



# The JCLO Monthly

# JAMAICA

YOUR PARTNER FOR RELIABLE WORKERS

December 2025 Edition

jaclo.org



Photo: Jamaican Overseas Employment Worker, Carlos Baker

## Where the Season Pauses, the Work Continues

As the year wraps up, we reflect on the work done together and the results it produced. Across agriculture, hospitality, and service industries, Jamaican workers have met employer needs with skill, discipline, and consistency. From food production under the H-2A programme to key roles within H-2B sectors, their contribution has been practical, dependable, and measurable.

These outcomes are built on trust. Employers rely on preparedness. Workers rely on fair systems. Both depend on sustained collaboration and effective oversight. At the **Jamaica Central Labour Organisation**, our focus remains clear: protect worker welfare, strengthen partnerships, and ensure reliable delivery across programmes as we prepare for the year ahead.

We thank our employers, workers, and partners for their continued trust. The season may pause, but the work continues.



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

As the year comes to a close, we take a moment to reflect on partnership, purpose, and the work accomplished together. Jamaican workers have continued to represent their country with professionalism, supported by employers and partners committed to opportunity and reliability.

We thank you for the trust you place in Jamaican workers and the systems that support them. We look forward to continuing this work together in the year ahead.

From the warm shores of Jamaica, we extend our best wishes for the season.



Scan the QR to hear our full Holiday Greetings.



# The Reason for the Season Lies in the Harvest

**Northern Orchard, the harvest reflects decades of preparation. For one third-generation farmer, Jamaican H-2A workers are not seasonal help, but the knowledge, care, and continuity that make the season succeed.**



**Photo:** Denzel Reid harvests apples at an orchard in Peru, New York. Photo by David Escobar.

In agriculture, seasons are not symbolic. They are decisive. They determine when land is prepared, when crops are harvested, and whether a year's effort ends in loss or yield. By December, when fields begin to quiet and workers return home, the harvest is already a verdict on months of planning, discipline, and labour.

At Northern Orchard, a 500-acre apple farm in rural New York State, that verdict depends heavily on Jamaican workers who return season after season with an understanding of timing that agriculture demands.

Jesse Mulbury, a third-generation farmer who runs the orchard alongside his sister and parents, has grown up alongside the H-2A programme itself.

"We've been working with the country of Jamaica since 1975," Mr. Mulbury said. "I'm thirty-four this year, so my experience with H-2A has been growing up alongside a lot of these guys who have been coming year after year."

That continuity matters. Some Jamaican workers at Northern Orchard have returned for nearly forty seasons, building a level of familiarity that cannot be replicated through short-term labour.

"A lot of these guys know the orchard like the back of their hand," Mr. Mulbury said. "We really rely on that knowledge of our personal farm to make our harvest happen each year."

The work unfolds in stages. In spring, smaller crews focus on pruning, spraying, and preparing the crop. By September and October, the workforce expands to meet the demands of harvest, when timing is tight and margins are thin.

"Apples are like raw eggs," Mr. Mulbury explained. "If you're not delicate with the fruit as it gets picked, we can't sell it to the grocery stores. Nobody wants banged-up fruit."

That attention to care and process, he said, is where Jamaican workers stand out. Many arrive with agricultural experience and an instinctive respect for the crop, understanding that quality in the field determines success at market.

"They care very deeply whether or not the crop is of good quality and of success for the season," Mr. Mulbury said. "They understand that the success of Northern Orchard is a success for them as well."

Northern Orchard employs more than 140 Jamaican workers at peak season, all housed on the farm in communal facilities. Managing nearly 150 people on site requires more than logistics. It requires trust.

"Our experience with the Jamaican H-2A workers has always been very positive," he said. "There's very little drama. Everybody gets along. We share our cultures. We share our town." That exchange extends beyond the farm gates. During the season, local grocery stores begin stocking Jamaican products, a quiet sign of how deeply the programme has become woven into rural life.

For Mr. Mulbury, the programme is not optional. Operating in a rural region with a limited local labour pool, he says the farm's survival depends on access to consistent, reliable workers. "We probably wouldn't exist year to year without the Jamaican H-2A programme," he said. "It's super critical to the success of our farm."

What gives him confidence going forward is not only the experience of long-serving workers, but the emergence of a new generation.

"These guys are hungry. They're ready to learn," Mr. Mulbury said, noting that some workers pursue agricultural courses and pesticide certification on their own time. "It's a relief to see just how capable this new generation of workers is."

As older farmers and long-serving workers prepare to step back, new hands are stepping forward on both sides of the exchange.

For Northern Orchard, the season ends when the last apples are picked. But the work that sustains the harvest continues, carried by preparation, shared knowledge, and a relationship built over decades.

That, Mr. Mulbury suggests, is the real reason for the season, a harvest shaped long before fruit reaches the bin, and long after the fields fall quiet.

# From Harvest to Table: The Products of Jamaican Labour

Jamaican farm workers are often associated with the hardest work in the fields. Less visible is how their skill carries through the full production process, shaping finished products that reach consumers long after the harvest ends.



**Photo:** Kingston Dry Hard Cider, a tribute to the Jamaican horticulture crews who have nurtured Vermont orchards for decades. Crafted from Kingston Black apples, the cider is known for its distinct flavour, silky tannins, and smooth finish.

The work of Jamaican farm workers is often described at ground level, the fields, the soil, the physical strain of harvest. What is less visible is how deeply that work carries through the full production process, shaping not only raw yield but finished products consumed far beyond the farm.

At Champlain Orchards in Shoreham, Vermont, Jamaican labour has been part of that process for a quarter of a century. Owned and operated by Bill Suhr, the orchard was purchased in 1998 and began employing Jamaican workers two years later. This year marks the 25th consecutive season of that partnership, one built not only on effort in the fields but on continuity across the entire production cycle.

"Our connection with Jamaica is woven into every harvest," Mr. Suhr said. That connection begins long before apples are picked. Jamaican workers are involved in pruning during colder months, land preparation ahead of planting, and the careful



**Photo:** Jamaican workers pause briefly during a work shift at Champlain Farm, Vermont

timing of harvest once the season peaks. Their role continues after fruit leaves the trees, into sorting, handling, and processing, where experience determines quality and consistency.

One of the orchard's most recognised products, Kingston Dry Hard Cider, reflects that continuity. The cider is made from Kingston Black apples, a variety known for its sharp profile and demanding cultivation. Printed on the label is a tribute to the Jamaican workers who tend the orchard, an acknowledgment of the hands behind the product.

The workers' familiarity with the land and the process allows operations to move efficiently from harvest to production. Decisions made at each stage affect what ends up in the bottle, how the cider tastes, and whether the product meets the standards consumers expect.

That familiarity is built over years, not seasons. "I've come to Vermont each fall for 20 years to work the apple harvest," said Utneil H., a member of the orchard crew. Returning year after year has given workers like Utneil an understanding of the orchard that cannot be replaced through short-term labour. They know the trees, the pace of the season, and the standards required once apples move off the field. That knowledge reduces error and protects quality during the most sensitive stages of production.

At Champlain Orchards, Jamaican workers are not interchangeable hands brought in for a single task. They are part of a process that extends from soil preparation to finished product, shaping outcomes that carry the farm's reputation into the marketplace.

Most consumers who pick up a bottle of cider will never see the orchard or meet the workers who helped produce it. But the result reflects their presence all the same, in consistency, care, and reliability.

From harvest to table, Jamaican labour is not only about getting crops out of the ground. It is about ensuring that what reaches the shelf is worthy of return, season after season.



**Photo:** A curated box featuring products from Champlain Farms, made possible through Jamaican labour. The JCLO bottle adds a visual contrast, linking production, partnership, and identity.

# The Heart That Longs for Home

For workers from rural Jamaica, the end of the farming season is not a conclusion but a return. After years of steady work abroad, the holidays offer space to reflect on what the programme has made possible and what lies ahead.



**Photo:** Jamaican worker Arthur Thomas shares a smile while on duty at New Morning Farm in Pennsylvania.

For Arthur Thomas, the holidays do not signal an ending. They mark a return. A farmer from rural Jamaica, Arthur has spent years moving between two worlds: home and the fields of New Morning Farm in Pennsylvania.

While this is his third season working at New Morning Farm, his journey on the overseas farm work programme stretches much further back, nearly two decades of seasonal travel shaped by discipline, routine, and purpose.

**“I am very grateful to be here,” Arthur said. “It’s my third season at New Morning Farm, but I’ve been coming here for nineteen seasons.”**

Each year follows a familiar rhythm. Days begin early. The work is physical and precise. Farming leaves little room for shortcuts. Over time, that structure becomes second nature, shaping how Arthur works both abroad and at home. Coming on the programme, he said, changed what was possible.

**“Coming on the programme, it really helps financially,” Arthur explained. “When you get here, you can achieve what you really want to.”**

Those gains are not abstract. Earnings from the programme have allowed Arthur to make steady improvements to his home, invest in his family, and plan with a sense of certainty that seasonal farming in Jamaica alone rarely provides. Progress is measured carefully, project by project, season by season.

But the work has offered more than income. Exposure to different farming methods, equipment, and work standards has influenced how Arthur approaches agriculture back home. The habits learned in Pennsylvania travel with him, shaping how he prepares land, manages time, and sets expectations for himself.

As the season ends, the return home brings a different pace. The holidays offer rest, a chance to recover physically and mentally after months of demanding work. More importantly, they offer time with family. Ordinary moments take on new weight after long absences, shared meals, conversations, simply being present.

Yet even during this pause, Arthur is already thinking ahead. He plans to return next season focused and ready, clear about what the work requires and what he expects of himself. For him, the programme is not a temporary solution or a single opportunity. It is part of a longer path shaped by effort, patience, and foresight.

The holidays, then, are not a conclusion. They are a moment to come home, take stock, and prepare to move forward again. For Arthur Thomas, the heart may long for home, but it is steady work across seasons that makes that return meaningful.

**We want to hear from you!**

The Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLLO)

Annex – Embassy of Jamaica  
1812 R Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20009  
Tel: (202) 667-6190 | Mobile: (240) 429-7916  
Fax: (202) 387-0450 | Email: info@jaclo.org