



# The JCLO Monthly

# JAMAICA

YOUR PARTNER FOR RELIABLE WORKERS

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**Photo:** Liaison Officer Kareem Morrison (centre) pauses for a photo with patrons at the Horticulture and Small Farm Conference in Indiana, held March 3–5

## Building Partnerships, Strengthening Systems

Each harvest season tells a story not only of crops gathered, but of the people and partnerships that make the work possible. In this edition, we highlight the steady presence of Jamaican workers in orchards and farms across the United States, the outreach of liaison officers who continue to strengthen relationships with employers, and the experiences that sustain one of the most enduring agricultural labour partnerships in the region.

We also reflect the continued effort to strengthen the systems behind the programme. As demand for reliable agricultural labour grows, Jamaica is modernising training, reinforcing oversight, and maintaining a clear commitment to worker welfare and employer confidence. At its core, the programme remains grounded in preparation, professionalism, and the trust built over decades between Jamaican workers and the farms they support.



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

### Did you know?

In some farming towns across the United States, local stores now stock jerk seasoning, ginger beer, and other Jamaican products because workers return to the same communities year after year.



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# JCLO Expands Employer Engagement Across U.S. Agricultural Industry

The Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLO) has expanded its presence across the United States, participating in major agricultural conferences and employer forums. The outreach strengthens relationships with growers while introducing new employers to Jamaica's H-2A labour pool and reinforcing the reputation of Jamaican workers as disciplined, reliable, and prepared for modern agricultural operations.

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As demand for dependable agricultural labour grows across the United States, the Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLO) has intensified its outreach within



**Photo:** From left: Sheldon Brown, Senior Liaison Officer; Maureen Torrey of Torrey Farms; Permanent Secretary Colette Roberts Risdien; and Liaison Officer Nora Smickle-Dryden at the National Council of Agricultural Employers' 62nd Annual Meeting, where discussions focused on strengthening partnerships and expanding opportunities within the seasonal agricultural workers programme.

key agricultural networks. Officials have been attending major industry conferences, labour forums, and trade shows across several states.

Liaison Officer Kareeme Morrison, who has participated in a number of these engagements, said meeting employers directly

continues to open new opportunities for the programme.

"Traveling across the country and meeting growers face to face reminds you how important this outreach is," Karlene Brown said. "Many employers are still discovering the pool of reliable English speaking workers available through Jamaica, and once they understand the system, they want to learn more."

JCLO representatives have participated in gatherings such as the Global Produce and Floral Show in Anaheim, the Great Lakes Expo in Grand Rapids, and the National Council of Agricultural Employers Labour Forum in Las Vegas. Additional engagements have included the Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show in Baltimore, the Southeast Regional Fruit and Vegetable Conference in Savannah, and the Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg.

These events bring together growers, labour contractors, and agricultural associations responsible for shaping labour decisions across the industry.

One of the most enduring partnerships exists in Vermont, where Jamaican workers have supported vegetable and berry farms for more than five decades. Today, 61 employers in Vermont rely on approximately 402 Jamaican workers, forming one of the most stable labour partnerships within the programme.

The Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association Annual Meeting in Burlington continues to serve as a key forum for maintaining those relationships. Permanent Secretary Colette Roberts Risdien said the outreach reflects a deliberate strategy to strengthen Jamaica's position within the agricultural labour market.

"Our presence at these events is strategic," she said. "The Jamaican worker has built a strong brand over decades, and growers recognise the reliability and professionalism our workers bring." She added that expanding engagement with employers aligns with the Government's directive to grow the programme responsibly.

"My Minister has given clear direction that we must increase participation while safeguarding standards and strengthening employer partnerships."

By meeting growers where decisions are made, the JCLO continues to reinforce Jamaica's reputation as one of the most trusted sources of agricultural labour in the H-2A programme.



# Jamaica Strengthens Systems to Support U.S. Agricultural Employers

Jamaica is strengthening its overseas employment systems to better support U.S. agricultural employers and prepare workers for modern farming operations. The effort includes improved training, stronger oversight, and updated administrative processes designed to ensure efficiency, reliability, and worker welfare across the H-2A programme.

Jamaica is modernising the systems that support its agricultural workers abroad, ensuring that employers receive a workforce prepared for the realities of modern farming. Minister Pearnel Charles Jr., speaking at the 2025 staging of the Annual Labour Forum said the reforms are grounded in a clear understanding of employer expectations. "We understand what employers need," the Minister said. "Our courses and systems are designed to help employers operate

efficiently while ensuring that workers are properly prepared for modern agricultural work." Agricultural production today requires more than physical labour. Workers must adapt to changing technology, structured farm operations, and fast-paced harvest schedules. Jamaica has strengthened its training programmes to better align with these realities. Pre-departure preparation now focuses on workplace readiness, teamwork, and communication. The objective is to ensure workers arrive prepared to contribute immediately within complex farm environments. Minister Charles said recent discussions with growers highlighted the uncertainty many farms face in maintaining stable labour forces.

"We listened carefully to employers and the challenges they face," he said. "That is why Jamaica continues to modernise its systems and strengthen the structures supporting this programme." He noted that the government is prioritising transparency, accountability, and flexibility in programme operations. Alongside operational improvements, Jamaica remains focused on worker welfare and responsible labour practices.

As demand for reliable agricultural labour increases globally, Jamaica's approach remains centred on preparation, partnership, and programme integrity.

## Slow Periods, But No True Off-Season in Farm Worker Programme

For Senior Liaison Officer Sheldon Brown, the work supporting Jamaican farm workers in the United States continues year-round. Even when worker numbers temporarily decline between harvest cycles, planning, reporting, and employer engagement remain constant, ensuring the next season begins with stronger systems and well-prepared workers.

For those managing Jamaican farm workers in the United States, the agricultural calendar may shift, but the work never truly stops. Senior Liaison Officer Sheldon Brown, who has been part of the programme since 2001, said the quieter periods between harvest cycles still require extensive preparation.

"When the worker population drops, the travelling and site visits slow down," Brown explained. "But the work continues with



**File Photo:** Hon. Pearnel Charles Jr., Minister of Labour and Social Security.



**Photo:** Senior Liaison Officer Sheldon Brown poses with a bucket of freshly picked cherries at Gebbers Farms in Brewster, Washington State, during a workers' visit.

reporting, planning, and preparing everything for the next season." Administrative responsibilities increase when worker numbers temporarily decline. Liaison officers coordinate employer communication, documentation, and programme planning during these periods. "I would not describe it strictly as a high and low season," he said. "There are moments when things slow, but there is never a period when the work stops." "With employer meetings and marketing events, things move quickly," he said. "Within a short time you can move from a handful of workers to welcoming another hundred." These preparations ensure that farms receive workers when production demands increase. Over twenty-five years in the programme, Brown has witnessed its evolution. "I have been part of this since 2001," he said. "You see the ups and downs, but you also see how the programme has transformed especially over the last year."

Even during the slower periods, the behind-the-scenes preparation ensures that when the next season begins, workers and employers are ready to move forward together.

## Twenty-Two Seasons in the Orchard: The Steady Work of Denzel Reid

For more than two decades, Jamaican farm worker Denzel Reid has returned each season to harvest apples at Rulfs Orchard in Peru, New York. His experience reflects the discipline, skill, and reliability that have made Jamaican workers central to the success of farms across the Champlain Valley.



**Photo:** Denzel Reid picks apples at Rulfs Orchard in Peru, New York. *Photo by David Escobar.*

Denzel Reid has spent twenty-two seasons at Rulfs Orchard in Peru, New York. Over time, he has become an expert in the farm's operations, pruning, picking the right fruits, and easing each apple into the picking pouch with speed and care. "They're a very loving set of people here," Reid said of the surrounding community. "It makes me feel at home." Apple harvesting requires more precision than many realise. Each apple must be twisted from the branch cleanly so the stem remains intact, and bruising must be avoided to protect the fruit's market quality.

Experienced pickers develop an eye for the work. They can scan a tree quickly, identifying the fruits ready for harvest. Reid is one of 16 Jamaicans employed at Rulfs Orchard during

the harvest season. Many of the men return year after year, forming a core team that understands the demands of the farm. For the growers, that consistency is essential.

"We wouldn't be able to operate without them," said Amanda Whisher, co-owner of Rulfs Orchard. "Local labor is basically non-existent at this point."

Jamaican workers have been part of the orchard's operations since the 1980s, when the farm began using the H-2A visa programme.

The season stretches across several months. Workers travel from Jamaica to New York each year, living and working on the farm until the harvest is complete.

For many, the time away from family is difficult. Yet the opportunity provides income that supports households back home.

Over time, the workers have also become familiar faces in the town of Peru. Local businesses recognise them, and look forward to their presence each year. As autumn advances and the long harvest season slowly winds down, workers prepare for the journey back to Jamaica. For Reid, the work is demanding but meaningful. Each season represents another year of experience, another harvest completed.

For farms across the Champlain Valley, the success of the harvest often rests on the commitment and quiet consistency from their Jamaican workers.

**We want to  
hear from you!**

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

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