



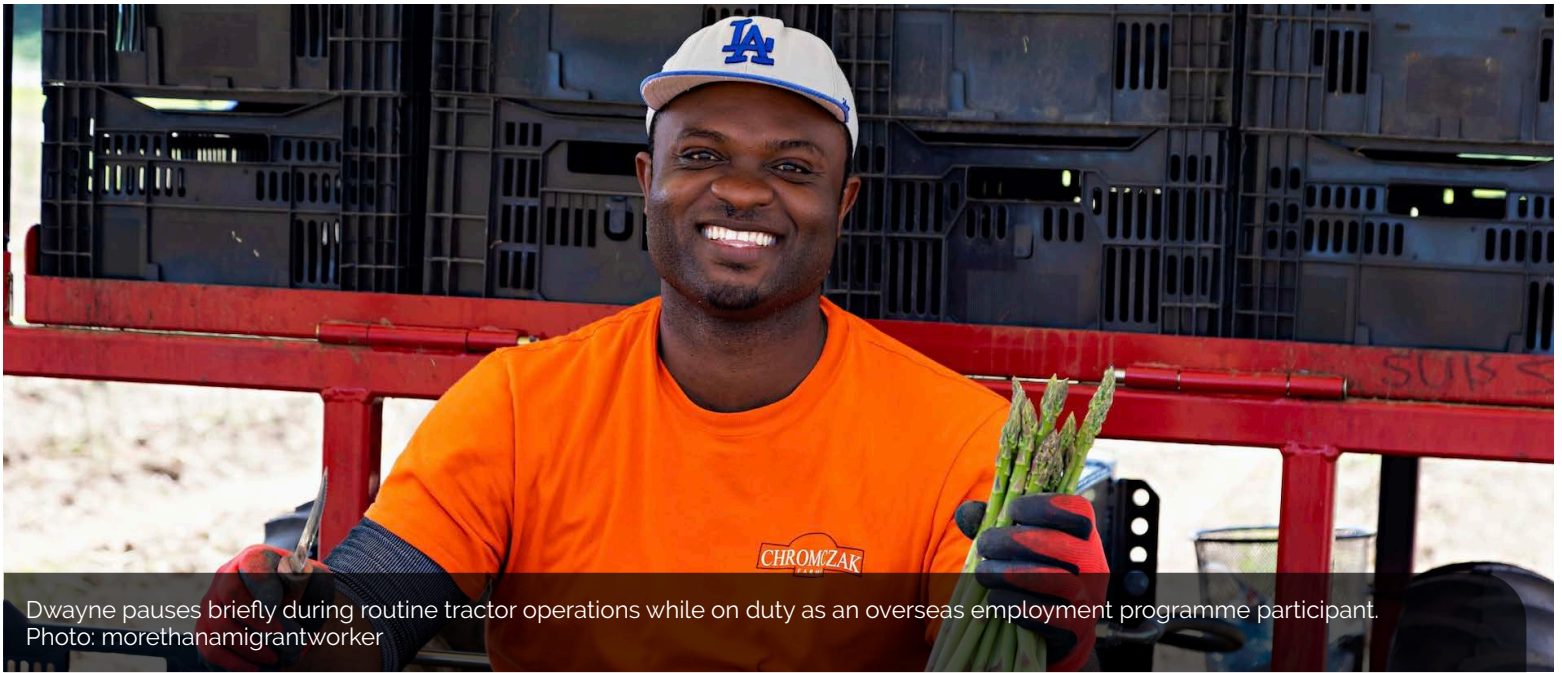
The JCLO Monthly

JAMAICA

YOUR PARTNER FOR RELIABLE WORKERS

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Dwayne pauses briefly during routine tractor operations while on duty as an overseas employment programme participant. Photo: morethanamigrantworker

From Labour to Legacy: Building the Workforce of the Future

For decades, Jamaica's overseas employment programmes have created opportunity through work, supporting families, strengthening communities, and building a reputation for reliability and performance. Today, that foundation is evolving. Employers are no longer asking only for labour, but for readiness, adaptability, and skill. In response, we are expanding the scope of our programmes, preparing workers to meet changing demands, and strengthening the systems that support them across both the United States and Canada. As we mark milestones such as sixty years of the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme, for our sister Programme in Canada, we are also investing in the future. Initiatives like the GOJ-SAWP Scholarship Programme reflect our commitment to extending opportunity beyond the worker to the next generation. Our focus remains clear: to protect the welfare of our workers, deliver value to our partners, and build a workforce that is prepared not just for today, but for what lies ahead.



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

Did you know?

Jamaica's overseas employment programmes operate through two distinct systems: the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLO) for the United States and the Jamaica Liaison Service (JLS) for Canada.

DID YOU KNOW



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Beyond the Fields: Jamaica Expands into Skilled Labour

Labour demand in the United States is shifting, and employers are looking for more than availability. They are looking for workers who can step in and perform from day one. Jamaica has responded by expanding into skilled categories, backed by training and certification. The question now is not whether Jamaica can supply labour, but how far it can go beyond it.



Overseas employment programme participant Andre pauses for a photograph while operating a tractor, part of daily field preparation and equipment handling on site. Photo: morethanamigrantworker

The demand for labour is changing, and across the United States, employers are facing new pressures, tighter compliance requirements, shifting workforce dynamics, and a growing need for workers who are not only available but skilled and immediately productive. Jamaica is responding.

According to Minister of Labour & Social Security, Parnell Charles Jr, the expansion reflects both demand and intent.

"This strategic move signals that Jamaica is not limited to traditional roles," he said. "Our workers are not only present in the fields. They are technologists, operators, and trained professionals. At the government level, we are deliberately preparing and enabling that transition."

At the New England Apple Council Annual Meeting, earlier this year, Liaison Officer Nora Smickle-Dryden presented a clear message to employers: Jamaica's workforce is evolving, and the programme is ready to meet a broader set of labour needs. "We remain open to new opportunities that strengthen programme integrity while expanding the scope of what Jamaican workers can deliver," she told attendees.

That expansion is not theoretical. It is being shaped by real gaps in the labour market. With new language requirements and a reduced availability of Spanish-speaking workers in some sectors, employers are increasingly seeking alternative labour sources for roles that require both communication and

technical competence. Jamaica is positioned to support these needs with workers prepared for roles such as CDL drivers, truck operators, and equipment handlers. The shift marks a deliberate move beyond traditional placements.

Jamaica has strategically leveraged the capacity of HEART Trust/NTA, the country's nationally recognised training and certification body. Through structured programmes, workers are being prepared to meet international standards, ensuring that skill is not assumed, but verified. The shift also reflects a broader reality.

Labour migration is becoming more competitive. Employers are no longer selecting based solely on availability. They are selecting based on readiness, adaptability, productivity and the ability to meet evolving job requirements from the first day on site.

Jamaica's approach is to prepare ahead of that demand. "The future of labour mobility will require us to innovate," Colette Roberts Ridsen, Permanent Secretary with oversight for overseas employment programmes, noted "Our competitive advantage must come from having a work-ready group, not reaction. That work is already underway."

For employers, the message is direct. Jamaica is not only supplying labour. It is building a workforce.

From the U.S. to Canada: Two Systems, One Standard

Jamaica's overseas employment programmes are anchored in a system built through the United States. Less visible, but equally significant, is a parallel programme in Canada shaped by the same standards of performance and trust. Together, these systems reflect a coordinated approach to labour mobility that prioritises preparation, accountability, and long-term partnerships



From left: Jenella Precius, host of Smile Jamaica; Colette Roberts Ridsen, Permanent Secretary (Overseas Employment Programmes); and Parnel Charles Jr., Minister of Labour and Social Security. Photo: Smile Jamaica, TVJ

For over 80 years, the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLLO) has defined how Jamaican labour is recruited, prepared, and supported in the United States.

Through that system, employers have come to expect a certain standard, workers who arrive ready, perform consistently, and are supported throughout their time abroad. That expectation has become one of Jamaica's strongest assets in the global labour market.

But the U.S. programme is only part of the story.

Alongside it, Jamaica has built a second, long-standing partnership in Canada through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme. While less visible, it operates with a similar discipline, shaped by structure, oversight, and continuity.

The distinction is clear. In the United States, programmes are administered through the JCLLO, which coordinates recruitment, placement, and ongoing support under U.S. labour arrangements. In Canada, that responsibility is carried out by the Jamaica Liaison Service (JLS), which manages Jamaica's participation in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme (SAWP).

The systems are different in structure. The standard is the same.

Each year, more than 9,000 Jamaican workers travel to Canada under SAWP, many returning to the same farms season after season. That continuity reflects more than participation. It reflects trust, built through performance, consistency, and relationships that have endured over time.

"The farm worker is the strength of this programme," said Parnel Charles Jr., Minister of Labour and Social Security. "Across Jamaica, families can point to someone who has benefited, improving their homes, investing in education, and building a better future."

In Canada, the Jamaica Liaison Service sustains that trust on the ground. Liaison officers monitor working conditions, engage directly with employers, and respond to worker needs throughout the season. Their presence ensures that the programme operates

not only as a labour arrangement, but as a system with accountability on both sides.

For six decades, that system has held. Workers travel. They work. They return home. And over time, the impact has extended beyond the farms themselves. Earnings have supported housing, financed education, and enabled small business development across rural Jamaica. In many communities, the results are visible, not in a single moment, but in steady, cumulative progress.

Now, at sixty years, the programme is being understood differently.

It is no longer only about labour but it is also about legacy.

That shift is shaping how the programme evolves. New initiatives, including scholarship opportunities for the children of farm workers, reflect a broader commitment to extending opportunity beyond the worker to the next generation.

"We are not only creating opportunity for today," said Colette Roberts Ridsen, Permanent Secretary with responsibility for overseas employment programmes. "We are building pathways for the next generation, ensuring that the benefits of the programme extend beyond the worker to the family."

The future of the programme will depend on maintaining that balance, meeting changing labour demands while preserving the trust that has defined it for decades.

From the United States to Canada, the structures may differ. But the expectation remains the same. And the standard continues to hold.

From Interest to Intent: Jamaica Makes Its Mark at TPI 2026

At TPI 2026, employers were not just browsing, they were searching. Labour shortages are forcing businesses to rethink where they source their workforce. Jamaica's presence at the expo turned conversations into concrete interest. What began as curiosity is now moving toward action.



Liaison Officer Kandre Leveridge engages with attendees at the Tropical Plant International Expo (TPI) in Fort Lauderdale, strengthening employer connections and programme visibility

At the Tropical Plant International Expo (TPI) 2026, the conversation around labour was not exploratory. It was immediate.

Employers are looking for workers, and increasingly, they are looking beyond traditional sources. What stood out at this year's event was demand, alongside a growing awareness of Jamaica as a viable and structured partner in meeting that demand. For many, the presence of Jamaica's delegation was both timely and necessary. "Labour can be difficult to secure," said Patricia Lee of Florida Tropiculture. "So it was good to see Jamaica here, offering a clear pathway for accessing workers."

That visibility matters.

Trade shows like TPI bring together growers, suppliers, and decision-makers across the horticulture industry. But beyond networking, they reflect the real pressures facing the sector. Labour shortages are no longer cyclical. They are structural, affecting planning, output, and long-term business sustainability.

For Jamaica, the engagement goes beyond presence.

It is part of a broader strategy to position its workforce within a competitive and evolving labour market, where employers are no longer selecting based on availability alone, but on reliability, preparation, and performance. The response suggests that the message is landing.

"I'm looking forward to exploring how we can work with Jamaica to bring in good

Jamaican workers for our business," Lee added.

Interest was not limited to one segment of the industry.

According to Gladstone Moore, there is a consistent flow of enquiries from individuals and businesses seeking to engage Jamaican workers, particularly in agriculture.

"We continue to see interest from people who want to work with Jamaican labour in agriculture," he noted. "The demand is there."

Beyond interest, there is also a shift in perception.

Kandre, a member of the delegation, pointed to the growing recognition of Jamaica's reputation in the space.

"Brand Jamaica carries weight," he said. "Some employers were already aware, others were just learning, but there is clear curiosity and serious intent."

That intent reflects something deeper than availability.

"We are presenting labour supply," he added. "We are presenting labour excellence. That is what Jamaica represents."

This distinction is central to how Jamaica continues to position itself internationally, as a provider of prepared, reliable, and high-performing workers, supported by systems that ensure consistency over time.

Engagements like TPI 2026 are not isolated. They are part of a wider effort to strengthen employer relationships, understand evolving labour needs, and align Jamaica's workforce to meet those demands with precision.

The conversations may begin with interest, but increasingly, they are becoming decisions.

“I Know Why I’m Here”: Samantha’s Eight-Year Canadian Journey

For Samantha, each season abroad is part of a longer plan. The work is demanding, the distance is real, but the purpose remains clear. Eight years in, she is not just participating in the programme, she is building something through it. And that difference shows in what she leaves behind at home.



Samantha, a participant in the overseas employment programme, during a workday in Canada, reflecting the discipline and continuity that define the programme. Photo: morethanamigrantworker

Samantha does not describe her work in Canada as an opportunity alone. She describes it as a commitment. “I know why I’m here,” she said.

Originally from Rock River in Clarendon, Jamaica, Samantha has been travelling to Canada for the past eight years under the farm work programme. The routine is familiar now, seasons spent working abroad, followed by returns home, each cycle tied to a clear purpose. “It’s not easy to dedicate yourself to being here,” she said. “But you have to stay focused on why you came.”

That focus begins at home.

Samantha supports her two children, her husband, and her parents. Her son, now 13, is the head boy at his school and has earned multiple certificates. Her daughter recently graduated and is preparing to return to college.

“When I’m here, I’m doing it for them,” she explained. “I have to remind them, and remind myself, what this is for.” The work itself is structured and demanding. At Pelee Acres in Leamington, Ontario, Samantha and her colleagues handle a range of tomato varieties, including Campari and Piccolo, tasks that require consistency, care, and attention to detail. But her routine extends beyond the farm.

In Leamington, she is an active member of her church, attending services every Sunday and serving as an usher. She also provides informal support to others, offering advice and listening to those who seek her out.

“People come and talk to me,” she said. “Sometimes they just need someone to listen.”

That role, part worker, part supporter, reflects a balance she has built over time, managing the demands of work while maintaining a sense of purpose beyond it.

Samantha speaks positively about her current placement.

“This is one of the best farms I’ve been on,” she said. “The treatment is good, and we appreciate the opportunity.”

For her, the experience is not defined by a single season, but by continuity, returning, improving, and building over time.

She does not frame the work as temporary. It is part of a longer path, one shaped by discipline, faith, and responsibility.

And for Samantha, that path remains clear. “I can smile through anything,” she said. “Once I remember why I’m here.”

**We want to
hear from you!**

The Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLLO)

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