

Short-term Temporary Labour Migration Yields Long-term Results

By Sonia Pellecer, IOM Guatemala

In 2003, IOM kicked off a two-year pilot project that involved 125 Guatemalan workers selected for temporary agricultural work in Canada. Four years later the programme has gained momentum and more than 2,000 men and women will travel this year to Canada.

"It was so difficult for me to become a temporary migrant worker. When I told my husband that there was an IOM programme that would allow me to go to Canada for a few months to work on a farm, he did not want me to go. But after I explained the benefits this would bring to our family, he reluctantly gave me permission to go," recalls Santa Pic de Ticú.

For the past three years Santa has traveled to Canada to harvest strawberries. Her sons, nine-year-old William and five-year-old Pablo, stay at home with their father and grandmother. "Leaving my sons and my husband for four months every year is hard; the months turn into what seems an eternity. But I do it because the sacrifice is worthwhile; it allows me to provide a better life for my family today and a bright future for my children."

The project "Temporary Agricultural Workers to Canada" was created by IOM and the Guatemalan Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Labour and Social Affairs, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding

between IOM and the *Fondation des entreprises en recrutement de main-d'œuvre agricole étrangère* or FERME, a Canadian Foundation based in Quebec that deals with the recruitment of foreign agricultural labour. FERME represents more than 350 employers and coordinates the seasonal hiring of some 4,000 temporary migrant workers, of which 1,600 are Guatemalans who have been hired by 160 Canadian farms.

Although the agreement was carried out with the approval of the Department of Human Resources and Social Development of Canada, it is not a bilateral agreement but one that works directly between the employers represented by FERME and the workers.



▼ Guatemalan women harvesting strawberries in Quebec, Canada (Photo: © IOM, 2006)



Günther Müssig, IOM Chief of Mission in Guatemala, says the project has become a successful model for temporary labour migration and that it is the only solution offered to avoid irregular migration. "The past four years have proven that it is possible to carry out a safe, dignified and orderly flow of migrant workers, thereby contributing to better management of migration flows. The project provides benefits all around – to the countries of origin and destination and to the migrants and their families."

IOM provides technical assistance to the Guatemalan government, participates in the selection of workers, advises those selected on travel documents and other

requirements for travel to Canada, and arranges their flights.

The agreement stipulates that all migrants must return to their country of origin at the end of their contracts, which range between four and six months, and provide coverage under Canadian labour laws.

Carlos Enrique López also has participated in the past three seasons. "Going to work in Canada has changed many things in my life. Now my children have corn flakes and milk before they go to school in the morning. We can afford to eat meat every day, while before we did not have money for bread, let alone corn flakes."

His Canadian earnings have allowed Mr López to send his six children to school, to build a home for his family, and to purchase land where he plans to grow potatoes, cauliflower and avocados.

"It's very difficult to be without my family, but I have to do it because it is the only way to forge ahead," López adds. "I focus on the benefits and this gives me the energy I need. And I tell my wife and children, 'don't be sad because I'll be gone for a while, this is a great opportunity for our family to prosper'."

The wages received by temporary migrant workers are higher than the minimum salary in Canada. Additional

▼ Carlos Enrique López says this project is a blessing for the families of small farmers (Photo: © IOM, 2007)

▼ Santa Pic de Ticú at home in Guatemala. (Photo: © IOM, 2006)

▼ Carlos Humberto García says he will continue to participate in the programme to provide a better life for his family (Photo: © IOM, 2007)



benefits for the migrants include the new skills they learn, which range from new planting and harvesting techniques to classifying and packing the produce, and which are transferred to Guatemala when they return.

A recent household survey on expenditures confirmed that the earnings these temporary migrant workers are bringing back to their places of origin are having a positive impact on their quality of life.

How earnings are spent	Percentage
Total	100.0
Construction of Home	45.3
Debt Repayment	10.8
Basic Needs (food, beverages, etc.)	9.8
Home Improvement	7.8
Clothing and Shoes	5.5
Furniture and other Equipment	4.5
Education	3.8
Land Purchase	3.4
Savings	3.1
Health Care	3.1
Purchase of Agricultural Tools	0.1
Other	2.8

“Thanks to this job we have no debts,” says Santa. “The first year we managed to pay back the loan for the land we had bought, and installed proper floors in my home. With the earnings from my second season in Canada we added a second floor to the house, and the third year we put money into a savings account so we can buy more land.”

Carlos Humberto García also says it was difficult to be away from his wife and children. “But when I received my first salary I felt energized; I had never earned that much money in a week.”

Like the vast majority of the project’s participants, Mr García has managed to build a home for his family. “I thank God because I have made new friends and I have a good boss in Canada who even speaks a little Spanish, so I have no problem following her instructions.”

And Santa adds a woman’s perspective, “This project is a great opportunity for women to contribute to the future of their families. Although it requires immense sacrifices, seeing your children and family prosper is the best reward.” **M**

Maple Leaf Foods of Canada to Hire Colombians for their Manitoba Plant

IOM Colombia is working with Maple Leaf Foods of Canada to recruit workers for its pork processing plant in Manitoba, Canada.

Maple Leaf Foods is a leading global food processing company that employs more than 24,000 persons at its operations in Canada, the United States, Europe and Asia.

Under the new labour migration scheme, those selected will travel to Canada in late summer and early autumn.

IOM worked with the employer, the Embassy of Canada, Colombia’s *Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje* (National Training Service), and three local mayors. And in just three weeks, 172 workers were selected to participate in the programme.

IOM Colombia also administered tests to all applicants, carried out medical examinations and has set up a 120-hour English course that the selected candidates must take before traveling to Canada. IOM will also obtain visas and provide logistical support for the workers’ trip to Manitoba.

Maple Leaf Foods also recruits workers from El Salvador, Ukraine, Germany and China, amongst others, and has contacted IOM missions in Mauritius, Armenia and Georgia.



▲ One of the applicants being interviewed by a Maple Leaf representative (Photo: © IOM Colombia, 2007)



▲ Applicants getting induction/training on labour conditions by an IOM officer (Photo: © IOM Colombia, 2007)



▲ Applicants performing the meat cut proof (Photo: © IOM Colombia, 2007)



▲ Applicants in meat cutting test (Photo: © IOM Colombia, 2007)

The migrant workers will receive support from Maple Leaf Foods for family reunification and the possibility of obtaining permanent residence after two years of employment with the company.

Maple Leaf Foods is considering IOM as its main partner on a worldwide level for similar labour migration schemes. **M**