



# The JALO Monthly

# JAMAICA

YOUR PARTNER FOR RELIABLE WORKERS

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[jaclo.org](http://jaclo.org)



Photo: Errol Mitchell, Jamaican Overseas employment participant

# Partnership, Productivity, and Results

At the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JALO), we believe that real progress happens where **partnership, productivity, and results** meet. Every milestone we achieve begins with collaboration—between our workers, employers, liaison officers, and the wider diaspora network that supports this programme. Across farms and states, these relationships continue to shape the quality of Jamaica’s overseas employment brand. When workers show up prepared, employers respond with trust. When liaison officers strengthen support systems, productivity rises. And when all partners stay connected, the results are evident—not just in numbers, but in lives improved and communities empowered.

Thank you for your continued commitment and collaboration. Together, we are not only maintaining a legacy—we are shaping a future defined by **Partnership, Productivity, and Results**.



**Colette Roberts Ridsen, CD**  
Permanent Secretary,  
Jamaica Oversea Employment  
Programmes

### Did you know?

In 2001, the **West Indies Central Labour Organisation (WICLO)** officially became the **Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JALO)**—marking a new chapter in the nation’s leadership of overseas employment programmes. The change reflected Jamaica’s growing independence and direct management of its own farmwork and hospitality initiatives, strengthening the country’s identity as a trusted source of skilled, reliable labour across North America.



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# When the Fields Go Quiet, Jamaica Gets to Work

Between December and March, when farmworkers return home and the fields fall silent, JCLO shifts into strategy mode. What looks like downtime has become a period of outreach, reform, and renewal.

When the last truck of apples rolls out and the orchards fall silent, Jamaica's liaison officers begin a new season. Between December and March, when many farmworkers return home, the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLO) shifts focus. What looks like downtime in the fields is now a period of outreach, review, reform, and renewal.

From growers' conventions in the National Council of



**Photo:** Contributed: Migrant farmers from Jamaica working on a vineyard at Tregunno Family Farms in the Niagara region of Southern Ontario Aaron Vincent Ellan for the New York Times

Agricultural Employers (NCAE) to policy briefings in Washington, JCLO officers are on the move. They walk through exhibition halls, meet long-time employers, and introduce Jamaica's evolving story to new ones. Each conversation strengthens a living network that has sustained thousands of livelihoods for generations. Permanent Secretary **Colette Roberts Ridsen** says this deliberate outreach reflects a new tempo.

**"The off-season gives us space to look outward, to strengthen the relationships that keep the programme resilient. It also gives us an opportunity to engage stakeholders and speak about the benefits of hiring Jamaican"** she explains.

New promotional videos, redesigned materials, and a modernised website are part of the drive to keep Jamaica's labour story current, a story rooted in trust and reliability, yet constantly being rewritten for a new generation of employers and workers.

There is strategy in geography as well. The Government has been targeting East Coast states, regions close enough for shorter travel and lower costs. For Roberts Ridsen, "proximity is more than logistics; it is partnership rooted in the need for success for employers and our workers. Our aim ultimately is

to build on the lessons from the previous year and increase the number of seasonal employment opportunities for Jamaicans".

That message is resonating. In the face of rising cost and labor uncertainty, employers along the Eastern Seaboard are beginning to view, with much optimism, the prospects of hiring more Jamaicans. "Farm employers tell us that when a Jamaican joins their crew, they don't just get labour, they get a dedicated workforce eager to perform and to improve the standard of living of their families back home" Roberts Ridsen adds.

Those changes are real. Climate shifts, labour shortages, and stricter compliance rules have made U.S. agriculture more complex than ever. Yet Jamaica's model, a blend of ethical recruitment, continuous oversight, and reliability, continues to offer stability amid uncertainty.

At a recent agricultural convention in Florida, a liaison officer recalled a farmer's request that spoke volumes.

**"Every time a grower says, 'Send more Jamaicans,' it is not just a compliment," he said. "It reminds me that I have to get to work. It is a responsibility."**

That quiet sense of duty defines the JCLO's rhythm. When the fields fall silent, the organisation listens more closely to workers, to employers, and to the shifting winds of opportunity.

The harvest may pause, but Jamaica's momentum continues.

## No Fees, No Debt: How Jamaica Rewrote the Farm Work Rules



**Photo:** Adam Arboine of Jamaica is a seasonal foreign worker

In a world where migrant workers often begin their journeys in debt, Jamaica stands apart. The Government's role in vetting and maintaining a database of suitable workers, is rooted in ensuring that there is ethical recruitment of Jamaicans for the H-2 A visa programme.

On a humid morning inside the Ministry of Labour's modest downtown office, rows of men in pressed shirts and worn caps wait for their names to be called. Some have worked the orchards of New York and Michigan for decades. Others are leaving home for the first time. What unites them is a promise few migrant labourers around the world can count on: they will not pay a cent to secure their jobs.

"A unique aspect of partnering with the Government of Jamaica is its liaison service, which no other country offers," a senior official explained. "This service provides a valuable benefit, ensuring the welfare of workers. Additionally, the Government does not charge for our services, and workers are not required to pay any fees to participate in the programme."

That quiet distinction has become one of Jamaica's strongest moral exports. While recruiters elsewhere often charge thousands in placement and processing fees, debts that can take workers years to repay, Jamaica's model turns the logic of labour migration inside out. The state, not private agents, facilitates recruitment, transportation, and welfare oversight through the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation.

Labor economists and the IOM call it ethical recruitment. The policy also highlights Jamaica as a rare kind of trust. American growers say the island's system ensures reliability; workers say

it ensures fairness. Liaison officers, stationed in major farming states, visit job sites checking on the welfare of workers. A presence many employers quietly welcome. "If something goes wrong, a worker gets sick, they have no family support here...we can call the liaison officer someone answers, someone is there to guide and offer support to workers" said a Vermont orchard manager who has hired Jamaican crews for twenty-five years. "That's not normal in this business."

The approach isn't cheap for the government, which covers administrative costs most nations shift to contractors or brokers. But the payoff, officials argue, is reputational. "We've protected our workers and built a brand," one liaison officer said. "When an employer says they want Jamaican labour, it's because they know we stand behind our people."

In an era when migration stories are so often tales of exploitation, Jamaica's programme reads almost old-fashioned: orderly, state-run, paternal in parts, but grounded in the belief that a country's labour force is still its citizens, not its commodity.

As the line of workers shuffles forward, passports in hand, the promise endures, a decent living derived from decent work.

## The Golden Ticket: Inside Jamaica's Farmwork 'Card' and the Quiet Economy of Hope



**Photo:** AI-generated Photo - representing a Jamaican Farm worker

For thousands of rural Jamaicans, the farm work "card" represents more than permission to work abroad. It is the chance to change a family's future.

In Jamaica, the "farm work card" isn't really a card. It's an approval, the government's green light that allows a worker to leave home, cross the ocean, and work seasonally in an American field. For thousands of rural Jamaicans, that approval has come to represent mobility itself: not just the right to work abroad, but the rare chance to change a family's fortunes.

The path to getting one isn't simple. Applicants are recommended by local leaders, members of parliament, councillors, or community advocates who vouch for their character and reliability and then vetted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. There are health checks, interviews, and waiting lists that can stretch for years. When a worker's name finally appears in a new "batch," it signals inclusion into a small, tightly managed cycle of opportunity.

**"It's not just paperwork," one applicant said. "It's like being told you're good enough to represent Jamaica abroad."**

The H-2A programme, through which Jamaicans travel seasonally to farms across the United States, was designed to fill labour shortages in American agriculture. In practice, it has become one of Jamaica's most enduring social safety valves — seasonally exporting labour while importing stability. A single season's earnings can fund a child's university tuition. Whole districts in Clarendon and St. Elizabeth are dotted with homes built from farm work savings.

"It's not just about the money," said a veteran participant from St. Elizabeth. "When you go up there and do good work, you carry Jamaica's name with pride. People respect that."

For Jamaican farmworkers, it is also an education. Many also learn new farming techniques that they utilise in their own small farms. Living and working in another culture brings new habits,

broader perspectives, and lifelong friendships. Many develop connections that outlast a single season. In the end, the “golden ticket” reflects Jamaica’s long tradition of hard work, resilience, and pride in honest labour; it is a reminder that when one worker boards a plane north, entire communities can move forward with him.

## “You Can See What You Work For: The Steady Hands of Michael Taylor



**Photo:** Michael Taylor, on the job at New Morning Farm in Pennsylvania

The day starts before the light. The air is cold, the rows endless, but Michael Taylor moves with the quiet rhythm of a man who has learned patience through seasons. He has been coming to New Morning Farm in Pennsylvania fourteen seasons and counting but has been traveling on the programme since 1995.

His record speaks for itself.

“In Jamaica you work hard, but here you can see what you work for,” he says. What he means is visible proof, money that builds a house, pays for his children’s education, improves his family’s life. “As long as you come here and do what you have to do, don’t try to have confrontations with people. Be respectable. Everyone here is respectable.”

Taylor’s workday is a study in discipline. He harvests spinach and baby arugula, cutting them carefully to avoid tearing the tender leaves. Then he washes them clean, drains the excess water, and packs them by weight into clear bags. Each bag is sealed, labelled, and boxed neatly for delivery. When they reach the market, the farm team can simply lift the boxes, open them, and place the produce directly on the table ready to sell.

That precision doesn’t happen by accident. Taylor works with the kind of attention that turns repetitive tasks into craft. Every bag filled to the right mark. Every label is straight. Every box is stacked evenly. “They don’t see me dodge work,” he says with a small smile. “That’s why I’m still here.”

He has seen many workers come and go over the years, some eager, some less so. “Sometimes when new men come and see the work, they want to dodge it,” he says, shaking his head. “But this kind of job needs you to be true to the work. When you start cutting corners, it shows. You can’t cheat the field, and you can’t cheat yourself.” For Taylor, honesty and effort are the only ways to earn respect in a place that demands both.

In a world that often glorifies speed, Taylor’s method is about steadiness. He measures his success not by how fast the truck loads, but by the satisfaction of doing things right. His careful hands have become part of the farm’s rhythm, his quiet consistency shaping the trust between worker and employer. “When you do good work,” he says, “people remember.”

Beyond the fields, his lessons travel further than he does. Younger workers often seek him out for advice, and he tells them the same thing he’s told himself every season: Respect the work, and it will respect you back. It’s a simple code, but one that has carried him across borders, seasons, and years.

He plans to return home soon, as he always does, to tend to his small farm in St. Elizabeth and the family who waits for him. For Taylor, the harvest is never just about crops—it’s about legacy. “You have to do what you have to do,” he says, glancing toward the horizon. “And when you do it right, you can see what you worked for.”

**We want to  
hear from you!**

**The Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLLO)**

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