

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Why Move Aboriginal Labour In and Then Out?

The Transition of Migrant Labour from Aboriginal to Mexican Workers

in Southern Alberta's Sugar Beet Industry

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

AUGUST, 2007

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-33801-8
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-33801-8

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Abstract

Between the early 1950s and 1980s, the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta relied upon thousands of “grab-a-hoe Indians” who migrated every growing season from reserves and communities in northern Saskatchewan and Alberta. In the 1980s, many sugar beet growers began hiring Mexican Mennonites rather than Aboriginal workers. This dissertation investigates the reasons for this transition in labour forces by analyzing documentary materials and interviews from the three groups involved in the transition: growers, Mexican Mennonite workers and Aboriginal workers. It also studies the impact of the transition on Aboriginal workers and why some of them persisted in the industry despite the change in the labour force.

The three main reasons for the transition to a largely Mexican Mennonite labour force in the industry are: a significant reduction in the growers’ need for hand labour because of increased mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls; the growers’ desire for a more reliable labour force; and most importantly, the cheapness of Mexican Mennonite workers vis-à-vis Aboriginal workers. For a number of years prior to the transition, sugar beet growers had been advocating for a new migrant labour force to replace Aboriginals. A concern of the growers at the time was the reliability of some Aboriginal workers. To reduce their dependence on migrant labour and to improve productivity, during the 1960s and 1970s growers invested in new machines and began using chemical weed controls. By the early 1980s these practices reduced the growers’

need for hand labour. Coincidentally, at the same time Mexican Mennonites began to migrate to southern Alberta in search of agricultural employment. This was a unique group of migrant workers because they had family roots in Canada that allowed them to claim Canadian citizenship and move freely between Mexico and Canada. When growers began hiring Mexican Mennonite workers, Aboriginal workers were available for both skilled and unskilled sugar beet jobs. At the time, Aboriginal workers with a long record of service in the industry recalled going from farm to farm looking for employment and being told that Mexican Mennonite crews had already been hired.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Lloyd Wong and Dr. Bob Stirling for their contributions to my dissertation. Also I would like to thank my external examiner, Dr. Avis Mysyk, and my internal examiner, Dr. Daphne Taras, for providing their insights to the dissertation. I would especially like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Tom Langford, for his support, guidance and belief in my dissertation work. For his thoughtfulness and patience during the time it took to complete this dissertation, I am deeply grateful.

I would also like to thank my colleagues, Dr. Roger Maaka and Dr. Rob Innis of the Department of Native Studies at the University of Saskatchewan for their generous support and encouragement in completing this research. A special thanks to Dr. Brenda MacDougall of the Department of Native Studies who has been a constant source of strength and moral support throughout the many struggles we survived in academia and the time it took to complete this dissertation.

In addition, I would like to thank the University of Saskatchewan for the provision of financial assistance during the period I completed my course work.

Finally, I want to thank my brothers, sisters, and friends for their support, laughter and for being there when I needed them. In particular, I want to thank my sons, Shane and Mason, and my daughter, Sandra, for all their love and understanding while I completed this work. Most of all, I want to thank my wife, Bernice, as it was through her strength, support and unconditional love that I was able to complete this dissertation.

Dedication

While conducting field research for this study, I was struck by the fact that in every community I visited, whether a First Nations reserve or a Metis community in northern Alberta or Saskatchewan, almost every adult Aboriginal person I talked to had either worked in the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta or they had a family member who did in the past; a few had even worked there recently or still do. It informed me of the extent to which Aboriginal workers were used in the sugar beet fields and that the work touched the lives of many Aboriginal people over the years. I also came to the realization that for many Aboriginal people, particularly those from distant northern communities and reserves, work in the sugar beet fields was their first introduction to paid labour in an industrial setting. For many First Nations people, especially those who migrated to southern Alberta in the 1950s, it was also the first time they were able to leave the confines of the reserve environment for an extended period and get out from under the tutelage of the Indian Agent and the Chief and Council. For those individuals, many of whom were just beginning to exercise new freedoms gained through revisions to the *Indian Act* in 1951, migrating to the beet fields of southern Alberta was not only about employment, it was an adventure, a social event and it was emancipating. The annual migration of Aboriginal workers to the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta throughout the latter half of the twentieth century ensured the survival and success of the industry; an industry vital to the well-being of the economy in southern Alberta. In fact, the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta was the largest employer of Aboriginal labour in the prairie

region of Canada since the decline of the fur trade and thus, important to the economic history of Aboriginal people in western Canada. This research is dedicated to the numerous Aboriginal workers who toiled in relative obscurity in the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval Page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Dedication.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	4
CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON TRANSITIONS OF MIGRANT LABOUR FORCES IN AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIES..	13
Introduction.....	13
Conceptualizing Migrant Labour.....	14
Why Transitions of Migrant Labour Forces in Agricultural Industries Occur..	16
Defining the Term “Transition”.....	16
The Problems of Labour Recruitment and Retention in Agricultural Industries.....	17
How Transitions in Labour Forces in Agricultural Industries Are Accomplished.....	64
Summary of the Review of the Literature.....	70
CHAPTER 3: THE SOUTHERN ALBERTA SUGAR BEET INDUSTRY...	73
Introduction.....	73
Where and How Sugar Beets Are Produced in Southern Alberta.....	73
The Historical Background of the Sugar Beet Industry.....	80
The Growers’ “Watchdog”: The Alberta Sugar Beet Growers Organization...	86
A Succession of Labour Groups.....	91

CHAPTER 4: “WE ARE STILL THE LARGEST USERS OF NATIVE WORKERS IN CANADA”: THE CANADIAN STATE AND THE PROCUREMENT OF MIGRANT ABORIGINAL LABOUR IN THE SOUTHERN ALBERTA SUGAR BEET INDUSTRY.....	95
Introduction.....	95
State Intervention in the Southern Alberta Sugar Beet Industry.....	96
The Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Agreements and Sugar Beet Labour.....	98
The Process of Recruitment and Mobilization of Migrant Aboriginal Workers.....	101
The Role of the Indian Affairs Branch in the Procurement of Aboriginal Labour.....	102
Recruitment and Retention Through Coercion and Paternalistic Practices.....	107
The Success of the State in the Recruitment of Aboriginal Workers.....	115
Was the Sugar Beet Industry a “Colonizing, Acclimatizing and Citizenship Training Organization” for Aboriginal People?.....	117
Conclusions.....	118
CHAPTER 5: THE PERSPECTIVE OF GROWERS ON THE TRANSITION FROM ABORIGINAL TO MEXICAN MENNONITE WORKERS IN THE SOUTHERN ALBERTA SUGAR BEET INDUSTRY.....	120
Introduction.....	120
Growers and Labour Demand.....	121
Working and Living Conditions, Wages and the Problems of Recruitment and Retention of Labour.....	134
Structural Factors and the Problems of Recruitment and Retention of Labour.....	154
“‘No ‘real’ Canadian beet producer wants to be subsidized’”: The Grower’s Response to the Volatility of the World Sugar Market and Low Returns for Sugar Beets.....	162
“‘To Survive and Compete We Must Be Efficient’”: Reducing the Costs of Production and the Problems of Recruitment and Retention of Labour.....	172
The Dissatisfaction with Aboriginal Labour.....	181
The Quest for Mexican Labour and the Advent of the “Kanadiers”.....	191
“‘There may have been less problems but their work was no better’”: The Factors That Attracted Growers to Mexican Mennonite Labour.....	197
The Growers’ Perspective on the Reasons for the Transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite Labour.....	220
Summary.....	225

CHAPTER 6: THE MEXICAN MENNONITE PERSPECIVE ON THE TRANSITION FROM ABORIGINAL TO MEXICAN MENNONITE WORKERS IN THE SOUTHERN ALBERTA SUGAR BEET INDUSTRY.....	228
Introduction.....	228
Defining the Terms “Mexican Mennonite,” “Old Colony” and “Kanadier”....	229
“The Gypsies of North America”: The Historical Background of Mexican Mennonites.....	230
“Ideal Workers?”: The Mexican Mennonite Perspective on the Transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite Labour.....	236
Summary.....	267
CHAPTER 7: “THE GRAB-A-HOE INDIANS”: THE PERSPECTIVE OF ABORIGINAL WORKERS ON THE TRANSITION FROM ABORIGINAL TO MEXICAN MENNONITE WORKERS IN THE SOUTHERN ALBERTA SUGAR BEET INDUSTRY.....	270
Introduction.....	270
A Brief Review of the Historical Segregation and Marginality of First Nations People.....	272
The Aboriginal Perspective on the Transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite Labour.....	274
Summary.....	299
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	304
Introduction.....	304
Summary and Discussion of Findings.....	305
Contributions to the Literature.....	319
Implications.....	329
Reference List.....	331
APPENDIX A: Map of Sugar Beet Country.....	339
APPENDIX B: Map of First Nations Reserves in Saskatchewan.....	340
APPENDIX C: Ethics Approval Form.....	341
APPENDIX D: Consent Form.....	342

Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodology

Introduction

Today, the migration of people in and between postindustrial societies, as well as to them from developing countries, is unparalleled in world history. The reasons for this mass migration of people are complex and varied. However, among the main forces driving migration are over-population, poverty, and the search for economic benefits and a better lifestyle. The globalization of migration has stimulated an increased interest in examining its impact on contemporary societies. As such, an enormous volume of literature has been generated which is aimed at explaining the broader political, economic and social implications of migrant labour forces within expanding capitalism (Castles and Kosack, 1973; Amin, 1974; Burawoy, 1976; and, Portes, 1978). As well, many studies focus on how migration impacts on multiculturalism, immigration policies, and racial and ethnic conflict in postindustrial societies (Satzewich, 1991; Satzewich 1992; Richmond, 1994; Castles and Miller, 1998; Fenton, 1999; Papastergiadas, 2000; Mysyk, 2000; and Basok, 2000). However, among the vast volume of literature dedicated to understanding the phenomenon of migrant labour, little attention has been paid to analyzing why transitions in the composition of migrant labour forces occur in capitalist industries. In particular, few studies exist that analyze the reasons for transitions of labour forces in seasonal agricultural industries where the transition involves replacing one ethnic group with another.

A specific example of an agricultural industry where the transition in the ethnic

composition of the migrant labour force has occurred more than once is that of southern Alberta's sugar beet industry in western Canada. Existing literature related to southern Alberta's sugar beet industry indicates that during the pre-Second World War period the labour forces used to cultivate sugar beet crops consisted mainly of immigrant workers drawn from Western European countries (Thompson and Seager, 1978) although Blood Indian labour resident in the area was vital to sustaining the industry during its first decade of existence (Regular, 1999: 207). During the Second World War European immigrant labour was not available and as a result the industry utilized interned Japanese-Canadian and German prisoners of war to perform the labour needed in the sugar beet fields. In the post-war period, however, once again immigrant workers from Europe moved to southern Alberta to labour in the sugar beet fields. But, in the early 1950s the industry turned to the employment of a migrant labour force that consisted of Aboriginal (i.e. First Nations and Metis) people recruited largely from northern reserves in Alberta and Saskatchewan (Laliberte, 1994; Laliberte and Satzewich 1999). Since the early 1980s, however, the use of Aboriginal labour in the sugar beet industry has dwindled.

Recently, the southern Alberta sugar beet industry has turned to employing a labour force that consists overwhelmingly of Mexican Mennonites. The advent of a migrant labour force consisting of Mexican Mennonite workers highlights the fact that at different periods in the history of the industry the ethnic composition of its labour force has shifted dramatically. The transition also highlights the fact that this is a case where Aboriginal labour was moved in as the primary labour force for an agricultural industry and then moved out and replaced by another ethnic labour force. Whether capitalist

owners in the sugar beet industry shifted to employing Mexican Mennonite workers due to the availability of their labour or whether they made a purposeful shift for other reasons has not been studied. In addition, the impact of the shift on Aboriginal workers has not been considered. Thus, the primary questions addressed in this research are as follows: “What are the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry?” “To what extent has Aboriginal labour persisted in the industry?” “What impact has the shift had on Aboriginal workers?” The main focus, however, is on the movement of Aboriginal labour in and then out of the sugar beet industry.

The new research will extend and build on my previous unpublished M. A. thesis entitled, “Native Migrant Labour in Southern Alberta’s Sugar Beet Industry” (Laliberte, 1994). The study analyzed the role of the Canadian state in the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal workers from northern reserves in Alberta and Saskatchewan between the early 1950s and the 1980s for work in the southern Alberta sugar beet fields. The research for this dissertation will extend the M. A. thesis by primarily analyzing the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry. However, I do utilize sections of my M. A. thesis that discussed factors related to the transition. This dissertation will argue that the transition of the labour force in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers came about largely because of three intersecting factors: changes in the production of sugar beets, beet growers found Mexican Mennonites to be a relatively more reliable labour force than the Aboriginal labour force and, Mexican Mennonite workers provided growers with a number of cost benefits which Aboriginal labour did not (particularly an

initial willingness to work for a lower wage).

Methodology

The methods used in this study included documentary analysis of primary and secondary sources and interviews. The main aim of each of these methods was to gather data on the underlying reasons for the transition of the migrant labour force in the sugar beet industry. Each of the methods and how they relate to the research are discussed in the following sections.

As a researcher, I hold the ontological position that written words, documents and records are meaningful components of the social world (Mason, 1996: 72). As such, I conducted an analysis of documents, records and other written material relevant to the research topic. Firstly, the annual reports of the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers (ASBG), previously known as the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers' Association (ASBGA) and the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers' Marketing Board (ASBGMB), currently located in Taber, Alberta, were analyzed from the early 1950s to 2005. The reports contain information on such matters as the annual tonnage of sugar beets harvested, Alberta Sugar Company sales and payments to farmers and the financial statements of the ASBG. Most importantly, however, the summaries of the activities of the ASBGA Labour Committee provided vital information on the labour requirements of the industry. Although the ASBGA Labour Committee was phased out in 1995, the annual reports were important for data related to the reasons for the advent of Mexican Mennonite labour in the industry. Secondly, newspaper articles related to the research topic and published in the

Lethbridge Herald, Calgary Albertan, Calgary Sun and *Calgary Herald* were used.

Thirdly, documents on the sugar beet industry were used from the “Alberta Sugar Beet Growers’ Association Fonds” located in the Glenbow Museum Archives in Calgary, Alberta. The Fonds provided valuable information on the “Minutes” of the ASBGA meetings, reports and studies conducted on the sugar beet industry as well as newspaper articles related to the research topic. Lastly, documents were used from the National Archives of Canada (NAC) in Ottawa consisting of the “Minutes” of the Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Committee (FPAMC) meetings and “Minutes” of the Canadian Sugar Beet Grower’s Association (CSBGA). The annual meetings of the FPAMC brought together representatives of the federal Ministry of Manpower and Immigration and representatives of the provincial Department of Agriculture that then made decisions regarding the recruitment and movement of labour needed in agricultural areas throughout Canada.

Data for this study were also gathered through qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews. Ontologically, the qualitative interview method was appropriate for this research because I hold the view that an individual’s knowledge, views, understandings and interpretations are meaningful properties of social reality (Mason, 1996: 39).

Epistemologically, interviews were appropriate for this study because I hold the view that interacting with people by talking and listening to them generates credible data and interpretations of the phenomena under investigation (Mason, 1996: 40). Also, since I assumed an active and reflexive role in the research process, the interview method was appropriate as it lent itself to these goals.

Interviews were conducted with three groups of respondents: sugar beet growers,

Mexican Mennonite workers and Aboriginal workers. The interviews ranged from approximately forty-five minutes to one hour in length. The interviews were guided by a set of questions devised to elicit the respondent's subjective opinions related to the topic under investigation. A total of 51 interviews were conducted for this study. However, it should be noted that three interviews are not in the list below as two were officials of the Roger's Sugar Ltd. and one was an official of the Mennonite Central Committee. Table 1 provides a summary of the number, gender, average age and education of the respondents in each of the groups interviewed.

Table 1: A Description of the Respondents Interviewed

Sugar Beet Growers/Farmers			
<u>No. of Interviews</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Average Age</u>	<u>Highest Level of Education*</u>
14	13 males, 1 female	72	% with post-secondary degree or diploma = 70% % with high school diploma = 10% % with grade 9 completed = 20% % with less than grade 9 = 10%
Mexican Mennonite Sugar Beet Workers			
<u>No. of Interviews</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Average Age</u>	<u>Highest Level of Education**</u>
8	8 males	44	% with post-secondary degree or diploma = 0% % with high school diploma = 0% % with grade 9 completed = 0% % with less than grade 9 = 100%
Aboriginal Sugar Beet Workers			
<u>No. of Interviews</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Average Age</u>	<u>Highest Level of Education****</u>
26***	23 males, 3 females	59	% with post-secondary degree or diploma = 15%***** % with high school diploma = 0% % with grade 9 completed = 25% % with less than grade 9 = 60%

*4 growers interviewed are not included in the highest level of education as no data was available.

**3 Mexican Mennonites interviewed are not included in the highest level of education as no data was available.

***This figure includes 25 First Nations workers and 1 Metis worker mainly from northern reserves in Saskatchewan.

****6 Aboriginal workers interviewed are not included in the average level of education as no data was available.

*****Although 3 First Nations workers had some post-secondary education at the time of the interview this was acquired after working in the sugar beet fields.

In addition, two officials from Rogers Sugar Ltd in Taber, Alberta and one official from Rogers Sugar in Vancouver, British Columbia were interviewed. In total 51 interviews were conducted for this study.

To sample the three groups of respondents, I traveled to southern Alberta during the spring and summer between the years 2001 and 2005 when sugar beet production was underway. This latter strategy, coupled with the snowball technique, was effective in gaining interviews with sugar beet growers, sugar beet officials, Mexican Mennonite workers and a limited number of Aboriginal workers who either migrated to the area at the time or who reside in the area and work in the industry or for growers year round. For instance, the majority of the growers and Mexican Mennonite workers interviewed for this study were conducted in the towns of Taber, Vauxhall, Lethbridge, Coaldale, Burdett and Chin in southern Alberta. Also, a few of the officials of Rogers Sugar Ltd in Taber were interviewed for this study. Officials of Rogers Sugar Ltd and the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers (ASBG) provided me with lists of growers that employed Mexican Mennonite and Aboriginal workers. The bulk of interviews with Aboriginal workers, mainly First Nations workers who were present in the industry when the transition to Mexican Mennonite workers occurred, were conducted between 2001 and 2005 by traveling to various northern reserves in Saskatchewan and Alberta during the spring and summer months. For example, in northern Saskatchewan I traveled to the Montreal Lake, Witcheikin, Island Lake, Big River, Lac La Ronge, Beardy's and Stanley Mission First Nations Reserves. In northern Alberta I interviewed members of the Saddle Lake First Nations Reserve. I was able to gain access to reserve respondents through contacting the

Band Office by phone prior to my arrival or by meeting with the Chief or Band Council members and gaining approval of my research intentions. Once I gained access to the reserve, the snowball technique was very effective in locating Aboriginal respondents. The majority of the interviews with Aboriginal respondents were conducted in the band office or in their homes. As is appropriate to the cultural tradition of Aboriginal people, I made an offering in the form of a hat or a T-Shirt to each Aboriginal respondent for sharing his/her knowledge on the research topic with me. The Aboriginal respondents interviewed for this study were able to speak English and thus there was no need for a translator who spoke an Aboriginal language such as Cree. Likewise, the Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study were also proficient enough in speaking English and hence there was no need for a German translator. Lastly, in 2005 I interviewed the manager of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Taber who provided very valuable information since I later found out that very little demographic data exist on Mexican Mennonite workers in the area and almost none on those who are transient. Overall, the sampling strategy was effective in gaining a diversity of views on the research topic.

Respondents who were interviewed for this study were asked to sign a consent form and they were provided with a summary of the objectives of the study and contact information if they had any questions or concerns regarding the research. The growers, Rogers Sugar Ltd and ASBG officials and Mexican Mennonites who were interviewed signed a consent form and they were ensured that the data gathered from each respondent would be confidential. The respondents were informed that if I used any quotes from the interviews in my study that they would be contacted by phone to ensure that I had their

approval to do so. However, due to the oral tradition of Aboriginal people most of the respondents did not sign a consent form to be interviewed and instead provided me with verbal consent to interview them. Furthermore, when I asked whether they wanted to be contacted before I used any of their quotes in the study, some Aboriginal respondents agreed I should but many said no. I should also point out that although all respondents were informed that what they said in the interviews would be held in confidence, the general consensus of those interviewed was that the information they provided was not controversial or inflammatory and thus they were not overly concerned with issues of confidentiality. Nevertheless, to ensure that the comments of the respondents remain confidential, this thesis uses a system that provides the year the respondent was interviewed (i.e. 2005), letters indicating a particular group (i.e. FN = First Nations, M = Metis, G = Growers, MM = Mexican Mennonite, SBO = Sugar Beet official) and a coded number instead of his or her name. An example of the coding system is as follows: (2005: FN23).

Mason (1996) provides guidelines to be taken under consideration when analyzing data gathered from interviews. For instance, Mason (1996: 109) points out that the researcher must decide whether the data will be read literally, interpretively or reflexively. Respectively, these refer to whether the researcher will pay attention to the literal form, content and structure of the data, whether the researcher will look for themes and underlying mechanisms in the data or, whether the researcher will take into consideration his/her role in the interview process. Since I find these aspects important, all three will be used in the data analysis process. In particular, the data were analyzed to uncover common themes from respondents that address the research questions.

Chapter 2 in this study provides a review of the literature on the factors that underlay the transitions of migrant labour forces in agricultural industries in capitalist societies. Although the literature on ethnic transitions of migrant labour forces in agriculture is not extensive, the review will discuss instances where an agricultural labour force was displaced by another labour force.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the establishment of the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta during the early 1900s, the reasons for its closure in 1914, its re-establishment in 1925, its takeover by BC Sugar in British Columbia and its current relationship with beet growers. In doing so, it will be pointed out that the industry has had a long history of labour problems. In particular, it will be pointed out that the industry has experienced numerous transitions in its labour force.

Chapter 4 analyzes the role the Canadian state played in the post-Second World War period in organizing an Aboriginal migrant labour force for the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. The chapter argues that the Canadian state, with the assistance of its Indian Affairs Branch (IAB), was instrumental in the recruitment, mobilization and retention of Aboriginal workers for farm jobs in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the factors that led to the displacement of Aboriginal workers by Mexican Mennonite workers in the industry from the perspective of sugar beet growers/farmers. The chapter argues that the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers occurred in the industry largely because of structural factors and changes in the process of beet production.

Chapter 6 focuses on Mexican Mennonite workers and how, in their view, they came to form the main labour force in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. As such,

the data gathered from Mexican Mennonite workers reinforces some of the key factors alluded to by growers in the previous chapter concerning why they opted to hire Mexican Mennonite workers instead of Aboriginal workers. In particular, the data gathered for the chapter indicates that growers opted to hire Mexican Mennonites because of the changes in the production of sugar beets and because of their skills as farm workers.

Chapter 7 provides the views of Aboriginal workers who were active in the industry during the transition to a Mexican Mennonite labour force. The chapter argues that Mexican Mennonites were hired over Aboriginal workers because of three main factors: the changes in the process of sugar beet production, the growers' stereotypes of Aboriginal workers and, Mexican Mennonite workers provided growers with a number of benefits which Aboriginal labour did not.

Chapter 8, the final chapter, provides a summary and discussion of findings of this dissertation. In addition, it provides a discussion on how the findings contribute to the literatures reviewed for this study concerning the reasons for transitions of labour forces in agricultural industries. Finally, the chapter considers the implications of the findings of this dissertation.

I hope that the findings of this dissertation contribute to a better understanding of the underlying reasons for transitions in labour forces in agricultural industries and, in so doing, contribute to the building a theoretical framework that allows a more informed and comprehensive analysis of the political economy of such transitions within capitalist development. Moreover, since the literature on the labour history of western Canada is relatively silent on the economic contributions that Aboriginal people have made during the twentieth century, I hope that this project helps to correct the historical record on the

importance of their labour to capitalist development in western Canada.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature on Transitions of Migrant Labour Forces in Agricultural Industries

Introduction

Following the large-scale movement of people into Western Europe after 1945 (Miles, 1987: 4), studies on migrant labour increased. Many of the studies focused on agricultural industries and used a political economic perspective to analyze migrant labour within capitalist development (e.g. Castles and Kosack, 1973; Nikolinakos, 1975; Sassen-Koob, 1978; Miles, 1987; and Satzewich, 1991). Such studies proliferated in the mid-1900s after the United States and Mexico negotiated the Bracero program that aimed to address labour shortages in agricultural industries in the States by using Mexican migrant workers. Until recently, however, there were few studies done in Canada that focused on the political economy of migrant labour in agricultural industries (Satzewich, 1991: 3). Moreover, only a few studies have been conducted in Canada that analyzed the use of Aboriginal migrant labour in agricultural industries (e.g., Laliberte, 1994; Laliberte and Satzewich, 1999). And although the body of literature related to migrant labour is extensive, there are few studies that specifically analyze the displacement of one group of migrant workers, whether domestic or foreign-born, by another group of migrant workers. This is especially the case concerning the displacement of an Aboriginal migrant labour force by another migrant labour force in an agricultural industry.

The following will provide a survey of the literature up to the end of 2005 that is related to transitions of migrant labour forces in agricultural industries. Its objective is to discuss factors or causes found in other studies associated with transitions in agricultural

industries. These factors will then be compared to the case of the southern Alberta sugar beet industry to understand factors related to the transition of the migrant labour force from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers. The literature review begins with a discussion on studies that analyze how capitalism structures labour demand in agricultural industries. It then reviews the literature that analyzes how employers of farm labour accomplish the transition in the composition of labour forces in agricultural industries.

Conceptualizing Migrant Labour

Since the term “migrant labour” will be used extensively in the literature review and throughout this study, it will be defined before proceeding. In this research, migrant labour will be conceptualized within the capitalist mode of production. It refers to spatial mobility that relocates people in the relations of production. Basically, migrant labour refers to the movement of workers, both within and between social formations (Miles, 1987: 7), in order to sell their labour power in the receiving areas. When migrant labour occurs within a social formation or nation, domestic workers generally migrate between their home and the host location. In the case of domestic migrant labour employed in agricultural industries, there is usually a continuous pattern and seasonal movement of workers.

Foreign migrant labour consists of workers who migrate from their home nation to take up labour positions in the relations of production in another nation. Satzewich (1991: 38) conceptualizes foreign migrant labour as follows:

Migrant labour refers...to those foreign-born persons who seek to relocate themselves in sites in production but whose work and stay within a social formation are subject to temporal constraints imposed by the state. Migrant workers are those who are not granted the right of permanent settlement by the state in which they sell their labour power. They do not possess the rights and obligations of citizens of the nation, nor are they allowed the possibility of ever acquiring those rights in the receiving nation. They are not defined as members of the political community. Among other things, they do not possess the right to participate in the bourgeois democratic political process, the right to family formation, the right to social, educational and welfare services. In other words, they are not defined as members or future members, of the imagined community which constitutes the nation. In theory, if not in practice, they are subject to repatriation to their country of origin.

In some instances, systems of migrant labour are created and regulated by the state whereby workers travel to sites of production and after a period of time return to their home location. The classic example was the case of South Africa under the apartheid system where the state imposed policies and regulations that forced indigenous workers to migrate between their reserves and surrounding gold mines (Lotta, 1985).

Why Transitions of Migrant Labour Forces in Agricultural Industries Occur

Although few studies were found in the review of the literature that focused specifically on transitions of labour forces in agricultural industries, studies were found that analyzed how capital accumulation and structural factors are linked to the problems of recruitment and retention of workers for agricultural industries. To address the latter problems many employers of farm labour found that one of the most viable and beneficial alternatives for them was to hire foreign-born workers as opposed to domestic workers. Hence, the move to procure foreign-born labour caused transitions in agricultural labour forces that in many cases also meant an ethnic transition in the composition of the labour forces. Before this section proceeds to a discussion of transitions in labour forces in agricultural industries, however, the term “transition” is defined in conjunction with other terms used in the literature that refer to changes in the composition of labour forces in agricultural industries.

Defining the Term “Transition”

This study focuses on the transition of a migrant labour force in an agricultural industry. As such, the term “transition” refers to the relatively complete change in the migrant labour force from one group of workers (either domestic or foreign) to another (usually foreign) in sites of capitalist production. The term “transition” is used in this study because it is indicative of the almost complete change in the labour force in the sugar beet industry from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers. Moreover, and as

this study will explain, the term is used as it characterizes the fact that the change in the labour force occurred in stages (i.e. it is a process). It should be noted, however, that in the literature other terms are used to describe changes in the composition of migrant labour forces in agricultural industries. The most commonly used terms other than “transition,” are “displacement,” “shifting,” and “succession,” which, in general, all refer to the case where the pre-existing labour force was replaced, or almost completely replaced, by another labour force.

A change in the composition of the labour force can go from one domestic group to another, from a domestic group to a foreign-born group, or from one foreign-born group to another foreign-born ethnic group. In the case where an ethnic group is involved in a change of the composition of a migrant labour force, this typically involves the use of foreign labour. The term “succession,” however, can refer to more than simply a change in the composition of the labour force. For example, following the termination of the Bracero program in 1964, Mexican workers still migrated to agricultural industries in the United States in large numbers only they did so as illegal aliens outside of a state sanctioned labour program. Hence, the continued movement of Mexican workers to agricultural industries was not simply a form of ethnic succession, but also a succession of legal migrant workers to illegal aliens (Satzewich, 2005).

The Problems of Labour Recruitment and Retention in Agricultural Industries

A number of studies have analyzed migrant or immigrant labour in agricultural industries from a political economic perspective within capitalist development (e.g.

Satzewich, 1991; Mysyk, 2000, Basok, 2002; Mines, 2002). As these studies show, transitions of labour forces in agricultural industries are linked to problems of recruitment and retention of labour and rooted in the historical development of capitalism.

A study that is very informative and includes many similarities to the research in this dissertation is Vic Satzewich's (1991) study on the fruit and vegetable industry in Ontario. Satzewich analyzed the pattern of labour demand and the extent of labour shortages since the Second World War in the fruit and vegetable industry of Ontario. He found that since the 1940s there has been a decline in the importance of agriculture in the Canadian economy as well as an absolute decline in the number of people employed in agriculture in Canada. However, when he broke the agricultural labour force into the components of "employers and self-employed owner operators," "unpaid family members," and "paid workers," he found a relative increase in paid workers or hired labour. More specifically, he found that in 1950 hired labour accounted for 10.9 per cent of the agricultural labour force in Canada but in 1966 it accounted for 18.0 per cent (Satzewich, 1991: 59). Satzewich (1991: 59) attributed the increase in the hired labour component of the agricultural labour force to the increase in the size of the average farm in Canada and to a "continued reliance on paid wage labour in some sectors of the agricultural economy." Indicative of the importance of paid wage labour in the Ontario fruit and vegetable industry was the fact that in the mid-1960s "wages paid to hired farm labour constituted the single most important cost for farmers who grew crops such as sugar beets, tomatoes, cucumbers, cherries and peaches" (Satzewich, 1991: 59).

In this study, evidence supports the notion that hired labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry increased from the early 1950s and peaked during the mid-

1960s in much the same fashion as in Satzewich's study. Moreover, data from the mid-1960s indicated that the two highest production costs for sugar beet growers in southern Alberta were machinery and labour where the former was a little higher in cost than the latter.

Satzewich (1991: 60) pointed out that the two types of labour traditionally in demand in the fruit and vegetable industry of southwestern Ontario were year round employees and temporary seasonal employees although recently there had been an increase in the demand for seasonal employees. Those positions available in the industry for permanent and seasonal employees were filled largely on the basis of labour market mechanisms. For instance, seasonal employee positions in the fruit and vegetable industry were filled by the spontaneous migration of workers from areas of Canada where there existed surpluses of labour such as from the Maritimes, Quebec, northern Ontario and Indian reserves. Nevertheless, Satzewich (1991: 60-61) found that these spontaneous migrations of labour could not meet the farmers' demand for seasonal wage labour.

As in Satzewich's study, the labour force in the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta has traditionally consisted of a small group of year round employees and a large seasonal labour force. However, throughout most of its existence the sugar beet industry experienced problems meeting its labour demand through the spontaneous internal migration of labour and thus, from the mid-1900s until recently the industry depended upon a migrant Aboriginal labour force initially recruited with the assistance of the Canadian state.

Satzewich (1991: 61) also found that fruit and vegetable farmers in southwestern Ontario encountered two problems with seasonal wage labour. One problem concerned

the recruitment of a sufficient supply of seasonal workers for the harvest and the other concerned the retention of seasonal workers for the duration of the harvest. As Satzewich (1991: 62) explained, “The difficulty that farmers have faced in recruiting and retaining suitable supplies of wage labour for the harvest is the result of several historically specific conditions associated with the farming industry and farm labour employment. In general, farm labour employment is characterized by poor wages, poor and unsafe working conditions, long hours of work, the lack of protection under provincial labour standards legislation, and the absence of habitable accommodation.”

On the issue of poor wages for farm labour, Satzewich (1991: 62) pointed out that while farm wages in eastern Canada have increased more rapidly than any other farm input following the end of the Second World War, they lagged far behind the wages paid to industrial workers. Satzewich (1991: 62) found, for example, that in 1974 when the average hourly wage for farm labour increased to \$2.25, the average hourly wage for those in manufacturing and construction increased to \$4.23 and \$6.24 respectively.

Similar to Satzewich’s argument that in the post Second World War period farm wages in eastern Canada lagged well behind the wages paid to industrial workers, this study will show that the earnings of seasonal workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry were well below those of industrial workers during the same period.

Satzewich’s study also noted that in most of Canada’s provinces, provincial labour standards do not apply to individuals employed in agriculture. He (1991: 63) stated,

In 1966 farm labour was excluded from minimum wage legislation in every

province. No province had hours of work legislation which applied to employment in agriculture, and farmers were not included in legislation providing annual vacations with pay. Provincial laws dealing with public holidays generally do not apply to farm workers. Similarly, laws in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Quebec and Nova Scotia which require an employer or employee to give notice of termination of employment do not apply to farm workers and farm employees. Moreover, while farming remains the third most dangerous industry in Canada in terms of work related injuries, with the exception of Saskatchewan, provincial health and safety legislation does not apply to farm workers.

Another factor that was detrimental to the recruitment and retention of farm workers was the fact that the Workmen's Compensation Act did not cover farm workers until 1965 in Ontario and until 1966 in the rest of Canada. In addition, until the 1970s those who were employed in agriculture were exempted from the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act (Satzewich (1991: 63). However, Satzewich (1991: 63) noted that the amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act introduced on June 23, 1971 hindered the efforts of farmers to recruit and retain needed workers because the amendments stipulated that those on unemployment insurance benefits were not required to accept available jobs that were deemed unsuitable. More specifically, the Act stipulated that if a person was drawing unemployment insurance benefits, then that person was not required to accept an available job if it paid less than he or she had been paid in the previous job position. The latter fact, in conjunction with the fact that the wages paid to farm workers were relatively low in comparison to the wages in most

sectors of the Canadian economy, hindered the efforts of farmers to attract the surplus workers laid off by industries outside of agriculture (Satzewich, 1991: 63).

The problems that undermined the recruitment and retention of seasonal labour in the fruit and vegetable industry of southwestern Ontario are remarkably similar to the problems that impacted on the successful recruitment and retention of migrant Aboriginal workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry during the 1960s and 1970s. Sugar beet workers also suffered poor wages, poor working conditions and the lack of protection under provincial labour standards legislation.

In the discourse surrounding the problems of recruitment and retention of farm workers, a recurring theme is that individual farmers have to shoulder much of the blame for the situation because of the poor wages and poor working conditions they offer farm workers. However, Satzewich (1991:63-64) argued that many of these conditions are “related to structural factors beyond the control of individual farmers.” For example, a structural factor that blocks an individual farmer’s attempts at improving the conditions of farm workers is that the various levels of the state seem unwilling to introduce health, safety and labour standards legislation in agricultural sectors because of the political power of farmers who oppose such standards and the relatively weak political power of farm workers. Farm workers in Canada are overwhelmingly non-unionized and this places them in a weak political position in comparison to farmers who form an important and powerful political group from which the various levels of government have sought political support (Satzewich, 1991: 64).

It should be noted, however, that in the *Dunmore v. Ontario Case* (2001) the Supreme Court of Canada attempted to address the right of agricultural workers to

bargain collectively and strike. Carson and Smith (2003: 12) pointed out that in the case the United Food and Commercial Worker's (UFCW's) asked the Supreme Court of Canada to rule on its claim that "farm workers were unfairly excluded from the province's labour relations regime and that the Charter's guarantee of freedom of association should give agricultural workers the right to bargain collectively and strike." Although the court ruled in favour of the UFCW's claim, the response of the Ontario government was to enact legislation that met the minimum requirements set by the court, which, in effect, deeply constrained the ability of agricultural workers to unionize and to strike. The Ontario government maintained that it limited the ability of agricultural workers to unionize in order to protect the family farm (Carson and Smith, 2003: 12). As such, the court ruling was a hollow victory for the UFCW as the Ontario legislation did little to effect unionization among agricultural workers.

Nevertheless, Satzewich touches on another similarity between his study and this research. That is, throughout the history of the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, seasonal workers have never been unionized. Thus, these workers have always been in a weak political position in comparison to the political power of farmers who could lobby the government to restrict legislation that was not in their favor as employers of farm labour. The lack of a union for seasonal workers in southern Alberta can be linked to their relatively poor working conditions in the industry. Thus, it is understandable that such poor conditions would undermine the successful recruitment and retention of workers.

Satzewich (1991: 64) went on to cite other structural processes that render farm work unattractive which, in turn, intensified the problems of recruitment and retention of

farm workers. Furthermore, he found that these structural processes have contributed to the post-Second World War decline in the family farm and low farm-owner incomes. First, Satzewich (1991: 64) identified the process of capital accumulation as impacting negatively on the attractiveness of farm work. That is, since the end of the Second World War urban-based and resource extraction industries in Canada have experienced a significant degree of expansion, part of which was fuelled by “the proletarianization of *petit* agricultural commodity producers and through the rural to urban migration of wage labour” (Satzewich, 1991: 64). Employment in urban-based industries is seen as much more attractive than employment in farm labour because urban-based job positions offer “the working class higher wages, better and safer working conditions and more steady employment” in comparison to farm labour. In addition, urban-based employment is seen as more attractive than farm employment due to the fact that urban industries have been easier to unionize which has enabled workers to fight for better provincial labour standards legislation, better rates of pay and safer working conditions (Satzewich, 1991: 64).

Satzewich’s argument that urban-based jobs were more attractive than farm jobs because they offered unions, better wages and better working conditions to workers was a factor related to the problems in the recruitment and retention of labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry where hoeing and weeding jobs were labour intensive and characterized by low wages and poor working conditions.

Another structural process that has inhibited the ability of farmers to increase farm wages and thereby recruit and retain sufficient farm labour is that farmers have been caught in a “cost-price squeeze” since the post-Second World War period. A cost-price

squeeze refers to “a situation where farmers increasingly pay monopoly prices for inputs such as machinery, fertilizer and seed, and increasingly receive competitive prices for their outputs. In the long run, the costs of farm inputs have tended to outpace the prices received for the commodities produced” (Satzewich, 1991: 64). For example, Satzewich (1991: 64) noted that in Ontario between 1941 and 1986 “prices of farm outputs increased by 180 per cent but prices of farm inputs increased by 270 per cent over the same period.” On the one hand, Satzewich (1991: 65) attributed the increase in the price of farm inputs to the industries that hold a virtual monopoly over farm implements, fertilizers and seed while on the other hand, he attributed the low price of farm outputs to the fact that a relatively small number of multinational corporations control increasingly larger portions of the total farm output. The effects of the cost-price squeeze on farmers was aggravated even more in the 1960s when the shortage of farm labour and a corresponding increase in the bargaining power of domestic farm workers drove up the wages paid to farm labour (Satzewich, 1991: 65).

In this study, it will also be shown that sugar beet farmers were caught in a cost-price squeeze since the Second World War period whereby the prices of outputs decreased relative to the costs of inputs, which increased. Moreover, this latter situation was exacerbated for sugar beet growers in the 1970s when the cost of hoeing and weeding operations in sugar beet contracts was increased. As a result of the cost-price squeeze, sugar beet growers offered relatively low wages to their workers that, in turn, exacerbated their problems of recruitment and retention of labour.

Another factor that inhibited the ability of farmers to recruit and retain enough farm labour was the fact that farmers were relegated to the role of “price takers” for the

crops they produced. According to Satzewich (1991: 65) the Canadian state's policy to keep fruit and vegetable prices low was partly accomplished by "the concentration and centralization of the food processing industry in the hands of American-based multinationals such as Heinz, Campbell's Soup Company, Del Monte, Green Giant and Libby's." For example, Satzewich (1991: 65) pointed out that in 1962 subsidiaries of American-based multinationals controlled approximately 60 per cent of the processed fruit and vegetable industry in Ontario, however, by the late 1960s they controlled 70 per cent of the industry. Given the limited number of food processors in the region among a large number of producers, the price that farmers had to take for the crops they produced was decided by corporations located in New York, Washington and Los Angeles.

In the case of the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta, growers were also price takers for the crops they produced. Since Rogers Sugar Company purchased raw sugar at a low price on the world market and held a virtual monopoly over sugar production in western Canada throughout much of the twentieth century it was able to dictate the price that it would pay for sugar beets produced in southern Alberta. Thus, in conjunction with the impact of the cost-price squeeze mentioned above, the low price Rogers Sugar Company would pay for sugar beets produced in southern Alberta dictated the low wages growers would pay to their workers. Consequently, few workers actively sought sugar beet work because of the low wages that, in turn, increased the industry's problems in the areas of recruitment and retention of labour.

In Satzewich's (1991: 67) view, the Canadian state's cheap food policy was linked to the problems farmers experienced recruiting and retaining sufficient farm labour, the low prices farmers received for their outputs and the decline in the family

farm. To explain, he pointed out that the state's cheap food policy rested on the implementation of low tariffs on the import of fruit and vegetables, many of which are either grown or could be grown in Canada. Still, the state has pursued a cheap food policy "to keep inflation down and to dampen pressures placed on employers by the urban-based working class for increased wages" (Satzewich, 1991: 67). The state has been quite successful in keeping the prices of farm products in Canada low because fruit and vegetables imported from South Africa, California, Mexico and South Korea are available at low prices due to fact that agricultural commodity producers in these countries have access to cheap labour and lower land costs, possess economies of scale and have a longer growing season (Satzewich, 1991: 67). Moreover, fruits imported from Australia are kept at a low price because Australian farmers who grow peaches, pears, and apricots for export are subsidized by the state.

Similar to what Satzewich points out in his study, the Canadian state's cheap food policy had an impact on the returns that growers received for their sugar beet crops in southern Alberta. That is, to pursue its cheap food policy the Canadian state implemented low tariffs on the import of sugar. As a result, the state set the price to be paid for domestically produced sugar on the price of sugar on the world market and imported into Canada. The end result was that growers received low returns for their sugar beet crops. As this study will show, the low returns that growers received for their sugar beet crops translated into low wages for their seasonal workers. As such, workers found employment in the sugar beet fields unattractive which, in turn, added to the growers' problems of recruitment and retention of labour.

In response to the problems of labour recruitment and labour retention, Canadian

farmers have sought to substitute capital for labour. For instance, since the early twentieth century grain farmers in the western provinces have been quite successful in the mechanization of farming processes formerly done by hired wage labour. Similarly, the mechanization of harvesting processes in the fruit and vegetable industry in Ontario has significantly increased productivity (Satzewich, 1991: 68). However, as Satzewich (1991: 69) explained, “investment in fixed capital in Ontario has affected labour demand for only some crops. The introduction of mechanical harvesting equipment has been widespread in the case of green and wax beans, peas, and sugar beets, for example, but other more tender crops such as peaches, apples, cucumbers, tomatoes, tobacco and asparagus continue to require a high proportion of variable capital in the harvest.” Furthermore, Satzewich (1991: 69) found that the escalation in the costs of machinery and credit has undermined the mechanization of processes in agricultural production. Hence, “despite an increasing organic composition of capital in this industry, certain sectors of fruit and vegetable production continue to require a high content of variable capital in the harvest” (Satzewich, 1991: 69).

In the southern Alberta sugar beet industry the costs of mechanization in the production of sugar beets also increased, especially during the 1970s. However, in contrast to Satzewich’s study the increased costs did not undermine the mechanization process. In fact, as mechanization increased the size of the labour force required for sugar beet cultivation decreased which, as this study will show, was a factor that facilitated the transition in the migrant labour force from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers.

A response by the Canadian state and farmers to address the problems of labour recruitment and retention in agricultural industries has been to mobilize internal labour

reserves, particularly the mobilization of marginalized workers from within Canada. Part of the state and employer strategy to procure these labour sources was to cover the costs associated with the transportation of the prospective workers from their place of residence to the harvest. As such, at varying times between 1943 and 1966 the Canadian state and employers attempted to mobilize temporarily unemployed farm workers, the urban unemployed, children between the ages of ten and sixteen with the aid of the YWCA and YMCA, female household workers, military personnel, Aboriginal people, high school students, and patients from psychiatric hospitals for farm labour (Satzewich, 1991: 69). During and after the Second World War Aboriginal people were recruited from reserves in northern Ontario for work in the southwestern Ontario fruit and vegetable industry while farmers in Manitoba and Alberta made extensive use of Aboriginal workers for the production of sugar beet crops (Satzewich, 1991: 80).

Again, Satzewich's study parallels events in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. That is, following the Second World War and in response to the difficulties sugar beet growers experienced in the recruitment and retention of workers, the Canadian state was highly active in the recruitment and movement of internal reserves of Aboriginal workers for the production of sugar beet crops.

Satzewich (1991: 84) found that despite the spontaneous and state-assisted labour migrations within Canada during the post-war period, fruit and vegetable farmers in Ontario continued to experience problems in recruitment and retention of sufficient workers for the production of their crops. To rectify the situation, the Canadian state mobilized "labour which was born and raised outside of the boundaries of the nation state" (Satzewich, 1991: 84). In fact, Satzewich (1991: 84) argued that as a result of the

lack of internal labour reserves for agricultural work in the post-war period, Canada became dependent on the use of various forms of foreign-born labour. According to Satzewich (1991: 84) foreign-born workers were incorporated into “sites in production relations” in agricultural industries as “unfree immigrant labour, free immigrant labour and unfree migrant labour.”

In the case of the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta, it too turned to the use of a labour force resident outside of Canada in the form of Mexican Mennonite workers. Interestingly, however, while Satzewich points out that the state was heavily involved in the mobilization of foreign labour for the fruit and vegetable industry in Ontario, in this study it was found that the Canadian state did not actively recruit or mobilize Mexican Mennonite workers for labouring positions in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. As this study will show, the circumstances related to the use of foreign-born Mexican Mennonite labour in the industry are quite unique in comparison to other cases where the state mobilized foreign-born labour for its agricultural industries.

Satzewich’s study points out that two groups of foreign workers initially incorporated into sites of production as unfree immigrant labour in Canada were Polish war veterans and Displaced Persons. He (1991: 86-87) defined these two groups as unfree labour because of the political and legal restrictions that were initially placed on their circulation in the Canadian labour market. In 1946, for instance, the state approved the entry of 4000 male Polish veterans to temporarily work on Canadian farms but they were first required to sign a labour contract that stipulated they would remain with their original agricultural employment for a period of two years. Once they fulfilled the latter requirement and following three more years of residency, they could apply for Canadian

citizenship and thus circulate freely in the labour market (Satzewich, 1991: 87).

Free immigrant labour was also incorporated into the fruit and vegetable industry in Ontario. Satzewich (1991: 98) defined these foreign-born workers as “permanent settlers, future citizens and members of the imagined community.” As such, the state placed no restrictions on their length of stay and their ability to remain in Canada. Although many of these workers found labouring positions in the fruit and vegetable industry in Ontario, they were free to circulate in the Canadian labour market (Satzewich, 1991: 98).

Finally, Satzewich (1991: 107) pointed out that the state mobilized unfree migrant labour to address the problems of recruitment and retention in agricultural industries. He (1991: 107) defined unfree migrant labour as “those who were granted the right of only temporary entry to the country, who were not defined as potential future citizens and members of the imagined community, and who faced political/legal restrictions over their ability to circulate in the Canadian labour market.” In the post-war period the most prominent groups of unfree migrant labour that migrated to Ontario agricultural industries were workers from the southern United States and the Caribbean. As Satzewich (1991: 111) noted, since 1966 when Caribbean workers were first recruited for labour in Canada, they have constituted “about 5 per cent of the total harvest labour force in Ontario fruit and vegetable production, and during the mid-1970s between 40 and 50 per cent of the total number of workers who were placed in employment in this industry by the Canadian state.”

As in Satzewich’s study, at the end of the Second World War European immigrant and domestic Aboriginal workers were mobilized by the Canadian state in an attempt to

address the problems of recruitment and retention of labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. Initially, European immigrant workers were what Satzewich would identify as unfree labour because they were required to sign a labour contract that stipulated they were to stay with their original sugar beet employer for a specific period before they could circulate in the labour market as free labour.

In the case of domestic Aboriginal labour mobilized by the state to address the labour problems in the industry, coercive and paternalistic tactics were used by state officials and employers to keep the workers in the sugar beet fields but at no time were they under any political or legal constraints prohibiting their freedom to leave the fields or to circulate in the labour market. Although sugar beet workers signed a contract to cultivate a specific acreage of beets that was meant to legally bind them to the job until it was complete, there was little growers could do if the workers did not complete the contract other than invoke a three dollar an acre holdback clause in the contract for unsatisfactory work.

However, Mexican Mennonite workers who migrated to the southern Alberta sugar beet industry during the late twentieth century pose an interesting anomaly to the groups of foreign-born labour identified by Satzewich and mobilized by the state. That is, while the Mexican Mennonite workers who migrated to the southern Alberta sugar beet industry were foreign-born labour, they do not fall into the unfree immigrant labour, free immigrant labour, or unfree migrant labour categories identified in Satzewich's study. In particular, Mexican Mennonite migrant workers do not fall into any of the categories because they were not mobilized by the Canadian state, they were under no legal or political compulsion to remain with a specific employer, and they were free to circulate

in the labour market. The reason they were able to migrate to southern Alberta outside of state sponsored labour programs and circulate freely in the labour market was because many held a dual citizenship; one as a Mexican citizen and the other as a Canadian citizen. Initially, the majority of Mexican Mennonite workers migrated between their homes in Mexico and the southern Alberta sugar beet industry on a seasonal basis. Before long, however, many Mexican Mennonite workers exercised their Canadian citizenship rights and settled permanently in southern Alberta while others continued to migrate back to Mexico during the winter months.

Satzewich's discourse on the categories of foreign-born labour he identified raises an interesting question. That is, since Mexican Mennonites were free to circulate in the labour market, how did they end up in the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta in what many would define as dirty and dangerous sites of production without legal or political compulsion sanctioned by the state? The answer to this question requires an overview of their history and religious beliefs and is beyond the scope of this literature review. However, the question of how Mexican Mennonites ended up in the industry will be addressed in Chapter 6.

Satzewich (1991: 121) posited that since the Second World War the fruit and vegetable industry in Ontario has suffered from "a structurally induced problem of recruiting and retaining suitable supplies of wage labour for the harvest." In response to the problem the industry increased mechanization of the harvesting process to reduce the dependence of farmers on wage labour. However, mechanization of some crops was less extensive and therefore farmers continued to require hand labour for harvesting. Although the state attempted to mobilize internal labour reserves to meet the wage labour

requirements of the farmers, these reserves proved to be insufficient. Consequently, the state intervened in the economy of the industry and mobilized foreign-born workers, which, Satzewich argued (1991: 121), led to “a historical dependence on foreign-born labour to fill harvest labour positions.”

As in Satzewich’s study and stated previously, the Canadian state intervened in the economy of the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta following the Second World War in order to address a labour shortage by the mobilization of domestic Aboriginal workers to hoe and weed sugar beet crops. Although the industry became dependent on Aboriginal labour for over thirty years thereafter, it recently moved to hire foreign-born Mexican Mennonite workers who largely displaced Aboriginal workers in the industry. Since Mexican Mennonites have displaced Aboriginal workers, the industry has become to a great extent dependent on their labour in the production of sugar beet crops.

Lastly, Satzewich (1991: 121) found that the process of capital accumulation did not adequately explain the various modes of incorporation of foreign-born labour in production relations. To address this inadequacy he (1991: 121) argued that, “various political and ideological relations structured the ways in which different foreign-born groups were incorporated into sites of production relations.” According to Satzewich (1991: 121) these relations were racialized whereby some foreign-born labour groups were defined as free, such as workers from The Netherlands, Germany and Britain, while other groups were defined as unfree labour because they were deemed “unsuitable occupants of positions in production relations.” In particular, the Canadian state refused to allow Caribbean workers to migrate to the fruit and vegetable industry in southwestern Ontario until 1966 and only then as unfree labour although the state had been under

pressure from farmers to tap this labour pool since 1947. Moreover, when the state allowed Caribbean labour in the fruit and vegetable industry in Ontario, it was not done on the basis of supply and demand. Satzewich (1991: 179) characterized the state's position as follows:

...it was structured by the idea of 'race', and an ideology of racial superiority and inferiority. The state's fundamental concern in the context of entry, recruitment and employment of Caribbean migrant labour in Canada was not so much whether they had jobs or not, or whether they would take jobs away from Canadians, but rather that this group might come to constitute a settler population in the country. They were defined as a qualitatively different 'race' of people, who, in a racist manner were further defined as possessing certain negatively evaluated traits. Their simple presence in the country was seen to constitute a threat to social order and therefore the state was unwilling to allow these people even temporary entry.

In Satzewich's (1991: 179) view, the state incorporated Caribbean labour into sites of production relations in Canada as unfree labour based on an ideology of racism. As such, the state was able to defuse pressure to admit workers from the Caribbean as permanent settlers and it resolved the labour problem "without increasing further the size of the 'black' population in Canada" (Satzewich, 1991: 179).

Similar to Satzewich's study, this study also found that the process of capital accumulation did not adequately explain the incorporation of Mexican Mennonite

migrant labour in production relations in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, especially in light of the availability of Aboriginal labour. However, by drawing on Satzewich's argument on racialized production relations, the incorporation of Mexican Mennonite workers in production relations in the sugar beet industry is more fully understood when it is considered that Aboriginal workers in the sugar beet industry were racially stereotyped as lazy, unreliable and inferior workers. However, in contrast to Satzewich's finding that Caribbean workers were incorporated in agricultural industries as unfree labour and restricted from settlement in Canada because of the racist ideology of the state, in the sugar beet industry Mexican Mennonite workers were incorporated in production relations by growers and not the state. Moreover, many of these growers held negative racial stereotypes of Aboriginal workers.

Another study that parallels many of the arguments made in Satzewich's study concerning the use of foreign-born migrant labour is by Tanya Basok's (2002). Like Satzewich, Basok focuses on the use of foreign-born labour in agricultural industries in Ontario. She (2002: xix) argues that migrant "Mexican seasonal workers have become a 'structural necessity' in many rural Ontario communities...and that without offshore labour Ontario horticulture would have experienced a significant decline." However, she (2002: 4) states, "migrant labour is structurally necessary only in those economic sectors whose viability hinges on the employment of workers who are unfree." Of significance for purposes of this study is Basok's analysis of why farmers in Ontario's fruit and vegetable industry are attracted to Mexican labour. As such, her study adds insights concerning the reasons for transitions in migrant labour forces.

Basok (2002: 4) defines "unfree labour" as those workers who lack the ability to

circulate in the labour market because of political and legal compulsion and who, as a consequence, lack the ability to refuse their employer's demands. Hence, Basok (2002: 17) argues that what was attractive about the use of Mexican workers in agriculture industries in Ontario was not that they were cheap labour because this was not necessarily the case; instead, employers were attracted to Mexican workers because they were unfree.

In 1974 Canada and Mexico signed an agreement that established the Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programs. The program aimed to address the labour shortages in agricultural industries in Canada. Many of the Mexican workers recruited under the program were placed in the Ontario fruit and vegetable industry. Basok (2002: 107) characterized Mexican workers who were recruited to work in agricultural industries in Ontario as reliable, docile, and unfree. She (2002: 107) states, "Unlike local workers, Mexicans are willing to accept minimum wages for work that is back-breaking, monotonous, and detrimental to their health. Even though Mexican labour is relatively costly because of the high transportation and accommodation costs, for many growers it is extremely valuable because it is unfree. Most Mexican workers stay with the same employer as long as there is work for them to do; they are available to work long hours every day; and they do not take time off work, even when they are sick or injured."

Another feature that attracted Ontario farmers to Mexican workers was that they would accept minimum wage rates for farm labour, wage rates that few domestic workers would be willing to accept. For instance, Basok (2002: 108) noted that although Mexican workers were paid \$6.90 per hour for farm labour in Ontario, this was still well below the wages paid to domestic workers for performing the same labour which ranged between \$7.50 and \$9.00 per hour. This discrepancy in wage rates between Mexican and domestic

workers occurred despite the fact that the agreement between Canada and Mexico stipulated that Mexican workers were to be paid at the prevailing rate of pay above the minimum wage.

Like Basok's argument that local workers were reluctant to perform agricultural jobs in Ontario, evidence suggests that local workers in sugar beet country in southern Alberta were also reluctant to perform weeding and hoeing jobs in the sugar beet industry because it was labour intensive and paid low wages. However, while Mexican Mennonite workers in the industry in southern Alberta cannot be identified as unfree labour, following their arrival in southern Alberta many willingly worked long hours and performed sugar beet jobs that were labour intensive. Moreover, evidence suggests that migrant Mexican Mennonites who performed weeding and hoeing jobs in the sugar beet fields initially accepted a lower pay rate than Aboriginal crews.

Basok's (2002: 108-109) study also points out that although the Employment Standards Act stated that harvesters were entitled to receive paid public holidays and vacation pay if they performed the job for thirteen weeks, few Mexican workers ever received these benefits. She found that this problem stemmed from the distinction the Act made between farm workers and harvesters and that harvesters had to perform the work for thirteen weeks to be eligible for the benefits. Basok (2002: 109) argues that employers were able to avoid paying the benefits by assigning a combination of farm and harvesting work and by seldom keeping track of how long the workers performed each task. Although no information was provided on whether domestic workers received the benefits, Basok (2002: 109) states, "It is possible that with respect to the benefits paid to farm workers, Mexicans are as cheap as domestic workers."

Basok's argument that few Mexican workers in Ontario agricultural industries received benefits such as holiday and vacation pay has similarities to the lack of benefits paid to sugar beet workers in southern Alberta. Throughout much of the history of the sugar beet industry, federal and provincial labour laws excluded agricultural workers from receiving benefits such as vacation and holiday pay. Moreover, both Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite sugar beet workers who signed contracts to weed and hoe a specific acreage of beets were deemed self-employed which, in effect, exempted them, and anyone they hired to work the acreage, from unemployment insurance benefits. As in Basok's study, sugar beet growers in southern Alberta would be attracted to Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite migrant labour because exclusion from employee benefits would lower the cost of their labour power.

Basok's study found that Mexican labour was also attractive to employers because it overcame the difficulties they experienced in the recruitment process. As Basok (2002: 109) points out, Ontario's Mexican migrant workers are recruited by the Mexican Minister of Labour and by the Foreign Agricultural Resources Management Services (FARMS) in Canada. Employers of Mexican workers pay FARMS an administration fee of thirty-five dollars per contract worker. Although this fee may have been higher than the cost of recruiting domestic farm workers through Canadian agencies, employers found the system to be extremely valuable because it was efficient and because it was able to deliver workers to them when needed. Furthermore, contract hiring provided other important benefits in the recruitment process such as the recruitment of new workers through social networks that eliminated the need for advertisements while job vacancies were filled almost immediately with eager new

applicants (Basok, 2002: 109). In addition, network hiring provided employers with “pre-screened” workers who were “kept in line by those who have referred them and by others from the same community” (Basok, 2002: 110).

Efficiency of recruitment and availability when needed are also factors that attracted sugar beet growers in southern Alberta to Mexican Mennonite workers. However, in contrast to Basok’s study where Mexican workers were recruited and mobilized by the Mexican Minister of Labour and the FARMS program in Canada, Mexican Mennonite workers who migrated to southern Alberta did so without the assistance of the Mexican or Canadian states. In other words, migrant Mexican Mennonite workers recruited themselves, covered the costs of their transportation, and made themselves available to growers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry when their labour was needed; all of which would lower the cost of their recruitment and hence attract sugar beet growers to migrant Mexican Mennonite labour.

Basok (2002: 110) also pointed out that domestic and foreign farm workers in Ontario were not allowed to organize a workers’ union. As such, the lack of union representation meant the workers lacked the ability to strike to improve their working conditions, which reduced labour unrest and, in turn, lowered the cost of labour for employers. Nevertheless, Basok (2002: 110) characterized Mexican workers as “more docile than many domestic workers:” they did not talk back to their employers, and they accepted their working conditions without complaining. As Basok (2002: 110-112) explained, Mexican workers were docile and accepted their working conditions because if they complained about their *patrones* to consular officials they may end up receiving severe repercussions as officials did not want to get the farm owners in trouble and upset

enough to replace Mexican workers with workers from other countries. Moreover, Basok (2002: 112) found that Mexican workers accepted their working conditions and did not complain out of fear that they would not be recalled to work in Canada in the future. In Basok's (2002: 114) view, the conditions of Mexican agricultural workers in Canada were similar to other workers throughout the world who were not allowed to challenge their exploitative working conditions through the collective bargaining process that allows the use of workers' strikes. Under such conditions workers are left with little recourse to address their concerns other than hidden forms of resistance or protest such as "slow-downs, 'careless' work, theft, and self-inflicted accidents and sickness" (Cohen, 1987 cited by Basok, 2002: 114). However, even these forms of resistance, particularly work slow-downs, were difficult to sustain among Mexican seasonal workers because some workers refused to support them out of fear of losing their jobs or losing their chance to return to work in Canada (Basok, 2002: 114).

As in Basok's study, migrant Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite sugar beet workers in southern Alberta were non-unionized. The lack of union representation and consequently the lack of political power to bargain for better wages and working conditions were factors that would have lowered the costs of their labour and made them attractive to sugar beet growers. However, in contrast to Basok's finding that Ontario Mexican workers were docile because they feared the repercussions for agitation as unfree labour, this study finds that migrant Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite workers in Alberta were also docile but not because they feared repercussions for agitation as unfree labour. Instead, it will be argued that they were docile and compliant with the demands of their employers because, although both groups were free to circulate in the

labour market, few had the education or the skills needed to find employment in other areas of the economy.

In regards to Basok's point on hidden forms of resistance, this study will point out that Aboriginal workers protested their working conditions to their political leaders who, in turn, confronted the industry to address their concerns. However, evidence suggests that a practice among Mexican Mennonite workers to protest their working conditions and labour exploitation has been to "job jump."

As Basok (2002: 114) points out, two areas where Mexican workers were more costly to farmers than domestic workers were in the areas of transportation and housing. Although Ontario farmers often had to pay for the transportation costs of domestic workers from their communities or from out of the province to their sites of work, such costs were low in comparison to the costs of the airfares they had to pay to transport Mexican workers from Mexico to their sites of work. Basok (2002: 114-115) states, "In 1998 the cost of airfare for Mexican workers was \$697 and an additional \$150 had to be paid for their visas. Of the total cost of \$847 per worker, growers could recover \$575 by making regular deductions from the workers' pay cheques. In addition, employers were responsible for the costs of ground transportation from the Toronto airport to the farms." Besides the latter costs, farmers were required to provide workers with furnished homes. Many of the homes were equipped with appliances such as a stove, fridge, air conditioner and a washer and dryer. Since local domestic workers usually did not require worker housing, providing housing to Mexican workers was an added expense for farmers.

As this study will show, growers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry also covered the costs of housing for Aboriginal workers but not for their transportation.

However, the Canadian state shared the cost of housing for Aboriginal workers by providing grants to growers that covered 50 percent of the cost for improvements to migrant worker housing. Although growers provided housing to both migrant Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite workers that made them more expensive than local domestic labour, Mexican Mennonite workers offset the housing costs to growers by covering the costs of their transportation between their homes and the sugar beet industry.

Furthermore, many Mexican Mennonites soon became permanent residents and secured their own off-farm housing.

Basok's (2002: 115-116) study found that in comparison to domestic workers, the high costs associated with Mexican workers in Ontario's agricultural industries were offset when labour productivity and turnover rates were considered. For instance, Basok (2002: 116) argues that Mexican workers were able to accomplish the same amount of work that domestic workers did only in half the time. Moreover, the high turnover rates of domestic workers resulted in the loss of approximately 1 per cent of the total crop value; but with the use of Mexican workers crop loss was minimal because they tended to stay for the duration of their contracts.

In this study, evidence suggests that many sugar beet growers considered Mexican Mennonite workers more reliable in comparison to Aboriginal workers in the sugar beet industry. In contrast to Basok's study, however, the evidence also suggests that it is questionable whether Mexican Mennonite workers had lower turnover rates and were more productive in comparison to Aboriginal workers when it came to hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops.

Basok (2002: 117) also argues that agricultural employers in Ontario were

attracted to Mexican workers because they were able to co-opt certain Mexican workers and use them to increase the productivity of their Mexican labour force. Co-opted workers were usually those who had been with an employer for an extended period of time and could speak English. Their privileged position over other workers came with the understanding that they had certain obligations to the employer. For example, they would be expected to ensure that their co-workers would comply with the expectations of the employer and those who did not were to be reported. In essence, co-opted workers held power over other workers because at the end of the season employers consulted them on which workers should be recalled and which workers should not be recalled for the next season. Given that the number of labouring positions available in Canada for Mexican agricultural workers was limited, workers competed with each other to impress their boss in the hope that they would be name called for the next growing season (Basok, 2002: 117).

Basok's assertion that agricultural employers in Ontario were attracted to Mexican workers because they could co-opt certain workers and use them to increase productivity has parallels to co-opted workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. However, the way in which sugar beet growers used co-opted workers to increase worker productivity was accomplished differently than in Basok's study because migrant Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite workers were not recruited through a foreign labour program where officials could threaten their jobs if they didn't comply with the demands of their employers. In the sugar beet industry, growers used preferential treatment to co-opt workers they considered hardworking and reliable. Preferential treatment usually ensured that the co-opted workers would return to the same grower each season and that

they would carry out the grower's demands efficiently. Moreover, since it was usually co-opted workers who signed a contract or came to a verbal agreement with growers to cultivate a specific acreage of sugar beets, they were in charge of hiring workers to complete the job which also gave them the power to ensure that the workers carried out the demands of the growers by fulfilling the requirements of the contract. In many cases the co-opted worker hired his extended family members, a practice that further ensured the compliance of the work crew to fulfill the requirements of the contracts. Thus, it is understandable that growers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry would be attracted to both migrant Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite labour since certain workers could be co-opted and used to increase productivity.

According to Basok (2002: 117), Mexican workers were also attractive to employers because they were reliable, committed and willing to work long hours when needed. For instance, Mexican workers complied with employer demands to work even though the agreement between Canada and Mexico for seasonal agricultural workers stipulated that after six consecutive days of work the employer had to give the workers a day of rest. As Basok (2002: 120) noted, employers were able to force the workers to comply with their demands to work beyond six consecutive days without a day of rest because a clause in the agreement stated, "where the urgency to finish farm work cannot be delayed, the employer may request the workers' consent to postpone that day until a mutually agreeable date" (Basok, 2002: 120).

As stated previously, a stereotype of Aboriginal workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry was that they were unreliable workers. Mexican Mennonite workers, however, were viewed as relatively more reliable than Aboriginal workers, committed to

agricultural work and accustomed to working long hours under the hot summer sun. As this study will argue, one of the reasons for the transition of labour in the sugar beet industry was because growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers who were characterized as more reliable than Aboriginal workers.

As noted previously, Basok's study points out that employers in Ontario's agricultural industry were attracted to Mexican workers because they complied with their demands to work whenever they were needed out of the fear that non-compliance would result in their expulsion from the labour program by the Mexican Ministry of Labour. In addition to the latter threat to the workers, Basok (2002: 120) points out that farmers were asked to provide a report on each worker at the end of the season and then place the report in a sealed envelope. The letter was then given to the worker who delivered it to a *licenciado* at the *Secretaria* upon arrival in Mexico. If the report characterized the worker as lazy, rebellious or unwilling to work upon demand, chances were that the worker would not be recalled to work in Canada for the next growing season.

Although workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry were not under the threat of expulsion from their jobs by state officials as in Basok's study, in the 1960s the National Employment Service (NES) and the sugar beet industry introduced a card system that recorded information on Aboriginal workers such as work efficiency, number of years in sugar beet work, medical clearance and previous employers. Although no direct evidence was found that indicates growers used the cards as a means to avoid hiring Aboriginal workers who were considered lazy or troublesome, it is reasonable to assume that they were intended for such a purpose. Moreover, it seems reasonable to argue that the card system would have been used by growers as documented evidence to

show advocates of Aboriginal workers, such as officials of the Indian Affairs Branch and First Nations leaders, that many Aboriginal workers were lazy and unreliable which would bolster their case in hiring Mexican Mennonite as opposed to Aboriginal workers.

Basok (2002: 123) noted that another reason Mexican workers in Ontario's agricultural industry complied with the demands of their employers was that they had no social life outside of work. Since the workers had left their families behind and they had no commitments outside of work, most were willing to put all their energy into work in order to make enough money to return home and live comfortably. In contrast, both Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry had social lives outside of their jobs. In the case of Aboriginal workers, many migrated to the sugar beet fields with their extended families and while in the fields came into contact with acquaintances from other reserves and communities. As for Mexican Mennonite workers, a reason many of them migrated to southern Alberta was because they had relatives who lived in the area or because they knew other Mexican Mennonites who had migrated to the area to work in agricultural industries. Although these groups had a social life outside of their jobs, this did not mean their productivity decreased. In fact, some argue that a social life with family and friends outside of their jobs added to the stability of the workers that increased worker productivity.

Finally, Basok's (2002: 124) study found that paternalistic relationships developed between Mexican workers and their employers that functioned to reinforce worker loyalty to their employers and their commitment to their work. Paternalistic relationships can take many forms such as the provision of housing, credit, provision of transportation and sponsorship of festivities, coverage of medical expenses, favours and

rewards. In Ontario's agricultural industry Basok (2002: 124) found that employees used an array of paternalistic tactics that included the provision of worker housing next to employer housing, the provision of weekly shopping trips for workers, the coverage of medical expenses when workers were sick and the use of employer telephone. In some instances employers even learned Spanish and worked alongside their Mexican employees. Moreover, Basok (2002: 125) found that the isolation of the work environment and the housing arrangements caused Mexican workers to be excluded from community social life and as a result the paternalistic relationship between the workers and their employers was reinforced because the employers and their families offered the workers the only opportunity for meaningful social interaction within Canadian society. Basok (2002: 125) concluded that the paternalistic relationships between Mexican workers and their employers functioned to create in the workers a personal commitment to their employers and their families and as a result whenever they were called upon to work, they felt obliged to do so.

Again, Basok's argument that employers in Ontario's agricultural industry used paternalistic relationships to reinforce Mexican worker loyalty and commitment to their jobs has similarities to this study. In particular, this study will show that the Canadian state, growers, and the officials of the sugar beet industry used paternalistic and coercive measures designed to render workers compliant with the demands of their employers.

In sum, Basok (2002: 126) argued that the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program provided Ontario employers of farm labour with a captive labour force. Workers in this labour force were not free to leave their jobs and they were available for work on demand. As such, the workers provided farmers not only with the ability to survive but to

expand their economic operations. As farmers understood, however, migrant Mexican workers were valuable to them because they were not free to quit. Moreover, they realized if Mexican workers were allowed to become permanent residents in Canada, farmers would lose the advantages these workers provided (Basok, 2002: 126).

The review of the literature also found that Rick Mines (2002) analyzed what he referred to as “ethnic shifting” in agricultural sectors in eastern United States. In doing so, he provides valuable insights for this study on why ethnic shifts or transitions occur in agricultural sectors, particularly in labour-intensive agricultural sectors.

Mines noted that while employment levels in farm production in the United States has remained relatively steady since the early 1970s the composition of the labour force has been constantly shifting where one group of migrant workers has been replaced by another. Such shifts, Mines (2002: 42) argues, “have contributed to the maintenance of very low wages and poor working conditions, since the newly arrived groups have consistently been willing to accept low wages that more settled groups would reject” (Mines, 2002: 42). Mines (2002: 42) also asserts that labour standards are undermined because “the newcomers have lower costs, since their families live in cheaper economies abroad and [because] they are unfamiliar with US labour protections.” Furthermore, Mines (2002: 43) found that the rapid shifts to foreign labour in agricultural sectors occur because poor working conditions fail to hold veteran US and foreign-born workers and because other low-wage jobs are available in the non-agriculture economy. Consequently, when experienced domestic and foreign-born workers leave agricultural jobs they are replaced by newly arrived foreign workers.

As Mines’ study found, the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite

workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry had the effect of lowering the growers' labour costs. That is, when growers hired new Mexican Mennonite workers instead of Aboriginal workers it reduced their labour costs because they were paid a starting hourly wage rate or, they were willing to accept a lower wage rate than Aboriginal workers would for performing the same job. This study will also show that indeed the working conditions for labour in the industry were generally poor. In fact, it will be pointed out in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the industry came under heavy criticism over the relatively poor working conditions of its Aboriginal workers, evidence suggests its response was to turn to the use of migrant Mexican Mennonite labour. Treatment of the latter group is far less of a political issue in Canada than treatment of Aboriginal people.

Mines also found that ethnic shifts in labour intensive agricultural sectors were linked to a decline in actual earnings over time. For example, in the United States during the 1990s data on farm workers indicated earnings stagnated and ranged between US\$5000 and US\$7500 (Mines, 2002: 43-44). These low incomes were due to low wages as well as the fact that many farm workers were not able to secure steady employment throughout the year.

Mines' argument that labour shifts in agricultural industries are linked to a decline in the actual earnings of workers does not seem to apply to the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. While it is true that during the period prior to the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the industry, the wages paid to Aboriginal workers for hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops were stagnant and well below those in comparable industries, Aboriginal labour crews were contented and would have

continued to have worked in the industry if they had been invited to do so.

Mines went on to argue that stagnant wages for farm workers in the United States was linked to guest worker programs. In particular, he argued that the Bracero program functioned to maintain low wages in agricultural sectors. Citing evidence from four California crops that were worked by Bracero labour from 1950 to 1974, Mines (2002: 45) found that the use of largely male-only guest workers “discouraged growers from raising wages” in spite of the fact that during this period there was a relative increase in real wages for production workers nationwide. However in 1965, a year after the Bracero program was terminated, the wages of workers in the agricultural sectors of California began to rise (Mines, 2002: 45). Still, Mines (2002: 47) points out that following the termination of the Bracero program the conditions of farm workers were “set largely by solo male newcomers who are willing and able to work for earnings below a sustainable wage.”

In contrast to Mines’ study, there were no guest programs in operation in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry during the period of transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour. Moreover, there were few single-male workers in the industry as most workers usually migrated to the sugar beet fields with their families.

In another study, L. Majka and T. Majka (1982: 5) agree with Mines’ assertion that ethnic shifts in agricultural labour forces occurred because farmers prefer a labour force characterized by low wages. However, they found that farmers also preferred a labour force that was relatively powerless. As such, farmers were able to control their labour force and undermine the demands of workers for higher wages and other rights. Commenting on ethnic shifts in agricultural areas in the United States during the 1970s,

Majka and Majka (1982: 5) state,

...in order to secure a labour force with the preferred characteristics, the growers have employed a succession of nonwhite minorities excluded from the predominantly white, urban based union movement. From 1870 to the present, Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans and Filipinos, to mention only the most numerous groups, have at different times dominated the agricultural labour force. At their first introduction to the fields, they served as a controllable work force. Contrary to their employers' expectations, however, when a homogeneous minority group became the dominant labour supply in certain types of harvest work, it began to organize, demand wage and other concessions, challenge the growers' control of working and employment conditions, and strike if it met grower intransigence.... When labour unrest and organization became widespread and the group no longer was the source of low wage, powerless labour, the large agricultural landowners attempted to undermine its dominant position in the agricultural labour force and hire another group to undercut the organized.

Although some workers from the displaced group remained in their labouring positions to compete with the workers from the incoming labour force, they maintained little of their former power. In effect, those workers who remained served to enhance the ethnic diversity of the labour force and thereby undermined successful worker organization as rivalry and distrust among ethnic factions hindered collective actions (Majka and T. Majka (1982: 5).

Similar to Majka and Majka's study where agricultural growers in the United States employed a succession of nonwhite minorities as a source of labour, growers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry have gone through a succession of sources of labour. However, these labour sources ranged from employing white immigrant groups in the pre- and post-Second World War periods, to employing Aboriginal groups, and recently to employing white Mexican Mennonites as seasonal workers. Similar to what was found in Majka and Majka's study, some workers from the displaced Aboriginal labour force remained in the industry and competed with Mexican Mennonite workers for labour positions after the more recent transition. However, no evidence was found that ethnic diversity of the labour force was a cause of distrust that undermined collective action for improved working conditions.

Another study that contains a number of similarities to this study is Avis Mysyk's (2000) study on commercial market gardening in Manitoba. Although Mysyk's (2000: ix) study examines how class, race and ethnic relations manifested themselves in commercial market gardening in Manitoba, it provides insights on the recent migration of Mexican Mennonites to western Canada and insights on how they came to displace Aboriginal workers in the commercial marketing gardening industry in Manitoba.

In addition, Mysyk's discussion on the function of the capitalist state warrants mention because it provides insights to labour force transitions. Borrowing from the Marxist perspective, Mysyk (2000: 11) argues that the state in a capitalist society functions to fulfill three main but contradictory functions. These include accumulation, legitimization and coercion. According to Mysyk (2000: 11), a contradiction in the function of the state became evident in the 1970s when the government refused to allow

the use of Mexican workers in commercial market gardening in Manitoba during periods of labour shortages. In other words, the state failed to create the conditions for capital accumulation. Mysyk (2000: 11-12) found that there were two reasons why government officials refused to allow the use of Mexican workers in the industry: firstly, officials blamed the farmers for the labour shortages because of their unwillingness to provide workers with adequate wages, housing and transportation; and secondly, officials found it hard to justify the use of Mexican workers at a time when unemployed domestic Aboriginal workers were available. Furthermore, state officials were concerned that the use of immigrant labour would strain race relations in Manitoba. Interestingly, in regards to this latter issue Mysyk (2000: 12) stated, “the ‘race relations’ problem in Manitoba came to manifest itself as blatant racism not towards Mexican but toward Indian farm workers, an odd twist on much of the literature which shows that immigrant, not domestic, labour is the target of racism.”

During the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, the state did not intervene to assist the industry. This is similar to Mysyk’s finding. The lack of state action in Alberta, however, was not because it failed to perform its accumulation function but rather because market mechanisms were sufficient to cause the transition. Moreover, in contrast to Mysyk’s study, this study will show that while Aboriginal workers were experiencing high unemployment rates, state officials in Alberta were not concerned that Mexican Mennonite workers were displacing them from the industry nor were they concerned that the transition of the labour force would strain race relations. In addition, evidence in this study reinforces the argument on racism found in Mysyk’s study. That is, this study will

argue that a race relation problem in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry manifested itself not against foreign-born Mexican Mennonite workers but instead against domestic Aboriginal workers in the sugar beet industry and racism served to justify the displacement of Aboriginal workers in the industry.

Mysyk's study also provides valuable information on how it came about that Mexican Mennonite workers were able to migrate from Mexico to southern Alberta outside of a state sanctioned foreign labour program. In the late 1800s, four sub-groups of Mennonites in Russia emigrated to Manitoba seeking group settlement, freedom of language and religion as well as exemption from military service. Within the first ten years of their arrival however, the government reneged on part of its agreement with the Mennonites in order to speed up assimilation of the group into Canadian society. Another problem the Mennonites experienced at the time was the scarcity of land in the colonies. Eventually, these problems caused many of the Mennonites to emigrate to Mexico (Mysyk, 2000: 43).

However, many of the Mennonites who moved to Mexico found life difficult. Moreover, once their population increased, the issue of access to land once again became a problem. Consequently, when the immigration laws were relaxed after the Second World War many Mexican Mennonites returned regularly (legally or illegally) to Manitoba to seek work in agricultural sectors. As well, those Mexican Mennonites who were born in 1947 or later to Canadian parents were allowed to apply for Canadian citizenship (Mysyk, 2000: 44). As a result, by 1966 many Mexican Mennonites were traveling over "2000 miles nonstop to work on sugar beets and potato farms at minimum wage or less in southwestern Manitoba" (Mysyk, 2000: 44).

In the late 1980s, Manitoba experienced another influx of returnee immigrant Mexican Mennonites who were escaping Mexico's poor economy and the possibility of conscription into the Mexican military. As Mysyk (2000: 45) pointed out, it was estimated that in 1986 there were 416, in 1987, 461 and, in 1988, 535 Mexican Mennonite returnees to Manitoba (Mysyk, 2000: 45). Many of the returnees found work on potato or sugar beet farms and formed a "cheap and eager labour pool" (Mysyk, 2000: 45).

As in Mysyk's study, this study will show that migrant Mexican Mennonite workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry share a similar history to those Mexican Mennonites who migrated to Manitoba during the late 1980s. In particular, this study will show that Mexican Mennonite workers migrated to southern Alberta specifically seeking agricultural work that they were willing to perform at low wage levels.

In discussing the Canada-Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program implemented by the federal government in 1974 to deal with labour shortages in agricultural areas in Canada, Mysyk's study provides insights on why commercial market gardeners in Manitoba were attracted to Mexican workers. According to Mysyk (2000: 46), commercial market gardeners in Manitoba defined "labour shortage" as a shortage of "skilled" workers who had experience with machinery and, a shortage of "unskilled" workers who were accustomed to stoop labour. It also referred to workers who were trustworthy, reliable, and motivated. Most importantly however, it referred to workers who would be willing to accept less than competitive wages (Mysyk, 2000: 46). Furthermore, Mysyk (2000: 52-55) noted that growers in Manitoba tended to prefer

Mexican workers as opposed to domestic Aboriginal workers because they were better adapted to menial work; they were driven by poverty; they needed less supervision than domestic labour; they could be used to fulfill a number of tasks; and, they possessed a strong work ethic. However, Mysyk's (2000: 52) study noted that a reason Mexican workers portrayed a strong work ethic was because they "had to produce or they were sent back." Moreover, the study also pointed out that Mexicans had no choice in working twelve hours a day, seven days a week because they were a "captive labour force" (Mysyk, 2000: 55-56).

Mysyk's study reiterates many of the points already addressed in this literature review concerning the reasons why agricultural employers are attracted to unfree Mexican migrant workers. Mysyk's argument that labour shortage in the commercial market gardening industry in Manitoba meant a shortage of skilled workers who had experience with machinery is relevant to my research. It is noteworthy that the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the sugar beet industry occurred at the same time that it was investing in new technologies and required a much higher proportion of skilled workers. Nevertheless, this study will show that during the period of the transition there were many skilled Aboriginal workers available for employment. Hence, this study will argue that the lack of Aboriginal workers to fill skilled positions in the industry was not a determining factor in the transition.

Finally, the theory of the "split labour market" (Bonacich, 1972; Howell, 1982; Rodriguez, 2004) provides important insights for understanding transitions in labour forces. Bonacich (1972: 549) argues that for a split labour market to exist, "a labour market must contain at least two groups of workers whose price of labour differs for the

same work, or would differ if they did the same work.” She (1972: 549) defines the concept “price of labour” as the total cost of labour to the employer including wages, cost of recruitment, transportation, accommodations, food, education, healthcare (if covered by the employer) and the costs of labour unrest. She (1972: 549) goes on to state, “the degree of worker ‘freedom’ does not interfere with this calculation.” Hence, in a split labour market, capitalists will shift to hiring the cheaper group of workers because of the potential to increase profit margins (Howell: 1982: 132).

Bonacich (1972: 549) points out that when a new labour group enters a labour market and splits it, this also creates a dynamic that may initially affect the price of labour in the market. These initial factors can be divided into two categories: resources and motives. Within the category of resources there are three factors that determine the initial price of labour. The first factor is the level of living, or the economic resources, of the newly arrived ethnic group. That is, it is generally the case that members of an economically impoverished ethnic group leave their territory or country and move to another territory or to a foreign country where they enter a labour market to raise their wage level. However, the extreme poverty they experienced in their home territory or country may cause them to sell their labour power relatively cheap in the new labour market. Nevertheless, Bonacich (1972: 550) notes that members of the newly arrived labour group may not have to sell their labour power cheaply for long because other options may be available where they can raise their income levels. A second factor is that the initial price of labour may be determined by the newly arrived group’s lack of information. For instance, immigrants may be induced in their home country to sign a contract that specifies they will be paid a certain wage level without knowing the

prevailing wage level for the work in the new country. As such, when a labour market is split this can depress the price of labour. A third factor that can determine the initial price of labour in a split labour market is the lack of political resources. For instances, migrant groups which receive little or no protection from their government while in another country are politically weak and thus vulnerable to being forced to accept low wages. As Bonacich (1972: 550) explains, “The price of a labour group varies inversely with the amount of force that can be used against it, which in turn depends on its political resources.”

Bonacich (1972: 550) identifies two motives that determine the price of labour both of which are related to the worker’s intentions of not remaining in the labour force (i.e. seasonal agricultural workers). Temporary workers generally cost less than permanent workers for two reasons. First, such workers, even when they take along their families, are usually willing to tolerate poor working conditions because the work is short term. Second, temporary workers avoid joining unions or lengthy labour disputes because of the short duration of their work. In fact, they are more concerned with immediate employment and as such they are prone to under cut wage rates in order to secure work (Bonacich: 1972: 551).

The first motive Bonacich (1972: 551) identifies that determines the price of labour is what she refers to as the “fixed or supplemental income goal.” In this instance temporary workers secure work in the market to supplement their family income and to earn money to purchase a specific item or to make a payment on something. Bonacich (1972: 551) finds that this motive has a “general depressing effect on wages” and leads to a rapid turnover rate of workers that undermines labour organization and the development

of skills that could be used for bargaining purposes.

The second motive Bonacich (1972: 551) identifies is what she refers to as “fortune seeking.” These migrants, or sojourners, travel great distances in order to seek their fortune so that they can improve their position in their homeland. Consequently, they are “more willing to work for less than the prevailing wage, to put in longer hours, and to endure more hardship...and they are less likely to become involved in lengthy labour disputes or other long term commitments” (Howell: 1982: 132). Bonacich (1972: 551) argues that because sojourners are willing to accept a wage lower than the prevailing rate this enables them to get a foothold in the labour market. Furthermore, Bonacich (1972: 551) points out sojourners are willing to endure long hours of work, which in turn saves their employers the costs of a special overtime labour force. Consequently, employers become attracted to sojourners and as a result this may lead to the displacement of other workers.

Bonacich’s (1972: 552) theory of a split labour market also argues that immigrant groups are able to develop political resources with employers through a high degree of community organization. That is, through community organization the immigrant group is able to develop political resources with their employers by assisting them in the recruitment of labour, ensuring that work is done properly and by providing workers with food and accommodations, particularly when seasonal workers are laid off for an extended period.

Split labour market theory also considers how differences in skills affect the price of labour. According to Bonacich (1972: 552), in a split labour market differences in the skills of workers do not lead to a difference in price for the same work. She (1972: 552)

states, “While a skilled worker may be able to get a higher paying job, an unskilled labourer of another ethnicity may be trained to fill that job for the same wage. Skills are only indirectly important in that they can be used to develop political resources, which in turn may lead to a difference in wage level for the same work.”

Another interesting aspect of the split labour market theory that has implications for this study is its consideration of how ethnic differences impact on the price of labour. Bonacich (1972: 552) points out that groups of people who have lived separately or who are from different countries develop different employment motives and levels of resources. As a result, between groups the factors that affect the price of labour differ significantly although there may be some overlap. However, in regards to how physical characteristics or skin colour affects the price of labour Bonacich (1972: 552) states, “Colour differences in the initial price of labour only seem to be a factor because resources have historically been roughly correlated with colour around the world. When colour and resources are not correlated in the ‘expected’ way, then I would predict price follows resources and motives rather than colour.” Bonacich (1972: 553) goes on to point out that when a cheaper labour group is introduced to a labour market and splits it, the higher paid group feels threatened that it will be forced to leave the territory or that it will be reduced to the level of the cheaper group. However, Bonacich argues that the latter antagonisms between the higher paid group and the cheap labour group do not constitute ethnic antagonism. She (1972: 553) states that when a labour market is split ethnically, “the class antagonism takes the form of ethnic antagonism. It is my contention that, while much rhetoric of ethnic antagonism concentrates on ethnicity and race, it really in large measure...expresses this class conflict.”

In a split labour market the displacement of high priced labour can occur in a number of ways. One way is where two groups are performing the same tasks but one group can be paid less. Eventually the cheaper labour group displaces the other (Bonacich, 1972: 554). Another way is when mechanization is introduced or increased in the production process (Howell, 1982: 132).

A final point that warrants mention in regards to the split labour market approach is “citizenship status” (i.e. citizens, documented aliens and undocumented aliens). Thomas (1985: 27) argues that employers are able to use the undocumented status of workers, such as undocumented Mexican agricultural workers in the U. S., to their advantage in the labour process. For instance, because undocumented workers are politically vulnerable, employers are able to train or employ them as skilled workers (i.e. non-unionized) and still maintain control over the labour process. In addition, competition between undocumented and documented workers for higher paid work undermines their common organization against their employers. As well, employers use undocumented workers to increase the rate of productivity of all workers (Thomas, 1985: 116-117).

In regards to the split labour market theory, this study will show that when Mexican Mennonites entered the southern Alberta sugar beet industry and took up positions formerly held by Aboriginal workers, they split the labour market. Furthermore, evidence will be provided that indicates Mexican Mennonites who migrated to southern Alberta were impoverished and thus they took up positions in the sugar beet industry to raise their wage level. As such, many Mexican Mennonites initially sold their labour power relatively cheap. Also, evidence will be presented that indicates Mexican

Mennonites who migrated to work in the sugar beet fields lacked information on the prevailing wages for the same work performed by Aboriginal workers.

This study will also show that Mexican Mennonites were a benefit to employers because initially many were sojourners who were willing to endure poor working conditions, work long hours, avoid union activities and under cut wages. Moreover, evidence will be presented that shows Mexican Mennonites were able to develop political resources with employers through assisting them in the recruitment of other Mexican Mennonite workers that essentially screened the workers to ensure they held a strong work ethic. In addition, this study will show that Mexican Mennonites developed political resources with their employers by recreating their close community lifestyle they enjoyed in their Mexican colonies. It will also be argued in this study that Mexican Mennonites were initially willing to accept a lower wage for performing skilled jobs, which in turn increased their political resources with their employers.

This study will show that the skin colour of Mexican Mennonites does not correlate to the price of labour in the expected way. As such, it will be argued it is their lack of resources and their motives that are the main factors in the initial price of their labour in the sugar beet industry. As well, this study will argue that little or no class antagonisms developed between Mexican Mennonite and Aboriginal workers when the former group moved to southern Alberta and split the labour market in the sugar beet industry. Nevertheless, evidence will be provided that suggests ethnic antagonisms may be developing between Mexican Mennonites and some growers who are stereotyping Mexican Mennonites as a means to justify paying them low wages.

Most importantly, however, this study will agree with split labour market theory

that two prominent reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the sugar beet industry included: the increase of mechanization and Mexican Mennonites workers were initially paid less than Aboriginal workers.

In the case of the citizenship status, it will be demonstrated that most Mexican Mennonites who migrated to southern Alberta were able to claim Canadian citizenship rights. Thus, they are unlike undocumented workers who can be easily taken advantage of by their employers because of their political vulnerability. In essence, the dual citizenship of Mexican Mennonites is what Ong (2004) describes as “flexible citizenship.” This refers to people who have citizenship in more than one country, which provides them with certain advantages. Hence, this study will argue that Mexican Mennonites were able to use their flexible citizenship to their advantage and also to the advantage of their employers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry.

The above section of the literature review surveyed studies that analyzed the factors linked to transitions of labour forces in agricultural industries. The next section of the literature review will focus on how one group of workers is displaced by another group of workers in agricultural industries.

How Transitions in Labour Forces in Agricultural Industries Are Accomplished

The review of the literature found that Galarza’s (1964) study on the use of Bracero labour in California’s agricultural sectors provides a number of insights on how the transition process from one specific group to another is accomplished by employers of farm labour.

As Galarza points out, the Bracero (literally means “arms” or hand labour for hire) program was negotiated between Mexico and the United States and implemented between 1942 and 1964. It allowed Mexican migrants to legally enter the United States under special contract for short-term labour. The Bracero program was initially established to meet the demands for labour in the agricultural areas of the western United States during the Second World War. However, it was extended because of the demand for this type of labour in agricultural industries (Galarza, 1964: 9). The program stipulated that Mexican labour was to be used exclusively in agriculture, that the onus was on the employer to prove beyond doubt that the labour was needed and that the workers were not to be used to displace domestic workers (Galarza, 1964: 47).

Bracero workers became so favored by agricultural employers in California they were welcomed by bands, parades, dining, and speeches. In addition, Mexican holidays were observed where barbecues were held at the expense of growers and townsmen. Such goodwill was stimulated in employers because they saw Bracero labour as ideal labour. That is, they saw Mexican labour as a flexible group of workers that could be readily moved from operation to operation and from place to place when labour was needed to save the crops. Coupled with these attributes was the fact that employers saw Bracero labour as a group of workers that could be sent home when they were no longer needed (Galarza, 1964: 55).

Galarza (1964: 158-59) argues that the use of Bracero labour effectively undercut the prevailing wages employers paid to domestic labour in agricultural areas. Hence, farmers preferred to hire the low wage Mexican labour as opposed to the higher paid domestic labour. Nevertheless, domestic workers fought against being displaced by

Mexican workers. However, farmers were able to use a number of means to ensure that Mexican labour prevailed.

According to Galarza, one way that farmers controlled the seasonal migratory labour market was through the creation of farm labour associations. During the early 1900s, the associations were formed to address the needs for labour recruitment and labour pool maintenance (Galarza, 1964: 37). In 1950, the Farm Placement Service of the California Department of Employment gave the associations control over job referrals of both Mexican and domestic workers. During this period, the associations “made it clear that they were organized to negotiate for and recruit [B]racero labour exclusively” (Galarza, 1964: 159). As a result, association control over agriculture referrals proved to be an effective means of dominating domestic labour.

Galarza’s study also pointed out that farm labour associations were able to break up crews of domestics that applied for work as groups by systematically dispersing individuals to different areas. This had the effect of breaking down domestic worker solidarity and common interests. Moreover, this tactic had the effect of disrupting car pools, separating families and demoralizing the workers (Galarza, 1964: 160). Once the associations applied such tactics, statistics were then compiled on domestic workers to be used as ammunition in the campaign to discredit them. In particular, individual user members of the associations were told to keep detailed records of domestic referrals consisting of the length of time each worker stayed on the job and the reasons for the worker’s departure. Consequently, records were compiled that indicated domestic workers departed for such reasons as “refused piece work, left town, can’t take it, work too hard, bad feet, quit, fired for fighting, drunk, in jail, failed to report” (Galarza, 1964:

161). The data compiled by the associations was sent to the California Growers Farm Labour Committee to be tabulated in the research conducted on farm labour. According to Galarza (1964: 161), “the purpose of these statistics was...to dispose of the domestics on alleged proof that they were unstable, unreliable and untrustworthy as a labour force.”

Although the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta never had farm labour associations that controlled job referrals as in Galarza’s study, this study will provide a discussion on the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers Association (ASBGA) that represented sugar beet growers and point out its role in the area of labour recruitment and in the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the industry. In addition, this study will discuss the role of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in securing employment for migrant Mexican Mennonites in the sugar beet industry, which in effect furthered the displacement of Aboriginal workers. Similar to Galarza’s argument on the purpose of association worker statistics, this study will point out that a card system was used by the industry and the National Employment Service to compile information on domestic Aboriginal workers that, evidence suggests, was used to discredit them as unreliable labour.

Galarza’s study goes on to point out that employers were able to circumvent the rules guaranteeing the employment of domestic workers through a number of hiring practices. For instance, some employers simply told domestic workers that no work was available. Others told domestic workers that black peat land was extremely irritating to most fair skinned people. As well, domestic workers were told that the job called for continuous fast pace walking or, that daily shifts lasted ten hours and there was no family housing available. In addition, employers harassed domestic workers by stringently

checking their work and by requiring them to fill out forms that asked whether they had ever been on county relief. Employers also asked why they had left previous jobs and whether they were aware that an employee could be arrested for stealing farm tools (Galarza, 1964: 206-07). The purpose of these tactics was clear; they were meant to force domestic workers to stop applying for farm jobs or to make them quit their jobs which, in turn, would reinforce the argument of the employers that domestic labour was unreliable labour (Galarza, 1964: 207).

As this study will show, some of the points raised in Galarza's study on how employers were able to discourage domestic workers from applying for farm jobs, touches on similar tactics used by growers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry during the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers. Nevertheless, there is no evidence of a concerted campaign of harassment like that described by Galarza.

In another study on ethnic shifting in agricultural sectors, Mines (1997) analyzed how crop employers on the East Coast of United States shifted from domestic labour to Mexican and Guatemalan-born labour. Mines' study points out that the shift to Hispanic labour began with initiation of the Bracero program in California's agricultural sectors. Consequently, Mines (1997: 2) argues, from the 1960s and into the 1990s ethnic shifting spread to the rest of the United States through networks of legal and undocumented workers.

Mines argues that employers were able to progressively shift the ethnic composition of their labour force by designating specific tasks to the new ethnic group as opposed to the domestic labour group. The shift to a new ethnic group began when employers found it convenient or preferable to hire foreigners to perform harvesting

tasks. Next, employers utilized foreigners to do pre-harvest tasks such as hoeing, thinning and transplanting. At the same stage, employers moved to hire foreigners to do their semi-skilled longer-term tasks. A further shift took place when the post-harvest tasks of packing and shipping were performed by foreign instead of domestic workers. The final shift occurred when some employers hired foreign workers instead of domestic workers for supervisory jobs (Mines, 1997: 2).

As Mines argues, this study will argue that the shift in the composition of the labour force in southern Alberta's sugar beet industry from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers proceeded in stages. In particular, this study will argue that the shift began when sugar beet growers assigned Mexican Mennonites hoeing and weeding jobs formerly done by Aboriginal workers and was completed when growers hired Mexican Mennonite workers to perform skilled jobs such as operating machinery.

Mines' study also argues that labour markets have been segmented where different ethnic groups have dominated different segments during different periods. For instance, during the early 1900s in agricultural areas of southern Michigan migrant workers consisted mainly of southern Blacks. Next, however, farmers shifted to Tex-Mex families. Finally, a shift was made to the use of male Mexican migrants from Florida and Mexico (Mines, 1997: 6).

The labour segmentation Mines' study refers to is also evident in the history of the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. That is, during the first half of the 1900s the industry went through a succession of labour sources from First Nations and local workers to European immigrant workers to the use of internment Japanese and German prisoners of war. Beginning in the early 1950s, the industry moved to hire Aboriginal

workers from northern parts of Saskatchewan and Alberta and recently, it turned to hiring Mexican Mennonite workers.

Mines' study concluded by citing a number of reasons why employers shifted from a domestic to a Mexican labour force. The reasons were that employers preferred Mexican workers because "most were men, young, homogeneous, uncomplaining, already screened for the best workers and willing to commit themselves to whatever task without being distracted by family obligations" (Mines, 1997: 9). Moreover, a very attractive incentive for employers to hire Mexican workers was the fact that the workers used their own earnings to cover the cost of the system used for their recruitment. The study also concluded that the use of Mexican workers benefited employers because it kept "wages and other working conditions very low in the farm labour sector" (Mines, 1997: 11).

Of the reasons that Mines' study cites for the shift from domestic to Mexican labour on the Eastern Coast of the United States, three are relevant to my study: the new ethnic group was homogeneous, covered the costs of its recruitment, and kept wages and working conditions low.

Summary of the Review of the Literature

The literature review undertaken for this dissertation has provided many insights into the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. In particular, it shows that the phenomenon of transitions in labour forces in agricultural industries is complex and linked to a number of

factors.

For the purposes of this study, the literature review indicated that capitalist development and accumulation structures the demand for labour in agricultural industries. Historically, agricultural industries suffered labour shortages as capitalist development and accumulation attracted workers to urban industries with the promise of higher wages and better working conditions than agricultural jobs could offer. As a result, agricultural industries experienced problems in the recruitment and retention of sufficient domestic labour for production purposes. These labour problems were exacerbated by the high costs farmers had to pay for farm inputs, the low price they received for their crops, and the cheap food policies of the state. These latter circumstances manifested themselves in low wages and poor working conditions that made agricultural jobs even less attractive to potential farm workers. Consequently, many employers of farm labour sought to address their labour problems by hiring foreign-born workers to perform the labour formerly done by domestic workers. Farmers were attracted to foreign-born workers because they were cheap, reliable, and docile. Foreign-born workers were cheap because they performed farm jobs at lower wages than domestic workers. They were reliable and docile because of the threat of not being recalled to work during the next growing season if they did not comply with the demands of their employers. Also, the split labour market theory provides important insights on why transitions from one group of workers to another occur. In particular, the theory explains how when a group enters a labour market and splits it, the price of labour of the group entering the labour market is a major cause for the transition from one group to the new group.

For the purposes of this study, the literature review also provided important

insights on how transitions in the composition of labour forces are managed by employers of farm labour. It was argued that an effective means of displacing domestic workers with foreign workers was through labour associations that functioned to undermine domestic worker solidarity through such tactics as gathering data on domestic workers that discredited their reliability. Moreover, employers were able to accomplish the transitions through a number of tactics such as informing domestic workers that no work was available, that no worker housing was available, and by stringently checking the work they performed. It was also found that employers were able to accomplish the transitions by assigning the incoming workers specific tasks in the production process and then incrementally assigning more of the tasks until the incoming group dominated the production process and supervisory positions thereby rendering the domestic labour force redundant.

The next chapter will present a discussion on Rogers Sugar Ltd located in Taber, Alberta. The purpose of the discussion is twofold: first, to provide an understanding of how the Rogers Sugar interfaces with sugar beet growers and second, to point out that Rogers Sugar was acutely interested in the growers' plight to secure sufficient labour because its level of production depended on the growers securing sufficient labour for the production of sugar beets.

Chapter 3: The Southern Alberta Sugar Beet Industry

Introduction

A purpose of this chapter is to provide background information that will help in understanding various aspects of the sugar beet industry discussed in subsequent chapters. The chapter starts with a brief discussion on the class structure of the industry and where sugar beets are grown in southern Alberta. It then provides a discussion on how sugar beets are grown, cultivated and harvested. It also provides a brief historical overview of the establishment of the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta. Next, the chapter provides a discussion on the organization that was created by growers to protect their interests in the sugar beet industry, currently known as the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers (ASBG). Following the latter discussion, the chapter points out the various labour forces that have been employed in the industry over the years in order to demonstrate that transitions in the industry's labour force were not uncommon. The chapter concludes by briefly pointing out the use of Aboriginal workers in the industry during the mid-1900s.

Where and How Sugar Beets Are Produced in Southern Alberta

As I pointed out in my M. A. thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 38), the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta can be characterized as consisting of three classes. At the top of the class structure there is BC Sugar based in Vancouver, British Columbia. Rogers Sugar Ltd, located in Taber, is a subsidiary of BC Sugar. In essence, BC Sugar holds a

monopoly over sugar production in western Canada and it controls the indispensable means of making and marketing the finished product. Moreover, it has remained the only buyer of sugar beets for the entire harvest of southern Alberta growers and this has allowed it to set the price it will pay for sugar beets.

Growers form the middle class in the structure of the industry. They enter into contracts with BC Sugar to deliver a specified quantity of beets with a certain predefined sugar content. Growers are then responsible for planting, fertilizing, and harvesting the sugar beets. Below, Table 1 indicates the number of farmers/growers who held contracts to produce sugar beet crops from 1954 to 2006 (ASGBA, 1954-83; ASBGMB, 1984-97; ASBG, 1998-2006). The number of growers who held a contract to produce a specific acreage of sugar beets in each year is, in general, consistent with the number of farms involved in sugar beet production for that year. Table 1 also indicates the total acreage contracted and the tonnage harvested for each year (ASGBA, 1954-83; ASBGMB, 1984-97; ASBG, 1998-2006). In addition, Table 1 shows that by the early 1980s the number of growers who produced sugar beets decreased significantly. Moreover, this decrease continued until currently an average of 250 growers produce sugar beets each growing season. Nevertheless, Table 1 shows that although the number of growers producing sugar beet crops each season decreased, the trend over the years has been an increase in the tonnage of beets harvested. This indicates that while fewer growers/farmers are producing beets each season, those that continue to do so are increasing the amount of land dedicated to growing beet crops.

Table 1: Number of Sugar Beet Farms/Growers, Acres Contracted and Tonnage Harvested in the Southern Alberta Sugar Beet Industry, 1954 to 2006.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Growers</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Tonnes</u>
1954	1577	37,500	442,607
1955	1610	38,466	430,143
1956	1583	38,747	464,421
1957	1550	37,868	492,870
1958	1568	39,037	601,201
1959	1539	35,325	474,768
1960	1551	42,493	545,559
1961	1520	41,979	525,425
1962	1459	45,579	532,605
1963	1432	44,586	580,306
1964	1440	43,500	526,982
1965	1369	43,556	504,109
1966	1265	41,264	575,513
1967	1177	40,975	434,080
1968	1101	41,109	596,196
1969	1034	40,989	576,611
1970	1029	38,040	523,502
1971	1014	43,610	684,293
1972	406	46,014	657,233
1973	923	43,018	580,165
1974	779	38,726	525,386
1975	863	45,986	488,259
1976	802	44,186	773,898
1977	792	35,464	543,718
1978	no data available	33,559	476,441
1979	705	33,793	499,734
1980	688	35,609	524,251
1981	685	35,405	715,082
1982	679	32,161	474,866
1983	656	32,354	569,846
1984	647	32,075	513,197
1985	-----No Sugar Beet Production-----		
1986	610	30,504	596,122
1987	609	29,983	564,814
1988	598	29,575	540,403
1989	563	30,619	499,061
1990	552	33,299	590,215
1991	551	33,260	634,949
1992	no data available	32,148	475,823
1993	no data available	33,088	542,253

1994	513	35,399	737,774
1995	492	34,506	688,498
1996	472	34,043	676,611
1997	465	33,467	650,423
1998	466	41,742	959,310
1999	490	44,965	839,773
2000	no data available	42,864	920,252
2001	no data available	30,501	523,110
2002	no data available	30,089	422,389
2003	no data available	28,807	628,081
2004	255	35,384	740,508
2005	248	34,302	668,141
2006	no data available	37,204	963,165

At the bottom of the class system in the sugar beet industry are the workers. Until recently, growers hired a large labour force on a seasonal contract basis to hoe and weed a specific acreage of beets. Although the details of the contracts often varied from season to season, they specified a fixed amount was to be paid for each stage of the job the workers completed.

Today, sugar beet growing country encompasses an area approximately seventy-five miles in diameter that extends from the town of Raymond in the south, north to Picture Butte and Iron Springs, east to the Bow Island area and north again to Vauxhall (see map, Appendix A). The town of Taber, where Rogers Sugar Ltd is located, is about 150 miles southeast of Calgary and near the center of the area. Also, on the southwest perimeter of the area and next to the Blood Indian Reserve, there is the city of Lethbridge. It is characterized by prosperity and offers most of the advantages of city living and hence it serves as the major shopping and entertainment centre for residents in sugar beet country.

Southern Alberta is known for its long hot summers and low annual levels of precipitation. However, the introduction of large-scale irrigation to the area in the early 1900s allowed a diversity of specialty crops to be grown (Gilpin, 2000: 15). As a result, southern Alberta became one of the most diversified agricultural regions in all of Canada. In particular, sugar beets became the crop of choice for many growers and before long they were grown in a wide region of southern Alberta.

The sugar beet is a deep-rooted biannual plant that produces sucrose (sugar) in its leaves during growth. After 40 – 50 days the sucrose is transported from the leaves and stored in the taproot. The amount of sugar that a beet will yield is related to the amount of sunlight it will intercept throughout the growing season. Sucrose accumulates as a result of photosynthesis but with the onset of cooler temperatures sucrose accumulation is enhanced. However, once the temperature reaches -4 or -5 degrees Celsius, sucrose accumulation stops. Depending on genetic and environmental factors, in the fall growers harvest sugar beets that contain 17% to 20% sucrose (*Rogers Sugar Ltd*, nd: 13).

In southern Alberta, sugar beets are grown under irrigation. The land is prepared for growing sugar beets by irrigating in the fall to ensure good soil moisture and conditions for seed germination in the spring. Sugar beet seeds are planted no deeper than 3.8 centimeters in the soil. Sugar production is maximized by limiting the plant population of each acre to 35,000 plants with 150 plants per 100 feet of row on a 22-inch spacing. Seeding is normally done from mid-April to mid-May using precision planters. Through technological advances in equipment, irrigation methods and scheduling, herbicides, seed protectants, and monogerm seeds, growers have greatly enhanced their ability to achieve the required plant population. Also, all sugar beet seeds are produced

and processed in Oregon “where the crop can be over-wintered and induced naturally to produce seed stalks the following spring” (*Rogers Sugar Ltd*, nd: 14).

Weed growth among the sugar beet plants is controlled by cultural practices and chemical weed control practices. Weed control begins in the fall when the land is prepared. The working of the land and irrigating in the fall creates favorable conditions for many weed seeds to germinate. However, these weed seedlings are destroyed by the frost. In the spring, the growth of weeds is controlled by inter-row cultivation. Then, once the beets are larger the soil between the rows can be moved against the beet by the cultivator to smother the weed seedlings in the rows. Weeds can also be controlled by chemical weed controls. This is achieved by pre-plant and post emergence applications of herbicides such as BETAMIX, POAST, NORTRON, LONTREL, UP-BEET, RONEET, and AVADDEX (*Rogers Sugar Ltd*, nd: 14).

Although insects damage sugar beet crops, agronomic practices that normally maximize yields also minimize insect damage. The insects that usually cause damage to beet crops are root maggots, leaf minors, flea beetles, webworms, cutworms and wireworms. With the exception of root maggots however, all of these insects can be controlled by insecticides and are not normally a serious problem in southern Alberta. But, sugar beet nematodes, which are small parasitic organisms, can cause severe damage to sugar beet crops. These organisms can be controlled through chemical controls but since they are costly, in general, they are not used in Alberta. The only practical method of control of the organisms is proper crop rotation. In Alberta, sugar beet growers are only allowed to plant sugar beets in the same field once every four years (*Rogers Sugar Ltd*, nd: 14).

Harvesting of sugar beets usually starts in early September and continues throughout October. As a result of its growth, the taproot of the sugar beet plant weighs 1 to 2 kilograms with a diameter of 10 to 20 centimeters and a length of 20 to 40 centimeters. The beets are harvested mechanically in a two-stage operation. The first operation removes the top growth by one of two methods. If the tops are to be used for cattle feed, topping machines are used to cut the tops off four to six rows of beets that are then piled in windrows. The tops can be left in the field where cattle can graze on them or they can be placed in silos. The second method of top removal is referred to as defoliation. In this method defoliators beat the tops off roots and leave them shredded between the rows. The shredded beet tops are then incorporated back into the soil after the harvest. The second stage of the harvesting operation entails digging up the roots. This stage is done by the use of mechanical lifters that can dig from two to six rows at a time. The roots are then placed on a conveyor belt with a series of rollers that remove loose dirt before they are placed in a truck and hauled to a Company receiving station.

At the stations the beets are weighed while in the truck and unloaded using special equipment that further washes and cleans the beets to remove soil and other trash. The cleaned beets are then placed in a large storage pile. The soil and trash removed from the beets are then replaced in the producer's truck that is then reweighed. Thus, the difference in the weight between the first weighing and the second weighing after the beets were cleaned is the gross weight of the beets delivered. The beets remain in the storage piles until they are transported to the factory for processing (*Rogers Sugar Ltd*, nd: 15).

As indicated above, today the production of sugar beet crops is highly technological and mechanized. Until recently, however, this was not the case as sugar beet production was labour intensive and required a large labour force. For instance, until the use of chemical weed controls became widespread in the industry, a large labour force was required for weeding and hoeing sugar beets.

The Historical Background of the Sugar Beet Industry

The idea to establish a sugar beet industry in southern Alberta was first conceived by Jesse Knight, a Latter Day Saint (Mormon) and wealthy entrepreneur from Provo, Utah, and Charles A. Magrath, a land agent for a British syndicate that owned Canadian Northwest Irrigation Company (later acquired by Canadian Pacific). In 1901, Knight sent his sons, Will and Raymond, to southern Alberta to purchase land so that persecuted Mormons could be resettled on it. As a result, Knight purchased 30,000 acres of land from Magrath's company that owned vast tracts of arid prairie land south of Lethbridge and which it proposed to irrigate (Schreiner, 1989: 92). In addition, on July 10, 1901 Knight contracted from Magrath another 226,000 acres and then he decided to build a sugar factory that was to be operational by 1903. The contract agreement stipulated that the factory was to be operated for a period of 12 years (Gilpin, 2000: 47).

Following the signing of the contract, a town site was chosen on the prairie to build the factory. The town site was named "Raymond," after the eldest son of Jesse Knight. Thereafter, Latter Day Saints from Knight's home county in Utah were moved to Raymond to colonize the town. Once the new settlers arrived they quickly set about

breaking and preparing approximately 3,000 acres of land to plant sugar beets. In 1902, construction began at Raymond for the establishment of the first beet sugar factory in western Canada (Rogers Sugar Ltd, nd: 1).

The sugar beet processing factory built at Raymond began to operate in the fall of 1903 under the name, "Knight Sugar Company." During its early phase of development, however, the factory experienced a number of problems that undermined its success. In particular, the Knight Sugar Company was met with strong competition from BC Sugar that supplied western Canada with cane sugar. BC Sugar was established in 1890 by B. T. Rogers and based in Vancouver. Initially, Rogers attempted to strike an agreement with the new company whereby Knight Sugar Company would function as a supplier of unprocessed beet pulp to BC Sugar that could then be processed into sugar commodities. However, such an agreement could not be reached because the factory at Raymond was designed to produce refined sugar and not unprocessed beet pulp. As a result, BC Sugar attempted to drive the Knight Sugar Company out of business by reducing the price of the sugar it sold in Alberta. In response and to gain a measure of protection from BC Sugar, the Knight Sugar Company lobbied the federal government to impose a tariff on cane sugar imported to Canada. As Schreiner (1989: 91) pointed out, on December 12, 1905 the *Vancouver News-Advertiser* described the issue by stating, "The Knight Sugar Company claims to have established a clear case that the sugar refinery in Vancouver is endeavouring to put them out of business through an arrangement with other Canadian refiners. They claim that these have an agreement by which territory is divided among them and Alberta comes within the district allotted to Vancouver. Now this refinery, says the Knight Company, is slaughtering prices in the interior to kill their business, selling

sugar in Lethbridge for less than in Vancouver.” Although the government did not impose a tariff on imported cane sugar, it did assist the Knight Sugar Company by offering a bonus of 50 cents per hundred pounds of sugar that was to be divided equally between beet growers and the factory. In addition, the government gave the factory a tax exemption for the 12 years of operation called for in the contract (Gilpin, 2000: 71).

Two other problems that undermined the success of the Knight Sugar Company in its early phase included first, the price the company offered growers for their beets and second, labour problems. By 1908, the company found that growers were slow in signing contracts to produce sugar beets. The result was that not enough beets were produced to keep the factory in full operation. Part of the problem stemmed from the growers’ position that they could not make a profit at the price the company paid them for their sugar beets. Moreover, when they asked the company to increase the price it paid for beets, their request was refused (Gilpin, 2000: 72). The other part of the beet shortage problem concerned sugar beet labour. That is, growers were reluctant to put their efforts into the production of sugar beet crops because there was a lack of cheap labour available to perform sugar beet work. Moreover, most workers were reluctant to perform sugar beet work because it was labour intensive. In fact, while commenting on problems the Knight Sugar Company experienced at the time, B. T. Rogers, in a letter sent to an associate, stated, ‘The great difficulty in the way of successfully operating a Beet Factory in Alberta is the lack of labour, and this is a condition which I believe will continue for many years. Beet cultivation is, as I daresay you know, very “intense cultivation,” and requires a great amount of cheap labour. In fact, the labour must be very, very cheap. In Europe the thinning of beets, which must all be done by hand, is carried out by children,

and women also work in the beet fields. People come to Canada particularly to escape this very thing, and I do not think they could be induced to do this kind of work after they reached this country' (Schreiner, 1989: 91). As a result of the numerous problems the factory experienced, in 1914 it was shut down and moved to Utah.

However, with the post-First World War expansion of irrigation in the Lethbridge area and a decline in grain prices, growers again became interested in producing sugar beets. Thus, the industry was revived in 1925 when sugar beet growers convinced the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company, based in Salt Lake City and controlled by the Mormon Church, that they had solved their labour problem. At the time, growers entered into an agreement with the federal government and the C. P. R. whereby the government would facilitate the transfer of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe to southern Alberta if the growers guaranteed work for them once they arrived (Laliberte, 2006: 308). Following the agreement, the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company moved one of its factories from Washington's Yakima Valley and rebuilt it at Raymond in 1925. The new factory was called, "Canadian Sugar Factories Ltd." (Schreiner, 1989: 94). In years that followed, there was an increase in irrigated land and in the number of sugar beet acres planted which firmly established sugar beets as a major crop in the area.

Once Canadian Sugar Factories Ltd. was established at Raymond, growers threw their support behind it. But even with strong grower support, the factory lost money every year except one between 1925 and 1930 (Schreiner, 1989: 95). Moreover, in 1930 the factory lost the harvest of beets to frost and then in 1931 the Depression caused the price of sugar to fall to a level the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company had never experienced in its forty-year history. As such, by 1931 the factory found itself in a financial crisis. Left with

few options, in April of 1931 Utah-Idaho Sugar Company sold the factory to BC Sugar for \$2.1 million (Schreiner, 1989: 95). Over the next few years BC Sugar expanded and modernized the factory.

With the expansion of the beet growing area in southern Alberta during the 1930s, growers pressured BC Sugar to build more beet factories. At first the company refused the growers' demands. But, under the threat that growers had negotiated a deal with the Amalgamated Sugar Company of Utah for another factory, BC Sugar finally relented and another factory was built at Picture Butte, Alberta. The factory was completed in 1936 at the cost of \$1.5 million (Schreiner, 1989: 99-100). By the time the Picture Butte factory was completed, however, growers in the Taber area had planted such an extensive number of acres in sugar beets that they began to pressure the company for yet another factory to be built in the area. Again, the growers attempted to strike a deal with the Amalgamated Sugar Company of Utah for a factory and again BC Sugar gave in to the pressure and signed an agreement to build a third Alberta factory to be operational in 1942. The project was stalled, however, by the outbreak of the Second World War. Eventually, construction of the factory began in 1946 and was completed in 1950 at a cost of \$5.9 million (Schreiner, 1989: 100-102).

For economic reasons, in 1963 the factory at Raymond was closed, as was the factory at Picture Butte in 1977. Following the closure of the factory at Picture Butte, the name "Canadian Sugar Factories Ltd." seemed inappropriate for the lone factory at Taber and thus it was changed to "Alberta Sugar Company." Again in 1995, the name of the factory at Taber was changed and since then it has been known as "Rogers Sugar Ltd" (Rogers Sugar Ltd, nd: 4).

In the late 1990s, Rogers Sugar Ltd at Taber underwent a \$51 million dollar expansion that made it one of the most modern and energy efficient factories in North America. The changes also increased the factory's processing capacity to 6000 tonnes of beets per day. Moreover, once the expansion was completed, 15 more permanent jobs were added to the 85 full-time workers at the factory and the 80 temporary workers hired during the beet processing campaign. Moreover, during the beet harvest period in 2000, the number of workers Rogers hired peaked at 250, most of whom worked at the sugar beet receiving stations that operated around the clock (*The Lethbridge Herald*, 2000: 20-21).

In recent years, the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta has been booming. As such, the industry continues to play a vital role in the economic well being of southern Alberta. In particular, the town of Taber has prospered because of Rogers Sugar Ltd. As the Mayor of Taber, Harley Phillips, stated in 2000, "the 450 sugar beet farmers are the big winners by having the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta, but the town gains significantly from the spin-off spending from many of those farmers....the town gains significant amounts of taxation money from Rogers Sugar, but of greater economic significance is the wages from the factory staff, both permanent and part-time, who mostly work in the factory....Taber has a strong economic base, primarily built on agriculture. Rogers is the backbone" (*The Lethbridge Herald*, 2000: 16).

The Growers' "Watchdog": The Alberta Sugar Beet Growers Organization

Currently, the name of the organization that serves as the voice of southern Alberta sugar beet growers and protects their interests is the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers (ASBG). The roots of the organization can be traced back to 1925 when sugar beet growers established the Alberta Cooperative Sugar Beet Growers' Association (ACSBGA). Since then the organization's primary purpose has been to be "the watchdog of the welfare of the Alberta sugar beet growers" (ASBGA, 1961: 5). As the current President of the ASBG, Merrill Harris (2004) explained, "The main purpose is to represent the growers in all functions such as negotiations with the Company on a contract. We negotiate with the Company on behalf of all the growers this contract which stipulates what we are going to get paid. That's probably the biggest function so that each grower doesn't have to go and negotiate on his or her own. There are other functions and we certainly...represent growers in a wide variety of issues such as trade negotiations that the government of Canada enters into and we belong to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. We deal with the provincial government on different issues; the regulations that happen with this province." Also, Harris (2004) noted that an important function of the Board is to negotiate with the Company the number of acres of beets grown each year. Once the quota of acres is set, it is the organization's responsibility to control who gets a contract to grow a specified acreage of beets and who does not. However, Harris (2004) points out that the negotiations with the Company concerning the number of acres to be planted in a season are no longer much of an issue since the expansion of the sugar processing factory in Taber in 1998 has allowed more beets to be processed.

Although the name and structure of the growers' organization has changed periodically, it has always consisted of a Central Board of Directors and area locals made up of members who are sugar beet growers. The members of each area local elect a representative to the Central Board. The Central Board of Directors consists of an elected President and Vice-President, representatives of area locals, and a Secretary-Treasurer. The Board also establishes sub-committees as the need arises to address the various issues and initiatives of the organization. At the end of each growing season, the Central Board of Directors presents a report at the Annual Convention of the organization that summarizes its activities and those of its various committees over the previous year. The various locals elect delegates that attend the annual conventions to provide directives to the Board by the way of resolution.

During its early existence, the organization benefited growers in a number of ways. For instance, in 1932 it raised the general price scale by 12 cents per ton of beets; in 1936 the Sugar Company agreed to accept a 50-50 profit sharing contract; and, in 1939 the Sugar Company agreed to build a new factory in Taber by the year 1942 (ASBGA, 1957, 25). However, one of the main problems that the new organization grappled with was the lack of sufficient workers for the labour intensive industry (ASBGA, Fonds, n.d.). In fact, the organization's concern for acquiring a sufficient labour supply for sugar beet growers is evident throughout its annual reports, particularly following the 1950s when immigrant labour dwindled.

In 1941 the organization changed its name to the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers Association (ASBGA). During the war, the policy of the ASBGA was to "increase sugar production to meet the emergency of threatened external sugar supplies" (ASBGA Fonds,

n.d.). However, throughout much of the Association's existence one of its main objectives was to get the federal government to adopt a national sugar policy that would protect Canadian sugar beet growers from the impact of foreign countries dumping cheap sugar on the world market, which, in turn, set the price that Canada would pay for its domestically produced sugar. As pointed out previously, the Association also carried out two other important functions: one was to negotiate the annual growers' sugar beet contract with the sugar processor and the other was to assist in the procurement of seasonal hand labour for sugar beet crops. However, in the latter part of the 1980s the Association began to negotiate longer sugar beet contracts with the sugar processor. For instance, in 1986 the Association negotiated a three-year contract with the Alberta Sugar Company. Since then, the norm has been to negotiate a three-year contract between the Association and the sugar processor. Also, by the early 1980s the assistance of the ASBGA in the recruitment of labour was no longer needed as most of the workers who migrated to the sugar beet fields did so on their own as freelancers.

In 1983 the organization changed its status to that of a marketing board and took on the name Alberta Sugar Beet Growers' Marketing Board (ASBGMB). The details of the plans for marketing board status were worked out between the Association's Central Board and the Agricultural Products Marketing Council, a government agency established to assist agricultural commodity organizations in the formation of their choice of government. The Sugar Beet Marketing Plan was tailored very similarly to the by-laws and constitution of the Association. However, some changes were made to comply with the Marketing Act and some were made to suit the interests of the growers. The most

significant changes between the Marketing Board Plan and the by-laws and constitution of the Association were as follows:

1. There will be one factory district with seven area locals replacing the present three factory districts each having three area locals. Each area local would have one representative on the Marketing Board.
2. Representatives on the board must be growers within the area local that they represent; this is not always so under the present system.
3. The Marketing board would consist of seven area local representatives and president. The president and vice-president would be elected in the same procedure as we now do.
4. No person can serve on the board for more than six consecutive years as a local area representative. This does not apply to the chairman.
5. All elections must be by ballot and the ballots cannot be destroyed until ninety days after the election date.
6. At the completion of negotiations between the Marketing Board and the Sugar Company, growers will be issued a license to grow their acreage of beets instead of the release letter that they now receive from the Central Board (ASBGA, 1982: 5).

In 1997, following a government mandated review of the regulations that governed the functions and operation of the ASBGMB that included three consultation meetings with growers, the words “Marketing Board” were dropped from the

organization's name (ASBGMB, 1997: 21). Although the organization remained a marketing board, it took on its current name of Alberta Sugar Beet Growers (ASBG). At the time, a requirement of the regulatory review process was for the Board to establish a vision statement. Thus, in November of 1997 the Board adopted the following as its vision statement:

An Alberta Sugar Beet industry that is Vibrant, Expanding, Profitable and
Producer Driven.

The Alberta Sugar Beet Growers organization is here to:

- provide leadership and representation for producers on provincial, national and international policy issues
- promote our industry through effective partnering with government, business and producers
- provide a united voice for producers in dealings with the processor
- guide research which would enhance the competitiveness of the industry (ASBG, 1997: 22).

As of 2004, the ASBG served as the voice for 255 sugar beet growers in southern Alberta. On average each grower held a contract to produce 140 acres of sugar beets. The total harvest for the year was 35,000 acres of sugar beets (ASBG, 2004: 3).

A Succession of Labour Groups

In the discussion above, it was alluded to that a recurring problem for growers was the procurement of sufficient labour for sugar beet work. However, when the history of labour in the sugar beet industry is recounted, it not only reflects that growers faced a recurring problem over the years in recruiting sufficient labour for their needs, it also reflects the fact that they tapped a succession of ethnically diverse labour groups in order to fulfill their labour needs. For instance, during the early phase in the development of the sugar beet industry, growers recruited First Nations workers from the Blood Indian Reserve located directly west of the sugar beet factory at Raymond for sugar beet work. Although this labour force was put out of employment when the sugar beet processing factory at Raymond was shut down in 1914, Keith Regular (1999: 207) has argued, “Blood labourers were vital to sustaining the industrial process during its first phase of operations from 1903 to 1915.”

It was also pointed out above that in 1914 when the processing factory at Raymond was shut down one of the main reasons for the closure was a shortage of cheap labour for sugar beet work. However, in 1925 when the industry was revived in southern Alberta the federal government and the C. P. R. assisted growers in the procurement of labour by agreeing to transfer immigrants from southern and eastern Europe to Canada and then transport them on the C. P. R. to southern Alberta to work in the sugar beet fields (Thompson and Seager, 1978: 154). Hence, with a steady flow of immigrant workers to southern Alberta, sugar beet growers were able to meet their labour needs until the Second World War.

During the Second World War sugar beet growers once again found themselves in short supply of labour needed for sugar beet production. However, with the assistance of the federal government, growers were able to utilize Japanese-Canadians, German prisoners of war, and conscientious objectors from internment camps to hoe, weed, and harvest their sugar beet crops (ASBGA, 1964: 17).

When the Second World War ended, growers again recruited European immigrants for sugar beet cultivation. In late 1946, for instance, a contingent of Polish veterans arrived in the industry and filled the labouring positions left vacant by German prisoners who returned to their homeland at the end of the Second World War. In addition, just over 500 more Polish veterans arrived in 1947 to augment the labour force. Moreover, from 1947 until 1953 immigrant workers from displaced persons camps in Germany of all nationalities supplied the labour necessary for sugar beet cultivation (ASBGA, 1964: 17).

By 1953, however, the flow of unskilled immigrants to Canada dwindled and again sugar beet growers experienced a severe labour shortage. It was at this time that the industry turned to recruiting Aboriginal people to fill the jobs left vacant by the lack of immigrant labour. In 1953, for instance, a recruitment expedition consisting of a representative of the National Employment Service (N.E.S.) and the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers Association (ASBGA) visited a number of First Nations reserves and recruited 120 First Nations people for sugar beet labour (ASBGA, 1964: 18). Thereafter, the recruitment expeditions canvassed northern reserves and communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan to recruit First Nations, Metis and non-Status Indian workers. By the mid-1960s the recruitment of Aboriginal labour was so successful that it formed the majority

of the labour force in the industry. For example, in 1966 over three thousand First Nations workers were employed in the industry as well as numerous Metis and non-Status Indians (ASBGA, 1966: 16).

While commenting on the various groups that were employed by the sugar beet industry over the years, in 1965 the Chairman of the ASBGA Labour Committee, Walter Strom (ASBGA, 1965: 14) stated,

The history of our labour supply involves a number of different groups of people, who at one time seemed to be in plentiful supply, and then gradually dwindled and faded out of the labour picture. First there were the Czechs, Hungarians, and Austrians. These people did an outstanding job in the beet fields and stayed with us to become land owners and beet growers themselves. When this source dried up we were able to fill in with other groups, such as the Dutch, Polish war veterans, Japanese and others such as German prisoners of war, Portuguese, etc. After the German prisoners of war were sent back home we had a fairly steady stream of immigrants from displaced persons camps in Germany of all nationalities, from 1947 to 1953, at which time this pool of labour showed definite signs of drying up also. Since 1954 the Indians have been our only source of replenishment to our labour force.

Indeed, the growers depended on the labour of Aboriginal people from the early 1950s until the early 1990s when they shifted to employing migrant Mexican Mennonites as their primary labour source.

In the next chapter I summarize my M. A. thesis (Laliberte, 1994) research on the role the Canadian state played in the recruitment, mobilization and retention of Aboriginal workers for the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. The role the state played in the procurement of Aboriginal workers for the industry provides background information necessary in understanding how it came about that Aboriginal workers migrated each growing season from isolated communities and reserves in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan to southern Alberta. As such, the chapter sets the stage for the subsequent analysis of the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite migrant labour in the industry.

Chapter 4: “We Are Still the Largest Users of Native Workers in Canada”: The Canadian State and the Procurement of Migrant Aboriginal Labour in the Southern Alberta Sugar Beet Industry

Introduction

During the early 1950s the southern Alberta sugar beet industry experienced a severe shortage of hand labour needed for the cultivation of sugar beet crops. In response, the Canadian state intervened to recruit, mobilize and retain Aboriginal people from primarily northern reserves and communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan for sugar beet work in southern Alberta. At first the Aboriginal labour force that migrated each season to the industry was small as in 1953 when approximately 120 First Nations workers were recruited to hoe, weed, and harvest sugar beet crops (ASBGA, 1964: 17-18). However, in 1966 the Aboriginal labour force had increased to include over 3000 status First Nations workers (ASBGA, 1966: 16) as well as numerous non-status Indian and Metis workers that together comprised the largest component of the labour force in the industry. During the early 1980s however, the number of Aboriginal workers that migrated each season to the industry was substantially reduced and the industry turned to hiring migrant Mexican Mennonite workers.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the role the Canadian state played in the procurement of an Aboriginal migrant labour force for seasonal jobs in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. This entails a discussion of how the Canadian state intervened into the economy of the sugar beet industry, the role that the Indian Affairs Branch (IAB) played in the recruitment of First Nations people and the methods employed by the state to recruit, mobilize and retain Aboriginal workers for the industry.

The chapter will conclude by arguing that the Canadian state was pivotal in the recruitment, movement, and retention of Aboriginal workers for the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta until their displacement by migrant Mexican Mennonite workers. It should also be noted that this chapter draws extensively on my MA thesis although minor changes and additions have been made.

State Intervention in the Southern Alberta Sugar Beet Industry

In my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 66), I pointed out that the question of how Aboriginal people from isolated northern reserves and communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan came to form a seasonal migratory labour force for the southern Alberta sugar beet industry is an interesting one in light of the fact that historically Aboriginal people have largely been excluded from various forms of wage labour. I (1994: 75-76) then noted that a few studies had been conducted on the sugar beet industry that attempted to answer the latter question. Because the reasons that were put forth in the studies were interesting if not mildly amusing, I will reiterate them here. A study done in 1969 on the sugar beet industry argued that Aboriginal people migrated to the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta because “it was a fast way to make a few bucks” and because it was “a social event for some: a time for renewing and making acquaintances, for romancing and arranging marriages, and, it seems, for a few, a time of orgies.” Another study done in 1971 stated government officials argued that Aboriginal people migrated to the industry because “the annual movement is something of a ‘holiday’ for the Indian...Indians come to the sugar beet fields to meet old friends, meet new people, and

generally to have a good time” (Laliberte, 1994: 76). Interestingly, and as this study will point out in a subsequent chapter, there is some evidence that suggests over time the annual movement of Aboriginal people to the sugar beet fields in Alberta did become a social event for some workers. Nevertheless, the question of how Aboriginal people came to form a seasonal migrant labour force for the southern Alberta sugar beet industry begs explanation especially since the sites of production were so distant from their home region, the work was so difficult and, the pay was low. As the following will illustrate, the answer to this question necessitates an examination of the role the Canadian state played in the development of the migrant Aboriginal labour force.

Studies on migrant labour in agricultural industries have argued that a function of the state is to create conditions for capital accumulation (Laliberte, 1994 and Mysyk, 2000). Consequently, in some instances the state will intervene in the economy to assist the industry in the procurement of labour for production purposes. In the case of the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, state intervention occurred in the early 1950s when the flow of unskilled immigrants to Canada dwindled which caused sugar beet farmers to experience a severe labour shortage (ASBGA, 1964: 17). Since the production of sugar beet crops was threatened due to the lack of sufficient labour, the Canadian state moved to recruit Aboriginal people from northern reserves and communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan to work in the southern Alberta sugar beet fields.

The recruitment of Aboriginal people for labour was initiated and accomplished through a cooperative effort by the sugar beet industry, numerous branches of the federal government, and the provincial government of Alberta. As I noted in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 76-77), although the National Employment Service (N. E. S.) was a key

figure in the movement of Aboriginal workers, it worked in conjunction with many branches of the government and the industry. In particular, the N. E. S. worked co-operatively with the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers' Association (ASBGA), the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), and the Department of Agriculture of the Province of Alberta through the Federal-Provincial Farm Labour Committee.

The Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Agreements and Sugar Beet Labour

At the time the Canadian state became active in the recruitment of Aboriginal people as a labour force for the sugar beet industry, the Federal-Provincial Farm Labour Committee (FPFLC) was responsible for all matters related to agricultural manpower in Canada. In particular, the FPFLC was responsible for identifying, recruiting, and relocating workers needed in agricultural sectors throughout Canada. The FPFLC, initially called the Federal-Farm Labour Committee, was established through the Federal-Provincial Agricultural Agreements. These agreements date back to 1942 when the Federal-Provincial Farm Labour Program was created to facilitate co-operative action between local, provincial, and federal agencies in finding solutions to war-time farm labour problems (Brown, 1956: 2). Thereafter, the agreements were signed each year between the federal Minister of Labour and the provincial Minister of Agriculture.

In the 1950s, control over labour matters in Canada was transferred from the Department of Labour to the Department of Manpower and Immigration. It was the responsibility of the Department of Manpower and Immigration to provide assistance and

funds, on a 50-50 cost sharing basis with the provinces, to carry out the provisions of the agreements. The provisions included the recruitment and movement of agricultural manpower, advertising, research, promotion of improvements in working and living conditions, expenditures for construction of new housing, renovation of existing buildings, and expenditures for the operation of camps for workers (Edmonds, 1969: 2-3).

In the mid-1960s, the Federal-Provincial Farm Labour Committee changed its name to the Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Committee (FPAMC). The FPAMC consisted of a joint committee of both federal and provincial representatives. The federal part of the FPAMC consisted of the chairman of all the provincial agricultural committees, officers of the Department of Manpower and Immigration, and representatives from other interested federal departments and farm organizations. The provincial part of FPAMC consisted of provincial agriculture committees composed of a senior officer of the provincial departments of agriculture, representatives of the Department of Manpower and Immigration, and other members appointed by the ministers of agriculture for the provinces. The provincial committees were in charge of assessing the labour requirements for the upcoming year. This information was then passed to the Canada Manpower Centres (CMC) of the Department of Manpower and Immigration, which carried out the recruitment, referral, and movement of workers with the assistance of provincial agencies (Laliberte, 1994: 77-83).

In my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 83) I stated, "In Alberta, the provincial committee was very involved with recruiting labour for the sugar beet industry. Moreover, throughout most of FPAMC's existence the provincial committee of Alberta

represented sugar beet interests.” To illustrate the latter point, I noted in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 83-84) that in 1969 M. Evanochko, Head of the Agency Relations Section of the Prairie Region for Manpower, remarked that the Alberta Provincial Agricultural Manpower Committee’s main concern was in the recruitment, movement and referral of First Nations and Metis workers who the sugar beet industry had come to depend on to complete its thinning and hoeing operations in the fields. Evanochko also pointed that the provincial committee was overwhelmingly represented by the sugar beet and vegetable industry and that the expenditures incurred by the Alberta provincial committee were mostly on behalf of the sugar beet industry. Evanochko ended his remarks by stating that First Nations and Metis workers performed most of the labour needed in the sugar beet fields and that this pool of workers was increasing each year (Laliberte, 1994: 84).

What the comments of Evanochko reflect is the relative political power of the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta since it was able to exert sufficient pressure on the FPAMC through its representatives on the provincial committee in Alberta to ensure that it received the resources needed not only to maintain the flow of Aboriginal workers to the industry but also to increase it. Moreover, it would not be unreasonable to assume that in return for its patronage, the government could depend on the political support of the industry.

The Process of Recruitment and Mobilization of Migrant Aboriginal Workers

By the early 1970s the process of recruitment and mobilization of Aboriginal people for sugar beet work was well established. Sugar beet farmers would assess their labour needs for the upcoming growing season and forward their requests to the provincial agricultural committee of the FPAMC in Alberta. This information was passed on to the CMC in Lethbridge, Alberta. With the assistance of the IAB, the CMC in Lethbridge then passed on the request for workers to its offices near reserves and Metis communities in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan (Steele and Zacharias, 1971: 8). Once the beet season began, letters and application forms were sent to the Chief and Band Council on reserves requesting placements. The applications were then filled out and returned to the CMC office in the area. When the demand for labour commenced, the FPAMC hired chartered buses to move workers between northern reserves and communities and the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. Upon arrival at the reception centre in Lethbridge, FPAMC officials registered the workers and allocated them to sugar beet growers (Laliberte, 1994: 87-88).

The pool of First Nations workers recruited and mobilized by the FPAMC and the IAB was referred to as the “sponsored movement” (ASBGA, 1963: 16). However, non-status Indians and Metis workers who migrated to the sugar beet fields each season did so outside of the sponsored movement and hence, the industry referred to them as “freelancers” (ASBGA, 1964: 15).

By the mid-1970s, most Aboriginal workers migrated between the sugar beet fields in southern Alberta and their homes on their own. Consequently, in 1975 the

FPAMC eliminated the policy of providing transportation for Aboriginal workers. Thereafter, Aboriginal workers who migrated to southern Alberta in search of sugar beet work were required to go to the Lethbridge Farm Labour Pool Office for job placements on farms. As a result, it was the responsibility of the Lethbridge Farm Labour Pool Office to record the number of Aboriginal workers placed in the sugar beet fields. However, these records were largely non-representative of the actual number of Aboriginal workers in the sugar beet fields because many workers returned to the same grower year after year without informing the Labour Pool Office. In 1981 the ASBGA Labour Committee Chairman, Norman Hall (ASBGA, 1981: 12), reported that all the Aboriginal workers who migrated to the industry came as freelancers and hence, labour recruitment was no longer necessary.

The Role of the Indian Affairs Branch in the Procurement of Aboriginal Labour

A branch of the Canadian state that was highly active in the recruitment of labour for the southern Alberta sugar beet industry was the Indian Affairs Branch (IAB), currently referred to as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). The DIAND holds responsibility for the well being of status First Nations people in Canada. In 1966 the DIAND became a separate federal department. Prior to that, however, the responsibility for First Nations people fell under the authority of the IAB that was merged with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration (Satzewich and Wotherspoon, 1993: 37).

One of the objectives of the IAB was to find employment opportunities for First Nations people so that they could improve their standard of living (Jackson, 1966 Appendix B: 1). Thus, in the early 1950s when immigrants were no longer available for sugar beet work, the IAB moved to recruit First Nations people on reserves as a source of labour for the industry. As I noted in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 84-85), in 1969 M. Evanochko pointed out that during the early 1950s the idea of recruiting First Nations people as a potential labour force for the sugar beet industry was conceived by the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration although some concern was raised that such a labour force had little experience working on farms.

By the mid-1950s the IAB worked closely with the sugar beet industry in the recruitment and movement of First Nations people for seasonal jobs thinning, hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops (Laliberte, 1994: 85). In my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 84) I demonstrated the close working relationship between the ASBGA and IAB officials by pointing out that when an ASBGA labour delegation attended a convention of Indian Agents from Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories in Edmonton in 1965, the agents assured the delegates their full co-operation in the recruitment of First Nations workers for the industry in the subsequent year and, moreover, that a greater number of First Nations workers would be coming to the sugar beet fields.

During the 1960s the IAB continued to be heavily involved in the recruitment of First Nations people for jobs in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. This was clearly demonstrated at the annual National Agricultural Manpower Meeting in Ottawa in 1966, when D. Jackson (1966: 10) of the Indian Affairs Branch stated, "The movement of Indians to Alberta in which tribal chiefs assist in the recruiting was referred to as a highly

successful movement which has been going on for several years. In this movement, some 5,000 to 6,000 Indians in family groups have been moved in some cases as far as 1,100 miles to employment in Southern Alberta.” In the same year at a Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Conference in Ottawa, R. F. Battle, Assistant Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, pointed out that the IAB was pleased with the increased movement of First Nations workers to the sugar beet industry that totaled 3,000, of which 1,727 came from Saskatchewan and 883 from Alberta. Battle also expressed gratitude to the sugar beet industry for providing job opportunities for First Nations people and he thanked officials of the Department of Manpower and Immigration and the Department of Agriculture for their co-operation in assisting the movement of First Nations workers for the industry (Laliberte, 1994: 86).

In my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 87), I also pointed out that the Department of Manpower and Immigration applauded the success of the IAB in the recruitment of First Nations people for the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. For instance, at a Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Conference in November 1966, Assistant Deputy Minister and Director General of Manpower, G. G. Duclos, commented that the 3,000 First Nations workers recruited in 1966 for the sugar beet industry was a substantial increase over previous years and as such, was one of the most gratifying aspects of the agriculture situation because it provided the First Nations workers with a better income level than they had experienced in a long time (Laliberte, 1994: 87).

An interesting aspect concerning the role of the IAB in the recruitment of First Nations workers for the sugar beet industry was while IAB officials sought to improve their conditions through such employment opportunities, they also hoped that the work

experience they gained would encourage them to move away from their reserves and integrate into mainstream society. As R. F. Battle (1966: 7-8) stated at the 1966 annual Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Conference in Ottawa in regards to the use of First Nations workers in the sugar beet industry, “there is agreement that the movement of Indians away from reserves in northern Canada and closer to areas where regular employment opportunities exist should assist in their eventual integration.” This sentiment of the IAB was echoed in other branches of the state involved in the procurement of labour for the sugar beet industry. For instance, in a memorandum sent to J. P. Francis, Assistant Deputy Minister of Manpower in 1969, M. Evanochko (Edmonds, 1969: 8) stated, “Indian Affairs Officials and other experts on Indians feel that the experience gained by Saskatchewan and Northern Alberta Indians in the sugar beet fields of Alberta was a major step in the motivation of the Native people to participate in an industrial society.”

In the memorandum, Evanochko went on to suggest that the state’s concerns with the integration of First Nations people may have been precipitated by the increase in the population of First Nations people at the time and the decline of their traditional economies. As Evanochko (Edmonds, 1969: 11) stated,

...employment in the sugar beet industry in Alberta provided an opportunity for employment off the reserves at a time when the Indian population explosion on the reserves was facing a declining income from their traditional way of life of fishing and trapping. This seasonal employment, although far from being an ideal alternative to fishing and trapping, did provide some of the native people

with an alternative. Many of these people have learned to work in a white man's society and have developed this seasonal employment into full-time employment in agriculture and allied industries.

I am advised by some social workers, manpower counselors and Indian Affairs Officials that the Indian sugar beet workers have benefited socially as a result of this employment. Their understanding of employment for white employees and the overall introduction to the white man's society, has been enhanced by participating in this labour force.

Moreover, those involved with the recruitment of Aboriginal labour for the sugar beet industry in Alberta at the provincial level were also concerned with the integration of First Nations people in mainstream society. For example, at a meeting of the Beet Labour Committee held in 1963, which included S. S. Graham, Edmonton Secretary of the Federal-Provincial Farm Labour Committee, James Lynn, Manager of the N. E. S. and L. R. Jensen, President of the ASBGA, it was reported that "growers were already making a very significant contribution to the assimilation of Indians and while this was necessarily very slow some progress was being made" (ASBGA *Minutes*, Feb. 14, 1963: 2). In the following year, the annual report of the ASBGA (1964: 18) commented on the recruitment of First Nations workers by stating, "The importance of this movement cannot be overlooked as it is the most promising movement there is for the integration of Indians into the community."

Recruitment and Retention Through Coercion and Paternalistic Practices

Studies on migrant labour in agricultural industries indicate that coercive measures can be used by the state to induce potential workers to migrate to sites of production (e.g., Laliberte, 1994; Laliberte and Satzewich, 1999). Also, studies indicate that a practice of employers is to develop paternalistic relationships with their workers to reinforce worker retention, worker loyalty to employers and increase worker commitment to their job (e.g., Basok, 2002; Laliberte and Satzewich, 1999). In the case of the southern Alberta sugar beet industry both coercion and paternalistic practices were used to ensure the recruitment, mobilization and the retention of seasonal migrant Aboriginal workers for the industry.

As I pointed out in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 99), in a 1970 article John Schmidt of *The Calgary Herald* stated that of the First Nations people recruited for the industry since 1953, over 90% were on welfare at the time of their recruitment. Schmidt substantiated his position by citing his twelve years of observation and interaction with the industry and by reference to a brief by L. R. Jensen, President of the ASBGA. Further, in the 1970 annual report of the ASBGA, Jensen reinforced Schmidt's views by stating that many Aboriginal workers in the industry had been on welfare at the time they were hired but that employment in the industry had taken them off the welfare rolls (Laliberte, 1994: 99).

As I argued in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 99-100), an effective tactic used by the Canadian state to induce Aboriginal people to migrate to southern Alberta was to terminate social assistance benefits on northern reserves and in Metis communities during

the summer when the need for hand labour in the sugar beet fields was the greatest. This was pointed out in a study done on the sugar beet industry in 1969 by H. French who interviewed Treaty First Nations workers that stated they migrated to the sugar beet fields each year because they felt obliged to because they received letters in the mail stating that their welfare payments would be cut off. As H. Tomaschuk a Canadian Labour Representative reiterated in a 1969 report on the sugar beet industry, the First Nations and Metis workers he interviewed from Saskatchewan stated that they migrated to the sugar beet fields because they were told by the government either go to the sugar beet fields or their welfare would be cut off (Laliberte, 1994: 100). Furthermore, Ferguson and Lipton (1969) found that an “unsavory aspect” that sugar beet workers found themselves in was that they were recruited to work in the fields “under conditions of compulsion or forced labour.” The study found that the provincial welfare departments of Saskatchewan and Alberta worked in conjunction with Canada Manpower and the federal Department of Indian Affairs to recruit First Nations workers for the sugar beet industry. In particular, the IAB had the policy of “stopping welfare payments” during the summer for all reserve members except for those on permanent welfare. Moreover, I pointed out in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 101) that Ferguson and Lipton’s study found that the welfare agencies in Alberta and Saskatchewan also cut off the welfare payments to non-status Indians and Metis people to pressure them to migrate to the sugar beet industry during beet season. The effect of the termination of welfare benefits for the Aboriginal people was that they had few other options but to migrate to the sugar beet fields to seek employment as their chances of finding jobs in their communities or near their reserve were basically nil (Laliberte, 1994: 101).

The state and the sugar beet industry also used paternalistic tactics designed to induce and retain Aboriginal workers for the sugar beet work. One such tactic was to involve the workers in community events. As I pointed out in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 89-90), during the late 1950s it was a practice of the sugar beet growers, B. C. Sugar and the N. E. S. to invite the Aboriginal workers as guests to the annual Stampede celebrations held each summer at Raymond. As Leith Johnson, ASBGA Labour Chairman, explained in 1956 the Aboriginal workers were entertained as guests in the hope that the gesture would “result in these people returning to the beet fields in 1957” (Laliberte, 1994: 90). I also note in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 90) that in 1959 an estimated 1200 First Nations workers and their children were guests at the Stampede in Raymond and the cost of \$2000.00 was shared on a 50-50 basis by the growers and B. C. Sugar.

Another tactic used by the state to induce Aboriginal workers to migrate to the southern Alberta sugar beet industry was by chartering buses and paying for part of their transportation costs to the sugar beet fields. In 1955 the policy of the federal and provincial governments was to transport workers to the sugar beet fields at a charge of one-third the transportation costs. For instance, in 1960 the average one-way incoming fare from Alberta and Saskatchewan was \$13.25 of which the worker paid \$5.00 and the government absorbed the remainder of the cost. During this same year, the Aboriginal share of the transportation cost was raised to \$7.50 per worker. The workers returned to their home communities by receiving tickets from the Canada Manpower Centre in Lethbridge at a cost of \$7.50 per worker. The government continued to cover the majority of the transportation costs for Aboriginal workers until 1975 when the policy was

discontinued because most of the Aboriginal workers who migrated to the industry did so as freelancers outside of the sponsored movement (Laliberte, 1994: 90-91).

Sugar beet growers were also able to induce and retain Aboriginal workers by providing them with free housing and utilities while they were employed in the sugar beet fields. As a result, growers developed paternalistic relationships with workers that obliged the workers to remain with the grower until the job was completed and in many cases, to return to the grower in the following season. This point was made clear in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 91), when in 1957 the ASBGA Labour Committee Chairman, Leith Johnson stressed to growers that suitable housing was an important factor in “attracting beet labour” to their farms and then “keeping them over from year to year.”

The ASBGA felt that housing was so important in attracting Aboriginal labour that in 1965 Leith Johnson argued that changes had to be made in order to keep the flow of Aboriginal workers coming to the sugar beet fields. At the time, suggestions were made to build hostels in the various areas of sugar beet country. In particular, the Department of Health and Welfare encouraged growers to build the hostels because they would offer modern facilities to workers such as gas heat, electricity and hot and cold water. Thus, as I pointed out in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 92), in 1966 growers in the Iron Springs area, with the assistance of Aboriginal workers, build the first Agricultural Manpower Hostel. The hostel consisted of individual cottages where workers were housed and a central dining room that also served as a recreation center. The workers were transported by bus from the hostels to the beet fields in need of hoeing. By 1967 another hostel had been built at Raymond and the provincial and federal

governments had agreed to provide grants to the ASBGA to cover 40% of the costs to build another five hostels in the sugar beet area (Laliberte, 1994: 93).

In 1969 when there were no new applications for the construction of hostels, the government reduced the grants by 50%. In response, the ASBGA took a new approach to housing assistance by asking the two levels of government to extend the housing program to individual farms on the same basis as the hostels were provided grants under the federal-provincial agreement. As a result, in 1970 ASBGA Labour Committee Chairman, Walter Strom, reported that grants were available to individual farmers for seasonal labour housing up to maximum of \$150.00 per worker or \$2000.00 per farmer. However, the grants were limited to 40% of the total cost of the seasonal housing improvements (Laliberte, 1994: 94).

Throughout the 1970s the federal and provincial governments provided sugar beet growers with grants to improve seasonal labour housing although various changes were made to the grants. For instance, in 1971 the grants were raised to cover 50% of the costs of housing improvements. Then, in 1972 the amount allotted per worker for the housing improvements rose to \$300.00 and growers were allowed to use their labour input to count towards their half of the project's cost. While the latter program for housing was kept in place, in 1973 the government sponsored another program called the Priority Employment Program. The program consisted of a carpenter repair crew that performed the housing repairs and the two levels of government paid for the labour costs as long as the grower provided the materials needed for the housing improvements. In 1974 more changes were made to the housing programs as the grant increased to \$500.00 per worker up to a \$4000.00 maximum per farmer and, under the Priority Employment Program a

second carpentry repair crew was added. In 1977, however, the government grants for labour housing repair was cancelled but the Priority Employment Program continued until the end of 1983. Although the ASBGA attempted to get the housing program reinstated in subsequent years, the government refused the request citing a lack of demand for the grants and the government's commitment to reducing expenditures (Laliberte, 1994: 94-95). Although the termination of government sponsored housing improvement programs meant that sugar beet growers lost a means of inducing and retaining Aboriginal workers, the impact on growers was minimal because their need for hand labour was substantially reduced by the early 1980s as a result of changes in the process of sugar beet production.

As pointed out previously, an objective of the IAB was to secure employment opportunities for First Nations people so that they could improve their standard of living. Hence, once First Nations workers began migrating to the southern Alberta sugar beet industry the IAB did everything it could to ensure that the seasonal migration continued. In particular, I noted in my MA thesis (95) that during the 1960s the IAB devised a number of recommendations and programs, many of which were paternalistic in nature, that were aimed at inducing First Nations people to migrate to the industry and retain them once they were in the fields. These recommendations and initiatives were usually carried out through a consortium of Indian Affairs officials, various government agencies involved in the recruitment of Aboriginal workers and officials of the sugar beet industry.

In my MA thesis (96) I noted that the 1966 annual report of the National Agricultural Manpower Committee meeting contained recommendations and initiatives put forth by the IAB that were designed to induce and retain First Nations workers. In

particular, I pointed out that the federal IAB representative, D. Jackson, described his report as “a resume of observations, conclusions, and recommendations” indicating the steps that could be taken to help keep First Nations workers on the job.

In the report the IAB stated that the availability of First Nations labour was dependent on whether the earnings for agricultural work matched those for other jobs in the labour market such as construction work, tree planting, fire fighting, pulp cutting, and guiding (Jackson, 1966: Appendix 2: 1). In addition, the report compiled a list of recommendations employers could use to recruit and retain Aboriginal workers. As such, the recommendations instructed employers to use First Nations workers with experience in agriculture employment to assist in the recruiting of other First Nations workers; show films on harvesting operations as an aid to recruitment; involve representatives of the Grower’s Associations in recruitment; establish and maintain personal contact and interest in the worker; provide properly equipped accommodations of an acceptable standard; provide facilities to First Nations workers so they could board themselves according to their individual tastes in food; provide the workers an opportunity to rest after a difficult 3-4 day trip to the south; promote an orientation to the new work setting and community; instruct First Nations workers adequately in preferred harvesting techniques; define conditions of employment and rates of pay to employees in writing; recognize the dependence of First Nations people on Aboriginal leadership; exempt employees from operations when the field or weather conditions are unsuitable; consult with leaders elected by First Nations workers in matters affecting or involving them; provide transportation facilities for shopping, recreation and sightseeing; and, waive

charges for accommodations when workers are unemployed due to factors beyond their control, such as weather conditions (Laliberte, 1994: 96-97).

In addition, the report stated that the IAB was willing to make field staff available to First Nations workers for consulting purposes or as a liaison between the workers and their home settlements. Lastly, the report pointed out that the IAB was willing to provide films and other material to farm labour committees which would assist them to better understand First Nations people (Laliberte, 1994: 97).

The IAB introduced other initiatives that were designed to recruit First Nations workers for the sugar beet industry. For instance, in 1970 the ASBGA Labour Committee Chairman, Walter Strom, informed growers that Indian Affairs was sponsoring an agricultural training program for First Nations workers engaged in farm labour. In essence, Indian Affairs was willing to pay for half the wages of a First Nations trainee for a three-month period (Laliberte, 1994: 88).

In the years after the recommendations of the IAB were introduced to the sugar beet industry, some were acted upon and proved to be highly successful. One such recommendation acted upon was to make personal contact with Aboriginal people as a means to enhance recruitment. As I noted in my MA thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 97-98), in 1973 the ASBGA, Manpower and Indian Affairs began making personal contact with former sugar beet workers by sending them letters asking them to return to southern Alberta for the next growing season. In the same year, representatives of the ASBGA and the Sugar Company traveled to reserves to encourage First Nations people and their friends to migrate to the beet fields. Similarly, in 1974 the ASBGA Labour Committee Chairman, Walter Strom, reported that the recruiting campaign consisted of sending

letters to former sugar beet workers as well as sending out public relations teams to the various C. M. C. offices, Indian Affairs offices, and First Nations reserves in Alberta and Saskatchewan to make personal contact with Aboriginal people and encourage them to migrate to the industry. In commenting on the recruitment campaign in 1974, Strom stated, "this program, which was very successful in 1973, proved to be equally successful in 1974" (Laliberte, 1994: 98).

The Success of the State in the Recruitment of Aboriginal Workers

As the foregoing indicates, the recruitment of Aboriginal workers for the southern Alberta sugar beet industry through the various branches of the state in conjunction with the sugar beet industry was met with a high degree of success. According to John Schmidt (1970: 31), a columnist of *The Calgary Herald* who had observed the industry, "As a social experiment, the sponsored movement of Indian seasonal labour from Northern reserves by the southern Alberta sugar beet growers has, in my opinion been a resounding success." Moreover, the recruitment of Aboriginal workers by those involved was so successful that in 1971 it prompted the ASBGA Labour Chairman, Walter Strom, to remark, "After nearly twenty years of using large numbers of native workers from Northern Alberta and Northern Saskatchewan, we are still the largest users of native workers in Canada" (ASBGA, 1971: 10). Strom went on to point out that during the 1971 sugar beet growing season the industry's Aboriginal labour force totaled 2000 of which 1200 were freelance workers and 800 were sponsored workers. Moreover, he (ASBGA, 1971: 10) noted that during the same year Aboriginal workers performed 60% of the hand

labour on sugar beet crops that amounted to 25,000 acres in total. Strom also commented on the economic benefits sugar beet work provided to Aboriginal workers and on the relationship they had with growers. He (ASBGA, 1971: 10-11) stated,

Most of the 1,200 workers who came on their own this year, were originally part of the organized movement. They saved their money, and purchased their own cars and half ton trucks. Since they come back on their own year after year, it proves to us that the relationship between farmers and the workers has been satisfactory to the workers. In fact most of them return to the same farms. Earnings for most of them average twenty dollars a day or better, plus free house and utilities.

Beet work performed by natives represented a cash payout of over \$700,000. Earnings from other agricultural and related sources in the areas totaled \$350,000.00 to \$400,000.00. This would include driving trucks, tractors, beet harvesting equipment, general farm work and work at the beet receiving stations. This means that over \$1,000,000.00 was paid out to native workers in 1971.

As indicated above, by the early 1970s the sugar beet industry was heavily dependent on Aboriginal labour for performing unskilled jobs and as well many skilled jobs as machine operators. In fact, the contributions of Aboriginal labour to the success of the industry was recognized in 1969 when M. Evanochko (Edmonds, 1969: 8) stated, "Although there were many problems associated with this labour force in earlier years it

is the belief of many manpower officers, sugar beet growers and sugar factory representatives that if this pool of labour had not been available the sugar beet industry in Southern Alberta would not have survived.”

Was the Sugar Beet Industry a “Colonizing, Acclimatizing and Citizenship Training Organization” for Aboriginal People?

As pointed out previously, an objective of the IAB was to secure employment positions for First Nations people in order to improve their quality of life. In addition, however, evidence indicates that the IAB envisioned that those First Nations people who gained work experience in agricultural industries would become a pool of wage earners that would eventually integrate into mainstream society.

In the case of the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, the IAB did everything it could to ensure that First Nations workers in the industry succeeded in making the transition from their traditional economy consisting largely of hunting and trapping to that of wage earners in modern industrial society, much like the aim of the government’s reserve policy for First Nations but only it was changed to assimilation through integration with mainstream society as opposed to segregation on isolated reserves. Moreover, evidence suggests that the sugar beet industry was not only aware that the IAB’s role in the recruitment of First Nations people as a seasonal migrant labour force entailed a quasi-social engineering project aimed at the integration of First Nations people into mainstream society through employment experience, but that it also did its part to facilitate the success in the transition by providing as much help as it could as long as the state maintained its assistance in the recruitment and retention of the labour force. In fact, in 1954 when a dispute arose over whether growers and the sugar factory should

cover part of the expense of recruiting First Nations and immigrant workers for sugar beet jobs, W. W. Dawson, Director, Special Services Branch of the federal Department of Labour, was sent a memo by the Director of the Alberta Department of Agriculture, F. H. Newcombe (1954: 1), that stated, "As you are probably aware, we moved in about 135 Indian workers this year. As near as can be estimated from the partial return of invoices this movement will cost about \$40.00 per worker, perhaps slightly more. Last week Mr. Lynn and I met with the Lethbridge people and made the proposal that they consider sharing in future movements....The growers and the factory were not prepared to commit themselves at that meeting and this was to be expected. They put up their usual line of argument, namely that they are being used as a colonizing, acclimatizing and citizenship training organization. They claim these men come to them and when they have trained them for a year or less they are absorbed into the economy outside of sugar beets." As such, the ultimate goal of the Canadian state was to create among First Nations people not only a group of wage earners who would be integrated into mainstream society, but that they would also serve as a pool of cheap labour which capitalists could draw upon when their labour was needed.

Conclusions

As this chapter has demonstrated, from the early 1950s until the mid-1970s the Canadian state, particularly through its IAB, played a central role in the procurement of Aboriginal labour for the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. In other words, the Canadian state intervened into the economy of the sugar beet industry and "moved

Aboriginal labour in” during a period when no other labour force was available.

Moreover, this chapter indicates that if not for Aboriginal labour, the sugar beet industry would not have survived and flourished. Thus, if the sugar beet industry was surviving when Aboriginal people served as its major labour force, the question that begs to be answered is, “why move Aboriginal labour out” and employ a migrant Mexican Mennonite labour force instead?

In the next chapter, the question of why migrant Aboriginal labour was displaced by Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry will be examined from the perspective of sugar beet growers.

Chapter 5: The Perspective of Growers on the Transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite Workers in the Southern Alberta Sugar Beet Industry

Introduction

Throughout most of the southern Alberta sugar beet industry's existence, the production of sugar beet crops was labour intensive. Furthermore, throughout most of the industry's existence sugar beet growers repeatedly experienced problems in the recruitment and retention of sufficient labour for production purposes. In fact, until recently growers seemed to be engaged in a continuous search for a reliable source of labour. From the early 1950s until the early 1990s, growers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry depended on Aboriginal labour for the production of their sugar beet crops. These workers migrated annually from northern reserves and communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan during the spring and summer to perform hand labour in the sugar beet fields. Today, however, the growers' demand for labour has been drastically reduced due to changes in the way sugar beets are produced. Nevertheless, during the early 1990s growers moved to employing Mexican Mennonite labour as opposed to Aboriginal labour. Thereafter, Mexican Mennonites became the main labour force growers used to perform sugar beet work.

The sections of this chapter are important for understanding the growers' perspective on the transition of labour from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. The first section points out that from the post-Second World period until the early 1980s sugar beet growers consistently suffered labour shortages. The second section links the labour shortages of growers to historically

specific conditions related to sugar beet production and to agricultural work. In particular, it is pointed out that the labour shortages were linked to poor wages and working conditions and to the fact that beet work was labour intensive. The third section further links the growers' labour shortages to structural factors such as high input costs and the low returns they received for their sugar beet crops. The fourth section discusses the growers' struggle in attempting to get the government to implement a national sugar policy that would provide them with a fair return for their beets and promote a profitable environment for the sugar industry in Canada. The fifth section discusses the growers' quest to increase efficiency in the production of beets in order to reduce their labour needs. The section points out that as growers increased their efficiency in the production of sugar beets, this created a need for a more skilled labour force. The sixth section discusses the dissatisfaction many growers had with Aboriginal workers. As such, the seventh section discusses the growers' long held desire and their attempts to secure a Mexican labour force for sugar beet work. The eighth discusses the various attributes Mexican Mennonite workers possessed that attracted growers to them as a labour force, particularly attributes such as reliability and farm skills. The last section of the chapter provides the testimony of growers on the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour.

Growers and Labour Demand

As noted previously, over the course of the sugar beet industry's history the demand for labour caused growers to experience numerous transitions in their labour

force. In addition, growers experienced labour shortages prior to the Second World War and following it as well. Moreover, they experienced a labour shortage despite an overall decline in agriculture in Canada as a whole. For instance, in 1969 M. Evanochko (Edmonds, 1969: 5) of the Agency Relations Section of the Prairie Region for Manpower stated, "The importance of agriculture in Canada has been changing. Only one hundred years ago Canada's society was predominantly agricultural. More than 3/4 of its working force was engaged in farming. Today only 7.6% of the total labour force in Canada is engaged in agriculture. By comparison the Prairie Region employs 20% of its labour force in agriculture but this too is declining and will probably stabilize at about 12 – 15% by 1980. Agriculture still contributes 26% of the gross production in the Prairie Region, which is an important contribution to the prairie economy." A similar statement on the decline of farming in Canada was made in 1966 when Lalovee Jensen (ASBGA, 1966: 3), President of the ASBGA, stated, "It appears that the flight from the farm continues. A study by the Economic Council of Canada shows that between 1921 and 1961 3.2 million people moved off Canadian farms. This is more than one and one-half times the present farm population."

The findings by the Economic Council of Canada regarding the decline in farm population numbers have been reinforced in a number of studies (i.e. Clements, 1983; Basran and Hay, 1988; Satzewich, 1991; Hay, 1992) For instance, Basran and Hay (1988: 22) found that the farm population in the western provinces of Canada decreased from 1941 to 1981 with the decrease in Alberta being 39 to 40 percent. As a result of the farm population decline, the number of farms in Canada has decreased. Yet, in conjunction with the decrease in the farm population Basran and Hay found that there has been "a

steady increase in the average size of farm units over the period from 1941 to 1986” (1988: 6).

Along with the decline in the farming population in Canada there was a corresponding decline in the agricultural labour force. In commenting on the decline in 1969, M. Evanochko (Edmonds, 1969: 4-5) stated, “Employment activities in agriculture in all CMC’s in the region are declining each year as is the labour force in agriculture, generally. The labour force and employment activities in agriculture will continue to decline with farm enlargement, consolidation and continued mechanization, resulting in a decreased need for farm workers. There will however, continue to be a need for certain types of farm workers for many years. The demand in the future most likely will be for workers on large livestock farms, well qualified equipment operators and a small number of labourers for sugar beets and other vegetable crops.”

Interestingly, although the farm population and agricultural labour force decreased in western Canada between 1941 and 1981, the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta never experienced a corresponding decrease in its demand for labour until the 1980s. Part of the reason for this was that over the years the sugar beet industry experienced an extended period of growth. For instance, in 1964 while commenting on the growth of the industry President Lalovee Jensen (ASBGA, 1964: 3) stated, “When we consider that the sale of sugar beets returned to the grower in the year 1925 was a total of but \$235,750.00 as compared to a total growers’ share in 1962 of \$11,321,790.00, we realize more fully the tremendous growth experienced by this industry. When the company’s share amounting to \$7, 918,317.00 is added to the total, we find that nearly

\$20,000,000.00 of new wealth was added to the economy of the Lethbridge district from one commodity alone. Truly an amazing growth and truly an amazing industry.”

The expansion of the industry is also reflected in the acres of sugar beets harvested over the years. For example, in 1925 when the industry was re-established in southern Alberta, the number of acres harvested totaled 5,394. However, in 1956 the number of acres harvested had increased to a total of 36,150 (ASBGA, 1957: 25). In 1964, 42,122 acres were harvested (ASBGA, 1967: 26) and in 1972, 43,325 acres. However, from 1973 to 1980, the average number of sugar beet acres harvested annually was approximately 35,700 acres (ASBGA, 1980: 24). Although the number of sugar beet acres harvested after 1980 averaged approximately 35,000 acres annually, it was during the 1980s that changes in the process of producing sugar beets effectively reduced the number of workers needed to cultivate sugar beet crops.

By the early 1980s the number of growers involved in the production of sugar beet crops decreased significantly but, as noted above, the number of sugar beet acres planted and harvested thereafter remained relatively stable (see Table 1: 74-75). This indicates that during the post-Second World War period individual growers were able to negotiate contracts with the sugar company to increase the number of sugar beet acres they planted. As a result, those growers who lacked capital or land to expand their operations were out-competed and eventually pushed out of the market. Furthermore, throughout much of the period when growers expanded the number of sugar beet acres planted this meant that the size of their farms and their need for hand labour also increased. However, by the early 1980s the use of chemical weed controls and increased mechanization reduced the growers' need for hand labour. As a former sugar beet grower

who was also a President of the ASBGA (2004: G01), stated, “it was...the mechanization that allowed us to grow bigger and bigger and bigger and now we can grow 100 acres....when it first started the farms were small. This is our original 80 acre farm and my dad and four brothers did all the work and could on this small 80 acre farm but then it became obvious that we could not.” In addition, Merrill Harris (2004), a sugar beet grower and the President of the ASBG, pointed out that in 2004 the average size of a grower’s crop was “over a hundred acres.” He (2004) went on to note that the increase in acres “is huge when you consider 1600 growers back in the 50s or 60s, the average...was about 16 to 20 acres.” Furthermore, Harris pointed out that the increase in the number of sugar beet acres a grower could plant each season eventually undermined the economical feasibility of using hand labour for the cultivation of sugar beets. He (2004) stated, “The largest farm we have right now, the largest single producer is right at 1000 acres but for him to have that many beets hoed he would need 200 people out there. So how does he deal with that? House all those people? I mean it’s a cost that you can’t justify anymore.” Although it seems plausible that a 1000 acre sugar beet farm would provide a grower with sufficient profit to manage a workforce of 200 people, what the development of bigger sugar beet farms meant was more profit and, with more capital, growers invested in new technologies that replaced their need for labour. Still, it took until the early 1980s before the growers’ demand for labour was significantly reduced because of the slowness of innovation and the use of other methods in the production of sugar beets.

As the above indicates, growers were heavily dependent on hired labour until the 1980s. In fact, the importance of labour to growers is reflected in the wages they paid to hired labour as it constituted one of their highest costs in the production of sugar beet

crops. This was pointed out in study done in 1970 on labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry that summarized Department of Agriculture statistics on the industry for the period 1966 to 1968. As the study (*Report of an Independent Committee of Inquiry*, 1970: 3) stated:

In recent years the seeded acreage has fluctuated between approximately 34,000 – 43,000 acres. The average being 40,500 with an average of 39,000 harvested. The production of beets yielded between 434,000 – 600,000 tons with an average of 530,000 tons. Average yield per acre has been 13.5 tons. The price per ton has varied from \$11.29 - \$21.25 with an average of \$16.50 per ton. Profit averaged for 1966 – 1968 inclusive was \$88.97 per acre or \$5.95 per ton....For the period 1966 – 1968 the breakdown of the sugar beet growers' dollar was as follows:

Return for profit and management.....	33.7
Machine costs.....	27.6
Labour costs.....	21.5
Seed, herbicides, fertilizer.....	8.9
Land costs.....	8.3

As the breakdown of the costs revealed, the second highest cost for growers in the production of sugar beets was the cost of labour.

The types of labour traditionally in demand by sugar beet growers consisted of a large number of seasonal workers and a small number of year-round workers. Workers who were hired as year-round employees were usually more skilled than seasonal

workers. Thus, besides performing sugar beet jobs, year round employees performed a variety of farm labour tasks such as operating machinery and mechanical work. Seasonal workers, however, were generally hired during the spring when the sugar beet plants were in need of thinning, hoeing and weeding. Seasonal workers were usually employed for a six-week period. However, thereafter many workers would stay in the area and find jobs in the vegetable industry, harvesting, or doing general farm work.

In the case of Aboriginal workers who were recruited as a labour force for the industry from the early 1950s until the early 1980s, most were hired for hand labour on a seasonal basis. Although these workers were recruited from northern reserves and communities in both Alberta and Saskatchewan, the majority of them came from Saskatchewan. For instance, in 1965 ASBGA Labour Committee Director, Leith Johnson, pointed out that 75% of the Aboriginal labour force came from Saskatchewan and 25% from Alberta (ASBGA Minutes, 1965: 1). Also, by the late 1960s and early 1970s approximately 50% of the Aboriginal labour force was recruited under the sponsored labour movement administered by the Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Committee (FPAMC) while the other 50% of the Aboriginal labour force came to the industry on their own as freelance workers and thus outside of the sponsored labour movement (*Report of an Independent Committee of Inquiry*, 1970: 4-7). In commenting on the employment of Aboriginal labour in the sugar beet industry in the late 1960s, M. Evanochko (Edmonds, 1969: 4-5) stated,

The period of employment for most sugar beet workers is about six weeks usually, commencing in late May to mid-July. A substantial number of

workers return to their reservations when this work is completed, others stay on to work for vegetable farmers picking sweet corn, harvesting hay and stacking hay and straw bales. When the vegetable canning plants start many of these workers get an additional three to six weeks work in the factories. A number of single workers stay on for the beet harvest, driving trucks in transporting beets to stock piles and factories, others operate equipment at the sugar beet stations and factories. In November, 1968 a quick survey revealed that the following number of Indian workers were employed in the Lethbridge – Taber areas: 43 were working for Canadian Sugar Factories; 68 were working for Cornwall Canning; 47 were working for Alberta Canning; 4 were employed at the Sun Alberta Potato Plant.

While the majority of the growers' labour requirements were met by the recruitment of Aboriginal workers in the post-Second World War period, some of the thinning, hoeing and weeding of sugar beet crops was "done by other workers such as family labour, high school children and farm workers of other ethnic origins" (Edmonds, 1969: 6). In particular, throughout much of the history of the sugar beet industry, growers sought to acquire European immigrant families for sugar beet work. However, during the early 1950s the lack of European immigrants caused growers to suffer a severe labour shortage. In regards to the lack of these workers, the Chairman of the ASBGA Labour Committee, Leith Johnson (ASBGA, 1956: 8) stated,

The year 1956 is now history. There was no improvement in the labour

situation over 1954 and 1955. European immigration, the main source of new beet labour, dropped off sharply in 1954 and 1955, and beet labour dried up still more in 1956. There were no bulk movements through the Department of Labour, however, out of 164,000 new immigrants a total of only fourteen families, consisting of 75 workers were placed through local offices. These consisted of 8 Dutch, 4 German, 1 Austrian and 1 Polish family from a camp in Germany....Lack of immigrants to the beet fields was due to improved economic conditions in Europe and to competition of recruiting campaigns carried on by some other countries, particularly Australia, and higher wages and unemployment insurance obtainable in other industries.

Although the flow of European immigrants to the sugar beet industry dwindled in the early 1950s, it still comprised a significant proportion of the growers' hand labour in the late 1950s. In commenting on the hand labour groups that performed sugar beet work in 1959, Chairman Johnson (ASBGA, 1959: 12), stated, "The hand labour picture was dominated by three groups: (1) Past Europeans took care of 35.5% of the total. While this was down 5% from 1958 it still comprises the largest block of labour, with mostly satisfactory work performed. (2) Growers' own families took care of 23.5% of the crop. This is up slightly from 1958 and the most dependable group. (3) Indians took care of 21.6% of the crop. This is an increase of 5% of the total crop over 1958 and is the largest acreage handled by them to date."

While European immigrants supplied growers with seasonal hand labour, the growers also hired them for year-round employment. This was pointed out in 1966 when

the Chairman of the ASBGA Labour Committee, Walter Strom (ASBGA, 1966: 15) stated, “Last December we took a survey of the needs of the beet growers in this area for year-round help. Approximately forty-five farmers filled in our survey sheet asking for sixty-five families. Following that, we asked these farmers to go in to the Manpower Office and fill in a definite immigration application. Less than twenty farmers have done so. These requests have been sent to the five immigration offices in Europe – two in Britain and three on the Continent. We have hopes that some families will be here before spring.”

It is interesting to note that sugar beet growers not only sought out European immigrants as a source of sugar beet labour, but that they also coveted them as future replacements of themselves as owners and managers of sugar beet farms. As such, in 1964 the Director of the ASBGA Labour Committee, Leith Johnson, expressed a concern over the lack of prospective growers to take over from those who were on the verge of retirement. He (ASBGA, 1964: 13) stated, “Some of the sons of our European friends that came to our beet fields 35-40 years ago, are now filling the positions of district agriculturists, teaching and other professions. And one that we know of has entered the atomic energy field. As a result, we are running short of men capable of taking over as owners and managers or renters of our beet farms. As far as we know, not one single Indian has come forward as a renter or new owner. The number of older farmers who would like to rent their farms increases annually. This lack of prospective new owners or renters is becoming so obvious that it is of great concern to the Company.” In the following year, Johnson again stressed a concern over the lack of European immigrants to take over sugar beet farms. He (ASBGA, 1965: 16) stated, “Mr. Kent, Deputy Minister of

Labour and Supply, suggested that we resume our applications for farm families who wish to farm on a full-time basis, with the local Immigration office. I feel that it is very important to the whole sugar beet industry of Alberta that we make a break-through with this problem, and at least start bringing in a few families with the potential of some time in the future of replacing older farmers who wish to retire.”

What is also interesting to note is that while some immigrant workers in the sugar beet industry eventually became renters and owners of sugar beet farms, this was not the case for First Nations and Metis workers. There are a number of reasons that shed light on why immigrants as opposed to Aboriginal workers put their efforts into becoming sugar beet producers. For example, many immigrants were pressured by growers to remain in the industry for the five-year period it took for them to become Canadian citizens. In fact, growers lobbied the government to enforce the requirement that immigrants stay in their chosen job for the five-year period required for Canadian citizenship (ASBGA, 1946: 15). Moreover, prior the early 1950s a requirement of unskilled European immigrants to Canada was that they “spend a year on a farm as part of their citizenship contract” (Schmidt, 1961: 46). As a result of the pressure exerted on immigrants to remain in farming jobs for an extended period of time, it seems logical that a number of immigrants would eventually become farmers and produce sugar beet crops themselves. Also, since most immigrants who took jobs in the sugar beet industry were unskilled workers, they would have had difficulty selling themselves in a competitive labour market and thus they had little recourse but to stay in the industry and consequently some would become sugar beet producers. Another factor is that, unlike immigrant workers, Aboriginal workers who migrated to the sugar beet fields had homes

in communities and on reserves that they could return to once they completed their stint of seasonal work, and this would have undermined their interest in becoming sugar beet growers. Moreover, Aboriginal workers had other employment opportunities that attracted them away from sugar beet labour. For example, in 1965 Director Johnson (ASBGA, 1965:15) noted that many of the workers who usually went to the sugar beet fields were being absorbed by the oil sands at Fort McMurray and the new potash mines in Saskatchewan. Lastly, it seems reasonable to assume that many Aboriginal workers simply had no interest in becoming sugar beet producers and instead worked in the industry to supplement the income they made from their traditional economy based on hunting and fishing in their home territory.

In addition to the reasons listed above, a few growers and sugar beet industry officials interviewed for this study provided their views on why no Aboriginal workers settled on the land and became sugar beet growers. For example, a former Field Superintendent (2004: SBO12) for Rogers Sugar Ltd. in Taber, stated, "They did not need to because the government looked after them on the reserve. Japanese did not have that, Dutch did not have that and that is why the Aboriginal people are still where they are at because the government hands it to them and the people on the welfare they stay there as long as you will keep them....it is not their fault; it is the way the government has set it up for them." A grower (2004: G02) stated, "Maybe because they have something already, maybe they have life on reserves, where Japanese had no choice, the Dutch had no choice, the Hutterites had no choice. Either work for someone your whole life or buy." Another sugar beet grower (2004: G03) responded to the issue by stating, "I don't know, maybe the drive is not there. I am not sure what their history is there but I

think that people that do go to certain areas and do that work because they want to do it and I am not sure if Aboriginals actually want to farm; there is a few of them but I think they are few and far between.” Merrill Harris (2004), President of the ASBG, stated, “...the Europeans...came over to stay whereas the Natives; I guess they had somewhere to go back to.”

As was pointed out above, over the course of the sugar beet industry’s history the growers’ demand for labour never subsided until innovation and changes in the way sugar beets were produced became widespread in the industry. Moreover, even while there was a decline in the demand for labour in other agricultural industries as a result of the relative decline in the farming population, particularly in the post Second World War period, due to expansion in the industry the growers’ demand for labour increased to the point where managing such a large seasonal labour force became difficult. It was also pointed out that, in general, neither the seasonal nor the year-round employee positions were filled on the basis of labour market mechanisms and the spontaneous migration of workers to the industry. Instead, growers tapped surplus pools of labour that existed in Europe prior to and after the Second World War by soliciting the help of immigration offices in Europe and the assistance of the Department of Labour. Moreover, once the flow of immigrant workers from Europe dwindled, growers in the sugar beet industry, with the assistance of the Sugar Company in Taber and the Canadian state, moved to recruit the surplus Aboriginal labour that existed on reserves and communities in northern Saskatchewan and Alberta to fill their labour needs.

Overall, the preceding discussion indicated that even with the help of the state, sugar beet growers still experienced problems in the recruitment and retention of labour,

particularly in regards to seasonal labour. Also, it indicated that during the post-Second World War period growers were concerned that there was a lack of prospective growers to take over the land and produce sugar beets once the existing growers retired. Moreover, growers were aware that Aboriginal workers were not interested in settling on the land in southern Alberta and becoming sugar growers. Thus, the concern over the lack of future sugar beet growers coupled with the fact that no Aboriginal people were interested in becoming growers, would have encouraged growers to attempt to secure another labour force other than Aboriginal; a labour force that would be suitable not only as workers but also as a group that could potentially be incorporated into the industry as land renters and owners and in particular, sugar beet producers.

Working and Living Conditions, Wages and the Problems of Recruitment and Retention of Labour

A number of studies argue that transitions of labour forces in agricultural industries are linked to problems of recruitment and retention of labour (e.g. Satzewich, 1991; Mysyk, 2000; Basok, 2002; Mines, 2002). In particular, studies indicate that the problems of recruitment and retention of farm workers are linked to a number of problems such as poor working and living conditions, poor wages and the lack of labour standards (Satzewich, 1991: 62). However, my research does not accord with other studies---the problems that sugar beet growers experienced in the recruitment and retention of labour were the manifestations of a number of historically specific conditions related to the sugar beet industry and farm labour employment.

A factor that undermined the ability of sugar beet growers to recruit and retain

sufficient labour was that prior to the introduction of machinery and chemical weed controls, the production of sugar beet crops was labour intensive. In particular, during the early growth stage of sugar beets it was critical that a large labour force was available to carry out the hand operations of thinning, hoeing and weeding of the plants. However, hoeing and weeding was tedious, backbreaking stoop labour and workers had to sweat many long hours under the hot summer sun for every acre of sugar beets produced. Before the early 1960s sugar beets were grown from a multigerm seed that produced a bunch rather than a single plant. Once germination occurred, the bunch had to be thinned until only one plant remained. To accomplish this task, workers had to crawl along the rows on their hands and knees. Then, the tiny seedlings had to be weeded as many as three times during the growing season. When the plants reached maturity in the fall they were harvested. Prior to the introduction of mechanical harvesters, sugar beets were harvested by hand which entailed uprooting the plants and knocking them together to remove excess dirt. The beets were then “topped” by cutting off their leaves and crown that made them ready for shipment to the sugar processing factory. Before mechanization, it took approximately 115 hours of hand labour to produce one acre of sugar beets, which, by comparison was more than ten times the amount of labour required to produce one acre of grain (Thompson and Seager, 1978: 154). Since the production of sugar beets was so difficult, during the 1920s and 30s most growers who tried producing sugar beet crops gave up after one or two seasons. Moreover, growers soon found that farm hands would do almost any other type of work before they would accept the job of hoeing and harvesting sugar beets (Thompson and Seager, 1978: 154).

In fact, the sugar beet work was so difficult that many immigrants who came to

Canada to work in the fields refused to perform weeding and hoeing jobs. This was acknowledged at a ASBGA meeting in 1953 when Lethbridge Northern, a local of the ASBGA, submitted a proposal to the Resolution Committee that stated, “WHEREAS in past years immigrants have been brought in as beet workers and WHEREAS the beet growers have gone to considerable expense to provide housing, etc. and WHEREAS immigrants have refused to work sugar beets, THEREFORE be it resolved that the Government be liable for such expense” (ASGBA *Minutes*, 1953: 2). Although the proposal was withdrawn, it indicates that the problem of immigrants refusing to perform sugar beet work was widespread enough that growers sought compensation from the government to cover the costs they incurred as a result of the loss of this labour. Moreover, during the post Second World War period when Canada was experiencing a huge influx of immigrants, many were unwilling to do sugar beet labour. In 1955 the unwillingness of immigrants to perform the work was noted by Leith Johnson (ASBGA, 1955: 9) when he stated, “It has been reported that the greatest immigration is taking place from Britain to Canada since the First World War, 1914-1918 period. But unfortunately these people are not interested in beet labour; they are going into other trades and industries.”

The problems that sugar beet growers faced in the recruitment and retention of sufficient labour for production was the result of historically specific conditions related to the farming industry and farm labour employment in general. More specifically, as was the case of all farm labour employment, sugar beet employment was characterized by long hours of work, low wages, the lack of protection under provincial labour standards legislation, and poor housing accommodations. These latter problems were

acknowledged in 1964 at a Federal-Provincial Conference on Agricultural Manpower when the Alberta Minister of Agriculture, H. E. Strom (1964: 2), stated “many skilled farm workers are leaving agriculture for jobs in urban centres....this pointed up the importance of improving working and living conditions in agriculture....more attention must be paid to such matters as wages, hours of work, unemployment insurance, etc.”

During the 1960s, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics confirmed that farm employment was characterized by long hours of work and low wages. For example, in 1964 at a Federal-Provincial Conference on Agricultural Manpower, a representative of the Department of Forestry, D. R. Buchanan (1964: 1) stated, “Farm workers generally put in much longer hours during a week than workers in non-agricultural industries. This is due mainly to the fact that many farm workers still put in six days of work per week....there has been very little change in the average weekly hours for males on farms over the past ten years. In 1953, they worked about 55 hours and in 1963, about 54.” Buchanan (1964: 1) went on to comment on farm wages by stating, “Farm cash wages paid to hired male workers, although low in absolute terms compared with wages in other industries, appear to be rising roughly in line with other wage rates. In the period 1949 to 1964, farm wages have increased more rapidly in Ontario and the three most western provinces....Despite the increase in farm wage rates, however, the levels in absolute dollars and cents are generally lower than levels for unskilled labourers in other industries.” The discrepancy in wages between farm and industrial labour was also noted in 1966 at a meeting of the National Agricultural Manpower Meeting in Ottawa when the Dominion Bureau of Statistics report on “Farm Wages in Canada” noted the average hourly wage for male farm workers in Alberta in 1964 was \$1.22 compared to male

construction workers which was \$2.17 hourly. (National Agricultural Manpower Meeting, 1966: Table 3). In addition, in 1967 the Alberta Deputy Minister of Agriculture, E. E. Ballantyne (1966: 4), pointed out the difficulty farmers faced in competing for labour by stating, “it was hard to convince potential workers that a gross income for farm work, made up of \$350 a month plus housing and food allowance, was competitive with \$600 to \$1000 a month that may be earned in the petroleum and construction industries.”

In southern Alberta, growers hired seasonal workers to hoe and weed sugar beet crops on a contractual basis. That is, sugar beet work was done on the basis of agreements made between the grower and the worker to undertake certain hand operations for a specific number of acres for a specific price per acre. The conditions of employment and the rates of pay were outlined in the “Alberta Cash Labour Contract – Sugar Beets.” In the 1960s the Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Committee (FPAMC) was responsible for the recruitment of Aboriginal labour for the sugar beet industry. Thus, once the workers arrived in the sugar beet fields FPAMC representatives provided them with an information sheet that stated “all labour shall be contracted labour and shall sign the Alberta Cash Labour Contract for Sugar Beet Workers” (Landon, n. d.).

The sugar beet contract called for a fixed fee to be paid to workers once they completed each stage of cultivation. For example, in a “Letter of Instruction and Information, Sugar Beet and Vegetable Industry Workers, Season 1968-69,” Canada Manpower instructed growers to pay the contractor a specific rate per acre upon satisfactory completion of the contract. An acre was defined as 23,760 lineal feet of row. The contract stipulated that workers were to perform Operation A or Operation B, but not both. The contract outlined the work to be performed and the rates of pay as follows:

Operation A: Trimming

Removing weeds and excess beets. Total plant removal not to exceed 50 plants, beets and weeds combined, per 100 feet of cultivated row.....	\$9.00
Plus per measured acre upon satisfactory completion of contract.....	\$3.00
Total for Trimming.....	\$12.00
Hoeing.....	\$9.00
Total for <u>Operation A</u>	\$21.00

Operation B: Thinning

Removing weeds and excess beets. Total plant removal exceeding 50 plants, weeds and beets combined per 100 feet of cultivation beet row.....	\$14.00
Plus per measured acre upon satisfactory completion of contract.....	\$3.00
Total for thinning.....	\$17.00
Hoeing.....	\$9.00
Total for <u>Operation B</u>	\$26.00

Operation C:

If, through cultural practices, the beet field warrants a once-over job only, the price will be \$12.00 per acre unless otherwise agreed between the grower and the worker (Landon, n. d.).

Since workers signed contracts to work a certain number of acres, they could also hire their own crew of workers to complete the job. As such, many workers who signed contracts would hire their own families to complete the job. Once the contracts were completed, the workers were free to go elsewhere to contract other jobs (French, 1969: 9).

In a study (*Report of an Independent Committee of Inquiry*, 1970: 4) done in 1970 on labour in the sugar beet industry, it was found that over the period from 1966 to 1968, the average hourly rate of pay for the different hand operations was calculated as follows:

	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>Average</u>
Thinning	\$1.17	\$1.37	\$1.34	\$1.29
Hoeing	1.12	1.24	1.22	1.19
Weeding	.97	1.01	1.51	1.16

In regards to the rates of pay, the committee members of the study (*Report of an Independent Committee of Inquiry*, 1970: 11) stated, “Jobs are contracted on an amount per acre, one acre equaling an average of 4 ½ row miles. When this is understood, the amount paid per acre is seen to be by no means generous....Increases in contract rates do not appear to have kept pace with increases in the cost of living and wage increases obtained in other sections of the economy.” During the period, growers were aware that the wages paid for sugar beet labour were low in comparison to other industries but they attributed this to low farm income levels, which, in turn, contributed to the decline in the farming population. As President of the ASBGA, Lalovee Jensen (ASBGA, 1966: 7), stated, “The real and very evident reason for this exodus from the farm is because there is a lack of adequate farm income to enable us to pay wage scales that are competitive with those of industry.”

Another aspect that was detrimental to the recruitment and retention of farm labour was the poor labour standards for farm workers. In most provinces in Canada, numerous federal and provincial labour laws explicitly excluded individuals employed in agriculture. In 1966, Gil Schonning (1966: 2) of the federal Department of Labour listed the federal and provincial laws that excluded farm workers as follows:

(1) Statutory school-leaving age

In all of the provinces there is a compulsory school attendance law but in many of the provinces exemptions are permitted for employment in agriculture.

(2) Minimum age for employment

No minimum age has been established for employment in agriculture.

(3) Minimum wage legislation

Farm labour is everywhere excluded from minimum wage regulations.

(4) Equal pay

While most of the provinces have an equal pay law, as a general rule this law does not apply to employment in agriculture.

(5) Hours of work

Five provinces have laws which regulate working hours but none of these laws apply to employment in agriculture.

(6) Weekly rest day

All provinces except Prince Edward Island provide for a weekly rest day for all or nearly all employed persons except farm workers.

(7) Annual vacations with pay

Annual vacations are provided for by law in eight of the provinces. Farm workers are excluded in all provinces.

(8) Public holidays

Provincial laws dealing with public holidays generally do not apply to farm workers.

(9) Fair employment practices

Farm workers are not included in provincial laws which prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, religion, and national origin.

(10) Notice of termination of employment

Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Quebec and Nova Scotia have legislation requiring an employer or employee to give notice of termination of employment. These laws do not apply to farm workers.

(11) Workmen's compensation

Agricultural workers were excluded from compulsory coverage in all provinces until 1965 when the provision of the Ontario law stating that the Act did not apply to the industry of farming was deleted. New regulations will be issued extending the protection of the Act to farm workers. It is proposed to bring these workers under the Act from January 1, 1966.

(12) Unemployment insurance

Employment in agriculture is one of the main categories of employment exempted from provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

(13) Labour Relations

The Labour Relations Act of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia exclude agriculture. Agriculture is not excluded in the Acts of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Under the Quebec Act farm workers are not excluded but the legislation applies only to farms which have three or more employees.

Throughout most of the history of the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, farm workers were excluded from federal and provincial labour laws. Even in the case where there was no specific exclusion and the labour laws were broad enough to include employment in agriculture, in most cases the laws were not applied to farm workers (Schonning, 1966: 2). In essence, the exclusion of agricultural workers from federal and provincial labour standards reflected the relative political power of the farm employers in comparison to the relative powerlessness of farm employees (Laliberte, 1994: 129).

Of all the areas where farm labour was excluded from labour laws, the lack of unemployment insurance benefits and workmen's compensation were the most detrimental to the ability of sugar beet growers to recruit and retain labour. For instance, following the Second World War the lack of unemployment insurance benefits for farm workers was cited as one of the reasons for the difficulty of the industry to attract European immigrant workers. As ASBGA Director, W. B. Grunewald (ASBGA, 1959: 13) reported in 1959 following a labour recruitment trip to Europe, "Getting sugar beet workers out of Europe, who will stay with farm work any length of time will not be an easy job as long as present conditions exist. It means a real job of salesmanship by personal contact. It calls for a program of education, persuasion and conversion, and last but not least, it calls for the provision of unemployment insurance to agricultural workers in Canada, a social security benefit which is common practice in Europe." Moreover, in 1965 the lack of unemployment insurance benefits was again cited as a reason for attracting workers to other jobs in the economy and away from sugar beet employment. As ASBGA Director, Leith Johnson (ASBGA, 1965: 15), stated, "We are of the opinion that a large number of people who had been coming into our beet fields found their way into other jobs where Unemployment Insurance was available. This trend will quite likely continue as the Government develops the community industries that are being planned for these people. Then there are the oil sands at Fort McMurray and the new potash industry in Saskatchewan that will absorb quite a number of workers."

However, growers were well aware of the impact that the lack of unemployment insurance had on the recruitment and retention of labour and on a number of occasions they requested that the Central Board look into getting the government to provide it for

farm workers. For instance, at ASBGA meeting in 1964 the Central Board received a resolution from the Taber-Barnwell-Cranford-Vauxhall Local that stated, "Whereas farm workers are in short supply on account of our industry not being able to provide unemployment insurance benefits to agricultural workers, therefore be it resolved that we request the Central Board to continue to press the federal government to include all farm workers under the Unemployment Insurance Act, and further be it resolved that we demand immediate action on the part of the federal government on this matter" (ASBGA *Minutes*, Feb. 19, 1964).

In 1966, D. J. Macdonnell (1966: 11) of the federal Unemployment Insurance Commission, announced that on April 1, 1967 unemployment insurance benefits would be made mandatory for agricultural workers. However, the benefits were extended to those agricultural workers who worked sufficient time at "non-contract" work to qualify. Therefore, sugar beet workers that signed a contract with growers to perform the hand operations on a specified acreage of sugar beets were excluded because they were judged to be self-employed (Schmidt, 1970: 31). Furthermore, if the self-employed contractors hired their relatives, the relatives too were excluded from unemployment insurance benefits whether they were paid wages or not (Macdonnell, 1966: 11).

However, another factor that worked against the efforts of sugar beet growers to recruit and retain non-contract labour was the amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act introduced on June 23, 1971 that stipulated those on unemployment insurance benefits were not required to accept available jobs that were deemed unsuitable (Satzewich, 1991: 63). This latter amendment to the Act stipulated that if a person was drawing unemployment insurance benefits, then that person was not required to accept an

available job if it paid less than he or she had been paid in the previous job position.

Hence, the amendment, coupled with the fact that the wages paid to sugar beet workers were relatively low in comparison to the wages in most sectors of the Canadian economy, would have hindered the efforts of growers to attract the surplus workers laid off by industries outside of the sugar beet industry.

Besides a lack of unemployment insurance benefits, the lack of providing Workmen's Compensation to workers was also a factor that hindered the ability of sugar beet growers to recruit and retain labour. In regards to the lack of the latter benefits, an industry document (ASBGA Fonds, n.d.) pointed out, "No contract beet worker whether white or Indian is covered by the farmer with Workman's Compensation or Unemployment Insurance. Indeed the farmer cannot give them this coverage because they have a contract and are judged to be self employed under the meaning of the Act. Any Indian working sufficient time at non-contract work is of course covered by Unemployment Insurance because it is mandatory. This is not true of Workman's Compensation. Not many farms have this coverage because farm coverage is expensive." Thus, while it was possible for growers to choose to come under the Workmen's Compensation Act few did because farm coverage was expensive (Schmidt, 1970: 31). For instance, in 1976 the Alberta government proposed to make coverage compulsory for sugar beet workers, including contract workers, by placing them under the Workers' Compensation Board. However, while growers agreed that farm workers should be protected with accident insurance, they objected to the high premiums they had to pay for the coverage during a time when farm income was falling. Thus, once growers presented their case to the government, the legislation was withdrawn and Workmen's

Compensation continued to be available to growers but on a voluntary basis (ASBGA, 1977: 13).

In 1980 the Alberta government attempted to deal with the issue of Workers' Compensation coverage for farm labour when it formed a Select Committee to the Legislative Assembly on Workers' Compensation for farmers and farm workers. A recommendation of the Committee was that a position paper be prepared on Workers' Compensation for farmers and farm workers by the Workers' Compensation Board, the Division of Occupational Health and Safety and Alberta Agriculture. When the Committee released the position paper in 1980 it argued that farmers and farm workers should be covered by the Workers' Compensation Act (ASBGA, 1980: 14). However, once again growers rejected compulsory coverage because of the high costs involved and because as free enterprisers they wanted to retain their right to choose between Workers' Compensation coverage and various other private plans that were available (ASBGA, 1981: 13). In 1991 Bernard Lyczewski and Tom Machacek of the ASBGMB Labour Committee commented on whether Workers' Compensation coverage for sugar beet workers should be made compulsory. They (ASBGMB, 1991: 19-20) stated, "...all farmers should have Workers' Compensation or at least an insurance policy for the protection of the worker. This would help to bring us in line with many other industries. At present the premium for Workers' Compensation \$7.25/\$100.00 is relatively high but if all farm organizations would lobby the province to implement a program similar to the average of other provinces in Canada a premium level of \$3.00/\$100.00 would perhaps be more acceptable for farm workers. Perhaps then, if farmers could provide the same benefits as a job in the city, more people would be willing to work on the farm."

Overall, the lack of labour standards for agricultural workers in the recent past has negatively impacted on the ability of growers to recruit sufficient labour for production purposes. That is, while the lack labour standards, such as Unemployment Insurance benefits and Workers' Compensation coverage, in the past undoubtedly hindered the growers' ability to recruit sufficient labour for sugar beet work, the lack of restriction on the employment of children for farm work functioned to increase their ability to recruit labour. Moreover, this facilitated the employment of family units in the beet fields. Today, the Alberta "Employment Standards Act" (2007) indicates that farm workers are still exempt from many employment standards that benefit employees in other areas of the Alberta economy. In particular, the Act (2007) states that employees employed on a farm or ranch are exempt from the provisions of the Act in the following areas: hours of work; overtime and overtime pay; general holidays and general holiday pay; vacations and vacation pay; employment of children prohibiting or regulating the employment of individuals under 18 years of age; and, minimum wage.

Also, the sugar beet grower's ability to recruit and retain labour was hindered by what was perceived to be relatively poor housing conditions provided to workers. In the industry, there were three types of housing available to workers. First, there were hostels. During the mid 1960s growers moved to improve worker housing by building hostels in various areas throughout sugar beet country. As ASBGA Labour Committee Chairman, Leith Johnson (ASBGA, 1965, 16-17) stated, "Suggestions have been that we try a few hostels in different parts of the beet area. The Department of Health and Welfare seem to favor this type of housing as this would be one means of providing modern facilities for more people, such as gas heat, electricity, hot and cold water, etc." Thus, in the following

year six growers in the Iron Springs area got together and built the first Agricultural Manpower Hostel that housed thirty-five workers in individual cottages. The workers were fed in a central dining room that also doubled as a recreation center. The workers were transported by bus from the facility to fields that growers needed hoed (ASBGA, 1966: 16). By the end of the 1960s the growers, with the assistance of government grants covering 40% of the costs, built five more hostels in sugar beet country, some of which housed up to 50 workers at a time (ASBGA, 1968: 11). The hostels were inspected by the Federal Provincial Manpower Division and were open to all workers.

Second, there were labour houses. These houses were occupied by sugar beet workers the year-round. The houses included heat for winter conditions, electricity, refrigerators, beds and mattresses. Also, many had gas heat, T.V. and other furniture. In many instances, these houses were previously the home of the grower. Like the hostels, the Federal Provincial Manpower Division was in charge of inspecting the labour houses when workers in the sponsored movement were placed in them (ASBGA, Fonds, n. d.).

The third type of housing was that provided to seasonal workers who generally migrated to the sugar beet fields for spring and perhaps some summer employment. The housing was supplied to the workers rent-free and in some cases they were allowed to stay for months and even over the winter while working in the canneries or at the sugar factory (ASBGA, Fonds, n. d.). Again, it was the responsibility of the Federal Provincial Manpower officials to inspect the housing used by workers in the sponsored movement.

The sugar beet contract stipulated that a habitable house was to be provided to the worker. Moreover, the Canada Manpower Centres (CMC) involved in the sponsored movement of workers for the sugar beet industry provided information to workers

concerning housing. For example, the CMC “Letter of Instruction and Information, Sugar Beet and Vegetable Industry Workers, Season 1968-69” promised that houses would be “supplied free and vary in size from 2 to 6 rooms, depending usually on the number of acres of sugar beets and the number of workers required to handle the contract” (Landon, n. d.). The houses were to be equipped with a stove, beds and mattresses. The workers were expected to provide their own food, fuel, blankets, cooking utensils, dishes and working tools. However, once the worker signed a contract to cultivate a specific acreage of beets, they could obtain an advance from the grower to cover the costs of their groceries and other essentials (Landon, n. d.). The provision of housing to sugar beet workers was seen as important for the recruitment and retention of labour. This was made clear in 1957 when Chairman Johnson (ASBGA, 1957: 11) stated, “I would like to again stress the importance of suitable housing as an important factor in attracting beet labour to our farms, and then keeping them over from year to year.”

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, growers came under harsh criticism for the relatively poor conditions of the housing provided to sugar beet workers. In particular, the criticisms of the housing were directed mainly at seasonal housing for workers as opposed to the hostels. In fact, the main complaint of the workers concerning the hostels was that they were overly regimented. For instance, the workers resented the rules of conduct that were set by operators of hostels. As a result, many workers resisted residing at the hostels and instead preferred the independence offered by separate dwellings. Interestingly, however, in a study done on the sugar beet industry by Steele and Zacharias (1971: 21) in 1971, it was found that worker resentment of the rules contributed to the difficulty in filling the hostels and it also contributed to the eventual

halt of the hostel-building program during the late 1960s.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s when the controversy over the conditions of worker housing erupted, a report by Ferguson and Lipton (1969) on the industry argued that almost all the buildings the growers provided to sugar beet workers to live in were “shacks, converted granaries and chicken coops.” Furthermore, it was argued that many of the buildings used for worker housing had dirt floors, no plumbing, no easy access to water, no refrigerators and as a result, the beet workers’ families lived on canned goods for the two or three months they worked in the fields (Ferguson and Lipton, 1969). While commenting on the housing conditions of Aboriginal workers in the industry, *The Native People* newspaper writer, Cecil Nepoose (1972: 1) stated, “Most of the so-called houses are one or two rooms shacks. Some have running water. You have to run out back and get it from a well.”

In another report on the working conditions in the sugar beet industry done in 1970, a representative of the Canadian Labour Congress, Henry Tomaschuk (1970: 20), also found that the housing provided to seasonal sugar beet workers was poor and in many cases workers were living in granaries and rundown shacks. He stated, “Most farmers have better barns and pigpens for their livestock.” In similar fashion, Steele and Zacharias’ (1971: 20) study on the industry characterized the housing provided to workers as “unacceptably substandard” where some of the workers were living in chicken coops and converted granaries. In one instance “the farmer moved the chickens out just before the workers arrived and, later, the chickens tried to return home for the night” (20).

In another investigation of the working and living conditions in the sugar beet

industry, the President of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, David Ahenakew, visited Taber in 1969 and took a job hoeing sugar beets in order to experience the conditions firsthand. While he found the working and living conditions “left a lot to be desired,” in describing the 4H building in Lethbridge that housed and fed Aboriginal workers that arrived in southern Alberta until they were assigned to growers, he stated, “I took pictures of the bologna and flies. The Indian people call this 4H Building the “Bologna House” (FPAMC Meeting, 1969: 3). Besides Ahenakew’s criticisms of the housing provided to Aboriginal workers in the industry, Stan Daniels of the Metis Association of Alberta stated, “Some uninspected housing used by sugar beet workers in southern Alberta ‘is not fit for animals’” (*Edmonton Journal*, ASBGA Fonds, n.d.).

As stated previously, it was the responsibility of the Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Committee (FPAMC) to inspect the housing the growers provided for sugar beet workers recruited under the sponsored movement. In general, the FPAMC inspections were done in March prior to beginning of beet season. The problem with the inspections, however, was the lack of basic criteria that defined what constituted an acceptable dwelling and the grounds upon which to reject a dwelling as unsuitable (Steele and Zacharias, 1971: 27). As a result, the judgments on whether the housing was suitable were arbitrary and subjective. That is, it was left up to the FPAMC inspectors to decide what constituted acceptable housing for workers. Hence, Steele and Zacharais (1971: 28) concluded that the lack of criteria for housing standards gave “the whole inspection program an air of meaninglessness and superficiality.”

While the conditions of the housing provided to workers under the sponsored movement and inspected by FPAMC officials created a great deal of controversy, so did

the conditions of the housing provided to freelance workers. By the late 1960s, approximately half of the workers who migrated to the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta were freelance and thus outside of the sponsored movement (Steele and Zacharias, 1971: 28). In the case of the workers recruited under the sponsored movement, FPAMC inspectors had the authority to refuse to provide these workers to growers who did not maintain adequate housing standards. However, in the case of freelance workers, FPAMC inspectors had no control over them and thus in many cases growers hired them and placed them in the very houses that the inspectors had rejected because of their poor conditions (Steele and Zacharias, 1971: 28).

In 1969, amidst the controversy created by the poor housing conditions of sugar beet workers, the ASBGA Labour Report Chairman, Walter Strom (ASBGA, 1969: 12), responded to the issue by arguing that the housing inspected by the FPAMC had improved year by year and moreover, in 1970 all housing used for sugar beet labour was to be inspected. Nevertheless, a study (*Report of an Independent Committee of Inquiry*, 1970: 9) done in 1970 argued that despite Strom's assertion in 1969 that all housing used by migrant workers would be inspected in 1970, this proved not to be the case. In particular, the study noted that the housing used by freelance workers was not inspected and that much of it was substandard.

Shortly after the allegations of poor housing conditions for sugar beet workers received widespread attention through the media in the 1969, growers provided their views on the issue. For instance, growers argued that maintaining the housing was too costly especially in light of the low returns they got for their sugar beet crops. As the President of the ASBGA, Lalovee Jensen (*ASBGA Minutes*, 1969: 7), stated, "The

margin of return for the farmer is not sufficient to meet with the housing of the city. In the past we have made a real effort to have the growers improve their housing....I believe that all of these houses should have hot and cold water and bathrooms. The money will have to be found to make these improvements. But for a farmer to do this for only two months – the cost is too high.”

Also, in 1972 J. McQuillan, a senior Public Health Inspector of Alberta, evaluated beet labour housing and in the process he interviewed a number of growers on the subject. As a result, McQuillan’s report was quite sympathetic to the growers’ views concerning worker housing. As McQuillan (ASBGA Fonds, 1972: 2) explained, “This housing is only utilized for a period of 6 – 10 weeks, with an average of about 7 weeks, and it would be unfair to require farmers to comply with minimum Provincial Housing Standards. I have paid as much as \$50 a week for less adequate housing at holiday resorts and thought I was getting a bargain. When you see at first hand the decimation of property that is carried out by some of these people I can understand some of the attitudes of the beet farmers. In point I have seen evidence of furniture having been chopped up in the middle of the kitchen because they have been too lazy to go to the wood pile for fuel.” McQuillan (ASBGA Fonds, 1972: 2) also found that in one house “mattresses had been slashed and the filling had been spread from one end of the house to the other. Windows were broken and the remaining mattresses, etc., showed evidence of urine contamination.” The Health Inspector ended the report by stating, “These comments may sound prejudiced in favour of the farmers but having seen so much destruction of property by some of the native workers, I feel that this attitude is justified. Fortunately the majority of native workers coming into this area have respect for other people’s

property and are provided with very satisfactory accommodations” (ASBGA Fonds, 1972: 3).

As this section has demonstrated, the ability of sugar beet growers to recruit and retain labour for the production of their crops was hindered by a number of factors. These factors included the difficulty of performing hand labour in cultivating sugar beets, the low wages paid to the workers, the lack of labour standards for agricultural workers and the relatively poor housing conditions of the workers.

Structural Factors and the Problems of Recruitment and Retention of Labour

In many cases, individual farmers have been blamed for the problems of recruitment and retention of farm labour because of the poor wages and poor working conditions they offer their workers. However, such arguments are too simplistic because they fail to take into account the structural processes that are beyond the control of individual farmers and which, in many instances, are at the root of the problems.

A case in point is that the various levels of the state are reluctant to introduce health, safety and labour standards legislation in agricultural sectors largely due to the political power of farmers in comparison to the political powerlessness of farm workers (Satzewich, 1991: 64). In particular, farm workers in Canada are overwhelmingly non-unionized which has placed them in a weak political position in comparison to farmers who are well organized and form a powerful political group from which the various levels of government have sought political support (Satzewich, 1991: 64).

Like other farm workers, sugar beet workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet

industry have never been unionized, although an attempt was made during the 1930s but failed (see Thompson and Seager, 1978). Still, during the period when the industry was widely criticized because of the working and living conditions of its workers, Ferguson and Lipton (1969) argued that the only way the conditions of the workers would improve was through the formation of a union. With a union the workers could then confront the powerful Alberta Sugar Beet Growers Association and demand “better working conditions, higher pay, improved housing and government benefits such as unemployment insurance and workmen’s compensation” (Ferguson and Lipton, 1969). In reality, however, it was difficult to organize a union among seasonal migrant workers because of the short period of time they spent in the sugar beet fields. As Roy Jamha (*Canadian Labour*, 1971: 22), President of the Alberta Federation of Labour, put it, “the situation cannot...be met by normal union organizing methods. One essential fact is that this is a short-term operation—normally mid-May to the latter part of July. This in itself makes union organization of the workers, who are scattered across the area of well over a hundred square miles, difficult.” Indeed, the logistics of organizing an itinerant group of workers spread over such a huge area would have been a challenge for even the most determined of union organizers.

Hence, in the case of seasonal sugar beet workers the very nature of their employment as itinerant workers was a factor that undermined their ability to form a union, which, in turn, contributed to their political powerlessness in comparison to the growers who were highly organized under the ASBGA. More specifically, the structural process that blocked the workers’ ability to form a union at their places of employment manifested itself as a difference in political power between owners and workers. In turn,

that caused the various levels of the state to shy away from introducing labour standards that would improve farm worker conditions for fear this would weaken their political support in the farming community.

Other structural processes that render farm work unattractive and thereby increase the problems of recruitment and retention of farm workers include the process of capital accumulation, the 'cost-price squeeze' endured by Canadian farmers and the Canadian state's pursuit of a cheap food policy. Moreover, these structural processes have been linked to the post-war decline of the family farm and low farm-owner incomes (Satzewich, 1991: 64).

Since the end of the Second World War, Canada's urban-based and resource extraction industries were expanded extensively; this process was spurred on by the "proletarianization of *petit* agricultural commodity producers and through the rural to urban migration of wage labour" (Satzewich, 1991: 64). As a result, jobs in urban-based industries were seen as more attractive than farm jobs because they offered higher wages, better working conditions and steady employment when compared to farm employment. Moreover, urban-based employment was seen as more attractive than farm employment because urban-based industries have been easier to unionize which has enabled workers to fight for better provincial labour standards legislation, better rates of pay and safer working conditions (Satzewich, 1991: 64).

As stated previously in this chapter, since the end of the Second World War a number of studies (e.g. Clements, 1983; Basran and Hay, 1988; Satzewich, 1991; Hay, 1992) have confirmed the decline in Canada's farm population numbers. Indeed from 1941 to 1981, Alberta's farm population decreased by approximately 39 to 40 percent

(Hay and Basran, 1988: 22).

Hence, the process of capital accumulation during the post-Second World War period resulted in the expansion of urban-based and resource extraction industries. This caused farm producers and farm workers, in provinces like Alberta, to seek out wage labouring positions in the expanding industries. In particular, seasonal farm labour was attracted to the industries because they offered better working conditions and higher wages than those offered in farm employment. This caused farm commodity producers such as sugar beet growers to experience problems in the recruitment and retention of sufficient labour for production purposes.

Another structural process that made employment in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry unattractive and increased the problems of recruitment and retention of labour was that growers were caught in a 'cost-price squeeze' situation. A "cost-price squeeze" arises when growers "increasingly pay monopoly prices for inputs such as machinery, fertilizer and seed, and increasingly receive competitive prices for their outputs. In the long run, the costs of farm inputs have tended to outpace the prices received for the commodities produced" (Satzewich, 1991: 64).

In southern Alberta, sugar beet growers had no control over the spiraling increases in the costs of their inputs. In particular, the cost of machinery, fertilizers, and herbicides increased dramatically during the post-Second World War period and adversely affected the profit margins of agricultural producers. For sugar beet growers, the negative effects of low market prices for their crops and a loss of profit due to the high costs of production became acute during the late 1950s. This was pointed out in 1959 when the ASBGA President, Lalovee Jensen (ASBGA, 1959: 4) argued that the

farm picture was bleak because of two factors: first, the cash returns for agricultural producers were too low and second, “the goods and services supplied by urban people and required in farm production [were] at an all-time record high.” Similarly, in 1961 Jensen (ASBGA, 1961: 5) argued that the costs of production were increasing because the cost of taxes, land, machinery, labour and supplies were at an all time high. Moreover, by the mid-1970s the costs of production were so high that they prompted ASBGA President, Burns Wood (ASBGA, 1976:2), to state,

As farmers, we have little or no control over the cost of vital and basic inputs. We have no power over holding the cost of production down. We are victims of ever increasing costs of fuel, labour, machinery, parts, services, taxes, herbicides, fertilizers and endless other inputs. For most of our products and especially sugar we have equally little or no control over the prices we receive. Because of these facts, farmers always take the initial brunt of inflation. Because of inflated land values and production inputs, the farming industry has been forced to build in a higher cost base into production. Without high enough returns to cover this cost base, many farmers will go out of business, and indeed, many farms now are in financial trouble.

During the early 1980s growers continued to suffer from the impact of low returns for their crops and the high price of inputs as Alberta prices for sugar dropped by fifty per cent within a two-year period and during the same period the costs of production increased by thirty per cent (ASBGA, 1982: 3).

A final structural process that has been linked to the problems of recruitment and retention of labour in agricultural industries, as well as to the low prices farmers received for their outputs and the decline of the family farm, is the Canadian state's cheap food policy. Central to the state's cheap food policy was the implementation of low tariffs on the import of agricultural products, many of which are either produced or could be produced in Canada. An objective of the state's cheap food policy was to "to keep inflation down and to dampen pressures placed on employers by the urban-based working class for increased wages" (Satzewich, 1991: 67). As such, the Canadian state has been quite successful in keeping the price of agricultural products in Canada low because the products it purchased on the world market were produced in foreign countries at a low cost due to the availability of cheap labour, low land costs, economies of scale, a longer growing season and in some cases, state subsidies (Satzewich, 1991: 67).

In the case of southern Alberta's sugar beet industry, Canada's cheap food policy had an impact on the price growers received for their sugar beet crops. That is, during periods when there was a world surplus of sugar, it was dumped on the world market by sugar producing countries at very low prices. Since Canada dealt on the international sugar market, the price Canadians paid for domestically produced sugar was based on the low price of sugar set by the international market (ASBGA, 1961: 7). This meant that domestic sugar producers such as Rogers Sugar had to sell its sugar to Canada based on the low price of international sugar that, in turn, meant it had to purchase sugar beets from domestic growers at a very low price. Consequently, growers had no recourse but to be "price takers" because they had no control over the domestic price of sugar in Canada (Laliberte, 1994: 42). In 1964, while commenting on the issue of low returns for sugar

beet crops and Canada's purchase of sugar on the world market, ASBGA President Lalovee Jensen (ASBGA, 1964: 5) argued, "Because Canada has chosen as its method of supplying and pricing its major sugar needs, its purchase on the so-called world market, which is the world's cheapest market, Canadian beet producers nine years out of ten receive very low returns for their beets." Furthermore, the impact of the Canadian state's cheap food policy on growers was acknowledged when Jensen (ASBGA, 1967: 3) stated, "Urban people are still demanding cheap food which means relatively low standards of living for us farm people while at the same time they are demanding ever higher standards of living for themselves. We farm people produce food for Canada's twenty million citizens. We have done this so well and so successfully and in such abundance for so long that Canadians take it for granted that food should be plentiful and food should be cheap. They feel it is their right to have food supplied to them at very little cost."

When it is taken into account that the Canadian state lowered the tariffs on the import of sugar purchased on the world market in order to maintain its cheap food policy which, in turn, set the price that Canada would pay for domestically produced sugar, it can be understood how such a policy would lower the prices that southern Alberta growers received for their sugar beet crops. In fact, when the prices that growers received for their sugar beet crops are reviewed, it is found that in many instances during the post-Second World War period indeed, they received low returns for the crops. In 1956, for example, ASBGA President, Lalovee Jensen (ASBGA, 1956: 3) pointed out that in 1950 growers received a return of \$18.45 per ton for sugar beets but thereafter prices fell to disastrous levels. Again, in 1961 Jensen (ASBGA, 1961: 5) expressed concern that growers were expected "to be satisfied to receive the same per ton of beets in 1961 that

[they] received 14 years ago in 1947.” And, although the price of sugar beets hit an all time high for growers in 1974 at \$47.10 per ton (ASBGA, 1974: 6), within a two-year period in the early 1980s, sugar prices in Alberta tumbled by fifty per cent (ASBGA, 1982: 3).

Another factor that growers had no control over but that nonetheless increased their costs of production and adversely affected their margin of profit, was the weather conditions. For example, in the fall of 1957 when over four-fifths of the sugar beet crop was still in the ground, it snowed which prompted ASBGA President Lalovee Jensen (ASBGA, 1957: 3) to consider whether or not to “leave them in the ground for the cost of harvest will never be met by the returns from the beets.” Again, in 1961 the impact of poor weather conditions on the quality of the sugar beet crops and the profit margins of the growers were acknowledged when ASBGA President, Lalovee Jensen (ASBGA, 1961: 3), stated, “Many things have transpired this past year to make the farm position an unhappy one. Rainfall has been subnormal...Heavy applications of irrigation water have been required and costs subsequently increased. Intense heat, which normally promises a good tonnage, served no useful purpose. We are faced with a new threat to the industry for the beet nematode has been found in the area. We have had one of the really tough beet harvests. Our sugar content was low which resulted in a low initial payment.”

As the previous discussion indicates, structural processes that included the political powerlessness of farm workers, the process of capital accumulation that attracted farm labour to urban-based and resource extraction industries, the cost-price squeeze faced by farmers and Canada’s cheap food policy were factors that were related to the problems sugar beet growers experienced in the recruitment and retention of labour.

Moreover, growers had little or no control over these structural processes that also manifested themselves in low returns for their crops and over time, a decline in the family farm. In fact, the only aspect of the production process that growers had any control over was their labour force. Hence, growers put the “squeeze” on the costs of labour in order to increase their profit margins. While the squeeze on labour translated largely into low wages and poor working conditions for workers, it also made employment in the sugar beet fields unattractive to workers, which, in turn, magnified the growers’ problems of recruitment and retention. The irony of this scenario is that while structural processes beyond the control of growers forced them to put the squeeze on their workers by offering them poor working conditions and low wages, it was growers who were held responsible for creating the poor working conditions.

“No ‘real’ Canadian beet producer wants to be subsidized”: The Growers’ Response to the Volatility of the World Sugar Market and Low Returns for Sugar Beets

As a result of the low returns growers received for their sugar beets they were forced to put the squeeze on their labour by offering workers low wages and poor working conditions as a way of increasing their profit margins. As such, employment in the sugar beet fields was unattractive to workers and hence the growers’ problems in the recruitment and retention of labour increased. Growers were forced to put the squeeze on labour because they had little control over the dumping of sugar on the world market at low prices that caused low prices for sugar in Canada and therefore, low returns for sugar beets. In response to these latter problems, growers lobbied the federal government to implement a national sugar policy that would provide growers with a fair return for their

beets while it also fostered positive growth for the Canadian sugar beet industry. In particular, a fair return for sugar beets would provide growers with the revenue to improve wages and working conditions of their labour force.

Throughout much of the post-Second World War period, the prices growers received for their sugar beets were volatile and generally low. While commenting on the low prices for sugar over the years, ASBGMB President, Brian Anderson (ASBGMB, 1991: 3-4) stated, "Sugar is indeed the most price volatile of all commodities entering international trade. Over the last twenty five years, sugar prices have been three times as volatile as wheat. World sugar markets are characterized by long periods of prices which are below production and processing costs in even the most efficient producing countries." The root of low sugar prices, growers argued, was that sugar-producing countries dumped sugar on the world market at low prices. Moreover, these countries were able to do dump the sugar cheaply because the exported sugar was subsidized by the state. As such, this created an unfair and uneven playing field in trade among sugar producing countries.

In response to the impact the world sugar market had on the Canadian price for sugar, growers lobbied the federal government for a sugar policy that would address the problem. For instance, in 1957 the ASBGA and its national organization, Canadian Sugar Beet Growers, lobbied the federal government for a "National Sugar Policy" that would protect Canadian producers from the impact of dumping cheap sugar on the world market and at the same time encourage the growth of the Canadian sugar beet industry (ASBGA, 1957:4). As a result of the lobby, in 1959 sugar beets were recognized as a commodity that fell under the Agricultural Prices Stabilization Act (ASBGA, 1959: 3). Under the

Act, sugar beet growers, but not the processors, were guaranteed a specific price per ton at a specified percentage of beet sugar content. What this meant was that growers would be given a deficiency payment or subsidy when the return for their sugar beet crops fell below the price level set by the federal government. For instance, in 1959 following the implementation of the deficiency payment and under an agreement worked out with the Federal Minister of Agriculture, the sugar beets grown in Alberta in 1958 were supported at \$15.45 per ton on beets with a sugar content of 17%. As such, growers received a total of \$1,470,000.00 or an average of \$950.00 per contract for sugar beets grown in 1958 under the deficiency payment formula (ASBGA, 1959: 3).

Still, growers in Alberta did not see the government's sugar policy based on the Agricultural Prices Stabilization Act as a permanent cure for its problems and therefore they sought a more satisfactory and effective solution. In particular, the ASBGA wanted a national sugar policy that would protect the home market from the impact of world sugar prices while it also fostered a fair profit for the grower's investment (ASBGA, 1960: 3). Consequently, a strategy that the ASBGA tried was to negotiate an "International Sugar Policy" with exporting and importing nations. For instance, in 1968 the ASBGA negotiated an agreement with other nations that called for 1969 target price levels to be set at a floor level of \$3.25 and a top level of \$5.25 per hundred for sugar at the point of export and then various methods were set up to ensure that the price of sugar would fall between the two levels (ASBGA, 1968: 4). The promise of the Agreement was that sugar prices on the world market would rise which would create higher prices for sugar in Canada and therefore sugar manufacturers in the home market would have larger margins to recover their costs and show a profit. Moreover, it was thought that if

Canadian manufacturers got a higher price for their sugar products, then growers would also receive a higher price for their sugar beets, which, in turn, would reduce the deficiency payments from the Stabilization Board (ASBGA, 1968: 4). However, a year after the implementation of the International Sugar Agreement the ASBGA was critical of its effectiveness because the price level of sugar had not been maintained above the bottom target of \$3.25. Consequently, sugar beet producers in Canada had to fall back on the assistance of the Agricultural Prices Stabilization Act in order to maintain production and remain competitive (ASBGA, 1969: 3).

During the early 1970s, the price of sugar on the world market increased which also caused the price levels of Canadian sugar sales to increase. This meant that growers received higher returns for their sugar beets and as a result the deficiency payment was not required (ASBGA, 1972: 3). In the early 1980s, however, once again the price for sugar decreased because bumper crops in sugar-producing countries caused a surplus production of sugar (ASBGA, 1982: 3). To confront the drop in world sugar prices, the ASBGA again demanded that the federal government create a National Sugar Policy and an International Sugar Agreement that was effective at reducing the surplus production of sugar (ASBGA, 1983: 3-4).

Nevertheless, the growers' problem of low sugar beet returns persisted to the point that in 1985 no sugar beet crops were planted because a sugar beet contract could not be negotiated between the growers, represented by the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers Marketing Board (ASBGMB), and B. C. Sugar. The breakdown in contract negotiations stemmed from the fact that sugar prices were too low which not only reduced the profits of growers but those of B. C. Sugar too. Thus, during contract negotiations, B. C. Sugar

demanded a greater share of the profits from sugar beets. In the view of B. C. Sugar, a reduction in the price growers received for their beets simply meant they would receive a higher deficiency payment. However, the ASBGMB argued that such reasoning was a misuse of the intent of the Stabilization Act and again called for the implementation of a National Sugar Policy that would establish a floor price for raw sugar entering Canada and assure a fair return to both sugar beet growers and processors (ASBGMB, 1985: 5-6).

In the spring of 1986, however, the ASBGMB (1986: 5) reported to growers “Beets are back.” At the time, the federal government established a domestic sugar policy aimed at maintaining the Canadian sugar beet industry. The centre-piece of the policy was a cost-sharing stabilization program that stipulated in 1986 the federal government and growers would negotiate and share the cost of the stabilization program but, in the following years the stabilization program was to be negotiated and the cost shared by the growers and the provincial governments of Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec. In contrast to previous stabilization programs, this cost-sharing stabilization program offered guaranteed payments to growers at a support level set over a longer period of time (ASBGMB, 1986: 3).

In addition to the stabilization program, the federal government committed itself to seeking an International Sugar Agreement that would promote fair competition and a stable world market for sugar. Moreover, to encourage growers to seed a crop in 1986 the federal government paid them a “planting incentive” based on their 1982, 1983 and 1984 average yield multiplied by \$12.423 per standard tonne, which was then multiplied by the 1986 individual seeded acreage. The outcome was that the federal government paid Alberta sugar beet growers approximately \$5.6 million to plant sugar beets in 1986

(ASBGMB, 1986: 8). Finally, the federal government's policy gave growers more direct access to U. S. sugar import quotas. What this meant was that beginning in January of 1987 the quotas were given to the Canadian Sugar Beet Growers Association (CSBGA). The returns from the quota of sugar exported to the U. S., which in 1987 was set at 10,010 tons of refined sugar, were given to the CSBGA and then each grower was paid on the basis of the total number of tonnes of beets delivered for export (ASBGMB, 1986: 9). As a result of the government's sugar policy and its support for the industry, the ASBGMB was able to negotiate a three-year contract, as opposed to a one-year contract, with the Alberta Sugar Company for the first time in its history (ASBGMB, 1986: 8).

On April 16, 1987 the ASBGMB and officials of both the federal and provincial governments signed the National Tripartite Stabilization Program for Sugar Beets (NTSP). In 1986 when the federal government announced its sugar beet policy, it consisted of three points. First, a tripartite stabilization plan would be implemented beginning with the 1987 crop; second, Canada would seek an International Sugar Agreement that would promote fair competition and a stable world market; and third, as a complement to the stabilization program, beet growers were to be given direct access to U. S. sugar import quotas. As the basis of Canada's sugar policy, the survival of the sugar beet industry was contingent on success in all three areas. However, before long problems arose in relation to the third point. That is, interdepartmental confusion within the federal government arose over the approach taken in the disbursements of the earnings from the U. S. Sugar Import Quota. The result was that this part of the policy became a net cost to the NTSP instead of the complement that it was meant to produce. Also, while there was some work done on the second point in the policy, the federal

government seemed to lack the commitment to establish an International Sugar Agreement. Furthermore, when the NTSP was introduced in 1987 under the first point in the policy, it was designed to be actuarially sound over time and thus it was implemented for ten years so that it would stabilize the price of sugar beets and the industry could then realize fair returns for its labour and investment. However, it was understood that unless success was achieved on the second and third points of the policy, then the NTSP could not absorb the liability of world sugar trade fluctuations. This followed because during periods of low prices, the majority of raw sugar and virtually all of the refined sugar that entered Canada from sugar exporting countries were either dumped or subsidized (ASBGMB, 1991: 5). As a result, after the first two years of operation, “the NTSP had an accumulated deficit in excess of \$13.5 million” (ASBGMB, 1991: 5).

While growers continued to lobby the government to create a Canadian sugar policy that would overcome the low prices paid for domestic sugar as well as promote a healthy sugar beet industry, during the late 1980s and the early 1990s the climate of world trade began to change following the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations that promised the liberalization of trade and the creation of a more global marketplace. In particular, growers anticipated that under the GATT agreement many of the sugar producing countries would reduce their export subsidies and internal support for sugar producers, which would alleviate some of the economic woes of beet producers in Canada (ASBGMB, 1991: 4). Although growers had always been critical of government subsidies as a solution to the low prices they received for their beets, it was during this period that growers became more critical of the subsidies they received as well as those

provided to producers in sugar exporting countries. The mood of growers on the issue of subsidies and the impact they had on trade was revealed in 1991 when ASBGMB President, Brian Anderson (ASBGMB, 1991: 3-4) stated,

With this extreme volatility of world sugar prices and Canada's narrow minded open door policy to subsidized imports, the beet industry in Canada has been forced to decline.

Our Canadian legislators have been far more concerned about the next election than the next generation. As a result Canada has adopted a cheap food policy along with the socialistic practice of subsidizing agriculture rather than looking at logical trade policies. The result is a high deficit which will become a burden to the economic future of our country for generations to come.... We must now look for some made in Canada solutions to our problems.

No 'real' Canadian sugar beet producer wants to be subsidized. The taxpayers of this country do not owe us a living; however they do owe us sound and effective trade policies that will enable us to make a living on our own.

Within the climate of the NAFTA and GATT agreements, growers continued to pressure the federal government to pursue an international trade agreement that would be conducive to free and fair trade. As President Anderson (ASBGMB, 1995: 4) put it, "Canada is a trading nation. Our industry has, along with others, strongly supported governments over recent years in their pursuit of international trade agreements. Free, open and fair trade is critical to the survivability of agriculture. We long recognized that

the world must move away from the trade distorting socialistic subsidies of world agriculture in order that some form of market justice could return.”

Thus, in 1996 growers voted to terminate the NTSP at the end of the 1996 crop year. The termination of the NTSP meant that sugar beet growers were left without federal or provincial government support and therefore they had to rely on the market for their income. At the time, ASBGMB President, Mark Kuryvial (ASBGMB, 1996: 3), commented on the state of affairs by stating, “We have, on your request, terminated the National Tripartite Stabilization Program for Sugar Beets, and with it, ended commodity specific support in Alberta. It is our desire to get fair returns solely from the market place. Unfortunately, we continue to be vulnerable to a market more often influenced by the domestic policies of various sugar producing nations than the true principles of supply and demand. As had been said before, our problems are not production related, but more often trade related.”

Once the NTSP was terminated, the premium surplus that remained in the account was returned to the respective signatories. In other words, the governments received their respective surpluses and the growers received theirs. Also, a program referred to as the Industry Development Fund (IDF) was established to help growers make the transition from the NTSP to an environment without commodity specific support. The intention of the fund was to help commodity producers promote and develop their products. In establishing the Sugar Beet IDF program, each level of government contributed one-half of their premiums for the last year of the NTSP. As a result, the funds for the IDF program amounted to approximately \$1.48 million dollars (ASBGMB, 1996: 21).

Although growers experienced some problems in maintaining profitable returns for their beet crops in the years after the termination of the NTSP, they continued to rely on the market place for their income. In fact, in 2004 ASBG President, Merrill Harris (ASBG, 2004: 3), took pride in stating, “The past 8 years have brought some very good returns and some very dismal returns. Not once in that time period have beet growers asked for support from either provincial or federal governments. We have received our returns from the market place, the place where farmers should be able to derive their income from, not from government coffers.”

During the first years of the twenty-first century, growers continued to pressure the federal government and other nations to establish free and fair trade practices between sugar producing countries. In particular, growers have remained involved in an ongoing inquiry initiated in 1995 by the Canadian International Trade Tribunal (CITT) to investigate whether dumped and subsidized imports of refined sugar pose a material threat to the interests of sugar beet producers in Canada (ASBGMB, 1995: 8; ASBG, 2004: 9). If the inquiry rules that indeed subsidized imported sugar poses a threat to Canadian sugar producers, growers believe that it will help reduce the flow of dumped sugar entering the Canadian market (ASBG, 2004: 9).

To date, however, southern Alberta sugar beet growers have survived without government subsidies and depend on the market to provide them with an income for their efforts. Whether or not growers are successful may depend on whether the state is willing to place a tariff on the importation of raw and refined sugar that would raise the price growers receive for their beets or, whether Canada is willing to raise the price it pays for domestic sugar. If growers were successful in either scenario, not only would growers

and the processors benefit, in theory so too would sugar beet workers as growers would be able to offer them better wages and working conditions. In hindsight, however, one thing that becomes clear is that the subsidies the government provided to growers were a band aid solution to a larger problem and moreover, they did little to improve returns of growers over the long run that could have improved the wages and working conditions for sugar beet labour and made employment in the industry more attractive.

“To Survive and Compete We Must Be Efficient”: Reducing the Costs of Production and the Problems of Recruitment and Retention of Labour

At the annual meeting of the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers' Marketing Board (ASBGMB) in 1990, Brian Anderson, ASBGMB Vice-President, voiced a rallying call that has been echoed throughout the history of the sugar beet industry when he (ASBGMB, 1990, 9) stated, “In order for our industry to survive and compete we must be efficient.” Evidence that growers have rallied to this call is writ large in the numerous obstacles they have overcome and in the many innovations and changes they have instituted in order to produce sugar beet crops and turn a profit. In particular, growers have responded to the rising costs of sugar beet production by increasing efficiency through the substitution of capital for labour. That is, in response to the rising costs of production as well as the low returns for their crops, growers increased mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls that reduced the amount of hand labour needed for beet production (ASBGA, 1974: 13). As a result, growers were able to increase productivity and their profits and, to some extent, offset the rising costs of production. Moreover, the reduction in the need for labour meant that growers not only reduced their

dependence on seasonal labour but as well, they reduced the problems they experienced in the recruitment and retention of sufficient labour for production purposes.

The history of innovation and mechanization of the processes in the production of sugar beets in southern Alberta is extensive. In particular, a great deal could be said about the history and development of irrigation in southern Alberta, from the early 1900s to the 1950s, which made it possible to grow an array of specialty crops including sugar beets in the semi-arid climate of southern Alberta (see J. F. Gilpin, *Quenching the Thirst of the Prairies*, 2000). However, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this study since the focus is on the reasons for the transition of labour in the sugar beet industry during the late twentieth century---a period when irrigation in the region and other innovations were already well established and hence, not important factors in the transition of labour during the late 1900s.

Two of the innovations that helped growers offset the negative impact of low returns and the rising costs of production were to increase the yield per acre of beets and the beet sugar content. For instance, after fifteen years of technological research it was reported in 1961 that the yield of tons per acre increased 30%. Moreover, during the same period it was reported that sugar production increased more than beet production. As ASBGA Board Director, Murray Holt (ASBGA, 1961: 22), stated, "In 1946 an acre yielded 1.92 tons of sugar, while in 1960 the average acre yielded 2.58 tons of sugar, an increase of 34% in 15 years. These are the results of combined efforts in agriculture, chemistry and factory operations making the best use of technological research." The increase in the sugar content in the beet was the result of a combination of factors that included: a larger beet growing area that used a greater variation of soils to grow beets,

the use of a greater amount of a combination of nitrogen and phosphates fertilizers, the use of mechanical thinners that changed the beet population per acre and reduced the row stands from 10 to 12 inches between each plant to 4 to 6 inches which affected the size of beet produced and lastly, the introduction of sprinkler irrigation systems which made it possible to irrigate almost up to the day of harvest (ASBGA, 1970: 16).

In 1946 growers embarked on a campaign aimed at full mechanization in the production of sugar beets that would result in cutting both the costs of production and labour in half. The three-part plan included the increased use of single germ seed or monogerm seed; the development of mechanical thinning of beets; and, the harvesting of beets with machinery (ASBGA, 1946: 12-13). As a result of the plan, by the end of 1963 mechanical harvesters had almost completely taken over the harvesting of beets (ASBGA, 1963: 14). Also, the campaign to mechanize production was further promoted in 1965 when the ASBGA Agriculture Committee adopted the motto, "Sugar Beet Survival Through Mechanization." As well, in the following year ASBGA President, Lalovee Jensen, called upon growers to increase mechanization, the use of monogerm seed and the use of chemical weed controls to cut labour costs and increase profits. He (ASBGA, 1966: 5) stated, "it is up to us growers to modernize our operations, to increase efficiency, cut labour costs through the full use of new high yielding monogerm seed and through the use of herbicides and mechanical thinners, increase our yields through the full and proper use of fertilizers so that our profit margins may be increased...."

As a result of the campaign, in 1967 the use of monogerm seed was accepted by almost 100% of the growers. At the time, ASBGA Chairman, John Vaselenak (ASBGA, 1967: 12), stated, "The breeding of monogerm seed, no doubt, is the most significant

change that has ever taken place in the beet industry. It is very unlikely that any greater change than this will occur in beet production in our lifetime. Without monogerm seed, mechanical thinning would be impractical and herbicide weed control only partially successful. Monogerm seed is the key to low labour cost beet production.” Moreover, Vaselenak (ASBGA, 1972:14) reported that in 1970 growers used herbicides on 21,008 acres of the 38,075 acres planted while eight thinners were used on 1,222 acres or 3.3% of the total 36,733 acres thinned. However, in 1972 growers had used herbicides on 30,165 acres of the 44,969 acres planted and 27 thinners were used on 4,306 acres or 10% of the total 43,620 acres thinned (ASBGA, 1972: 14).

The growers’ transition to mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls was also facilitated by the Alberta Department of Agriculture. In 1972, for instance, W. M. Bayda, the Supervisor of Agricultural Programs for the Alberta Department of Agriculture, sent a letter to J. G. Snow, the Agricultural Superintendent of the Canadian Sugar Factories in Lethbridge, offering assistance to the sugar beet industry in making the transition. In the letter Bayda (1972: 1) stated, “Information from the Cultivator, Spring 1967, publication of the Utah – Idaho Sugar Company, indicates that the cost of labour can be reduced from \$33 an acre to \$8 an acre with mechanization and adequate use of herbicides. This is a 75% decrease in labour cost.” Bayda went on to state,

We understand the province of Alberta would be willing to consider some proposals from the growers as to how the province might assist the growers in making the necessary transition. We appreciate that farm incomes are low and that equipment is expensive. Government assistance might be in the form of

credit, especially for the smaller sugar beet growers.

As you know, Walter Strom, Director of the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers' Association is now surveying the growers to see how they feel towards increased use of herbicides and mechanization. After all, it is only with the cooperation of the growers that we can achieve any success in reducing the dependency on seasonal labour.

Thus, in 1973 the ASBGA Chairman of the Agricultural Report, John Vaselenak (ASBGA, 1972: 15), was able to inform growers that the provincial government was willing to provide them with low interest loans to either purchase or rent sugar beet equipment such as electronic beet thinners. As such, the state provided growers with support to mechanize that would reduce their labour requirements.

Also, an interesting and unexpected development occurred in the late 1960s that had implications for mechanization in the production of sugar beets. As stated previously in this study, in 1969 the southern Alberta sugar beet industry came under heavy criticism over the poor working conditions of its Aboriginal labour force when Ferguson and Lipton published a report in 1969 entitled "Exploitation and Discrimination in the Alberta Beet Fields" and then, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) aired a film on national television that alleged Aboriginal workers were subjected to a number of indignities (*Report of an Independent Committee of Inquiry*, 1970: 1). In particular, the industry was accused of allowing the use of child labour in the sugar beet fields and of offering Aboriginal workers poor housing and wages (Laliberte, 1994: 112-143). The report by Ferguson and Lipton and the CBC film caused the industry to come under fire

over the working conditions of Aboriginal labour from a number of groups and leaders that included the Canadian Labour Congress, the Alberta Federation of Labour and Grant Notley, leader of the Alberta New Democratic Party (*Report of an Independent Committee of Inquiry*, 1970: 1). Moreover, the controversy spawned a number of studies that looked into the working conditions of Aboriginal workers in the industry (e.g. *Report of an Independent Committee of Inquiry*, 1970; Tomaschuk, 1970; and Steele and Zacharias, 1971).

As a result of the harsh criticisms the sugar beet industry endured over the alleged poor working conditions of its Aboriginal labour force, evidence suggests that growers became more determined to increase mechanization in the production of sugar beets so that they could reduce their dependence on labour. In 1970, a year after the media frenzy over the working conditions of Aboriginal labour in the industry, the ASBGA President, Lalovee Jensen (ASBGA, 1970: 5) appealed to growers to increase mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls by stating, "I think that I should tell you that the sources of hand labour suitable for sugar beet work are fast drying up....It is becoming increasingly evident that we will be forced into complete mechanization of the thinning operation. We must learn to handle herbicides and all mechanical methods known in an effort to reduce hand labour." However, Doug Walker of the *Herald* (June 11, 1970) in Lethbridge was more explicit in pointing out how growers reacted to the criticisms of the treatment of Aboriginal labour in the industry by stating, "adverse criticism of working conditions (felt to be unjustified by those in the beet growing industry) is forcing the introduction of mechanical thinners. Two such machines were shown at work in the fields and were hailed by beet growers as a real breakthrough in the industry."

By the mid-1970s, the mechanization of the processes in production and the use of chemical weed controls were widespread in the sugar beet industry. As ASBGA President, Burns Wood (ASBGA, 1976: 4) put it, “We are in the midst of a great transition in the beet industry. It’s a slow but gradual change as all farm changes are. Each new year there are more growers using selective herbicides, more growers improving doing mechanical thinning or space planting, more growers improving their irrigation equipment and other equipment, more growers using methods that are as up-to-date as any beet growers in the world.” Consequently, in 1980 Mr. Wood (ASBGA, 1980: 4) stated, “The past has been full of changes. In my term as a member of the Board we have progressed from a horse and hand labour economy, to a fully mechanized economy on sugar beet farms.”

As the transition to mechanization, the use of monogerm seed and the use of chemical weed controls increased during the post-Second World War period, the growers’ need for labour decreased. In particular, during the 1970s the annual reports of the ASBGA began to note the impact the transition was having on seasonal hand labour. For instance, in 1970 the ASBGA Agriculture Chairman, John Vaselenak (ASBGA, 1970: 15) reported, “The sugar beet crop is not as much dependent upon the availability of good hand labour, as it was some ten years ago. Today with monogerm seed, herbicides, thinning machines and good management, most fields of beets can be saved even with a shortage of labour. The general feeling among agriculturalists is that as soon as post emergent herbicides become more effective, sugar beets will be grown without hoeing.” Three years later, Vaselenak (ASBGA, 1973: 9) reported, “Hand labour requirements for our beet crop are continually being decreased with the use of herbicides

and electronic thinners. Eight more thinning machines were added this year, bringing the total number of machines to 35. The cost of hand labour following machines usually is less than the cost of second hoeing following hand thinners; a saving of \$25.00 an acre. No doubt half of this sum would be needed to cover the machine operating expenses. In addition to the monetary gain the grower is also free from other expenses incurred with workers.”

As the decline for hand labour for sugar beet production continued during the 1980s, ASBGA President, John Vaselenak speculated that there would soon come a time when hand labour would be eliminated. He (ASBGA, 1981: 4) stated, “This sugar beet industry overcame many hurdles during the last decade, some of which even the experts felt would never become a reality. The most significant was the elimination of back breaking thinning and hoeing operations.... We are on the threshold of eliminating all hand labour from beet fields in the near future with no loss in yields.”

Although the use of the herbicides, monogerm seed and increased mechanization helped growers reduce their labour needs, when growers interviewed for this study were asked what played the most significant role in reducing their demand for labour most of them said that it was largely the use of chemical weed controls or herbicides. For instance, a former grower and past President of the ASBGA (2004: G04) stated, “as the herbicide weed control came in, then the labour came down....it was really the life-saver of the beet industry for many years. It would kill the wild oats and it would get rid of oats because that was the one that they had to get rid of.” However, in reference to the use of mechanical thinners, another former sugar beet grower and past President of the ASBGA (2004: G05), stated, “mechanized thinners did not work out very well....it did not work

good to cut down labour.” Nevertheless, a sugar beet grower pointed out the importance of machinery in dispensing chemical weed controls. He (2004: G06) stated, “The chemicals started out with the six row sprayer...now lots of people use a thirty-six row spray so it goes fast.”

While the transition from labour intensive production to the use of chemical weed controls and mechanization reduced the growers’ need for seasonal hand labour, it also caused the profile of their labour demand to change. This was pointed out in 1989 when ASBGMB Labour Committee representatives, Richard Butler and Ron Sutka, stated,

During the last five years the placement of beet workers through the A.E.S. has consistently shown a decline. When assessing the cause of the decline in placements, it is not difficult to identify at least some of the reasons why. Firstly, the workers have become better acquainted with the beet growing area. They also have advanced in self mobility aiding them to locate employment on their own, resulting in less inquiry through A.E.S. by both farmer and workers as to available labour and jobs. On farm management of weed control through chemical control has played a part in reducing the need for beet workers.

Indications from the current situation surrounding the demand for labour would indicate that the demand is beginning to take on a different profile than in the past; namely, the knowledge to carry out safe and precise chemical application, high quality truck drivers and machine operators.

Again, in 1990 ASBGMB Labour Committee representatives, Bernard Lyczewski

and Ron Sutka (ASBGMB, 1990: 19), acknowledged the transition in labour demand by stating, “Today, on most farms if someone is to be hired as a seasonal worker, there is a great need for them to be skilled, or at least, have a basic knowledge of farm operations.” Furthermore, in the following year, Lyczewski (ASBGMB, 1991: 13) remarked, “labour needs for agriculture in the future seem to be going to a more skilled type. Manual labour will probably always be needed, but as technology becomes better, these needs will be less.”

As this section pointed out, in response to the spiraling costs of production and the low returns for their sugar beets, growers turned to technological innovations, mechanization, and the use of monogerm seed and chemical weed controls to increase efficiency and reduce the amount of hand labour needed for production. As a result of the innovations and changes in production, growers were able to increase their profits and offset the rising costs of production inputs. Moreover, evidence suggested that the adverse criticisms over the working conditions of Aboriginal labour in the industry hastened the growers’ need to reduce their dependence on labour. However, while growers were able to decrease the size of their relatively unskilled seasonal labour force through the increase in mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls, their demand for skilled labour to operate machinery and apply chemical weed controls increased.

The Dissatisfaction with Aboriginal Labour

As a result of the growers’ campaign during the 1960s and 70s to increase

mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls, by the early 1980s the size of the seasonal labour force, consisting largely of Aboriginal workers, was reduced significantly. Yet, growers found themselves in need of a more skilled labour force. As this section will indicate, however, during the period when the growers' need for unskilled seasonal labour decreased and their demand for a more skilled labour force increased, Aboriginal workers were performing jobs in the production of sugar beets that were skilled labour positions. Still, growers sought out an alternative labour force other than Aboriginal labour. As this section will also indicate, a reason growers sought out another source of labour was, in part, because of dissatisfaction many of them had with Aboriginal labour.

In 1966, the number of migrant Aboriginal workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry peaked with over three thousand First Nations workers employed through the sponsored movement (ASBGA, 1966: 16). Shortly thereafter, however, the Aboriginal labour force began to decrease in size largely due to increased mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls, both of which displaced workers from processes in the production of sugar beets formerly done by hand labour. For instance, in 1969 the number of First Nations workers employed in the industry dropped to a total of 2000 (ASBGA, 1969: 13). By the late 1970s, however, the number of First Nations workers employed in the industry was hard to gauge because most of the workers came to the beet fields outside of the sponsored movement. The difficulty in keeping accurate numbers of the size of the Aboriginal labour force was reflected in the ASBGA Annual Report (1977: 14) for 1977 when it was noted that the number of First Nations workers who migrated to the industry outside of the sponsored movement for the year totaled 2000 workers while

only 30 workers came through the sponsored movement. Again, in 1979 the difficulty in gaining an accurate count of the Aboriginal workers who migrated to the industry annually was pointed out in ASBGA Labour Report when Walter Strom and Robert Wilde (ASBGA, 1979: 11) stated, "We estimate that 1,000 to 1,200 workers came this year. When they come on their own, without registering in their home areas or at Lethbridge, an accurate count is impossible." Eventually, all of the Aboriginal workers who migrated to the sugar beet fields came on their own as freelancers and thus, in 1981 the recruitment of labour was no longer necessary (ASBGA, 1981: 12).

In many cases, freelance Aboriginal workers who migrated to the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta were experienced workers who returned to the same grower each growing season. Following the termination of the sponsored movement in 1981, however, many Aboriginal workers contacted the Canada Farm Labour Pool (CFLP) office located in Lethbridge to be placed in labouring positions in the sugar beet fields. In 1988, when the CFLP changed its name to the Agricultural Employment Service (A.E.S.), ASBGMB Labour Committee representatives, Richard Butler and Ron Sutka (ASBGMB, 1988: 15), stated, "Sugar beet workers placed through the Agricultural Employment Service numbered 953 this year. When compared to 1987 the number of placed workers is down by 234." During the early 1990s the demand for seasonal hand labour was so low that ASBGMB Labour representative, Ron Hanzel (ASBGMB, 1993: 17), stated, "In 1993, Lethbridge Agricultural Employment Services (L.A.E.S.) placed a mere 80 people in sugar beet related jobs. Although this does not relate accurately to the amount of hand labour done, it does relate to the fact that we have become less reliant on L.A.E.S. to fill our labour needs on the sugar beet row." Eventually, the need to report on sugar beet

labour became redundant and thus in 1995 the Labour Committee Report section was dropped from the ASBGMB annual report. However, this did not mean that the need for hand labour was eliminated from sugar beet production. In fact, to date there is still a demand for hand labour to weed sugar beets because the use of chemical weed controls does not kill all the weeds and moreover, during wet growing seasons weeds tend to proliferate. For instance, during the 2004 growing season sugar beet crops received above normal amounts of precipitation that caused growers to hire hand labour to weed 20% of the approximately 32,000 acres of sugar beet planted (Jones, 2004).

During the period when growers reduced their need for unskilled seasonal labour because of increased mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls, which, in turn, caused growers to turn to a more skilled labour force, evidence indicates that Aboriginal workers held skilled labouring positions in the process of sugar beet production. For instance, in 1968 ASBGA Labour Report Chairman, Walter Strom (ASBGA, 1968: 11-12) stated, "Of the 39,000 acres planted, 57% (22,500 acres) was thinned by Indians. Between 1700 and 2000 workers did the job....Credit for this goes to those farmers who used both chemical and mechanical means to assist their hand labour....Another significant feature of 1968 was the number of Indians who operated tractors, beet harvesters and trucks during the growing and harvesting of the beets. A larger number than usual were also employed at the receiving station." Moreover, in 1974 when growers were experiencing problems hiring sufficient labour for harvesting purposes, the ASBGA Labour Report (ASBGA, 1974: 17) noted that Gil Evans of the CFLP was "successful in bringing in 24 truck drivers and machine operators from Indian reserves."

As indicated above, when the growers' need for skilled labour arose, Aboriginal workers were available to fill the job positions. Moreover, in 1990 when there was a growing need for skilled labour, the ASBGMB Labour Committee and the Local Agricultural Employment Board announced they had put together a training course for farm labour that would address the growers' need for skilled labour. As Labour Committee representatives, Bernard Lyczewski and Ron Sutka (ASBGMB, 1991: 19), explained, "Francis McArthur, manager of the Lethbridge A.E.S. along with John Calpas, Agriculture Program Administrator from the Lethbridge Community College, have put together a course that will give students basic training of farming in southern Alberta. The course which will take sixteen weeks (approximately 480 hours) is scheduled for February, 1991. Ten weeks will be devoted to theory and hands-on experience in the classroom and the farm shop at the college. The remaining six weeks being spent at a host training farm will give each student individual supervision by the host farmer." The training program, known as the "Seasonal Farm Workers Training Program," was put on again in 1992 and was aimed at training seasonal workers for agricultural positions. Also, funding was provided by the Canada Employment & Immigration Centre (C.E.I.C.) and to be eligible for the program the student had to be "unemployed, on unemployment insurance, or a social assistance recipient" (ASBGMB, 1992: 19). However, in 1993 the training program was discontinued due to problems surrounding proper screening of applicants, advertising, and the hiring of a coordinator (ASBGMB, 1993: 13).

Since the training program was aimed at seasonal workers and at the time the program was initiated there were many seasonal Aboriginal workers employed by

growers, it seems reasonable to assume that a number of students in the program would have been Aboriginal who sought to upgrade their skills so they could fill the skilled job positions required by growers. Hence, the training program would have provided some unskilled seasonal Aboriginal workers with the skills necessary to fill the skilled positions at the time when the growers' demand for skilled labour increased.

Yet, while there were Aboriginal workers available who growers could draw upon to meet their demand for skilled labour, they sought out an alternative source of labour. In fact, throughout the post-Second World War period the annual reports of the ASBGA make numerous references to its efforts to recruit an alternative labour force. For instance, in 1956, during the time when growers were hiring large numbers of Aboriginal workers, the ASBGA (1956: 8-9) reported that it had the support of the Department of Labour and Immigration and the C.P.R. Colonization Department in its attempts to recruit European workers. In particular, the Department of Immigration gave the ASBGA (1956: 9) "a firm commitment of 150 single Portuguese men from the Azores." In the following year, the federal government's Chief of the Settlement Division, Mr. Hunter, addressed the annual meeting of the ASBGA on the problems he encountered while attempting to recruit European workers for the industry. He (ASBGA, *Minutes*, 1957: 1) stated,

In dealing with the British Isles, it is impossible to bring farm labour from there as their conditions are much better than ours. They receive an hourly wage and good housing which makes it very difficult to convince them to come to this country to work on our farms. The set-up in Holland is also changing, they have

schools to train factory workers to agricultural. In 1955 we did find some Istrian (sic) farm workers and induced a few to come here. For 1957, for development of our requirements, they have sent 4 men overseas to recruit farm labour. They are using films as well as Brochures and pictures, in fact we are doing everything possible to secure a satisfactory type of labour suitable for your needs.

One of the reasons growers searched for another labour force was because of their dissatisfaction with Aboriginal labour. This was acknowledged in 1961 when some growers were so unwilling to accept Aboriginal labour that it prompted Labour Report Director, Leith Johnson (ASBGA, 1961: 13-14) to state, "...we will have to depend on Indian labour for a long time yet, to carry on an expanding sugar beet industry.... We have good reason to believe that the grower acceptance of these people is getting better each year, and the goodwill and business relations between the two groups are slowly but steadily improving. We believe that a big majority of our growers try to be fair and honest with their workers, for which we highly commend them. The other side of the picture shows that a few of our growers could improve considerably in their dealings with these people." A few years later Johnson (ASBGA, 1964: 14) reported that while Aboriginal workers did satisfactory beet work, there were instances where "the quality of thinning left something to be desired" and "there were some problems with drinking and frequent moving." Also, in 1965 at the annual ASBGA meeting a motion submitted by the Burdett-Bow Island Local was carried which stated, "Whereas we are relying entirely upon Indian labour for our thinning and weeding, and whereas generally we are encountering more of a problem with their quality of work and their reliability, therefore

be it resolved that we ask the C.S.F. to make more of an attempt to keep this under control” (ASBGA, Annual Meeting *Minutes*, 1965: 4).

Another indication of dissatisfaction among growers over Aboriginal labour was the “Work History Card System” that was set up in the early 1960s by the ASBGA and the N.E.S. office in Lethbridge that was meant to gather information on Aboriginal workers and then screen out those considered to be poor workers. The card system was established after a resolution was put forth by the Taber-Barnwell-Burdett local at the ASBGA Annual Meeting in February, 1963 that stated, “Be it resolved that the Central Board look into the problem of labour, keeping in mind better screening of Indian workers and more effort be made to keep family and tribes together. Be it resolved that the Central Board in conjunction with the National Employment Service set up a card system for Indian workers. The card should show: A. The number of years they have been doing sugar beet work. B. Grading by the Factory Fieldman as to work efficiency. C. Medical clearance. D. Signature of each previous employer” (ASBGA, Annual Meeting *Minutes*, 1963). Although the card system was used from 1963 until 1966 (ASBGA, *Minutes*, 1966: 1), from its inception it did not work as expected because many Aboriginal workers migrated to the fields on their own and thus they did not register with the N.E.S. (ASBGA, *Minutes*, 1963: 2).

During the 1960s, growers made more appeals to the government to assist them in the recruitment of a labour force other than Aboriginal. In 1965, for example, the ASBGA (1965: 16) appealed to the Department of Immigration in both Lethbridge and Ottawa “about bringing in Mexican labour or new immigrants from Europe.” As Labour Report Director, Leith Johnson (1965: 16) stated, “We stressed the desperate need of a

new source of workers other than Indians, for the following reasons: (1) The growing wide-spread dissatisfaction of growers with Indian workers. (2) Too many farmers discontinuing growing of beets for the lack of satisfactory workers. This is hurting the industry as a whole, which in turn depresses the growth and expansion of our economy.”

In response to the growers' request for assistance in the recruitment of foreign-born labour for sugar beet work, Department of Immigration officials pointed out that it was basically impossible to bring in Mexican workers under government regulations because only professionals and skilled workers were allowed into Canada at the time. However, government officials also pointed out that under certain circumstances there was the possibility of getting some farm workers into Canada. As ASBGA Labour Report Director, Leith Johnson (ASBGA, 1965: 16), put it, “First, you would have to prove that the need existed, and that it could not be filled from a source within Canada. (2) The worker would have to be assured of year-round work, at a level that he would not become a dependent of the government. (3) You would have to find the right people who were willing to come.” As such, there was little growers could do to justify the need for foreign-born labour because Aboriginal workers in Canada were available for sugar beet work. Consequently, the only recourse growers had to acquiring foreign-born labour was to apply to the local Immigration Office for farm families who were interested in coming to Canada to eventually farm on a full-time basis (ASBGA, 1965: 16).

In the interviews conducted for this study, sugar beet growers were asked whether they held any stereotypes of Aboriginal workers. While many of the comments were positive, indicating that a number of growers were satisfied with Aboriginal workers, other comments negatively stereotyped Aboriginal workers as unreliable and drunks. For

instance, when asked if Aboriginal workers were stereotyped, one grower (2004: G06) stated, "Ah, well, everybody knows they are not, basically reliable....instead of working...if the bingo starts at 7 o'clock then they are gone." Similarly, Merrill Harris (2004) stated, "if you gave them more [money] than what we thought they needed...they would disappear whether it was bingo night, a night in Lethbridge or whatever, you had to go looking for them and so, you know, you are waiting for your field to get hoed or whatever and you thought you had a crew and after the weekend you didn't have a crew and then all of a sudden they are back." Also, a labour manager, sugar beet grower and current employer of Aboriginal labour (2005: G07) stated, "I know it sounds really stupid but I have to manage a Native's money for him. My Native labour is put on an allowance. I can't give them a pay cheque at the end of the month.... If I did that then I wouldn't have any Native labour the following week....I'd lose good 60-70 per cent of them. They'd go on a drinking binge. They'd go home to Saskatchewan....They are provided with a weekly allowance, basically, is what it works out to. If they need an advance, I will write them an advance for \$25, \$30, \$50 once a week, at the end of the week but, I cannot at the end of the month write them a cheque. I wouldn't see them." In another response, a former beet grower and Field Superintendent for the Sugar Company (2004: G08) in Taber, stated, "They weren't really reliable after they got their first paycheck. After a week or so they got their first paycheck then they were drinking...and that was the problem to get someone to come back and finish up."

As this section demonstrated, as a result of increased mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls, the Aboriginal labour force was substantially reduced. It was also demonstrated that when the growers' demand for skilled labour increased,

Aboriginal workers were available to fill skilled labour positions but still, growers sought out an alternative labour force. In fact, this section noted that since the time growers began the large scale use of Aboriginal labour, they consistently sought to replace them with another labour force. Evidence suggests that one of the reasons growers sought to replace their Aboriginal workers was because many were deemed “unreliable.” In fact, growers were so concerned over the issue of their reliability that they created a work history card system that was aimed at screening out workers who were unreliable. In the next section a discussion will be provided that shows throughout much of the post-Second World War period, growers sought to recruit Mexican workers for sugar beet jobs.

The Quest for Mexican Labour and the Advent of the “Kanadiers”

Throughout much of the post-Second World War period, sugar beet growers experienced problems in the recruitment and retention of adequate labour for production purposes despite the state assisted labour migration of Aboriginal workers to the sugar beet fields. Coupled with the latter problems was the dissatisfaction many growers had with Aboriginal labour. Hence, growers searched for an alternative labour force other than Aboriginal labour. Although growers attempted to recruit a number of foreign-born groups for sugar beet work, it was Mexican labour in particular that they attempted to recruit on a number of occasions. Over most of the post-Second World War period, however, their attempts to recruit Mexican workers failed because of government regulations that restricted their entry into Canada. Nevertheless, during the late 1980s and

early 1990s growers began to hire Mexican labour in the form of Mexican Mennonites, also known as “Kanadiers,” who migrated from Mexico to Canada in search of agricultural jobs.

It is not surprising that sugar beet growers in southern Alberta were interested in recruiting Mexican labour since they would have been aware of the widespread use of Mexican workers in agricultural industries in the United States since the Bracero Program was implemented between 1942 and 1964. In fact, during the late 1950s and 1960s growers made a number of requests to the Department of Immigration for Mexican labour for seasonal sugar beet jobs. In 1960, for instance, a memo sent to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, B. A. Wallis, by the Director of Immigration, W. R. Baskerville (1960: 1-2), stated, “Early in 1958 the Sugar Beet Growers Association of Lethbridge, Alberta, suggested to this Department that we admit 200 labourers from Mexico to work in the beet fields of Alberta on a seasonal basis. This request was refused at the time because arrangements were being made to employ Canadian Indians in this type of work. In any event we could not approve such a movement without greatly antagonizing The West Indies which has been pressing Canada unsuccessfully to admit West Indians for seasonal employment.” In another instance during the annual meeting of the ASBGA in 1966, representatives of the Taber-Barnwell local put forth a resolution asking the Central Board to look into recruiting Mexican labour. The resolution stated, “Whereas the Immigration laws prohibit entry into Canada of Mexican Labour, therefore, be it resolved that the beet growers organization investigate the possibility of bringing in this type of labour. Be it resolved that the beet growers association petition the federal government to allow Mexican labour to come into Canada to work sugar beets” (ASBGA

Annual Meeting *Minutes*, 1966: 1).

However, the growers' request to the federal government to create a movement that would recruit Mexican workers on a seasonal basis for sugar beet labour was refused for two main reasons. First, government officials refused to let Mexican workers enter Canada to work in the beet fields if there was another internal source of labour available. This point was made in an ASBGA Board Report (Wood, 1965: 5) that stated, "The Labour Committee was very active during the year. Mr. Evans, of this committee, along with the Executive, met with the Federal Dept. of Manpower and Mobility to again go over the labour picture. All traditional areas of supply were examined. Mexican, Asian and West Indian sources were discussed. The group was told by Mr. Tom Kent, Deputy Minister of Manpower that as long as there were Canadian Indians that could work and would work in the beet fields there was little chance of any other outside large-scale movement. The need for such movement would have to be demonstrated without doubt before any consideration would be made." Secondly, Department of Immigration officials refused to bring in Mexican workers at the time because government regulations stipulated that only professionals and skilled workers were allowed into Canada (ASBGA, 1965: 16).

Moreover, although the Canada-Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program was initiated in 1974 to bring in Mexican workers on a short-term basis to perform agricultural work when there was a labour shortage, to get Mexican workers employers first had to prove they had exhausted all sources of internal labour (Mysyk, 2000: 47). As such, southern Alberta sugar beet growers would not have been eligible for Mexican labour under the Canada-Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program because of the

existence and availability of a large Aboriginal labour pool in the western provinces.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, growers turned to hiring mainly Mexican Mennonite workers who recently migrated to Canada. Growers were able to hire Mexican Mennonite workers outside of a government sponsored labour movement because many of them could claim Canadian citizenship (Jansen, 1997: 5). Although Chapter 6 will explain the background to the recent arrival of Mexican Mennonites in Canada, at this point it will suffice to note that they are the descendents of the approximately 8000 Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to Canada and settled in Manitoba in the late 1880s after which many migrated to Mexico in the 1920s. Recently, many have migrated back to Canada in search of employment in agricultural areas (Jansen, 1997: 1-2).

While there is little information available on exactly when Mexican Mennonite labour was first used in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, there is evidence that indicates Mennonite labour, although it is not clear whether this was Mexican Mennonite labour, was used to a small degree in the industry to harvest beets during the early post-Second World War period. For example, in 1955 Mennonite labour harvested 619 acres of the 16, 226 acres of sugar beets harvested but in 1961 this figure increased to 1378 acres of the 36, 732 acres of sugar beets harvested (ASBGA Fonds, 1961). However, there is no direct mention of Mexican Mennonite labour in the annual reports of the growers' organization until the early 1990s and even then not much detail on the labour force is provided. In 1993, for instance, ASBGMB Labour Representative Ron Hanzel (ASBGMB, 1993: 17) stated, "1993 was a difficult year for weed control because of an abundance of rain which caused untimely chemical applications. Freelance native labour

and Mexican Mennonite families filled the labour needs of those farmers requiring it.” In the following year, again the use of Mexican Mennonite labour is briefly mentioned when Hanzel (ASBGMB, 1994: 17) stated, “...21% of total acres seeded had hand labour in conjunction with the use of herbicides. Most of the labour is provided by free-lance natives and Mexican Mennonite families.” Thereafter, however, the annual reports of the grower’s organization are silent on the use of Mexican Mennonite labour, which may be explained by the fact that the “Labour Report” section of the annual report was discontinued in 1995.

Another reason that the annual reports of the growers’ organization are silent on the use of Mexican Mennonite labour is because since they have been returning to Canada and settling in southern Alberta, their placement in labouring positions with sugar beet growers has been done mainly through the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) located in Taber. The MCC in Taber assists Mexican Mennonites, or Kanadiers, find employment in agriculture by having growers/farmers call into their office with their requests for workers which MCC staff post on a job board. Then, when their clients come to the office they are informed of the availability of the jobs and directed to the type of work for which they are qualified (Bueckert, 2005).

When growers first began hiring Mexican Mennonite workers in increasing numbers during the early 1990s, many were hired as seasonal labour to hoe and weed sugar beet crops, a job that was formerly done by Aboriginal workers. Moreover, the hoeing and weeding of the sugar beet crops by Mexican Mennonites was generally done as a family unit that consisted of seven or eight members that included the husband, wife and their children. Today, however, when Mexican Mennonite labour is hired to weed

sugar beet crops, it is usually the women and their children who perform the labour.

Many of the men are hired by growers on a seasonal basis that lasts from early April until the end of October or they are hired on a year-round basis to perform general farm labour such as welding, the spraying of crops and operating farm machinery (Bueckert, 2006). As a result, it is generally the case that Mexican Mennonite men perform a very limited amount of weeding work each year.

As indicated above, during the post-Second World War period sugar beet growers in southern Alberta sought to replace their Aboriginal labour force with another labour force, in particular, a Mexican labour force. However, their attempts were stymied at the time by government regulations that restricted the entry of foreign-born seasonal labour into Canada. Nevertheless, during the late 1980s and early 1990s growers found themselves in a position to draw upon Mexican Mennonite, or Kanadier, workers who migrated to Canada from Mexico because many were able to claim Canadian citizenship as a Canadian born abroad under Canada's immigration regulations. Moreover, the Mennonite Central Committee assisted the growers in the recruitment of Mexican Mennonite workers for sugar beet labour. As a result, during the 1990s Mexican Mennonite workers were hired in such numbers for a range of sugar beet jobs that, in effect, they overwhelmingly comprised the largest component of the labour force in the sugar beet industry. Hence, the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the industry was completed. In recent years, only a small number of the Aboriginal workers who migrate to southern Alberta each growing season are able to find employment performing weeding jobs in the sugar beet fields.

“There may have been less problems but their work was no better”: The Factors That Attracted Growers to Mexican Mennonite Labour

Unlike other workers who came to Canada through state sanctioned foreign-born seasonal labour movements, Mexican Mennonites workers migrated to Canada in the latter part of the twentieth century unfettered by state regulations to seek out employment in the agricultural sectors of southern Ontario, southern Manitoba and more recently, southern Alberta. Interestingly, they arrived in southern Alberta seeking agricultural employment at an opportune time as growers had reduced the size of their labour force through increased mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls but in doing so, they found themselves in demand of workers with the skills to operate the machinery and apply the chemical weed controls---skills that many Mexican Mennonite workers possessed. This section will discuss the reasons growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite labour that culminated in the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. It should be noted that this section, and the one that follows, draws heavily on the data gathered from interviews conducted with sugar beet growers. This is because, due to the transient nature of many Mexican Mennonites, there exists very little documented evidence on them in southern Alberta and almost no demographic statistics on the number of them who migrate between southern Alberta and Mexico on a seasonal basis to perform sugar beet work.

Basok (2002: 17) has argued that farmers in Ontario’s fruit and vegetable industry were attracted to Mexican seasonal workers because they were unfree. In other words, Mexican workers recruited under the Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Program established in 1974, were unable to circulate in the labour market in Canada and because

of political and legal compulsion, which, also rendered them unable to refuse the demands of their employers. However, this was not the case for Mexican Mennonites who migrated from Mexico to the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta because many were able to claim Canadian citizenship as Canadians born abroad (Jansen, 1997: 5). In other words, while they were not mobilized by the state to migrate from Mexico to Canada to perform agricultural work, they closely resembled what Satzewich (1991: 98) would classify as ‘free immigrant labour’ because they were “foreign-born workers” who had the option to become “permanent settlers, future citizens and members of the imagined community.” Moreover, the state could not restrict their ability to remain in Canada and they were free to circulate in the Canadian labour market.

While Basok (2002: 107) argued that farmers in Ontario’s fruit and vegetable industry were attracted to Mexican seasonal workers because they were unfree labour, she also argued that Mexican labour was costly because of the high transportation costs. However, the majority of Mexican Mennonites who migrated from Mexico to southern Alberta to work for growers used their own vehicles and covered the costs of the trip to the sugar beet fields. This was noted in a case study on Mexican Mennonites who had recently migrated to southern Alberta to seek employment on sugar beet farms when Hall, et al. (n. d.: 11), stated, “Abe and Esther Wiebe arrived in southern Alberta from Durango, Mexico in early March in hope of securing a job at one of the many sugar beet farms. They had heard stories from other Mennonite families that a better life could be enjoyed in this part of Canada. Abe, Esther and Adam, their four year old, had driven for six days and were awestruck by the long distance they had to travel.” Also, when asked how Mexican Mennonites migrated to southern Alberta, a former ASBGMB President

and beet grower (2004: G09) stated, “they would get in a car and drive up and look for jobs...all the way from Mexico. One of those boys could take a car worth \$250.00 and drive it from Mexico and back where you and I would not get ten blocks away; they had the technology and know-how.” In addition, when asked how Mexican Mennonites get to southern Alberta, Ruben Bueckert (2005), Director of the Mennonite Central Committee in Taber, stated, “they come on their own and I think the rumor mill has really...proved to be very effective and...they start coming, they go back and then they come with these beautiful vehicles. They go home with all this money in their pockets...and they live over there...in quite an affluent manner...after being in Canada one summer, you see. So it picks up pretty quickly.” When asked whether Mexican Mennonites migrated to Canada with any government support, Bueckert (2005) added, “No, I don’t think so...I think this was kind of...unique to the people themselves and there’s no other generating force other than themselves to help...get them in this migration mode.”

In light of the comments above, growers would have been attracted to Mexican Mennonite labour because not only did they recruit themselves for employment in the sugar beet fields, a site of production that historically had difficulty in the recruitment and retention of labour, but they also covered the costs of their transportation to the sugar beet fields. Furthermore, since Mexican Mennonite workers recruited new workers for sugar beet labour through their own social networks, growers would have been attracted to them because this eliminated the need for a costly advertisement campaign to fill their labour demands. Moreover, it seems reasonable to assume that Mexican Mennonites who worked in the sugar beet industry and referred other Mexican Mennonites to migrate to the industry, in essence, provided growers with “pre-screened” workers who held a good

work ethic. As such, Mexican Mennonite workers reduced the cost of labour for growers because they covered the costs of their transportation to the sugar beet fields, recruited themselves and provided growers with pre-screened labour.

Basok (2002: 114) argued that Mexican labour recruited for agriculture jobs in Ontario was more costly than domestic labour because farmers had to cover the cost of providing them with accommodations. In the case of Mexican Mennonites who migrated to southern Alberta to work in sugar beets, this study found some evidence that it was also costly for growers to cover the expense of providing them with free housing. For instance, when asked whether free housing was costly, a grower and labour manager (2005: G07) who employs both Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite workers, stated,

It is difficult, very difficult...it's a pain to have to put these people up in housing. It's always an issue and we have some transient Mennonite labour...that comes to us—'well, have you got a house?' 'Well, do you want to share it with the Native labour?' You know...they're not going to do that....we only have so much available. It's very expensive to have housing just on standby for people coming in....It's left in really bad repair...And, then...you have...mice issues and all that sort of thing. So that's a really big problem....seasonal housing is just a real pain but it's a fact of life we have to deal with so we do provide it.

Still, the cost of housing provided to Mexican Mennonite workers that increased the cost of their labour in comparison to that of domestic workers, was off set when it is considered that Mexican Mennonite workers lowered the growers' recruitment costs by

recruiting themselves and others and as well covered the costs of their transportation between Mexico and southern Alberta.

A number of studies (Mines, 2002; Majka and Majka, 1982; Galarza, 1964) have argued that foreign-born labour displaces another labour force in an agricultural industry because it is cheap labour. Still, other studies (Basok, 2002) have argued that foreign-born labour is not necessarily cheap. However, based on the testimony of growers interviewed for of this study, Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry cannot be considered cheap labour. That is, when growers were asked whether Mexican Mennonite workers were paid lower wages than Aboriginal workers for doing the same job, the majority agreed they were paid the same wages. For instance, when asked whether there was a wage differential between the two groups of workers, a labour manager and grower (2005: G07) stated, “No, it’s never been an issue here anyways.... We pay people what we think is fair.” Similarly, another sugar beet grower (2004: G03) stated that he paid the two groups of workers “identical, we pay on a per acre basis.... I had no difference who did the job as long as it was being done in a timely manner.” Merrill Harris (2004), grower and President of the ASGA, stated, “I think for the most part they were paid the same. I can’t remember exactly what the rates were but say it cost \$30.00 acre for your second hoeing... that’s basically what you would say you were paying whoever was doing it. I don’t think, in my experience... that anybody was paid any different whether they were Mexican or Native.” Also, when a past ASBGA President and grower, was asked whether Mexican Mennonite labour was cheaper than Aboriginal labour, he (2004: G08) stated, “No, every year we would set within the Sugar Beet Growers Association the labour fees where the cost of hoeing, the cost of thinning,

the cost of topping, when we used to top by hand, that was set by so much an acre and it was all paid the same and whenever a grower tried to cheat on that he was reprimanded and in some cases his contract was taken away when he tried to get cheaper labour.” The growers’ comments suggest, therefore, that Mexican Mennonite labour did not lower the cost of labour because when they performed the same sugar beet jobs as those performed by Aboriginal workers, they received the same rate of pay.

The growers employed Mexican Mennonites on temporary contracts just like they employed Aboriginal work crews. This minimized labour costs since many did not receive workers’ benefits such as Unemployment Insurance and Workmen’s Compensation coverage. That is, similar to Aboriginal labour, Mexican Mennonites were hired to weed sugar beet crops through a contract. As noted previously in this study, the individual that took the contract to weed a specific acreage was expected to hire the labour crew necessary to complete the operation. Moreover, when a worker agreed to contract a job, the grower or employer was exempt from providing the workers with Unemployment Insurance benefits and Workmen’s Compensation coverage because the onus was on the contractor to provide the benefits to the work crew. When a labour manager and grower was asked whether the weeding of sugar beet crops was done on contract she (2005: G07) stated, “some of my Mexican Mennonite people who came through early in the season...did that. They were some kids and the wives of...a couple of our workers. We had a couple of fields that were dirty and I paid them on contract but they still have to sign a receipt.” Also, when Ruben Bueckert, manager of the Mennonite Central Committee in Taber, was asked whether Mexican Mennonite workers get Unemployment Insurance and Workmen’s Compensation coverage, he (2005) stated,

“Well, we had an accident just last week. A man crushed his hand and lost his small finger and everything on a big farm. There was no compensation. The guy has no accident insurance so his wife is now looking at going to work because he can't work. This is one of the problems. They're not aware of what the boss is carrying for insurance, whether he's paying in for them, you know. A lot of them end up doing contract work instead of hourly work and so they get no benefits. The boss is paying nothing in for them, you see.”

Also, studies (Basok, 2002; Majka and Majka, 1982) have argued that agricultural employers were attracted to non-unionized foreign-born labour because the lack of union representation renders workers powerless to organize for higher wages and better working conditions. When asked whether Mexican Mennonites had considered starting a union, Ruben Bueckert (2005), manager of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Taber, stated, “ a lot of them are very ignorant of benefits, they're ignorant of their rights....There was a guy in yesterday saying...what about statutory holidays...should we have a day off? You see...they're very ignorant about some of these things. So for them to think about unionizing, I have not heard of that.” Hence, growers in the sugar beet industry would have been attracted to Mexican Mennonite labour because, like the former Aboriginal labour force, non-unionized workers are powerless to bargain for higher wages and better working conditions which lowers the cost of their labour.

Basok (2002: 100-112) has also argued that agricultural employers in Ontario were attracted to Mexican workers because they were docile and accepted their working conditions without complaint largely because the workers feared they would lose their

jobs. As pointed out previously, however, Mexican Mennonites were free to circulate in the labour market and thus, they were not docile and compliant because their status in Canada would be threatened if they were terminated. Nevertheless, Mexican Mennonite workers were, in general, docile and compliant with the demands of their employers. For instance, a former sugar beet grower and past President of the ASBGA (2004: G01), stated, "...we never had any trouble with Mexican Mennonites because they are so passive....I guess I would have to say they were easier to get along with generally because they were so passive and I think they, in their culture, they are conditioned to be that." Also, a number of growers stated that they employed Mexican Mennonite workers because they were reliable and good workers. For instance, a sugar beet grower (2004: G03) stated Mexican Mennonites were "Good labour, good people, dependable, hard workers, knowledgeable with farm equipment." Also, Ruben Bueckert (2005), of the MCC in Taber, noted that Mexican Mennonites actually sought out jobs where they could work "fourteen hours a day...and six days a week" so that they could "make a fair living." He (2005) went on to state, "They're hard working, they like to work long hours, they like the money, they're rural and by that I mean they don't like to live in town."

As the preceding indicates, in general, growers characterized Mexican Mennonite labour as compliant, reliable and hard working. However, evidence suggests that they were passive and compliant for different reasons than those of foreign-born workers who entered Canada through state sanctioned seasonal labour programs. Mexican Mennonites were passive and compliant with the demands of their employers for three main reasons: first, they had problems communicating in English; second, they had little or no formal education; and third, they had no marketable skills other than those in agriculture that

would allow them to seek out other jobs in the labour market.

Many of the Mexican Mennonites who either reside in southern Alberta or migrate between Mexico and southern Alberta, hold the religious belief that they should have the freedom to educate their own children. As such, most Mexican Mennonites as well as their children have on average a grade 6 education because parents take their children out of school at the age of twelve years old. As Janzen (1997: 7) states, “Some parents have their children working on farms at age 12 and the children are not returning to school as the attendance law requires. Employers are hiring them and so the parents believe it is alright. They have taken 12 years of age as school leaving age from their village school in Mexico and feel the children have been in school long enough.” Furthermore, Janzen (1997: 4) states, “Now you have the poorer, usually the labour class in Mexico coming to Canada. Many of them are illiterate in their own language and therefore, find it more difficult to learn the language of our country. The emphasis in Mexico has been to work in the machine repair shops, work with farm machinery and the girls have helped their mother in the house or care for the garden. In many of the poorer families, young girls go live with another family that needs help in return for room, board and the opportunity to learn how to cook and take care of a house.”

The data gathered for this study also indicate that a lack of education and communication skills were problems that limited the job options for Mexican Mennonite workers. While commenting on the Mexican Mennonite practice of taking their children out of school at an early age, a beet grower (2004: G03) stated, “They are taking them out of school too early and they won’t get a good education. Look at even in a grocery store...if you don’t know how to use a computer you can’t even get a job as a cashier

anymore...hand labour is going to be less and less and what will these kids do in 20, 30 years from now? They are going to do hand labour for the rest of their lives and I think that is wrong.” Also, while commenting on the how the Mennonite Central Committee attempts to help Mexican Mennonites overcome problems so they can settle in Canada, Ruben Bueckert (2005), manager of the MCC in Taber, stated, “...we try and teach them communication skills, some social skills, some employability skills....I mean, if you’re going to have some sustainable employment, there are certain things that you’ve got to have in place and that you’ve got to be aware of and that’s really lacking with these people.”

Moreover, Janzen’s (1997) study found that employers listed literacy and language as the greatest problems that undermine the employability of Mexican Mennonites in southern Alberta. He (1997: 9) stated,

Literacy and language. The majority of employers combined these two items as deficiencies that are of uppermost concerns for them. They state that if they cannot communicate clearly with the employee, they have to monitor the work closely, which is an extra burden and cost to them. A number of them indicated that they were pleased with the work ethic of the Mennonite employees and would like to promote them to a supervisory position, but this is not possible because they are functionally illiterate. They indicate that they also have to limit the work that they can do because they need the ability to read to work with some of the high tech machines that are used in their place of business or on their farm.

Clearly, Mexican Mennonite workers in southern Alberta suffered from a lack of education, poor English language skills and a lack of diversity in job experience that would have hindered their ability to seek out alternative employment in the labour market. As such, Mexican Mennonite workers had few other options but to seek employment in agricultural sectors---the only sites of production where they could market their skills and work experience. Moreover, the lack of education, poor English skills and the lack of employment options, rendered Mexican Mennonite labour docile and compliant with the demands of their employers and with little hope of job promotion.

Hence, because Mexican Mennonite workers were docile and compliant with the demands of employers, had no union representation and, in many cases lacked worker benefits, growers in southern Alberta would have been attracted to them as a labour force. In particular, growers would have been attracted to such workers because their attributes as a labour force would have been fertile ground for the exploitation of their labour power. That is, a labour force that was rendered docile and compliant largely because it lacked an education and spoke poor English would be less likely to challenge exploitative working conditions such as long hours of work and the lack of worker benefits.

Mexican Mennonite workers were not entirely docile and compliant, however. They recognized that they had some freedom, unlike foreign contract workers. Evidence suggests that Mexican Mennonites protested their working conditions by “job jumping” or quitting one job and moving on to another. For example, while assessing the concerns of employers in regards to Mexican Mennonite workers in southern Alberta, Janzen’s (1997: 9) study noted, “A number of employers mentioned that they had employees in the

past that would be working without making any comments of dissatisfaction. Then, without notice they would disappear and not show up again. It left the employer in a difficult situation where the field had to be irrigated or some other urgent work had to be done.” The tendency of Mexican Mennonite workers to job jump was also pointed to by a former grower and past President of the ASBGMB. He (2004: G09) stated, “I notice if they were not happy, they would not discuss it with you. They would just load up in the middle of the night and go.” Also, when asked about whether Mexican Mennonites were reliable labour, Ruben Bueckert (2005), manager of the MCC in Taber, stated, “Well, there always is that issue of reliability. That’s a constant and there’s an issue with reliability in terms of the Mennonites because they have not learned the skills, the social skills. They have not learned the employability skills. For example, they’ll quit without giving any notice.” However, since this study found that, in general, growers agreed Mexican Mennonites constituted a reliable labour force, this reinforces the view that job jumping was a form of passive resistance or protest to their working conditions or to the exploitation of their labour power, or to both.

Despite the phenomenon of job jumping, beet growers tended to agree Mexican Mennonite labour was reliable. For instance, when one beet grower was asked to comment on the reliability of Mexican Mennonite workers he (2004: G10) stated, “They come to work on time, reliable, they are good.” Similarly, another beet grower (2004: G06) stated, “...they are reliable. When you ask them to come on that day and that time, they are there.” As well, when a labour manager and beet grower was asked to comment on the reliability of Mexican Mennonites, she (2005: G07) stated, “The Mexican Mennonites are...reliable. They’re...stable.”

However, when growers were asked whether they found Mexican Mennonite workers were better or more productive than Aboriginal workers, they largely agreed that they were not. For instance, when asked whether Mexican Mennonites were better workers than Aboriginal workers, one grower (2004:G05) stated, “No...they were both decent workers. No, I don’t think so. There was always some bad ones in either group.” Another grower (2004: G01) stated, “They were no better nor worse. It was a simple operation you had to hoe out the weeds or you had to thin out the beets and it did not take a rocket scientist to do it and there may have been less problems but their work was no better than the Aboriginal’s and if farmers tell you otherwise, tell them to come and talk to me.” Merrill Harris (2004) stated, “I would say in actual work, I wouldn’t say that anyone was actually better than the other.” He (2004) went on to add, however, “when the going got tough for the Mexicans they were gone whereas the Natives they would keep at it.” Similarly, when another was asked whether Mexican Mennonite or Aboriginal workers were more productive, she (2005: G07) stated, “...my Native labour will work longer hours. They’ll work harder in worse conditions and will stick it out...because trust me, I’m out there working right along side of them. I don’t expect my Native labour or my Mennonite labour to do anything I myself won’t do...[Natives] they’ll do jobs that Mennonite men will just say forget it, I’m not putting up with this shit. Literally, they will. I firmly believe that and they’ll work Sundays and they’ll work longer hours; definitely!” In regards to Mexican Mennonite workers, she (2005: G07) went on to say, “They...refuse to work on Sundays. It doesn’t matter if it rains all bloomin’ week and Sunday is the nicest day of week...but, it’s okay for them to go to Lethbridge and make other people work for them and to go grocery shopping and to go

drinking and partying. That's all okay. But they won't work on Sundays. To me that's just hypocritical." A grower (2004: G03) also pointed out that Mexican Mennonite workers take a number of days off for religious reasons such as "Easter, Good Friday, Extension Day and Sunday."

As the preceding indicates, this study found that, in general, Mexican Mennonite workers were relatively reliable which would have lowered the growers' turnover rates. However, it also found they were not more productive than Aboriginal workers. In fact, it was found that in some instances Aboriginal workers could be depended upon to complete jobs that Mexican Mennonite workers might refuse to perform. Moreover, it was found that Mexican Mennonite workers refused to work on Sundays and also took days off for other religious holidays whereas Aboriginal workers were willing to work on Sundays if asked to do so by the grower. In addition, when it is considered that some Mexican Mennonite workers would job jump when dissatisfied with their jobs, this would lower the growers' level of productivity because of the cost and time needed to replace the worker. Thus, the evidence suggests that beet growers in southern Alberta would have been attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they were more reliable than Aboriginal workers but not because they increased productivity.

Basok's (2002: 117) study also argued that agricultural employers in Ontario were attracted to Mexican workers because they could co-opt certain workers and then use them to increase the productivity of their Mexican labour force. Although this study did not find direct evidence that indicated beet growers co-opted Mexican Mennonite workers through the use of tactics such as privileged treatment, indirect evidence does suggest that some of the workers were co-opted. For instance, it was pointed out

previously in this section that growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they covered the cost of their own recruitment and mobilization between Mexico and southern Alberta. In doing so, it was noted that those workers who migrated from Mexico to southern Alberta to work in the sugar beet fields were, in effect, pre-screened as reliable workers by those who recruited them and referred them to certain growers. Hence, those workers who recruited the new workers must have been co-opted by the grower to some extent and felt they had an obligation to ensure the workers would comply with the demands of the grower. In particular, workers who were employed year-round or returned each season to the same grower and who recruited new workers for their employer, would have felt obligated to ensure that the newly recruited workers would comply to the demands of the grower.

In addition, it was also pointed out previously that although the need for hiring workers to hoe and weed sugar beet crops has been significantly reduced, some growers still hire hand labour on a contract basis to perform the operation where herbicides fail to get rid of all the weeds. Although most of the contracts to weed sugar beets are taken on a verbal basis, the onus is still on the individual who takes the contract to hire a crew to complete the job. As was also noted previously, today the hoeing and weeding of sugar beet crops by Mexican Mennonites is usually done by family units or, the job is done by the women and their children. Furthermore, in many instances the women and children who are hired to weed sugar beet crops are family members of a Mexican Mennonite male employed by the grower. As a labour manager and grower (2005: G07) stated, "...some of my Mexican Mennonite people who came through early in the season ... were just some kids and the wives of... a couple of our workers. We had a couple of fields that

were dirty and I paid them on contract.” As such, male employees would feel obligated to the grower to ensure the work done by their families was completed in a satisfactory manner. Moreover, when growers hire workers on a contract basis, whether verbal or signed, in essence, the contractor is co-opted to ensure that the job is completed and that it meets the demands of the grower.

Basok’s (2002: 123) study goes on to argue that farmers in Ontario’s agriculture industry were attracted to Mexican workers because they had no families, no commitments and thus no social life outside of work which made them put more energy into work and be more compliant with the demands of their employers. However, this study found that Mexican Mennonites who migrated to southern Alberta did so as a family unit. As Ruben Bueckert (2005), manager of the MCC in Taber, explained, “They come in as families and often times they like to work on a farm as a family too, which, sometimes works, sometimes does not because [of] the nature of the work. They like to have their families and their children work....So, with large families coming up, some of them like to have them working for one farmer....I would say most of them, 99 per cent of them...come as families.”

Moreover, most of the Mexican Mennonites who migrated to southern Alberta and eventually settled in the area had a social life, much of which centered around socializing on Sundays (Hall, et al., n. d.: 12). In fact, many Mexican Mennonites migrated to southern Alberta because they had relatives who lived in the area or because they knew other Mexican Mennonites who migrated to the area and worked in agricultural industries. For instance, a grower pointed out that many of the Mexican Mennonites who he had hired to do sugar beet work had relatives in the area. He (2004:

G03), stated, "...they usually had relatives that they stay with for a month or a brother." In addition, many Mexican Mennonites who migrated to southern Alberta came from the same area in Mexico. As Ruben Bueckert (2005) pointed out, "They come from...central Mexico, in the Cuauhtemoc area. Chihuahua is the central province in central Mexico and that's where the bulk of them come from."

Thus, in contrast to Basok's (2002) findings that farmers in Ontario were attracted to Mexican workers because they had no social life, Mexican Mennonite workers who migrated to southern Alberta had a social life. In particular, most Mexican Mennonite workers who migrated to southern Alberta took along their families with whom they would not only socialize, but also on whom they spent a great deal of their time and energy fulfilling commitments. As well, Mexican Mennonite workers socialized with relatives, friends and attended social gatherings on Sundays. As one grower (2004: G06) stated, "...they have their own group...and they have their church life and they are strong in that, especially with certain holidays like after Easter they like to have a few days off." In addition, the fact that Mexican Mennonite workers took their families with them to southern Alberta might explain why they were, in general, reliable and stable workers. This point was alluded to when Ruben Bueckert (2005) stated, "I think the fact that they bring their families with them, that's been a good thing....it makes for a peaceful situation for the family...and this may reflect on the working relationship too." Hence, in contrast to the case in Ontario where farmers are attracted to Mexican workers because they were unfree workers with no families, no commitments and no social life that caused them to be more productive and compliant workers, in the case of Mexican Mennonite workers in southern Alberta, the evidence suggests that growers were attracted to them

because they had families, commitments and a social life that caused them to be more reliable and stable; this caused Mexican Mennonite workers to be more compliant with the demands of growers and thus more productive.

Finally, Basok's (2002: 124) study pointed out that paternalistic relationships developed between Mexican workers and their employers in the fruit and vegetable industries in Ontario that functioned to increase both the worker's loyalty to their employers and their commitment to work. In regard to paternalistic relationships, it was pointed out in Chapter 4 that sugar beet growers in southern Alberta used an array of paternalistic relationships or tactics that were designed to retain Aboriginal workers in the sugar beet fields to perform hand labour jobs. In the case of the Mexican Mennonite workers, however, very little evidence was found of paternalism, other than the provision of free housing. This suggests that growers may have been attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they recruited and retained themselves. This released growers from the need to develop time consuming and in some instances, costly (e.g. recruitment costs and up-grading of worker housing) paternalistic relations with their workers, as was the case with the former Aboriginal labour force.

In another study on the use of foreign-born labour in an agricultural industry, Mysyk (2000: 52-55) argued that growers in commercial market gardening in Manitoba tended to prefer Mexican workers instead of domestic workers because they were driven by poverty, they possessed a strong work ethic, they needed less supervision than domestic labour and they could perform a number of job tasks. In particular, Mysyk (2000: 52) argued that Mexican workers portrayed a strong work ethic out of the fear they would lose their jobs and be sent back home.

In the case of Mexican Mennonite workers who performed sugar beet jobs in southern Alberta, this study found that they too were driven by poverty. In Janzen's (1997: 5) study on the needs of Mexican Mennonites who recently arrived in southern Alberta, the dire economic conditions in Mexico that forced them to migrate to Canada were explained as follows:

...the Mennonites from Mexico are primarily economic refugees. Their prolific birthrate and the limited availability of good farmland, the population pressures in the Mexican colonies have reached crisis proportions. Some have found opportunities to buy land in Mexico but, because of high interest rates and high inflation rates, have found it virtually impossible to make their payments and they come to Canada to escape their creditors and have a new beginning. Others simply cannot find a way of earning a living. Compounding the problem is the virtual lack of social assistance either from their own community or from the Mexican government. In desperation, those who can qualify as Canadian citizens or landed immigrants come to Canada looking for work, fully aware that if no work can be found, they can at least qualify for Social Assistance. Even those who are desperately poor according to Canadian standards say conditions here are far better than those they left in Mexico.

Also, while commenting on the reasons for the recent influx of Mexican Mennonites in southern Alberta seeking work, Ruben Bueckert, manager of the MCC in Taber, reinforced the findings in Janzen's study. He (2005) stated,

Well...in 1921 they went down to Mexico because of faith issues. The Manitoba government, first of all, promised them certain things, education, military exemption, other promises. Then they felt the government reneged on those promises and so...a couple of thousand went down to Mexico. Now there's about 60,000 in Mexico and the land that they have down there is now in such small pieces and when you have a family of 12, for example, how many times can you split it up and have your sons or your daughters live on it and make a living? It's impossible....The extra land is very, very high priced and the interest rates are exorbitantly high so this forces them to come back and it's easy for them to come back to Canada because they are Canadian citizens....I think it used to be a faith issue, as I mentioned...moving down there. Now it's an economic issue and so a lot of them have to come.

Clearly, Mexican Mennonites who migrated to Canada were driven by the poverty they experienced in Mexico that would have motivated them to display a strong work ethic to their employers in southern Alberta. This was pointed out previously in this section when a grower (2004: G03) characterized Mexican Mennonite workers as, "Good labour, good people, dependable, hard workers." Similarly, Ruben Bueckert (2005) stated, "...they're hard working. They like to work long hours. They like the money." Also, when one grower was asked to characterize Mexican Mennonite workers he (2004: G02)) stated, "The Mennonites fill the need. Overall, they do have a good work ethic." In addition, Mexican Mennonite workers would have attempted to show their employers

they had a strong work ethic for fear of losing their jobs, especially since, as was pointed out previously in this section, they had few marketable skills outside of agriculture that would have allowed them to find employment in other job markets.

Moreover, evidence indicates that many Mexican Mennonites were driven to overcome their poverty by opening businesses or purchasing land in southern Alberta so they could become farmers. As a grower (2004: G03) noted, "I have one guy that started in 1990 and he left two years ago and bought a small farm near Tabor and he has eleven kids and six are working so he brings in good money so that is the way they work." In addition, Rueben Bueckert (2005) stated, "...there's more and more [Mexican Mennonites] settling.... They're buying the acreages, they're buying the farms, they're buying trucking businesses, they're...opening garages. They're...very resourceful in this respect."

Similar to Mysyk's (2000) characterization of Mexican workers in commercial market gardening in Manitoba, Mexican Mennonite workers involved in the production of sugar beets were, in general, found to be independent workers who needed little job supervision. For instance, it was pointed out in this section that Mexican Mennonite workers recruited, mobilized and retained themselves for labouring positions in the production of sugar beet crops. As such, this was a strong indication that many of them were self-motivated and independent as workers. Also, one grower (2004: G02) noted that the father of a Mexican Mennonite family he hired on a seasonal basis was a very independent worker by stating, "Here he is his own boss. He likes to be his own boss."

Mysyk's (2000) study also found commercial market gardeners in Manitoba preferred Mexican workers because they could perform a number of job tasks. In the case

of Mexican Mennonite workers involved in the production of sugar beet crops in southern Alberta, this study found that one of the main reasons growers were attracted to them as workers was because they were mechanically inclined and because they had the skills to perform a number of farm jobs. In fact, it is understandable that many Mexican Mennonites would possess an array of the farm skills because in Mexico most of them either worked on farms or they owned farms prior to migrating to southern Alberta. In commenting on the farm skills of Mexican Mennonite workers, Merril Harris (2004) stated, “Well...most of the ones that I know...either worked or owned farms in Mexico or sold their farms down there and moved up here to try and start their lives over so, they know what they are doing.”

Also, a labour manager and grower commented on the farm skills and the versatility of Mexican Mennonite workers. She (2005: G07) stated, “The...Mennonite men are more skilled and mechanical. They’re a little bit more up-to-date on current technology and tractors...and things like that. They can service their own trucks, things like this, and that’s why they’re employed more on the tractors, truck driving end of it, anything that requires a bit more mechanical experience, things like that.” When one grower was asked why beet growers hired Mexican Mennonites, he (2004: G09) stated, “...they are very mechanically inclined and they are just suited for that type of work...you give them a job taking care of the irrigation equipment or operate a tractor or drill or expensive equipment they would take great pride in that.” In addition, when another grower was asked why growers hired Mexican Mennonites he (2004: G06)) stated, “Oh...some of them are very practical in fixing. I think that is attractive to a lot of farmers.” While commenting on why growers hire Mexican Mennonites, Ruben Bueckert

(2005) stated, “I think now, the Mennonites who come here, many of them are very skilled. Intuitively, they’re very...intelligent. They haven’t had the formal training. They’re very skilled in welding...in a lot of trades and so they’re a very versatile person to hire by the farmer and I think that’s...why they are...getting the jobs that they are...because they’re...quite skilled in a lot of things and so, it’s very good for the farmer to hire someone like that.” Bueckert (2005) went on to state, “...when they lived in the [Mexican] colonies...a lot of them were farm-based...without any education. But...these people are very, very resourceful. For example, if they see something, they look at it and they say, okay, I can do better...and they’ll go and they’ll build that whether it’s welding, whether it’s construction, whether it’s automotive. They seem to have an intuitive skill or intuitive knowledge on producing things and building things.”

As this section has pointed out, sugar beet growers in southern Alberta were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers over Aboriginal workers for a number of reasons. However, it should be noted that some of the attributes that attracted growers to Mexican Mennonite workers were also attributes of Aboriginal workers. That is, both groups were non-unionized, both would work without workers’ benefits, both took along their families which was conducive to their stability, both were poverty-stricken and both had poor English skills and low education levels that meant they would be compliant with the demands of their employer as their ability to secure employment in jobs outside of the agricultural sectors would have been limited. It was also noted that because of their poverty, Mexican Mennonites displayed a strong work ethic to their employers. Nevertheless, it was found that Mexican Mennonites were prone to “job jumping” when the work became too difficult and that they refused to work on holidays. This suggests

that Mexican Mennonites were reliable and productive workers as long as the work was not too difficult. In comparison, it was found that Aboriginal workers would work under difficult conditions as well as on holidays. In fact, growers clearly indicated that Mexican Mennonite workers were not better workers than Aboriginal workers. Hence, this study found that growers did not hire Mexican Mennonite workers over Aboriginal workers because they were better or more productive workers.

Still, it was found that growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers over Aboriginal workers because they recruited, mobilized and retained themselves as workers for the sugar beet industry. In particular, when Mexican Mennonite workers recruited other Mexican Mennonite workers for sugar beet jobs this functioned to provide growers with pre-screened workers with a strong work ethic. As such, the growers' labour costs were reduced as their need for an expensive labour recruitment campaign to procure other workers, such as Aboriginal workers, was eliminated. Growers were also attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers over Aboriginal workers because Mexican Mennonite workers were relatively reliable workers in comparison to Aboriginal workers. Furthermore, it was found that growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers over Aboriginal workers because they were independent workers and because they usually had the skills to perform an array of farm jobs.

The Growers' Perspective on the Reasons for the Transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite Labour

To gather data for this study, interviews were conducted with beet growers who had either employed or still employed Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite workers.

During the interview, they were asked for their views on why there was a transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry. Hence, this final section of the chapter provides the testimony of beet growers in response to this question.

A factor that was discussed previously in this chapter and one that growers point to as a major reason for the transition of labour in the industry is that many growers preferred Mexican Mennonite workers over Aboriginal workers because they were more reliable. For instance, a grower (2004: G06) pointed out that he hired Mexican Mennonites because "...they are reliable. When you ask them to come on that day and that time, they are there. And, like the Natives, I had no clue when they are coming or when they left." Another grower (2004: G10) stated he hired Mexican Mennonites instead of Aboriginal workers because "...they are more dependable...show up all the time." Similarly, a grower pointed out that Mexican Mennonite workers were more reliable than Aboriginal workers. He (2004: G08) stated, "I think that Mennonites were a lot more dependable, they were good workers and tried to do a good job." In addition, one grower (2004: G02) stated, "I prefer the Mexican Mennonites above the Native workers....You can depend on them."

In the view of some growers, another reason that they turned to hiring Mexican Mennonite workers as opposed to Aboriginal workers was because the flow of Aboriginal workers to southern Alberta dwindled. For instance, one grower (2004: G09) stated, "...we were happy with Aboriginal people but they slowly did not come...so why the switch to Mexican Mennonites? Because they were available and they came on their own and through the Mennonite Church and, an office in Lethbridge and Taber...worked with the Labour Department and placed these people." Another grower agreed that Aboriginal

labour dwindled. He stated (2004: G08), "...the industry was increasing the number of acres they were planting and the people from Saskatchewan started to slow down and not come. They had to do something different because the acreage was not getting done...."

Furthermore, when asked why there was the transition in labour a former Field Superintendent for Roger Sugar Ltd. (2004: SBO12) in Taber stated, "Because...nobody else will do it. One of the reasons are the Indians aren't here and there is nobody else in the country that will do it. Our people won't do it." In commenting on the lack of Aboriginal workers, a grower (2004: G03) added, "...at that time they were good labour too, but it started to dwindle off and we had less and less....Probably in the mid-80s."

Lastly, when asked why Mexican Mennonite workers took over from Aboriginal workers, one grower (2004 G05) stated, "I think, just simply because the Native people stopped coming."

Other growers pointed out that the widespread use of chemical weed controls reduced the need for labour in the production of sugar beet crops. As one grower (2004: G04) explained, "The beet growers and the sugar companies they were convinced that we could grow these beets without any labour. That was our objective and it was achieved....using weed control....it wasn't because there was any animosity towards the workers. It was our objective to do it without labour and we achieved that." Another grower (2004: G11) stated, "I would cite the use of chemicals that farmers turned to...then they didn't have to put up with some of the Natives that weren't very good either whether it be the labour or the social life....I would say the chemicals were the big reason that Native labour was replaced." Moreover, when asked about the role mechanization played in regards to the need for labour, he (2004: G11) stated, "The only

mechanization that I can remember is those thinners that came along and you would still have to have labour go through there. If you are referring to mechanization as replacing labour the answer is no, herbicides did.” In addition, a former ASBGA President and grower (2004: G01) stated, “I don’t think we switched from Aboriginals to Mennonites for any reason other than they were here and we used what we had. Actually, we used what drove into the yard and we would say you have a job and that is really how we decided...I am not sure we ever said, ‘no, get out of there you are Aboriginal.’” He (2004: G01) went on to state, “...about the start of the 60s we started getting really specific herbicides that would kill dandelions but not the tender sugar beet...really specific like Nortron and Betamix and that was the demise of the movement; really, it was the herbicides.”

In commenting on the importance of chemical weed controls and their impact on labour, Merrill Harris (2004) stated, “When we made the switch to chemicals it put more work on us to get the spraying done on time but relieved us from so many of the other problems that came along...whether it was Mexican or Natives in the social responsibilities that we had with the accommodations and those sort of things. But, it hasn’t really relieved us of a whole bunch of work by going to chemicals. It relieved us of the headaches of taking care of fifty people, if that makes sense. So, really, the workload shifted from you guys go hoe these beets to I got to be out there doing this work and making sure that it works so that you don’t have to find these people in a week or two to have them come in and hoe the beets because the chemicals doesn’t work.” When asked why Aboriginal workers were displaced, Harris (2004) went on to state, “Just a revolution in the industry....I don’t know that the Mexicans displaced them at all. Like I

said, on our farm we had both of them going and it was only because of availability. We started out slow in the transition to chemical like we only would do part of the beets and the next year we would do only 40 per cent chemical and decided, oh, it's working so we are going to do it 100 per cent and then even at that the first few years we needed some help and eventually, it got to where we didn't need help anymore." Finally, in commenting on whether Aboriginal workers were displaced, Rueben Bueckert (2005) stated, "I think that the assumption that I'm sort of hearing is that Mennonites have sort of replaced Aboriginals. I don't think that's an accurate assumption. I think...the Mennonites have been coming and it may have just been the opportune time for them to come and...with the technology taking care of some of the work that the Aboriginals were doing earlier, I think it's just opportune." In regards to the latter comments of Bueckert, however, it must be kept in mind that in the past the Growers' Association made many efforts to get Mexican workers as a labour force for sugar beet work. This suggests that other factors were at work regarding the transition in the labour force other than it simply being a case of an opportune time for the hiring Mexican Mennonite workers.

As noted above, growers interviewed for this study indicated that the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the sugar beet industry included: the reliability of Mexican Mennonites compared to that of Aboriginal workers, a lack of Aboriginal workers and the availability of Mexican Mennonite workers, the increased use of chemical weed controls that reduced the need for a large Aboriginal labour force for sugar beet cultivation and, the arrival of Mexican Mennonite workers at an opportune time when growers needed the skills they possessed.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry from the growers' perspective. The analysis began by pointing out that throughout most of the post-Second World War period the beet growers' need for labour never subsided. This was the case even though farming and the need for farm labour in western Canada declined during the period. In fact, during the period the sugar beet industry expanded; this caused the size of beet farms and the growers' demand for labour to also increase. However, throughout much of the post-Second World War period beet growers were able to continue production by recruiting Aboriginal workers from northern communities and reserves in Alberta and Saskatchewan for seasonal sugar beet work. Still, growers searched for year-round workers, particularly for those who were interested in working the land and becoming sugar beet producers themselves.

It was then pointed out that the growers' ability to recruit and retain workers for the production of sugar beets was hindered by a number of historically specific conditions related to the farming industry and farm labour employment in general. These factors included long hours of work, low wages, the lack of protection under provincial labour standards legislation, and poor housing accommodations. Furthermore, it was pointed out that growers experienced problems in the recruitment and retention of labour because of structural processes that rendered farm workers powerless to improve their working conditions. As well, the structural process of capital accumulation attracted farm

labour to urban-based and resource extraction industries because they offered worker benefits and higher wages. Also, growers were caught in a cost-price squeeze where their costs of production inputs increased while the prices they received for their beets were kept low. The latter problem was related to Canada's cheap food policy which lowered the price growers received for their sugar beets because Canada purchased sugar on the world market at very low prices which lowered the price it would pay for domestically produced sugar. As a result of the cost-price squeeze, growers were forced to put the squeeze on labour in order to increase their profits. This translated into low wages and poor working conditions that further hindered the growers' ability to recruit and retain sufficient labour for production purposes.

Although growers lobbied the federal government to create a national sugar policy that would provide them with a fair return for their beets and foster a positive environment for the sugar beet industry in Canada, all they were successful in gaining were subsidy payments when the returns for beets fell below a specified level. However, once growers turned to technological innovations, chemical weed controls and increased mechanization, their need for labour was significantly reduced. In fact, the evidence presented in this study suggests that controversy over the working conditions of Aboriginal labour in the industry was a factor in motivating growers to reduce their need for labour through weed controls and mechanization. Ironically, the controversy hastened the changes in the production process, and turned out to be the death knell for the large Aboriginal labour force that migrated to the industry each season.

It was also pointed out that almost since the very beginning when growers began using Aboriginal people as their main source of labour, they searched for an alternative

labour force partly because many growers found them unreliable. As such, it was found that throughout much of the post-Second world War period, growers in southern Alberta sought to recruit Mexican labour but that their efforts were blocked by federal government regulations. However, during the late 1980s and early 1990s Mexican Mennonites, the majority of whom could claim Canadian citizenship, migrated to southern Alberta seeking agriculture employment. Consequently, growers turned to hiring them over Aboriginal workers for the following reasons: they recruited themselves as well as other Mexican Mennonite workers for sugar beet jobs which reduced the growers' costs for labour; they were relatively reliable; they were independent workers who needed little supervision; they had the skills to perform a number of farm jobs; Aboriginal workers for sugar beet work was lacking; increased chemical weed controls reduced the need for sugar beet labour; and Mexican Mennonite workers arrived in southern Alberta at a time when beet growers were in need of the skills they possessed. Indeed, not only did Mexican Mennonites fill the growers' demand for a skilled and versatile labour force, by all indications they also fulfilled the growers' quest for a suitable group of workers that could take over the land and become beet growers. Arie One grower (2004: G06) summed it up by saying Mexican Mennonites were "dedicated to the land."

In the next chapter a discussion will be provided on the background to Mexican Mennonites who have recently migrated to southern Alberta to work for growers in the sugar beet industry. In addition, a discussion will be provided on the views of Mexican Mennonite workers in order to highlight their understanding of the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry.

Chapter 6: The Mexican Mennonite Perspective on the Transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite Workers in the Southern Alberta Sugar Beet Industry

Introduction

An interesting anomaly in recent international labour migration trends and patterns is that of Mexican Mennonites who have traveled from Mexico to Canada to perform seasonal agricultural jobs in southern Alberta. Not only has this migration of labour circumvented the legalities and regulations of state sponsored seasonal agricultural labour programs through which foreign-born workers are recruited and retained, the majority of Mexican Mennonites migrated to Canada to specifically seek out jobs in agricultural areas—a sector of the economy that has consistently experienced difficulty in the recruitment of labour since the post-Second World War period. Moreover, the recent migration of Mexican Mennonites to Canada was largely because of economic necessity whereas in the past they emigrated largely as a way to resolve their problems with state authorities over the protection of their religious beliefs and freedoms.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the perspective of Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study on how they became employed in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry—the culmination of which was the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the industry. The first section of the chapter discusses the background of Mexican Mennonites who recently migrated to Canada. The section is important for understanding how Mexican Mennonites were in a position to come to Canada and seek out employment. The second section analyzes the factors that attracted Mexican Mennonite workers to seek out jobs in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry.

In doing so, the section indicates that Mexican Mennonites did possess many of the attributes that attracted growers to them as workers. The section ends by analyzing the stages in the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour.

Defining the Terms “Mexican Mennonite,” “Old Colony” and “Kanadier”

There are three terms that are used interchangeably to describe the Mennonites who have recently emigrated from Mexico to southern Alberta. The terms include “Mexican Mennonite,” “Old Colony Mennonites” and “Kanadier.” Of the three terms, the one most commonly used to describe the newcomers is “Mexican Mennonites” (Jansen, 1997: 3). However, the term is not entirely accurate for two reasons. First, although the term is used to denote their homeland, there is virtually no common ancestry between most Mexican Mennonites and other Mexicans. Second, Mennonites who went from Canada to Mexico and then emigrated from Mexico to other Latin American countries during the last fifty years are now coming to Canada from Belize, Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina (Jansen, 1997: 2).

The term “Old Colony Mennonites” refers to all Mennonites whose ancestors were part of the Chortitza Colony in Russia, an area that is now part of the Ukraine. Since the colony was the first to be established in Russia, it became known as the “Old Colony.” The term “Old Colony” became associated with an ultra-conservative mindset because, traditionally, members of the colony were “much less progressive in terms of education, agricultural practices, and cultural and religious practices” (Jansen, 1997: 2). This explains, in part, why members of the group have been willing to move away when

faced with encroachment from the host culture. Today, the majority of Mennonites from Mexico are Old Colony Mennonites who speak German and thus they represent the most conservative faction within that group (Jansen, 1997: 2).

The term “Kanadier,” which means “Canadian,” was coined to distinguish between the Mennonites who were already living in Canada and those who emigrated to Canada from Russia in the 1920s. The Kanadiers (Canadians) were those Mennonites who lived in Canada since the 1870s. Since many of the Kanadiers were from the Old Colony the terms were used interchangeably (Jansen, 1997: 2).

“The Gypsies of North America”: The Historical Background of Mexican Mennonites

The story of Mexican Mennonites who crossed two national borders in North America and traveled over two thousand miles to work in the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta is fascinating. Yet, when the history of the Mennonites is recounted it is found they uprooted themselves and moved to another country on a number of occasions. In particular, their tendency to migrate to different areas in Canada and the United States prompted one grower (2004: G09), who is also a former President of the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers Marketing Board (ASBGMB), to refer to them as the “Gypsies of North America.” However, to understand the reasons for the numerous migrations of the Mennonites and in particular, the recent Mexican Mennonite migration to southern Alberta, an overview of their history is necessary.

The Mennonites from Mexico are part of the larger ethno-religious Mennonite peoples who descended from the Radical/Anabaptist Reformation in the 16th century.

Although the Mennonites have no homeland they formed a distinct cultural heritage among their members who were of Swiss, German, Dutch and Polish descent. During the 16th and 17th centuries the Mennonites in northern Europe came under intense religious persecution that caused them to move to the Vistula Delta region of what is now Poland. However, during the last decade of the 18th and the first decade of the 19th centuries a large number of Mennonites moved to the steppes of the Ukraine following an invitation by Czarina Catherine the Great (Jansen, 1997: 1).

Once the Mennonites were located on the steppes, they were isolated from Russian culture and the outside world. Still, the Mennonite colonies flourished and their agricultural success was unparalleled. As a result, for a century the Mennonites were able to develop a unique and strong cultural identity that melded together ethnic, social and religious factors to create their own values, beliefs and lifestyle (Jansen, 1997: 1). For instance, the Mennonites adhered to a belief in adult baptism, pacifism and to applying a literal interpretation of the bible to their everyday lives (Hall, et al., n.d.: 6). However, what the Mennonites came to cherish most in their lifestyle was the freedom to remain outside of the influence of Russian culture. Consequently, when Russia introduced the “russification” program in the 1870s that meant Mennonite children were to be educated and taught the Russian language, the Mennonites felt threatened. In particular, the Mennonites held a strong belief that they should be given the freedom to instruct their children in the German language. Although the more progressive people in the colonies were able to reach an agreement with the Russian authorities over their concerns, the more conservative Mennonites were unwilling to compromise on their beliefs and thus a contingent of approximately 8000 Mennonites immigrated to Canada (Jansen, 1997: 1).

The Mennonites who immigrated to Canada in the late 1800s did so as a means to resolve their problems with Russian authorities. Following their arrival in Canada, they settled in Manitoba where they were promised the freedom to practice their language and religion as well as exemption from military service (Mysyk, 2000: 43). By 1895, however, the population of the Mennonites increased to the point where there was a scarcity of land in the colonies. As such, some Mennonites resettled in Saskatchewan around the Hague-Osler area north of Saskatoon and around Swift Current in the southern part of the province. Nevertheless, in the 1920s the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan demanded that Mennonite children be taught the English language and that they learn some of the provincial school curriculum. Although some of the Mennonites agreed to the demands of the provincial authorities, once again it was the most conservative of the Mennonites who felt their religious freedoms were threatened. Hence, the Mennonites who refused to compromise their beliefs resolved the issue by emigrating to Mexico where they were promised a number of privileges including the freedom to educate their children in their own customs and in the German language. As a result, by the end of the 1920s approximately 8000 Mennonites had relocated to Mexico (Jansen, 1997: 2). As pointed out previously, however, over the years Mennonites from Mexico relocated to other Latin American countries such as Belize, Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina.

During the 1950s, many Mexican Mennonites became impoverished because of a severe drought. In addition, as their population numbers increased, access to land became a problem. Consequently, many Mexican Mennonites returned to Canada in search of employment. The destinations of choice for most Mennonites were the provinces of

Ontario and Manitoba where their chances of securing employment in agricultural areas were promising (Jansen, 1997: 2). For instance, by 1966 Mexican Mennonites were migrating to southwestern Manitoba to perform labouring jobs on sugar beet and potato farms. Moreover, in the late 1980s Manitoba experienced another influx of immigrant Mexican Mennonites who had moved there to escape a slumping Mexican economy and to escape a threat of conscription into the Mexican military (Mysyk, 2000: 44-45).

In recent years, however, many Mexican Mennonites seeking to escape the lack of economic opportunities in Mexico have made Alberta their destination of choice because of the job opportunities in the irrigated agricultural sectors of the province (Jansen, 1997: 2). As of May 2006 it was estimated that between 9,000 and 12,000 Mexican Mennonites are in southern Alberta; the majority are settled in the area while between 10 and 15 per cent migrate annually between their homes in Mexico and seasonal jobs in southern Alberta (Bueckert, 2006). In a recent survey of 105 female and 95 male Mennonites in southern Alberta, Judith Kulig (2006: 11) found that 55 of the 95 males were employed in the agricultural sector while 23 were employed in the trades and another 18 were employed as truck drivers. In the study Kulig (2006: 4) defined the term “agricultural employment” as work in feedlots, the sugar beet industry and general farm labour. Kulig (2006: 4) also found that 102 of the 105 females surveyed in the study were married and that 98 had been born in Mexico. However, the study also found that the females had lived in other Canadian locations. These included 38 in Ontario, 13 in Manitoba and 1 in Saskatchewan (Kulig, 2006: 4). It was also found that the females in the study had been in Alberta for an average of 7.6 years with a range from 6 months to 20.5 years (Kulig, 2006: 4). The study also found that of the 95 males, 94 were married and 86 were born in

Mexico. It was found that the males had also lived in other Canadian locations. That is, 28 had lived in Ontario and 9 in Manitoba (Kulig, 2006:5). The study found that the average length of time the males were in Alberta was 8.2 years with a range of 6 months to 28 years (Kulig, 2006: 5). Moreover, Kulig (2006: 6) found that of the 200 Mexican Mennonites surveyed in the study, 138 had lived in Alberta for 10 years or less. In addition, the study found that 81 of the females had completed grade 6, mostly in Mexico, while 63 of the males also completed grade 6 in Mexico. Moreover, the study indicated that the Mexican Mennonites had taken their schooling through their local colony school (Kulig, 2006: 9). The study went on to point out that of the 109 families in the household survey, 49 owned their own home and 20 were provided with a home as part of their employment (Kulig, 2006: 11). In regards to religious affiliation, Kulig (2006: 10) found that of the 200 individuals surveyed most identified their background as Old Colony: approximately 60% identified as currently Old Colony and approximately 78% identified as having an Old Colony background. Kulig's (2006: 8) study also found that the Alberta communities with the highest concentration of Mexican Mennonite households included Burdett, Grassy Lake, Duchess, Nobleford, Bow Island, Taber, Vauxhall, Picture Butte and Redcliff.

For many of the Mexican Mennonite workers and their families who have moved to southern Alberta, adjusting to the change has been difficult because of their former lifestyle in Mexico and their beliefs. While commenting on the latter social dimensions of the Mexican Mennonites, Janzen (1997: 3) stated,

The Mennonites from Mexico have migrated frequently to obtain privileges

important to them living their lives in a way they believe is acceptable to God. They have and are attempting to isolate themselves from the influences of the surrounding cultures and want to retain their traditional life style. The leaders emphasize the promise to be true to the way of life they have learned from the previous generation. However, it is more difficult for them at present because the host culture is more sophisticated and many aspects are seen as attractive to them. Change for them is most difficult because they are taught continuously to 'hold on to that which you have been taught'....They have lived with relatively little change for their many years in Mexico and when they are forced out of the Colonies to find other ways of making a living, they have major adjustments to make. All humans find changes difficult. But when you have lived in a culture that is opposed to change and then are thrown into a culture that thrives on change, the adjustments become overwhelmingly difficult. The main issues the Church and Colonies in Mexico were and are struggling with are electricity from high voltage lines, rubber tires on tractors and rubber tired vehicles.

Hence, Mexican Mennonites who migrate to southern Alberta are confronted with a cultural clash where many of their traditional beliefs are challenged. Since they are taught to live a life acceptable to God, to isolate themselves from other cultures to protect their traditional life style and, to be true to the way of life they have learned from the previous generation, it can be understood why they try to avoid the use of electricity and vehicles with rubber tires.

As indicated in this section, throughout their history Mennonites have emigrated

to different countries as a means to resolve their political problems with the host state. In contrast, however, the recent migration of Mexican Mennonites to Canada was largely caused by the poor economic conditions they experienced in Mexico. In the next section of this chapter, the Mexican Mennonite perspective will be presented on how they ended up performing sugar beet work in southern Alberta.

“Ideal Workers?”: The Mexican Mennonite Perspective on the Transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite Labour

The arrival of Mexican Mennonites in southern Alberta during the late 1900s and their employment in the sugar beet industry in jobs previously held by Aboriginal workers, was the culmination of a number of factors. While economic conditions in Mexico caused Mexican Mennonites to migrate in search of employment opportunities, there were a number of other factors that attracted them to Canada. Moreover, the data gathered from Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study reinforced some of the arguments made in Chapter 5 concerning why southern Alberta growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers as opposed to Aboriginal workers which, it was argued, was one of the main reasons for the transition of labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. In addition, as the information gathered for this study and the data from the interviews with Mexican Mennonite workers will show, the transition to Mexican Mennonite labour in the industry was accomplished in a number of ways.

As pointed out previously in this chapter and in Chapter 5, the main reason Mexican Mennonites left Mexico during the latter 1900s was because of the poor economic conditions they experienced (e.g. Jansen, 1997; Bueckert, 2004; Hall, et al.,

n.d.). For example, a needs assessment study done on Mexican Mennonites in Alberta argued, “The Mennonites from Mexico are primarily economic refugees” (Jansen, 1997: 5). Mexican Mennonites were driven to migrate in search of employment because of “their prolific birthrate and the limited availability of good farmland” (5). Jansen went on to argue that the poor economic conditions in Mexico created economic disparity and oppression within the Mexican Mennonite communities that also forced many to leave Mexico. He (6) explained,

Some Mennonites from Mexico come to Canada to escape the traditionalism and oppression of their culture. Because of a shortage of land, a two-class system has emerged in Mexico. Those who own land are able to exert far more influence in their community...and often take advantage of those who are helpless. In many cases the wealthier Mennonites will not hire their poorer compatriots because Mexican nationals will work for less. Furthermore, the church continues to exert tremendous influence and often the poorer Mennonites will find themselves at odds with the church simply because they are forced to disobey church regulations just to survive. Therefore, emigration is seen as a way out of this dilemma.

This study also found that many Mexican Mennonites left Mexico because of the lack of employment opportunities and a lack of access to land. For instance, when one Mennonite was asked why he left Mexico, he (2004: MM14) stated, “Well, because of agriculture and the land was getting small there. In Mexico where I come from there is

not enough land there to start farming. I heard there was farming up here in Alberta so I came....land was the biggest thing. There was not enough land and it was getting too expensive to farm there....The fuel, the expense of the family, fertilizer, and we didn't get enough money....too much free trade with other countries and [we] don't get enough money for the crop we grow.”

Although this study found that poor economic conditions forced Mennonites to leave Mexico in search of better economic opportunities, it also found there were a number of factors that attracted them to Canada. One factor was that the majority of Mexican Mennonites who migrated to Canada could claim Canadian citizenship. Mysyk's (2000: 44) study on commercial market gardening in Manitoba pointed out that Mexican Mennonites who were born in 1947 or later to Canadian parents could apply for Canadian citizenship. Also, Jansen's (1997: 5) study on Mexican Mennonites in Alberta pointed out that most of the recent migrants fell under the Canadian immigration law that allows anyone who can trace Canadian citizenship back to their parents or grandparents to qualify as a “Canadian born abroad.”

The Director of the MCC in Taber, Ruben Bueckert (2006), explained the process that Mexican Mennonites go through to acquire Canadian citizenship as follows:

The Mennonites who left Canada departed as Canadian citizens in 1921. The problem with citizenship started when some of the parents did not register their children born in Mexico as [Canadian] citizens. This has changed somewhat as now many of them want to retain their rights because of economic reasons. They want the opportunity to work and live in Canada. Because the citizenship is

grandfathered (passed on to the children from the parents), the Canadian government has requested that those born after 1977...retain their citizenship before they reach the age of 28. Before they can apply for this retention, they need to spend or have spent 1 full year in Canada and have proof to show that this has taken place. Then they can apply to renew their Canadian citizenship. The fact that many of the first generation Mennonites were uninformed about the laws of citizenship has resulted in registration and retention difficulties for their children. This is one of the reasons that many are coming back to Canada - they don't want to lose their citizenship. Should they lose it, they would have to go through the process of being sponsored by a spouse to get their Permanent Residence.

In regards to the latter point, Bueckert (2006) added, "When the Mennonites come in here without papers, they need to be sponsored to become Landed Immigrants. When they have applied for their Permanent Residence (Landed Immigrant) status, they are still not allowed to work until they have a letter from Citizenship Canada stating that all their papers are in order and that they are now allowed to apply for a Work Permit. Now they can begin working in Canada."

Nevertheless, most Mexican Mennonites who entered Canada were under no direct or immediate political or legal restrictions and therefore they were able to travel and circulate in the job market. As such, when the Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study were asked whether they came to Canada through a seasonal work program or whether they received any assistance from the Mexican state or the Canadian state in

coming to Canada or, for that matter, a Church organization, they unanimously answered “no.”

In light of the discussion above, it can be understood that many Mexican Mennonites would be attracted to Canada because they could claim Canadian citizenship and thereby retain the option to work and reside in Canada if they chose to do so. Furthermore, because most could claim Canadian citizenship and thus circumvent state immigration regulations, they could migrate to Canada as a family unit to work in agricultural sectors such as in southern Alberta. Moreover, it is interesting to note that because Mexican Mennonites who sought to retain Canadian citizenship had to reside in Canada for one year, in many instances this requirement functioned to retain them as workers for agricultural jobs such as sugar beet work.

Another reason that Mexican Mennonites were attracted to Canada was because many had relatives who already lived in the country. In fact, all of the Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study indicated that they or their spouse had relatives living in Canada prior to leaving Mexico. For instance, when one Mexican Mennonite was asked why he came to southern Alberta he (2004: MM15) stated, “...my wife’s parents live down here. They wanted us to come here as there was work here.” Likewise, when another Mennonite was asked why he came to Canada he (2004: MM16) stated, “Well...my brother’s sisters and my wife’s mum [were] here in Canada and my children were in Canada and that’s why Canada.” When one Mennonite was asked if he had relatives in Canada he (2004: MM17) responded, “”Yes, I have quite a few uncles in Ontario and cousins there and my mom and dad are in Manitoba now. And, I have also my brothers, one sister living in Saskatchewan and some other siblings in Manitoba

now.” In another instance when a Mennonite beet worker was asked if he had relatives in Alberta before he left Mexico he (2004: MM14) stated, “I had my sister and two brothers that lived up here for 9 years before I came.”

Mexican Mennonites were also attracted to Canada because of the money they could earn doing agricultural work. In particular, many Mexican Mennonites were attracted to southern Alberta because they could make money hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops. Moreover, many Mexican Mennonites chose to migrate to southern Alberta to work in jobs such as hoeing sugar beets because they could bring along their families and work together as a unit. For instance, a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM18) pointed out that he did sugar beet work to “make money, make a living” and because the “money’s good.” He (2004: MM18) also stated that he worked in sugar beets “cultivating about a month, hoeing about a month.” Similarly, a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM19) said he was attracted to Canada because “I get a little more money here....housing is not much better but...money wise that is much better.” In addition, one Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM20) stated, “I would make more money here than in Mexico....”

Also, an interesting finding in the data gathered from Mexican Mennonite workers was that it was their custom when the whole family worked that the children would give their earnings to the parents until they reached the age of twenty-one. At the age of twenty-one Mennonites were allowed to leave the family unit, work on their own, get married and raise children who would in turn, give their earnings to their parents until they reached the age of twenty-one. For example, a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM17) stated, “I was at home until twenty-one and then [I] was on my own and got married at twenty-two.” When asked whether he gave his earning to his parents, he (2004: MM17)

stated, “Well, I would say not all of the funds. It seems like now it is slowly changing and more and more younger people are leaving home before they are twenty-one.” In addition, when Rueben Bueckert of the MCC was asked whether family earnings go to the parents, he (2005) stated, “...once the children become twelve or thirteen, traditionally they go to work because, in Mexico, they don’t go to school longer than that age. Then, all the money goes into the family pot...until they move out of the home or get married....that’s usually around, for the girls, sometimes eighteen, for the men, maybe twenty, twenty-one....The father is very patriarchal and... he’s very concerned about the whole family working. And, the reason for that is...it’s good for the family finances.” Hence, it is understandable that Mexican Mennonites would seek out agricultural jobs such as hoeing and weeding beet crops because the work allowed them to work as a family unit and thereby maximize their earning power.

As noted previously, during the latter part of the 1900s the Mennonite population in the colonies in Mexico increased which caused a shortage of farmland. During the same period many Mexican Mennonites who were able to purchase land found it difficult to make their loan payments because of high interest rates and the high inflation rates (Janzen, 1997: 5). Hence, the lack of farmland in the colonies and the problems Mexican Mennonites experienced in making loan payments on land caused many of them to leave Mexico in search of a place where land was available for farming. As a result, many Mexican Mennonites were attracted to Canada and in particular, to southern Alberta where land was available for farming. For instance, while commenting on the reasons why Mennonites left the colonies in Mexico, one Mennonite (2004: MM16) stated, “They had no land in Mexico so they came to Canada.”

In some instances, Mexican Mennonites sold their land in Mexico so they could emigrate to Canada to purchase land to begin farming. This was acknowledged when a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM17) stated, "...most of them had farm land in Mexico and sold it and came here and had something to start with." In other instances, some Mexican Mennonites migrated to Canada to find employment so that eventually they could buy land for farming purposes. As one Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM15) said, "We still think we may buy some land, small, something to start....I think we will probably own in a couple of years....Not enough money to do that now." Also, when another Mexican Mennonite was asked what his future objectives were in Canada he (2004: MM20) stated, "We bought a house. I would like to buy our own land. I don't like growing old the way I am and working by the hour."

It was also noted previously that the Mennonites who migrated from Canada to Mexico in the 1920s were mainly Old Colony Mennonites who were the most conservative and held a strong belief in educating their own children who usually never went beyond grade six. In fact, many Mennonites who emigrated from Canada to Mexico during the 1920s did so, in part, because the provincial government of Manitoba and Saskatchewan were demanding the parents teach their children the English language and learn the provincial school curriculum. Evidence in this study confirmed that during the 1920s, indeed, many Mennonites emigrated to Mexico because of the schooling issue. According to one Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM19) his grandparents emigrated from Canada to Mexico in 1922 "because...they did not want to take the school....they wanted the people to go to high school too and they didn't want it." Also, when asked why his grandparents left Canada for Mexico during the 1920s, another Mexican Mennonite

(2004: MM21) stated, "I heard it was the schooling....forcing the kids to go to school and they didn't want to lose their language."

However, in regards to the issue of provincial education for Mexican Mennonite children who recently migrated to southern Alberta with their parents, this study found that the educational opportunities Canada offered Mexican Mennonite children actually attracted and retained Mexican Mennonites. For instance, one Mennonite (2004: MM20) stated, "...we came here and sent our kids to school....It seemed like when I was supposed to be in school I wasn't. So, my wife and I talked it over and we didn't want our kids growing up like that....Our first two kids we didn't push them too much to finish school. Our oldest daughter quit school in grade 9 and the second girl did the same thing....I think she finished grade eight and the boys have finished grade 12....I push my kids because there are things that I don't understand and I can't read well and all that stuff. One reason I didn't go to school [was] because our parents didn't understand that it would become so important for the future. And another thing was their beliefs, their religion part, if you go too much to school---they didn't understand---it hindered people." Another Mennonite also commented on the importance of education for his children. He (2004: MM17) stated, "...in the last couple of years the technology is getting higher and if I could do it all over again I would like to have more education to know more about computers and electronics and stuff....I know in Mexico they [i.e. children] get taken out of school because they need the kids to help on the farm. They even take them out of school a couple of days here and there....people believe maybe they get hindered if they go to school too long...but they don't look at the long term. That is not good for the child. Like for my kids, I want them to stay in school and finish all the way." When asked

if more Mexican Mennonite children were getting educated he (2004: MM17) said, “Yes there is. There is a guy here he just graduated grade 12 and maybe 10 years ago you would not have seen that....they are getting encouraged by other people.” Thus, the evidence gathered from Mexican Mennonites indicates that they were attracted to Canada because of the educational opportunities it offered their children, opportunities they wanted to pursue because the traditional Mennonite aversion to formal education is breaking down.

This study also found that Mexican Mennonites were attracted to Canada because of the healthcare system it offered them. That is, since most Mexican Mennonites could gain Canadian citizenship because of their links to Canada, this also meant they were eligible for healthcare (Hall, et al.: 7). For example, when one Mennonite was asked why he migrated to southern Alberta he (2004: MM21) stated, “The wages are better here...well everything else....Ya, health coverage.” When another Mennonite was asked what the benefits were of being in southern Alberta he (2004: MM14) answered, “The healthcare is a big thing down here for me. As far as I look at it, it is way better here.”

As the previous discussion indicates, there were a number of reasons why Mexican Mennonites were attracted to Canada and to southern Alberta where many ended up working in the sugar beet fields. However, the data gathered from Mexican Mennonites for this study also confirmed many of the arguments made in Chapter 5 related to why beet growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers. For instance, it was argued that growers found Mexican Mennonite workers attractive because they covered the costs of their transportation between the sugar beet fields and Mexico. Thus, when Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study were asked who paid for the costs

of their transportation between Mexico and southern Alberta, they unanimously indicated that they covered their own costs (e.g. 2004: MM20, 2004: MM17). As such, it can be understood that beet growers would have been attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they lowered their costs of labour recruitment in terms of time and money.

The previous chapter also argued that growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they recruited other Mexican Mennonite workers for sugar beet jobs. The data gathered in this study confirmed that, indeed, Mexican Mennonites who were employed in sugar beet jobs in southern Alberta recruited other Mennonites from Mexico for the jobs. It was found that in many instances Mexican Mennonites were informed about sugar beet work in southern Alberta through friends who migrated to Canada each growing season. In one instance, a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM20) stated his friends "...were coming every year and they were coming back...they were hoeing beets and doing other work. I decided to do that....First my plan was to come and work here and save the money. I thought that would be easier. So we came here and I found it a little different. I had a good job but stuff costs a lot here too. It seemed like I couldn't save anything. By that time my wife and kids found beet hoeing jobs here and we did pretty good. By the end of the year all we did was buy a pickup truck. But, we didn't have anything saved money wise so we went back to Mexico for the winter. By the next year we came back again. So, then in 1991 we came back again and I found farm work here and my wife found a beet hoeing job and we got into it and we started liking it better here...." As well, a Mennonite pointed out that his family in the Chihuahua area of Mexico told him to go to the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta to find work. As he (2004: MM17) explained, "I came from a large family and they said if you want to go

into sugar beets you can make a good living....that was in '85 and we came here in '86....the Mennonites have large families and you could do quite a few acres if it wasn't too dirty, eh." Also, one Mennonite (2004: MM18) indicated that he left Mexico with his family because of economic hardship and moved to southern Alberta "to the sugar beets and [to] make a little money." At the time he moved to southern Alberta to work in the sugar beet fields, he (2004: MM18) stated, "I had a brother here....and I worked for a time for the same boss as he did and then I found my own job."

What the latter passages indicate is that in many cases Mexican Mennonites actively recruited other Mennonites in Mexico, particularly family members, for sugar beet work in southern Alberta by informing them of the job opportunities and by encouraging them to migrate to the area. Thus, it can be understood that growers would have been attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because their propensity to recruit other Mexican Mennonite workers for sugar beet work lowered their costs of labour recruitment. Furthermore, the evidence presented above suggests that Mexican Mennonites recruited friends, family members and relatives for sugar beet work because not only could they work together in the fields as a family unit, but also it was a way to recreate a sense of community in southern Alberta which they shared in their communities in the Mexican colonies.

In Chapter 5 it was also argued that Mexican Mennonite workers who migrated to southern Alberta displayed a strong work ethic because they were driven to overcome the poverty they experienced in Mexico. As such, growers were attracted to them as workers for sugar beet jobs. While comments from beet growers in Chapter 5 reinforced the argument that most Mexican Mennonite workers displayed a strong work ethic, the data

gathered from Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study also demonstrated that the primary reason most Mennonites left Mexico for Canada during the late 1900s was because of the poor economic conditions they experienced in Mexico. For example, when one Mennonite was asked why he left Mexico and came to southern Alberta, he (2004: MM20) stated,

I was farming on my own and part time helping my dad and then for many years we did very good through the 70s. But, later things turned around and we didn't have good years anymore....it seemed like the government started stepping in and we couldn't get...credit anymore and we had to start borrowing money...to farm. And, the years weren't good, we didn't get that much rain....then I started to borrow money from good friends but [at] very high interest rates and especially the last couple of years before I quit farming. I borrowed some money from a friend and he wouldn't lend me money unless it was in US dollars and that was very high interest....then all of a sudden I got a normal crop and then we sold most of my crop and had the money to buy the dollars. I was very busy and we had a late harvest and I had to somehow buy those dollars. So, I took one day off to buy US dollars and right then and there [when] I was in town the dollar went up. By that time I was paying 130 pesos per dollar and then it went up 1000 more and before that I had just enough money and I couldn't buy the dollars...then the dollar came down a little bit and I had to sell one tractor and I barely made [it]...from then on everything went down. Those years they weren't good years anymore....I tried another two years and I had to borrow money again. It seemed I

could barely pay the debts I had and I didn't have money to repair my machinery. I decided to quit farming and come to Canada because people were telling me that they were making good money here.

Another Mennonite (2004: MM19) said he came to Canada because in Mexico "...everything is just...dry land....so expensive to make a well and to irrigate. So, I...couldn't afford it." Moreover, when one Mennonite was asked why he came to Canada he (2004: MM18) stated, "I sold my farm in Mexico...because of a loan problem then we came here...." Thus, the data gathered from the interviews with Mexican Mennonites established the fact that the majority of them came to Canada because of the poor economic conditions they experienced in Mexico. Hence, these stories support the notion that Mexican Mennonites were driven to overcome their poverty and thus they displayed a strong work ethic when they came to southern Alberta.

In addition, in Chapter 5 it was argued that beet growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonites as workers because they were compliant with employer demands. That is, because most Mexican Mennonites had poor English skills and low educational levels their chances of finding employment in another sector of the job market were limited and thus to hold on to the jobs they did find, such as sugar beet work, they were compliant with employer demands. Again, the data gathered from Mexican Mennonites who were interviewed for this study and who performed sugar beet work in southern Alberta confirmed that most had poor English skills and a low level of education. In particular, the interviews revealed that the highest number of years of education most Mexican Mennonite workers completed was 6 years although a few indicated they had

completed 7 years of education. Moreover, when one Mennonite was asked why he didn't seek out other work as opposed to farm work he (2004: MM21) stated, "Well, I don't think I am schooled well enough to go much further than this." As well, another Mennonite noted that because of the low level of education of most Mexican Mennonites, they had to accept what work they could find. He (2004: MM20) stated, "sometimes we feel like we got little. It seems like people tried to sometimes to take advantage of us because they know that we didn't have much education. You had to take what you could get." Since this study found that most Mexican Mennonites possessed poor English skills and a low level of education that limited their chances of finding employment in other areas of the economy, it is understandable that many of them would have been compliant with the demands of their employers. As a result, employers, such as sugar beet growers, would have been attracted to Mexican Mennonites workers.

Also, while this study found that most Mexican Mennonites liked their employers and were treated well by them, evidence suggested some beet growers and Canadians discriminated against Mexican Mennonite workers particularly because of their lack of education. For instance, when one Mexican Mennonite was asked whether southern Alberta was a good place to be, he (2004: MM14) responded by saying, "We're kinda like pushed away, kinda hated or something." When he was asked who hated or pushed away Mexican Mennonites, he (2004: MM14) stated, "Well, by all, that's what they say. [I] worked with some other guys here and had that feeling by Canadian people; that's what they say. We didn't have the high school like they did; the higher grades....feels like it sometimes. I hope it is not but I have had the feeling." Thus, although Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study never cited any direct instances of racial

discrimination or negative stereotypes, a few of their comments indicated that some Canadians looked down on them or treated them like second class citizens mainly because of their lack of education.

Also, in Chapter 5 it was pointed out that Mexican Mennonites who worked under a contract to weed and hoe sugar beet crops would not have received workers' benefits such as Unemployment Insurance and Workers Compensation benefits from their employers. Moreover, it was noted that the onus was on the contractor to cover the costs of worker benefits if a crew of workers was hired to fulfill the contract. In this regard, Mexican Mennonites offered the same cost advantage to growers as Aboriginal workers.

Furthermore, this study found that in cases where Mexican Mennonites were paid an hourly wage to operate machinery for beet growers, many were still not covered by Workmen's Compensation. For example, when one Mexican Mennonite was asked if he would be covered by Workmen's Compensation if he got hurt on the job, he (2004: MM14) stated, "Um, I don't really know. I have been looking into that but I guess for them [i.e. growers] it is really a big expense. But, they promise if you ever get hurt, down for a month or so, that they would pay us. But, if it was for longer, would have to look into unemployment."

Another argument in Chapter 5 was that beet growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because when they migrated to southern Alberta in many cases they came as a family and this increased worker stability and reliability. When the Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study were asked whether they migrated to southern Alberta as a family unit, the majority indicated that initially they did so they could performed sugar beet work together (e.g. 2004: MM20, 2004: MM17). In addition, many

Mexican Mennonites who migrated to southern Alberta indicated they had relatives living in the area that enhanced their social life (e.g. 2004: MM15, 2004: MM21). Therefore, it can be understood that beet growers would be attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers who migrated to southern Alberta with their families because in doing so their commitments to their family members were increased and it provided them with a social life which, in turn, increased their stability and reliability as workers. Furthermore, if Mexican Mennonites were more stable and reliable workers because of the presence of their families in southern Alberta, it can be understood that these attributes would also increase worker productivity and compliance with employer demands and thereby increase the growers' attraction to them as workers.

In Chapter 5 I noted that unlike other instances where employers used a number of paternalistic measures to recruit and retain domestic and foreign-born workers for agricultural labour, there was no evidence of growers in southern Alberta using similar tactics towards Mexican Mennonite labour other than to provide them with free housing and utilities. The data gathered in this study from the interviews with Mexican Mennonite workers also found that there was little direct evidence that beet growers used additional paternalistic tactics to recruit and retain them as workers. Yet, in some instances Mexican Mennonites indicated they were treated well and praised their employer. For instance, a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM15) stated that once he and his wife came to southern Alberta they were "happy because our boss...is a very good guy." In another instance a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM18) stated that one of the reasons he moved his family from Mexico to southern Alberta to do sugar beet work was because "when we came here...I liked the people here a lot more. There's a lot of love in the people here...find

them friendly and that's what I liked about Canada." Therefore, although there is little evidence that indicates beet growers used paternalistic tactics to recruit and retain Mexican Mennonite workers, evidence suggests that some growers cultivated a good relationship with the workers and their families that would have not only increased worker recruitment and retention, but it would have also increased worker loyalty to their employer and commitment to their work.

In this study, however, it was also found that while it was the practice of growers to provide Mexican Mennonite workers with free housing and utilities until the contracted job was completed, some workers were provided free housing but paid an hourly wage to perform sugar beet work as well as other farm jobs. Moreover, in such instances some workers were told that if they found their own housing and paid for it themselves, then their pay rate would be increased. For example, a Mexican Mennonite pointed out that when he first migrated to southern Alberta, he was paid an hourly wage and provided with free housing by the grower. He (2004: MM14) stated, "...the house is free but if you move into your own house you get a little bit more....it is \$2.00 an hour...for living in our own house. Um, when I first came here years ago I work for 8 bucks an hour and I had my house and my utilities...free. Then, the second year \$9 an hour and the same thing. Then, I moved to a different farm and my brother and I got up to \$10.50 right away with house and utilities....Then, the fourth year I moved into my own house, saved up enough to buy my own house and moved in there and now I am at \$14.00 an hour....I pay my own payments and my own utilities and everything." Thus, the evidence indicates growers offered the workers a pay increase as an incentive to move out of the free housing which would then lower the growers' cost and the time it took to

maintain the housing. Moreover, and as pointed out in Chapter 5, until Mexican Mennonites began to migrate to southern Alberta and work in the sugar beet fields, growers were concerned over the lack of a suitable group to replace them as land renters or owners and sugar beet producers once they retired. Thus, it seems plausible that growers provided a pay increase to Mexican Mennonite workers as an incentive to move into their own housing not only to eliminate the growers' costs to maintain the housing and worker dependency on the use of the housing, but to force the Mexican Mennonite workers and their families to live in the area and forge a stronger bond to the local community. As such, the potential that some Mexican Mennonites would stay in the area and eventually work the land as sugar beet producers increased.

In Chapter 5 it was also pointed out that some studies argue that employers of agricultural labour were attracted to Mexican workers because they were more productive than domestic workers. However, contrary to such studies it was argued that in the case of the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta Mexican Mennonite workers were not more productive or better workers than Aboriginal workers. In the data gathered from interviews with Mexican Mennonites, they were asked if they thought they were more productive or better workers than Aboriginal workers. Although it was most likely difficult for both groups of workers to observe one another because they never worked in the same field, it was found that Mexican Mennonites agreed they were not more productive or better workers than Aboriginal workers. When one Mexican Mennonite beet worker was asked if he thought Mexican Mennonites were better workers than Aboriginal workers he (2004: MM17) stated, "No, I think there is good and bad [in] each, good and slower, and faster." Similarly, when another Mexican Mennonite was asked

whether Mexican Mennonites were better workers than Aboriginal workers he (2004: MM18) stated, “Yeah, sometimes I thought about it. I guess when they work they’re both the same. They get tired and they like to sit in the middle of the day. Usually we decided in the morning, if you go the whole day, we go the whole day.” In another instance when a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM20) was asked whether Aboriginal workers were good workers he stated, “In my eyes they were. It looked like they weren’t doing a good job but I couldn’t find a weed that they missed.” In particular, when he was asked whether Mexican Mennonites were better workers than Aboriginal workers, he (2004: MM20) went on to say, “I would say some workers were better than other workers. My wife was doing the best. We would go one way around the field and go back around. And then I would see the way the Indians did it. You would think they would do a dirtier job but they knew how to do it.” Thus, evidence gathered in this study indicated that Mexican Mennonites who worked in the sugar beet industry agreed that they were not more productive or better workers than Aboriginal workers. Therefore, as it was argued in Chapter 5, evidence suggests that growers were not attracted to Mexican Mennonites because they were more productive than Aboriginal workers, especially when it came to performing the job of weeding and hoeing sugar beet crops.

It was also pointed out in Chapter 5 that some studies argue employers are attracted to foreign-born workers for agricultural jobs because they undercut the prevailing wage paid to domestic workers and therefore they constituted “cheap labour.” However, based upon the growers’ comments it was argued in Chapter 5 that Mexican Mennonite workers were not paid less than Aboriginal workers for hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops. Similarly, the data gathered from the interviews with Mexican

Mennonite workers indicated that Mexican Mennonite workers were not paid less than Aboriginal workers for performing sugar beet jobs. For instance, a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM20) stated, “According to them [i.e. employers] I heard we got the same.” In other instances, however, when Mexican Mennonites were asked if they were paid less than Aboriginal workers for the same job, some pointed out that they didn’t know. For instance, one Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM14) stated, “I didn’t have a big feeling there because I was totally...there [myself] on the farm, no one else there so I really couldn’t compare.” Thus, while there is some evidence that indicates Mexican Mennonite workers were not paid less than Aboriginal workers for hoeing and weeding beet crops, in most cases Mexican Mennonite workers were separated from Aboriginal workers and therefore they had no way of knowing for sure whether they were paid less for performing the same job as Aboriginal workers. Moreover, since in many instances contracts to hoe and weed sugar beet crops consisted of a verbal contract, this meant that Mexican Mennonite workers would have had to trust that their employers were paying them the prevailing rate for the work.

However, in Chapter 5 it was pointed out that during the 1980s and up to the early 1990s when the use of chemical weed controls and increased mechanization reduced the growers’ need for hand labour in the production of sugar beets, a number of Aboriginal workers were hired by growers to operate tractors, beet harvesters and trucks. Moreover, it was also noted that during this period a number of Aboriginal workers took courses put on by the Agricultural Employment Service (A.E. S.) in order to gain the training needed to fill the growers’ demand for skilled workers. Thus, it was argued, during the early 1990s when the growers’ demand for skilled labour increased, many Aboriginal workers

had been hired to fill the positions. Nevertheless, evidence gathered for this study indicated that when Mexican Mennonites competed with Aboriginal and other domestic workers for skilled labour positions that paid an hourly wage, Mexican Mennonite workers were relatively cheaper labour because in many instances they undercut the prevailing hourly wage paid for the skilled position. For example, when Rueben Bueckert, the Director of the MCC, was asked why beet growers did not hire domestic labour to fill their demand for skilled workers, he (2005) stated, “Well, you know, some of these people (i.e. Mexican Mennonites) will work for \$7, \$8 an hour, you see, whereas our own people here won’t do that. And, the reason that the Mennonites will take that job on is they can get 14 hours a day, you see, and six days a week. They can still make a fair living, you see. And our people here don’t want to do that, you know. They don’t want to work those kind of hours.” Bueckert’s remark indicates that growers did pay skilled Mexican Mennonite farm hands less than other skilled workers would have accepted. Hence, this is circumstantial support for the idea that Mexican Mennonite hoeing crews were paid less than Aboriginal crews.

The data gathered from interviews with Mexican Mennonites who performed sugar beet work in southern Alberta also confirmed the argument made in Chapter 5 that beet growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they had the skills to perform a number of farm jobs. In particular, this study found that after a Mexican Mennonite family migrated to southern Alberta and performed sugar beet jobs for a few seasons, the male head of the family usually found an hourly wage job as a farm worker for anywhere from 8 to 9 months of the year to year round employment while his wife and children usually sought out seasonal employment hoeing and weeding sugar beet

crops. For instance, a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM18) who migrated from Mexico to southern Alberta in 1997 with his wife and four children indicated they all worked hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops. A year later, however, the family moved to southern Alberta and he found employment as a farm hand doing harvesting and driving truck for 10 months of the year. Another Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM15) indicated that he worked for over 2 years earning an hourly wage for cultivating sugar beets as well as operating machinery. In particular, he (2004: MM15) pointed out that he hoed weeds in sugar beet crops where the chemicals missed them such as in “the corner [of] the circle that you miss so you hoe that a bit.” Another Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM17) pointed out that when he migrated to southern Alberta with his parents in 1986, the family found jobs weeding and hoeing sugar beet crops. Eventually, however, he (2004: MM17) found employment as a combine and tractor operator while he also drove semi-trucks. He (2004: MM17) went on to state, “Mennonites have a good background in machinery [when] they come from Mexico. Right [from when they are] small that is what they learned. Everyone has a farm or they rent land and they get to work with machinery. I know I knew how to drive tractor when I was 9...I remember the first tractor did not have power steering and I had to stand up and pull on the steering wheel...I just [did] everything; combine, tractor, semi. I...even went hauling logs.” Hence, the evidence in this study reinforces the argument that beet growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they had the skills to perform a number of farm jobs.

As demonstrated above, it was largely the poor economic conditions in Mexico that caused Mennonites to leave and migrate to Canada. Moreover, it was demonstrated that there were a number of reasons that attracted Mexican Mennonites to Canada and to

southern Alberta where many found employment in the sugar beet industry. In addition, data gathered from interviews with Mexican Mennonites confirmed many of the arguments made in Chapter 5 concerning why beet growers found Mexican Mennonites attractive as sugar beet workers. As a result of the latter discussions, what emerges is a general pattern of how Mexican Mennonites came to be employed in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. That is, Mexican Mennonites who migrated to southern Alberta to work on a seasonal basis informed other Mexican Mennonites, usually relatives or friends, of the job opportunities in the area. Consequently, in many instances whole families would migrate to southern Alberta in search of seasonal work where they could work together as a family unit and thus maximize their earnings. As such, it was generally the case that when Mexican Mennonites migrated to southern Alberta the first job they performed was hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops. Before long, however, the male head of the family usually found a skilled labour position with a grower or farmer while his wife and children periodically performed short-term seasonal jobs on sugar beet or potato farms. Therefore, after perhaps only one or two years of migrating between Mexico and Canada, the family would settle permanently in southern Alberta. For example, this study found that one Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM18) and his family migrated back and forth from Mexico to Canada for one year to perform sugar beet work until the family decided to move to Alberta. He (2004: MM18) stated, "I sold my farm in Mexico because of a loan problem. Then we came here to the sugar beets and made a little money....the first year we came here two months. Then, we went back for five months. Then, we decided we like Alberta. Our home we had to auction then we came back. The first year we came in '97 then, we went back. In '98 we came here to stay." In

this study, the scenario where Mexican Mennonites migrated between Mexico and Canada for a few seasons and then moved to Canada permanently was found to be a common pattern among Mexican Mennonite workers and their families.

As Galarza's (1964: 37) study on Bracero labour in California's agricultural sectors pointed out, employers were able to effect a transition in their labour forces from domestic to Mexican workers by creating labour associations that addressed the employers' needs in the area of labour recruitment and labour pool maintenance. As was pointed out in this study in Chapter 3, beet growers in southern Alberta created the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers (ASBG) that played a huge role in labour recruitment for the sugar beet industry. However, it was noted that in the mid-1990s the ASBG Labour Committee was terminated because of the increase of mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls both of which reduced the industry's need for sugar beet labour. However, in the case of Mexican Mennonites who recently migrated to southern Alberta it was the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Taber that played a significant role in finding them employment in agricultural work such as sugar beet jobs.

The main objective of the MCC is to help incoming Mennonites settle in Canada. As the Director of the MCC in Taber, Ruben Bueckert (2005), explained,

The function of the mandate of our office is, and always has been since 1921, to help the Mennonite; the Mennonites who live in Mexico, first of all to settle when they moved down to Mexico and then, now, when they come back to Canada. They're called "Kanadiers" because they are Canadian citizens and they're coming back to Canada to live or to work with seasonal work or whatever. We are

involved in settlement issues common to newcomers such as healthcare, all the documentation work. Most of them are Canadian citizens and therefore they also have citizenship issues. Some of them need to renew their citizenship because they have been grandfathered to citizenship years ago and now the Canadian government wants that corrected so they have to come up here to live for at least a year and then we do paperwork for them. We also do job searches for them. We have a job board and we help them with that.

In regards to the latter point, the MCC staff in Taber assist Mexican Mennonite newcomers find agricultural work by posting available employment on a job board in their office and then directing the applicants to the jobs for which they are qualified. As Bueckert (2005) stated, “We have a job board and the farmers will call in for their jobs to be posted on our board and then as our clients come in, we can direct them to whatever type of work they want. We help them get their Class 3 and their Class 1...that’s what some of the drivers or some of the farmers require in terms of hauling beets and hauling potatoes and so forth. So...we direct them towards certain jobs.” Furthermore, while commenting on the how the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) attempts to help Mexican Mennonites overcome problems so they can settle in Canada, Bueckert (2005), stated, “we try and teach them communication skills, some social skills, some employability skills....I mean, if you’re going to have some sustainable employment, there are certain things that you’ve got to have in place and that you’ve got to be aware of and that’s really lacking with these people.” Thus, it can be understood that the MCC has played a significant role in helping Mexican Mennonite workers secure jobs in the

southern Alberta sugar beet industry. Although the MCC was fulfilling its mandate to help Mexican Mennonite newcomers exclusively by assisting in their settlement and by finding them employment, in doing so, however, it also, in effect, prevented Aboriginal workers from filling the job positions in the sugar beet industry.

In another study on the transition of labour in agricultural industries in the United States, Mines (1997) argued that employers were able to progressively shift the ethnic composition of their labour force by designating specific tasks to the incoming foreign-born group. As Mines argued, the shift from domestic labour to the incoming labour group began when they took over harvesting operations and then they took over the hoeing, thinning and cultivating operations. During the latter stage, Mines (1997: 2) found that employers hired the foreign-born incoming group for semi-skilled longer-term jobs. The next stage in the shift to the incoming group took place when they were hired to perform post harvest tasks such as packing and shipping. The final shift occurred when the employers hired the incoming group to perform supervisory jobs (Mines, 1997: 2).

In the case of the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, this study found some significant differences in the way the shift of labour occurred as compared to the way the shift was accomplished in Mines' study. As was indicated previously, the data gathered from Mexican Mennonites for this study found that the first job many Mexican Mennonites performed in the sugar beet industry was to hoe and weed beet crops for growers as opposed to harvesting jobs (e. g. 2004: MM16, 2004: MM17; 2004: MM19). This is because the harvesting of sugar beets in the 1980s and 1990s was almost entirely mechanized, and there was little need for seasonal labourers. Moreover, a reason that most Mexican Mennonites started off

hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops was because Mexican Mennonites tended to migrate to southern Alberta as a family unit so that they could work together and thereby maximize the family's earnings (e.g. 2004: MM17). In regards to Mexican Mennonites who came to southern Alberta, the Director of the MCC, Rueben Bueckert (2005), stated, "I would say most of them are family units. They come in as families and often times they like to work on a farm as a family too, which sometimes works, sometimes does not because...of the nature of the work. They like to have their families and their children work. Education seems to be a very low priority so anyone over 13 years of age is usually encouraged to be working....These are all families. I would say most of them, 99 per cent of them...come as families." Also, when Bueckert was asked whether most Mexican Mennonites initially worked cultivating sugar beet crops he agreed and in doing so he noted the importance of worker housing in the process. He (2005) stated, "I would say so. Around here we have sugar beet, we have potatoes, we have corn, we have beans and I think sugar beets were the ones that started the Aboriginal migration to work with them and also the Mennonites because I think the housing probably was used for both groups and...farmers would have little houses on their farms where they housed these migrant people and these seasonal people...." Thus, in contrast to Mines' study where a shift from domestic to foreign-born workers began with the harvest operations, in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry the transition of labour largely took place when Mexican Mennonites, working as a family unit, took over the hoeing and weeding operations in the production of sugar beets.

Still, because of the growers' need for skilled labour, this study also found that in many instances Mexican Mennonites were initially hired by beet growers to perform jobs

such as spraying crops with chemicals and operating tractors and trucks. For example, when one Mexican Mennonite first migrated to southern Alberta he found a job with a beet grower and was paid an hourly wage to operate machinery to plant, cultivate and harvest sugar beet crops and thus he never performed the hoeing and weeding operations for sugar beet crops. As he (2004: MM14) stated, “when I came here it was just me and my wife...[I] found a farm job...[to] do the tractor work and all that kind of stuff.”

Moreover, this study found that once growers hired Mexican Mennonite males for the growing season or on a year-round basis many operated machinery, sprayed crops and performed general farm labour that included the hoeing and weeding of sugar beet crops. For example, a Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM19) pointed out that he did sugar beet work for 14 years and the job included the cultivating, hoeing and spraying of sugar beet crops. Also, he (2004: MM19) pointed out that he did sugar beet work for 7 years and the job included cultivating, hoeing, operating harvesting machinery as well as the hauling of the beets by truck to the sugar processing plant in Taber. As well, another Mexican Mennonite (2004: MM16) noted that he did sugar beet work for 4 years that included general farm work and part of the job included the hoeing of sugar beets.

As the latter statements indicate, beet growers hired Mexican Mennonites because they could perform an array of farm related tasks. As Rueben Bueckert (2005) explained, “the Mennonites who come here, many of them are very skilled. Intuitively, they’re very...intelligent....They’re very skilled in...welding...in a lot of trades and so they’re a very versatile person to hire...and I think that’s why they are...getting the jobs that they are...because they’re...quite skilled in a lot of things and so it’s very good for the farmer to hire someone like that.” Thus, this study found that once the hand labour requirements

for beet crops were significantly reduced because of the use of chemical weed controls and the increase of mechanization, growers sought to hire workers who were skilled in the handling and application of chemical weed controls and in operating machinery. Hence, when Mexican Mennonites arrived in southern Alberta during the time when growers had a need for the skilled workers, they readily hired them. Moreover, what growers found particularly attractive about male Mexican Mennonite workers was their relative versatility because not only could they perform an array of farm jobs such as spraying crops with chemicals and operating machinery, they were also willing to perform jobs such as weeding and hoeing sugar beet crops if necessary.

In addition, this study found some evidence that indicated Mexican Mennonites who performed skilled work for a beet grower for an extended period of time also took on a supervisory role over other workers. For example, one Mexican Mennonite pointed out that while he operated a tractor in the same field as Aboriginal workers who were hoeing and weeding beets, he played a supervisory role. He (2004: MM20) stated, "Like this farm boss trusted me so much he put me on the tractor but in the meantime he hired the Native people to hoe the beets. So, at times they would stop and ask questions. Where should they go? What should they do?" However, because beet growers generally did not put Mexican Mennonites and Aboriginal workers together in the same field, this study was unable to gather a significant amount of evidence that clearly indicated Mexican Mennonite workers generally took on a supervisory role over other Aboriginal workers in the production of sugar beet crops.

As the preceding discussion indicates, the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry did not follow the same

stages as the transition of labour did in Mines' (1997) study. That is, this study found that in general, the first stage in the transition of labour from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers occurred when Mexican Mennonites migrated to southern Alberta and worked as a family unit to hoe and weed sugar beet crops. However, it was also found that during the same stage when growers were hiring Mexican Mennonites for hand labour work in the industry, many growers hired Mexican Mennonite males to perform skilled jobs such as chemical sprayers, tractor operators and truck drivers. In most instances, the latter jobs lasted for 8 to 10 months or year-round and included performing harvesting and post-harvest activities as well as hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops. Thus, this study found that while it is substantially clear that the first stage in the transition of labour from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour occurred when Mexican Mennonites and their families took up the hoeing and weeding operations in the production of beets, the second stage where growers hired male Mexican Mennonites for the skilled positions in the production of beets began during the first stage in the transition and increased as more Mexican Mennonite workers and their families decided to reside permanently in southern Alberta. Although more research is needed, this study found some evidence that the last stage of the transition of labour occurred when Mexican Mennonite workers were given supervisory roles over other workers, particularly over domestic Aboriginal workers who performed the unskilled hand labour operations in the production of sugar beets.

Summary

As this chapter illustrates, the story of how Mennonites from Mexico ended up as the labour force for the southern Alberta sugar beet industry is fascinating. The first section of the chapter pointed out how Mennonites ended up in Mexico---a journey that can be traced back to the 16th Century in northern Europe where the Mennonites first created a distinct culture and lifestyle. However, in the late 19th Century when their religious rights were threatened by Russian authorities, many “Old Colony” Mennonites emigrated to Manitoba, Canada. Nevertheless, the religious and educational freedoms of the Mennonites were once again threatened by Canadian authorities during the 1920s and consequently, many emigrated to Mexico. Since the mid-1900s, however, economic hardships in Mexico caused many Mennonites to migrate to other countries in search of employment.

The second section of this chapter discussed the factors that attracted Mexican Mennonites to Canada. These factors included: most Mexican Mennonites were able to claim Canadian citizenship; many Mexican Mennonites had relatives living in Canada; the wages for agricultural work in Canada were relatively high in comparison to those in Mexico; farmland was available in Canada; Canada offered educational opportunities to Mexican Mennonite children; and, Canada offered healthcare coverage to Mexican Mennonites as Canadian citizens.

Evidence presented in the section also supported a number of arguments made in Chapter 5 concerning the attributes of Mexican Mennonites that would have attracted growers to them as workers. The attributes of Mexican Mennonites included: they were

driven by poverty; they were compliant with the demands of their employers; they would work without receiving workers' benefits; they migrated with their families which increased their stability and reliability; and, they displayed a strong work ethic. In regards to the latter point, however, Mexican Mennonites agreed with the assertion of growers in Chapter 5 that they were not better or more productive workers than Aboriginal workers. Furthermore, the evidence presented in the section supported arguments made by growers in Chapter 5 concerning why they were attracted to Mexican Mennonites as workers. That is, the testimony of Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study indicated they recruited themselves as well as other Mexican Mennonite workers, covered the costs of their transportation to southern Alberta and that many of them had the skills to perform an array of farm jobs.

In addition, the testimony of Mexican Mennonites in the section found that Mexican Mennonites were victims of discrimination because of their low level of education and that growers encouraged them to seek their own housing by giving them a higher wage once they moved into their own housing. As well, Mexican Mennonites thought they were not paid less than Aboriginal workers for hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops although they often acknowledged that they did not know for sure. Interestingly, however, when beet growers paid Mexican Mennonites an hourly rate, it was found that Mexican Mennonites undercut the prevailing wage paid to domestic workers. Moreover, although it was found that Mexican Mennonites refused to work on Sundays and holidays, many were willing to work 14 hours a day for six days a week whereas non-Aboriginal domestic workers usually refused to do so. As such, Mexican Mennonite workers out-competed domestic workers for sugar beet jobs. However, both

non-Aboriginal domestic workers and Aboriginal workers were out-competed by Mexican Mennonite workers because the latter group was willing to accept a lower hourly wage for sugar beet jobs.

Lastly, evidence presented in the section pointed out that the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry was accomplished in three stages. The first stage in the transition occurred when Mexican Mennonites sought out weeding and hoeing jobs in the production of sugar beets. The second stage in the transition occurred when beet growers hired male Mexican Mennonite workers in large numbers for an extended period of time for the skilled positions in the production of sugar beets. The final stage in the transition occurred when Mexican Mennonite workers, hired as general farm workers, were given supervisory roles over domestic or Aboriginal workers during the process of beet production.

In the next chapter, the data gathered from Aboriginal people who worked in the sugar beet industry during the period when Mexican Mennonites also worked there will be presented. The main objective of the next chapter is to provide the Aboriginal workers' perspective on the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry.

Chapter 7: “The Grab-A-Hoe-Indians”: The Perspective of Aboriginal Workers on the Transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite Workers in the Southern Alberta Sugar Beet Industry

Introduction

Since the decline of the fur trade during the late 1800s the notion has persisted that Aboriginal people contributed little to the economic development of Canada. This notion has been reinforced by the relative dearth of studies that deal directly with instances where Aboriginal people have constituted a significant component of industrial labour forces in Canada. The studies that do exist include: Knight, 1978; Wien, 1986; Pinkerton, 1987; Muszynska, 1996; and Mysyk, 2000. Yet in many circumstances Aboriginal people, as one of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in all of Canadian society, had little recourse but to seek employment in dirty or dangerous sites of production. They thus have provided their labour power to many sectors of the Canadian economy, particularly in the agricultural sectors of western Canada. A good example of where Aboriginal people have contributed to the success of an agricultural industry for over fifty years is the southern Alberta sugar beet industry.

The overall purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the underlying reasons for the recent transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. To this point, my dissertation has indicated there were many factors that led to the transition. Since this dissertation has already presented the views of beet growers and those of Mexican Mennonites on the transition, the main purpose of this chapter is to provide the Aboriginal workers' perspective on the reasons for the labour transition in the industry. This chapter also addresses the extent to which Aboriginal

labour has persisted in the industry and the impact the transition of the labour force in the sugar beet industry has had on Aboriginal workers. Since this chapter utilizes data gathered through interviews with Aboriginal workers who were present during the introduction of Mexican Mennonites to the industry, it serves as a voice for the countless Aboriginal workers who, season after season, migrated to southern Alberta to perform the difficult and back-breaking job of weeding and hoeing sugar beet crops in relative obscurity.

As this chapter will show, the interviews with Aboriginal workers provide further insight on how the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the industry was accomplished. It also reinforces some of the perspectives of beet growers and Mexican Mennonite workers on the transition of labour in the sugar beet industry. However, on the issue of whether Mexican Mennonites undercut the wages paid to domestic workers, the comments of Aboriginal workers contradict those of the growers and Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study.

The first section of the chapter provides a brief overview of the how First Nations people in Canada, particularly in the western provinces, became segregated and marginalized from mainstream society. As such, First Nations people on reserves served as a pool of labour that could be drawn upon by capitalists when needed. The second section provides the views of Aboriginal workers on why they migrated to the beet fields to seek employment and their views on why growers turned to hiring Mexican Mennonites over Aboriginal workers. The section ends with a discussion on the benefits Aboriginal people [or workers] gained from working in the sugar beet industry.

A Brief Review of the Historical Segregation and Marginality of First Nations People

As noted in my M.A. thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 31), following the decline of the fur trade during the latter part of the 19th Century in what is now Canada, Aboriginal people lost their importance to the staples economy. Also, during the same period the new Dominion of Canada moved to establish a national economy based on agriculture and urban industry. As a result, Aboriginal people were seen as redundant and as obstacles in the path of capitalist development. In addition, the buffalo, which served as the main source of subsistence for the Plains Aboriginal groups, became depleted and caused the Aboriginal groups to suffer from starvation. As a result of the latter events the Canadian state was able to force First Nations groups on the plains to sign treaties, which, in effect, gave the state control over First Nations land and in return they were confined to small tracts of land referred to as reserves.

In my M. A. thesis (Laliberte, 1994: 32-35), I also noted that the Canadian state segregated First Nations people on isolated reserves in order to fulfill its objectives of protecting, civilizing and eventually assimilating them into mainstream society. In particular, one of the state's main objectives of the reserve system was to transform First Nations populations from a traditional lifestyle based on hunting and trapping to that of a lifestyle based on agricultural production and wage labour. In order to achieve the latter objectives, the state utilized the *Indian Act* of 1876 that, in effect, sought to control every aspect of the lives of First Nations people on reserves until they were ready to enter mainstream society and assume full citizenship rights and obligations. In most instances, however, poor farm land and financial restrictions within the *Indian Act* that restricted

First Nations people from securing bank loans undermined agricultural and economic development on reserves. As such, the state's policies for First Nations people on reserves served to segregate them from mainstream society and place them in a position of marginality and dependency. Consequently, the state's policies transformed First Nations populations on reserves into pools of cheap labour from which capitalists could draw workers during periods of labour demand. Moreover, because the state held control over First Nations people through its reserve policy and the *Indian Act*, it was in a position to facilitate and regulate the flow of First Nations workers from reserves to sites of production where there was a demand for labour. As Chapter 4 in this study explained, such was the case when the Canadian state, through its Indian Affairs Branch, mobilized, recruited and retained Aboriginal workers from reserves and communities in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan for labouring positions in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry from the early 1950s until the early 1980s.

Although the Canadian state recruited First Nations people as well as Metis and non-Status Indians from reserves and communities in both northern Alberta and Saskatchewan, the majority of the workers recruited for jobs in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry were First Nations people from reserves in northern Saskatchewan. At the height of the Aboriginal labour movement to the sugar beet industry during the mid-1960s, it was not uncommon for anywhere from 65% to 95% of a Saskatchewan band's members, including men, women and children, to migrate to southern Alberta during the spring to work in the beet fields for 6 to 8 weeks. A number of these people would then return to their homes in Saskatchewan. However, many workers stayed in southern Alberta past the sugar beet hoeing season to harvest sugar beet, potato and pea crops; to

operate tractors and trucks; or to work in the sugar factory. While the list of First Nations reserves in northern Saskatchewan that provided workers for the southern Alberta sugar beet industry is extensive, some of the more notable reserves include Witchehan Lake, Pelican Lake, Big River, Thunderchild, Island Lake, Montreal Lake, La Ronge, Stanley Mission and One Arrow (see Appendix B). The most notable First Nations reserve in northern Alberta that provided workers to the southern Alberta sugar beet industry was Saddle Lake.

The Aboriginal Perspective on the Transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite Labour

Since one of the questions addressed in this chapter is the impact that the transition of the labour force (i.e. a loss of employment) in the sugar beet industry had on Aboriginal workers, a reasonable starting point is to provide the reasons Aboriginal workers cited for migrating to the sugar beet fields each season in the first place. In doing so, however, it must be kept in mind that in Chapter 4 it was pointed out the Canadian state, through the Indian Affairs Branch, played a key role in initiating the flow of Aboriginal workers to southern Alberta and retaining them for sugar beet jobs in the industry. However, while the state initially assisted the industry in the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal workers, before long most of them migrated to the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta on their own to seek employment.

This study found that the main reason Aboriginal workers migrated from their reserves and communities in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan to weed and hoe sugar beet crops was so that they could make money (e.g. 2004: FN22, 2003: FN23, 2003:

FN24). A First Nations worker from a reserve in northern Alberta pointed out that he first migrated to southern Alberta with his parents at an early age to work in the sugar beet fields. He (2005: FN25) stated, "I started working when I was about...ten years old. I used to work with my parents over there....Way back in...the early '60s I started going over there with my parents....I used to work on sugar beets all the time. Every year we went....we did hoeing; hoeing the beets you know. When we did it we hoed the beets, we cleaned them over, the weeding...you know." He (2005: FN25) went on to point out that since he first did sugar beet work forty years ago he has migrated to the beet fields each spring to weed and hoe sugar beet crops. In fact, at the time he was interviewed for this study he indicated he was in the process of returning to southern Alberta to work. When asked why he migrated to the beet fields each growing season he (2005: FN25) responded, "Well, there was nothing here [i.e. on the reserve], you know....there was no jobs. There was [only] odd jobs like picking rocks and that, you know." In another instance, a First Nations worker (2003: FN26) from a reserve in northern Saskatchewan stated he went to the sugar beet fields because "mostly it was a place to...go...because everybody left...the reserve...it's a change of scenery. That, and you could go over there and try to make money...come back with something, buy yourself a motor bike, buy yourself whatever you want." When another First Nations worker from a reserve in northern Saskatchewan was asked why he went to work in the sugar beet fields he (2003: FN27) responded by saying, "There was no work around here in this area....[we] used to have work pulp cutting but that died down. Then there's sugar beet work, you know...we went down there."

Aboriginal women were also among the workers who annually migrated to southern Alberta to hoe and weed beets. A First Nations woman from a reserve in northern Saskatchewan who worked in the beet fields for a number of years since the age of nineteen was asked why she went to southern Alberta to hoe and weed beets. She (2003: FN28) stated, “I wanted to find out what it was all about to be hoeing beets and to make money for my family....people had been going there before I ever went there and they talked about making money over there so I had to go find out for myself [and] make good money.” Another First Nations woman from a reserve in northern Saskatchewan was also asked what motivated her to go to the sugar beet fields to work. She (2003: FN29) responded, “I don’t think it takes motivation. I think it was survival back then. Like we had to, you had to...work. I know back then, like even with welfare, like it’s not like it was back then eh...I come from a family of 10 and it’s hard and that was the only way....if we wanted maybe furniture or...household stuff, then like for the kids new clothes, you know, that was the only way.”

As the testimony of Aboriginal workers indicates, most were attracted to the sugar beet fields in southern Alberta because of the money they would make. As well, the testimony of the workers indicates that during sugar beet growing season, the entire family would migrate to the beet fields and work as a unit or crew of workers hoeing and weeding beet crops. As such, the family was able to increase the number of acres of sugar beets it could do and thereby increase the amount of money earned. While commenting on the amount of money a family could make hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops, a First Nations worker (2005: FN30) from a Saskatchewan reserve stated, “They could make \$10,000.00 in a couple of months if you had a large crew, a large family...that

wasn't uncommon....in the early '90s....maybe the late '80s." A First Nations worker from a reserve in northern Saskatchewan, who worked hoeing and weeding sugar beets for 40 years, noted that he took his family of 7 or 8 members to the sugar beet fields. He (2003: FN31) stated, "Well, you used to live pretty good when you go there. That was good money working on sugar beets. If you're fast you make a lot of money and I remember a lot of times we started home with about \$5000.00 quite a few years ago... a lot of money in the '80s...clear, we brought it home." He (2003: FN31) went on to point out that he and his family made the latter amount of money in 1984 in "About a month...and a half" hoeing and weeding sugar beets. In regards to hoeing and weeding sugar beets, another First Nations worker (2003: FN32) from a reserve in northern Saskatchewan stated, "I made about \$25,000.00 a year over there." According to the worker (2003: FN32) he made the money in "a month and a half" but he had to split the money with his crew that consisted of 10 workers.

The data gathered from the Aboriginal respondents also found that most of the workers had a low level of education (e.g. 2005: FN25 [grade 6], 2005: FN33 [grade 3], 2004: FN22 [grade 8], 2003: FN34 [grade 5], 2003: FN35 [grade 6], 2003: FN36 [grade 6], 2003: FN23 [grade 5]). As well, it was found that many Aboriginal respondents had problems communicating in the English language. The reason many respondents had problems communicating in the English language was because they spoke the Cree language on their reserves. Thus, it can be understood that many Aboriginal workers would have been attracted to employment opportunities in the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta because their lack of education and poor English skills would have limited their ability to find employment in other areas of the non-Aboriginal job market.

The data gathered for this study also found that some Aboriginal workers were attracted to southern Alberta to perform sugar beet jobs because they enjoyed the social dimensions of the work. For instance, when one First Nations worker was asked whether there was a social aspect to working in the sugar beet industry he (2003: FN37) stated, “Oh yeah. I see my grandkids, make new friends....It was a good time, yeah.” Another First Nations worker (2003: FN38) pointed out that he went to do sugar beet work not only for the money but also because it was “more or less like a holiday to get away from the band....we go down there...to work, to get away from the reserve and the people, a nice break....Kinda nice to see people from other reserves....there used to be a lot of people working there every year not just from this reserve but...people...from other reserves, different areas...just go down there and meet new faces, new friends.” When a First Nations woman who had worked in the sugar beet fields was asked if there was a social aspect to the annual migration to southern Alberta to do sugar beet work, she (2003: FN29) responded, “Yeah, there was I guess. Like I know...with us...our parents would wake us up 5 or 6 o’clock in the morning...And then if it was too hot we would quit maybe 1, 2 o’clock...and we’d go back again in the cool evening and work....or else we’d go to town...go and hang out in town just to visit other people....the funny thing is like...I know I don’t visit on the reserve here, the people. But over there you’re just so glad...to see people, you know. You’d just sit down and have coffee and you know, chat....Even people...in surrounding communities like Big River, Pelican...we’d be so happy to see them....and they live not too far and we don’t even...visit.”

As the discussion above indicates, most of the Aboriginal workers I interviewed were introduced to sugar beet work at a very early age because they migrated to southern

Alberta each growing season with their parents who took along the entire family. This means most of those who were still hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops during the late 1980s and early 1990s were second-generation sugar beet workers. Furthermore, most Aboriginal workers were motivated to migrate to the sugar beet fields because they wanted to make money as there was little or no chance of finding comparable paying employment in their home location. In other words, as was shown in Chapter 6, just as Mexican Mennonites were driven to seek employment in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry because of the poverty and the lack of economic opportunities they experienced in their home country, so too were Aboriginal people driven to migrate to the industry to seek employment. In addition, the data gathered from the workers indicated that most had a low level of education and relatively poor English skills. Hence, many workers would have been attracted to employment opportunities in the sugar beet fields since they lacked the skills to find employment in other areas of the job market. The data also indicated that many Aboriginal workers were attracted to work in the beet fields of southern Alberta because it was a social event where family and band members would socialize and new friendships were created.

In chapters 5 and 6 of this study it was argued that one of the main reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry was because Mexican Mennonites possessed an array of farming skills and thus beet growers were attracted to them as workers at the time their need for skilled labour increased. However, the data gathered from the interviews with Aboriginal workers found that during the period when the grower's need for skilled labour increased, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s, many Aboriginal workers were already

performing a number of farm jobs that required skilled labour as well as operating various kinds of machinery.

For instance, a First Nations worker (2005: FN33) from a reserve in northern Alberta, who worked for twenty seasons in the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta, pointed out that he operated backhoe, toppers and drove tractors for beet growers. Another First Nations worker (2003: FN37) noted that he worked in the sugar beet fields for thirty seasons and while he was there he drove trucks and he did tractor work to plough and disc the soil. Furthermore, he (2003: FN37) pointed out that in the 1960s he was trained to do acetylene arc welding and sheet metal work. In another instance, a First Nations worker (2003: FN32) pointed out that during the six seasons he worked in the sugar beet industry he periodically operated bobcats. As well, a First Nations worker (2003: FN36) who worked in the sugar beet fields for fifteen seasons between 1965 the early 1990s, noted that he was trained to drive tractors to do work in the fields. Another example of the array of skills that Aboriginal workers offered was a First Nations worker (2003: FN39) who pointed out that he worked for beet growers “fixing fences...moving sprinklers four o’clock in the morning, noon and evening....driving tractor and piling bales, moving them out of the fields.” This information suggests that while beet growers may have been attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they too had many farming skills, this may not have been the most prominent reason for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry.

In chapters 5 and 6 it was also argued that Mexican Mennonites were not better workers than Aboriginal workers, especially when it came to performing difficult jobs such as hoeing and weeding sugar beet crops. Aboriginal workers supported this

assessment: when Aboriginal workers were asked whether they felt Mexican Mennonite workers were better or more productive workers than Aboriginal workers, they overwhelmingly disagreed. For instance, when one First Nations worker was asked whether Mexican Mennonites were better workers than Aboriginal workers he (2003: FN40) stated, "I don't think so. We work pretty hard out there. It's hard to say somebody can work harder than you when you work that hard....you got to be a machine." Also, when a First Nations woman who worked in the beet fields was asked whether Mexican Mennonites were better workers than Aboriginal workers she (2003: FN29) stated, "I don't think so. I know...we had went and worked in this one field and on one side was the Mennonites working and they were kind of, really, we thought they were really slow." In an unsolicited comment, a First Nations worker (2003: FN41) stated, "I used to work with the Mennonites and so for a hundred acres we started on both sides. There were two or three farmers that year that tried to give me some trouble because of all the work. But, when I go out and watch, look one evening, the Mennonites were working. We said we're ten times better than those people. I know one time I talk[ed] to that farmer and I don't know how long they (i.e. Mexican Mennonites) have to work there. The sugar beets, how they work, we can do that a lot better and he knew that."

In Chapter 5 it was pointed out that some beet growers (e. g. 2005: G07, 2004: G08) found that Aboriginal workers would work harder and longer than many Mexican Mennonite workers. This view of Aboriginal workers was bolstered by some of the comments made by Aboriginal workers interviewed for this study. For instance, when a First Nations worker from a reserve in northern Alberta was asked whether Mexican Mennonites were better workers than Aboriginal workers, he (2005: FN25) stated, "They

don't work any harder. The only thing is I noticed...these Mexican [Mennonites] they can take the heat, you know....They can go all day no matter how God damn hot it is....they work steady. But then, another thing too is they quit early, you know. They quit about 6:00, 7:00....But us Native people we'd rather work late, you know. Like we work until 9 o'clock some times....As long as I can see what I'm doing, you know. [If] it's getting dark in the evening I'll work right until I can't see nothing, you know. That's the way us Natives here, Indians, do [it], you know." Moreover, a reason Aboriginal workers were driven to work hard was because being quick and efficient meant their chances of securing more work increased. This was pointed out by a First Nations worker (2003: FN26) who stated, "we had no choice to work hard to finish the field so we could get another field. The faster you work and the more better, the farmer will see that and maybe if you are lucky he'd give you another field."

In Chapter 5, growers pointed out that in some instances Mexican Mennonites would "job jump" or simply quit the job and in other cases they would refuse to do certain work. This latter characterization of some Mexican Mennonite workers was reinforced in data gathered from the interviews with Aboriginal workers. That is, it was found that in some instances Mexican Mennonites refused to hoe and weed sugar beet crops if the field was too "dirty" or overrun with weeds. In reference to Mexican Mennonite workers, one First Nations worker (2005: FN33) stated, "if they see a dirty field they won't work. They'll go to a clean field, the Mennonites. They'll go look at a field, if it's too weedy, no way. They won't...they're not hard workers...they don't believe in hard work." Furthermore, the view that Aboriginal workers were relatively good workers was supported by comments made by a Metis (2004: SBO13) official of

Rogers Sugar Ltd. at Tabor, who stated, “I think, in retrospect, that farmers prefer the Native workers over Mexican Mennonites, not in all regards but, for doing a very thorough job.” Interestingly, the official (2004: SBO13) went on to point out that she has seen a resurgence in the use of Aboriginal workers by growers “over the past few years” and that most of the Aboriginal workers were coming from Saskatchewan.

As pointed out in the introduction of this chapter, a question this study seeks to address is why some Aboriginal workers still persist in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry even though there has been a general transition to Mexican Mennonite workers. When Aboriginal workers were asked the latter question, most agreed many persisted because they were good workers. For example, one First Nations worker (2005: FN25) pointed out that he has worked seasonally in the sugar beet fields since the early 1960s; at the time he was interviewed for this study, he still did. When asked why some Aboriginal workers persist in the industry, he (2005: FN25) stated, “Well...the thing is...these Indians from here...they work for...these farmers...because they like their work, you know. Like me, this farmer, I’ve worked for him for years....So, whenever he’s got a job all I do is phone him and he tells me...how many people he wants [me] to bring.” Another First Nations worker (2003: FNM37) noted that he worked in the sugar beet fields for thirty years. When he was asked why some Aboriginal workers persisted in the sugar beet industry even when Mexican Mennonites were there, he (2003: FN37) stated, “They did a good job on those sugar beets....Aboriginals did a better job.”

The data gathered from interviews with Aboriginal workers also provided indirect evidence as to why some Aboriginal workers persisted in the industry. That is, not only did the data reveal that some Aboriginal workers had worked in the industry for a long

period of time, it also revealed that some of the workers were hired by beet growers year-round as farm hands. For example, a First Nations worker (2005: FN30) indicated that he had performed seasonal work for beet growers for 30 years but at the time was hired by a beet grower year-round to do “general farm labour whether it be stacking hay or tractor work; just general labour.” Also, a Metis worker (2004: M42) pointed out that he did seasonal work in the sugar beet fields for 42 years. However, at the time he was interviewed for this study he worked as a year-round farm hand for a sugar beet grower.

As the discussion above indicates, whether it was beet growers, Mexican Mennonites or Aboriginal workers themselves, all tended to agree that Aboriginal workers were as good, and in some instances better, workers when compared to Mexican Mennonite workers. Moreover, the fact that some growers repeatedly hired the same Aboriginal workers over the years to perform seasonal sugar beet jobs and in some cases as year-round farm hands even though they had the option to hire Mexican Mennonite workers, is a clear indication that the Aboriginal workers persisted in the industry because they were good workers. In addition, the evidence presented above by Aboriginal workers reinforced what some growers in Chapter 5 pointed out: that some Mexican Mennonite workers were reluctant to perform difficult work such as weeding and hoeing sugar beets. Furthermore, it should be noted that at the time of the flow of Mexican Mennonite workers to southern Alberta, the use of chemical weed controls had largely reduced the beet growers’ need for hand labour. In addition, the Mexican Mennonites did not have a long association with weeding and hoeing beet crops and many did not have an affinity for the work. In the case of Aboriginal workers, however, they had been weeding and hoeing beets for decades. As such, this provides a perspective on just how

good Aboriginal workers were in comparison to not only Mexican Mennonite workers but also in comparison to the succession of other foreign-born labour groups in the past that were recruited for sugar beet work but moved on to other areas of employment in short order. Hence, evidence gathered for this study strongly suggests that the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry had little to do with the notion that growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they were better or more productive than Aboriginal workers.

In Chapter 5, however, it was argued that a reason for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the sugar beet industry was because growers tended to find Mexican Mennonite workers more reliable than Aboriginal workers. That beet growers needed a reliable workforce can be understood when it is considered that sugar beets are a perishable crop and that weeds needed to be destroyed during their early growing stage so that they would not proliferate and affect the growth of the beets or end up costing the grower extra to get the weeds removed. Nonetheless, during the interviews with Aboriginal workers interviewed for this study a number of comments were made that indicated some Aboriginal workers had a problem with alcohol that could have impacted on the view of growers concerning the reliability of Aboriginal workers as a whole. For instance, when a First Nations worker from a reserve in northern Alberta was asked whether beet growers preferred Mexican Mennonite workers over Aboriginal workers, he (2005: FN33) stated, “Well, the only point I can think of is they’re [i.e. Mexican Mennonites] there when you want them....And, some of us Natives, if you want to miss, you’ll miss....First pay day they [i.e. Natives] want to go grab a beer and they miss. That I see clearly. That’s why they’re hiring these people.” Also, when a

First Nations worker from a reserve in northern Saskatchewan was asked whether there were any stereotypes of Aboriginal workers in the sugar beet industry, he (2004: FN43) stated, “There was a lot of alcoholism at the time....I think the people were dealing with their problems. Sick or sorry we were out there working. When I was a teenager I would go to work still feeling intoxicated, but it didn’t deter what we were doing.” In addition, one First Nations worker (2003: FN34) commented, “when we first started going there we were not allowed to go to the bars. But, once the bars were open for us we drank a lot. A lot of people left their jobs and drank for a number of days and didn’t go back to work and the farmer [would] get mad. But, when those Mennonites came in there I don’t think they drank.”

In light of the latter comments made by Aboriginal workers, it seems plausible that a number of growers would have stereotyped Aboriginal workers as unreliable workers. Hence, the argument in Chapter 5 that growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they were more reliable than Aboriginal workers found some support in the data gathered from Aboriginal workers. As such, this suggests that a reason for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry was because growers found Mexican Mennonite workers relatively more reliable than Aboriginal workers.

The data gathered from Aboriginal workers also provided insights on how the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the sugar beet industry was accomplished. In particular, the data revealed that beet growers accomplished the transition by simply telling Aboriginal workers when they came to their door looking for sugar beet work that they had already hired enough workers. In short, the growers had

already hired Mexican Mennonite workers. For example, a First Nations worker (2003: FN32) stated, “every place where I’d go the farmers....they already hired them....some farmers, when I went to see them they said they got workers, eh. Then, right away you know when [you] see them (i.e. Mexican Mennonites) in the field.” Also, another First Nations worker (2003: FN26) noted, “when we went over there (i.e. sugar beet fields), they (i.e. Mexican Mennonites) would already be there....The farmer would say nope, we already got people....They already had the jobs. Be lucky if you found some work.” Similarly, one other First Nations worker (2003: FN36) pointed out that he was unable to get sugar beet work because the growers had hired Mexican Mennonites. He (2003: FN36) stated, “They (i.e. growers)...just said they got enough people to work, that’s what they used to say, we got enough people.” Although this study found no evidence that the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers was a stage-managed affair under some sort of centralized direction, the latter testimony of Aboriginal workers, many of whom had worked for years in the industry and then suddenly found themselves displaced, suggests there may have been a concerted effort by growers to hire Mexican Mennonite workers over Aboriginal workers.

An important reason that Mexican Mennonites were able to displace Aboriginal workers from job positions in the sugar beet industry, particularly in the performance of weeding and hoeing sugar beet crops, was that they moved to southern Alberta year-round. In doing so, the workers were able to make themselves available to growers before any Aboriginal workers migrated to southern Alberta in the spring looking for sugar beet work. While commenting on the reasons for the transition of labour in the sugar beet industry, a Metis (2004: SBO13), who works for Rogers Sugar Ltd., stated, “I think why

the switch turns more to Mexican Mennonites is because they were coming and staying and they were not leaving and if they did, it was in the winter and they would go to Mexico and come back....” In addition, a First Nations worker made a similar comment on the transition of the labour force. He (2005: FN25) stated, “Well, see, the thing is, they’re here all year-round. So, they’ve got a better chance, you know, because us...we come back. Then, they (i.e. growers) have...some jobs, they’ll hire the Mexican, you know, because they’re there.” Another First Nations worker (2005: FN30) explained how Mexican Mennonites were able to displace Aboriginal workers by stating, “The Indians used to come when the beets were up and ready to hoe. The Mennonite would come 2-3 months before them. They would beat them to the job. I used to see that happen. They were here early. The beets weren’t even up yet and they would get first crack. That had a lot to do with more and more taking the work away. Well, the Natives were used to coming in May, June because there was not much work before then, and if they got here late the work was gone.”

The data gathered from Aboriginal workers also indicated that another way the transition of labour in the sugar beet industry was accomplished was by the widespread termination of free worker housing. In particular, when growers stopped providing free housing for workers it had the effect of discouraging Aboriginal workers from seeking employment in southern Alberta because they usually migrated to the beet fields as an extended family and used the housing as a home base while the head of the family sought sugar beet work in the area. Moreover, free housing was important to the workers because when they arrived in southern Alberta they usually had no money to pay for other living accommodations. As one First Nations worker (2003: FN26) explained,

“Usually the farmers supplied the houses...where all the workers could stay...Our family was living at a house then we would all pile into that house...my uncle would go looking for work for the extended family...in order to get some cash flow.” A First Nations worker also pointed out that when his family arrived in southern Alberta looking for work they were usually impoverished. He (2004: FN43) stated, “We were fortunate to make ends meet. We would have to go knock off a partridge or something....and in the springtime we would go into the slews and catch ducklings or something like that to eat.”

Interestingly, a First Nations worker (2004: FN22) noted that during the period when Mexican Mennonites came to southern Alberta, growers began to ask workers to pay for the housing they provided. He (2004: FN22) pointed out that he had to pay “if we wanted to live in that house....other than that you had to live in the campground.” One First Nations worker pointed out how the lack of worker housing discouraged Aboriginal workers from seeking employment in the sugar beet fields. He (2003: FN41) stated, “...it’s really worse...for the houses in the sugar beets. The Mennonites they...have their own houses that’s why it’s difficult now. Farmers don’t have to make a house for the workers....I asked the people, the ones that sometimes go there for a couple weeks. It’s hard for them to find a house to stay in now.” Another First Nations worker (2005: FN30) stated, “A lot of Mennonites they managed to live where the farmer was renting or they would live in town and eventually they would buy their own places. A lot of them sold farms in Mexico and they would get here and buy their own places where Natives couldn’t. They took a lot of work away, so eventually more and more Natives stopped coming.”

In regards to the discussion above concerning worker housing, it should be remembered from Chapter 4 that during the late 1960s and early 1970s beet growers came under heavy criticisms for the relatively poor conditions of the housing they provided for seasonal workers. As a result, it seems reasonable to assume that many growers sought ways to rid themselves of providing workers with housing that would also relieve them of the cost, time and energy they devoted to managing the houses. Hence, during the early 1980s when the need for hand labour in the production of sugar beets was reduced because of increased mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls, and government funding for worker housing programs was terminated, most beet growers moved to destroy the housing provided to the workers or they began to charge workers to live in the houses. Thus, it was pointed out in chapters 5 and 6 that although some growers continued to provide housing for workers, they did so on the understanding that their wages would be reduced until they found their own housing at which time their wages would then be increased. However, this latter arrangement had the effect of discouraging Aboriginal workers from pursuing the housing because most of them migrated to southern Alberta to perform short-term sugar beets jobs such as weeding and hoeing that paid a lump sum of money as opposed to a wage.

As for Mexican Mennonite workers, relocating to southern Alberta enabled them to secure sugar beet jobs ahead of Aboriginal workers. Moreover, relocating to southern Alberta allowed Mexican Mennonites to find hourly wage employment on farms that lasted for 8 to 10 months or year-round. As such, they were also able to move into any existing housing that growers had available for workers and pay rent or eventually move into their own homes. Hence, the relocation of Mexican Mennonites to southern Alberta

and the lack of available housing for Aboriginal workers were factors in the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry.

Of all the evidence presented in this study concerning the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, there is none more at odds than the testimony of Aboriginal workers in comparison to those of beet growers and Mexican Mennonites over the issue of wages. As pointed out in Chapter 5, beet growers were adamant that they paid Mexican Mennonite workers the prevailing wage for sugar beet jobs, especially when they did the weeding and hoeing of beet crops. Moreover, in Chapter 6 it was argued that while Mexican Mennonite workers tended to undercut the hourly wage rates for various agricultural jobs, when it came to weeding and hoeing sugar beet crops they did not, although most of the Mexican Mennonites interviewed were somewhat uncertain whether they were, indeed, paid the prevailing wage. However, in contrast to the testimony of both beet growers and Mexican Mennonite workers, the Aboriginal workers interviewed for this study overwhelmingly stated that Mexican Mennonites undercut the wages Aboriginal workers were paid for performing the same job. As such, Aboriginal workers characterized Mexican Mennonite workers as cheap labour.

For instance, when one First Nations worker was asked why beet growers hired Mexican Mennonites he (2005: FN25) stated, “The reason why these farmers would rather hire these Mennonites...is because they...work for minimum wage....they’ll do sugar beet fields for 30 bucks an acre....Compared to \$55.00, that’s what we [made] because you got to deal with farmer, you know, how much....but these Mennonites...sometimes there’s 20 of them, you know. They had buses that came. They

just work over a field in no time, you know. There's 30 of them sometimes." In another instance, a First Nations worker (2003: FN41) stated, "the farmers that I used to work for, I'd go see them and they'd say they got people there. Then, I go ask what those people are making an acre. Maybe, they say, \$15, \$16 an acre. That's not even half of what we were making before....So, then about that time I was not too happy to go to Alberta for 15 bucks. That's not even half of what I used to charge the farmers. I was working by the acre and they used to pay about \$35.00. That time there was about 10 rows to an acre...\$30, \$35 an acre. But...now that the Mennonites came...there was next to nothing, \$15.00 an acre. That was the reason I never go back." In reference to the issue of wage rates for sugar beet jobs one First Nations worker (2004: FN43) commented, "it seemed that to line their (i.e. growers) pockets as best they could were to bring in the Mexican Mennonites and pay them under the table. They wouldn't have to give them a cheque. Sometimes we were paid by cheque or they would pay us cash, it all depended on the farmer. But the Mexicans, they were given cash under the table. They were giving them 50% of what we should have been getting paid." As well, another First Nations worker (2003: FN38) stated, "All those people (i.e. Mexican Mennonites) coming in from the south were all hired because they were low paid. The way I found out about that is that I talked to one of them...some of them families we talked to them cause they worked for the same farmer that we worked for. They asked us how much we [were] getting and that's how we found out that they were getting less. So they (i.e. growers) would rather go with them instead of us."

The data gathered from Aboriginal workers also indicated that where they were paid an hourly wage for sugar beet work, Mexican Mennonites undercut the prevailing

wage there too. For example, when one First Nations worker was asked why beet growers hired Mexican Mennonites, he (2005: FN33) stated, “Well, they (i.e. growers) don’t pay the full amount...I get 10 bucks an hour. They (i.e. Mexican Mennonites) don’t get 10 bucks an hour. I checked, you know...I get 10 bucks, the other guy gets \$7.50 or \$7.25.”

Also, when the beet weeding and hoeing season was finished, many Aboriginal workers went to work in other agricultural industries in southern Alberta. For instance, many went to work in the production of potato crops. Aboriginal workers interviewed for this study stated that Mexican Mennonites undercut the prevailing wage there too. As a First Nation worker (2003: FN31) explained, “Well, all of a sudden they (i.e. Mexican Mennonites) started coming there and they worked with us. Then we worked less and less and we asked a lot of the workers how much they got paid.” Sometimes \$3.00 or \$4.00 or \$5.00 they tell us. We couldn’t complain, we used to get \$10.00 for potatoes.”

As the discussion above indicates, Aboriginal workers argued that Mexican Mennonite workers undercut the prevailing wage rates whether the work was weeding and hoeing sugar beets, sugar beet work that paid an hourly wage or hourly wage work in other agricultural industries such as potato production. Furthermore, what is interesting about the testimony of the Aboriginal workers is that it contradicts the testimony of beet growers and Mexican Mennonites who argued that the pay rates for jobs such as weeding and hoeing sugar beet crops were the same for both Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite workers. Thus, this raises the question: how could the testimony of Aboriginal workers concerning wages be so different from that of growers and Mexican Mennonites? A plausible explanation for this is that when Mexican Mennonites first started performing

sugar beet jobs such as weeding and hoeing sugar beets or other hourly wage work, they did in fact accept lower wages not only because they needed the work, but also because the grower paid them a starting wage rate. In other words, Mexican Mennonite workers were paid less because most Aboriginal workers had experience performing certain jobs, such as weeding and hoeing beets, and thus knew how to negotiate a fair price for the job or their experience dictated they would be paid a higher hourly wage rate than the Mexican Mennonite workers who had to start at the bottom of the pay rate scale. In fact, indirect evidence from the interviews with Aboriginal workers suggests the latter scenario may have been the case for the wage discrepancies. For instance, one First Nations worker (2003: FN35) stated, "Mennonites go for a different wage. And, if they got on somewhere they asked for a higher wage right away. That's what I found, cheap labour for a while." Also, a Metis (2004: SBO13) employee of Rogers Sugar Ltd., stated, "I am not aware of the Mexican Mennonites charging less than the Native workers did. As a matter of fact, I think the Mexican Mennonites are becoming more demanding in the last few years...so they could be paid at a certain standard." However, while the explanation for the wage discrepancies between the two groups posited above may have some validity in explaining the difference of a few dollars in wages between the two groups, it does not account for the claims by Aboriginal workers that Mexican Mennonite workers undercut prevailing wage rates for sugar beet work by as much as 50% which would, indeed, characterize them as cheap labour.

Another question this study set out to address is the impact the transition to Mexican Mennonite workers in the sugar beet industry had on Aboriginal workers. Thus, when the Aboriginal workers interviewed for this study were asked what impact the

transition had on them, the two most common responses were the loss of jobs and the loss of income. For example, when one First Nations worker was asked how the transition impacted Aboriginal workers, he (2003: FN40) stated, “it was the biggest...employment...in the summer time...around here and it took away the jobs.” He (2003: FN40) went on to state, “I know back then we were not getting paid the rate we should but you know my parents stayed. Seems like they didn’t have a choice, you know. They wanted to work, they wanted to feed us and clothe us. And, that was a big thing because...I remember every summer when we would come back...we would have clothes for the fall to go to school with and stuff like that.” Also, when another First Nations worker was asked how the transition impacted Aboriginal workers, he (2003: 26) stated, “we just lost a lot of jobs and we always used to count on that money and go to Alberta for sugar beets....but...you get there and realize that there are no jobs available....you have an employer...but when you get there...he hired someone else...some Mennonite for \$10.00 an acre. Then, you go over there and spend your money and you have no money to come back and you have to phone back to get some money wired down to go home. Like you felt hopeless when you get over there and find out you don’t have a job waiting for you.” Similarly, a First Nations worker (2003: FN37) stated, “Ah, often like they were taking away our jobs, our work. Like they were...replacing us....It felt like we were neglected, you know. The farmers were...letting those Mexican (Mennonites) take away our jobs and....basically we couldn’t get any work.” In another instance, when a First Nations worker was asked how the transition impacted Aboriginal workers, he (2003: FN30) replied, “you know, for them that was their life, for them to come out here every year. Some of them would stay

right to the end of harvest. They would find work through the summer and then they would stay for the fall work. When they stopped coming, it had to have hurt them....a lot of them were so unskilled and because the only work they knew was the sugar beets, I would say it had to have hurt.”

As the latter comment points out, once Aboriginal workers completed the weeding and hoeing operations needed to cultivate sugar beets, many were able to work the summer and fall performing other agricultural jobs in southern Alberta. For instance, one First Nations worker (2003: FN23) pointed out that once he finished working sugar beets he would find work during potato season or he would harvest corn. Similarly, a Metis worker (2004: M42) pointed out that he worked in the sugar beet industry for 42 seasons but also found other work cultivating and harvesting peas, corn and beans. Another First Nations worker (2003: FN32) noted that besides weeding and hoeing beets, he found other work such as hauling sugar and operating machinery at the factory in Taber. As such, when Aboriginal workers stopped migrating to southern Alberta because of the decrease in the beet growers' need for hand labour and because Mexican Mennonites took over the remaining sugar beet jobs, they also lost the other jobs they performed after working sugar beet crops. Hence, the transition to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry had a ripple effect where the loss of sugar beet work caused Aboriginal workers to lose other jobs opportunities in southern Alberta as well.

Clearly, the comments above by Aboriginal workers indicate that when they lost their jobs to Mexican Mennonite workers, they lost an important source of income. In fact, for many First Nations workers the loss of sugar beet jobs was even more devastating since the chance of finding employment on or near their home reserves was

remote. Moreover, once Aboriginal workers stopped migrating to southern Alberta because of the lack of sugar beet work, this had an even further adverse effect on their income because they also lost out on the other jobs they used to get in the area.

Nevertheless, the data gathered from Aboriginal workers indicated that many of them gained a number of benefits besides income from working in the sugar beet industry. In particular, it was pointed out previously in this chapter that many Aboriginal workers who were employed in the sugar beet industry learned a number of useful skills such as operating machinery, driving trucks and other farming skills.

However, Aboriginal workers also pointed out other benefits they gained from employment in the industry. For example, when a First Nations worker was asked what benefits she gained from working in the sugar beet fields, she (2003: FN29) stated, "Well, I know...my Mum and Dad...bought vehicles. I know we bought furniture and household stuff. Kids...for the upcoming school year...things the kids wanted... I know when I was 16 I got a vehicle from over there....Ah, I think just learning to try and work to support yourself and I think...a good thing came out of that because...I know all my brothers and sisters have...jobs and they try to...support themselves and their families." When another First Nations worker was asked what benefits he gained from working in the sugar beet fields he (2003: FN40) stated, "I certainly think the benefits is...developing work ethics and putting in long hours and working steady. You work seven days a week. You work from sunrise to sundown. I remember when we were working because the more you worked the more money you made and we would also make it fun too. We would always, us guys, race in the fields and try and out-do each other." In one instance when First Nations worker was asked what benefits he gained

from working in the sugar beet fields he (2004: FN43) replied, “The ultimate thing was survival, especially as a child. You know, children should be enjoying their summer holidays vacationing and us poor kids were out there sweating, crying sometimes because the sad thing was when you would look out at the field, if you kept your head down, you could make it to the end of the day. But, if you looked out to the end of the field you would cry. How to get by, you learned how to be a better human being. That is one thing that motivated me. That’s why I go to university now. When I don’t want to do my homework, I think about those hot days in the sun; it humbles me.” As the latter comment indicates, for some Aboriginal workers employment in the sugar beet fields spurred them on to a higher station in life. In particular, this study also found that one former First Nations sugar beet worker (2003: FN38) became a band councilor for twenty-four years as well as the Chief of his reserve. In addition, one former First Nations sugar beet worker (2003: FN40) attended university and acquired a certificate in Administration and one in Social Work.

While the latter comments by Aboriginal workers indicate that their experiences in the sugar beet fields instilled in them a strong work ethic, they also indicate how difficult it was to weed and hoe sugar beets. In fact, the difficulty of weeding and hoeing sugar beets provided, in part, an answer to a question raised in Chapter 5 of this study which concerned the reason why no Aboriginal workers became sugar beet growers while many workers from the various European immigrant groups that were used as a source of beet labour in the industry in the past did. Thus, a Metis worker was asked why no Aboriginal workers became sugar beet growers, he (2004: M42) responded, “Well, I can look at my own experiences and like, with my kids, I would not want them to work hard

the way I do. I get up early and work long days....That was one reason I did not want my kids to work on the farm. I knew how hard it was when I was a child, not so much as an adult but when you have to work as a child, it is hard. I did not want my kids to hoe beets.”

Summary

The main purpose of this chapter was to present the Aboriginal perspective on the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. The Aboriginal workers interviewed for this study were either present during the transition or they still worked in the industry at the time they were interviewed. The chapter also sought to address two other secondary questions in this study. One question concerned “why some Aboriginal workers persisted in the industry although there was a transition to Mexican Mennonite workers in the industry?” The other question asked, “what impact did the transition of the labour force in the industry have on Aboriginal workers?”

The analysis of the transition from the perspective of Aboriginal workers began by pointing out what attracted Aboriginal workers to the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. As such, it was found that the majority of them migrated to the industry to work in the sugar beet fields so they could earn money. Moreover, it was found that most Aboriginal workers migrated to the beet fields with their families so that they could work together and thereby maximize their earnings. Also, it was found that Aboriginal workers were attracted to sugar beet work because their relatively poor English skills and low

level of education left them with little chance of gaining employment in other areas of the job market. In addition, it was found that many Aboriginal workers were attracted to work in the sugar beet fields because it provided them with an opportunity to get away and meet other people and socialize.

The data gathered from Aboriginal workers also found that during the period when the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour was occurring, many Aboriginal workers possessed an array of skills not unlike those possessed by the Mexican Mennonite workers. Therefore, it was argued that while growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because many possessed a number of farming skills, it was most likely not a prominent reason for the transition to Mexican Mennonite workers since many Aboriginal workers were available to fill their demand for skilled labour.

Moreover, the data gathered from Aboriginal workers backed up the arguments made by growers and Mexican Mennonites in previous chapters that Aboriginal people were good workers. In fact, it was found that the main reason some Aboriginal workers persisted in the industry although there was a transition to Mexican Mennonite labour was because they were good workers. Furthermore, the data gathered from Aboriginal workers indicated that in many instances they found the Mexican Mennonite newcomers reluctant to weed and hoe sugar beet crops, a job that in many cases two and three generations of Aboriginal families had performed over a fifty year period. Therefore, it was argued that the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the industry did not occur because growers found Mexican Mennonite workers better or more productive than Aboriginal workers.

However, the testimony provided by Aboriginal workers did reinforce the

argument made by growers that many Aboriginal workers were unreliable. In particular, a number of Aboriginal workers interviewed for this study pointed to alcohol consumption as one of the main reasons why Aboriginal workers were stereotyped as unreliable workers. Thus, evidence in this study indicates that a factor in the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour was that Aboriginal labour was stereotyped as unreliable labour.

The testimony gathered from Aboriginal workers also provided more insights on how the transition was accomplished. One simple but effective tactic used by growers was to hire Mexican Mennonite workers and then tell Aboriginal workers who came looking for work that they already had enough workers. Another way the transition was accomplished was when Mexican Mennonite workers moved to southern Alberta year-round they were able to fill available positions in the sugar beet industry before Aboriginal workers migrated to the area in the spring. Moreover, since many Mexican Mennonite workers relocated to southern Alberta, many made themselves available to growers for periods ranging from short-term employment consisting of a few months to periods of eight to ten months as well as for year-round employment. Also, growers were able to facilitate the transition of labour by terminating their policy of providing free housing to sugar beet workers. In many instances growers tore down worker housing and in other instances they charged rent if the workers used the housing. Since Aboriginal workers depended on the free housing because they could not afford to pay the high costs of renting a house or staying in a hotel, the lack of free housing discouraged them from migrating to the beet fields. Hence, the irony of the latter situation is that where growers once used free worker housing as a paternalistic measure to recruit and retain Aboriginal

workers for sugar beet jobs, the termination of free worker housing caused the expulsion of Aboriginal workers from employment in the sugar beet fields.

However, the data gathered from Aboriginal workers indicated that the main reason for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry was because Mexican Mennonite workers constituted a source of cheap labour. That is, Aboriginal workers interviewed for this study overwhelmingly stated that Mexican Mennonite workers undercut prevailing hourly wages in the industry. In particular, when it came to weeding and hoeing beets, they undercut the prevailing wages by up to 50%. As such, the testimony of Aboriginal workers strongly endorsed the view that the main reason growers opted to hire Mexican Mennonites workers over Aboriginal workers was because they stood to gain more profit. Furthermore, it was found that once growers hired Mexican Mennonite workers at lower wages rates, and terminated free worker housing, not only did they effectively end the reign of Aboriginal labour in the sugar beet industry by causing the transition of the labour force, they also caused Aboriginal workers to suffer a double economic hit because many were discouraged from migrating to southern Alberta at all which, in effect, meant they also lost out on the job opportunities available to them in other agricultural industries in the area. As such, the loss of employment in the sugar beet industry to Mexican Mennonite workers had a huge economic impact on Aboriginal workers who, in most cases, had no other prospects for securing employment. Indicative of this latter point is the fact that many of the Aboriginal workers who lost their jobs in the sugar beet industry were the second and third generation of sugar beet workers in their families.

Still, it is interesting to note that many Aboriginal people, especially those from

northern reserves, gained their first introduction to the capitalist wage labour economy by working in the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta. As a result, many were able to acquire useful skills that helped them secure employment in other areas of the job market. In particular, work in the beet fields instilled in many a strong work ethic and caused some of the former workers to aspire to a higher position in life.

The fact that hoeing sugar beets was difficult work was pointed out in this study a number of times. Yet, Aboriginal people have endured in the industry for over 50 years. During conversations with the workers it was found that one of the ways they coped with the difficulty of the work was through their sense of humour as some jokingly referred to themselves as the “grab-a-hoe Indians.” Another example of their humour was when one First Nations worker was asked if he learned any skills from work in the industry and he (2004: FN22) replied, “Just drinking beer.” Given the difficulty of sugar beet work and the fact that no other non-Aboriginal group that laboured in the fields could withstand the job for long, recognition of the important economic contribution Aboriginal workers made to the success of the southern Alberta sugar beet industry is long overdue.

The next chapter of this study summarizes and discusses the main findings of this project. It then discusses the theoretical aspects of the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry and concludes by pointing to areas that need further research.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Theoretical Considerations

Introduction

The purpose of the research for this dissertation has been to examine the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. The primary question it set out to answer is as follows: “What were the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry?” Secondary questions the research also set out to address included, “To what extent has Aboriginal labour persisted in the industry?” and “What impact has the shift had on Aboriginal workers?” The research questions were addressed through an analysis of archival material that included primary documents such as federal and provincial government documents and Alberta Sugar Beet Growers annual reports; and secondary sources such as newspaper articles and various studies done on the sugar beet industry. Also, secondary materials in the form of articles and books were used to address the research questions. In addition, 51 interviews were conducted that included Aboriginal workers, Mexican Mennonite workers, sugar beet growers and officials of the Rogers Sugar Ltd. located in Taber, Alberta and Vancouver, British Columbia. My research found some differences between the three groups consisting of growers, Mexican Mennonites and Aboriginal workers concerning the reasons for the transition in the labour force. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that the changes in the production process, the issue of reliability and the price of Mexican Mennonite labour were significant factors in the transition. This final chapter consists of three sections: a summary and discussion of the main findings of this dissertation, a discussion on how the

findings of this dissertation contribute to the literatures reviewed in Chapter 2 concerning the reasons for transitions of labour forces in agricultural industries and, the implications of the findings of this dissertation.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The research for this dissertation found that a number of factors played a role in the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. Some of the factors consisted of historically specific conditions related to farm labour employment. Other factors were related to structural processes within the process of capital accumulation. Moreover, members of the groups interviewed for this study provided a number of reasons for the transition from their own perspectives. Given that those interviewed for this study represented three different groups involved in the production of sugar beets, it is not surprising that views between the groups on the reasons for the transition would differ in some respects.

In this study it was pointed out that throughout the history of the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, growers consistently experienced problems recruiting and retaining sufficient labour for beet production. As a result, since the advent of the industry growers have gone through a succession of labour forces that reflect the use of different ethnic groups. As such, it was not uncommon for the industry to experience transitions in its labour force. The two main reasons that it was hard for the industry to retain workers, particularly prior to the use of chemical weed controls, were: (1) sugar beet work is labour intensive and (2) sugar beet work pays low wages.

During the early 1950s when the industry experienced a severe labour shortage, the Canadian state intervened into the economy and played a key role in the procurement of Aboriginal labour for sugar beet production. Most of the Aboriginal workers were hired to perform the unskilled job of hoeing and weeding sugar beets. Evidence indicated that during the initial period when Aboriginal workers were hired for sugar beet jobs, growers welcomed them and were satisfied with their labour. Yet, evidence indicated that during most of the post-Second World War period the growers' search for labour, particularly for cheap labour, never subsided.

Also, it was found that during the post-Second-World War period the growers' ability to recruit and retain labour for beet production was hindered by historically specific conditions related to farm labour employment. These conditions included: long hours of work, low wages, poor housing conditions and a lack of protection under federal and provincial labour standards. Moreover, it was found that the growers' ability to recruit and retain labour for beet work was hindered by structural processes within capital accumulation---processes largely beyond the growers' control. That is, it was pointed out that the growers' ability to recruit sufficient labour for production was hindered because available workers were attracted to jobs in urban-based and resource extraction industries that offered worker benefits and higher wages. Another structural process that hindered the ability of growers to attract labour was that they were caught in a cost-price squeeze where the costs of production inputs increased while the prices they received for their beet crops remained low. In regard to this latter point, it was learned that cane sugar purchased by Canada on the world market depressed the price paid for beet sugar from Alberta. Since growers received low returns for their sugar beets, this meant that to

increase their profit margins they had to keep the costs of production down. One of the ways that growers accomplished this was by offering workers low wages. As such, the growers' ability to attract workers was hindered.

However, the growers employed other means to lower their costs of production in order to increase their profit margins. These included: increased mechanization, an increase in the use of chemical weed controls, the use of technological innovations that increased the yield per acre of beets and the beet sugar content and lobbying of the federal government to implement a national sugar policy that would provide a fair return for beet crops as well as promote a healthy future for the sugar beet industry in Canada. Although the growers failed to motivate the Canadian government to implement a national sugar policy, they were successful in the other initiatives. In particular, increased mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls reduced their demand for a large unskilled labour force. Nevertheless, the changes in the production process caused an increase in the growers' need for skilled workers. Consequently, growers now need workers who are skilled in the application of weed control chemicals for crops and in the operation of machinery. While the increased use of machinery and chemical weed controls decreased the growers' need for hand labour, I did not determine whether these changes in the production process actually increased the growers' profit margins. That is, because the increased use of machinery and chemicals are very expensive for growers, it may be that they are more costly than the use of hand labour in the production process. Thus, more research is needed in these areas before it can be determined whether the changes have, in fact, increased the growers' profit margins. Still, the technological innovations mentioned above as well as the use of chemical weed controls, gave growers

more control over the labour process. In fact, evidence presented in this study indicates that the problems growers experienced in managing a large hand labour force was a factor that motivated them to initiate changes in the production process that would reduce their need for workers. In particular, evidence indicates that the controversy during the late 1960s and early 1970s over the housing conditions and the use of child labour in the industry played a role in the growers' push to further mechanize and increase the use of weed controls in the production process.

By the early 1980s, the use of Aboriginal labour in the production of sugar beets fell into disfavour among growers. Moreover, by this time the racial stereotypes of Aboriginal workers as being lazy, drunks and unreliable were well established in the industry. Coincidentally, during this period Mexican Mennonites began to migrate to southern Alberta in search of agricultural employment. As a result, beet growers began to hire them in increasing numbers even though Aboriginal workers were available for both skilled and unskilled sugar beet jobs. It was found that the Mennonite Central Committee, located in Taber, played a significant role in helping recently arrived Mexican Mennonites secure employment with beet growers. Thus, before long a transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonites labour occurred in the industry.

The groups interviewed for this study provided valuable information concerning why the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonites occurred. In particular, it was found that the transition occurred because beet growers were attracted to the attributes Mexican Mennonites offered as workers. Table 1 provides a comparison of the attributes of Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite workers during the transition period in the sugar beet industry.

Table 1: A Comparison of the Attributes of Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite Workers

	Education Attainment	English Skills	Relative Skill Level	Family Size	Willingness to Perform Hard Work	Availability	Reliability	Willingness to Work for Lower Wages
Aboriginal	low	low	medium	high	high	medium	medium	medium
Mexican Mennonite	low	low	high	high	medium	high	high	high, later medium

Table 1 indicates that both groups of workers are highly conducive to labour exploitation because their low education levels and poor English skills limited their ability to sell their labour power outside of the agricultural job market. Also, while Mexican Mennonite workers were found to be relatively more skilled than Aboriginal workers, evidence presented in this study indicates many Aboriginal workers were also very skilled at the time beet growers hired Mexican Mennonites for skilled positions. Furthermore, it was found that at the time of the transition unskilled Aboriginal workers were being trained to perform skilled farming jobs. Table 1 also indicates that both groups brought their families with them to work in the industry. This was attractive to growers because it not only provided additional workers, it also added to the stability and reliability of the workers. In addition, Table 1 indicates that Aboriginal workers were more willing to perform hard and unpleasant work in comparison to Mexican Mennonite workers. Interestingly, however, it was found that when Mexican Mennonites were first employed in the industry they portrayed a strong work ethic to their employers and then later, many refused to perform difficult jobs. Furthermore, Table 1 indicates that while

both groups were available for employment at the time of the transition, Mexican Mennonites had the advantage of being in southern Alberta for a longer period of time than Aboriginal workers from northern Alberta and Saskatchewan. That is, many Mexican Mennonites moved to southern Alberta and made themselves available all year round for jobs while Aboriginal workers migrated from their homes each season, usually in the spring, to seek employment in the industry. In addition, Table 1 indicates that Mexican Mennonite workers were more reliable than many, but not all, Aboriginal workers. Finally, Table 1 indicates that, at least initially, Mexican Mennonite workers were more willing to work for lower wages in comparison to Aboriginal workers.

Table 2 provides a list of the factors that each group interviewed for this study offered as reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the sugar beet industry.

Table 2: *Factors that Growers, Mexican Mennonite Workers and Aboriginal Workers Cited as Reasons Related to the Transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite Labour in the Sugar Beet Industry*

Growers	Mexican Mennonites	Aboriginal Workers
a) Mexican Mennonites recruit themselves for jobs in the sugar beet industry.	a) Mexican Mennonites can claim Canadian citizenship and thus move to Canada to search of agriculture jobs.	a) Some Aboriginal workers are unreliable and thus growers hired Mexican Mennonites.
b) Mexican Mennonites recruit other Mexican Mennonites for sugar beet work.	b) Mexican Mennonites have relatives living in Canada that attracts them to seek out jobs in its agricultural sectors.	b) Mexican Mennonites moved to southern Alberta and made themselves available to growers before Aboriginal workers.
c) Mexican Mennonites cover the costs of their transportation to the sugar beet industry.	c) Wages for agricultural work in Canada are relatively high in comparison to those in Mexico.	c) The lack of free housing discouraged Aboriginal workers from migrating to the beet fields to seek employment.
d) Mexican Mennonites are relatively reliable workers.	d) Mexican are attracted to Canada because of the availability of farmland.	d) Mexican Mennonites undercut the prevailing wages for sugar beet jobs and thus growers hired them.

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| e) Mexican Mennonites are independent workers who need little supervision. | e) Canada offers educational opportunities for Mexican Mennonite children. |
| f) Mexican Mennonites possess the skills to perform a number of farm jobs. | f) As Canadian citizens Mexican Mennonites are able to get healthcare coverage in Canada. |
| g) Mexican Mennonites were hired because there was a lack of Aboriginal workers available. | g) Mexican Mennonites are willing to work long hours. |
| h) The use of chemical weed controls reduced the need for the hand labour of Aboriginal workers | h) Mexican Mennonites are willing to work for lower hourly wages. |
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As Table 2 indicates, growers were attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they recruited themselves and other Mexican Mennonite workers for the industry, and they covered their own transportation costs between Mexico and the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta. This lowered the costs of labour for growers because it eliminated the need to recruit and mobilize the workers themselves. Moreover, since Mexican Mennonites recruited other Mexican Mennonites for work in the industry this, in effect, pre-screened the new workers to ensure they possessed a strong work ethic. Hence, this was also a benefit to growers.

As Table 2 also indicates, growers hired Mexican Mennonites because they were relatively reliable as workers. In particular, it was found that many Mexican Mennonites were more reliable than Aboriginal workers. In fact, Aboriginal workers interviewed for this study pointed out that some Aboriginal workers consumed alcohol that caused them to miss work. Consequently, growers stereotyped Aboriginal workers as unreliable labour. Nevertheless, it was found that Mexican Mennonite workers were not necessarily

more productive than Aboriginal workers because they tended to refuse to perform difficult and unpleasant jobs and they refused to work on Sundays and religious holidays. In particular, when the work got difficult Mexican Mennonites tended to “job jump” which lowered the growers’ level of productivity. On the other hand, it was found that Aboriginal workers tended to stick with a difficult job and they had no problem working on Sundays and religious holidays. Hence, this study found that one of the main reasons growers hired Mexican Mennonites over Aboriginal workers was because they were generally more reliable than Aboriginal workers but not more productive.

Furthermore, this study found that some Aboriginal workers persisted in the industry because they were good workers. From the growers’ perspective, then, it can be said that the ideal labour force for sugar beet work would be permanent Mexican Mennonite farm hands supplemented by a seasonal crew that could be counted on to work no matter the conditions. The seasonal workers would be hired on their track record, not on the basis of stereotypes. This is why some Aboriginal crews persisted in the industry despite being relatively more expensive to growers because of their wages and the provision of housing. Also, evidence presented in this study suggests that growers would view Mexican Mennonite workers as an ideal labour force to take over the land and beet production when they retired.

Table 2 also indicates that growers hired Mexican Mennonites because they can work independently and thus they require little supervision. In addition, it was found that growers hired Mexican Mennonites because the skills they possess enabled them to perform a number of farm jobs. Moreover, growers indicated that Mexican Mennonites migrated to southern Alberta at an opportune time when they needed their skills. Growers

also stated that they hired Mexican Mennonite workers because of the lack of Aboriginal workers seeking sugar beet jobs. Another reason that growers stated they no longer hired Aboriginal workers was because the use of chemical weed controls, which became widespread by the early 1980s, reduced their need for hand labour in the production of beet crops. Also, growers interviewed for this study indicated that they paid Mexican Mennonite workers the same wage rates they paid Aboriginal workers whether it was piece work hoeing or jobs that paid an hourly wage rate. As will be pointed out shortly in this conclusion, however, the perspective of the growers interviewed for this study concerning the wage rates they paid Mexican Mennonites does not coincide with other evidence provided on the wage rates of Mexican Mennonites.

When Mexican Mennonites were interviewed for this study, it was found that they did indeed possess many of the attributes that attracted growers to them as workers. That is, it was found Mexican Mennonites covered the costs of their recruitment and transportation between Mexico and southern Alberta, recruited other Mexican Mennonites for sugar beet work, possessed a number of farming skills and, migrated to southern Alberta as a family unit, thus adding to their stability and reliability as workers. Moreover, it was found that Mexican Mennonites took their families to southern Alberta so that they could all do agricultural work and thus maximize the family's earnings.

While this study found that the transition of labour in the sugar beet industry was linked to the growers' attraction to Mexican Mennonites as workers, it also found that the transition was linked to other factors that attracted Mexican Mennonites to Canada. As Table 2 indicates, the factors that attracted Mexican Mennonites to Canada are as follows: they could claim Canadian citizenship, they had relatives in Canada, the wages

for agricultural work in Canada were higher than in Mexico, Canada had farmland available, Canada offered their children educational opportunities and, as Canadian citizens they were eligible for healthcare coverage. In addition, it was found that two other factors were linked to the transition in the labour force: (1) Mexican Mennonites were willing to work longer hours than non-Aboriginal domestic workers and (2) Mexican Mennonites were willing to work for lower hourly wages than domestic workers whether this was non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal workers. On the issue of wage rates, Mexican Mennonites interviewed for this study indicated that they believed they were paid the prevailing wage rate for hoeing and weeding beet crops. Nevertheless, some Mexican Mennonite workers also indicated that they worked in relative isolation on the farms and therefore they had no way of knowing that they were, in fact, being paid the prevailing wage rate for hoeing and weeding jobs. Moreover, given that Mexican Mennonite workers were not experienced in hoeing and weeding beet crops, it can be understood that they would accept what they thought was the prevailing wage rate for the job even if the crop was “dirty” (i.e. excessively weedy) whereas an experienced Aboriginal worker would negotiate a higher wage for such jobs.

Evidence gathered from Mexican Mennonite workers also indicates that growers offered them an increase in their hourly wage if they moved out of the free housing they were given and into their own housing. As such, this would benefit growers as it lowered their costs for worker housing maintenance that, in turn, lowered their costs for labour. Another interesting finding was that some Mexican Mennonites felt they experienced racial prejudice from the growers. Although this study never found any instances of overt racism against the workers, evidence indicated that Mexican Mennonites are victims of

stereotyping or covert racism. This suggests that some ethnic antagonisms exist between the two groups and although growers are not basing their stereotypes on skin colour, they may be negatively stereotyping Mexican Mennonites as a means to justify paying them low wages.

What also emerged from the data gathered from Mexican Mennonites was a pattern of how the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour proceeded. The first stage of the transition occurred when growers hired Mexican Mennonites to perform the weeding and hoeing operations in the production of sugar beets. The second stage occurred when growers hired Mexican Mennonites for skilled positions in the production of sugar beets. In this stage Mexican Mennonites moved to southern Alberta and were hired by growers for the duration of the growing season (i.e. 8 – 10 months) and as year-round farm hands. The final stage occurred when growers gave Mexican Mennonites supervisory roles over Aboriginal workers during the process of beet production.

The data gathered from Aboriginal workers found that the main reason they migrated to the sugar beet fields in southern Alberta was to earn money. Furthermore, it was found that they took along their families so they too could work in the fields and thus maximize the family's earnings. Also, the evidence indicates that Aboriginal workers migrated to the beet fields because they understood their lack of education and poor English skills meant they had little chance of finding employment in other areas of the job market. An interesting aspect revealed in the evidence gathered from Aboriginal workers is that many Aboriginal workers migrated to the sugar beet fields so that they could escape the confines of their communities and reserves and meet other people and

socialize.

Also, the data gathered from Aboriginal workers reinforces the argument made in Chapter 5 that during the period of the transition in the industry, many Aboriginal workers possessed numerous farming skills not unlike those possessed by many Mexican Mennonite workers. What this indicates is that growers may have hired Mexican Mennonite workers for the skills they possessed but it was not a main reason for the transition of labour in the industry since Aboriginal workers were available to fill the job positions. Furthermore, the argument that Aboriginal workers were good workers, as acknowledged by growers and Mexican Mennonites, was reinforced in the evidence presented by Aboriginal workers. As such, the secondary question this research set out to answer concerning why some Aboriginal workers persisted in the industry even though there was a transition in labour force was answered; they persisted because they were good workers. Moreover, the consensus among the groups that Aboriginal workers were good workers put to rest any notion that the transition of the labour force was because Mexican Mennonites were better workers or more productive than Aboriginal workers.

Nevertheless, evidence gathered from Aboriginal workers themselves acknowledged that a number of them consumed alcohol that caused them to miss work and hence, they were stereotyped as unreliable workers. Thus, it was found that there was some validity to the argument made by growers that they turned to hiring Mexican Mennonites because they needed a reliable work force. Furthermore, it was pointed out in this study that the growers' need for a reliable labour force was crucial during the spring growth stage when the young beet plants are threatened by the proliferation of weeds.

As indicated in Table 2, Aboriginal workers interviewed for this study

overwhelmingly stated that the main reason for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry was because Mexican Mennonites undercut the wages they were paid for piece work or for jobs paid on an hourly basis. In particular, Aboriginal workers were adamant that Mexican Mennonites undercut the wages for weeding and hoeing sugar beets--- in some cases by up to 50%. In short, Aboriginal workers argued that the transition of labour in the industry occurred because Mexican Mennonites were a cheaper source of labour that growers hired to increase their profits.

The data gathered from Aboriginal workers also shed light on how the transition in the labour force was accomplished with little or no conflict between themselves and Mexican Mennonite workers. Although there is no evidence to indicate growers instructed Mexican Mennonites to do so, Mexican Mennonites showed up in the early spring and applied for sugar beet work before Aboriginal workers migrated to the area. As such, Mexican Mennonites beat Aboriginal workers to jobs and when the latter workers showed up, growers simply told them they had already hired a labour crew. Moreover, many Mexican Mennonites relocated to southern Alberta and this allowed them to not only apply for available jobs in the spring before Aboriginal workers, but also to make themselves available to growers for the extent of the growing season or for year-round employment.

Also, it was found that the transition of labour was facilitated when the majority of growers terminated their policy of providing free housing to workers. Consequently, many Aboriginal workers stopped migrating to the beet fields because they were too impoverished to pay for their own accommodations while employed in the industry. What the data gathered from Aboriginal workers indicates is that they were available for

jobs in the industry when the transition took place but that they were effectively shutout. Hence, the growers' argument that they hired Mexican Mennonites because there was a lack of available Aboriginal workers is called into question by the evidence provided by Aboriginal workers.

It was also found that the loss of employment in the sugar beet industry caused Aboriginal workers severe economic hardship since they had few other prospects for employment. Hence, this answered the secondary question this research sought to address concerning the impact the transition had on Aboriginal workers. Still, it was found that Aboriginal workers gained some benefits as a result of their employment in the industry. In particular, many Aboriginal workers gained a strong work ethic while others indicated that the work experience they gained helped them move on to become machinery operators, band administrators, to pursue an education or to secure jobs in other areas of the economy.

In summary, then, the findings of the research for this dissertation indicates that the main reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite workers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry include: increased mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls that effectively reduced the growers' need for hand labour, the growers' need for a more reliable labour force and, most importantly, growers hired Mexican Mennonites over Aboriginal workers because the price of their labour was cheaper.

Contributions to the Literature

The main question this research set out to address concerned the reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. To answer this question, a literature review was provided that firstly, discussed the reasons “why” transitions of labour forces occur in agricultural industries and secondly, discussed “how” employers accomplished the transition of labour forces in agricultural industries. The findings of this study generally support the literature reviewed in this thesis although some of the findings do not. Still, in those instances where the findings do not coincide with the literature, they shed new light on questions concerning transitions of labour forces in agricultural industries. This section will discuss where the main findings of this research coincide, and where they diverge, from the literature reviewed for this study.

A reoccurring theme in the literature on labour forces in agricultural industries is that employers consistently experience problems in the recruitment and retention of sufficient labour for production. The literature also indicates that a response of agricultural employers to the problem of insufficient labour is to substitute capital for labour. For example, farmers in the western provinces of Canada have been successful in mechanizing processes in production that were formerly done by hired wage labour. Moreover, the literature indicated that the mechanization significantly increased productivity. Yet, the literature indicated that in some instances the escalating costs of machinery and the credit needed to purchase it could undermine the mechanization of processes in agricultural production.

A finding of this study is that increased mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls were main reasons for the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry. In fact, throughout the post-Second World War period the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta has consistently advocated for increased mechanization as a means to reduce its need for hired labour. In particular, this study found that during the early 1970s growers in the southern Alberta sugar beet industry responded to the harsh criticisms of the media concerning the poor working conditions of their labour force by increasing mechanization and the use of chemical weed controls. As a result, the industry effectively reduced its need for labour, particularly the need for a large seasonal labour force to hoe and weed sugar beet crops. Hence, unlike some other agricultural industries where the cost of increased mechanization in production has become too high to pursue, evidence suggests this has not been the case in the sugar beet industry. This raises an interesting question: “how did growers increase mechanization and effectively reduce their dependence on labour without it becoming too costly?” Clearly, a number of factors would have to be researched to answer this question such as the price of labour, the costs associated with mechanization, land costs, bank loan rates and so.

Also, this study found that as mechanization in the production of beets increased and reduced the need for hand labour, the growers’ need for a more skilled labour force to operate the machinery increased. Thus, when Mexican Mennonites made themselves available for jobs in the industry, growers seized the opportunity to hire them instead of Aboriginal workers. The evidence presented in this study indicates that two reasons growers hired Mexican Mennonites were because many possessed the skills necessary to

perform an array of farming operations and, the price of their labour was cheaper than that of Aboriginal labour. Therefore, while this study coincides with the literature that finds agricultural industries increase mechanization in order to reduce the need for labour and increase productivity, its findings also sheds light on how the increase of mechanization in the production process of agricultural industries can cause employers to effect a transition in their labour force. Moreover, the evidence in this study indicates that labour force transitions under such circumstances decreases the employers' costs for labour, at least initially, because they are able to hire members of the new group for unskilled and skilled positions at lower wage rates than those paid to members of the former labour force.

The literature review also indicates that in some instances the state intervenes in the economy to assist employers to overcome their problems in the recruitment and retention of labour for agricultural industries. In such instances, the state provides assistance by sharing with employers the costs associated with mobilizing internal labour reserves to fill the job positions. However, the literature also noted that despite the efforts of the state to fill the job positions, some agricultural industries still experienced labour shortages. Hence, to address the labour need the state has mobilized foreign-born labour to fill the job positions. The literature also points out that in most cases state sanctioned foreign-born seasonal labour programs constitute "unfree labour" because the regulations that govern the workers restrict them from circulating in the labour market in the host country. Furthermore, the literature argues that foreign-born unfree labour provides employers with a number of benefits that reduces their costs for labour. That is, foreign-born unfree workers are characterized as beneficial to employers because their tenuous

political and legal status in the host country compels them to be docile, reliable and compliant with the demands of their employers.

An interesting finding in this study is that most Mexican Mennonites who migrate to southern Alberta to work in the sugar beet industry are able to claim Canadian citizenship status. Thus, they migrate to Canada as free workers who are able to circulate in the economy under no political restrictions. Nevertheless, this study found that growers in the sugar beet industry are attracted to Mexican Mennonites as free workers because they lower the cost of labour and provide other benefits in the labour process. For instance, it was found that Mexican Mennonites lower the growers' costs of labour in the following ways: by covering their costs for transportation between Mexico and the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta, by recruiting other Mexican Mennonites for sugar beet jobs which not only reduces the growers' costs for labour recruitment but also screens the new workers to ensure they possess a strong work ethic, and by constituting a relatively reliable labour force in comparison to Aboriginal workers, which reduces turnover rates and increases productivity. In addition, it was found that growers are attracted to Mexican Mennonite workers because they possess a number of farming skills, work independently and need little supervision. Moreover, while foreign-born unfree workers are docile, reliable and compliant with the demands of their employers because of their tenuous political and legal status in the host country, this study found that Mexican Mennonites are also docile, reliable and compliant to the demands of growers but not because of their tenuous political and legal status in Canada, but rather because of their poor English skills and low education levels that diminish their chances of securing employment in other areas of the job market outside of agricultural sectors. Therefore, contrary to the

literature that suggests foreign-born unfree labour constitutes an ideal type of seasonal agricultural labour because its political and legal status renders it highly exploitable, this study found that Mexican Mennonites are not only as exploitable as unfree labour but offer more benefits to employers that lowers their costs of labour and assists them in managing the labour process.

The issue of citizenship status was also discussed in the literature review in relation to split labour markets in agricultural industries. In particular, it was noted that the undocumented status of Mexican workers in agricultural industries in the United States made them politically vulnerable, which in turn provides employers with a number of advantages in the labour process. As noted above, Mexican Mennonites as free or documented labour with citizenship status in Canada not only provide employers with as many advantages as unfree labour, they provide them more advantages. However, an interesting finding in this study, and an area where the literature is relatively silent, is the advantages that dual citizenship or flexible citizenship status provides to agricultural workers. This study found that the flexible citizenship status of Mexican Mennonites provided them a number of advantages including: easy entrance to work and settle in Canada, educational opportunities, welfare benefits and healthcare coverage. In particular, this study found that easy entrance to Canada allowed Mexican Mennonites to make themselves available and secure jobs in the sugar beet industry before Aboriginal workers showed up to apply for the same job positions. Moreover, the flexible citizenship status of Mexican Mennonites also provides them with a safety valve where they have the option to return to Mexico if their economic situation takes a turn for the worse. In

summary, this study found that flexible citizenship status provides both workers and employers with a number of advantages.

In regards to the literature on the split labour market theory, the findings of this study coincided with much of what it argued concerning why employers gravitate towards hiring lower priced labour. For instance, when Mexican Mennonites entered the labour market in the sugar beet industry and split it, they were impoverished and as a result they were initially willing to accept wages rates below those paid to Aboriginal workers for the same work in order to gain a foothold in the market. In fact, evidence was presented in this study that indicates Mexican Mennonites who migrated to work in the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta lacked information regarding the prevailing wage rates for the work they were to perform and consequently, they agreed to accept wages well below the standard. Thus, the evidence in this study agrees with the split labour market theory that once a cheaper group enters the labour market it will eventually displace the other group because employers will hire the cheaper labour.

Split labour market theory also coincided with the findings of this study in other ways. In particular, the theory argues that the motives of workers can determine the price of their labour. In the case of Mexican Mennonites, many of them initially migrated to southern Alberta to work in the sugar beet fields on a seasonal basis. Many also took along their families so that they could work as a unit and thereby increase the total family earnings. Thus, as temporary workers they were willing to work for wages below the prevailing rates, work long hours, tolerate poor working conditions and they avoided involvement in labour disputes. All of these factors lowered the price of their labour for employers.

An argument of split labour market theory is that the difference in the skills of workers does not *per se* lead to a difference in price for the same work because an unskilled worker of another ethnicity can be trained to fill the job for the same wage. This study found that many Mexican Mennonites were skilled farm workers and farm owners in Mexico but the lack of economic opportunities there forced them to migrate to search of employment. Yet, once they found employment in the sugar beet industry of southern Alberta they were willing to accept a lower wage than Aboriginal workers for performing the same skilled and unskilled jobs. Nevertheless, many were able to use their skills to develop political resources with growers that attracted them to hiring Mexican Mennonites over Aboriginal workers. Thus, evidence in this study coincides with the argument in split labour market theory that skills are only indirectly important because they can be used to develop political resources.

Split labour market theory also argues that the initial price of a group's labour in a split market is not determined by its physical characteristics or skin colour but rather by its motives and level of resources. When Mexican Mennonites entered the labour market in the sugar beet industry and split it by accepting lower wages than Aboriginal workers for performing the same jobs, they did so largely because they were impoverished. Moreover, given that Mexican Mennonites are of Swiss, German, Dutch and Polish ancestry and thus no different in skin colour than the majority of their employers, who had no qualms about hiring them at low wage rates, this is a clear indication that initially skin colour does not determine the price of labour. Hence, the findings of this study correspond with the argument in split labour market theory that motives and resources initially determine the price of labour and not ethnic differences.

In addition, this study found that when Mexican Mennonites entered the sugar beet labour market and split it, most Aboriginal workers stopped migrating to the beet fields. Yet, evidence suggests little or no ethnic or class antagonisms developed between the two groups. Thus, contrary to the literature on split labour market theory that argues it is generally the case that a class conflict initially develops between the two groups in a split market, the findings of this study indicate that no conflict developed between Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonite workers. This raises an interesting question: “why didn’t a conflict develop between Aboriginal and Mexican Mennonites in the industry?” Although this question requires further research to answer, the only indirect evidence found in this study that suggests a possible reason for the lack of conflict is that growers generally separated the two groups so that they didn’t work together. Interestingly, however, evidence presented in this study suggests that growers are beginning to negatively stereotype Mexican Mennonites. In light of what the literature on the split labour market theory argues, it seems plausible that this stems from a class conflict as opposed to ethnic or race antagonisms. However, more research is needed on this development before it can be adequately understood.

The literature review also provided a number of insights on how transitions of labour forces in agricultural industries are accomplished. For instance, it was noted that the creation of farm labour associations that held control over job referrals enabled them to shutout domestic workers from securing job positions in an agricultural industry. As such, the associations were able to ensure that the industries hired the workers it represented or promoted for the job positions. In addition, the associations compiled statistics on domestic workers that essentially discredited the workers as unreliable

labour. Although this study never found that farm labour associations were created in the sugar beet industry that held control over job referrals, it did find that the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) played a significant role in securing jobs for Mexican Mennonites in the sugar beet industry. In doing so, the MCC effectively reduced the chances that Aboriginal workers would get the jobs. Moreover, this study found that officials of the sugar beet industry used a card system to compile information on Aboriginal workers that suggests it was used to discredit them as unreliable labour. Thus, the findings in this study coincide with the literature that argues organizations that handle job referrals can be instrumental in effecting labour force transitions. As well, evidence in this study agrees with the literature that argues the use of statistical information gathered by industries or organizations to discredit a group of workers can be an effective means of assisting a transition of the labour force in an agricultural industry.

It was also pointed out in the literature that employers use a number of tactics to discourage domestic workers from seeking work in an agricultural industry so that a transition to foreign-born workers can be accomplished. For instance, it was noted that employers would tell domestic workers such things as: no work is available, no housing is available, the work is difficult or the work requires long hours. This study found that growers used similar tactics to discourage Aboriginal workers from continuing to seek jobs in the sugar beet fields. However, this study found that what discouraged Aboriginal workers the most from migrating to the industry to seek employment was that growers stopped providing free housing to them for the duration of their stint of work in the beet fields. As such, the findings in this study concur with the literature that points out

employers use various tactics to discourage one group for seeking jobs in an agricultural industry so that another group can be installed in the labouring positions.

A final aspect that the literature review pointed out was that transitions in agricultural labour forces proceed in stages. Although the findings in this study did not coincide exactly with the stages described in the literature, it was found that the transition from Aboriginal to Mexican Mennonite labour in the sugar beet industry did proceed in stages. The first stage of the transition occurred when growers hired Mexican Mennonites instead of Aboriginal workers to weed and hoe sugar beets, the second stage when Mexican Mennonites were hired for skilled jobs in the industry, and the last stage when Mexican Mennonites were given supervisory positions.

As this section indicates, the literature review for this study provided many insights on why and how transitions of labour forces occur in agricultural industries. Most significantly, the findings of this study reinforced the argument in the literature that the transitions occur largely because the price of labour (i.e. wages, cost of recruitment, transportation, accommodations, the costs of labour unrest) of one group is lower than the other. In addition, the findings of this study reinforced the arguments in the literature that the transitions in labour forces are accomplished through a number of tactics that industries or organizations and employers invoke that are aimed at discrediting or discouraging one group so that another group will be hired instead. The findings of this study also reinforced the argument in the literature that transitions of labour forces occur in stages. Lastly, there is fertile ground for further research where the findings of this study do not coincide with the literature. The discordant findings include the benefits that

flexible citizenship status provide to agricultural workers and their employers and the reasons for the apparent racialization of Mexican Mennonite workers by growers.

Implications

The findings in this study indicate that more research is needed in some areas. Clearly, more research is needed to fully understand the roots of the developing racialization of Mexican Mennonites in the sugar beet industry. For instance, is it being generated by the need of growers to exploit the labour power of the workers, or is it because growers are beginning to feel threatened by the aspirations and advances of Mexican Mennonites in the sugar beet industry, or because of a combination of both? Or, is it because of an increased xenophobic fear of the 'other' resulting from the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent 'war on terror'? Also, more research is needed on whether the traditional beliefs and values of "Old Colony" Mennonite workers and their families are breaking down after their recent migration to southern Alberta or whether some of them are surviving within capitalist development. This area of research is particularly interesting since it is apparent that Mennonite heads of families are beginning to insist their children become more educated in order to acquire the skills needed to compete in a more technological job market. Moreover, another area worthy of research would concern the future of Mennonite migration to southern Alberta. The evidence in this study suggests that Mexican Mennonites and Mennonites from colonies in various countries in Central America will continue to migrate to southern Alberta to seek out agricultural employment. An implication of this is that throughout the near future,

southern Alberta growers will have a sufficient pool of labour to draw on in times of need and there will be no need for another major transition in the ethnic composition of the labour force. And since many Mennonite workers and their families will also settle in the area, the need for individuals to take over the land and produce sugar beets would seem to be secure. What is unclear is how the trend of Mexican Mennonites' increasing importance in the sugar beet industry meshes with the observation of their racialization.

More research is also needed on the southern Alberta sugar beet industry and its quest to force the state to provide a more equitable sugar policy in Canada that would provide growers with a fair return for their beet crops. In the era of corporate globalization, many farming sectors in advanced industrial countries are under pressure and neo-liberal institutions like the World Trade Organization have called for an end of subsidies to these sectors. The sugar beet industry in southern Alberta has staked its future to the neo-liberal agenda and is lobbying for the end of all subsidies for international sugar. Given the importance of agricultural subsidies to the well being of many farming populations, this might yet prove to be a strategic error.

Lastly, evidence found in this study suggests that domestic labour forces, such as Aboriginal workers, will be further squeezed out of the agricultural labour market in the future as growers search for cheaper labour forces in order to increase their profit margins. As such, further studies along the lines of this one could help the state devise policies to address how it is best to prepare domestic workers, such as Aboriginal workers, for future employment.

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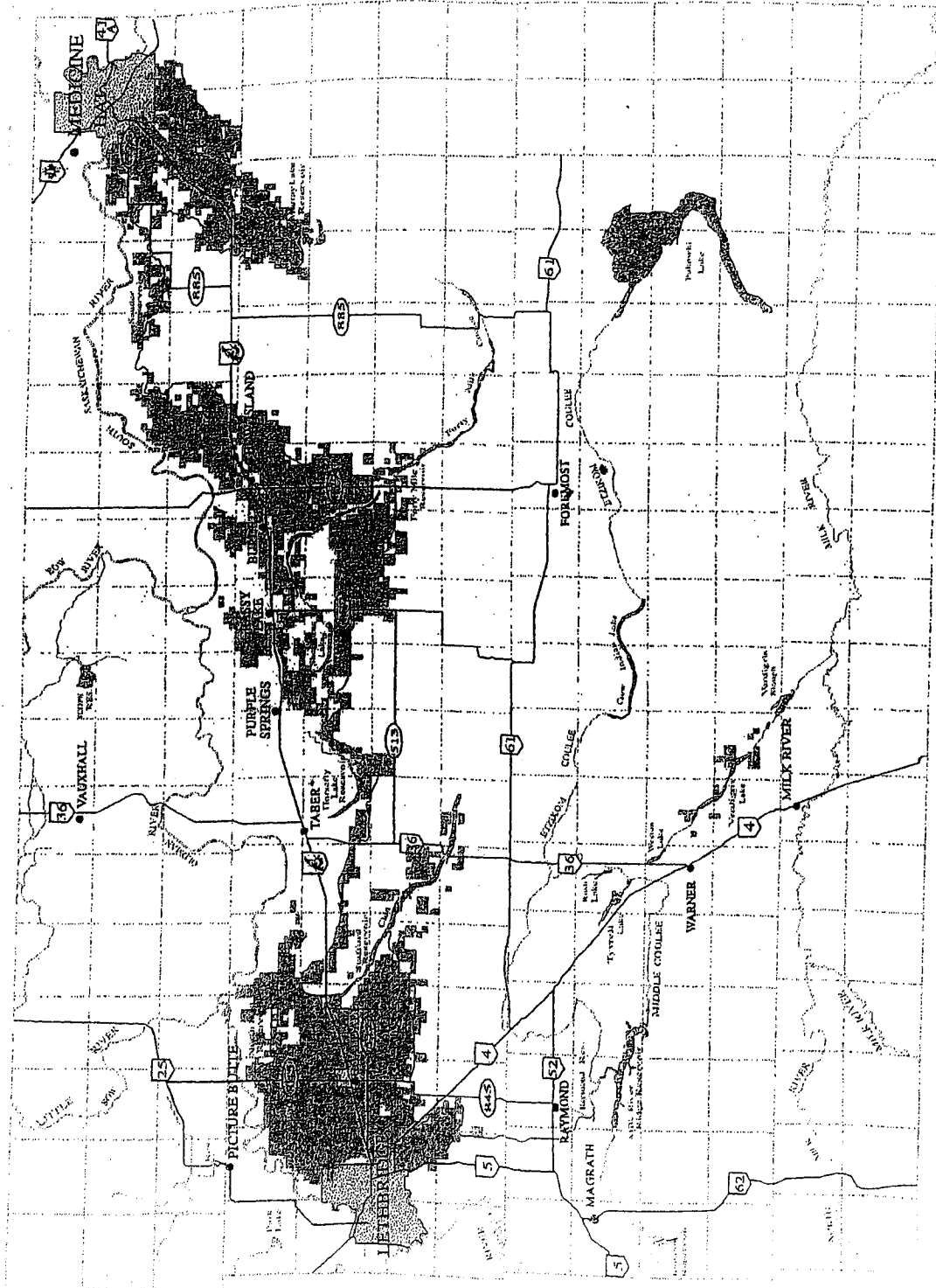
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Appendix A: Map of Sugar Beet Country

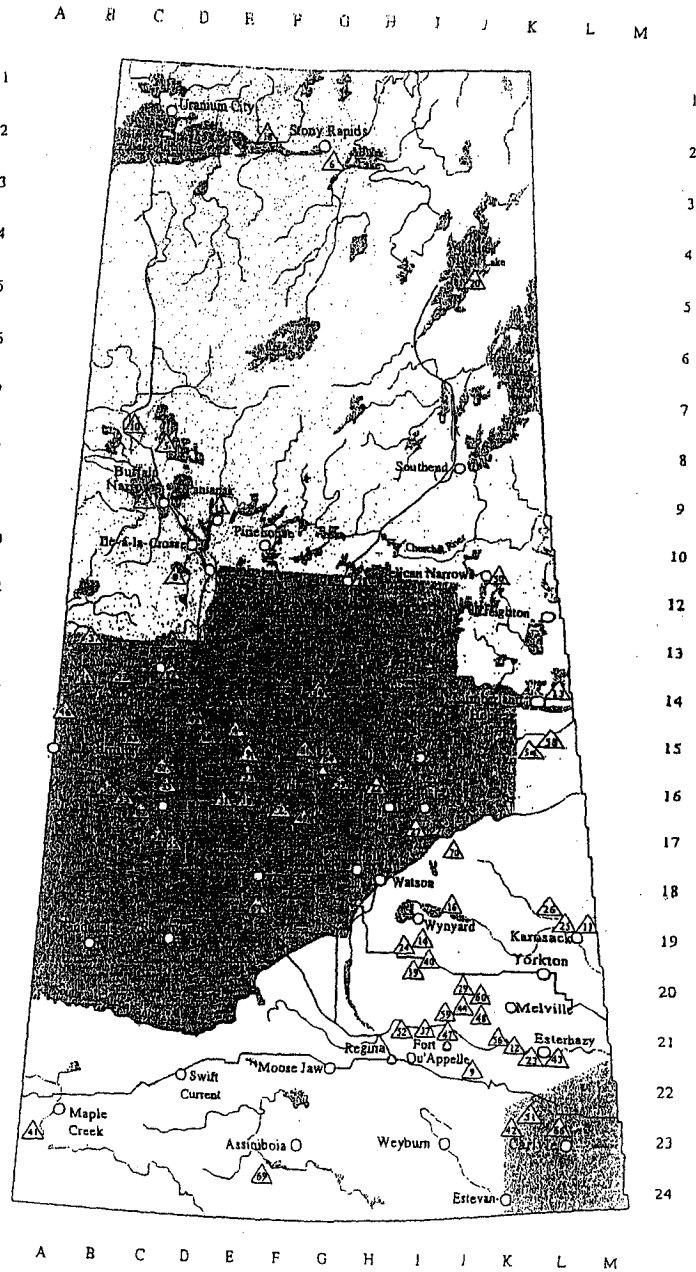


Source : J. Gipin. 2000. *Quenching the Prairie Thirst*, p. 267.

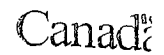
Appendix B: Map of First Nations Reserves in Saskatchewan

- 1) Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation (6) * E-15
- 2) Beards and Okemasis First Nation (6) * F-16
- 3) Big Island Lake Cree Nation (6) * B-13
- 4) Big River First Nation (6) * E-15
- 5) Birch Narrows First Nation (10) * C-8
- 6) Black Lake First Nation (8) * G-2
- 7) Buffalo River Dene Nation (10) * C-9
- 8) Canoe Lake Cree First Nation (10) * C-12
- 9) Carry the Kettle First Nation (4) * J-22
- 10) Clearwater River Dene Nation (8) * B-8
- 11) Cole First Nation (4) * L-19
- 12) Cowessess First Nation (4) * K-21
- 13) Cumberland House Cree Nation (5) * L-14
- 14) Day Star First Nation (4) * I-18
- 15) English River First Nation (10) * D-9
- 16) Fishing Lake First Nation (4) * J-18
- 17) Flying Dust First Nation (6) * C-14
- 18) Fond du Lac Denesuline First Nation (6) * E-2
- 19) Gordon First Nation (4) * L-20
- 20) Hatchet Lake First Nation (10) * J-5
- 21) Island Lake First Nation (6) * B-14
- 22) James Smith Cree Nation (6) * H-16
- 23) Kahkewistahaw First Nation (4) * L-21
- 24) Kawacoose First Nation (4) * I-19
- 25) Keesekoose First Nation (4) * L-19
- 26) Kistin Saulteaux Nation (4) * I-17
- 27) Lac La Ronge Indian Band (6) * H-10
- 28) Little Black Bear First Nation (4) * J-20
- 29) Little Pine First Nation (6) * B-16
- 30) Lucky Man Cree Nation (6) * E-16
- 31) Makwa Sahgahchan First Nation (6) * C-14
- 32) Mistawasis First Nation (6) * E-18
- 33) Montreal Lake Cree Nation (6) * G-14
- 34) Moosomin First Nation (6) * C-16
- 35) Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, Lean Man First Nation (6) * C-17
- 36) Muscowpetung First Nation (4) * I-21
- 37) Muskeg Lake Cree Nation (6) * E-18
- 38) Muskoday First Nation (6) * G-16
- 39) Muskowekwan First Nation (4) * I-19
- 40) Nekaneet First Nation (4) * B-23
- 41) Ocean Man First Nation (4) * K-23
- 42) Ochapowace First Nation (4) * L-21
- 43) Okanese First Nation (4) * J-20
- 44) One Arrow First Nation (6) * F-17
- 45) Onion Lake First Nation (6) * A-15
- 46) Pasqua First Nation (4) * J-21
- 47) Peepeskis First Nation (4) * J-21
- 48) Pelican Lake First Nation (6) * D-15
- 49) Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation (6) * J-10
- 50) Pheasant Rump Nakota First Nation (4) * K-23
- 51) Plapot Cree Nation (4) * I-21
- 52) Poundmaker Cree Nation (6) * C-16
- 53) Red Earth First Nation (5) * K-15
- 54) Red Pheasant First Nation (6) * D-17
- 55) Sakimay First Nation (4) * K-21
- 56) Saulteaux First Nation (6) * C-16
- 57) Shoal Lake Cree Nation (5) * K-15
- 58) Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation (non) J-21
- 59) Star Blanket Cree Nation (4) * J-20
- 60) Sturgeon Lake First Nation (6) * G-15
- 61) Sweetgrass First Nation (6) * C-17
- 62) Key First Nation (4) * L-18
- 63) Thunderchild First Nation (6) * C-15
- 64) Wahpeton Dakota Nation (non) * G-15
- 65) Waterhen Lake First Nation (6) * D-13
- 66) White Bear First Nation (4) * L-23
- 67) Whitecap Dakota First Nation (non) F-19
- 68) Witchehan Lake First Nation (6) * D-15
- 69) Wood Mountain First Nation (non) F-24
- 70) Yellow Quill First Nation (4) * J-17

http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/sk/nmap_e.html



Indian and Northern Affairs Canada / Affaires indiennes et du Nord Canada
Saskatchewan Region / Région de la Saskatchewan



Appendix D: Consent Forms

Document 4: Consent Form Re: Sugar Beet Workers, Farmers, and Alberta Sugar Beet Growers' Marketing Board Officials

Research Project Title: Why Move Aboriginal Workers In and Then Out? The Transition of Migrant Labour from Aboriginal to Mexican Workers in Southern Alberta's Sugar Beet Industry

Researcher: Ron Laliberte (this research is being conducted as part of my Ph. D. requirements)

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

You have been given a verbal explanation of the purpose of the study. The verbal explanation pointed out that I am seeking interviews with individuals from the various groups involved in the sugar beet industry. I am also seeking to observe workers while they perform their work duties. You have been selected to participate in this study either because your name appeared on a document provided by the Sugar Beet Growers' Marketing Board (ASBGMB) or because I heard about you while conducting research on the sugar beet industry. Since I am seeking a wide a variety of views on the shift from Aboriginal workers to Mexican workers in the sugar beet industry, your participation would be greatly appreciated.

The verbal explanation pointed out that before you can be interviewed concerning the labour shift in the sugar beet industry, your consent is required. As well, the verbal explanation noted that necessary precautions would be taken to protect interview data and to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents. In particular, confidentiality will be provided to Mexican workers who may feel vulnerable to repercussions from their employers and/or government officials who sponsor the Canada-Mexico Seasonal Worker Program.

As stated in the verbal explanation of the study, confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed. For instance, long extracts from your interview may be printed in the study and these extracts will appear in the public domain. Thus, there is the possibility that someone could identify you in the study based on what you have said in the interview. If you are concerned about the possibility of being identified through the use of a long quotation from your interview, you have the option to require the researcher to contact you by phone before the study is printed and have the quote read to you. You may then have the quote altered so that you will be assured that you will not be identified in the study. Please check the appropriate choice:

I would like the researcher to call me with the long quotations from my interview so that I may have the option of altering identifying information. Yes ___ No___

Please do not hesitate to call the researcher (Ron Laliberte) at 1-306-966-6211 if you change your mind about your initial decision regarding long quotations from your interview. Your decision will be respected.

Document 5: Alternative Consent Procedures Where Culturally Appropriate

**** NOTE **** This consent form will be translated into Spanish before the commencement of the summer 2004 phase of research. A copy of the translated consent form will be forwarded to the Department of Sociology's Ethics Committee and the Conjoint Ethics Committee.

Research Project Title: Why Move Aboriginal Workers In and Then Out? The Transition of Migrant Labour from Aboriginal to Mexican Workers in Southern Alberta's Sugar Beet Industry

Researcher: Ron Laliberte (this research is being conducted as part of my Ph. D. requirements)

The researcher will determine when to use the consent form and when to use alternative procedures to gain consent from the interview subject. That is, in instances where it is culturally appropriate, the consent form will **not** be used to gain consent for interviews with Aboriginal (First Nations and Metis) and Mexican (indigenous) workers. Instead, the researcher will make an offering to the subject to gain consent for the interview. There are three scenarios where a verbal explanation will be used to explain the research study. These are: First Nations and Metis respondents who formerly migrated to the sugar beet fields; current Aboriginal and Mexican sugar beet workers who will be interviewed in their place of residence; and, current Aboriginal and Mexican sugar beet workers who will be interviewed in the fields where they work. Outlines of the procedures that will be used by the researcher in each of the three scenarios will proceed as follows.

1. A verbal explanation of the research will be provided to each potential respondent.
2. The researcher will then ask for permission to interview the potential respondent by offering of a small amount of tobacco. If the offering is accepted, this is an indication that the respondent is willing to be interviewed. Still, the researcher will ask for verbal permission from the potential respondent to be interviewed. In the case where a respondent does not use tobacco, a small gift consisting of a T-Shirt or a hat will be offered instead.
3. Once consent is provided, respondents will be encouraged to approach the interview process in a relaxed and informal manner and to answer the questions freely.
4. Respondents will be informed that the interview will take about one hour to complete.
5. Respondents will be asked to provide permission to tape-record the responses to the interview questions. In doing so, respondents will be told that tape-recording the

interview is done to ensure the accuracy of the participant's responses to the questions.

6. To ensure confidentiality, respondents will be told that their tape-recorded voice and responses to the questions will never be heard by anyone other than the translator, the research supervisor, and the researcher. They will be given verbal assurances that confidentiality will be upheld as their names will not be used in the study. Furthermore, unless the participant provides written permission to the researcher, information that may reveal the name of the participant will not be released or published. They will also be told that tape-recorded data will be stored in a secure setting. And, they will be told that while in the field, the researcher will carry tape-recorded data at all times to ensure that the tapes will not be lost or damaged by heat. Respondents will also be told that translators hired to help with the study will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. They will also be told that any data stored on my computer will be password protected. Lastly, respondents will be told that taped interviews will be destroyed no later than December 31, 2008 after all relevant material has been transcribed for data analysis.
7. The researcher will then record in a research journal how consent was received from the subject for the interview.

Document 6: Script Used By The Researcher To Inform Participants (Who Do Not Sign A Consent Form) Of Their Rights

**** NOTE ** This script will be translated into Spanish before the commencement of the summer 2004 phase of research. A copy of the translated script will be forwarded to the Department of Sociology's Ethics Committee and the Conjoint Ethics Committee.**

Research Project Title:

Why Move Aboriginal Workers In and Then Out? The Transition of Migrant Labour from Aboriginal to Mexican Workers in Southern Alberta's Sugar Beet Industry

Researcher: Ron Laliberte (this research is being conducted as part of my Ph. D. requirements)

I am reading this to inform you of your rights as a participant in this study. After I go over what I have to say concerning your rights, you will be given a copy as it contains information needed if you want to contact my supervisor or myself. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please listen carefully to what I have to say concerning your rights.

As a participant, you will be asked to answer a series of questions that deal with how and why the transition of the migrant labour force in southern Alberta occurred and what you experienced during that transition. Your answers to the questions will be tape-recorded. Tape-recording the interview is done solely for the purpose of accurately representing your responses to the questions. Your voice and responses to the questions will never be heard by anyone other than my research supervisor and myself. It is understood that as a participant in this study you may feel vulnerable to repercussions from your employers (or from officials who sponsor the Canada-Mexico Seasonal Worker Program). Thus, as a participant you are assured that confidentiality of your comments will be upheld by not using your name in the study. Moreover, unless you provide written permission, any information that reveals your name will not be released or published. And, if a translator is hired to help with the study in areas where there are language differences, this person will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. To ensure that tape-recorded data will be confidential, it will be stored in a secure setting. While in the field, I will ensure confidentiality as well as secure tape-recorded data from heat damage by carrying the tapes with me at all times. Any data stored on my computer will be password protected. Also, the taped interviews will be destroyed no later than December 31, 2008, after all relevant material has been transcribed for data analysis.

I want to point out that although precautions will be taken, participants should be aware that confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed. For instance, long extracts from your interview may be printed in the study and these extracts will appear in the public domain. Thus, there is the possibility that someone could identify you in the study based on what you have said in the interview. If you are concerned about the possibility of being identified through the use of a long quotation from your interview, you have the option to require me to contact you by phone before the study is printed and have the quote read to you. You may then have the quote altered so that you will be assured that you will not be identified in the study.

Please be aware that as a participant, you may not benefit directly from this study other than knowing that you have contributed valuable information to understanding how and why agricultural industries, such as the southern Alberta sugar beet industry, shift their labour force from one ethnic group to another.

Please note also that you have the right to refuse to participate in this interview. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer as well as the right to withdraw from participating in the interview at any time. Throughout the interview process, you are encouraged to ask for clarification on any aspect of the interview process or research. If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, particularly if you are concerned about being identified through the use of long quotes, please contact me (Ron Laliberte) by phone at 1-306-966-6211, or by email at: laliron@duke.usask.ca. Also, you can contact my research supervisor, Dr. Tom Langford by phone at: 1-403-220-5043 or by email at: langford@ucalgary.ca. Finally, if you have any questions or issues concerning this project that are not related to the specifics of the research, you may also contact the Research Services Office at 1-403-220-3782 and ask for Mrs. Patricia Evans.

1. Do you agree to participate in the study? Yes ____ No ____
2. Do you agree to be tape-recorded? Yes ____ No ____

3. Do you want me to contact you by phone before the study is printed to read the quote(s) to you? Yes _____ No _____

4. If you answered "yes" to question 3, where can you be contacted by phone or mail?

Ph: _____

Mail Address: _____