

Institution

University of the Fraser Valley

Principal Researcher

Kelly Hodgins
Gerry Fehr

Research Field

Agriculture and Land Use

Student Involvement

1 student researcher

Partners & Collaborators

Eastern Fraser Valley Farmers

Funding Sources

Student Led Research Grant
Student Research Day Award
SSHRC Graduate Scholarship

Project Location

Chilliwack,
Eastern Fraser Valley

Do Seasonal Workers Enhance Agriculture?

The Impacts of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) on Chilliwack Agriculture

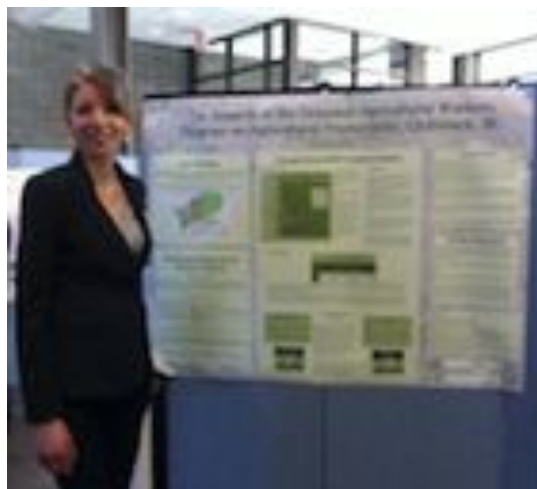
This research investigates the how low cost labour has influenced agricultural diversification and productivity in the eastern Fraser Valley.

It shows that the results are increased competitiveness, crop diversification, productivity and area under production.

The student-led research investigates how the provision of low cost labour has influenced agricultural diversification and productivity in the eastern end of the Fraser Valley. Other research on the SAWP has looked at how the workers have been treated and advocated for improved working conditions. This research is important because it is the first research to determine how the ten year old SAWP has affected agricultural production. It is important for government and farmers to know whether the program is providing a positive impact and enabling farmers to be competitive in the global marketplace.

Prior to the implementation of this program farmers in the Fraser Valley struggled to find reliable, seasonally flexible, low cost labour. This resulted in a growing stagnation of the region's agriculture sector and an inability to take advantage of new export opportunities. Under the SWAP, at present:

- a. SAWP workers comprise two-thirds of all seasonal horticultural labour, particularly for labour intensive berry production and greenhouse crops.
- b. There has been a change in the face of seasonal agricultural labour from a strong reliance on family members, primarily from South Asia to an increasing number of migrant workers from Mexico.
- c. Worker remittances have improved health and education at home in Mexico.



PACE Research Report

- d. Farmers have diversified production and increased specialization of production methods which have provided positive spin-offs for related agricultural businesses. There has been an increase in field vegetables, blueberries and greenhouse crops. These increases aren't solely due to the SAWP, but the program has made the transition smoother and more quickly than if the labour shortage had continued.
- e. Wages comprise 85% of berry farmer production costs and the program enables FV farmers to compete with US farmers who pay a lower minimum wage.
- f. SAWP workers tend to work on the same farm for extended periods and in successive years. This has resulted in lower training wages and increased efficiencies as local workers tend to be more transient and less reliable.
- g. Increased competitiveness, crop diversification and productivity have resulted in an increase in the number of weeks of paid agricultural work. In other words, more agricultural jobs have been created.
- h. The total area under production has increased for field vegetables by 191%, berries by 48% and greenhouse crops by 24.4% compared to the trend of stagnation prior to the implementation of the program.

This research can be applied to help the federal, provincial, and regional governments to understand:

- a. How to maximize the dwindling stock of land in the ALR;
- b. How to maximize export opportunities;
- c. How to diversify productivity;
- d. How agricultural is evolving in the Fraser Valley so that they can forecast and provide appropriate supports and infrastructure.

The student researcher indicated that, in addition to the importance of the research itself, the opportunity to engage in research as an undergraduate benefited her in the following ways:

- The opportunity to do research allowed me to experience doing independent research while still an undergrad. I learned the ins and outs of writing proposals, grant applications, ethics requests, analyzing data, presenting, engaging in debate, and designing and carrying out interviews. It also taught me the complexities of focusing a research topic and choosing the most crucial and pertinent questions to ask as well as evidence to present. All of this prepared me for what I will face in my master's and that is going to be incredibly valuable. Having had an introduction to the research process will allow me to hit the ground running when I begin my master's.
- I also won grants and awards which helped me not only financially, but also academically. They lengthened the list of awards of my Academic CV which will help me win other awards and makes my CV more noticeable to any potential employer or recruiter.
- I was able to travel to conferences and networked with people at these conferences. The conversations there brought up new questions and allowed me to deepen my understanding of my topic and recognize flaws or shortcomings in my research, which I could then amend.
- Through my interviews, I also connected with local farmers and industry representatives. These connections will be really important in my future endeavors and work in BC's food systems. These were not just one-off interactions for the sake of that research. The networking I did will continue to affect me as I continue to study and work in this field.
- Presenting is a skill I will value all my life, it is already paying off, giving me confidence in both my jobs this summer. I am teaching, at the front of my own classroom, and also running a Farmer's Market booth. Presenting made me self-assured in talking to the public and standing proudly behind my work.
- I also made some real friends. I got to know other student researchers and important figures in the UFV faculty, and make strong friendships. The whole experience made me more at home at UFV and gave me a real sense of purpose in my final year.