



The JCLO Monthly

JAMAICA

YOUR PARTNER FOR RELIABLE WORKERS

May 2025 Edition

jaclo.org



Photo: Jamaican farmworker Livian takes a moment during apple picking on an orchard.

What's New at the JCLO

We're happy to share our latest updates, fresh stories, and things to look out for.



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As the world changes, so must the way we serve and support our people. That's why we are raising the bar. We are strengthening how we prepare, how we partner, and how we support our workers abroad. At the heart of it all is a commitment to dignity, discipline and delivery.

Colette Roberts Ridsen, CD
Permanent Secretary,
Jamaica Overseas Employment Programmes



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Exciting things are happening at the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLO). We are entering a new chapter of growth and actively engaging employers, workers, and stakeholders across the United States to ensure we remain responsive to your needs. Our intentional presence in-country allows us to listen closely, respond swiftly, and improve services and systems based on your feedback and priorities.

We've made staying in touch even easier. This printed update is part of our commitment to keeping you informed- featuring reforms like psychometric testing, stories from the field, and key developments across our overseas employment programme. Thank you for your partnership as we continue building a stronger, more accountable JCLO.

Together, we are shaping a programme that reflects Jamaica's best values: excellence, reliability and respect for every individual who takes this journey. Whether you're a long-standing employer, a first-time recruit, or a policy partner, your insight continues to help us refine what we do and how we do it. This is just the beginning.

The transformation under way is not only raising standards for our workers it is reinforcing Jamaica's reputation as a trusted partner to American agriculture. By delivering a workforce that is well-prepared, emotionally resilient and professionally supported, we are helping U.S. farms thrive while opening life-changing opportunities for Jamaican families. It is a model of international cooperation built on mutual benefit, shared responsibility and long-term impact

JAMAICA

#1 Source of English-speaking H2-A Workers



Kingston, Jamaica

Photo: Hon. Pearnell Charles Jr. MP addressing at post Cabinet briefing at Jamaica House, in Kingston.

Jamaica Now Requires Psychometric Testing for H-2A Candidates

Jamaica has strengthened its already thorough screening process for farm workers by introducing psychometric testing. In addition to literacy, numeracy, and physical readiness, candidates are now evaluated on emotional intelligence, attitude, discipline, and resilience; qualities that are essential for maintaining performance and reliability in fast-paced, high-pressure work environments.

This new requirement complements existing assessments in literacy, numeracy, and physical readiness. Candidates are now also evaluated for emotional intelligence, discipline, teamwork, stress management, and adaptability—qualities essential to thriving in fast-paced agricultural environments where reliability under pressure is non-negotiable.

"We are not sending bodies. We are sending professionals," said a senior official at the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLC). "This is about dignity, discipline, and delivery."

The introduction of psychometric testing is part of a broader reform agenda led by the Ministry of Labour and the JCLC. The aim is to ensure Jamaica remains the most trusted and consistent labour source for U.S. agricultural employers.

The reform package includes enhanced pre-departure training covering workplace etiquette, cultural expectations, mental preparation, and team communication. It also features upgraded screening mechanisms, matching specific job demands with personality traits, stress profiles, and behavioural aptitude. Structured in-field support ensures continuous monitoring and adjustment to maintain alignment between worker performance and employer needs.

Global demand for reliable farm labour is rising, but so are expectations. Employers today want more than strength; they want workers who are adaptable, emotionally resilient, and capable of integrating seamlessly into multi-cultural teams.

Jamaica's new testing protocol positions its workforce as disciplined, pre-screened, and integration-ready. It also protects the reputation of the programme by reducing incidents of poor conduct, absenteeism, or mismatched placements.

A New Era for Jamaican Workers

Beyond employer confidence, this move empowers Jamaican

workers. By holding applicants to a higher standard, the programme affirms that they are not disposable labour, but respected professionals representing the country abroad.

"It's a new era," one JCLC assessor noted. "The farm-ready worker of today is not just physically capable, but mentally prepared. They know their role, their rights, and their responsibility."

With these reforms in place, Jamaica is not just participating in the H-2A programme. It is setting the pace, ensuring that every worker deployed is a reflection of the country's values and the government's commitment to excellence. As other countries grapple with worker shortages and performance gaps, Jamaica has made its position clear: It will lead with quality, character, and results.



Photo: Minister Charles shares a light moment during a tour of farmland in Clarendon, Jamaica.

Milton, New York US

Photo: Dan, Alisha, Marcus and Harold Albinder in 2022.



How Jamaican workers became the backbone of a Multi-State Orchard

“Without this relationship, it would be very difficult to do what we do.”

That’s how Alisha Albinder, fourth-generation owner of Hudson River Fruit Distributors, describes her family’s partnership with Jamaica’s farmwork programme.

What sets the Jamaican programme apart? According to Albinder, it’s the reliability, professionalism, and legacy-minded workers, many of whom return season after season and even introduce their sons and relatives to the opportunity. But above all, it’s the unmatched support of the Jamaican Liaison Service.

“One of the most valuable aspects of the programme is the support provided by the Jamaican Central Labour Organisation,” Albinder notes. “They’re responsive, proactive, and deeply involved in the well-being of the workers.”

Whether it’s resolving logistical issues, handling documentation like U.S. Social Security, or preventing problems before they escalate, the JCLO’s engagement model has built trust with employers like the Hudson River Fruit Distributors, who made Jamaica the first call

for new growers exploring the H-2A programme.

Some Jamaican workers have even gained DEC pesticide certification, through a rigorous exam that most U.S. locals find challenging, highlighting just how skilled and dedicated these individuals are.

Many of these workers have developed lifelong friendships with their employers, sharing meals, holidays, and family milestones. The cultural exchange enriches both sides, with Jamaican workers bringing warmth, discipline, and resilience, values that now define the orchard’s work culture.

The Albinders are not alone. Across the U.S. northeast, growers cite Jamaica’s farmworkers as setting the gold standard for seasonal labour. Their presence has made orchards more stable, operations more efficient, and workforce planning more predictable.

Yet this success is no accident. It is the product of careful policy stewardship by the Jamaican Government and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, which have prioritised recruitment standards, worker welfare, and employer engagement. Psychometric testing, pre-departure training, and close liaison monitoring have become hallmarks of Jamaica’s modern approach to overseas employment.



Photo: A Jamaican farmworker harvests apples on a farm in upstate New York.



Spotlight Series

THE HEART BEHIND THE HARVEST

Scan here to nominate
a worker for the next
spotlight feature



The heart behind the harvest: The Willis Newman story

Willis Newman grew up in rural Jamaica, learning to farm on his grandfather's sugarcane land. It was there, among rows of cane under the Caribbean sun, that he first understood the rhythm of the land. Even as a boy, something about working the soil felt right, calm, purposeful. That same feeling followed him thousands of miles north to Terrace Mountain Orchard in Schoharie County, New York.

Today, at 65 years old, Willis is one of thousands of Jamaicans who travel through the Government of Jamaica, under the H-2A agricultural programme in the United States. Willis is more than a seasonal worker. He is part of the soul of this orchard, where he has worked for 18 years, after beginning his journey in the programme in 1987.

During the week, Willis tends to the apples with deliberate care. His hands know the trees, the weather, the weight of the fruit. On weekends, he becomes the face of the farm, driving the tractor for wagon rides, sharing the orchard's story with families and school groups, answering every question with quiet pride. For many visitors, he is the only Jamaican they have ever met, yet his warmth and humility leave a lasting impression.

Off the field, Willis remains equally committed. In the small village nearby, he shops for essentials to send home to Jamaica. He emphasises how beneficial the farm work programme has been for him financially and personally. "There's more opportunity here," he explains. "You make much more money farming here than in Jamaica. I built my house and sent my children to school from what I earned here. But it's the people that make it feel like home." Farming wasn't always Willis's primary career path, he was originally a tailor by trade. Reflecting on his shift to agriculture, Willis acknowledges the difficulties: "It is hard, but if you use your head good, you can get a lot out of it. I built my house and sent my children to school out of it." His words reflect the careful wisdom of

someone who has navigated life's challenges with practical insight.

To young Jamaican farm workers eager to join the H-2A programme, Willis offers straightforward advice: "It is just a mindset. You've got to know what you want. It's not an office job, so you have to work hard. Farming takes work, and you have to make up your mind to work, it's a good job."

Willis' 38-year journey on the programme reflects something deeper than seasonal migration. He is a bridge between two worlds, between the plains of Clarendon and the valleys of upstate New York. He carries with him not only the skill of Jamaican agriculture but also the values of resilience, loyalty, and leadership.

He has returned to the same farm year after year, earning the respect of his peers and neighbours alike. Children in the orchard call him "Mr. Willis." Local shopkeepers greet him by name. And each year, he returns home not only with savings, but with stories of harvests, of laughter, of the dignity that comes with honest work.

Willis also highlighted the strong relationship he has with the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JACLO), points of contact-the liaison officers. He deeply appreciates the officers, who provide critical support and service. "I never really have a bad experience," he says about these officers. "I get along with them; they come and see us. They are important, they do their job. I think they help the programme. If the Government should stop it, I don't know what we would do."

In an era where migrant labour is often reduced to numbers and contracts, Willis Newman is a reminder of the human spirit behind the harvest. He is living proof that the Jamaican farmwork programme is not just about filling labour gaps. It is about legacy, trust, and men like Willis, who till foreign soil with Jamaican roots and leave behind something far greater than fruit.

We want to hear from you!

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