For the past 50 years, Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) has been an exemplary model of how good policy works. Through a partnership between Canada and Mexico, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and the Eastern Caribbean, Canadian fruits and vegetables are planted and harvested. What’s more, men and women from these nations are given a chance to earn an income which gives their families back home opportunities that they might not otherwise have.

It truly is a win-win.

Despite this, there are some myths about the program. Here are 10 myths about the SAWP and the reality that exists.

1. **MYTH:** Workers are being denied healthcare.
   **REALITY:** In every province, workers are provided with the same public health care that every Canadian enjoys through their provincial health care system.

2. **MYTH:** Workers are kept in sub-standard housing.
   **REALITY:** In every province, housing is inspected and must meet or exceed provincial guidelines or the employer will not receive workers.

3. **MYTH:** Workers are subject to abuse with no opportunity for complaint.
   **REALITY:** The federal government maintains an Integrity Office that is accessible to every worker, employer and the general public. Reports can be made anonymously via the tip line and will result in investigations. If an employer is found to be guilty of abuse of workers, they can be fined, imprisoned or excluded from hiring foreign workers.

4. **MYTH:** Employees are denied the opportunity to receive Employment Insurance (EI) benefits.
   **REALITY:** An employee may receive EI benefits while they are living in Canada. Under the previous government, a change was made which no longer allowed EI benefits to be paid to a worker once they had return to their own country.
MYTH: Workers don’t have any choice in accepting a contract.
REALITY: On the first contract, neither the employer nor the employee has a choice in who they work with or for. If an employment situation is unacceptable for either party, there are provisions under the contract to end the contract. Employees may have and have had the opportunity in some cases to transfer to an other employer. If an employee is requested to return for a subsequent contract the following year, the employee has the right to reject that invitation and apply to work elsewhere.

MYTH: Workers have no collective bargaining.
REALITY: All workers on the SAWP program are represented in contract negotiations by their respective government agents. These reviews are done on an annual basis and have resulted in the SAWP program being highly regarded as a program that has worked well for both the employer and employee for the past 50 years.

MYTH: Employees should be able to work wherever they want once they come to Canada.
REALITY: The employer assumes the cost of airfare and accommodation for each employee. The contract is a three-way agreement between the government, the employer and the specific worker.

MYTH: Seasonal workers should become permanent Canadian residents the moment they arrive in Canada.
REALITY: Whereas methods for attaining permanent residency exist, this program is a contract for seasonal work and not an application to become a Canadian resident. Contracts range from a minimum of six weeks to a maximum of eight months after which the foreign worker is obligated to return home.

MYTH: The SAWP program is used by farmers because it provides a cheap source of labour.
REALITY: The SAWP program is actually a premium program. The base wage rate is based on the provincial minimum wage, but the employer is also responsible to cover other costs such as airfare, transportation, housing and sundry items. The farmer bears these costs because of the benefit of having the availability of a reliable labour source.

MYTH: Workers are really indentured slaves.
REALITY: Workers sign up for the chance to be employed on the SAWP program voluntarily. There are no recruitment fees. There is no obligation to remain involuntarily. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people from Mexico and the Caribbean have been able to make improvements to their livelihood and provide opportunities for their children.