour in Canada) and the concept of hospitality.

First, for Derrida, the law of hospitality requires that there be a territory or property over which the host claims power—the space necessary for the extension of welcome. Paradoxically, the maintenance of this space begets a kind of intolerance. “[O]ne can become virtually xenophobic,” states Derrida, “in order to protect or claim to protect one’s own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one’s own hospitality.”<sup>2</sup>

We witness this hostility in the emergent nationalist discourses that ossify around the figure of the foreigner. According to the state, however, there is increasing need to assuage certain industries’ labour shortages: the national economy desires the labour of the foreigner. (To say nothing of international neoliberal trade agreements that have driven subsistence farmers from their own lands in search of work abroad.<sup>3</sup>)

Questions of hospitality and of the foreigner are further complicated by Canadian state policies of multiculturalism. Hospitality takes on multiple forms. We should note, here, how Canadian multiculturalism is always figured in contrast to whiteness and set against the dominant identities and values of Euroamerican heritage.<sup>4</sup> TFW programs, functioning in tandem with state policies of multiculturalism, create a category of figures-who-belong; as the figure of the Canadian is reproduced the foreigner is produced. Those who are foreign, as well as those who are non-white are, in a contradictory move simultaneously embraced (through state policy) and othered.

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 53.

<sup>3</sup> See Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*, (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> See Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

This move is what Derrida calls the impossible possibility of hospitality. In order that the foreigner remain foreign, he or she must retain some of what makes he or she other: to come “here,” to be offered space upon which to live, might constitute the negation of the foreigner. “Must we ask the foreigner to understand us,” asks Derrida, “to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him [or her] into our country?”<sup>5</sup>

Second, we should consider the “where” of the co-constitutive relationship of host and foreigner. Who is figured in this pairing? If we narrow our scope to TFW programs, then only two figures emerge: Eurowhite and Asian/arrivant Canadians and foreign labourers. But we must not forget that this relationship is both discursively constructed, and materialized in and on treated and untreated lands of Canada; and, if the relationship between host and foreigner is one of unequal power predicated upon, crucially, a claim to territory, then the Canadian state not only constitutes its power over migrant workers but additionally makes a repeated claim to sovereignty over Indigenous lands.

In the pages that follow we consider, further, what it means to consume the produce of migrant farm workers on unceded lands; we attempt, through a series of lighthearted, humorous, and serious pieces to address some of the above raised concerns.

Thank you for your interest,  
Glenn Mendonsa, Liz Villalva, Reuben Jentink, Anna K. Kvasnikova,  
Elizabeth Young, and Rachel Beales

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<sup>5</sup> Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 15.

**“Agreement” for the Employment in Canada of Seasonal Agricultural  
Workers from Mexico in British Columbia [REDACTED] 2016**

[REDACTED] The Government of Canada [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] are desirous [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Mexican Agricultural Workers in Canada. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Government of Canada [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] have signed [REDACTED] to give effect to  
this [REDACTED] desire. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Workers from Mexico [REDACTED] participating  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] shall be stationed in Canada  
to assist [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Canada [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] 'TIL  
THE \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ FOREVER \_\_\_\_\_ [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
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[REDACTED]

## Agreement for the Employment in Canada of Seasonal Agricultural Workers from Mexico in British Columbia for the Year 2016

**WHEREAS** the Government of Canada and the Government of the United Mexican States are desirous that employment of a seasonal nature be arranged for Mexican Agricultural Workers in Canada where Canada determines that such workers are needed to satisfy the requirements of the Canadian agricultural labour market; and,

**WHEREAS** the Government of Canada and the Government of the United Mexican States have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to give effect to this joint desire; and,

**WHEREAS** the Government of Canada and the Government of the United Mexican States agree that an Agreement for the Employment in Canada of seasonal agricultural Workers from Mexico be signed by each participating employer and worker; and,

**WHEREAS** the Government of Canada and the Government of the United Mexican States agree that an agent for the Government of the United Mexican States known as the "GOVERNMENT AGENT" shall be stationed in Canada to assist in the administration of the program;

**THEREFORE**, the following agreement for the employment in Canada of seasonal agricultural workers from Mexico is made in duplicate this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2016.

### II SCOPE AND PERIOD OF EMPLOYMENT

1. The EMPLOYER agrees to employ the WORKER(S) assigned to him by the Government of the United Mexican States under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program and to accept the terms and conditions hereunder as forming part of the employment Agreement between himself and such referred WORKER(S). The number of WORKERS to be employed shall be as set out in the attached clearance order.
2. c) Subject to compliance with the terms and the conditions found in this agreement, the EMPLOYER agrees to hire the WORKER(S) as \_\_\_\_\_ for a term of employment of not less than 240 hours in a term of six (6) weeks or less, nor longer than eight (8) months with the expected completion of the period of employment to be the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2016;
- d) the EMPLOYER needs to respect the duration of the employment agreement signed with the WORKER(S) and their return to the country of origin by no later





# Guacamole for Justice Recipe

This recipe was kindly donated by the MWDA. Follow directions carefully when cooking for justice.

Prep Time 15 mins

Total Time 15 mins

Serves 4

## INGREDIENTS

3 ripe avocados

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup finely chopped Roma tomato

2 jalapeño chilis, very finely chopped (seeded and deveined)

3 heaping tablespoons of chopped onion

1 clove garlic minced

3 tablespoons of minced cilantro

Lime juice to taste

Salt to taste (usually around a teaspoon)

## DIRECTIONS

1. De-pit the avocado. In addition to removing the flesh, throw away any pre-conceived notions you have about temporary foreign migrant workers.
2. In a medium-sized bowl, mash the avocados with the back of your solidarity fork.
3. Add the chopped onion, chili, cilantro, and garlic and incorporate evenly, making sure to stir in some sweet justice.
4. Adjust the salt, lime juice, and conviction to taste.

# Tips for Cooking for Justice



*Tip for ripeness; to tell if an avocado is ripe, first remove the stem tip at the top of the fruit. If it comes away easily and you see green underneath, then the avocado is perfectly ripe.*

*Tip for cutting an avocado; for easy removal, cut a checkerboard pattern into the flesh of the avocado— handle knife carefully.*



*Tip for cutting jalapeños; cut the stem off the chili and slice in half. Remove the central vein and seeds (the hottest part of the chili) before easy chopping.*



*After combining all of your ingredients, add salt to taste. Serve guacamole at room temperature.*



# Nutrition Facts

Per serving (120g)

**Amount per 1 medium red tomato**  
**Calories 22**

% per serving\*

<b>Total exploitative labour</b> 106g	88%
workplace injuries	12%
employment benefits	0%
subsistence wages	92%
hazardous environment	33%
<b>Water</b> 3.6L	0.01%
<b>Stolen land</b>	100%
colonial present	26%
depletion of resources	3%
<b>NAFTA</b>	41%
forced migration	29%

Vitamin A 20%	Vitamin C 28%
Calcium 1%	Iron 1%
Vitamin B 5%	Vitamin B-6 0%

\*serving size based on a typical 2000 calorie daily diet

# Irresponsibility

## A story from the MWDA

By the time his face and arms became paralytic, it was over: Miguel was dying but he didn't yet know it. Somehow, with considerable effort, he managed to get from the farm to Norfolk General Hospital, in Simcoe, Ontario.

With only hand gestures and an unfamiliar second language, Miguel tried to explain his ailments to the doctor. For Miguel, the struggle to communicate took too long. The doctor eyed him askance and, without even the routine check-up, sneered, "Nothing is wrong. Come back tomorrow if you feel any worse." Scorn was the only medicine prescribed for Miguel's pain and worry.

Miguel suffered through the night and the following day his pain was worse. He returned to the hospital clinic. By now, the whole right side of his face was asleep. He could barely speak. This time, Miguel saw a different doctor who recognized his illness but, still, he was dismissed. "We don't have beds for transfer patients here. Go back to your farm, call an ambulance, and ask to go to the hospital in Hamilton," the doctor recommended.

Miguel did not understand why the doctor would make such a recommendation. Nor could he respond; his illness, made worse by the doctor's mistreatment and apathy, had kidnapped his voice. He was weak—clearly unwell and requiring immediate medical attention—but the hospital returned him to the farm. The paramedics threw him onto a couch where they left him, alone.

"That was where we found him—almost dead," gesturing toward the couch, recalled one of Miguel's coworkers a few days later. "We called ambulance and he was taken to the Hamilton hospital."

Another worker, with cold fear dripping from his face, remembered their employer's response, "We were scolded," he said, "simply because we asked for help."

"I may have to pay for the ambulance service because of you two!" barked their employer.

The farm workers didn't receive any help from their government, either. They recalled only a sharp rebuke and no offers of sympathy from the

Mexican Consulate officials. “When they became aware of the situation, the Mexican Consulate berated us.”

“Are you insane?” the officials shouted, “these cases tarnish our name!”

Two aghast workers, who went with Miguel to the hospital, remember facing blame; the hospital staff reprimanded them. “Yes, on September 16th, when they flew Miguel out to the hospital in London, even the interns at the Emergency room insulted us.”

“Why didn’t you bring him earlier? Why are you so irresponsible!?”

Everybody who could have offered help instead washed their hands clean of the situation, absolving themselves of wrongdoing, of negligence. The employer denied everything; he compelled his workers to testify that Miguel never showed any signs of illness at his farm. Likewise, the Consulate forced Miguel’s relatives to sign a document stipulating that he was already ill in Mexico. His private health insurance—which Miguel had always paid punctually, but had never used—specified that his disease was the result of a pre-existing condition; the company did not cover one single cent of the medical expenses. And, Doctor Weeks, the hospital director assured that, “The correct protocol was followed!”

But, is this true? What can we say about Canadians who privilege bureaucracy and procedure over human life? Who, ultimately, is responsible here: the Canadian or Mexican government? The temporary foreign worker programs? The media, who largely ignored this story? Workers’ fears? I am not certain these questions are easily answered. But what happened the day Miguel died was never fully disclosed.

In the news, there was a faint mention of a tragedy on a farm; all the workers, however, were suddenly mute. “What should I say?” implied the workers’ silence. “The truth could take my job and the food of my children. Bravery is not good business.”

The man’s full name was Miguel Pasion and he was thirty-five years old. Of those years, fully eight were spent working in Simcoe, Ontario. He left behind three children and a dream to build a house of his own in Mexico.

Today, we still don’t know whether Miguel will be given a respectable burial.

# The Unofficial Glossary of Migrant Workers

<b>boss</b>	someone who does not have my best interests at heart
<b>Canada</b>	greenhouses and shared living
<b>contract</b>	something the boss makes for himself but does not respect
<b>ethical food</b>	something that extends to the quality of food, “local” or “organic,” but which does not consider the workers
<b>foreign</b>	Mexican, Guatemalan, Caribbean, Filipino, and Chinese
<b>local</b>	produced within borders by temporary migrant workers
<b>low skilled</b>	workers who are paid less but must have expertise
<b>medical care</b>	what workers pay for but cannot easily access

<b>migrant workers</b>	people who do dirty, hard work for little money
<b>minimum wage</b>	what we receive for highly skilled, often dangerous work
<b>organic</b>	a status symbol for Vancouverites
<b>pension plan</b>	paid but not received
<b>remittances</b>	battered bodies
<b>seasonal workers</b>	employed through unequal trade agreements signed because Canadians don't want to do the work
<b>temporary</b>	living somewhere for a majority of the year
<b>work place injury</b>	serious, but viewed as an accident
<b>work week</b>	12-16 hours a day, 6 days a week
<b>worker's rights</b>	a right that might cost us our livelihood if we use it

# Migrant Workers' Dignity Association

The BC Migrant Workers Dignity Association (MWDA) is a not-for-profit, civil society-based organization composed of workers (both Canadian and Temporary); members of grassroots, faith-based and arts organizations; advocacy groups and members of the general public who are interested in the work of MWDA. The goal of the Association is to assist in the improvement of the conditions of Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) while in Canada, with a particular focus on farm workers, as they represent one of the most abandoned and discriminated populations of workers, both Canadian and temporary.

All members of the MWDA are volunteers that work side by side with TFWs in the fields. We do not decide and invent what these workers want: we follow what they decide collectively and seek to support their initiatives.

[dignidadmigrante.ca](http://dignidadmigrante.ca)



