



The JCLO Monthly

JAMAICA

YOUR PARTNER FOR RELIABLE WORKERS

June 2025 Edition

jaclo.org



Photo: Roy "Eddie" Williamson rides a farm ATV around the fields at Rulfs Orchard. Photo by David Escobar.

Here's Why Employers Trust Us

Trust isn't claimed. It's earned.



Based on what we've heard from you, on farm visits, in feedback calls, and at recruitment briefings, Jamaica is delivering. You've shown us what works and where we need to improve. We're listening, and we're acting.

More employers are choosing Jamaica every season. They point to the reliability of our workers, the discipline they bring, and the steady follow-through from our liaison officers.

We know trust depends on consistency. So we're sharpening worker preparation, improving response times, and staying present on the ground when it counts.

You've invested in Jamaican labour. We don't take that lightly. This partnership matters, and we're here to strengthen it, one season at a time.



Colette Roberts Risdien, CD
Permanent Secretary,
Jamaica Oversea Employment
Programmes

DID YOU KNOW

Did you know the JCLO was established in 1943?

Long before smartphones and social media, the British West Indies Central Labour Organisation (BWICLO) was already connecting Jamaican talent to overseas opportunities. More than 80 years later, through the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLO), that legacy continues.



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Washington, USA

Photo: A full harvest crate of crisp apples sits beneath the rows of trees at FirstFruits Farms, 2014. In the distance, workers and ladders mark another productive day in the orchard.

Smart Labour, Real Value: Why FirstFruits Farms Chooses Jamaica

Ayres is the Director of Human Resources at FirstFruits Farms, the largest grower of Opal apples in the United States. Located along the Snake River in southeastern Washington, the farm depends on reliable, seasonal labour to keep operations moving. Since 2022, Ayres has turned to Jamaica through the H-2A program to meet that need.

"The experience has been overwhelmingly positive," he says. "We've been very impressed by the quality and reliability of the workers." But for Ayres, who has worked in consulting, accounting, and human resource leadership for more than 20 years, it's not just about the workers. The structure of the program matters.

"Our liaison officer, Sheldon, lives in Washington during the harvest. He's always just a phone call away. That kind of presence and responsiveness makes a real difference."

In addition to his role at FirstFruits, Ayres also runs Desert Management Services, a company that guides growers through the H-2A process. From that vantage point, he's seen the inner workings of labour recruitment across multiple countries.

"One of the questions people always ask me is whether using

Jamaican workers is too expensive. I tell them...do the math. When you compare it to the cost from other Central American countries, it's usually the same or within a hundred dollars," he explains. "And that doesn't account for the added value Jamaica brings through structure and support. It's absolutely worth it." That support starts early.

"Another major benefit is the pre-departure orientation. It's something no other country does with their H-2A workers," Ayres says. "It's a huge advantage for us as employers, and for the workers when they arrive in America, as they come prepared."

He also pointed to efficiency. Visas are secured early. Workers arrive on time. There are no surprises.

"That consistency gives us the predictability we need," Ayres says. "This programme delivers. It's not about cheap labour. It's about smart labour." Employers like Ayres see the difference that structure, preparation, and steady support make. With each season, Jamaica is proving itself as a reliable and long-term partner. The JCLO model does more than just deliver labour. It is delivering results.

Jamaicans Keep the Orchard Running, Says Massachusetts Employer

Each spring, a small crew of Jamaican farmworkers arrives in Harvard, Massachusetts. They begin pruning apple trees across acres of land at Carlson and Westward Orchards. By the time the harvest ends in autumn, they will have worked hundreds of hours. Many of them have done so for decades. Audley Gentles is one of them. He first came to Carlson's orchard in 1987. This year marks his 33rd season.

"It's a good opportunity to work," he said simply. Frank Carlson, co-owner of Carlson Orchards, is clear about their value.

"They're here every day. They show up early. We often have to tell them the day is done because they would keep working from dawn to dark."

Carlson's team includes six Jamaican workers, several of whom are also farmers back home. Their familiarity with the land and the rhythm of the work makes them essential. Tasks like pruning, thinning, and hauling require timing and consistency. Carlson says the returning workers know what to do without being told.

"They work extremely hard and take pride in doing a good job," he said. "They understand what it means to be responsible." The arrangement benefits both sides. Under the H-2A program, Jamaican workers earn well above the minimum wage in Massachusetts. Housing and transportation are provided by the farm. With fewer expenses, they can save and send more money home.

Carlson has seen the economic impact.



Photo: Caption: Frank Carlson of Carlson Orchards inspects freshly harvested apples during a busy picking day in the orchard. For generations, the Carlson family has cultivated these fields, producing some of the region's finest fruit with a deep commitment to quality and tradition.

"If you go to Jamaica, the guys who work with us live a class above their neighbours," he said. "They invest in their homes. They look after their families. They use the opportunity."

For Carlson and other growers, the program offers more than labour. It offers predictability. At a time when local labour shortages have disrupted farms across the country, Jamaican workers have established a steady presence.

"They're not just a part of the operation. They make it possible," he said.

Season after season, the crew returns. They bring experience, endurance, and a standard that is hard to replace. What begins in early spring as a quiet arrival has become, over time, the foundation of a successful harvest.



Photo: Sheldon Brown with farm workers in Washington State.

The Workers Behind the Workforce: Liaison Officers

Each year, thousands of Jamaican farmers and hospitality workers arrive in the United States to fill critical labour gaps. They bring discipline, resilience, and the kind of institutional memory that spans generations. But once they land, they are not left to figure it out alone.

Liaison officers from the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLO) meet them where they are, literally and figuratively.

They respond to emergencies. Navigate legal systems. Negotiate with employers. Arrange hospital visits. Intervene in conflicts. Repatriate the dead with dignity. Track down missing pay. Sit beside injured workers in unfamiliar hospitals. And sometimes, they just listen.

"Our job doesn't come with a script," said Karlene Brown, a JCLO officer based in Washington, D.C., responsible for more than 800 workers across six states. "It's diplomacy. It's social work. It's logistics. It's all of it."

The Liaison Officer model is unique to Jamaica. No other country participating in the U.S. H-2A or H-2B programs provides this level of embedded, in-country support. Employers regularly cite it as the reason they choose Jamaica again and again.

"Other countries send workers. Jamaica sends a system," said one

Vermont-based farm manager. "If there's a problem, I know exactly who to call."

The system is not accidental. It is the result of decades of institutional design, driven by the principle that sending labour without support is not just risky. It is unethical. Officers are trained in labour law, mediation, crisis responses, and international coordination. Many, like Kareeme Morrison, bring backgrounds in workforce development and social protection. Morrison, who covers five Midwest states, says the job is as much about foresight as it is about response.

"You have to see problems before they become problems. And when things do happen, you can't afford to be hard to reach," he said.

For others, the work is deeply personal. Sheldon Brown, Senior Liaison Officer, has been doing it for over two decades, across more than 25 U.S. states. "Our job is to make sure things run smoothly and to make sure the welfare of the worker is protected, but also that the employer is pleased with the entire labour force that they have selected from Jamaica"

Behind the ceremonies and headlines is steady, unseen work—late calls, quiet check-ins, and constant support. It's this human, responsive presence that sustains Jamaica's reputation abroad.



Spotlight Series

THE HEART BEHIND THE HARVEST

Scan here to nominate
a worker for the next
spotlight feature



Eddie* Williams stands in the apple fields at Rulfs Orchard in Peru. Photo by David Escob

The heart behind the harvest: The Roy 'Eddie' Williamson Story

As autumn settles over Rulfs Orchard in Peru, New York, Roy "Eddie" Williamson moves quietly between rows of ripening apples on a mud-splattered John Deere ATV. Now 64, Eddie has been returning to these orchards each season since 1988. His presence is steady, his hands experienced, and his name is known wherever the apple bins are full.

"Whenever they ask, 'Eddie, can you do that?' I say, 'No problem,'" he said with a grin.

This season, Eddie is one of 16 Jamaican workers at Rulfs. They arrive in April and stay through November, managing everything from equipment to harvest flow. For many of them, including Eddie, this work is not just about income. It is about continuity, duty, and pride in what they've helped to build across two countries.

Back in Jamaica, Eddie has used the opportunity to create a better life. He has built a home, supported his family, and taken pride in showing what disciplined, honest labour can achieve. "What I've done with this chance, people in my district see it. It gave us a lift," he shared.

He credits the Jamaican Government and the liaison officers for making the process structured and secure. The support he receives—both at home and in the field—gives him the confidence to focus fully on the job. He carries himself with a quiet authority, respected by younger workers and known for his deep understanding of the land.

On the orchard, Eddie's experience speaks before he does. Younger workers watch him for rhythm and approach. He understands the soil, the tree lines, and tells subtle shifts in temperature just by

feeling the air.

"They taught me patience," he once observed. "You don't rush a tree to bear fruit. You take care of it and wait."

Eddie knows when the trees are ready, how the weather will turn, and which slope needs more attention. He doesn't need to speak much. His years in the orchard speak for themselves.

When the season ends, he will return to Jamaica. And when spring comes again, so will Eddie, ready to walk the orchard paths once more.

Eddie doesn't talk much, but people pay attention when he moves. He sees what's off before others notice. A belt slipping. A ladder placed wrong. A hesitation from someone new. He steps in, fixes it, and keeps the day going. He doesn't wait for instructions. He reads the work and gets it done. No title, no performance. Just precision.

Back home, that same steadiness shows up in different ways. He pays school fees on time. He helps neighbours without being asked. He invests in small things that hold families together. Nothing flashy. Just proof that the system can work when people take it seriously. Eddie isn't trying to be noticed. He's focused on what lasts.

When the season ends, Eddie will pack up the same way he arrived—orderly, without fuss. He'll say goodbye to the orchard, knowing he left it better than he found it. And when next spring comes, if his name is called, he'll be ready. Not because he needs to prove anything, but because this is what he does. He shows up, does the work, and leaves a mark without needing to sign it.

We want to hear from you!

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