'I am not a number'

Exploring the wellbeing of seasonal farm workers in the UK

Heidi Janice Saxby

Thesis submitted for Doctor of Philosophy

Centre for Rural Economy, School of Natural and Environmental Sciences,

Newcastle University

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Abstract

Most seasonal workers on UK farms currently come from countries in Eastern Europe. Many are highly transient, and shuttle between the UK and their home country in response to work. Seasonal farm work is typically precarious, arduous and socially isolating. Although evidence suggests that returnee workers who have accumulated expertise and knowledge are highly valued by farmers, their work is often poorly paid and categorised as low-skilled. Despite having an important role in horticultural production, little is known about seasonal workers' wellbeing.

The research conducted for this thesis took a case study approach to four farms in Yorkshire, England, all of which produce soft fruits and vegetables. Ethnographic methods were used to understand the wellbeing of the farms' seasonal workers. Language barriers, political and industrial sensitivities about migrant labour and tight industrial deadlines necessitated a highly flexible approach to data collection. This utilised informal conversation and participant observation with workers, as well as unstructured interviews with farmers and other people working in or associated with food and farming industries. The collection of data followed the 2016 referendum, in which a marginal vote led to a decision that the UK would leave the EU. The UK's long-standing shortages of seasonal farm workers became worse after the EU referendum's result, and three years after the referendum are now described by the industry as critical.

This thesis provides an original contribution to an extensive field of literature about seasonal workers. It discusses the ways in which farms' psychosocial and material conditions might support or hinder workers' wellbeing, and how workers' decisions to return to the same farm(s) in subsequent years might thus be affected. The main contributions of this thesis can be summarised within the following themes. Farms with human-centric workplace cultures are more conducive to wellbeing; workers' wellbeing is supported by opportunities for physical and psychological relief from the farm; returneeism and employment on 'good' farms supports wellbeing and may positively influence subsequent farm employment. Finally, it is possible to support workers' wellbeing through several simple and relatively low-cost on-farm initiatives.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to food growers and workers, everywhere.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

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Introduction

Research Overview

This research explores the wellbeing of seasonal workers on farms in the United Kingdom (UK). More than eighty thousand seasonal workers are required to pick and pack fruits and vegetables in the UK each year (NFU, 2017b), and most come from Eastern European countries (ALP, 2019b). The term Eastern European country has various constructions (Stenning, 2005), but in this thesis refers to countries, including Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Lithuania and Latvia, which became EU members in or after 2004 (Sert, 2018). Whilst the UK remains part of the European Union (EU), workers from these countries are free to enter the UK without visas and work without a permit.

Many seasonal workers are highly transient; 'earning there, but living here' (White, A. 2014, p. 73). This means that they shuttle between their home countries and UK farms according to the availability of work, sometimes returning to the same farm(s) year after year. They are often categorised as low or unskilled (Dellot, 2018; ALP, 2019b). They are part of a population of 'flexible' workers upon which modern supply chains rely (NFU, 2017a), and are key to reducing the production costs of labour-intensive farm crops (AHDB, 2016).

Seasonal farm work epitomises the sort of 'dirty, dangerous and demeaning' (Aronowitz *et al.*, 2010) work in which migrant workers are over-represented (Åhlberg, 2018b). This work is typically precarious (Carolan, 2017; Fitzpatrick and Young, 2017) and is often done under punitive terms, in challenging physical conditions (Clutterbuck, 2017; Gore, 2019). Whilst not necessarily extreme or overtly violent, the effect upon workers means such work could be described as 'lawful but awful' (Passas, 2005, p. 773). The associated terms and conditions can become sufficiently commonplace as to become normalised and legitimised within the workplace (Chesney *et al.*, 2019) which makes it harder to stamp them out. Despite the difficulties experienced by many temporary farm workers, little is known about their wellbeing (Herbst and Gonzalez-Guarda, 2016; Meierotto and Som Castellano, 2019 (in press)).

The global shortage of workers willing to do low-waged and precarious jobs is jeopardising food production (AHDB, 2019e). More countries and industries are competing to attract workers from an ever-decreasing pool, forcing farmers to expend more and more resources on recruitment and trying to encourage workers to return (Capper, 2019). Farmers value returnee workers, whose accumulated knowledge and expertise contributes to their status as 'good' workers, and seek their return (MAC, 2013). The UK's shortage of seasonal workers is being

exacerbated by the 2016 EU membership referendum result, in which it was decided that the UK would leave the EU after a period of negotiation known as Brexit.

Workers who came to the UK from elsewhere in the EU after the referendum experienced increased anti-immigrant hostility (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017; Grant, 2017b; Guma and Dafydd Jones, 2018), devalued UK earnings because of poor exchange rates (ParliamentaryLive.TV, 2018) and uncertainty about being able to work in the UK after Brexit (Capper, 2019). Farmers growing labour-intensive crops reported less confidence about investing in their businesses; some downsized or relocated the production part of their businesses to countries with available labour (Food and Drink Federation, 2017). If the UK imports more fresh fruits and vegetables this could lead to more labour exploitation in its food supply chains, because auditing labour practices and implement safeguards on off-shored workforces will be difficult (Barrientos, 2013; Wilshaw, 2018).

Justification for the Research

This research is the first in-depth qualitative work-based account of UK seasonal workers' wellbeing on farms since the EU membership referendum. It contributes to a significant body of ethnographic work about transient workers in food and farming industries, most of which concerns workers in the Americas (Wells, 1996; Benson, 2008; Holmes, 2011; Gray, 2014; Preibisch, 2014; Weiler *et al.*, 2017). Evidence about Eastern European workers on farms in Western Europe has so far been limited (Rye, 2014).

Existing literature about seasonal farm workers tends to focus on certain characteristics of their experiences. These include migrating for extended periods of time with a view to settling in the host country for the medium to long term or having this in mind as a possibility. Irrespective of geographic location or the duration of workers' migration, related research and policy tends to foreground extreme exploitation, including slavery (Davies, 2018). Whilst this might raise the public's consciousness of it, it risks becoming voyeuristic (Jensen, 2014) whilst also neglecting the higher proportions of workers experiencing impoverished but legally acceptable conditions (Davies, 2018).

The wellbeing of rural communities in general is under researched (Saxby *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the perspectives, opinions and lived experiences of the seasonal workers in rural communities tend to be overlooked in favour of those of their employers (Basok, 2002; Meierotto *et al.*, 2019 (in press)), reinforcing their 'invisibility' to wider society (Wald, 2011; Holmes, 2013, p. 156; Carolan, 2017; Meierotto *et al.*, 2019 (forthcoming)).

For food supply systems to remain viable and sustainable, food workers' social wellbeing must be sustained (Allen, P, 2008; Open Letter, 2019; Meierotto *et al.*, 2019 (forthcoming)). Social wellbeing is likely to be reduced by the inequalities which workers experience, both in their home countries and in the UK. These can limit their work choices and make them more vulnerable to exploitation (Rogaly, 2008b; Barrientos, 2013; FLEX, 2017).

UK farms are experiencing unprecedented challenges recruiting and retaining seasonal workers from Eastern European countries (Thomson *et al.*, 2018; Capper, 2019). These shortages are exacerbated by global labour shortages (AHDB, 2019e), rising demand for UK produced fruits and vegetables (NFU, 2016) and, since 2016, by the Brexit process.

Seasonal farmworkers' working terms and conditions often fail to reach decent standards (France, 2016; Davies, 2018; McConnell, 2019), but may be sufficiently routine that workers normalise to them and no longer evaluate them as 'wrong' (Food Ethics Council, 2008). I maintain that the food and farming industry has a moral imperative to understand this and support workers' wellbeing accordingly. The resulting insights may also help to inform industry practices so that the recruitment and retention of workers improves.

My research aim is therefore as follows:

To explore on-farm factors affecting the wellbeing of seasonal workers, and the ways in which their cumulative effects may influence workers' decisions to return to a farm.

Within this, I set out to answer the following questions:

- o What on-farm features and practices are identified as important for wellbeing by seasonal workers?
- o What do farming employers knowingly or unknowingly do which facilitates workers' wellbeing?
- o What relevance do these on-farm features have for workers' employment decisions, including to return to a specific farm?

Research Approach

This research took a qualitative, interpretative approach to exploring seasonal workers' wellbeing on UK farms. The lack of existing knowledge about this necessarily meant that this research was inductive. I set out with the intention of exploring workers' subjective experiences of wellbeing, which are often associated with quality of life and happiness (Diener and Suh, 1997; Taylor, T, 2018). I utilised wellbeing concepts in broad terms,

because of the language and cultural differences of the seasonal workers who contributed, and the likelihood that they would evaluate wellbeing in various ways. Wellbeing concepts therefore informed rather than determined my collection and analysis of research data. I made no attempt to compare wellbeing between different individuals, or the wellbeing of one individual across time. Neither did I measure the wellbeing of individual workers, because the available wellbeing matrices might not have aligned with their own values (Scott, 2012), and because measurement risks depersonalising the individuals concerned (Jenkins, 2018).

Where communities with characteristics of particular research interest are repeatedly targeted, research fatigue can become a problem (Neal *et al.*, 2016; Goodman, Ashley *et al.*, 2018). This created an ethical incentive to select a less researched community, hence I chose my home county of Yorkshire in the north of England as a case study area. Carrying out research in my home county also enabled me to utilise my existing networks within local farming communities and to respond quickly to data collection opportunities according to the weather and other factors.

Taking a case study approach facilitated exploration of seasonal workers' wellbeing within specific, real-life contexts (Gilham, 2000; Yin, 2014). Language barriers, political and industrial sensitivities about migrant labour and tight industrial deadlines necessitated a highly flexible approach to data collection. I took an ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis. By this I mean that I employed various research methods typically associated with ethnography, whilst acknowledging that time constraints precluded a full ethnographic study. This would have required a prolonged and more intense period of data collection. Ethnographic research provides insights into research participants' social realities (Medland, 2019); the meanings and processes shaping and sustaining social groups and specific to that place and time (Herbert, 2000).

Four Yorkshire farms which produce soft-fruits and vegetables provided the basis for my data collection. I collected data primarily through informal conversation with and observation of seasonal workers, often whilst they were engaged in paid work. I also conducted unstructured interviews with farmers who currently or previously employed seasonal workers and sought the opinions of various other individuals concerned with food, the farming industry and its labour force. As a means of documenting evidence for subsequent analysis, I took photographs of workers on two of the farms visited, and utilised photographs provided by one seasonal worker for the express purpose of discussing his seasonal work-related wellbeing. I referred to secondary materials including policy documents, videos and industry surveys, maintained a detailed research diary and made audio-recordings of my own thoughts and

observations in the field and in intervals immediately following interactions with research participants. I analysed the data via a process of thematic analysis, informed by concepts of wellbeing.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the wellbeing theory underpinning my research. First, it considers wellbeing as a concept; what it is and why it matters. It then considers wellbeing in relation to migration and associated concepts including transnationalism. The final section of Chapter 2 is concerned with wellbeing in workplaces and introduces the concepts of decent work and of structural violence and structural vulnerability, both of which are significant to the workplace wellbeing of transient farm workers, as is indicated by Benson (2012), Holmes (2013) and Vogt (2013).

Chapter 3 provides a review of the evidence about food, farming and Brexit. It considers the existing literature about food's social costs and the ways that structural factors, which are largely outwith the control of individual farmers, can shape on-farm activities and workers' wellbeing. In the final section of Chapter 3, I provide a background account of Brexit, including its current and anticipated effect upon seasonal workers and their farming employers. It is important to consider this context because the farming industry tends to attribute its worsening labour shortage to off-farm factors including the rise in Brexit-related hostilities, the devaluation of workers' remittances and global labour shortages. But this may risk overlooking what can be done at a local, on-farm level to improve seasonal workers' wellbeing and encourage their return.

Chapter 4 provides an account of my methodological approach. It discusses the challenges of researching 'hard to reach' (Basok, 2002) research participants, and the issues that I encountered when collecting data, and then outlines the process that I followed when analysing the data. The Chapter explores the case study approach and the use of ethnographic methods as a way of improving understandings of workers' everyday experiences on farms and their wellbeing there. The existing literature has identified that this has not yet been properly explored (Meierotto *et al.*, 2019 (in press)) and adds to insights gained from earlier UK studies, including that of Thomson *et al.* (2018) which sought to understand what mattered to those looking to return to a farm.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I present and discuss my empirical data, relating this to the wellbeing concepts introduced in Chapter 2, and to the food and farming industry and the circumstances created by Brexit. Chapter 5 is concerned with workers' on-farm psychosocial experiences; many of which are personal and intangible, and how their wellbeing is affected by these. These include the numbering and commodification of workers, and farmers' management of division and conflict. The third section of Chapter 5 is concerned with workers' scope to look after themselves whilst on farms, including by accessing health care and finding respite from the farm, its work and their co-workers.

Chapter 6 presents my research findings about the material components of workers' on-farm wellbeing. These include the processes of recruitment, being kept (or not) on farms when workloads diminish; and what it is about the way that farm's productive processes are organised that is relevant to workers' wellbeing. Chapter 6's second section is about the ways that workers make their money on farms, and that workers did not always believe earning the highest possible sum to be the easiest way to improve their wellbeing. The third section of Chapter 6 is concerned with workers' domestic facilities on farms, and how they manage their limitations.

Categorising my research findings as either psychosocial or material is artificial but makes the data more accessible to readers with limited knowledge of the food and farming industry. In 'real life' there is little or no separation between the two, and one affects the other. These two Chapters show that, despite the imposition of structural factors and limitations influencing workers' treatment at a local level, there is scope for 'good' workplace practices to replace 'bad' ones, in order that farms can be more supportive of workers' wellbeing.

Chapter 7 offers conclusions to this thesis. It also offers recommendations for farms' practices relating to seasonal workers' wellbeing, and for future research.

Research Contributions

This thesis provides an original contribution to the existing field of literature about seasonal workers on UK farms. By invitation, its preliminary results contributed to a report by the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights (Alston, 2018). My results provided an account of the deprivations and challenges experienced by some seasonal workers on farms in the UK. They also contributed to an Open Letter to Henry Dimbleby, who had recently been commissioned by Defra's Secretary of State to carry out an

independent review of the UK's national food strategy. This letter requested better recognition of labour and labour conditions in food production and provision (Open Letter, 2019).

My research did not reveal illegal practices on the participating farms, and in line with existing research (Sommerstein and Botero, 2015; Sexsmith, 2016) these are not cited by workers as their primary concern. Instead, whilst taking it for granted that their season of work would be monotonous, dirty and tiring, they indicated that numerous, often mundane factors had scope to affect their wellbeing, and that many of these could be addressed through simple, low-cost measures informed by a person-centric workplace culture. Workers expressed greater inclination to return to farms that actively sought to meet workers' wellbeing needs.

A Note about Terminology

This section provides short explanations for some key terms employed in this thesis. Whilst some may seem self-evident, they require clarification because the ways in which they were used mattered to workers. Other terms are included to make clear from the outset how they are being used, and to reduce repetition.

Seasonal workers

My research focuses on the wellbeing of seasonal workers on UK farms, and what supports or undermines their wellbeing during their time there. It is important to clarify my use of the term seasonal worker, which can mean different things to different agencies. For example, different agencies within the farming industry may use it interchangeably with temporary or migrant worker (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). Meanwhile, the European Commission categorises those to whom I refer as seasonal workers as mobile workers (Kindler, 2018).

Most workers who participated in my research were highly transient and home-focused, travelling from their Eastern European home countries to work for weeks or months on UK farms. As nationals of A8[1] countries they had a right, at the time when I collected my data, to work in the UK (Zaronaite and Tirzite, 2006) without a work permit and to move freely within the EU, including into and out of the UK. Some shuttled back and forth between the UK and their home country several times in each calendar year to work on successive crops.

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[1] Poland, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and Estonia are the A8 countries which joined the EU in May 2004. Nationals of these countries were entitled to work in the UK from this point, first under the UK's worker registration scheme if intending to remain in the UK for more than a month, and later with free movement in and out of the UK (McCollum, 2012).

These were sometimes on the same farm, but some workers went to a succession of farms, and often returned to the same one(s) each year. This could mean for example that they harvested crops such as asparagus, soft fruits, orchard fruits and pumpkins over the course of several months at the same or different farm locations.

In this thesis I have not used the terms migrant worker and seasonal worker interchangeably, nor have I assumed them to be synonymous. This approach was informed by the workers who contributed to my research, and who tended to self-identify as one or the other. Within the Brexit context, it was perhaps significant that most of them rejected the term migrant worker, preferring instead the term seasonal worker. Some explained that political sensitivities about migration into the UK, including those which were reported after the EU referendum (BBC, 2016; Versi, 2016; MacNab, 2019) meant that electing to describe themselves as seasonal workers indicated that they were home-focused, with no intention of settling in the UK. Those whom they identified as migrants were in contrast more likely to have settled or be considering settling in the UK long term.

Such distinctions aside, deciding how to refer to and identify seasonal workers was problematic. To use *workers* as a term seemed to belittle and dehumanise them, as if I were referring to units of human labour which had no co-existing identity. That wellbeing was my research focus made this seem even less appropriate. However, it was important to be able to differentiate between them and other research participants such as farmers in terms that lay-readers would be able to make sense of, and so I made a pragmatic decision to retain the term workers.

Farmers and agriculture

In this thesis I describe seasonal workers as located on farms, employed by farmers and doing agricultural work. However, this is not an entirely accurate account of the arrangement. Although some workers *were* on farms which, for example raised livestock and/or grew arable crops, they were employed to pick, pack and cultivate what are more correctly described as horticultural crops. These include herbs, soft fruits, orchard fruits, cut flowers, vegetables such as salads and asparagus and root crops (NFU, 2019a). It is worth more than £3billion (AHDB, 2013) and is the most labour-intensive of all agricultural sectors (AHDB, 2017; Sustain, 2018).

'Big' and 'small' farms

In their accounts of seasonal farm work, seasonal workers who helped with my research talked about the farms on which they were currently employed but also frequently referred to and provided examples from farms where they had worked previously. Doing so enabled them to contrast their experiences on 'big' and 'small' farms and compare 'good' and 'bad' on-farm practises. This gave me a better understanding of what mattered to their wellbeing. I have tried to make this clear when recounting workers' descriptions, especially when these were critical or negative, because it is important that the farmers who cooperated with my research requests, enabling me to speak with their workers, are not assumed to have been responsible for 'bad' practices which actually occurred elsewhere.

Employers and employees

I refer to farmers as employers and seasonal workers as their employees because this is a readily understood and common-sense way to denote their respective roles and status on a farm, and the nature of their relationship to each other. However, my use of the terms employer and employee are not intended in any legal sense. Being an employer or an employee is associated with various legal obligations and rights respectively (Bexley, 2015), and because most seasonal workers are employed on a zero-hours basis, these obligations and rights do not automatically apply.

Food Supply Chains

I use the term food supply chains (FSC) or food systems to refer to the highly complex, interdependent processes through which raw materials are turned into food products suitable for retail and consumption (Devlin *et al.*, 2014).

Brexit

Although I began my research before the UK's EU referendum on its membership of the European Union was planned, this and the Brexit process greatly influenced my research. This included because farms found it harder to recruit and retain workers following the referendum, and because sensitivities about Brexit and the related issue of migration made some people in the industry more reluctant to engage with my research.

The term Brexit has become a shorthand term which refers to Britain's Exit (from the EU). It is used in reference to the debates, processes and negotiations associated with the UK's referendum on its membership of the EU and its final outcome (Tempest, 2017). There are

several terms relating to Brexit for which I provide definitions here, in line with those provided by The UK in a Changing Europe (2019b).

The UK's EU referendum, held in 2016 asked the question, 'Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?' In response, 51.89 percent voted for Leave, against a Remain vote of 48.11 percent, with the voting turnout being 72.21 percent. The process through which the UK exits the EU, and the terms and conditions under which it does so are regulated by Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union. Article 50 was triggered when the UK's then Prime Minister Theresa May notified the European Union of the UK's intentions on 29th March 2017. Brexit negotiations between the UK and the remaining EU member states then began, with 31st March 2019 originally set as the UK's departure from the EU. However, the lack of progress in agreeing the terms and conditions under which the UK would depart the EU led to this being postponed to 31st October 2019, but with repeated calls for a second referendum. A 'No-deal' Brexit, also known as a 'cliff-edge' or 'hard' Brexit, or as 'crashing out' of the EU could happen if the UK and the EU fail to agree the Article 50 negotiations. This remains a possibility until the entire negotiations are concluded. If this happens all agreement reached so far will be null and void, and there will be no transition period during which the UK could adjust to no longer being an EU member state. EU workers could, with immediate effect, lose their rights to work and live in the UK (The UK in a Changing Europe, 2019b).

The Psychosocial

The term psychosocial draws attention to the importance of considering people's psychological experiences within social contexts in order to fully understand their wellbeing (Hettige *et al.*, 2012). This means that a person's social and material circumstances has scope to affect their thoughts, feelings and actions (Akhter *et al.*, 2018). Psychosocial experiences may include a person's conscious and unconscious motivations, decisions and interactions (Stenning, 2018), and can be associated with emotional labour. Emotional labour describes the effort of self-regulating one's own reactions and responses to others and managing internal feelings so that interactions with others continue to be constructive and amenable (Wharton, 1999).

The Material

In this thesis I use the term material in relation to physical locations, things and practices that matter for workers' on-farm wellbeing. Whilst sometimes more tangible and visible than a farm's psychosocial factors, significance sometimes lay in the meanings attributed to a

material thing by workers, or in its symbolic value. These meanings are informed by life experiences, knowledge and people's perceptions of the function that a material thing plays (Lulle, 2008), or indeed the function or effect of its absence (Meyer, 2012).

Summary

In this Chapter I have provided an overview of the research, justified my choice of research focus and introduced my research aim and questions. I have outlined my methodological approach, summarised the thesis structure and research findings and provided notes on the terminologies used.

Wellbeing

Introduction

In this Chapter I review the wellbeing literature underpinning my research. The Chapter is presented in three sections. The first considers the arguments about what wellbeing is, what contributes to it and why it matters. The following section is concerned with wellbeing and migration. The association between the two is important for this thesis because people tend to migrate as part of their strategy for improving their longer-term quality of life and that of their families (Garapich, 2016). I also review the literature about how migration can affect migrants' health, their access to healthcare, and the significance of this for their overall wellbeing. In section 2.3 I review the literature about wellbeing and workplaces, and the potential for certain workplace factors to enhance or diminish wellbeing. I also introduce the concepts of structural violence and vulnerability, and that of decent work.

What is wellbeing and why does it matter?

That wellbeing is described as being an 'ultimate good' (Huppert, 2017, p. 4) provides sufficient reason to actively support and promote it. But by doing so it may also be possible to positively influence people's health and productivity, so that their immediate as well as their longer term quality of life is enhanced (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

Although wellbeing is an increasingly mainstreamed concept, consumption and acquisition are still actively promoted in westernised cultures as routes to happiness and wellbeing (Max-Neef, 2010). Status and 'stuff' are taken as evidence of life quality and objective wellbeing (D'Acci, 2011; Andrews *et al.*, 2014), and gross domestic product (GDP) is the dominant measure of prosperity (Gasper, 2004). But at a societal as well as on an individual scale, income and acquisition seem to enhance wellbeing only to a certain point, beyond which it tends to plateau or decline (Diener and Seligman, 2004; Kahneman and Deaton, 2010). It is increasingly understood that factors other than, or in addition to, observable and measurable ones like GDP must be considered, if progress and wellbeing are to be fully understood (Diener and Suh, 1997; Bergh, 2009; Bache and Scott, 2018; Kubiszewski *et al.*, 2018; OECD, 2018; Taylor, T, 2018). This has raised interest in new ways of thinking about wellbeing across various disciplines (Andrews *et al.*, 2014; Durand, 2015; Schwanen and Atkinson, 2015).

As a consequence, governments and across-nation organisations have begun assessing wellbeing and happiness on a national scale (Bache and Scott, 2018), with wellbeing concepts and indices being increasingly utilised in policies (Carlisle *et al.*, 2009; Hicks *et al.*, 2013). Examples include those created by the Scottish Government (Scottish Government, 2009), the OECD (OECD, 2018) and the UN (United Nations, 2018). The extent of this growth in interest about wellbeing suggests that the concept of wellbeing is intuitively plausible (Gasper, 2004) and that it offers important, valuable insights.

Wellbeing is an abstract, ambiguous concept, open to interpretation (Carlisle *et al.*, 2009; White, S, 2017). It is not always easy to define, or apply to real-life situations (Gasper, 2010; Dodge *et al.*, 2012). But there are commonalities; what is indicative of wellbeing in one theory or according to one individual is often a component or product of wellbeing according to another theory, or according to someone else's definition (Easterlin, 2003; Taylor, T, 2015). There is also a broad consensus that wellbeing is multidimensional, and that it relies on someone feeling that they can meaningfully contribute towards, and draw upon good social relations (Pontin *et al.*, 2013).

The Oxford English Dictionary (2019b) suggests that wellbeing is '*the state of being healthy, happy, or prosperous; physical, psychological, or moral welfare…good or safe condition'.* Wellbeing is an ideal, whatever is good for an individual (Tiberius, 2014), according to their subjective evaluation of their life at that moment in time (Atkinson, 2013; Seaford, 2018). But it is important to note that different cultural backgrounds and social constructions can lead to wellbeing being thought about and evaluated in subtly different ways (Gasper, 2010; Lomas, 2015), as can changing circumstances. Wellbeing may be evaluated as good despite difficult circumstances, or as poor despite (apparently) privileged and satisfactory circumstances (Huppert, 2017; Taylor, T, 2018; Thiede *et al.*, 2018). This can occur when individuals normalise to 'better' circumstances, because the wellbeing they derive from their improved circumstances, such as in their material or economic 'wealth,' may be negated by their raised expectations (Easterlin, 2003; Diener and Seligman, 2004).

As well as working out what wellbeing constitutes, it is also useful to consider its prevalence (Dolan *et al.*, 2017). Wellbeing can be transitory, fluctuating over time according to social, personal and economic circumstances (Layard *et al.*, 2014; Helliwell, 2018), so that someone who feels their wellbeing is good most of the time may have better wellbeing than someone else reporting good wellbeing some of the time. Because of this, comparing the wellbeing of different individuals, or assessing how quickly and to what degree their wellbeing improves or deteriorates makes it difficult to determine who has the 'best' wellbeing at any moment in

time, or to draw up definitions and frameworks which can be applied to everyone irrespective of their individual circumstances. It is especially relevant to my own research that wellbeing is relational, dependent on what is happening within a person's social and communal environment (Seligman, 2011; White, S, 2017) and informed by processes including social justice and social differences including gender, race and environment (White, S, 2015).

The extent to which wellbeing is determined by a person's genetics and intrinsic personality, sometimes referred to as a person's setpoint (Diener *et al.*, 2006; Conceição and Bandura, 2008) is debated. Setpoint theory presumes that a person's wellbeing *may* quickly return to a pre-determined equilibrium after advantageous events, and that people therefore need to take responsibility for improving their own lives, levels of happiness and wellbeing (Helliwell, 2011; Atkinson, 2013; Scott, 2015a). But this assumes that people's social conditions, opportunities and support networks are consistent and optimal, and that improving one's wellbeing simply requires effort. It ignores that people's circumstances are often sub-optimal, that they must deal with adversities, discrimination and disadvantages which are at least partially outwith their control. I return to this point in the following section when introducing the concepts of structural violence and structural vulnerability in relation to collective wellbeing determinants.

Migration-related wellbeing

In this section I consider the associations between wellbeing and migration. I provide an overview of migration-related literature and related concepts with relevance to my own research, including about migration and health. I apply the terms migration and migrant here in their broadest sense, to indicate shifts in a person's geographical location, usually but not necessarily between nation states (Loue, 2009).

In this thesis I describe the workers who participated in my research as seasonal or temporary workers in accordance with their preference. However, seasonal workers are often casually described as migrants (Carrington, 2017; Daneshkhu, 2017) and are categorised as migrants in immigration statistics (McKay *et al.*, 2006). Along with other low-waged workers they are likely to face more obstacles when seeking work in the UK once it has left the EU (Clutterbuck, 2017; Åhlberg, 2019).

Although my research is concerned with workers' on-farm wellbeing, their life-course wellbeing, life circumstances and intrinsic personalities are important because migration does

not occur in isolation of what someone leaves behind and may later return to. Wellbeing and migration are therefore inextricably linked from the outset (Bhugra and Mastrogianni, 2003; Prilleltensky, 2008).

Deciding to migrate indicates that a person is proactive about improving their life (Galasińska, 2010; Jones and Lever, 2014). Migration, temporary or otherwise, is often promoted as a way in which long-term wellbeing and lifestyle can be improved (Kasimis, 2008; Hettige *et al.*, 2012; Gardner, 2015). Many people are primarily or significantly motivated to migrate by financial circumstances (Anderson, B, 2010; Garapich, 2016; Czaika and De Haas, 2017; White, A *et al.*, 2018) and, in relative terms, financial remittances can be considerable (León-Ledesma and Piracha, 2004; White, A, 2009; Blouchoutzi and Nikas, 2010). For some target-earning migrants (White, A, 2014) this enables specific goals to be met, such as purchasing land or property. Having these sorts of material goals can improve that individual's long-term wellbeing as well as that of their family, via provision of decent housing, a reliable income, and stability for children and spouses previously separated by migration. These things may, in addition, enhance a migrant person's wellbeing by affirming their role and status within their home community (Vianello, 2013; Grabowska *et al.*, 2017), therefore enhancing their psychological wellbeing.

Being unhappy or dissatisfied with the home-country situation appears to increase a person's motivation to migrate (Ivlevs, 2014), as does stigma, a sense of social isolation or restlessness (Nail, 2015), making it possible that migration is sometimes a strategy for actively creating distance from things impairing wellbeing. But this almost certainly means that someone's wellbeing related to their home-country circumstances will affect whether they thrive in the host country (Cai *et al.*, 2014), influence the degree to which they feel satisfied with their migration experience (Diener *et al.*, 1985) and affect their levels of psychological distress whilst absent from their home-country (Bhugra, 2004; Loue, 2009). This draws attention to the possibility of migrant workers' wellbeing continuing to be influenced by what is going on within their home circumstances but over which they have no control (Holmes, 2013).

Unlike migrants who arrive with the intention of settling in their host country, seasonal workers are often, at least initially, perpetually transient. Their lifestyle may be one of 'turnstile,' or 'circular/repeat migrations', characterised by repeated relocations between their home country and the UK (Cook, J *et al.*, 2011; Martin, R. and Radu, 2012). As a feature of migration this can generate a sense of being 'neither here nor there' (IOM, 2010, p. 1), but transience can also become a state of mind (Kelly, 2009; Labroo and Mukhopadhyay, 2009; Jeffers and Vocke, 2017), which is not necessarily conducive to wellbeing. Although arguably

more 'normal' and society shaping than sedentariness (Nail, 2015), transience as a material process or a state of mind can be unsettling, associated with feelings of insecurity and unpredictability (Aure, 2013), and may therefore inform future migration decisions.

Some migrants are able to find emotional support and fortitude in local migrant networks and diasporic communities (White, A and Ryan, 2008; Galasinska, 2010; Flynn and Kay, 2017). However, those whose work necessitates repeated relocation, or who are rurally located, may find it harder to access and nurture such networks away from their workplace, and home-country communities and place-belongings may then develop especial significance (Lien and Melhuus, 2007). Significant home-country people and places can promote transnational behaviours, the migrant's life continuing to be shaped by their connections with and obligations to people, organisations and institutions in their home-country (Rosewarne, 2010). Transnationalism can be reinforced as well as facilitated by visits, economic and social remittances, religious practices and electronic communication (Vertovec, 2003; Burrell, 2010; IOM, 2010; Grabowska and Garapich, 2016). Transnationals may find themselves managing conflicting demands, labouring to sustain economic, social and cultural connections both 'there' and 'here' simultaneously (White, A, 2009; Jang *et al.*, 2015). The associated responsibility can be especially onerous for migrant wives and/or mothers (Ryan, L and Sales, 2013), especially if they contravene patriarchal traditions by leaving children behind (Duda-Mikulin, 2013). The low-waged, exploitative work often done by women migrants (Tayah, 2015; Netto and Craig, 2017; LeBaron *et al.*, 2018) means that their wellbeing is likely to be diminished by their home-country *and* host country circumstances.

Migration is strongly associated with upheaval and separation (Gardner, 2015), and greater psychological distress is sometimes observed in migrants than in non-migrants (O'Brien and Tribe, 2013). Although highly advantageous migration often represents, 'some kind of loss' (Nail, 2015, p. 2) of a personal, social or economic nature, often characterised by a pervasive sense of loss and yearning for something indefinable. This can be debilitating, can disrupt daily activities and make it harder to adjust to new situations (Ahmed, 2010). Transient individuals may experience 'identity disruption' (Iarmolenko and Kerstetter, 2015, p. 221) and consequently feel incapacitated by homesickness which is often trivialised, derided or shamed in workplaces (Matt, 2007). Many industries with migrant workers described as 'ex-pats' recognise the psychological debilitation and reduced work output that can result from transience, and often provide specialist support accordingly (Truman *et al.*, 2011). Yet, ex-pats often return home prematurely (Sappinen, 1993), which suggests that well-resourced

privilege is not always enough to make migration tolerable. Low-waged workers with access to fewer resources and less work-place support may find the experience even more difficult.

An intention to return home and/or no longer need to migrate is thought to be the aspiration of many east-west European migrants (Snel *et al.*, 2015). The anticipation of no longer needing to migrate for work can comfort people away from home (OECD, 2008), and yet some workers continue feeling adrift and emotionally unsettled long after returning home (Sinatti, 2011; McGhee *et al.*, 2012; Konzett-Smoliner, 2016). This may be compounded by the myth of return which, although originally applied to permanently settled migrants (Anwar, 1979), may also be experienced by turnstile migrants (Sinatti, 2011). Incremental increases in their home-country living standards over several years should eventually mean that some should no longer need to migrate. But during this period of time their expectations, or those of their families, may also rise, so that they have to continue migrating to service their life-style aspirations (Sinatti, 2011; Friberg, 2012; Tudor, 2014; Helliwell 2018). They may also be anxious to accumulate 'enough' money to ensure their living standards do not drop on returning home and this can be compounded by home-country property prices and living costs, which may rise in their absence (Parutis, 2014). In such circumstances, return can be elusive, acquiring a myth-like status and leading to feelings of disillusion about migration and their 'imagined futures' (Pine, 2014, p. 100).

A person's physical and mental health influences their wellbeing and vice versa (De Neve *et al.*, 2013; Department of Health, 2014), but attending to their own health can be problematic for migrants (Ullman *et al.*, 2011; Madden *et al.*, 2017; Holmes, 2019). The often referred to 'healthy migrant' phenomenon (Boden and Rees, 2009; Kennedy *et al.*, 2015; Lee, 2018) assumes that only young, healthy people migrate for work. Yet, the circumstances compelling workers to migrate may mean that they have a pre-migration history of inadequate healthcare, so that they arrive in their host country with already compromised health (Holmes, 2013). Healthy migrant assumptions may also be reinforced by the apparent fact that migrant workers seek healthcare less often than permanently resident workers. Yet this may be determined by their limited access to it (Preibisch and Hennebry, 2011; Hennebry *et al.*, 2015; Green *et al.*, 2018), rather than their lack of need.

Accessing healthcare in the host country can be difficult enough for migrant workers, that they may choose to temporarily return to their home country to get healthcare (Feldman *et al.*, 2008). Those who do try to access care in their host country can encounter difficulties because of language barriers, not knowing how the local healthcare system operates, their entitlement and how to register for care (Spencer *et al.*, 2007; Boden and Rees, 2009; Madden *et al.*,

2017; Öztaş *et al.*, 2018). Remoteness and long, unpredictable working hours (Schmalzried and Fallon, 2012; Rajjo *et al.*, 2018) and inadequate rural infrastructure, including public transport and digital services, also make it harder for temporary workers to find, register for and attend healthcare (Spencer *et al.*, 2007; Cassidy, 2008; Jayaweera, 2010; Rural England, 2018). Furthermore, health and social support is typically based on the needs of static populations and does not account for seasonal farm workers who are largely invisible (Bail *et al.*, 2012). Their limited access to healthcare is to the detriment of their general wellbeing, their occupational health (Bail *et al.*, 2012; Öztaş *et al.*, 2018) and ultimately their earning potential. The vulnerabilities that these circumstances create has led to a call for low-paid migrant workers to be targeted by health services as a high-risk group (Weishaar, 2008).

Finally, migrant workers may experience compound vulnerabilities and precarities. These may arise from their migrant status, the circumstances which led to their migration, and the limitations within which they can work (Gilmartin and Kuusisto-Arponen, 2019). Their work choices may at least in the short-term, be limited to unskilled or low-skilled work (Feldman *et al.*, 2008; Anderson, B. 2010). This brings us to the following section, about wellbeing and work.

Wellbeing and work

In this section I review the literature about work-related factors which may be relevant to workers' wellbeing. These factors are considered within the broad heading of decent work. Decent work, informed by local laws and regulations and the needs of industry (Taylor, M, 2017b) exists on a continuum of experiences and situations, the 'worst' of which are evident in exploitation and forced labour (Skrivankova, 2010).

But first, I introduce the concept of structural violence. Structural violence describes how disproportionate power and political, social, corporate and economic actions and agendas can indirectly prevent socially disadvantaged individuals from fully achieving their potential (Galtung, 1969). Their circumstances, which often appear to be 'nobody's fault' (Farmer, 2004, p. 307) can provoke disadvantaged individuals to migrate in search of opportunity and wellbeing, the migratory process itself then exposing them to new harms (Gamlin, 2016). At a local level, this may include intimidation, violations of human rights and reduced dignity and agency (Holmes, 2013). The concept of structural violence is associated with transient and precarious workers in global economies (Anderson, B. 2010; Reid-Musson, 2014; Weiler *et al.*, 2017), their commodification (Vogt, 2013), and with seasonal farm workers (Benson,

2008; Binford, 2009; McLaughlin, 2010; Holmes, 2013; Mares *et al.*, 2019). Structural violence significantly increases the exposure of transient, low-waged, low-status workers to slavery and other forms of extreme exploitation, whilst perpetuating the need for and supply of such workers (Binford, 2009; LeBaron *et al.*, 2018).

The related concept of structural vulnerability refers to individuals' increased risk of physical or emotional illness because of their work and circumstances, and that they are blamed and held morally responsible for their predicament. This serves to deflect attention from the macrostructures which cause and perpetuate the harm (Holmes, 2011; Quesada *et al.*, 2011). It is associated with structural disempowerment (Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010). This refers to the marginalisation, increased risk and reduced agency and bargaining power which certain social groups face as a consequence of structural violence (LeBaron *et al.*, 2018). Such disempowerment may determine the work someone does, where and on what terms.

A job's material and measurable factors, including wages and whether it is zero hours or not are, of course, important for workers who want to maximise their earnings. But decent work is more complex than how satisfactory someone's wages and hours are. This means that it is important for work to be thought about and evaluated in less simplistic and reductive terms, so that other workplace factors are also considered (Taylor, M, 2017b). This is because material resources, including money, are enablers. They are a means to an end, rather than something which in itself can guarantee wellbeing (Sen, 1985). For this reason, simply paying higher wages may not necessarily raise someone's work-related wellbeing (Carnegie Trust, 2018).

Definitions of decent work are necessarily broad, but the International Labour Office (ILO) believes it incorporates some key characteristics. Decent work is secure, stable, productive, is conducted in safe conditions and is adequately remunerated. Workers in decent work are fairly and equally treated and are provided with opportunities for development. They are free to take collective action, including through unionisation, to express their concerns and to challenge and negotiate decisions made which affect them and their work, whilst having their labour rights upheld (ILO, 2013). The Taylor Review of modern working practices, which is informed by concepts of decent work, summarises, 'All work in the UK economy should be fair and decent with realistic scope for development and fulfilment' (Taylor, M, 2017b, p. 6). Taylor's report offers explanations of what decent work *means* in practical terms, and makes various points about good and decent work relevant to my own research.

For work to be decent, organisations and those with authority within those organisations must take people's subjective opinions and needs into account. Weiss and Rupp (2015) observe that workers are often treated as objects which get things done, but that this limits an organisation's ability to understand how people relate to and operate within their work-roles. As an alternative, they propose that taking a person-centric approach, in which people's objective, lived experiences of work are accounted for and used to inform the business's operational decisions, can help sustain workers' sense of self, their motivation and positive affect (Weiss and Rupp, 2015). For this reason, the extent to which an organisation is person-centric may affect workers' wellbeing, and is therefore an important consideration in my research.

Local and global factors can combine in ways which will affect workers' health and wellbeing (Mares *et al.*, 2019). Locally, having a sense of control and autonomy about what tasks to do, how to go about getting them done and having choices about how to vary their workplace routines is supportive of workers' wellbeing (Tims *et al.*, 2013; Ogbonnaya and Daniels, 2017; Taylor, M, 2017b; Thomson *et al.*, 2018). But working under pressure tends to reduce wellbeing (Macky and Boxall, 2008; Rogaly, 2008a; Taylor, M, 2017b), and can increase the risk of occupational injury (Lloyd and James, 2008). Working under pressures can include being subjected to unreasonable demands (Bryson *et al.*, 2014; Fitzhugh, 2018; Wallace-Stephens, 2018) , and a lack of clarity about accountability and what the role includes (Bryson *et al.*, 2014). But where this has become routine and normalised workers may no longer 'see' or challenge it (Bloodworth, 2018).

Precarious work arrangements (Duke, 2011; Cooper and Faragher, 2013; Lewis *et al.*, 2014; Potter and Hamilton, 2014; Koehoorn *et al.*, 2019) and feeling obliged to work more hours than preferred are both associated with increased occupational illness. These include anxiety, stress and physical illness (Cooper and Faragher, 2013; Taylor, M, 2017b). Precarious work is often low-waged (Taylor, M, 2017b; Wallace- Stephens, 2018), often as a consequence of market pressures associated with fragile, global markets (Cooper and Faragher, 2013).

Globalised markets necessitate mobile, adaptive and flexible labour forces, so that production costs and risks can be delegated and/or minimised (Barrientos *et al.*, 2003; Pai, 2008; Standing, 2011; Bloodworth, 2018). But the sort of jobs created as a consequence rarely give workers the sort of work-related security and predictability that their wellbeing requires (What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2017; Fitzhugh, 2018). Instead, workers may feel resentful and constantly anxious about the possibility of their work coming to an end (Standing, 2011).

Precarious or flexible work often takes the form of zero-hours[2] contracts (Brinkley, 2013; Wallace- Stephens, 2018) which are heavily weighted in favour of the employer, host country or industry where they are operating (Scott, 2017). But because they have fewer employment rights, precarious workers often have little ability to challenge job demands of this sort (Ruhs and Martin, 2008; Bexley, 2015). For target earners, including many migrant workers (White, A, 2014), precarity has long term material implications, the income from their migratory work often being their means of securing life-long wellbeing. Whilst migrant workers appear to be over-represented in precarious, low-waged and otherwise exploitative jobs (Anderson, B, 2010; France, 2016; Iglicka *et al.*, 2016; Koehoorn *et al.*, 2019), these jobs seem to be peculiarly associated with seasonal farm work, regardless of time or place (Binford, 2009; McLaughlin and Hennebry, 2013; Reid-Musson, 2014; Preibisch *et al.*, 2016).

A person's intrinsic personality traits can influence their subjective wellbeing in the workplace (Biggio and Cortese, 2013), because these can inform their interactions with and responses to others. Irrespective of their status and the relationship between those involved, people's wellbeing is deeply affected by the *terms* on which they interact with others (Illich, 2001; Bryson *et al.*, 2014; White, S, 2017; Fitzhugh, 2018). Inevitably therefore, good relationships and regular communication (Fitzhugh, 2018) between workers and their employers significantly affect workplace wellbeing. This includes the promotion of good and open communication, proactive management of inter-personal conflict, a deliberate levelling of hierarchies, and acts of mutual respect (Biggio and Cortese, 2013).

Employers and line managers with high emotional intelligence[3] (Goleman, 1998; Mikolajczak *et al.*, 2007) are more likely to have an effective and compassionate leadership style (Edelman and van Knippenberg, 2018), and this can help to protect workers from psychological and social harm (Dollard and Bakker, 2010; ILO, 2019). This promotes in-work contentment which in turn enhances team working and co-operation, pro-social behaviours and motivation (Ivlevs, 2014). Work teams which operate on these terms tend to be more productive (Ryan, R and Deci, 2001; Bryson *et al.*, 2014; Oswald *et al.*, 2015; Ogbonnaya and Daniels, 2017), with less absenteeism and lower rates of staff turnover (What Works Wellbeing, 2018).

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[2] Zero hours contracts are those under which the employer is not obliged to offer regular work. They *sometimes* give workers more flexibility, but mean they have no reliable income and can be highly exploitative (Brinkley, 2013).

[3] Emotional intelligence is a 'soft skill' enabling people to identify, understand and manage their own emotions and those of others (Goleman, 1998).

Summary

Despite its many definitions and applications, wellbeing is universally considered to be an ultimate good. Facilitating people's wellbeing within communities is important for social justice but can also bring economic benefits. Regardless of cultural differences, people tend to respond consistently and predictably to given events and situations, so that wellbeing has a universal relevance (Lomas, 2015). I utilise wellbeing in this thesis in broad, pragmatic terms without imposing specific theories or matrices (Meierotto *et al.*, 2019 (in press)) and consider workers' wellbeing at individual scales as well as from relational and situated perspectives (Atkinson, 2013).

Migration is often intended and undertaken with the expectation of a better quality of life and improved wellbeing. But migration can also present wellbeing challenges which continue to be informed by home-country circumstances. These include the emotional labour of sustaining social connections in two or more locations and a sense of being 'neither here nor there' because of prolonged transience. Wellbeing may also be affected by migrants' host country experiences, which include the sort of work available to them and their access to networks and services, including healthcare as temporary or 'new' residents of a community.

The concept of wellbeing can be used to encourage organisations to adopt person-centric approaches to policy and practice (Seligman, 2011; Helliwell, 2016). In relation to work and workplaces, wellbeing can be influenced by global or macro forces as well as by local or micro forces. Structural violence on a macro scale tends to be attributed to the indirect harms caused by systems and organisations which are sufficiently powerful and influential to shape local working and social practices, but to whom blame is not easily attributed. Structural violence can predispose people to migrate for work, and to accept work under disadvantageous terms and conditions. Locally, 'decent' work, including scope to negotiate fair terms and working conditions and influence how and what they do at work, matters to workers' wellbeing. The latter may have especial relevance in workplaces subject to increasing intensification. Workplace wellbeing also requires equitable, proactive and sensitive management and leadership practices, so that workers can be confident that action will be taken where necessary, and that they feel 'visible' and valued.

Theories and concepts of wellbeing informed, rather than determined my approach to collecting and analysing data for this thesis. The ways in which my research participants' evaluations of subjective wellbeing differed according to their cultural, social and vocational identities and their intrinsic personalities and traits led me to avoid adopting a rigid definition

of wellbeing. Bearing this in mind, I therefore adopted the following as a working definition of wellbeing. I assumed that social, physical, emotional and material satisfaction were key components of wellbeing. I assumed that scope to belong to, draw upon and contribute meaningfully to social communities of which they were a part at any given time, confident their intrinsic worth and contribution were valued within and by that community would contribute to someone's wellbeing. Within this setting it was also important for them to feel materially and emotionally safe, protected from harm, pain or threat and to have a sense of purpose; day to day as well as for the long-term. The more prevalent a person's sense of 'good' wellbeing was, the more likely they were to positively evaluate their overall wellbeing status.

Food, Farming and Brexit

Introduction

This Chapter offers accounts of the UK's food and farming system and of Brexit, and their relation to seasonal workers' on-farm experiences. I first discuss the social costs of cheap food, and then develop a discussion about the on-farm conditions typically experienced by seasonal workers. This Chapter ends with an account of Brexit and its current and likely effect on the recruitment of seasonal workers to labour-intensive farming sectors.

A considerable body of literature about seasonal farm workers' experiences already exists and includes accounts about some of the challenges faced by seasonal workers. Notable examples which I draw upon here and in my empirical Chapters include ethnographies by Basok (2002); Benson (2012); Gray (2014); Holmes (2013); and Wells (1996). However, in common with many others these accounts focus on workers in the Americas, and none consider workers' experiences from a perspective of their subjective wellbeing.

Reflecting on existing literatures about workers' experiences helps to emphasise the potential for farms to make positive changes at a local level, which might support workers' wellbeing, and subsequently encourage their return. Some of these challenges may exist in isolation of wider political contexts such as Brexit, which also have potential to affect workers' wellbeing and discourage or even prevent them from returning to work on UK farms.

Social Costs of Cheap Food

In this section I provide an overview of the UK's food supply system, and its consequences for farmers. I then show how imperatives to make food supply chains more efficient whilst simultaneously pushing down food retail prices, can shape on-farm working practices.

Food Supply Chains

Despite the UK producing less than half of all the food it consumes (DEFRA, 2018a; Henderson, 2018), most consumers have access to a highly varied, cheap and convenient diet (Clutterbuck, 2017). This is facilitated by highly complex global food supply chains (FSC), which operate so smoothly that customers are largely unaware of them (Stone *et al.*, 2015). The complexity of FSC make them highly vulnerable to failure (Henderson, 2018), and because they tend to be protracted and have multiple stakeholders, they are subject to abuse.

This is because when foodstuffs frequently change hands, there tends to be a greater delegation of risk, and more abdication of social responsibility (Willoughby and Gore, 2018).

Food is political (Brunori *et al.*, 2013; Bell, 2016) and has a complex role which extends beyond that of human sustenance. Governments, powerful corporations and industry related organisations are motivated to keep food prices low as this helps stabilise society and boost economic growth (Gray, 2014; Manning, 2015; Clutterbuck, 2017; Lang *et al.*, 2017; Pritchard, 2018). These incentives make food and farming an attractive proposition to multi-national corporations, who seek involvement and investment at every stage, from breeding new crops to retailing foodstuffs (IPES, 2016; Pritchard, 2018). Food's significance is such that seeds and other food related goods are increasingly being patented by multi-national corporations hoping to control their use and disenfranchise less powerful stakeholders (Then *et al.*, 2018). This has concentrated power, wealth and influence at the top of FSC hierarchies, tying different sectors of the food and farming industry together; the majority of global seed sales and pesticides for example, are now controlled by only a handful of corporations (IPES, 2017; Then *et al.*, 2018).

This has led to farmers' production costs increasing whilst what they get paid for their produce has fallen (Tansey, 2008). In comparative terms, some farmers receive less pay than they did several years ago (Frerick, 2019; Kirwan, 2019). Farmers trying to ensure that their farms are still viable despite these pressures may become more reliant on migrant labour (Geddes and Scott, 2010). Whilst seasonal workers' mobility makes it difficult to quantify this increasing reliance, Devlin (2016) suggests that it has risen from around 5 percent of the agricultural workforce in 1980, to around 14 percent in 2014. In attempting to remain viable businesses, farms may also more frequently operate in ways that are not in their workers' interests (Holmes, 2013; Willoughby and Gore, 2018).

The Customer is King

The UK's agri-food industry contributes around £112 billion to the UK economy (NFU, 2018a) but is weighted in favour of food retailers (IPES, 2017; Medland, 2017). Retailers retain around fifty percent of the revenue from food retail sales, but only five percent is retained by farmers and other food producers (Willoughby and Gore, 2018). Retailers, most particularly big multi-nationals, have established their position over time through processes of consolidation (IPES, 2017; Pritchard, 2018). This has become mutually reinforcing (IPES, 2017), with its occurrence in one location or within one group of organisations forcing others to follow suit in order to retain their market share. Supermarkets have secured themselves as

the gatekeepers of UK food retailing (Wilshaw, 2018) with sixty-seven percent of all UK food retail sales now being controlled by only four supermarkets (Crossley, 2018; Wilshaw, 2018).

This powerful position enables supermarkets to wield considerable influence over both their customers and their suppliers. For example, increasingly efficient production methods, processing and distribution (Lightfoot *et al.*, 2017) help reduce food retail costs, but these are pushed down further by the ability of large retailers to negotiate favourable trading terms and conditions. By such means, retailers can manipulate farmers into becoming price takers, rather than price setters (Hellio, 2016; DEFRA, 2018b). Their considerable buying power means that they can afford to abandon producers and farmers whose prices are too high or whose produce is of lower quality, coercing them into renegotiating their terms or reducing their asking prices. Farmers who become the casualties of these ethically dubious practices are more likely than others to reduce what they pay their own workers (MAC, 2013) in their efforts to minimise their losses.

Elaborate, highly processed foods generate significantly more profit for large retailers than high quality, unprocessed foods (Pritchard, 2018), and retailers are subsequently keen to reduce the liabilities associated with retailing foods like fresh fruit and vegetables. One of their preferred strategies for reducing their own liability is to avoid carrying excess stock of fresh foods, because they are expensive to warehouse and difficult to dispose of if unsold (Ball, 2018; Feedback, 2018). But retailers also aspire to always have in stock what customers want, and so have adopted 'just in time' stocking systems. These are operationally and economically advantageous to retailers, and are convenient for customers, but they can force farmers into complying with retailers' schedules. Retailers often make last minute changes to orders already placed, for example when unexpected hot weather increases the demand for salads (Geddes and Scott, 2010; MAC, 2013), before sanctioning farmers who cannot fulfil their amended order. This encourages farmers to deliberately over-produce (Quinn, 2017), increasing wastage and leaving them with higher labour costs.

Not coincidently, liability pushed down the FSC tends to concentrate where temporary workers are employed. This is because in their attempts to manage the liabilities described, farmers have increasingly utilised flexible labour (AHDB, 2008; MAC, 2013; Thomson *et al.*, 2018), labour being one of the few production costs that they can control (Scott, 2013b; LeBaron *et al.*, 2018). As a result, seasonal and temporary workers have increased as a proportion of the UK farming workforce, rising from around five percent in 1980, to seven percent in the mid-1990s to around fourteen percent in 2014 (Devlin, 2016).

The risks inherent in food production are disproportionately borne by farmers and their workers (Rogaly, 2008a; Barling, 2015; Fitzpatrick and Young, 2017). This means that food production's economic, social and environmental costs are no longer reflected in what consumers pay at the supermarket checkout (Food Coalition Scotland, 2016; Crossley, 2018; Holden, 2019)[4]. Retailers reduce their own risk when retailing fresh fruits and vegetables by using legal but ethically dubious unfair trading practices (UTPs). These are terms and conditions which retailers unilaterally impose upon their suppliers (European Commission, 2018; Verdonk, 2018) to their own advantage.

The exploitative nature of UTP's is widely acknowledged, and legislation has been recently introduced to protect food producers (European Commission, 2018). Examples of UTP's include deliberately delaying payments (Quinn, 2017; Herman and Wills, 2018), paying less than the production cost (Wilshaw, 2018) and making producers pay for in-store promotion of their own produce (Donati, 2015; European Commission, 2018). Farmers subjected to frequent or multiple UTP's are likely to have unreliable cash-flow, and over time may be forced to supply produce at ever lower prices (Baggini, 2014).

Food retailers consider customers to be their most important stakeholders (Jachertz and Nützenadel, 2011; Wald, 2011; Lightfoot *et al.*, 2017). This privileging of customers can further disadvantage farmers and their workers (Lloyd and James, 2008; Baggini, 2014; Crossley, 2018), often resulting in their exploitation. Many food customers are primarily motivated by price, convenience and choice (Manning, 2015; Wilshaw, 2018), and retailers' efforts to always meet their expectations has created a self-perpetuating co-dependency between them and their customers.

Retailers' price wars make it possible for most UK citizens to access a wide range of foodstuffs at low prices (Devlin *et al.*, 2014; Lever and Milbourne, 2017). The average household food spend in the UK is now lower than ever before, having fallen from around thirty percent of household income in the 1950's to less than ten percent today (DEFRA, 2018b). Many foods which used to be too expensive for most people, often because of the labour intensiveness of their production, have become democratised. Strawberries and raspberries, for example, were once an occasional, short-season treat but are now an everyday staple for around eighty percent of the UK population (British Summer Fruits, 2017a). This might seem like social progress; why should less affluent people be denied soft fruits? But it

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[4] For every pound spent at the checkout, it is estimated that consumers indirectly pay another pound in taxes to tackle the effects of current food production methods and consumption habits on human health and the environment (Pritchard, 2018).

has happened because retailers found a way of meeting demand more cheaply, including by forcing farmers to shoulder more than their fair share of the risk of growing these crops. Farmers responded by becoming more reliant on 'flexible', low-waged workers (LeBaron *et al.*, 2018; Wilshaw, 2018). Few consumers understand the effect that their own food choices have upon food workers, because most have urban lives, disconnected from the realities of food production (Thompson, 2002).

This section's title is intended to indicate the significance of customer expectations about fresh foods, and their capacity to indirectly shape what happens on farms. This includes the terms and conditions under which seasonal workers work. Large retailers have secured a position in which they now continually influence customers' buying habits and raise their expectations, but also influence seasonal workers' experiences (Herman and Wills, 2018). In the following section I discuss the existing literature about farming's flexible workforce and the on-farm terms and conditions under which workers operate.

On the farm

In this section I describe how UK farms came to depend on seasonal workers from other EU countries, and the implications of technology as a replacement for, or an adjunct to, seasonal workers. I then provide an account of the typical conditions experienced by seasonal workers on farms.

Farming's flexible workforce

Farming is an inherently unpredictable activity (Gray, 2014). It is constrained and influenced by multiple factors. These include pests, diseases and weather conditions, all of which can destroy or delay crops; and market uncertainty, which can reduce the value of a crop (Fleisher, 1990; Isakson, 2015). Farmers seek to mitigate these factors, by maximising the farm's efficiency and reducing their production costs as much as they possibly can (Allain *et al.*, 2013; Gray, 2014). For some horticultural crops, labour can account for up to seventy percent of production costs (AHDB, 2019f). This can make workforce flexibility a necessity if any profit to be made (Basok, 2002; Anderson, B and Ruhs, 2010; Alho and Helander, 2016). This is because the markets into which these goods are being sold are highly competitive (ALP, 2017a). Flexible workers or workforces, who can, at least theoretically, be recruited and laid off at short notice, mean that farmers can get their crops picked, without having to

meet ongoing costs incurred when permanent workers are retained through periods of insufficient work (McCollum and Findlay, 2015).

Flexible workforce arrangements provide farmers, retailers and shoppers with more value for their money (Binford, 2009; Geddes and Scott, 2010; Weiler, 2018), but the workers themselves are rarely advantaged (Lever and Milbourne, 2017). This is because the flexibility of their work means it is usually also precarious (Binford, 2009), and often offered only on a zero hours basis (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). This reduces their in-work rights and usually means that their wages are low (ALP, 2017a).

Farms' workforces can be in a state of constant flux throughout the year, according to what crops are maturing, and retailers' demands. Big farms may have several hundred workers (Thomson *et al.*, 2018; AHDB, 2019c), with a four-fold increase at the peak of production (Scott, 2013b). Determining how many seasonal workers are needed, and how many are actually working on UK farms at any given time is difficult (ONS, 2018). This is because the EU's Freedom of Movement means that most seasonal workers are not recorded. Jack Ward, the Chief Executive of the British Growers Association, explained to me that the frequency with which many seasonal workers shuttle between the UK and their home countries, and/or move between farms, as different crops matured creates additional complexities for anyone trying to accurately calculate the numbers of workers in the UK at any given time. He said that DEFRA used to compile figures, but the cost of doing so became too prohibitive for this to continue. He also explained that the farming industry, and particularly the horticultural sector, currently calculates its labour requirements and estimates how many workers are in the UK on the basis of the number of workers required per hectare of a given crop. This is then multiplied by the number of hectares of that crop grown nationally and leads to estimated requirements of around eighty thousand seasonal workers for UK horticulture to be sustained, in addtion to permanent workers (NFU, 2017b). Workers from other EU countries are over-represented in this work (Wasley, 2011; McCollum, 2012; FLEX, 2018).

Demand for UK-grown horticultural crops is rising and is likely to continue doing so (Nye, 2018). This is because the UK's population is growing, because of concerns about the ecological impact of importing food, and because more people are trying to incorporate more fresh fruits and vegetables into their diet for health reasons (Devlin, 2016). Sales of certain horticultural crops has increased significantly, including soft fruits which have risen by over one hundred and thirty percent in the past ten years (Hortnews, 2018a). But sustaining and capitalising on these sorts of increases relies on being able to recruit and retain more workers, and this is becoming harder (AHDB, 2019c),

Seasonal workers in the UK used to be recruited from local communities or other UK regions (Nye, 2016), but social changes meant that this ceased to be a viable option (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). Many of these workers were women, who were already living within a rural community, but most now have to work full time (Nye, 2016; ParliamentaryLive.TV, 2018). Many other potential workers are discouraged from doing the work because of its precarity, unsociable hours, low wages and poor career prospects (Nye, 2017b; ALP, 2019b).

Low national rates of unemployment mean that people living in urban areas have a wider choice of similarly waged jobs (ALP, 2018), and would in any case find it difficult to commute or relocate to a rural area because of high rural living costs and poor transport links (Grant, 2017a; ALP, 2019b). Those who are claiming benefits but willing to take temporary jobs like those on farms are additionally discouraged by the UK's social welfare system, the complexity of which makes it almost impossible to temporarily suspend benefits claims to do short-term work at short notice (MAC, 2013; Grant, 2017a). This can mean that for every two hundred seasonal worker vacancies, farmers may receive just one 'local' applicant (MAC, 2018). 'Local' workers are also frequently described as too unfit for the work, too unreliable or unwilling to stick at it (MAC, 2013; Ward, Graham, 2017a), so that farmers tend to scorn the suggestion that their local workforce will ever meet their labour needs (Tasker, 2016; Capper, 2019).

Although getting worse, farm labour shortages are not a recent phenomenon (Rolfe, 2016), nor are they unique to the UK. Globally, more industries across more countries are chasing fewer workers (MAC, 2013; Rohleder, 2016; ALP, 2018; AHDB, 2019f; Charlton *et al.*, 2019). Countries which were once the source of large numbers of temporary workers are becoming more prosperous (Grant, 2017b), better educated, and are ageing demographically reducing that populations' inclination and ability to work abroad (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). And while many workers from Eastern European countries used to earn more on UK farms than in their home countries (ALP, 2019b), pay differences there are now narrowing, so that wages offered by UK farms have become less incentivising (Taylor, C, 2017a).

Historic shortages of farm labour prompted the UK government to introduce the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) in 1943 (Scott, 2015b). Intended as a cultural exchange, this work permit scheme provided UK farmers with short term labour, often by agricultural students (Consterdine and Samuk, 2015). Work permit schemes like SAWS prioritise employers' needs (ALP, 2017b), and by doing so often neglect workers' wellbeing and welfare (FLEX, 2018). Work permit schemes have also been criticised on the ideological grounds that they import 'labour', not 'people' (Castles, 2006; Preibisch, 2010). They often

disadvantage low-skilled workers in practical ways too, including by stopping workers from seeking work in other sectors or applying for citizenship (Walia, 2010; Gordon, 2018; LeBaron and Phillips, 2018), or tying them to specific employers or industries (Sumption and Fernández-Reino, 2018). For these reasons, work permit schemes, especially those that are badly designed or poorly 'policed,' can make low-waged workers more vulnerable to severe exploitation or slavery (Metcalf, 2018).

But work permit schemes are an attractive solution to labour shortages for farmers, because they are assured of having an agreed number of workers for an agreed duration (ALP, 2017b). For this and other reasons they tend to evaluate these workers as better and more reliable than those recruited through other means (Scott, 2015b; Sexsmith, 2016). Its predictability gives farmers confidence about planning their farm's productivity around this labour (Basok, 2002; Hellio, 2016; Weiler *et al.*, 2017).

The UK farming industry's demand for temporary farm workers increased significantly in the 1990s. This occurred because of consolidation in UK food retail, which reduced farmers' profits and forced them to find new ways to cut production costs (Nye, 2016). At the time, SAWS was the principal means of securing non-UK labour, and the number of worker permit continued to grow until 2014 when it peaked at twenty-five thousand (Scott, 2015b). However, undocumented and/or illegal workers were also doing seasonal farm work in the UK at this time (Pai, 2008). Some of these acquired legal work status overnight when their A8 home county joined the EU on the 1st May 2004 (Anderson, B *et al.*, 2006). I was told by one of my own contacts in the farming industry that large numbers of these workers took day trips to mainland Europe, so that they could re-enter the UK as EU citizens and go back to their work on the same farms.

The EU's 2004 enlargement gave UK employers a larger potential pool of EU workers to draw upon (Bachan and Sheehan, 2011; McCollum *et al.*, 2012), and SAWS permits were gradually reduced in number. In 2007, they were restricted to Bulgarian and Romanian workers (McGuinness and Garton Grimwood, 2017). In 2013, the UK's then Coalition Government closed the SAWS programme (MAC, 2013), claiming that employer's labour requirements could easily be met by EU workers' free movement (Grant, 2017b; Sumption and Fernández-Reino, 2018). Farmers protested that although likely to have enough in the short term, the numbers of Eastern European workers available to them would probably decline once they were no longer confined to agricultural work under SAWS, because they would probably disperse into other industries (MAC, 2013). In addition, it was suggested that

the abolition of SAWS might increase the overall number of irregular as well as permanent migrants (Consterdine and Samuk, 2015).

The campaign for a new SAWS type programme to be introduced therefore continued, on the basis that it would provide farmers with a reliable and predictable source of labour without increasing net migration (ALP, 2017b; NFU, 2017a). The UK government finally announced a new SAWS style programme, beginning in 2019. But this is capped at two and a half thousand workers per year from outside the EU, and permits workers to work on UK farms only for up to six months each year (NFU, 2018b). It is also criticised for recreating many of the problems of the old SAWS, being weighted in favour of employers and therefore making workers vulnerable to labour abuse (FLEX, 2018).

At present, around ninety percent of the UK's temporary farm work vacancies are filled by workers from Eastern European countries (ALP, 2019b; McGuinness and Garton Grimwood, 2017), and their contribution to the UK food and farming industry is credited with having significantly increased the UK's production and consumption of certain labour-intensive crops over the past twenty years (British Summer Fruits, 2017b). But this industry expansion is now under threat. Although new technologies[5] and mechanisation promise to reduce the need for human labour and reduce the drudgery of labour-intensive farm work (AHDB, 2019f), the demand for labour is in fact rising (AHDB, 2019c). Ironically, one reason for this is that technological advances and investment, including for new plant varieties and crop protection, mean that crops including salads and soft fruits are in season for longer, so that the duration for which workers are needed is being stretched (MAC, 2013).

Some sophisticated technology, including robotics, is already commercially available for grading, sorting and packing, but is unlikely to replace human workers for crops like strawberries in the next decade (NFU, 2017a; AHDB, 2019a). This is because machines cannot easily replicate the dexterity and judgement required to harvest easily damaged produce (MAC, 2013; British Summer Fruits, 2017b; Kirwan, 2019). The new technologies will in any case require highly skilled operators and maintenance workers. These workers will command higher wages, so that on an industry scale, sophisticated technology may help manage production risks, but not resolve human labour shortages (AHDB, 2019a; Kirwan, 2019).

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[5] New technologies are not always high-tech. They also include crop protection and growing systems, such as polytunnels, plastic crop mulches and raised strawberry cultivation 'cradles'. These all help to extend the crops' season, and make it easier to grow a cleaner, more uniform crop. They may also raise employers' expectations about how quickly crops can be harvested and over what duration.

The significant up-front cost of these new technologies will in any case make them cost prohibitive for smaller business (Grant, 2017a; NFU, 2017a; Charlton *et al.*, 2019), and even bigger businesses with more capital at their disposal will want to be sure that the political and industry climate makes investment worthwhile. Inevitably, this includes them having confidence that they will be able to get appropriately skilled workers (ParliamentaryLive.TV, 2018).

Workers described as low-skilled are those who farmers have the biggest shortages of at present (ALP, 2019a), but the term low-skilled may have implications for workers' wellbeing. This is because the term low-skilled may be used legitimise seasonal workers' low wages and poor working conditions, as evidenced by ethnographies of cross-border farm workers in South Africa (Bolt, 2013) and California (Holmes, 2013). Farmers try to reduce their costs because their profit margins are tight, and so the work currently done by seasonal farm workers is typically paid at, or close to the UK's national minimum wage (ALP, 2019b).

But whilst seasonal farm work often requires no qualifications, the work must be done to exacting standards, including without damaging the fruit and at a speed which is difficult to achieve and maintain for hours at a time. With experience, most workers become faster and more efficient, which indicates that 'good' workers are more skilled than others. The concept of 'good' workers is explored in the next section of this Chapter, but for the purpose of the current discussion, it must be recognised that 'good' low-skilled and low-waged workers may be more skilled than is often realised. Farmers who rely on seasonal workers are often quick to acknowledge that their work requires skills, and that workers should not be dismissed as unskilled (BBC, 2019; Capper, 2019). Equally, it is evident that much of the work done by seasonal farm workers, demands minimal *expertise* or *previous experience*, although as will become evident, the previous experience held by returnee workers is highly valued by farmers.

Of importance, however, is the fact that jobs typically categorised as low-skilled are becoming increasingly standardised, with tasks within those jobs prescribed by strictly defined guidelines and standards. This can have the effect of de-skilling workers, and/or of validating others' beliefs that their work is unskilled, and can make it harder for workers to lobby for better recognition and terms of employment (Dellot, 2018). One such example of this standardisation, introduced by the Agriculture Horticulture Development Board (AHDB),

takes the form of lean[6], a programme designed to remove all possible impediments to seasonal workers' productivity (AHDB, 2008; AHDB, 2019b). Such standardisation has clear benefits for employers who can identify what (or whom) needs to become more efficient. But it also raises expectations about the pace at which workers are expected to operate, and the duration for which this pace can be sustained (Dellot, 2018). The psychological pressure that this imposes may contribute to the 'job strain' experienced by workers subjected to increased workplace demands, but with reduced autonomy and control about meeting them (Wallace-Stephens, 2018).

Seasonal workers' on-farm conditions

In this section I review the existing literature about the on-farm conditions and practices typically experienced by seasonal workers employed to work on labour-intensive crops. This is followed by a discussion of literature concerned with the concept of 'good' workers.

The nature of farm work has always been such that it requires people to labour in difficult and uncomfortable physical conditions, often exposed to the weather and working long hours to optimise the value of the farm's crops. Additionally, power imbalances between those who own or control the land, and those who make their labour available to work upon it very often disadvantage the latter. Workers' terms of employment are often precarious and unilaterally favour employers, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and reducing their bargaining power (MAC, 2013; Devlin *et al.*, 2014).

This is not a recent phenomenon; the trade union movement began in the 1800s in southern England in an attempt to secure better terms and conditions for farm workers (Clutterbuck, 2017). Finding work more congenial and secure than farm work has a history of taking people away from rural areas (Lang *et al.*, 2017), and this trend has contributed to the current shortages of temporary farm workers (Hurst, 2015). While it is indisputable that more legislation is now in place to protect today's seasonal workers, including through the scrutiny of the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, seasonal farm workers are still vulnerable to unfair workplace practices from the outset, including during their recruitment to the industry (AHDB, 2019e).

Most horticultural crops for which seasonal workers are now required are highly perishable and must be harvested at an optimal moment to have any retail value. This makes flexible and

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[6] Lean is a whole-system approach intended to create a work-place culture in which everyone operates in ways that reduce waste, including inefficient use of time, to get products to customers quicker. It is highly customer focused and was *not designed* as a means of reducing staffing requirements (Liker and Morgan, 2006).

timely access to labour crucial (Devlin *et al.*, 2014). The haste with which farmers must respond to get crops picked optimally and satisfy retailers' demands can encourage them to err on the side of caution by over-recruiting (AHDB, 2019e). This is easier than calculating the number of workers actually required for the season, but can mean that workers have their start dates delayed because crops have not matured, or that too little work is shared between too many workers, so that they all earn less than they expected (AHDB, 2019e).

Sometimes, farmers cannot secure enough workers themselves via processes of direct recruitment, or quickly enough to accommodate the fluctuating demands associated with growing highly perishable crops. They may then outsource the task to intermediaries, including labour providers, temporary worker agencies or gangmasters (ONS, 2018). Their role is to provide just in time labour to optimise farms' productivity by either supplying labour to farmers as and when required, or recruiting workers on farmers' behalf (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). Using intermediaries can reduce risk for farming employers, including by relieving them of some staff management responsibilities and of the non-wage costs associated with workers who are employed directly (Barrientos, 2013; Hellio, 2016). But it can also reduce farmers' control and governance on their own farms, and make workers more vulnerable to labour exploitation (Barrientos, 2013).

Workers may be charged a fee by intermediaries who find work for them; a practice which is illegal in the UK (GLAA, 2018). To make it more likely that they will accept work, intermediaries may deliberately mislead workers about their likely earnings on a farm, or about its location (ibid). Especially for those unable to speak the host-country's language, there may be confusion about whether the farm or the labour-provider is responsible for workers. If things go wrong, workers recruited through or employed by unscrupulous labour providers may be caught between them and the farm, making it easier for both to deny responsibility and leaving the worker without resolution or redress (Eriksson and Tollefsen, 2018; LeBaron *et al.*, 2018).

That farm workers tend to be poorly represented by trade unions (ALP, 2017d; Clutterbuck, 2017) increases their vulnerability in such circumstances, and workers may be anxious about trying to advocate for themselves in case they antagonise their employer or are accused of trouble causing (Duke 2011). This can make disputes between workers, farmers and intermediaries highly stressful.

Most farmers have a strong preference for returnee workers who have several positive attributes. It takes around three weeks for new workers to become sufficiently quick in their

work that farmers no longer have to subsidise their wages to match the minimum wage[7] (MAC, 2013). Returnees who are familiar with the farmer and the other workers on a farm, who have learned how to do their work more efficiently and are familiar with the farm's health and safety and operational rules are a far better prospect for farmers than 'new' workers (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). Such is the value of returnees, that farmers will often begin negotiating with them in the early part of one season about them returning for the following season (ParliamentaryLive.TV, 2018). Going back to a known farm as a returnee also benefits workers, because it enables them to incrementally accrue social capital within their role on that farm, is likely to increase their earnings and means that they can develop more autonomy and status (Thomson *et al.*, 2018).

Many seasonal workers live on site in what is effectively tied accommodation. Workers who become surplus to the farm's labour requirements or who voluntarily leave the farm cannot remain in the farms' accommodation. Living in the farm's on-site accommodation is often the only option open to workers, because of the remoteness of many farms and because workers' transience and lack of capital and resources in the UK make living elsewhere untenable. But it can also be convenient for farmers to have them on site since this increases workers' short-notice availability for work, increasing farmers' capacity to respond quickly to retailers' demands (MAC, 2013). Whilst it may be their cheapest and most convenient accommodation solution, living on-site can leave workers with a sense of being perpetually on-call, with limited choice about how many hours that they work (Hellio, 2016; Griesbach, 2018). If the farm's expectation is that they will work as many hours as are made available, this can lead to self-exploitation (Binford, 2009; Lever and Milbourne, 2017), if only to avoid offending or letting down their employer. On-site accommodation can also unhealthily blur psychological distinctions between work and 'time off' (Hurst, 2015). Workers' sense of having nowhere to legitimately escape to, and their sense of being marooned on the farm, 'invisible' to local communities, can frustrate them and leave them feeling that they may as just spend their time working (Wald, 2011; Benson, 2012; Hellio, 2016).

Whereabouts workers' accommodation is located on the farm can be significant. This is because it may be in the vicinity of the farmhouse and therefore within sight of workers' employer. For some workers this closeness is advantageous, being associated with frequent and positive interaction (Andrzejewska and Rye, 2012; Rye, 2014), but for others, it increases

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[7] Currently, minimum wages are: £6.15 for workers aged 18-20; £7.70 for those aged 20-24, and £8.21 for those over 25. (Gov.uk, 2019b). Farmers must pay the minimum wage hourly rate to workers who do not achieve piece rates (Gov.uk, 2019a).

their sense of being under scrutiny and subject to farmers' paternalism (Gray, 2016). Unfortunately, the same scrutiny is not always extended to the quality of workers' accommodation. This is sometimes grossly inadequate (GLAA, 2018) and is often indicative of labour abuse or exploitation (Jayaweera and Anderson, 2008). On big farms, where hundreds of seasonal workers are employed, accommodation may be in the form of dormitory-style buildings (Jayaweera and Anderson, 2008), but is very often in the form of large caravans, for which workers may pay between £40 to £60 per week (Thomson *et al.*, 2018).

Minimum legal standards, including how many can share a caravan, its sanitation and fire safety standards and laundry facilities (Fresh Produce Consortium, 2018) exist. But these standards are intended to protect workers and little more, and some farming employers may take the view that nothing further is required of them, or that workers deserve or require nothing better (Benson, 2008). The financial pressures that farmers are under may further disincline them from investing in 'good' accommodation (ibid).

Seasonal farm work typically involves long hours of gruelling labour in physically challenging material conditions (Basok, 2002; Gray, 2014; Alho and Helander, 2016). This itself creates challenges for workers, but today's workers must additionally cope with pressures arising from farms' efforts to remain economically viable. These include farms' economies of scale, which can result in them becoming what Clutterbuck (2017) describes as plantation farms; obsessively focused on productivity and heavily reliant on the highly prescribed efforts of large numbers of workers. Managing this requires a hierarchy of command, so that every detail of the work can be kept under surveillance and addressed when opportunities for greater efficiencies are spotted. Being kept under surveillance is thought to reduce workers' social functioning (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Scott *et al.*, 2012; Holmes, 2013), and can leave workers feeling dehumanised and commodified (Scott *et al.*, 2012; Hellio, 2016; Rogaly and Qureshi, 2017; Snipes *et al.*, 2017).

Surveillance and commodification are associated with the processes of intensification[8] to which workers are increasingly subjected in order to reduce production risk and sustain profits. (Basok, 2002; Rogaly, 2008a; Scott, 2015b). Intensification includes incentives such as piece rate payments, which make farms' production more consistent and predictable, are in the farmers' interests (Rogaly, 2008a). They can however, also coerce workers into working

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[8] Intensification refers to growers' response to tight margins, high risk and retailers' rising expectations about the quality, price and volume of fresh food production. They have ratcheted up their expectations of workers, making them work harder and faster but more discerningly to earn the same money (Rogaly, 2008a).

harder and for more hours than they would otherwise choose (Hurst, 2015). This and other forms of intensification, including technology and innovations which stop workers from self-regulating their own work pace (Rogaly, 2008a) can increase injuries (Boden and Rees, 2009; Wasley, 2011), worsening what are already high industry rates (HSE, 2018) and causing psychological stress (Kim-Godwin and Bechtel, 2004; Hiott *et al.*, 2008; Holmes, 2013; Civita, 2018).

The market pressures that farmers currently face make them keen to recruit efficient workers. Within the industry these are often referred to as 'good workers'; a simplistic term which fails to capture the numerous attributes which these workers are often expected to have. As noted in the earlier section of this Chapter, UK workers are often considered incapable of seasonal farm work whilst those from elsewhere, including A8 countries, are subjectively evaluated as 'good workers.' In the context of seasonal farm work this appears to include a strong work ethic (Rogaly, 2008a; Geddes and Scott, 2010; Grant, 2017a), with less need for supervision and a high tolerance for on-farm conditions (Scott, 2013a). It appears that docility, or compliance is also a desirable trait, this being something to which many workers inevitably conform by virtue of their precarity and economic need (Rye, 2014).

But knowing whether they are good workers can be difficult for workers to ascertain and results in constant anxiety about the effort required to be positively evaluated (Binford, 2009). This can inadvertently confirm the stereotype and make them more appealing to farmers. These stereotypes can also be perpetuated by racially informed perceptions, these appearing to relate especially to workers' stoicism and physical capacity for hard work (Holmes, 2007; Maldonado, 2009; Duke, 2011). Workers are known to sometimes rank themselves more 'good' than other nationalities or, through claims of working harder, confirm that theirs is the preferred nationality to employ (Binford, 2009).

Brexit: A disruption

On the 23rd June 2016, a referendum held in the UK resulted in a marginal vote to leave the European Union, or to use common parlance; Brexit. This had, and continues to have, significant implications for food and farming in the UK, in practical, political and economic terms (Clutterbuck, 2017; British Retail Consortium, 2018; Lang *et al.*, 2018).

At the time of the referendum most of the UK's seasonal farm workers were coming from other EU countries. UK farmers and rural communities had become accustomed to EU

Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) subsidies (NFU, 2015) and the EU was fundamental to the UKs just in time food supply chain (Food and Drink Federation, 2019). A third of all the UK's food (NFU, 2015) equivalent to 10,000 shipping containers was arriving each day from or through the EU (Pennycook and Dickinson, 2018). Dan Crossley of the Food Ethics Council observed that Brexit created 'not just a capacity question of who will grow our food, but an ethical question of how they will be treated' (Crossley, 2017).

This thesis does not have scope to delve into the details of Brexit. But an overview of the concerns expressed by the industry, especially in relation to its access to seasonal workers is necessary. The details in section 1.6 and in the following sections therefore provide brief accounts of Brexit, and some of the reasons why fewer EU workers came to do UK farm work after the 2016 referendum. I end by considering some possible implications of leaving the EU for UK farming.

Taking Back Control?

During the 2015 election campaign David Cameron, the then Prime Minister of the UK, promised an EU referendum. This was in response to UK society's apparent ambivalence about its EU membership, and historical but increasingly disruptive dissension in relation to the EU by the Conservative Party, the UK's centre-right political party (Becker, S *et al.*, 2017; Corbett and Walker, 2018). The in/out referendum held on 23rd June 2016 returned a marginal majority of 51.9 percent in favour of leaving the EU (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017). Article 50, triggered nine months after the referendum started a period of negotiation about how and on what terms the UK would leave the EU. It was initially intended that this would take place on 29th March 2019, after which the UK would no longer benefit from the free movement of people, capital, goods and services upon which the EU's single market is based (The UK in a Changing Europe, 2019c).

During their referendum campaign, right-leaning politicians capitalised on public fears (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017; Corbett and Walker, 2018; Tyrrell *et al.*, 2018), encouraging the electorate to vote Leave, including by misrepresenting EU membership costs and claiming that UK housing and public services were under growing pressure from immigrants (Becker, S *et al.*, 2017). EU migrants in particular were blamed for growth in low waged and precarious work, despite their fulfilment of roles which 'local' people refused to do, or were unable to do (Rolfe, 2016; ALP, 2017a; Åhlberg, 2018b). More moderate but still Euro-sceptical politicians claimed the UK would 'take back control' once out of the EU, including by drastically reducing immigration (Goodman, Simon, 2017; Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017).

Ironically, immigration is anticipated to change or even increase rather than diminish following Brexit, because immigrants already in the UK may become stuck here (Garapich, 2016), and diminishing numbers of EU workers might increase the number of workers recruited from outside of the EU. That these might include people of non-Christian faiths made policy makers anxious about possible increases in anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim hostilities (conversation with Jack Ward, 23.1.17).

Analysis of the EU referendum results revealed urban/rural divides, with local authority areas described as 'rural' by the Office for National Statistics more pro-Brexit than their urban neighbours (CLA, 2019). The largely rural region of Yorkshire and Humber in which I conducted my research returned a Leave vote of 57.7 percent (The Electoral Commission, 2018). Some areas with high Leave majorities had high numbers of Eastern European workers employed on labour-intensive farms, whose presence was blamed by 'local' people for their community's loss of identity (Clutterbuck, 2017).

No cherry picking

In the run up to the UK's EU referendum, trade organisations including the NFU and the Yorkshire Agriculture Society offered information about the possible consequences of the UK leaving the EU but refused to advise members about how they should vote, stating that members should vote on broader issues than food and farming (NFU, 2015; Yorkshire Agriculture Society, 2016). Perhaps because it relies so heavily on workers coming from elsewhere in the EU, horticulture seemed to be the only sector of agriculture to *not* vote Leave in overwhelming numbers (Grant, 2016). Whilst there is no authoritative data on this, it does appear to be supported by a series of polls in an industry-focused magazine (Grant, 2016). The farming industry's keenness to leave the EU baffled many, as comically illustrated by letters to the trade paper Farmers Weekly:

> *'...They say turkeys don't vote for Christmas, but it seems they actually do',* and
> '... *"you reap what you sow" has never been more apt following last week's vote'*
> (Relf, 2016).

It seemed as if politicians had paid little thought to what 'taking back control' meant for UK food and farming before the referendum, or how and with whom the UK's food supply systems might operate after Brexit (Clutterbuck, 2017; Lang *et al.*, 2017). The UK's highly integrated FSC's across the EU seemed likely to be vulnerable to significant disruption (Clutterbuck, 2017), and was flagged as an especial concern in the event of a no-deal Brexit (Dunt, 2018; NFU, 2019b). Industry leaders expressed alarm about the threat that this posed

to national security (NFU, 2017b; Butler, 2018; Henderson, 2018; Lang, 2019), and about the UK government's apparent complacency about the need to act (Lang *et al.*, 2018).

For the farming industry, Brexit became an 'everyday lived experience' (Maye *et al.*, 2018, p. 271) immediately after the referendum. Migration from the EU fell sharply (The UK in a Changing Europe, 2019a), and recruiting new seasonal workers and retaining existing workers quickly became much more difficult (FarmingUK, 2018a). Although this situation was initially attributed to unfavourable exchange rates which devalued workers' remittances (NFU, 2017b) there were also reports of workers discouraged by anticipated and actual anti-immigrant hostilities (Carrington, 2017). The political rhetoric at the time may have reinforced the sense of workers no longer being wanted, the British Conservative Party actively encouraging an environment hostile to immigrants (Bradley, 2016). One of its politicians, Iain Duncan Smith, stated the party's intention to reduce 'low-value, low-skilled people (being) let in' to the UK from elsewhere in the EU (BBC, 2017), but migrant workers also faced hostility at a local level (BBC, 2016; Guma and Jones, 2018). Whilst collecting testimonies about the psychological impact of the Leave vote on EU migrants in the UK, one author was told, 'we don't deal with people, we deal with products' (Szirtes, 2017, p. x). This came from a major employer of seasonal farmworkers who presumably failed to understand that Brexit might be a deeply personal, hostile and unsettling experience for workers upon whom he relied. Other farmers reported that their workers felt rejected, and anxious about the possibility of having to leave the UK (Tasker, 2016).

These problems were made worse by uncertainty, because although the rights of seasonal workers were to be protected during a transition period which was scheduled to run until the end of 2020, no assurances were forthcoming about the period following this, or in the event of a No Deal Brexit (Thomson, 2018). Industry leaders and organisations appealed to the government for clarity, warning of industry disruption and the risk of the security and resilience of the UK's FSC coming under threat (Lang *et al.*, 2017; Batters, 2019; Capper, 2019).

The UK is heavily dependent on EU labour across all sectors of food and farming, so labour shortages in one risk disrupting other, related sectors (Lang *et al.*, 2017). This could threaten food production (ParliamentaryLive.TV, 2018) as well as the wider economy, because of the industry's size and its number of employees (Food and Drink Federation, 2019). The industry repeatedly expressed concern about the government's apparent complacency about Brexit and its failure to offer solutions (Lang *et al.*, 2017), especially around labour (British Summer Fruits, 2017a; NFU, 2019b).

Responding to the Migration Advisory Committee's 2017 call for evidence, the Association of Labour Providers noted that despite still having full access to EU workers, the UK's seasonal farm labour shortage was quickly moving towards what it described as a 'train wreck' situation (ALP, 2017c, p. 3). The government was in a double bind, wanting to reduce immigration but needing to reassure farmers about their continued access to labour (Lang *et al.*, 2017), accused of either complacency or ignorance about the extent to which labour shortages might impact the food and farming industry (British Summer Fruits, 2017a). One member of the Association of Labour Providers was quoted as saying, '*Various participants involved in Brexit say that there can be no cherry picking. People need to realise that there will be no strawberry, raspberry or any other type of berry picking unless action is quickly taken*' (British Summer Fruits, 2017a, p. 22).

Alan Manning, Chair of the Migration Advisory Committee, denied that labour shortages were an issue, stating that although UK agriculture would, 'go backwards' without seasonal workers, this 'wouldn't be the end of the earth for the country' (BBC, 2018), whilst Chris Grayling, the then transport secretary, said the UK would simply grow more food and import more (Elgot, 2017). This demonstrated his ignorance that UK's dependence on EU labour had grown from its inability to source enough UK workers.

Attempts to recruit workers led some farms to introduce additional incentives, including subsided transport, end of season bonuses or reducing accommodation costs (ParliamentaryLive.TV, 2018). But these could not be long term solutions, because farms were by now also absorbing increased labour costs associated with the introduction of the national living wage (NFU, 2018c). The industry reported that the number of people accepting jobs but failing to turn up, going home early or showing less aptitude and dexterity for the work increased significantly, but were also costing more to employ (Capper, 2019). Against the background of Brexit uncertainty, rising costs and the diminishing availability of 'good workers' prompted some horticultural businesses to begin shifting part of their production abroad, or considering or planning to do so (NFU, 2017b; Fletcher, 2018; Leahy, 2018). This meant that food production's historic pattern of chasing cheap, available labour, instead of labour being brought to the place of production resurfaced (Clutterbuck, 2017).

Long and complex food supply chains tend to be associated with increased labour abuse and with reduced scrutiny and audit of the sort necessary to stamp it out (Willoughby and Gore, 2018). If the UK off-shores more of its food production, it may therefore be responsible for more labour exploitation, but there may also be an increase in the exploitation of workers within the UK. This is because labour shortages are likely to increase the numbers of

undocumented and otherwise vulnerable workers being recruited from outside of the EU, and because workplace protection and employment law may be weaker once the UK is no longer subject to EU law (Åhlberg, 2018a).

Summary

This chapter aimed to review the UK's food supply system and the way in which it, especially food retail, creates a demand for 'flexible' workers whilst also shaping their on-farm experiences. It reviewed the terms and conditions under which workers operate, and reviewed Brexit's relevance to the UK's farming industry.

 Seasonal workers on UK farms operate within a food supply system whose model of operation conspires against their wellbeing. Food retail in the UK is dominated by corporations who gatekeep the market and influence consumers' purchasing habits. This influence is significant, the two parties having become locked into a co-dependent relationship, each shaping and perpetuating the other's behaviour. Large retailers' business models provide most UK customers wide a choice of affordable, year-round fresh fruits and vegetables, but in doing so can force farmers to supply food under restrictive terms, these having been unilaterally designed to retailers' own advantage. Farmers operating under contract to large retailers are typically expected to supply fresh produce at short notice and in flawless condition and are obliged to shoulder a disproportionate share of the risk inherent in the production of highly perishable fresh foods. In order to accommodate retailers' demands whilst limiting their own production costs and risks, farmers also delegate risk, including by increasing their reliance on 'flexible' workers who can be recruited and dismissed at short notice. In recent years, most of these workers have been recruited from A8 countries (McCollum *et al.*, 2012), whose citizens have been at liberty to move in and out of the UK and to work without any requirement for a visa or permit. Farmers rarely set out to intentionally disadvantage or harm workers but are constrained by the demands of the industry and by their own narrow profit margins. These encourage them to find ways of getting more value from each worker, including through over-time and short-notice work. They may also intensify work processes and discourage deviation from what have been identified as the most economically efficient methods. They may cut costs and therefore corners by providing material conditions; including accommodation and other on-farm amenities, which meet mandatory and legal requirements but no more.

Long-term declines in the number of seasonal workers available to farmers threaten the continued growth of the UK's horticultural sector and are exacerbated by Brexit. Anti-migrant

sentiment associated with the UK's referendum about EU membership and the UK's devalued currency appear to have discouraged EU workers from taking work on UK farms. But what happens, or does not happen, on farms also informs workers' decisions about which farms to return to, and the effects of Brexit do not obviate the need for farms to make things better for their seasonal workers at a local level.

Immigration processes likely to be introduced once the UK has left the EU may mean that EU workers on farms will be replaced by non-EU workers, recruited under a work-permit scheme and at increased risk of exploitation. It is crucial that the existing EU legislation about employment is retained after Brexit, instead of being discarded or watered down as a concession to the economics of food production.

Methodology

Introduction

In this Chapter I explain my research design, my choice of research location and the research methods I used in order to answer the research questions that I presented in the introduction to this thesis.

This exploratory case study which used ethnographic methods suits the exploration of manual labour experiences (Waite, 2007) and attends to a need identified by Rogaly (2008a) for contextualised explorations of farm workers' experiences. The challenges inherent in accessing and researching with transient and often 'invisible' individuals who speak different languages and whose workplace is subject to tight deadlines necessitated a flexible and responsive approach to data collection.

I begin this Chapter with an explanation of my rationale for choosing Yorkshire as a case study and the attributes which made it a suitable choice. I also discuss the challenge of locating 'invisible' workers, and provide information about each of the four participating farms. Section 4.3 provides an account of the research methods used. First, I discuss the possible impacts of cultural and language differences on data collection and analysis. I then discuss the ethnographic methods employed for collecting data, and the process of thematic analysis.

Yorkshire as a Case Study

Although seasonal workers' experiences have been previously researched, these have tended to be workers in mainland Europe (Callejón-Ferre *et al.*, 2015; Medland, 2017), Africa (Bolt, 2013; Hall *et al.*, 2013), and North America (Wells, 1996; Benson, 2012; Holmes, 2013). I chose the English county of Yorkshire for a case study and conducted my research during the UK's preparations to leave the EU. This interval of time and these preparations created unique political and social circumstances for seasonal workers and farmers.

Case studies are 'very much within the 'social constructivist' perspective of social science' (Chadderton and Torrance, 2011, p. 54), and because there was little existing evidence about seasonal workers' wellbeing (Becker H and Gonzalez-Guarda, 2016; Meierotto and Som Castellano, 2019 (in press)), my research had to be inductive. Taking a case study approach meant that I was able to gather in-depth, rather than extensive data (Chadderton and Torrance,

2011), which, although sometimes hard to summarise, can indicate that something of pertinence has been identified (Flyvberg, 2006). This suited what I wanted to explore about workers' wellbeing, which was intrinsically associated with the highly specific context of their on-farm life and work. The findings from this sort of context-specific research are usually assumed to be indicative of similar contexts elsewhere (Gilham, 2000; Bryman, 2004; Flyvberg, 2006).

My research questions meant that different kinds of evidence were required, almost inevitably coming from a variety of sources (Gilham, 2000). Choosing to collect data from four farms rather than one generated a greater volume of more compelling evidence, the downside being that this required far more time and resources (Yin, 2014). This was to some extent addressed by choosing Yorkshire as my case study. Since this is where I reside, I was able to respond quickly to data collection opportunities and utilise my existing networks within the county's farming community.

Selecting Yorkshire as my case study also provided other methodological advantages. These included that the farmers and workers who contributed to my own research had not taken part in any similar research projects before. Their research 'naivety' may have increased the authenticity of their responses. I had initially intended to collect data within one of the UK's 'hot spots' of intensive horticultural production, for example with established communities of Eastern European workers on farms in Lincolnshire. However, I realised that they were likely to be suffering 'research fatigue' following repeated intrusions from researchers and others interested in their communities' profiles. 'Research fatigue' can create frustration within heavily researched communities, including because they may anticipate but never see any positive social change. They may also experience a sense of alienation from researchers who lack personal interest in the community (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2012; Neal *et al.*, 2016).

Yorkshire, which is the UK's largest county, is predominantly rural and located in the north of England. It is described by the Chair of the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership as 'punching above its weight' (Kerfoot, 2018) for its agricultural output and know-how. This description is based on the fact that Yorkshire produces more than 20 percent of the UKs total arable and horticultural output and is heavily invested in agricultural and land-based research through universities and land-based colleges, an agricultural technology centre and the National Agri-Food Innovation Campus (Kerfoot, 2018). Grazing livestock and cereals are the predominant output of Yorkshire's farms, which tend to be slightly bigger in hectares than the English average. Despite their considerable contribution to England's agricultural output and their bigger than average size, Yorkshire's

farms employ less than the national average number of people and fewer than average numbers of casual workers (Defra, 2020).

Although it has a reputation as a tourist destination Yorkshire is heavily reliant on farming (FarmingUK, 2018b). It has a low population density and its low output of labour-intensive crops means that its seasonal workers are less visible than in counties such as Lincolnshire, where thousands of temporary Eastern European workers are employed on farms (Zaronaite and Tirzite, 2006). There, the presence of these workers is evidenced in local shops' stock, and in the languages being spoken in the streets (Cook, C, 2016). In comparison, the Yorkshire villages where I visited farms showed no obvious sign of their seasonal workers, who apparently had minimal contact with local, sedentary communities. This is another contrast with the Lincolnshire communities where 'local' people are familiar with, but also often resentful of temporary workers (South Holland District Council, 2010; de Hoyos and Green, 2011; Storey, 2013).

The number of migrants coming to Yorkshire for less than one year, thought to be around 13,250 in 2017 (Migration Yorkshire, 2019), appears to be declining, as does the total number of migrants into Yorkshire. This appears to be principally because fewer people are coming from EU accession countries. However, Poland and Romania are still the top countries of origin for people migrating into Yorkshire, and most people migrating into Yorkshire continue to gravitate towards its large urban centres (Migration Yorkshire, 2018).

The challenge of locating 'invisible' workers

This section explains the process through which seasonal workers were recruited to become my primary research participants. These were A8 nationals and therefore had freedom of movement in and out of the UK in 2017 when I collected my data with the same rights and restrictions as UK citizens. None were undocumented workers and to the best of my knowledge none were engaged in slave labour.

Locating seasonal workers can be challenging (Alho and Helander, 2016) since even in localities in which they are known to be working they often remain largely invisible to anyone who is not directly involved with the employing farms (Basok, 2002; Holmes, 2006; Geddes and Scott, 2010; Hellio, 2016). Reasons include workers' on-site accommodation, long working hours and their infrequent interaction with local communities.

Anticipating that I might have difficulties finding farmers and seasonal workers willing to contribute to my research led me to seek a collaborative partner at the industry level. Collaboration between university researchers and business-related organisations can be mutually beneficial, furthering strategy and management understandings (Loan-Clarke and Preston, 2002). My hope was that a collaborative partner would help legitimise my research requests, increase my findings' credibility and provide alternative perspectives of the industry and its challenges concerning workers' wellbeing. Accordingly, I requested the input of several organisations concerned with food and farming. Several declined, saying that my research was politically too sensitive for their involvement. The Association of Labour Providers (ALP) did however agree to take on the role, and I subsequently had occasional phone and face to face contact with their Chief Executive and their Head of Policy. Their input helped to shape my research questions, and my references to ALP when approaching prospective research informants and participants undoubtedly made them more receptive to my requests for research access. ALP is a not for profit specialist trade association, formed at the instigation of the government in 2000 to help address labour abuse practises in agriculture. Labour suppliers, who are required by law to be registered by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), can voluntarily become members of ALP. ALP supports best practice in the recruitment and employment of workers within several industries, including food and farming. Workers recruited and supplied by GLAA organisations are typically engaged in low-wage roles. Many are migrant or seasonal workers (ALP, 2017c).

In the course of locating farms which employed seasonal workers I spoke with a greengrocer selling locally grown produce who expressed great interest in my research and was very informative. However, when I asked him for his suggestions about whom I might contact, he became evasive, refusing to name farms which were employing 'the foreigners' (his phrase). He did refer to one farm which had until recently employed hundreds of seasonal workers, but which 'went bust' (his expression). I did not know of this farm and said as much, to which he retorted that of course I would not know about it; 'they were all up the back in caravans', meaning that they were kept out of sight. He did not explain his reluctance to reveal workers' whereabouts, but I wondered whether he perhaps thought that farmers preferred their seasonal workers to remain 'invisible' and was anxious to avoid compromising them.

Benson (2012) and Gray (2014) both described phoning farmers to enquire about research access to seasonal workers and having the phone hung up on them, this perhaps being because those farmers were time-poor and wished to evade scrutiny of their on-farm activities, especially in relation to their workforce. But local, non-farming communities can also be

anxious about or resentful of temporary workers (Benson, 2012; Preibisch 2014) moving into their locality, and this along with the media's sensational and critical reports of seasonal workers suffering exploitation in squalid conditions (Wasley, 2011; Nye, 2017a; Lawrence, 2018) may further incentivise farmers' attempts to keep their workers invisible.

Because my research focused on seasonal workers, the window of opportunity in which to locate, develop a research relationship with and collect data from workers was less than six months within each calendar year. In anticipation of having a tight timeframe, I had begun building relationships with prospective farmers during 2016 and introduced myself to one farm's workers who intended to return in 2017. This meant that at least part of that farm's team were familiar with me and my research requirements, and I later discovered that they had reassured the farm's 'new' workers that I was credible and trustworthy. This approach can also save time later, because it provides opportunities to identify likely obstacles and create the foundations for subsequent data collection, including who the most helpful or most knowledgeable participants might be (Frankham and MacRae, 2011).

Since I was looking for more farms and workers who might participate in my research, I asked at this first farm for suggestions, feeling that established access to one might reassure others of my motives and trustworthiness. This led to my contact with my nearest regional office of the National Farmers Union (NFU), who cautioned that, 'our growers (are a) closely guarded bunch'. The NFU circulated my request[9] for research participants to an extensive list of Yorkshire farmers but none responded.

The EU referendum vote to leave the European Union occurred in June 2016, shortly before my planned data collection and compounded the challenge of recruiting research participants. Retaining flexibility about accessing research participants became immediately more important, reinforcing my decision to use my home county of Yorkshire as a case study. Because of the referendum, I decided to target seasonal workers from any Eastern European country, instead of Poland and Romania alone, as had been my initial intention on the basis of Poland's status as a long-standing source of temporary labour for the UK and Romania as a relatively recent one. My rationale was that targeting workers from only two countries might reveal insights about how subjective wellbeing was informed by the respective cultures, and expose differences in workers' treatment by UK farms, according to the extent to which their

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[9] In this email I described myself as a post-graduate student in the School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AFRD). Following a process of restructuring AFRD was subsumed into the School of Natural and Environmental Sciences (SNES). I downplayed this and retained AFRD on my information and consent paperwork, anticipating that farmers would believe their interests were more closely aligned with this.

nationalities were established within the industry. But post referendum, the sudden drop in workers seeking seasonal employment on UK farms made this approach too limiting, so that I included workers from any Eastern European (post socialist) country in my selection criteria, which provided diverse wellbeing perceptions and related behaviours to scrutinise.

I had not anticipated workers becoming less visible, perhaps in response to anti-migrant hostilities which flared up in the referendum's immediate aftermath. Fearing that I would not find enough workers to take part in my research, I asked whether the local libraries, which have established Eastern European user-groups, would display invitation posters for me. One librarian conferred with her colleagues before refusing my request, stating it was 'too political' and 'too contentious'. I managed to persuade her otherwise, but her anxiety and the subsequent complete lack of response to my posters, fruitlessly displayed in several libraries, illustrated how cautious people had become about Brexit related matters.

Farms and farming related organisations were similarly reticent. Farmers may have felt more reluctant about their seasonal workers taking part in my research once they had realised the extent to which labour shortages increased after the referendum, but there were other reasons too. One farm emailed their response to my request to speak to their workers saying '…sorry, we cannot speak regarding overseas workers following the public backlash…'; a development previously noted by policy makers and researchers (Clutterbuck, 2017; Guma and Jones, 2018), and the media (Chapman, 2017; Sharman and Jones, 2017). Similarly, when I sought the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board's (AHDB) opinion on the post-referendum situation, they declined involvement, on the basis that my research was 'too political'. Such reticence illustrates the sensitivity of the issue, including for established, well-resourced organisations for whom my research findings might have had value. However, anxieties about losing access to seasonal workers from the EU may equally have made some individuals more receptive to my requests for research access, and more willing to contribute their own opinions and insights.

Farms and Workers

This section offers descriptions of the farms where I obtained data. They, their farmers and their workers are anonymised and given pseudonyms in this thesis in order to protect their identities, and because of sensitivities around their work and personal circumstances.

Many of the workers that contributed to this research had significant experience of working on other farms, often of different sizes and sometimes in other parts of the UK or in other EU

countries. Being able to draw on these experiences enabled them to reflect on the relative merits of different farms and compare good and bad on-farm features and practices.

Table 1 outlines the characteristics of each farm and is followed by a more detailed description of each. The order in which they appear indicates the chronological order in which I established contact with and had access to each farm. Coincidently, it also indicates how much contact I had with each and the volume of data derived from each.

Features common to the farms included their Yorkshire location, their production of perishable fresh fruits and vegetables and their employment of seasonal workers from Eastern European countries. Although sharing some on-farm challenges they differed significantly in other respects. These differences, which seemed to be relevant to workers' wellbeing, included the farm's size, its annual turnover, its workplace culture and the extent of interaction and the frequency with which farmers interacted with their seasonal workers. These features are discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

	Home Farm	Southwold	Springwood	Vale Farm
Ownership	Tenanted farm, run by Mia and Russell	Family owned/ run by Luke	Family owned/ run by Roger.	Family owned/ run by Claire and Simon.
Workers' tasks	Picking, grading, packing asparagus and soft fruits. Plant husbandry, including pruning, weeding, preparing polytunnels	Harvesting, grading and packing root crops and pumpkins. Some hand cultivation	Picking, grading, packing strawberries. Plant husbandry	Picking, grading, packing asparagus and soft fruits.
Sale of Goods	Farmgate, local retail, catering outlets. Wholesalers.	Wholesale and supermarkets.	Farmgate, wholesale, local retail.	Pick your own, farmgate, wholesale and retail.
Workers	Up to 20 seasonal workers from Poland/ Romania, between March-Sept. Some returnees	Up to 150-200 seasonal workers, plus many temporary workers who often return.	Up to 20 seasonal Romanian workers. Many returnees.	2 Bulgarian seasonal workers. Returnees.
Recruitment	Some are directly recruited by farmers, others via labour provider	Labour provider and direct recruitment.	Direct recruitment and labour provider.	Direct recruitment.
Workers' mobility in UK	Subsidised minibus. Farm-owned bikes. Get lift from farmer	Own cars.	Some have own car. Public transport.	Get lift from farmer, public transport
Accommodation	On-site, in large caravans	None provided.	On-site, in large caravans	On-site, in large caravans

Table 1: Description of participating farms

Home Farm is run by tenant farmers Russell and Mia. They do not have any permanent staff. The farm produces various crops, but seasonal workers are employed only for asparagus and soft fruits. The produce is retailed through farm-gate sales and bought via wholesalers by local restaurants, hotels and greengrocers. Other than basic packing and labelling in line with food legislation and purchasers' requirements, no processing is carried out on the farm.

Some seasonal workers arrive in March to prepare the asparagus fields and poly-tunnels. The remaining workers who arrive in April when the asparagus harvest begins, are involved in every stage of the process including harvesting, packing, despatching, and the cultivation of asparagus plants. The asparagus season's end overlaps the start of the soft fruit season, which includes gooseberries, strawberries and raspberries. Again, workers are involved in each stage of the process. Most workers leave after the fruit harvest, but a few remain for a few weeks to cultivate the fruit fields, dismantle the poly-tunnels and assist with preparation for the following season.

Up to twenty workers are employed, with none retained over the winter. Some are recruited directly and others via an agricultural worker's agency called HOPS. Workers are selected so that returnees work alongside new workers. The farmers feel this increases productivity and reduces the formation of cliques. A mix of 'old' and 'new' workers at both ends of the season helps work progress smoothly and develops 'new' workers who may wish to work for longer at Home Farm the following year.

The worker team was comprised of Polish and Romanian nationals when I collected my data. The farmers believe that teams comprised of just one or two nationalities are more socially cohesive and productive than multiple-nationality ones. Some long-term returnees have introduced partners, friends or adult children to the farm, so that small groups of close friends and relations sometimes work there and there is some familial continuity with the adult children of former workers continuing to work there.

The farm is situated about a mile off the public road, three miles from a village. Although only ten miles from a large urban centre, it feels isolated. None of the workers had their own car whilst I was there but could use the farm's minibus and bikes for shopping, socialising in the city and attending events including car boot sales. However, not all the workers were old enough to drive the minibus. All workers are housed on site in large, self-catered caravans which are deliberately under-occupied for workers' benefit. They are situated within the immediate vicinity of the farm house and buildings and are equipped with all household items

required, including bedding and linen. On-site laundry facilities are available to workers at no cost.

I first visited Home Farm several months before collecting data and for unrelated reasons, and had a chance conversation with Mia and Russell which led to them giving permission for me speak with their seasonal workers. I introduced myself to their workers in 2016 and outlined my research request. This seemed to increase their acceptance of me and certainly made beginning field work less daunting for me. Having permission to turn up at short notice with no need to repeatedly negotiate access made it inevitable that the bulk of my data would be from Home Farm. By the season's end I was negotiating each of my next visits with workers and this may have reassured them that my research was not instigated by, or primarily in the interests of, Mia and Russell.

Southwold:

My contact with Luke, the farmer at Southwold was instigated by the Chair of a local agricultural technology centre. Southwold is a family-owned and run farm bigger in acreage, output and workforce than Home Farm, and feels more industrial.

Southwold grows various root vegetables, most of which are sold on contract to supermarkets. These are harvested, processed, including into vegetable sticks and soup mixes, packed and transported off site using the farm's own staff, machinery, pack houses and refrigerated lorries.

At peak times around 200 workers from various Eastern European countries are employed for these processes. Some are seasonal, in the UK for only a few weeks or months and are supplied by labour providers or employment agencies. Others are temporary workers, doing a variety of low-waged jobs in the area and living semi-permanently in the UK. Finally, some of Southwold's staff who began as temporary or seasonal workers now hold contracted supervisory, managerial or administrative positions there. One, whom I call Stella, was nominated as my principal liaison and helped me to organise visits and contact workers.

All of Southwold's workers have their own transport. The farm is not easily accessed via public transport and workers' accommodation is no longer provided. Workers apparently rejected the farm's rentable accommodation because Luke prohibited workers from sub-letting to other workers in order to reduce their living costs. This and their rural location led to workers finding accommodation in towns, often at some distance from Southwold where

occupancy rates are subjected to less scrutiny, enabling them to increase their remittances home. Adopting an urban base also facilitates their access to shops and migrant communities.

I visited Southwold three times, but also spoke with three of its agency-supplied temporary workers at an urban location near their homes.

<u>Springwood:</u>

Access to a third farm, Springwood, arose following a chance conversation with a fellow-student who knew a Yorkshire-based fruit farmer, identified here as Roger. Springwood's main crop is strawberries which are sold at the farmgate and through local wholesalers and retailers. The fruit is grown in large glasshouses in a system of moveable 'cradles', which can be adjusted so that the strawberries can be picked at waist height.

Seasonal workers are recruited for two crops of strawberries each year; one in summer and the other in early autumn. During an interval of several weeks in-between there are no seasonal workers at Springwood. Springwood has several other workers who came from Eastern Europe and settled in the UK. They work year-round on the farm but did not contribute to my research. All those who did contribute to my research are Romanian, many of whom are returnees who negotiate their employment directly with Roger. Others are recruited via a labour provider.

The workers to whom I refer as Cristian and Elina were the only two who spoke much English and did not request anonymity. Cristian and Elina therefore acted as interpreters for several other workers who wanted to tell me about their on-farm experiences. I visited Springwood once for an informal, group conversation, the season's imminent end making a return visit impossible.

The farm is rurally located, several miles from urban centres, but workers can reach these to shop and socialise using public buses, or by sharing cars owned by workers who drove from Romania to begin working at Springwood. Whilst at Springwood, seasonal workers are accommodated in large, self-catered caravans which are situated on the farm but out of the sight of the farmhouse. For workers' comfort, Roger ensures that the workers' caravans are always under-occupied.

<u>Vale Farm</u>**:**

Another chance conversation led to my access to what I refer to as Vale Farm, reinforcing the importance for research of informal networks and of recognising opportunities.

The farmers, whom I call Simon and Claire, used to employ large numbers of seasonal workers to pick soft fruits and asparagus crops. They are now 'running down' this side of the business, focusing instead on arable and livestock crops, and consequently employ only two or three returnee workers from Bulgaria. Currently, Vale Farm's asparagus is sold at the farmgate and through local wholesalers and retailers. The farm also has a small pick-your-own fruit facility. I visited the farm once for an informal interview with Simon and Claire but was not able to visit whilst their workers were still there. Simon and Claire's considerable experience of employing seasonal workers enabled them to reflect on the changes within seasonal farm work and the successive cohorts of workers over three decades.

Although only a few miles away from a large urban centre, Vale Farm feels isolated. Its seasonal workers can access (limited) public transport in order to shop and socialise, but often rely on lifts from Simon and Claire. Vale Farm's workers are accommodated in under-occupied self-catered caravans which are close to but out of sight of the farmhouse.

Other informants

Seasonal workers were my primary research participants, but other informants also provided valuable insights from alternative perspectives. They included a priest who has a Yorkshire-based Polish church congregation, Yorkshire's NFU team and the NFU's Deputy President, the Chief Executives of a local agricultural research centre and of British Growers, staff from the Gang Masters Licensing Authority, and staff and users of a migration and asylum support group. I also spoke with Eastern European nationals who did seasonal farm work when they first arrived in the UK, but who had since graduated to other, better paid and less precarious jobs.

An ethnographic research approach

In this section I provide my rationale for choosing an ethnographic approach to my research. I provide a summary of the research methods I used (

Table 2), followed by a discussion of each. Finally, I discuss the cultural and language differences I encountered and my attempts to manage them.

Ethnography is an attempt to capture the complexity of people's 'real lives' from within their own setting (Charmaz, 2006), and to tell their story through analysis and interpretation of their everyday contexts (Frankham and MacRae, 2011). A primary principle of ethnography is that to understand the 'other' and their social worlds, we must suspend taken-for-granted understandings, looking for meanings that are not always immediately apparent (Frankham and MacRae, 2011). This is achieved through interaction with, and immersion in the community under consideration (Hobbs, 2012) to obtain rich data (Charmaz, 2006) showing people's experiences of place, of social behaviours and settings usually unseen, and of inequality and marginalisation (Frankham and MacRae, 2011; Hobbs, 2012). My ethnographic approach was informed by my earlier research (Saxby *et al.*, 2018), and follows a tradition of ethnographies about transient farm workers (Wells, 1996; Benson, 2008; Holmes, 2013; Griesbach, 2018).

Identifying what is relevant and significant when carrying out ethnographic processes can be challenging. This is because the researcher may begin the process without knowing what is and is not important, and because what is 'normal' within that social context often have taken-for-granted meanings. This put me at risk of overlooking, misinterpreting or over-interpreting things (Frankham and MacRae, 2011; Hobbs, 2012). However, my ignorance of seasonal farm work gave me permission to ask naïve questions of the sort which tended to generate more frequent, detailed explanations of what was significant about that thing. This process also legitimised workers' treatment of me as a new, uninitiated worker, their familiarity with the farm's context and my ignorance making me appear less 'privileged' within my researcher role.

Participant Observation

The importance of understanding workers' day to day experiences led me to collect my data predominately through participant observation and unstructured conversation. At Home Farm I chose to 'work' without remuneration as a route to understanding workers' experiences. Becoming a paid employee might also have achieved this same aim but I felt that it risked confusing my role. I was on the farm first and foremost as a researcher, and had I been 'too slow' to be retained as a viable worker would have then lost access to the farm altogether.

However, I felt it was important to experience what I feasibly could of workers' on-farm experiences, and participant observation helped me to do so.

Research intervention	Examples
Participant Observation	34+ days of participant observation, mostly between March-August 2017.
Interview and conversation	Numerous episodes of informal narrative with seasonal workers during participant observation. Recorded semi-structured interviews with three workers. Unstructured, recorded conversation with one individual worker, and with one group of workers. Eleven unstructured interviews with farmers/ ancillary workers, some audio recorded. Other pertinent interactions include with the Chief Executive of ALP, a greengrocer, a Polish photographer, Polish nationals with previous experience of seasonal farm work, the Deputy President of the National Farmers Union, staff from an agricultural technology centre and representatives of Yorkshire's Anti-Slavery Movement.
Meetings	8+ informal or semi-formal meetings with farming/migration related organisations.
Ethnographic process	Opportunities for ethnographic reflection drawn from entire research process
Photographs and audio	Own photographs, plus some taken by a seasonal worker. Audio recorded own 'debriefs' following data collection.
Written data	Research diary. Field notes on participant observation, own interactions with workers and information from farmers and workers.
Phone conversation	Various, including with Chief Executives of British Growers and ALP, and with a Catholic priest.
Email content	Numerous emails between gatekeepers, one seasonal worker, and other industry-related contacts.
Secondary material	Webinars relating to food and farming and/or Brexit. Live Parliamentary sessions via video link, of expert panel discussing seasonal farm workers and Brexit. Relevant secondary data and sources, including mainstream media, social media, industry articles, press releases and reports; audio-visual clips.

Table 2 Overview of research activities

Participant observation is central to ethnographic research (Frankham and MacRae, 2011; Shah, 2017). It provides a means of becoming part of, rather than simply a spectator of what is being researched, and because it requires immersion in the research context, gives insights into what would otherwise have remained hidden (Guest *et al.*, 2013; Yin, 2014). My observation of research participants was overt; that is, they knew that I was carrying out research and knew the purpose of this. I spent enough time at Home Farm for my presence to be taken for granted and assimilated into their working routines. I tried to be unobtrusive but helpful, predictable and respectful; all part of what Guest *et al.* (2013) describe as building

rapport and gaining acceptance. This revealed what was 'normal' for the context, what mattered but remained unsaid and what workers had ceased to notice (Guest *et al.*, 2013).

It was only possible to become properly engaged in participant observation for a prolonged interval of time at Home Farm. I did also observe workers at Southwold on two separate occasions but was not allowed to participate in their work because the farm's security measures, pace of work and levels of background noise did not permit me doing so. However, this restriction alerted me to factors which potentially had relevance for workers' wellbeing, and which I might not have otherwise been aware of or understood.

My 'working' alongside workers at Home Farm gave them little or no advantage, but gave me a role and some legitimacy; perhaps as an outsider with inside knowledge (Bucerius, 2013), or an outsider in the act of becoming an insider (Frankham and MacRae, 2011). Getting my hands dirty, kneeling in the dirt and sweating over crates of fruit alongside workers may have reduced their self-consciousness. I hoped also that it reduced their sense of being under surveillance from my participant observation. These workers were engaged in familiar tasks for which I lacked competence and for which I needed their instruction, so that the balance of power was shifted in their favour. This may have reduced reactivity, in which they modified their behaviours in response to feeling scrutinised. My physical proximity to workers during participant observation created natural opportunities for conversation and may have given them some light relief from their tedious work. Workers often invited me to help with a task or drew my attention to things in ways that made conversation natural, making easier for me to grasp the significance of things, but making it harder to separate our narrative from my observation of them.

Participant observation can be difficult, draining and time consuming (Frankham and MacRae, 2011; Yin, 2014). Being actively rather than passively involved provided me with useful insights but could also be challenging, including because I sometimes became so absorbed in picking or packing that I forgot to notice what was going on around me. I was also at risk of normalising or overlooking things that someone in a purely observational role would have noticed. But workers seemed more nonchalant about my presence if I was 'working' and were perhaps less guarded. However, it would be naïve to assume it had no effect, since team dynamics may have shifted in ways that neither they or I realised.

Some days, I spent more time simply loitering on the periphery than I did 'working', picking up small tasks as and when appropriate, and taking opportunities to talk, ask, watch and listen. This required some reflexivity in order to remain alert to new insights and understandings, as

well as to the effects of my presence and questions on the seasonal workers (Frankham and MacRae, 2011). This 'hanging around' without attempting to choreograph interactions is an important component of participant observation (Latimer, 2018), and it helped me to gain a more intuitive sense of what seasonal workers' lives look and feel like. Loitering meant I noticed the sort of non-verbal behaviours that support rich data and create meaning, including the things which were notable by their absence (Denham and Onwuegbuzie, 2013). These are the sort of things that 'insiders' are unlikely to point out or remark upon. These included workers' inflections, demeanour and mood, and their inter-personal responses, including for example their unguarded responses to their employer's unexpected appearance during one of their short (legitimate and reasonable) rest breaks from work.

Because workers are paid an hourly rate to pick asparagus, I was advised by Mia, the farmer at Home Farm, to prioritise this as the interval in which to do my participant observation. Her rationale was that I would have less impact on their earning than when they were doing piece rate work. But in the event, my presence made such little (or no) difference to their productivity, that I was permitted to continue 'working' with them. This was highly beneficial, because I saw workers becoming increasingly fatigued and sometimes despondent about being away from their families as the season progressed. Such things, as well as observation at different times of day and in various situations increases the data's depth and richness (Bryman, 2004).

Having arranged a visit, I sometimes arrived at Home Farm to find them engaged in tasks which would have been dangerous or difficult for me to observe. On other occasions I arrived to find them all asleep, having decided to take a long lunchbreak and work later in the evening to avoid the mid-day heat. This sometimes meant that I 'lost' a planned day of participant observation, because although I could have spent time with them whilst they were not working, I felt that this would have been an unfair intrusion.

Unstructured interview and informal conversation

The subjective wellbeing focus of my research made it important to capture workers' 'voices' and subjective opinions, about which insufficient research evidence exists, (Rogaly and Qureshi, 2017). But the nature of seasonal workers' work, the challenge of finding 'invisible' workers, and our language barriers meant that most of my interactions with people contributing to my research were informal and unstructured. The sensitivity of the topics likely to arise, such as unfair working practices and workplace conflict also made this approach preferable to more standardised research methods (Snipes *et al.*, 2017). Case study

dialogue tends to be informal in any case (Yin, 2014), and I had concerns about the sense of formality and interrogation that might have been created if I had utilised any form of interview schedule or referred to extensive written notes. This meant that, for example, even when talking to a farmer in a farm office, I used nothing more than bullet points and prompts (Appendix 3), these being typically based on what had arisen in previous conversations with them and/or other workers. These helped me to identify reoccurring themes and draw my attention to potentially new themes from across successional conversations and from other methods.

Most of my verbal interactions with Home Farm's workers were secondary to whatever practical task they were engaged in at the time, often taking place whilst I followed workers around the fields, pack-houses or polytunnels. 'Listening in' and asking for occasional clarification is typical of case study observation (Gilham, 2000), and their suggestions that I help them to complete various tasks indicated their willingness to talk, these invitations and subsequent interaction themselves becoming data for analysis (Holmes, 2006). What we talked about often initially seemed irrelevant to my research, but these interactions helped develop trust and demonstrated my interest in them as individuals (Wolpaw and Shapiro, 2014). The nature of their work sometimes meant that conversation was limited to brief comments, questions or observations, sometimes aided by reference to a Polish or Romanian/ English dictionary and my note pad on which odd words, numbers or quick illustrations were made to aid comprehension. Occasionally, other workers intervened to interpret or find a helpful picture or word on their phone.

I had to manage the time I spent with receptive and talkative workers without neglecting or ostracising less confident ones who might have 'better' or more compelling accounts about their wellbeing to relate. I made special efforts to be inclusive but suspect that overcompensation on my part sometimes left the more talkative workers baffled by what seemed to be my disproportionate interest in their more reticent colleagues.

The bulk of my data was gathered at Home Farm, so there were relatively few exceptions to this spontaneous and reactive approach. However, I did have an informal group conversation with Springwood's workers in their farm's canteen following their day's work, and with an interpreter met three temporary workers from Southwold at an off-farm location for an unstructured interview. On these occasions, audio-recording our conversations and jotting down notes was easier and seemed less intrusive than it did at Home Farm, where I audio-recorded only a few exchanges with workers.

Additional sources of data

In addition to my observation of and verbal interactions with research participants, I utilised field notes and a research diary, audio recordings, photographs and items in everyday use on the farms. Throughout the entire research process, I utilised an A4 page-a day-diary as a research diary and to my record field notes. This helped my recall about the chronology of different incidents and events and is where I also recorded spontaneous thoughts, speculative interpretations about what something might mean for a particular person in specific contexts and began my preliminary analysis.

Because I started my ethnographic fieldwork not knowing what was important, documenting as much as possible was crucial. This was a tiring and time-consuming process, especially after a day of participant observation which always left me feeling drained, but needed to be done at the earliest possible opportunity to be of value (Frankham and MacRae, 2011). My field notes typically included details about whom I had had contact with, the mood and atmosphere of the day and what workers had been engaged in doing. I often noted things which initially seemed irrelevant, but which became more important through the course of the season because they reoccurred.

Whilst my notepad, used as a communication aid, and my field notes helped my recall, one of my most beneficial strategies was to audio record my spoken-aloud thoughts whilst driving home from farms. These recordings captured the detail of my observations and interactions whilst still fresh in my mind (Stenning, 2018) as well as providing an emotional debrief after what were often intense and draining experiences. I made an especial effort to transcribe these recordings at the earliest opportunity, usually on the same day, which helped trigger other recollections, ideas about emerging themes and further questions to be explored. My audio recordings also often captured things that I had not consciously considered before beginning to record my thoughts, and this prompted me to comment even on mundane things which might prove to be useful later. Hearing what I had said whilst transcribing was more instructive and informative than any hand-written notes, however meticulous, because recordings captured the mood and atmosphere of the day more vividly.

Observing Home Farm's workers' progress along rows of asparagus or fruit made it difficult to make decent audio-recordings. In the pack-house, workers' voices were raised to compete with a radio being played loud enough to be heard over the machinery. Attempting to audio-record in these circumstances might have felt intrusive, but I did record a few select interactions, mainly of workers who were singing whilst they worked in the polytunnels.

As part of the recruitment process and later as a means of getting insider information and/or negotiating access, I had email contact with various farmers and farming related organisations. I did not always receive a response. I also had several conversations via email with Tomasz at Home Farm, who used these to practice his written English.

The use of visual methods, including photographs raises ethical concerns (Clark, 2013), including because of what it demands of participants, what happens to the images and who owns them (Pink, 2004). But whilst bearing these issues in mind, I felt that asking workers to provide photographs of the things they felt were important to their on-farm wellbeing might be quite revealing and be a useful way of initiating and structuring discussion about these things. Although Home Farm's workers expressed great interest in this and were keen to get hold of the single use cameras that I provided, none used them. All of them were (needlessly) apologetic about this, explaining that they wanted to take photos and would have enjoyed doing so, but always lacked time, energy and inclination in their free time. One worker did take a few photos with his phone and we discussed the significance of these during one of our informal conversations.

The physicality of Home Farm's work environment made note-taking difficult and may have intimidated workers. But I knew my poor recall and the sheer volume of observations and conversations risked inadvertently losing data. Taking photographs of activities and objects helped in this respect, triggering useful recollections and insights. Evidence often has to be seen to be understood (Gilham, 2000), and in the case of my research this included the numbered 'tokens' used to indicate who had picked each tray of fruit at Home Farm (Figure 1). The relevance of these 'tokens' will be explained further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Home Farm's workers were content for me to photograph them, sometimes going out of their way to ensure their inclusion. However, some explicitly stated that these must not be used for research or related purposes. With the agreement of all concerned, I made the photos available to everyone involved, so they could share them within their own social circles. I also took photos of some workers at Southwold, who were very keen to be photographed, posing around the tractor whilst holding pumpkins aloft (*Figure 2*).

As with the audio recordings of Home Farm's workers singing, these photos provided evidence that their lives on farms were not unrelentingly grim. Grimness is sometimes deliberately or accidentally implied when visual methods are used to portray people's lives (Becker, H, 2002), and created a responsibility for me to avoid romanticising or being nostalgic about their experiences.

Figure 1: Numbered tokens used to denote which worker had picked each tray of fruit

Figure 2: Pumpkin pickers, Southwold

Analysis

Inductive thematic analysis (Table 3), was chosen as a flexible approach to finding rich patterns and meaning within the research data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Analysis was not a chronologically discrete process, but was iterative and began whilst still in the field (Yin, 2014). I documented my intuitive understandings and reflections about what (apparently) mattered for workers' wellbeing and about what required further consideration in my research diary. This iterative process continued throughout the entire data collection process to inform my tentative themes and preliminary findings.

I transcribed interviews and my own written and audio notes at the earliest possible opportunity to capitalise upon my recollections, the 'feel' and affect (Clarke, 2002) of encounters and events and their contexts. Such detail was not always captured in audio recordings or photographs but added important context to the 'story'. This detail included for example, the distance at which a worker had positioned themselves from others, or the apparent effect of the weather on their levels of irritation. For this reason, I also listened to my audio recordings several times and repeatedly sifted through the photos I had taken at Home Farm and Southwold.

Revisiting secondary material, including that produced by the wider farming industry helped triangulate the thematic patterns which began to emerge from my own data, and helped confirm that my understandings of on-farm practices and workers' experiences aligned or failed to align with industry insiders' accounts. This required reflexivity and a recognition that qualitative data can be interpreted in many ways; nothing is a simple 'truth' (Bryman, 2004).

I conducted further rounds of analysis whilst transcribing data from audio-recorded conversations and entering this and other data such as photos, policy documents and extracts from my research diary into NVivo. These entries became my case study database (Yin, 2014), helping me to differentiate between the data relating to different farms. Developing this database enabled me to easily revisit the raw data, avoiding the need for me to rely on my own interpretations and recollections and enabling me to confirm what had become obscured during the coding process (Gibson and Brown, 2009). My NVivo database also made it easier to compare and triangulate data, with the data from one source helping to verify those from another.

The sort of rich, 'thick' data obtained through case studies captures a real-life messiness difficult to reduce to simple categories (Flyvberg, 2006), making analysis harder and less clear-cut. Although I used NVivo to organise my data storage and retrieval (Maher *et al.*,

2018) this could not replace systematic analysis (Yin, 2014). It was easy to feel overwhelmed by the volume of data I put into NVivo, and to retain a clear overview of what I had in front of me. Additionally, the ease with which NVivo enables codes and themes to be applied to raw data meant I acquired numerous codes and themes (see Appendix 4). Many of these were interesting but only superficially aligned with my research questions. I consequently resorted to more visually accessible processes, including large sheets of paper and coloured pens with which to map provisional themes and codes (Maher *et al.*, 2018). An additional advantage of this method was that it facilitated casual perusal during periods of reflection (Maher *et al.*, 2018) when I was not working in front of a computer. This made it easier to see the data with fresh eyes.

As I became more familiar with the data and continued adding to it, I began identifying the meanings, patterns and repeating themes on which thematic analysis focuses (Snipes *et al.*, 2017). These were selected in accordance with my research questions and developing argument, and were informed by existing literature (Aronson, 1995).

Phase	Action	Description
1	Familiarisation with data	Interview data transcribed and annotated. Data read repeatedly, including field notes. Noted initial ideas.
2	Created initial codes	Systematically coded relevant/ interesting data. Collated data according to codes, in line with: • What participant said was important • Was strong or reoccurring • Related to existing wellbeing theory/ literature Coding list created.
3	Defined themes	Grouped codes into potential themes. Themes labelled.
4	Themes reviewed	Checked themes against coded extracts to ensure coherence between themes and original data. Created thematic map of analysis.
5	Themes named	Refined themes and overall 'story' told by analysis to generate definitions and names for themes.
6	Findings reported	Themes and codes amended as necessary for coherency and consistency. Those relating to research questions selected for discussion under two headings (Chapters 5 and 6).

Table 3 The phases of thematic analysis. Informed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Cross cultural and across languages

Conducting research with participants from different cultures and speaking different languages can present significant methodological challenges (Temple and Edwards, 2002;

Gkartzios and Remoundou, 2018; Medland, 2019). Engaging the assistance of an interpreter may appear to at least partially address this but can present new problems. Some of these are methodological, including that the researcher might not know whether the interpreter has noted or failed to note certain things (Davies, 2018). Interpretation is not simply about making words understandable; it constructs meaning in accordance with the interpreters' own position (Kapborg and Berterö, 2002; Temple and Koterba, 2009; Tremlett, 2019). For this reason, I felt that it was important to locate an interpreter whose own culture was Eastern European.

I quickly realised the impossibility of evaluating the professionalism and reliability of private interpreters, and those provided, at some considerable cost, by local authorities were highly restrictive, specifying non-negotiable terms and conditions which precluded on-farm 'engagements.' I knew that because farms' schedules are in constant flux according to the weather, amended orders for produce and the availability of workers, it was highly likely that any arrangements that I made would come to nought, my only evidence of the encounter being a large bill for the interpreters' fees. The likelihood of this happening meant I decided against having an interpreter for any of my on-farm encounters, and in the end, I employed an interpreter on only one occasion. This was to meet with three workers in an urban location away from their workplace.

Formal language tuition is not always helpful for ethnographic research because of its often informal setting and the everyday-ness of the verbal interactions which occur (Gibb and Iglesias, 2017). Having intended to learn some Polish words before beginning fieldwork I realised that even if I managed to do this, working with several different nationalities and under significant time constraints would reduce its usefulness. Some Eastern European acquaintances who were not involved with my research advised me that even technically correct translations would in any case not aid my understanding of what workers *meant*. This is because meanings are socially and culturally informed, and I was ignorant of those pertaining to workers' cultures. Their claim, supported by Kapborg and Berterö (2002); Medland (2019); Tremlett (2019), was reinforced by the Polish-born interpreter, with whom I conducted the off-farm 'interviews' with Southwold's workers. Responding to my concerns about the validity of what I asked workers, my interpretation of their responses and my subsequent analysis he stated that as a Polish national living in the UK he could 'speak Polish intelligently'. By this he meant that he intuitively understood the context and implicit meanings of what the workers said in ways that I could not and frankly should not bother to attempt.

However, I wanted to learn some words specific to my own ethnography's context, including those for the crops that workers picked. This was because I felt that doing so would evidence my own commitment to understanding workers' cultures (Gkartzios and Remoundou, 2018). Asking workers what they called various things was a useful way of initiating interaction with them, and the workers at Home Farm spent a great deal of time trying to teach me various words, testing my pronunciation and recall. Despite their heroic efforts, the only word that I managed to remember was capra. This Romanian word for goat had no relevance to the workers' work in the UK. Being able to remember the Polish and Romanian words for things such as raspberry, punnet and crate would have been far more valuable. Although it was soon evident to them as well as me that I had little aptitude for language learning, my efforts amused them and did act as an icebreaker; what Tremlett (2019) describes as a breakdown which provides in-roads. It also helped to increase my research participants' control of the immediate situation. Whilst not ideal, my inability to speak the language(s) of research participants 'intelligently' or indeed unintelligently was therefore evidently something which could be used advantageously, providing I took care to respect its limitations.

The nature of participants' work naturally made our conversation opportunistic and unstructured. It often related to their task at the time or to whatever spontaneous thoughts and questions arose. The standard of English spoken by workers who helped with my research varied, as did their motivation for and interest in improving it. I did not perceive that the onus was on them to improve their English, but those workers who actively wanted to practice their English seemed less reticent about engaging with me. In turn this seemed to make our interactions less intimidating for them because they often initiated interaction by asking for advice about the correct way to pronounce an English word, or to structure a sentence. Because speaking English with me was probably tiring for them and risked reducing the quality of what they revealed (Murray and Wynne, 2010) I tried to bear this in mind when gauging what to talk about and for how long before moving on to talk to other workers.

I preferred to ask open ended questions when initiating conversation since these were more likely to elicit rich data. However, language differences sometimes made these inappropriate and I had to signpost our conversation with a closed question. Some workers understood written words but not the same word when it was spoken, so we used my note pad to scribble odd words or numbers, make quick sketches, or referred to one of the dual-language dictionaries I kept in my car. The more confident English-speaking workers sometimes intervened to interpret or find helpful pictures or words on their phone. One worker mimed, did animal impersonations and sketched in my notepad to explain what his farm at home was

like and what his pre-existing farming skills were, whilst trying to teach me words for various farm animals.

I discovered that having to constantly think about how to communicate was draining, made more so by my sense of disorientation and isolation when spending hours on end with people speaking other languages. However, this encouraged me to consider how tiring it must also be for people working amongst speakers of other languages, and helpfully illustrated the potential impact of mixed-nationality teams on workers' wellbeing.

Reflections

Seasonal farm workers are largely 'invisible' to the general public and as migrants are, in any case, a 'hard to reach' group. For this reason, finding workers with whom I could spend time in their workplace setting was always going to be a challenge. Added to this, the tight timescales and deadlines in the production of fresh fruit and vegetables, and the political sensitivities of migrant labour on farms, especially following the referendum, creates a reluctance in the industry to let uninitiated people have access. Only when I went out to visit farms did I realise that on some farms, bio-security and a requirement for accountability meant that additional restrictions were in place which imposed additional limitations upon the length of time I could spend with workers at the 'coal face'. These circumstances may have meant that the farms that I gained access to were not entirely representative. This situation is of course to some extent the nature of case studies and of qualitative research.

Those farms that I did get access to felt that whilst not perfect, they had nothing or little to hide. Meanwhile, it remained unlikely that I would ever gain access to the sort of farms described by workers as 'bad'. Most of my data was provided by workers who had rejected employment on 'big' farms, who *may* have had attributes and perspectives different from those held by workers still working on 'big' farms. I do not believe that this makes my data less valid than might have been gathered from a less homogenous cohort, simply that it may be different. Gathering data mainly from small farms had some distinct advantages, including that informally arranged visits were possible.

Having located farmers willing to let me onto their farms, and workers willing to talk to me, it seemed that many people within the industry were willing to share their thoughts and actively assist my research. As Wells (1996) observed, although initially difficult to access, farmers who agree to engage in the research process often give generously of their time and insights,

especially to researchers with more than purely academic interests in their experiences. Perhaps anxieties about labour shortages increased their receptiveness, especially if they anticipated that the outcomes of my research might inform their recruitment and retention practises.

My data collection seemed to result in the acquisition of numerous bite-sized pieces of data which initially seemed unlikely to ever amount to what might be called a 'proper meal' of unambiguous data. But this arises from the uncertainty and loose structures of ethnographic research (Bryman, 2004; Frankham and MacRae, 2011), and in hindsight it was clear that evidence accumulated over time, my interactions and insights informing those that followed.

Setting out clearer objectives with my collaborative partner at the outset may have led to different, or better research outcomes. I was guided in my choice of research aims and questions by the input of ALP but feel that I could have utilised their expertise better. Evaluating my collaborative partnership with ALP leads me to conclude that I would, for future research, be more explicit in my expectations from the process. I would, for example request more regular contact, request appropriate access to relevant policy documents and industry-specific training, and a more collaborative approach to disseminating research findings to wider audiences.

Finally, my perception that farmers and their workers function within a dysfunctional food system inevitably influenced my approach to the research and how I interpreted my data. Being objective about my research was not necessary or even possible (Pink, 2004; Charmaz, 2006), but it was important to acknowledge my own preconceptions (Maher *et al.*, 2018).

Ethics

In this section I discuss the process of gaining ethical approval and managing ethics during the data collection process. Research ethics are described by the ESRC as maximising research benefits whilst minimising harm to those involved, including research participants, funders, collaborative partners and the researcher throughout the entire lifecycle of the research (ESRC, 2015). Ethnographic research can be risky (Pink, 2004; Benson and O'Neill, 2007) and requires knowledge of the research context, reflexivity and some sensitivity (Collins, Christopher. S and Cooper, 2014). It required me to constantly make judgements about ethical issues including asymmetrical power, respect, and with whom, what and how I negotiated my research processes (McAreavey and Das, 2013).

My research was granted ethical approval by the Science, Agriculture and Engineering (SAGE) Faculty Ethics Committee, Newcastle University, and a copy of their approval letter is shown in Appendix 1.

The mechanics of applying for ethical approval was adequately assisted by online templates and forms. But explaining how I would manage the ethics of my research with accuracy was less straightforward. This was because ethnographic research is by its nature, ethically risky (Benson and O'Neill, 2007), and because it is difficult to identify in advance the ethical issues which might arise (Pink, 2004). In addition, I was to carry out research in difficult to predict workplace environments, with groups of transient workers, these all making speculation difficult. Ultimately, I had to be guided by the broad principles of ethical research, including benefit, autonomy, informed consent and anonymity (ESRC, 2015), and accept the need to be ethically reflexive throughout. This was necessary in order to manage what are sometimes described as the micro-ethics of ethnography (Tomkinson, 2015).

As well as not knowing all the ethical challenges likely to be encountered, I also found that having begun my fieldwork, my research focus shifted in line with my growing understanding of workers' on-farm experiences. For this reason, my ethics submission reflects my original intention to explore workers' transience and belonging, rather than their wellbeing and intentions for return.

Workers' limited English language skills and the nature and precarity of their employment meant that in terms of research ethics, they were considered vulnerable (Johnsen *et al.*, 2008; Düvell *et al.*, 2009; McLaughlin and Weiler, 2017). However, concepts of vulnerability are socially constructed (von Benzon and van Blerk, 2017), and I felt that making blanket assumptions about all seasonal workers being vulnerable was in itself unethical and patronising. This was because I believed that their decision to take work in another country, in unpredictable circumstances illustrated their tenacity and resilience, and that this could surely co-exist with any vulnerabilities they may have. To overlook this could have assumed that they had no autonomy or personal reserves of strength and led to me treating them with sympathy rather than empathy. It also risked changing the dynamics of our interactions which may have offended or distanced them.

The circumstances in which seasonal workers live and work whilst on UK farms meant that their farming employers were the obvious gatekeepers for me to approach when seeking access to farms and the workers there. But whilst good manners and security meant I clearly needed permission from farmers to go onto their farms, I had reservations about asking them

71

to function as gatekeepers. This was because it seemed to imply some sort of ownership of, and control over workers because of the power differences that often exist between prospective research participants and gatekeepers, and because of gatekeepers' potential motivations for facilitating the research (McAreavey and Das, 2013). I was, for example, concerned that workers might cooperate with my research requests because of a sense of duty to their employer, or to avoid offence. I had to balance this against the possibility of not getting any research participants and tried to remain vigilant to signs of coercion and pressure by gatekeepers and farmer-employers and to reluctance from workers. In the event, it was clear that I could not avoid asking farmers to be gatekeepers. Finding a community of workers who did not live on the farms where they worked might have presented an alternative, but this opportunity never arose.

I provided typed information and consent forms in English, Romanian and Polish (Appendix 2). Some workers consented to help with my research but did not want to be named or photographed. Those who helped with my research provided explicit verbal consent but declined to return signed consent forms, and I wondered whether this reluctance stemmed from their association between form-filling and oppressive bureaucracy of their home countries, noted by McAreavey (2014). To insist on signed consent forms would have prioritised bureaucracy above ethics and may have risked raising, rather than alleviating suspicions about the research (Homan, 1991). Having verbally confirmed that they had read the paperwork, I therefore simply periodically checked their continuing consent for me to utilise their data. This re-affirmation of consent provided opportunities for me to clarify my research intentions and for them to query the process and was made especially important by our language differences.

Workers' consent was somewhat dependent on circumstances and on their mood and inclination on any given day. They would sometimes quite pointedly distance themselves from me, change the topic of conversation or suddenly remember an urgent task to be done elsewhere before hurrying away. Their avoidance strategies seemed quite reasonable, especially given language barriers which may have made it harder to articulate the cause. I never acknowledged or enquired about these behaviours, hoping that this would demonstrate respect and acknowledgement that they too could control what became part of the research (Jacobsson and Akerstrom, 2012). This approach seemed to work, because on other occasions the same workers willingly answered my questions as well as actively initiating conversation.

I took a pragmatic approach to consent, which may have made the process more collaborative than it would otherwise have been and made the process feel less exploitative to the workers

(Pink, 2004). With their consent I hoped to retain participants' own names, rather than use pseudonyms because anonymisation seemed paternalistic, and a denial of their individuality (Svalastog and Eriksson, 2010; Coffey *et al.*, 2012). I also felt that it compounded the sense of workers being 'invisible' and as commodities, in this case, of my own research output. But these plans were confounded by the request by some participants for anonymity. Others were not only content for their real names to be included in my thesis but actively requested that I use them. However, complying with this request might have revealed the identity of those preferring anonymity, so I used pseudonyms for all the seasonal workers, farmers and farms and did not disclose their location. Participants were invited to suggest their own pseudonym, but none did so. The impossibility of managing the issue of anonymity in accordance with everyone's preference left me conflicted. I felt awkward about inadvertently reinforcing workers' invisibility, and about commodifying them as the providers of my data. Other individuals who contributed to my data are identified in this thesis by their own names. They are publicly associated with industry-related organisations whom I have cited here, and it therefore made no sense to deny their identity.

The wellbeing focus of this research made it especially important for participants to be portrayed in a constructive light, without obscuring the realities of their experiences. I wanted to avoid sensationalising workers' employment-related hardships, or portraying them as victims, unless this is what they claimed, or it was confirmed by strong evidence. It was also important for me to avoid depicting them as one-dimensional 'workers' without any alternative or co-existing identities. My research interest was in workers' routine and banal experiences of farm work (Davies, 2018), rather than in experiences of extreme exploitation, and whilst extreme examples draw attention and serve a purpose (Gray, 2014), they also sensationalise. This is similar to what Patrick (2017) describes as poverty porn; employed by the media for the 'entertainment' of people who presumably feel they must be somehow better for having avoided such circumstances. Their belief is, presumably, that people in impoverished circumstances lack internal resources and cannot exercise autonomy and agency. I wanted therefore to acknowledge workers' predicament and respect their own subjective accounts of their experiences, rather than create an account which would confirm them as victims of their circumstances.

During my field work I heard and saw things highly relevant to my research questions which I have not included here, since these would identify worker(s) and risk exploiting them in moments of vulnerability. I have also omitted things which I felt revealed too much of a person's life and feelings, as well as some highly informative data which would have

illustrated some of my findings in spectacular fashion but would have cast certain individuals in an unfavourable light and risked revealing their identities. It would be disrespectful to 'use' these things for my own intellectual gain when revealing them would do nothing to relieve their discomfort. These include some instances when I had explicit verbal permission to 'use' the data, which illustrates that certain ethical dilemmas cannot be fully prepared for or included in research ethics submissions.

Opinions differ about what constitutes acceptable research behaviour, including the extent to which research themes should be pursued and at what point lines of enquiry should stop, so that researchers' efforts to manage this inevitably becomes risky (Benson et al, Goode, 1996). I often talked to seasonal workers about issues or events which could be sensitive or embarrassing, or cast them or someone else in a negative light. I sometimes made on the spot decisions to press for further information, because doing so would advance my understanding of workers' on-farm wellbeing in ways that might positively inform industry practices. But this could feel uncomfortable for them or for myself, and whilst my naivety sometimes 'excused' my questioning (Medland, 2019), I felt that ethically I could only push things so far. Sometimes, I deliberately redirected our conversation, or gave participants opportunities to redirect or terminate our interaction when they looked uncomfortable or cornered. Taking this approach meant that workers understood that I respected their decisions about what and what not to share with me, and they often offered a little more information the next time that the subject arose. This strategy contributed to the sense of 'us' doing research together, instead of me researching them (McAreavey, 2014; von Benson and van Blerk, 2017). Because I used to work as a nurse with vulnerable, mentally ill individuals, managing this balance of pressing for information and backing off was familiar territory, but I felt strongly that it was not my place to probe uncomfortable thoughts and feelings for which I could offer no relief or solution, or allow my role to evolve into that of a therapist. Finding things out that *might* benefit industry practices took time and patience, observing for patterns of behaviours which formed over the course of the season, or which were left unsaid or avoided, these in themselves 'telling' important things about workers' wellbeing. Additionally, at Home Farm, where I spent a considerable amount of time with workers, I saw that recognising how things *felt* to workers had scope to reveal more about their wellbeing than establishing facts about a given situation could.

Ethnography can be a 'hit and run' experience (Pink, 2004, p. 44) with researchers spending considerable time in the field (quite literally, in this case) and then disappearing to write up, leaving the participants wondering where the researcher has gone, what will happen to their

data and whether it was any use. There are always new and interesting things to be discovered (Buchanan *et al.*, 1998), and this made leaving the field psychologically harder for me. But I was presented with a natural end when the seasonal workers returned to their home countries in late summer 2017, creating a natural termination of contact. However, I felt a responsibility to not simply disappear, and so visited Home Farm's workers on a social basis during the 2018 season. This appeared to be appreciated, and the workers who I had met in 2017 seemed keen to introduce me to the farm's new workers and explain my reasons for being on the farm the previous season. Their explanations were given in their own languages and I was gratified to realise that they could not have been all bad, because one of the 'new' workers immediately offered me some freshly made pancakes in what felt like a gesture of acceptance.

Summary

This Chapter describes my case study approach. This used ethnographic methods to explore workers' everyday experiences of seasonal farm work, the factors affecting their wellbeing and how these influenced their decisions about returning to a farm. I sought to understand workers' highly subjective experiences within their day to day context, and by prioritising participant observation and informal conversation was able to gain insights into their 'real lives'

The dynamic context of this research necessitated flexibility and constant modification of my plans in order to remain relevant and secure data of the right sort and in sufficient quantity.

The Psychosocial Matters

Introduction

This Chapter presents my research findings about workers' psychosocial experiences on farms. My use of the term psychosocial refers to the relation between social and psychic experiences (Stenning, 2018); the ways that workers' social and material circumstances affect their thoughts and feelings (Hettige *et al.*, 2012; Akhter *et al.*, 2018) and vice versa, and ultimately their wellbeing.

Peoples' real motives for migrating for work are complex and often undisclosed (Hettige *et al.*, 2012), and whilst workers I met were ostensibly economically motivated, it is quite possible that other forces were also at play, and that these continued to affect their wellbeing whilst on UK farms. The complexities of their transience, their work and their home circumstances were likely to mediate their wellbeing status during the time that they work away from home (Hovey and Magana, 2002). Bearing these things in mind may help explain why workers contributing to my own research expressed preferences for farms which were first and foremost conducive to their wellbeing, rather than those offering higher earning potential but where workers anticipated that their wellbeing might be less well supported.

Section 5.2 is concerned with the routines and workplace cultures that influenced seasonal workers sense of being perceived as commodities or as human beings whilst working on farms. This included them being known by name or as a number, and their status as good workers or otherwise. Section 5.3 is concerned with the divisions that arose or were deliberately created between different groups of individuals on farms, their potential to reduce workers' wellbeing and some of the strategies used to reduce their impact. Section 5.4 discusses the risks to workers' health and wellbeing of seasonal farm work and their attempts to manage these.

These people are human beings

Farmers employing seasonal workers may not intend to reduce their workers' wellbeing, but the agri-food industry adversely affects them as well as their workers (Basok, 2002; Rogaly, 2008a; Duke, 2011; Montoya-Garcia *et al.*, 2013; Gray, 2014). This is because it forms part of a larger system which exposes them and their workers to vulnerabilities and risks which are outwith their control (Holmes, 2011).

Modern food supply chain operation dictates that productivity is often privileged above community and what Illich (2001) describes as conviviality. Workers who I spoke with

resented that they were often considered solely in terms of their contribution to farm productivity such that their real and more complex identities were overlooked. Workers being valued only or principally in terms of their availability and capacity to do certain jobs cost-effectively is increasing in modern supply chains worldwide, and not only in food and farming (Bloodworth, 2018; Knowles, 2019). Workers may be considered in terms of 'need for, rather than needs of' (Rye and Scott, 2018, p. 1), so that making provision for their needs as people is resented (Mitchell, 2012; Kouvonen *et al.*, 2014; Borjas, 2016; Iglicka *et al.*, 2016; Rye and Scott, 2018). This may be largely determined by what Prilleltensky (2008) refers to as an organisation's social norms which facilitate autonomy and wellbeing. When low skilled and migrant workers are treated dismissively, rendered invisible (Bail *et al.*, 2012; Hellio, 2016), or constructed as 'disposable, interchangeable bodies' (McLaughlin and Hennebry, 2013, p. 6) they may perceive one another as competition (Hellio, 2016). They may feel dispensable and replaceable (ibid), although current shortages of workers on UK farms may reduce these concerns.

That workers' identities were overlooked became a reoccurring theme in my research. During a conversation about my research, Graham Ward, the Chief Executive of an agricultural technology centre recalled that whilst the post-war Seasonal Agricultural Scheme (SAWS) was operating, he met with immigration officials to deliberate the fate of Eastern European nationals who worked on UK farms but had no leave to remain. He described the officials' indifference to workers' individual needs and circumstances and described reminding them that they were 'making decisions about people, not tables and chairs being moved around'. The proposed post-Brexit visa system may see a return to this sort of arrangement, with workers' entry to the UK contingent on the requirement for their labour. This is described by the Chair of the NFU's Horticultural Board as a likely psychological disincentive to would-be seasonal workers (Capper, 2019) so that workers might avoid the UK, opting instead to go to other EU member states where visas are not required.

Names not numbers

Workers who helped with my research had taken work on UK farms for economic reasons, yet money did not dominate their decision-making when they were deciding whether to remain on or return to a farm. Instead, they seemed more concerned with the farm's culture and how it made them feel, and often explained this by referring to the farm's size and to their sense of being known as people, or conversely seen only as workers.

Some described having worked for farmers who apparently had no interest in them as individuals so that they felt anonymous and indistinguishable from one another. This sort of demeaning on-farm culture and workers feeling that they are reduced to mere numbers does not appear to be explained by the contemporaneous pressures on food producers caused by rising demand and worker shortages. Instead, it appears to have been widespread in food and farming across time and space, as evidenced in the accounts offered by Scott *et al.* (2012); Rogaly and Qureshi (2017), Wells (1996), Berger and Mohr (1975) and Hellio (2016).

Most workers expressed a preference for smaller farms which they associated with small and relatively stable workforces. Small, stable workforces made it logistically easier for workers to be known as individuals, and workers indicated that this had become a part of the criteria by which they chose or rejected farms as return destinations. This was despite bigger farms often promising higher earnings. Workers also associated small farms with supervision, consequently preferring them to the big farms which they associated with being kept under surveillance by people in authority. Since a farm's size seemed so fundamental to workers' evaluation of it, I will offer some further explanation.

Descriptions of farms as big or small indicated farms' literal sizes, including acreage, worker numbers and the farms' productivity. The words big and small were also applied symbolically. But regardless of the sense in which workers used the words big and small, their descriptions were relative and subjective. Had I been able to speak their languages, or had they been more fluent in English we may have arrived at more nuanced descriptions of the farms they had worked on. But it was clear they used big and small as a sort of shorthand value judgement to indicate that a farm was bad (big) or good (small) in terms of their wellbeing. Workers' preference for small farms is noted by Basok (2002), whilst Metcalfe (2019) observed that complexity and large scale in relation to food and farms seems intimidating, so that people often instinctively assume that smallness equates to goodness. This could not be taken this for granted though, and I often had to clarify whether they meant a farm was big or small symbolically, or literally, or both.

Interestingly, even workers without personal experience of working on big farms said that they favoured small farms:

> *'I speak with our friends, they say it's [big farm] very, very bad, yes.'*

> *(Elina, Springwood).*

And:

> *He hasn't worked elsewhere in the UK, or on another farm, but thinks that a small farm is better, because everyone knows one another. He likes the fact that the farmers know his name, remember things about him etc. It's a recurring theme (Field Notes).*

This suggests that experienced seasonal workers, who avoid big farms after having bad experiences have scope to influence 'new' workers' judgements about what constituted a bad or good farm. 'New' workers are likely to also actively seek out the opinion of experienced workers within their home-country networks, or have opinions thrust upon them by individuals keen to protect them, so that they might leave their home country having already decided to avoid big farms:

> *'If someone…is interested about work in a big farm…I will tell him don't do this, never [emphasized]. This is terrible, terrible system of work. All there is terrible.' (Tomasz, Home Farm. By email).*

Workers were usually vague about what constituted a big or a small farm in literal terms, and since their comments often referred to former jobs, I could not be sure that their description of a big or small farm entirely matched mine. However, it was clear that in literal terms, a big farm covered many acres and employed scores or even hundreds of seasonal workers, horticultural production at this scale being increasingly common (Taylor, C, 2017a; AHDB, 2019c; S&A Produce, 2019). Farms described as small by workers often required seasonal workers' input for only a few acres of crops, although those farms might also grow other crops which did not require any seasonal labour. Such 'small' farms often employed fewer than twenty seasonal workers.

As Thomson *et al.* (2018) showed, a farm's size *per se* does not make it objectionable to workers and besides, a farm's smallness does not guarantee that its workers will be treated more ethically and fairly (Allen, P *et al.*, 2003; Harrison and Getz, 2014; Gray, 2016). However, workers often associate small farms with better conditions and with employers who are more engaged with their workers (Benson, 2010), and this was certainly the opinion of workers I spoke to. They were critical of many big farms' workplace cultures, and their descriptions of being diminished to units of production, commodities and a cost input by the logistics of big farms powerfully illustrated this:

Cristian: when I was in the big farm, I have numbers; two thousand five! That is my name! [the other workers, to whom this is familiar all laugh]...Nobody knows Cristian...that this is Elina, no! he's seven hundred fifty!

HS: How does that make you feel?

Cristian: not so good.

Elina: it's important for me that Roger knows, because I know ...[tries to express importance of being known as an individual]

Cristian: [interrupting impatiently] '...for everybody it's important because it's like a prison! Who's there? two thousand five? OK ! Nobody know.... who are you, y'know? you are just are a number!' (Springwood).

The identification of people by numbers can be demeaning and hostile and is readily associated with slavery, death camps and inhumanity (Scott *et al.*, 2012) and Cristian's description illustrates what Benson (2008) and Holmes (2011) describe as the structural violence which makes it impossible to hold anyone to account for the systematic oppression faced by many workers. As Cristian indicated, this often leaves people feeling trapped, dehumanised and disempowered. The farmers I spoke to recognise that workers who are not perceived as individuals became valued only for their utility:

'...all they see at the end of the day is figures and what goes out, never mind how their staff are at the lower ranks.' (Claire, Vale Farm).

To explain the importance and simplicity of identifying workers individually, Springwood's workers showed me barcoded stickers with which they labelled trays of fruit as they picked them. Each person had their own, unique barcode and by tallying these up at the day's end they ensured that they were all currently paid for their piece rate work. A similar approach was used at Home Farm, where numbered 'tokens' (Figure 1) were placed in trays of fruit to indicate which worker had picked it, each having been assigned a number at the season's start. But the sheer scale of a big farm's workforce can mean barcodes and other, similar forms of numerical identification become workers' de facto identities. The point that workers wanted me to understand was that Springwood's barcode labels identified who had done what work, not who people were, because Roger knew each of his workers by name:

HS: Does Roger (employer) know everybody's name?

Cristian: yes, of course (laughs, and looks at me quizzically, as though this is self -evident)

Elina added that, in her opinion, Roger's willingness to learn how to correctly pronounce their names also demonstrated his respect for his workers.

The use of barcodes and other systems for tracking and identifying workers and their output have obvious administrative benefits, leading me to wonder whether such things are universally disliked by workers. I was therefore interested to hear Alina, a temporary worker at Southwold, defending them. She has worked at Southwold often enough to be given supervisory duties and through her interpreter explained how bypassing workers' names for identification makes her role easier:

> '...(Alina is) working as a supervisor, it is better because... there's a job to do!
> (She doesn't have to) write all these names! [mimes writing]... And as well, for
> people's point of view y'know, stream of people, weight of people... standing in
> queue because of these names... and some person have a different spelling....
> much quicker.... and you're not wasting time and really, both sides are happy....'
> (Alina, Southwold. Via interpreter).

Dozens of people begin and end their shifts simultaneously at Southwold and Alina is responsible for ensuring that this happens quickly so that production continues uninterrupted. Efficient shift changeovers also reduce how much time workers are on site but not being paid. Whilst I did not have an opportunity to ask workers supervised by Alina whether they cared about this, Bloodworth (2018) identifies it as a problem for people employed in places where time-consuming systems are imposed in order to manage security and worker-traceability. Shift management on the smaller farms in my research was more straightforward, because fewer workers had to be coordinated and production was less automated. This meant that short interruptions were less disruptive. On these farms, workers doing work for which they were paid an hourly rate clocked in and out via what was essentially a traditional clocking-in machine. They were in any case, sufficiently familiar with their farm's routine, their employer's expectations and with one another to manage their own time keeping and appeared to be largely trusted to do so.

In contrast farms contracted to supermarkets, including Southwold, must comply with stringent food traceability measures which include identifying every worker who makes contact with the food. This is enabled by facial or fingerprint recognition which also generates data for retailers and auditors (Hortnews, 2018b), so that workers can be identified and held accountable for errors, poor quality or contamination. The smaller farms in my research sold produce into shorter and less complex supply chains, including directly to small retail outlets and farmgate customers and this reduced the imperative for such stringent traceability. Although seemingly far removed from food retail the systems designed to identify workers reveals how complex, retail-driven supply chains can influence on-farm practices, increasing workers' sense of being simply a number or cost-input.

Workers' sense of being simply a commodity seemed to be greater on farms which were especially productivity driven, aligning with Hellio's (2016, p. 219) account of foreign labour as 'just another production input'. On such farms, workers were sometimes intimidated into increased productivity, including by working at an unnaturally and unsustainably rapid pace:

> '*On the big farm I was no name, the same like a lot of people. You are number there, not a person. You have to work like a machine, nobody is interested about you. You have regulations there, which are more important than you. If you need a help, probably you will not have… Do you know (how people) are behaving in situation like this? Like animals. Law of the jungle.*' (Tomasz, Home Farm).

The punitive and hostile treatment of seasonal farm workers is well documented (Binford, 2009; Barrientos, 2013; Davies, 2018; Gore, 2019), and various people including workers[10] assisting my research said they had witnessed or had been subjected to abuse. This included verbal abuse and physical violence. I was given eye-witness accounts, by Mia at Home Farm and by someone representing the Association of Labour Providers, of supervisors on 'big farms' shouting and swearing at seasonal workers. Both remarked that language barriers had done nothing to hide the intimidation and fury that had been intended. Although Tomasz did not elaborate on what he had said in the extract I included previously he evidently associated 'big' farms with hostile, punitive and degrading treatment, indicated by his use of the jungle as a metaphor. This caught my attention because one of Springwood's workers had also

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[10] Out of respect for the farmers whose workers I spoke with, I must emphasise that the violence to which workers referred to had occurred on farms elsewhere, not on those I visited for my research.

described farms as jungles, in that they were socially isolating and materially bleak, having few identifying features beyond those relating to food production. I initially assumed the jungle metaphor was inspired by Calais's refugee camp, which was being reported regularly in the news. This was informally known as the jungle and was regularly condemned for its impoverished, restrictive and dehumanising conditions (Sandri, 2017). But I later recalled that The Jungle was the title of a novel about Lithuanian slaughter house workers in Chicago (Sinclair, 1985) and that other researchers had also used it or referred to its use in relation to unpleasant and hostile places associated with seasonal workers' transience and precarity (Bletzer, 2004; Benson, 2012).[11]

'Good' workers

Being identified as a number rather than by one's own name is extreme, but workers can be diminished through other means too, including by habitually describing them as unskilled. Political motivations for neatly categorising people as skilled or unskilled according to their economic usefulness perpetuates this (Anderson, B. and Blinder, 2015; Blinder and Jeannet, 2017). Yet unskilled is an arbitrary and subjective term, which belittles workers' contribution to farming and is a sort of bad faith which facilitates the oppression and invisibility of seasonal workers (Holmes, 2013) and their low-pay (Bolt, 2013).

Nobody contributing to my research used unskilled as a pejorative term, perhaps because their familiarity with seasonal farm work leads them to recognise that 'good' workers do in fact have skills. 'Good' worker skills are not universal. They are enhanced by practice, as evidenced by my own inability to match the high standards set by my research participants. For this reason, simply substituting the falling numbers of seasonal workers from Eastern European countries with UK workers is not likely to be a viable option (Anderson, B. and Ruhs, 2012).

The relentlessness of farming requires farmers to work long hours, and often for several days without a break. This probably helps to inform their expectations of seasonal workers; what Gray (2014, p. 83) described as 'if I'm working hard you'd better be working hard'. 'Good' workers are expected to have a strong work ethic, be capable of laborious work in materially

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[11] A Romanian national not associated with my research explained that the jungle is common parlance in Romania, to the extent that it requires no documented definition. The jungle apparently refers to people, places and organisations characterised by deviance and unpredictability, often in the context of Roma people. Her explanation amply illustrates workers' feelings when on farms, and their desire to disassociate themselves from such places.

uncomfortable conditions and have the emotional resources to continue to function until the season's end (Preibisch and Binford, 2007). Fulfilling this brief for many years has enabled many Eastern European workers to establish and hold on to their 'good' worker status (Berger and Mohr, 1975; Ruhs and Anderson, 2010; Anderson and Ruhs, 2012). The farmers who assisted me with my research were all heavily involved in their farm's day to day activities, strategically and practically, and expected equal commitment from their workers. This meant that workers willing to do any and all available work could validate their status as 'good' workers, as workers at Springwood were well aware:

> *HS: ...so most of you think (you'll) come here and just work. It's just for now? [chorus of yeses].*
> *Worker 1: ... just work, work, work!*
> *HS: so if Roger says there's loads of strawberries, would you all work 7 days a week? [chorus of yeses]*
> *Worker 2: I'm working twenty days, twenty days (without a break).*
> *Worker 3: I'm working 3 weeks (without a break).*
> *HS: how many hours a day?*
> *Worker 3: Nine, ten hours.*
> *HS: OK, that's a lot of work. But you don't care? [all nod]. Money? [all laugh].*
> *Worker 1: yes, but the season is one or two months. And after that, when it's the summer we work eight hours (each day).*
> *Worker 1: just in season, we not have a break, or day off. (Anonymous workers, Springwood).*

The self-exploitation of these workers was based on their money-making opportunities being time limited. They were pragmatic about having to cope with high workloads because they knew it would be short-lived. I heard similar accounts at Home Farm: *'... but I have this money, this is only 3 months, I can survive.'* (Tomasz, Home Farm), this being a recognised psychological coping mechanism of seasonal farm workers (Magana and Hovey, 2003). Farmers often 'need' workers to self-exploit to optimise their crops' value, which may contribute to workers' 'good' status, and is likely to also result in workers returning to their home country having earned more money. But I wondered whether these behaviours might also become burdensome to workers who felt less inclined to self-exploit.

What is 'good' at one farm may be deemed unsatisfactory at another, according to farmers' expectations and their motivational strategies. For example, Iolanda was described by her

Home Farm employers as an 'Über' worker, because in addition to being a quick worker she was also highly proactive, liked by her co-workers and was reliable; all qualities which are identified by Capper (2019) as those of a 'good' worker. Yet Iolanda described being chastised on another, bigger farm, where the only criteria by which workers were judged to be 'good' or otherwise was their productivity, other intrinsic qualities including social fluency seemingly being disregarded.

Recruiting and retaining seasonal workers is indisputably becoming more difficult (ALP, 2018; FarmingUK, 2018a) but there are also claims of workers becoming less 'good'. This has been attributed to factors including workers' increasing age with associated declines in stamina, and accounts of declining reliability, numeracy and literacy (Binford, 2009; Thomson *et al.*, 2018). These things were stated as fact by Southwold's farm manager and by Simon at Vale Farm, both of whom felt that it had impacted their farms' productivity. Simon at Vale Farm claimed that workers are less inclined than earlier cohorts to work intensively to maximise their earnings:

> *'...they don't want to have to work like mad to earn a lot. As long as they earn £300 a week or whatever, y'know they'd rather be paid by the hour and just go steady away and not have the pressure.' (Simon, Vale Farm).*

Clearly their 'steady away' approach to earning has negative financial implications for farmers who get left with over-ripe, spoiled crops. But whether workers actively elect to exercise agency in being only as good as they need to be (Baxter-Reid, 2016), or are simply incapable of working as fast as their predecessors did, they are likely to be unfavourably compared to earlier workers who were compelled by extreme economic need to work very hard.

Mia at Home Farm referred to one worker who had described herself as better off than her co-workers before resigning after just one week, stating that the work was too difficult and awful for her to ever voluntarily do farm work again. Perhaps this is illustrative of workers' increasing sense of agency; a form of resistance which enables them to refuse to work at the pace their employer wants (Basok, 2002). The constraints they were under and the limited opportunities open to them in their home country almost certainly increased their motivation to work hard and earn well (Rogaly and Qureshi, 2017). This would make them more desirable as workers. For this reason recruitment across a 'development gap' was especially advantageous for farmers (Scott, 2015b), and the recent economic growth in workers' home

countries may have reduced this advantage. Viable alternatives in their home countries as well as improving standards of living probably reduces workers' willingness to self-exploit to the same extent, so that comparing current workers with earlier, more desperate workers creates a perception that they are becoming less 'good'. Simon, at Vale Farm concurred that workers' diminishing economic vulnerability empowered them:

> '...we used to get students, but now they are more middle aged ....they seem to come from more wealthier families y'know... those are the ones that can't hack it and say they're going home. (Their) parents have enough money so…' (Simon, Vale Farm).

Many workers who helped with my research engaged in racial stereotyping, professing that they were better; more 'good' than UK workers, or even workers from other A8 countries, and that they were proud of this. Those at Home Farm joked about 'the English' being slow, unfit and lazy, these comments provoked partly by my inability to match the speed and accuracy with which they worked. On one memorable occasion I did manage to pick many more strawberries than either they or I expected and was subsequently quizzed for some time by one worker who inspected 'my' trays in disbelief. She demanded, good naturedly, to know who had helped me, and appeared doubtful about my (truthful) insistence that no-one had. Springwood's workers also explicitly associated nationality with 'good' worker attributes, stating that UK farmers should endeavour to employ Romanian workers after Brexit instead of relying on less efficient UK workers:

> Cristian: It's much better to pay Romanian than Polish or whoever, or English. And…English guy, I don't know how to explain...he don't work the same like us…(he has to) take a break for water…it's different…' (Cristian, Springwood).

Perhaps it is inevitable that people doing work rejected by others will seek ways to assert their pride and dignity, including by drawing attention to their own competencies within their role (Griffith *et al.*, 2018). But Cristian's reference to nationality in what Maldonado (2009) described as a proxy for worker quality is noteworthy, because the farmers I spoke with appeared not to attribute their workers' performance to their nationality, or else they attributed the industry's over-representation of Eastern European workers to the logistics and economics of labour supplies, including their willingness to fulfil short term roles. Luke, the farmer at Southwold remarked that he had in fact employed UK workers who were 'ok,' but said that local housing costs and inadequate public transport prevented them continuing with the work.

Perhaps, as Maldonado (2009) found, racialised perceptions of 'good' workers are increasingly moderated by incoming seasonal workers' adoption of the local, indigenous population's behavioural norms, so that once within the role they become less distinguishable from one another.

Achieving 'good' worker status was informed not only by technical and practical ability, but also by workers' soft and social skills, including what Goleman (1998) describes as emotional intelligence. These skills facilitate regulation and correction of one another's behaviours in a process of co-evaluation or less positively co-surveillance. At Home Farm I saw workers sigh and grimace whilst pointing out or rectifying what they thought a co-worker should have done more adequately. Farmers evidently took note of which workers were likely to notice and try to address what they saw as co-workers' failings:

> *Russell said Iolanda's frustrated with the others doing things wrong or inefficiently. She keeps an eye on everything and keeps everything moving and can't understand why they don't or can't. He said she tallies up the crates and bunches of asparagus in her head, whilst doing her job and directing others, even though she's not been asked to do all of this. Is this because she's been there longer than some of the others? Does she feel entitled or confident enough to take on extra roles/ tasks that less confident or newer workers wouldn't? (Field notes).*

Sometimes workers who had 'failed' in this respect were publicly challenged, usually by Iolanda who was quick to point out what would have got the task done more efficiently. These events took a familiar course. For example, having spent most of the day in the fields picking asparagus, Home Farm's workers would relocate to the packhouse to grade and pack asparagus, a process which involves several highly repetitive tasks. Workers tend to alternative between the tasks to relieve boredom and reduce aches and strains, but this required no negotiation; they just shifted to another task periodically using what might be described as tacit knowledge (Waite, 2007) about getting things done with minimum discomfort. Iolanda almost always persisted with the task of grading asparagus, because by common consent she was quicker and more accurate than her co-workers. Meanwhile, the one or two workers loading the grading machine would invariably sling too much asparagus haphazardly onto the conveyor belt where Iolanda graded it as it moved slowly past her. Their carelessness risked spoiling and devaluing the asparagus, which could waste the effort expended in harvesting it (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Asparagus which is aligned in a consistent fashion in crates when picked is then easier to grade and pack.

After initially working faster to sustain high standards of grading whilst also correcting their sloppy work, she would lose patience and halt the machine to berate them and demand improvements. Whilst I could not understand what was being said, Iolanda's expression indicated that she was baffled by her co-workers' indifference about the job taking longer than necessary. Inefficient working was probably a deliberate act of resistance by some, intended to slow the pace of a task being paid at an hourly rate with no incentive to work faster. Indeed, by prolonging time it took for them to complete the task, they could feasibly accrue more hours of pay whilst expending relatively little effort. This work was far easier (although more tedious) than harvesting asparagus out in the fields. Whilst being reprimanded Iolanda's co-workers tended to stand passively, their acknowledgment of her outburst usually consisting of little more than a dismissive shrug. It was noticeable that they rarely worked faster or much more methodically afterwards.

Although workers may be independently 'good', this status can also be collectively held. Both Home Farm and Springwood had several returnees in their teams during the summer that I visited which increased their teams' familiarity with their farms' environments and working

practices. Several returnees at Home Farm had what seemed to be an uncanny knack of completing each other's tasks, working in ways that maintained momentum to get tasks done with minimal fuss so that no-one was left behind. Words and gestures were rarely exchanged to achieve this and progress relied on the sort of cooperation and coordination that is more prevalent amongst returnee workers. This sort of familiarity also increased their group skill, predictability and cooperation, so that they all stood to benefit (Wells, 1996). Like some of the other 'good' workers I met at Home Farm and Springwood, Iolanda had appointed herself, or been appointed as a mediator between the workers and their employer. When workers wanted to negotiate some arrangement, such as organising the day's work around the local car boot sale, these mediators were nominated to conduct the necessary negotiations with their employer.

The role of mediator can be a difficult one to navigate, because it relies on, and results in, workers being trusted and positively evaluated by co-workers, as well as employers. My observations of workers at Home Farm led me to believe that individuals performing 'good' worker mediation on behalf of co-workers may be concurrently revered and resented by co-workers. This is presumably because whilst benefitting from the 'good' workers' actions, co-workers also feel threatened by the alignment which mediators develop with their employer and which confuses hierarchical distinctions. In Iolanda's case, the respect that her co-workers had for her made them less critical of her than they were of others who secured fewer benefits for their co-workers.

Workers I spoke with appreciated employer's willingness to acknowledge 'good' workers and 'good' work although few provided explicit examples of this being done. Cristian at Springwood stated that appreciation might be demonstrated by 'more money', a rather tongue in cheek suggestion provoking laughter from other workers who knew that getting paid more tends to be conditional upon working harder, or working more hours. With a more serious demeanour he then suggested *'I'll be a good worker and I will be appreciated,'* implying that whilst he knew what it felt like to be valued he did not expect anything to materially change. Also at Springwood, Elina felt that becoming a returnee illustrated her value: *'I think I feel appreciated because I work here three years on this farm' (Elina, Springwood).* Some workers at Home Farm also believed returneeism indicated that they had 'good' preferred-worker status, and while they did not say so explicitly, it was clear that they also valued overt, face to face feedback. I saw workers at Home Farm praised on several occasions by Russell, their employer, for achieving more than expected, or for appropriately using their initiative. Russell's familiarity with each worker enabled him to do this on an individual basis rather

than just giving generic feedback to the team, and it was evident that the workers liked and appreciated this sort of positive feedback. This indicates best practice in relation to workplace wellbeing (University of East Anglia, 2018), and appears to be highly motivating for seasonal workers (AHDB, 2008). But this may be more difficult to achieve in big, anonymous workforces, where it is harder for farmers to identify which worker's effort made the difference.

1.3 Them and Us

Seasonal workers operate within on-farm social organisations which may comprise several 'them and us' structural segregations (Duke, 2011). These may be associated with on-farm hierarchies such as farm ownership or management, gender, ethnicity or nationality, or with status with which being a returnee and/or a 'good' worker is associated. Some inter-worker conflicts that I saw or heard about on farms apparently related to returneeism and to workers' identities, including 'good' workers' characteristics and worker compliance. Tension also arose from alliances and feuds which invariably occur within social communities, as well as from gender, age, ethnicity and nationality and their associated stereotypes. Those associated with the latter may be more marked where teams are comprised of workers coming from more than one sending countries (Duke, 2011; Scott *et al.*, 2012). Different manifestations of 'them and us' and the differing ways in which people respond to them makes it difficult to generalise about what these things might mean for workers' wellbeing.

The first part of this section presents and discusses my findings about the who and how of on-farm line management in the form of surveillance or supervision. A predominance of one or the other seemed highly significant for workers' wellbeing, perhaps because it had an immediate and direct affect upon them, but it seemed to also reveal something about that farm's culture. Workers' sense of being supervised or under surveillance was to some extent subjective but they did appear to associate 'big' farms with supervisors and surveillance, and 'small' farms with supervision by farmers who were workers' primary point of contact. This is important because the hierarchies and autocratic management that they associated with 'big' appears to reduce wellbeing (Biggio and Cortese, 2013).

Data extracts in this section are dominated by what Tomasz at Home Farm told me. He was more vociferous about supervision and surveillance than the others, indicating that supervision and surveillance as management strategies were a distinguishing feature of 'good' and 'bad' farms respectively. The second part of this section illustrates ways in which workers

differentiated between who was 'us' and who was 'them', how people were 'othered', and how workers negotiated actual and perceived differences to get through the season.

The who and how of supervision and surveillance

It has been argued that farmers are compelled by disadvantageous trading terms to exploit workers, because they themselves are exploited (Stenbacka, 2018) by a 'system of labor that perpetuates suffering' (Holmes, 2013, p. 86), and because labour is one of the few aspects of production within their control (Gray, 2014). The difficulty of growing fresh foods economically and to a standard acceptable to retailers and consumers requires a workforce who can work quickly without damaging the fragile, perishable produce. It is increasingly common for businesses to try to optimise the value of employees via what could be described as supervision or, at its most extreme, surveillance (Belton, 2019), farms often deeming this necessary to meet retailers' Just in Time and Quality Control standards (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992).

What workers told me suggested that the means by which this was achieved was determined by the farm's size and by the attitudes of individuals, including those of farmers and co-workers. Russell at Home Farm suggested that farmers might employ intermediary supervisors with an express intention of delegating psychologically uncomfortable tasks to them, including those involving extorting greater compliance and efficiency from workers. Strategies used can be profoundly detrimental to workers' wellbeing and sense of self-worth (Basok, 2002; Scott, 2017), facilitating what Benson (2012, p. 181) describes as an 'us and them' which stigmatises and blames workers for their own employment situation. Some workers described previously working under constant, critical surveillance, associating this with 'big' farms where intermediary supervisors were given the task of overseeing big teams of seasonal workers. These farms were less attractive as workplace destinations in line with the opinion of workers in existing studies including Benson, (2012). One explanation that workers offered was that having a supervisor or farm manager as their first point of contact often made it harder for them to get problems addressed. Where supervisors did not speak their language it became harder still, as wryly observed by Elina:

> Elina: '...here is good because if something's a problem? Go speak to Roger what problem I have.
>
> HS: and that's ok? You're happy to do that? And he'll try to sort it out?

Elina: Yes! Because maybe speak one manger, maybe resolve this problem maybe not. Maybe no understand.' (Springwood).

Language barriers are easily exploited by employers and supervisors wishing to discourage complaints, deflect responsibility and keep workers in a position of ignorance (Potter and Hamilton, 2014; Snipes *et al.*, 2017) but even in the absence of language barriers workers might still feel too daunted to pursue grievances or challenge the status quo via hostile, unapproachable supervisors or where they are not known to workers. Some of Springwood's workers, as well as Iolanda at Home Farm, described previous farm jobs where they did not know who owned or ran the farm. This in turn made it difficult for them to know who was accountable for what went on, which is a situation described by Bloodworth (2018) as allowing employers to evade their social responsibilities.

As identified by Rye (2014), Gray (2016) and Rye and Andrzejewska (2010), workers told me that they felt safer when they knew, regularly interacted with and trusted their employer. But this known-employer arrangement presents its own challenges. This is because workers who believe their employer is approachable and reasonable may be subjected to a benign paternalism which is not always easily distinguished from well-intentioned support (Benson, 2012).

Workers also associated supervisors with unrelenting pressure to work harder, as my field notes show:

...she said they're expected to work hard, but… there's 'no pressure'… there isn't always someone barking at them to pick more/ faster. She imitated someone shouting, clapping and pointing and then pretended to work really quickly in a panicked fashion… she maintains (this) never happens at Home Farm…and said it's worth getting less money…(because the pressure can be) psychologically and physically unsustainable… (Field Notes).

It appeared that supervisors tasked with increasing productivity often imposed highly prescriptive, inflexible rules about how things had to be done, watching closely for non-compliance, leaving workers with 'little opportunity to behave as social beings' (Scott *et al.*, 2012). Various factors over which farmers have little control, including rising minimum

wages[12], having to pay enhanced rates to improve recruitment and retention and having fewer workers to do increasing volumes of work make them keen to adopt strategies which could help them utilise what labour they do have more effectively, often by 'stretching them' (Martin, P, 2017, p. 1). One such strategy is lean[13], a production industry approach designed to reduce labour requirements and decrease production costs which proponents claim also helps workers earn more without expending more energy or incurring work-related injuries (AHDB, 2008). But raising expectations about what people ought to be capable of amounts to intensification, described as a 'worryingly common response' (Low Pay Commission, 2019, p. 24) by employers seeking to mitigate wages costs and is associated with a 'trade-off between increases in pay and a deterioration in working conditions and nonwage benefits' (ibid). In addition, the prescriptive working methods and relentless scrutiny can make workers miserable:

> *'...everything must be like (supervisor) wants. So… if you pick something and you use three fingers? No; you must use four fingers, because (he) said. Because supervisor said this is the best idea, but for me it's not. Because (then) I'm slower…' (Tomasz, Home Farm).*

Having observed workers doing paid work at Home Farm, I felt that workers feel demeaned by the enforcement of pedantic working practices by diminishing their sense of agency. Self-directiveness and a sense of owning their own problems and challenges, rather than being 'done to' or micro-managed, is liberating and provides a sense of control. I saw workers at Home Farm utilizing their individual strategies to work quickly, whilst minimising their physical discomfort. For example, some workers chose to only pick those raspberries which meant they did not have to repeatedly crouch or over-reach. Those who adopted this approach reached the end of their row of raspberry canes quicker and with less discomfort, but often left a proportion of that row's fruit unpicked and therefore wasted, illustrating why close, critical supervision might be attractive to farmers. Workers at Home Farm were trusted to get on with their work with minimal and intermittent supervision because Russell, their employer prefers

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[12] Farmers are paying higher wages to attract and retain workers, but are also having to meet increases in the national minimum wage. This has risen by around 7 percent annually for the past five years (ALP, 2017a).
[13] Lean is a management principle which seeks to reduce or eliminate superfluous workplace activities to increase efficiency and productivity. See section 3.2.1.

to discreetly 'keep an eye' on them from a distance, believing that especially when new to the work they need time to learn how to do their work without feeling pressured by scrutiny.

Some of Home Farm's workers compared this benign approach favourably to their experiences on previous farms, but it undoubtedly demanded more of them in other ways, including that they used their initiative instead of waiting for instructions and were self-directing so that as Russell anticipated they took on more responsibility for their own work, reducing the practical and financial costs to him for supervision (Benson, 2012). His workers have in any case become naturalised 'good' workers, having internalised the vulnerability imposed upon them at other, earlier farms (Duke, 2011). Supervisors may try to justify close supervision on the basis that it helps to attain the consistently high standards which are necessary in food picking and packing. But close supervision, or what would more accurately be described as surveillance, may also be (mis)used to intimidate workers into greater obedience, compliance and subservience. Workers who display these characteristics may be more favourably evaluated as well as more productive (Scott *et al.*, 2012). Tomasz described his experience of this on a 'big' farm where he used to work:

> Tomasz: 'They were watching us, with this? [mimes looking through binoculars].
>
> HS: Were they English? The people with binoculars?
>
> Tomasz: No, from Poland, Romania, England [slapping table for emphasis]…and… if supervisor was not happy…he say don't talk! Just work, yes? Don't talk to each other. This is normal.
>
> HS: well, what difference would that make? (to their work)
>
> Tomasz: No difference, but atmosphere of scared.
>
> HS: And do you think… them watching you through binoculars… was it done to intimidate… or to check that people were doing the right thing?
>
> Tomasz: I think the two options…
>
> HS: It was useful then, that it intimidated….made people work harder?
>
> Tomasz: And it wasn't secret.' (Home Farm).

Having read accounts of farm supervisors often being preferentially recruited 'local' people whose behaviours are excused and overlooked by higher management (Holmes, 2013), I assumed that Tomasz's references were to UK nationals. But he said that this was not so, leaving me to wonder how certain people secured those positions of power within the farm's hierarchy. It was not clear whether individuals exhibiting certain behaviours were promoted to supervisory roles, or whether workers placed into positions of authority subsequently became punitive and exploitative, willing to bully others into subordination. However, regardless of their route to authority, their abuse of power may have been wilfully overlooked by farm owners providing productivity was sustained or increased. '*It wasn't secret*' certainly suggests that supervisors did not anticipate being reprimanded for their treatment of workers. One farmer offered an insight into this:

> '*...(workers) don't like big farms… there's a hierarchy…bullying, a lot of employers don't see it because they don't go onto the farms. They're run by supervisors y'know. And they leave it to them…there's so much that goes on that they don't hear about until something bad happens…*' (Claire, Vale Farm).

Whilst prohibiting conversation purportedly increased workers' efficiency, it also reminded them that they were under surveillance. It is likely that they would be too intimidated to complain especially on farms where a culture of punishing 'difficult' workers existed, this being a familiar abuse of power by supervisors (Holmes, 2013). Workers are typically reluctant to complain about or challenge abusive treatment like this, especially if more powerful workers are implicated, meaning that abuse is rarely identified by audit processes (Kyritsis *et al.*, 2019). I later realised it would have been informative to know whether those supervisors to whom Tomasz referred were permanently or seasonally employed; the reduced precarity of permanent employment may have emboldened them in exerting authority over others (Wells, 1996). Perhaps Tomasz and his co-workers were too subordinated to resist this treatment, including because language barriers between supervisors and workers made it difficult for workers to meaningfully challenge them (Potter and Hamilton, 2014).

My observation of what went on at Home Farm suggests that workers' surveillance of one another is routine. I was included in this whilst working alongside or hanging around them. Co-worker surveillance was more evident whilst workers were doing hourly rate work, perhaps because of suspicions about some people making less effort yet receiving equal remuneration. Whilst I fully expected to be subjected to greater scrutiny and surveillance than 'real' workers who were quicker and more accurate in their work, I was surprised by the level of discomfort I experienced whilst we were being watched and prompted by Marius, who

always drove the tractor and rig on which we stacked the asparagus crates. From his high seat he literally and figuratively looked down on his co-workers, drawing attention to asparagus stalks we had failed to harvest and occasionally stopping to allow slower workers (usually me) catch up. In practical terms this increased the team's efficiency and reduced the proportion of crop wasted. However, workers subjected to this scrutiny on a daily basis are likely to feel intimidated and demoralised to varying degrees, if only because one person is consistently able to avoid the heavy work and weather exposure. Despite this, the arrangement never seemed to be questioned by other workers.

Several people had had previous farm employment where their earnings relied on the collective efforts of small teams of workers, rather than on their own productivity. This seemed more common where produce, including apples and cauliflowers, was harvested by hand into large wooden crates. Small groups worked together to fill crates with per-crate payments then shared between them. This practice seemed to be associated with various behaviours which workers resented, including the tendency for workers to subject one another to constant standard raising and punitive surveillance:

> *Tomasz '... you have a big box, and cut (the crop) with machete... and if they was fast they have more money...(through) piece work. If somebody's slower, then everybody [gestures]... then we want (to) kill him! Because...these people are not interested, woman, man, old young, doesn't matter. You must go, go, go, you must do the same fast like me because I'm the faster here, and you must do this the same. It... was very not nice!*
> *HS: so, who decides who goes in which team?*
> *Tomasz: Erm, big boss. And it was lottery. If you was there first time it was lottery....' (Home Farm).*

In such conditions, workers become objects to get a task done, not people (Weiss and Rupp, 2015). Workers forced to work quickly are more likely to make mistakes, including spoiling produce and sustaining injuries and this presents a dilemma: to work quickly to avoid being shouted at or to be shouted at for spoiling produce. Quality and quantity become a compromise in the 'stresses and contradictions of picking' (Holmes, 2013, p. 77). Novice workers may be particularly vulnerable in this respect, since they are disadvantaged in the allocation process and are still trying to learn the most efficient way of doing the job.

Getting Along

Home Farm's workers' efforts to get along helped them to navigate their everyday existence on the farm and continue to be resilient to the pressures and stresses associated with the work and their separation from their home-country communities. Social relationships are thought to be fundamental to workplace wellbeing in small businesses (What Works Wellbeing, 2018). For the seasonal workers that I met, getting along enabled them to manage the extent to which seasonal farm work impacted their wellbeing. In this section I use the term 'getting along' to describe the collective ability and willingness of workers and others on farms to coexist, drawing on their intrinsic resources including resilience and tolerance, and behaving in ways that reduced tension and conflict to make everyday interactions easier. Achieving this requires frequent, often 'unspectacular' (Rye and Scott, 2018, p. 11) behaviours, but often requires significant emotional labour. The concept of emotional labour is often used in relation to migrants' efforts to sustain and nurture home-country relationships, including with children (Baldassar, 2008; Svašek, 2010; Fiałkowska, 2019), yet it seems to be less frequently considered in relation to workers' everyday lives in their host country workplaces. Social experiences are informed but also experienced through emotions (Anderson, K. and Smith, 2001; Davidson and Milligan, 2004) and socio-emotional fluency is important for increasing the resilience and motivation of social groups in workplaces (Goleman, 1998). I therefore believe that what contributes to workers' ability to get along should receive more attention.

Seasonal workers are often surrounded on farms by complete or relative strangers with whom they have nothing in common outside their work, and with whom they would probably not voluntarily choose to spend time with. Considerable personal resilience and tolerance is therefore required for workers to function with little or no reprieve for several weeks or months. Workers who referred to this made it clear to me that being familiar with and getting along with co-workers and employers made their time on a farm more tolerable. Iolanda indicated that small farms were preferable in this respect:

> *...she said she likes a small farm where you know everybody, it's 'really good'*
> *coming back to where you know the same people and you've worked with them*
> *before. There's a degree of predictability, you know what people's good points*
> *and strengths are. You can work more efficiently as a team and know what people*
> *will tend to avoid.... (Field Notes).*

It appears that several different factors contribute to what is necessarily a two-way process of getting along, some of these relating to (but not determined by) fixed, non-negotiable entities including ethnic origin or nationality, and others being elective to varying degrees. These included workers' assumptions and biases, their preferences and their willingness to compromise, negotiate and cooperate. They also included the willingness of their employer to intervene and/or mediate to nurture a more harmonious workforce. I will now discuss my findings in relation to non-negotiable as well as elective factors.

Several factors which affected workers' ability to get along related to their nationality, ethnicity and the languages spoken within the seasonal worker team, one of the most obvious examples being the ease with which workers were able to communicate with one another and with their employer. Language was also symbolically important, with farmers' willingness to learn some words of their workers' languages perceived by workers as interest in and respect for them. This could make that farm a more attractive workplace destination:

> *'If my employer say to me something in Polish this is more than nice…I feel something very pleasurable… I think it can be one reason to like somebody more, this is a big plus for employer.' (Tomasz, Home Farm).*

I saw that workers' ability to converse with one another had practical value including making task delegation, information sharing and work-related instructions easier to manage, but ease of communication also had significant social value. Workers at Home Farm and Springwood told me that talking whilst working made the day pass quicker and more pleasantly as well as making the practicalities of their work easier. Crucially, being able to talk also meant being *allowed* to talk, this being prohibited on some big farms as I describe in an earlier section. Their references to being able to talk meant sharing enough spoken language(s) to successfully engage in dialogue beyond the purely transactional. By this I mean that whilst transactions along the lines of 'how many boxes of fruit do we need to pick?' are made easier with shared language, the sort of dialogue which focused on the social and emotional might contribute to a more convivial working environment. Some workers found ways to overcome limitations of their shared language to work efficiently and get along, and this seemed more frequent between workers who knew and trusted one another, as illustrated by two of Home Farm's returnees in the process of organising their day's work:

> *'I heard [two workers] talking together rapidly at one point and asked them how they understood each other. They looked at me a bit blank and then answered that*

they were using a mixture of English, Polish and Romanian words and get by
quite comfortably like this.' (Field Notes).

But their attitude could not be taken for granted. Despite being willing to accommodate my inability to speak their languages, workers did not consistently extend the same courtesy to co-workers of other nationalities or who spoke other languages. Sometimes, language was used divisively to exclude and intimidate, and Tomasz described feeling wrung out by the emotional effort required to cope with such behaviour:

'...When they speak in (their) language to me I hate it because this is not normal.
I understand if somebody don't speak English, and he want to tell me something,
but (then he would) try saying something, show me, let me understand. But if there
is four or five people and they say to me in their language because this is funny
for them, I don't know what they're talking about, and they're waiting for my
*answer... Because this is not normal. It is not normal. And this is **every** day,*
sometimes it's too hard....' (Tomasz, Home Farm).

Anxiety and worry at work can reduce workplace related wellbeing (What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2017) and workers with little social support may be more vulnerable to depression and anxiety (Hovey and Magana, 2002). It was clear that some workers made conscious efforts to get along, including by trying to involve workers from outside their immediate friendship group in their social activities. However, their efforts were sometimes thwarted by suspicions and language differences which were perhaps a consequence of earlier alienation and 'othering'. Springwood's workers described their own efforts to be more inclusive:

HS: Do you tend to all socialise together? Spend time...drink and eat... do all of
you join in?
Cristian: yes, yes, those who living here, yes...it is better for us.
Adrian: Errr... Last year, 2 years ago we have Polish and Bulgarian. And
sometimes they...
Ana: come for barbecue.
Adrian: not every time but (gestures that they sometimes did).

HS: and that's OK?

Cristian: yeah, but then you have to learn to speak the language.

Adrian: and if I talk with her (gestures at his female friend) he might be...
(gestures frustration and speaks quickly to her in Romanian) he thinks to talk with
you about him! And it not good ....

Marius: if he speaks Romanian? Maybe he think we speak about him and he...

HS: right, he thinks you're talking about him. So that makes people feel as though
they're excluded or… defensive? [All indicate agreement]. (Springwood).

Sustaining the effort of getting along with one another could be emotionally taxing for workers and I realised that conflicts and tensions probably arose which I knew nothing of. These may have been a consequence of cultural differences, real or perceived, without anyone having done anything 'wrong'. But if workers are to get along, they must attempt to manage their differences, or at least mediate their resulting feelings. Because I spent a lot of time with Home Farm's workers, I saw evidence of these tensions, and of workers' efforts to mitigate the effects:

The mood was very subdued today. Things must happen that I have no idea of,
and which workers won't ever tell me about. Wiesia didn't want to talk; just
shrugged when I tried to talk to her. Later, she told me she really dislikes the
Romanians' noisiness. I wonder if this is an ongoing source of conflict within the
team, the more reticent workers at odds with the more exuberant ones?
Interestingly, Mia had previously said she sometimes has to go out at night time to
ask the Romanians to quieten down a bit. (Fieldnotes).

Individuals in unpredictable situations and isolated from their social support networks may invest considerable emotional labour in managing their anxieties about others or judge others according to past experiences and misinformation (Svašek, 2010). Perhaps this was the case for Helena at Home Farm, whom I was told had expressed anxieties to Tomasz about their Romanian co-workers. She appeared to feel intimidated because of their nationality and language, rather than because of any specific behaviours they exhibited towards her or anyone else. Her apparent inability to accept that her Romanian co-workers meant no harm irritated some other workers and was resented, as I recorded in my field notes:

...he said Helena was paranoid about what Romanian workers said... she thought they were talking about her. He said this is ridiculous since she can't understand what they're saying. He's clarified this [she doesn't understand them]. But it seems her mind is made up. She insists she 'knows' they're talking about her. (Field notes).

It is not clear whether Helena's perceptions were accurate, and it is possible that she felt intimidated by her co-workers because of her own, unrelated anxieties which led her to perceive ill-intent where none was intended (Goffman, 1963). This is important because a personal capacity to negotiate inter-worker conflict and maintain good and positive relations with co-workers supports workplace wellbeing (Biggio and Cortese, 2013) and is likely to be outwith their employers' control.

Observing and working alongside workers at Home Farm led me to understand that their willingness to cooperate relied upon, but also increased their likelihood of getting along. Tasks including pack house work and asparagus harvesting, both of which are paid at hourly rates, were less onerous and completed in less time when workers cooperated, but I also saw evidence of cooperation amongst workers doing piece rate work. This was especially evident during the raspberry harvest, and I made some observations in my field notes about it:

Workers help one another to fill trays or at least make them up to half trays at the end of their shift. This seems to be at an arbitrary point in time, but as it draws near, people begin shouting to one another across the polytunnel, asking how much fruit they need to complete their tray or half tray. They sometimes donate a punnet to someone else if that enables them to completely fill a tray, or they may pick a handful of extra berries to top up someone else's partially filled punnets. The fastest pickers initiate this, probably because they have enough and can afford to help others. Perhaps it's easier to be magnanimous when you're confident you'll have made enough money for the day. I noticed yesterday that the 'uber fast' pickers [as Mia describes them] picked almost twice as much in some shifts as some of the other workers did. (Field Notes).

Tacitly agreeing to collaborate may not provide economic benefit at an individual level, yet may be recognised by workers as a way of making their time pass more enjoyably (Waite, 2007). A willingness to help one another may also indicate a sense of group identity and belonging (Ogbonnaya *et al.*, 2018), making the team more cohesive and resilient. An especially important factor in workers' ability to get along appeared to be their employer's willingness to act as mediator and address inter-worker conflict promptly, workplace wellbeing being improved by the objective management of those in authority (Biggio and Cortese, 2013).Tomasz was not alone in stating that his employers' support and preparedness to act on his behalf was vital for him to endure the season:

> *'... they like me, and I like them, really. I know my worker and human value, and they respect me. It is very important. They are very helpful, and nice.' (Tomasz, Home Farm).*

Someone else, who had done seasonal farm work before moving into a different industry, told me that 'nice' employers who were willing to 'look after' their workers could make the difference between a job being bearable or intolerable. Positive farmer-worker relationships in which workers evaluate their employer as a 'good person' encourages workers' return (Thomson *et al.*, 2018) and although workers who spoke to me about this employed fairly neutral language I deduced that they felt it demonstrated a compatibility of values which is thought to nurture a sense of identify and belonging (Ogbonnaya *et al.*, 2018).

Although equitable relationships were important workers sometimes also needed their employer to show benevolence and provide pastoral support. Many seasonal workers are young or inexperienced, with little or no previous experience of being away from home and regardless of their age may have multiple vulnerabilities. In such circumstances, their employer may be their only predictable UK contact (which does not necessarily mean reliable or trustworthy), especially for workers recruited directly by the farmer rather than via a labour provider. In a crisis, workers may turn to the farmer for help, even if they are no longer working for them:

> *Mia: '... so I send them off on a National Express bus on the Thursday to Scotland. They're back in the yard on Friday! [mimes asking] What're you doing? 'It was awful, it was awful' [imitates a tearful worker].... We've had that quite a lot, they come back in tears, (saying) 'it was horrible......*

HS: Yeah, but you're familiar....

Mia: Yes. Yes! Where do they go? Where do they go? What do they do? So, we've sent them up to Perth, they've seen this man who's marching up and down just pointing in the general direction of the caravans...'(Home Farm).

Workers at Home Farm spoke of things 'going wrong' in previous seasons, in ways that had left them feeling unhappy and ill at ease, but which had been successfully diffused by their employer. This can be challenging for farmers who, as observed by one farmer unconnected with my research, have rarely received training or support in staff management and human resources. Russell described dealing with staff management issues by adopting what he referred to as a 'firm line' with workers at the season's start, so that expectations and standards were clear from the outset. This also indicated to his workers his willingness to intervene in order to keep things as harmonious as possible on the farm. Making management strategies public in this way perhaps helps develop the sort of employer-worker social contracts that promote collaboration, increasing the likelihood of a mutually satisfactory season.

The frequency with which ethnicity, language differences and nationality appeared to be implicated in hostilities between workers meant that Simon at Vale Farm preferred to recruit single nationality workers:

'We don't like mixing them, we always found that Bulgarians and Romanians didn't mix anyway, they seemed to have this aggression between them and ... that's something you don't want because if they're fighting all the time they're not working!' (Simon, Vale Farm).

Roger at Springwood also described requesting single nationality teams from his labour provider but often got what he described as a 'mixed bag'. His rationale was informed by his experience of mixed nationality teams scapegoating and blaming one another for mistakes or slowness, something which I also saw evidence of, and he described having to sometimes mediate between workers of different nationalities. Farmers understandably wish to reduce inter-worker conflict but trying to do so by selecting or rejecting workers according to ethnicity or nationality breaches employment law (ACAS, 2018). It also reduces the pool of workers from which they can recruit. This would be counter-productive with the current shortages of available workers and raises questions about the ethnicities or nationalities an employer might reject or favour, and why.

Russell and Mia at Home Farm had taken steps to reduce inter-worker conflict by turning down two would-be returnees because of their behaviour and poor social skills. These are attributes which can be as valuable within a team of seasonal workers as occupational skills are (Stenbacka, 2018). The two workers to which Mia and Russell referred had apparently been highly efficient but had actively disrupted the team, inciting resentment and suspicion and strategically isolating some workers whom they described as Gypsies in their work as well as in their accommodation. The resulting breakdown of cooperation and communication amongst the workers made managing the farm's work much harder. I had spent little time on the farm during that season so cannot offer an opinion about these events, but Mia and Russell's account of events was corroborated by workers who had been at Home Farm for both seasons.

Positive relations with others and a relative absence of anxiety and unpleasant feelings are important for the wellbeing of people's workplace related wellbeing (Biggio and Cortese, 2013) and associated with higher productivity and less sick leave (What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2017). It is important to recognise however that a farmer's willingness to intervene to manage workers, including by withholding returnee invitations, raises the possibility of workers being rejected because of subjective bias or because of spurious accusations by other workers. Workers are often unwilling to challenge authority because doing so is often not in their long-term interests and may result in offers of work being denied, or in dismissal (McLaughlin, 2010; Scott *et al.*, 2012; Gray, 2016).

Field notes that I made whilst at Home Farm documented workers' attempts to get along together, but also their failure to do so. It is quite possible that failure to get along was due to individuals' innate personality traits and behaviours and to the issues and stressors pre-dating their immediate situation, and this means that workplace wellbeing is not entirely under the control and influence of their employers and workplaces (Biggio and Cortese, 2013). Individuals may therefore sometimes be careless about or indifferent to the effect their own behaviour has upon others. In extremes this may manifest itself as people behaving, 'like animals' (Tomasz), but it may also be evident in more subtle, innocuous ways including the micro-aggressions and hostilities by which group exclusions and inclusions are defined, and through which individuals become intimidated and isolated. The following relates to a

scenario which recurred throughout Home Farm's raspberry harvest, but which became more noticeable towards the end of the season, when workers were less tolerant of each other's foibles:

> *Tomasz and Pavel were each playing loud, aggressive sounding music on their phones whilst working. Wiesia was at the far end of the polytunnel, apparently trying to be inconspicuous. The Romanian workers were singing, loudly. The singing had several effects. It meant that the Romanians interacted in ways that they perhaps wouldn't otherwise have done, sharing ideas about what to sing, inviting others to sing, laughing at one another's attempts and therefore enhancing their sense of community. At the same time, the Polish workers were irritated by the relentless singing, and tried to work in ways that reduced their awareness of it. I'm not sure the Romanian workers intended, IE; it wasn't their express purpose, to distance and 'other' their Polish co-workers. But equally, they didn't seem concerned about their singing having this effect, and certainly took no steps to minimise irritation. Perhaps singing is used to indicate belonging and non-belonging and who is accepted/ not accepted but is also an act of resistance. (Field notes).*

Such performances of allegiance, identity and belonging may contribute to workers' productivity and relative contentment, enhancing their sense of being part of that workplace and increasing their commitment to it (Ogbonnaya *et al.*, 2018). But at Home Farm it simultaneously excluded and intimidated the Polish workers. I realised that there was potential for conflict and suspicion to be high between workers of different nationalities, and that the emotional and physical fatigue accumulated by workers over the course of a season might make them less tolerant of one another. However, ethnicity could also play a part. This came to my attention when I asked one Romanian worker whether he did, and could, sing as well as one of his co-workers, with whom I thought he had a positive and respectful relationship. After initially evading my question he finally responded with some irritation, saying he did not, because 'I am not Roma!'

Selfcare and healthcare

Along with good social relationships health is considered one of the most important features of workplace wellbeing in small businesses (What Works Wellbeing, 2018). The material means for self-care and the self-knowledge to maintain their health and sustain their own resilience was very important for workers' on-farm wellbeing.

Breaking Bodies

Processes of intensification imposed by food-supply chains promote punitive and stress inducing practices which can increase workers' susceptibility to illness and injury (Lloyd and James, 2008; Duke, 2011; Scott *et al.*, 2012; Doyle *et al.*, 2013). None of the workers at Springwood or Southwold suggested that their health was negatively affected by their work or told me that they had sustained injuries doing it, but as the season progressed at Home Farm and workers became more nonchalant about my presence I began hearing about and seeing evidence of their discomfort and fatigue. There is no shortage of evidence to show that seasonal farm work can cause multiple health issues (Holmes, 2012; Gray, 2014; Civita, 2018), and seasonal farm workers may find that the nature of their work exacerbates pre-existing health conditions or makes them harder to manage. But physical health issues also have psychosocial and emotional costs (Holmes, 2006) and it is those that I wish to address in this section.

I heard few complaints about pain and fatigue from Home Farm's workers once they had become accustomed or re-accustomed to their tasks. However, the pain and fatigue I sustained whilst working with them left me in no doubt that they *did* suffer, even when taking into account their relative youth and physical fitness. As discussed at length by Holmes (2013) and Benson (2012), illogical claims of migrant workers having superior natural aptitude and capacity for the work presumes that they suffer less than local, indigenous workers do. In fact, it is more likely that they simply continue working after becoming fatigued, ill or injured because of their personal circumstances (Civita, 2018). But they may also be motivated to work when sick or injured by more immediate and local forces:

Tomasz: 'If you had some problem, you had a pain somewhere, and said I can't work today because I have a problem with my finger? OK! you have 3 days off… because you must be punished? (checks this is the correct word to use).
HS: Really?
Tomasz: Yes, 3 days you will not work.

HS: And that was presumably to discourage people from saying, oh this is painful…so they could finish early for the day? Am I right in thinking they were trying make people too scared to say they were too sick to work, so they would never have people off sick?
Tomasz: Yes!
HS: So, where you and I would say I feel sick or my back hurts… I'll not work tomorrow, they just wanted people to work regardless?
Tomasz: Yes, something like this, yes.' (Home Farm).

Workers are sometimes bullied or coerced into not taking time off work for illness or injury (Gray, 2014; Snipes *et al.*, 2017). Yet sickness and injury is 'practically unavoidable' for farmworkers (Civita, 2018, p. 932), who have little control over it yet are made to feel responsible (Holmes, 2013). As Tomasz implied, incapacitated workers are considered a liability (Basok, 2002) with punishment used to encourage 'good' worker attributes, including reliability and physical capability. But this inevitably impacts their wellbeing. It may increase their anxiety, and risks pushing workers into cycles of self-exploitation, exacerbating health problems and impeding their recovery (Civita, 2018).The precarity of workers' income and accommodation, not having a UK based social network and lacking a trusted, accessible employer with whom work might be negotiated so that their health requirements are suitably accommodated can make satisfactory resolution less likely, by making them more reliant on forthcoming work and wages.

It was evident that workers sometimes arrive on farms with pre-existing health issues, contradicting existing literature which often portrays migrant workers as young, fit and healthy and unlikely to place a healthcare burden on the receiving country (Kennedy *et al.*, 2015; Madden *et al.*, 2017). Even under Home Farm's relatively benign management, workers sometimes worked whilst ill or in pain. I saw several individuals working as intensively and for as many hours as their co-workers, despite suffering with what I believe were abscesses associated with tooth decay:

> *She had such terrible toothache… a rotten molar. She's putting Lidocaine on it, brought from home. She said she's had the problem for a long time, which is probably true since the tooth has collapsed. She won't go to a dentist, because it costs too much money and intends to wait until she gets home to get treatment. Another worker said dental care is expensive at home but much, much cheaper*

than in the UK. I suggested she goes to A and E or the walk-in centre and asks for a referral to an emergency dentist. She looked a bit doubtful about doing this. I'm curious to know why she won't address this problem. Is it because she thinks she'll be sent home if she complains of pain? Might she be worried about not being able to get to the hospital or a dentist? What does this do to your wellbeing, when you don't know how your employer will react, and/or you fear having to go home? And how is your wellbeing if you're constantly in pain? (Fieldnotes).

A subsequent conversation with Mia, their employer revealed that dental problems typically resurfaced every season:

'We take them to a place that does emergency dental stuff, although this is a last resort - compared to prices (at home), dentistry in the UK is astronomical. They don't use dentists for preventive stuff but rather, go when in agony. Some have had to pay a hundred pounds plus to access a dentist here in the UK.' (Mia, Home Farm).

By late summer 2017 when workers at Home Farm were harvesting raspberries, they had apparently decided I was sufficiently trustworthy to be asked for health-related information and advice, and that it was worth trying to implicate me in resolving their dental problems. Their enquires included asking where antibiotics might be bought, how much a dental extraction might cost and whether I would procure rubbing alcohol on their behalf so that they could self-medicate. This seemed to be an extreme example of body management (Waite, 2007) to sustain their capacity for labour. I felt ill-equipped for this responsibility and unable to provide anything other than sympathy and practical guidance. Despite the consistency of my responses (prescriptions are required for antibiotics; over fifty pounds; no) they continued asking the same questions with such frequency that their enquiries felt like a means of eliciting comfort and reassurance, rather than a way to address the actual problem:

Stefan.. has a very swollen face from his infected tooth and asked what might help. I suggested he might need antibiotics, and that he could get those from a GP but would need a dentist to remove the tooth. He liked this idea but was less keen when I told him how much it would cost. He said he thought the NHS paid. I explained that free health care IS provided at the point of access, but only a percentage of dental care costs are met…. Tomasz said Stefan's better now than

he was. A few days ago he wasn't even talking to anyone, just picking silently because of the pain. Tomasz said, 'at least he's laughing now.' (Field Notes).

Workers temporarily in the UK probably find its healthcare system unnecessarily bureaucratic, especially if their employer is not willing to assist, and the practicalities of accessing healthcare, especially in remote rural areas with no public transport and poor digital reception, may make it impossible without an employer's assistance. Even with Mia's and Russell's willing assistance workers were reluctant to request help, perhaps fearing that this would somehow indebt them. Being unable to resolve these issues autonomously was probably anxiety provoking and Mia described sometimes taking matters into her own hands to ensure workers received treatment:

'We can phone the local GP practice, get an appointment, arrive 20 minutes early to fill in a registration form and that's it. They're always surprised to learn that they don't have to pay to see a doctor. Last year Alex got injured playing football and we took him to the hospital despite his protests. He had an x-ray, sling and painkillers all for 'free' - he was well happy. I do think that that is their concern when becoming ill - that they may have to pay.' (Mia, Home Farm).

Looking after workers in this way can encourage workers to stay on or return to a farm, and to do a good job whilst they are there (Stenbacka, 2018). I thought that it was telling that Alex tried to work immediately after and on the following days but was told to rest by Russell. Workers who believe that their employer does not care about them are more likely to suffer ill health (Doyle *et al.*, 2013), and being 'looked after' by an employer brings psychological benefits. I assumed that Alex was, like many workers, motivated by his need to resume earning but loyalty towards an employer can also motivate workers to continue working when they might otherwise have taken time off (Stenbacka, 2018).

Employers face a dilemma in such situations, being required by law to protect their workforce and probably wanting to do so for their own moral comfort, but they also need workers back at work at the earliest opportunity. Meanwhile, workers may be prevented by practical circumstances from drawing upon state support or those local, social networks often available to workers in more stable and secure employment and therefore forced to choose between earning money or recuperating.

This illustrates an inherent structural violence of workers' lives; reduced opportunity, financial vulnerability and socio-political constraint, which simultaneously exposes workers to increased risk of illness and injury, whilst making it harder for them to access healthcare in their home and receiving countries (Holmes, 2013; Civita, 2018).

Workers' descriptions revealed that few sought preventative healthcare even in their home countries including for routine dentistry which suggests self-medication and self-treatment were routine. Whilst their home-country circumstances do not diminish their right to appropriate UK healthcare, they did go some way towards explaining workers' *ad hoc* self-treatment and apparent casualness about timely healthcare intervention. For workers like Alex who self-medicates and self-treats to continue working whilst in his home country, being stopped from doing so by his UK employer probably feels patronising and disempowering. Mia told me that many workers arrive for the start of the season with supplies of over the counter[14] products including antibiotics which can have adverse consequences if improperly used. Although this shows initiative it also suggests workers anticipate pain and illness as an inevitable part of their seasonal farm work, whether this be because of their work's direct effects, because of health and dental care related costs in the UK or because their work schedules and circumstances make accessing healthcare difficult.

Sickness and injury related costs whilst on the farm included prescriptions and dental fees, but also the earnings lost when too ill to work or whilst attending appointments. Even when forced to take time off work, workers had to meet their day to day living costs including those for on-farm accommodation, eroding earnings already accrued. In addition, all the home-focused workers that I spoke with were highly motivated to improve their own and their families' lives, including through remittances, and it is likely that they therefore prioritised taking money and tangible goods home above dental care for themselves. Taking health-related time off work may also have risked less favourable evaluation by employers and co-workers, although this was not mentioned by anyone I had contact with. Irrespective of an employer's willingness to facilitate healthcare, workers are socialised over the duration of several seasons, often by a series of different farms, becoming conditioned to avoid taking time off (Holmes, 2012; Civita, 2018). Having to rely on an employer to find and attend appointments can discourage workers from seeking help, since this necessarily disrupts their employer's working day too. In addition, co-workers have to work harder in their absence to

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[14] Over the counter medications (OTCs) can be bought from a pharmacy or other retailer without a qualified health practitioner's prescription. OTCs are subject to stricter controls in the UK than in many other countries. This can mean, for example that some analgesics and antibiotics which workers purchase as OTCs in their home country are available only with a prescription in the UK.

make up shortfalls in production caused by workers' absence, and workers who feel inhibited by these sorts of obstacles understandably may decide to self-medicate and continue working.

Self-care

In this section I discuss the self-care and self-compassion exercised by workers to sustain their wellbeing whilst on farms. I am using self-care and self-compassion to refer workers' behaviours and the way they treated themselves when stressed or anxious. Self-care activities included creating meals associated with home which provided emotional solace (Collins, F., 2009; Galasinska, 2010), sharing food with other workers, sleeping for their entire rest day (which may also have been a means of 'escaping' the farm and avoiding social interaction) and shopping for little luxuries. Self-compassion is an important determinant of wellbeing (Neff, 2003; Allen, A and Leary, 2010), and was evident in workers' thought reframing to make their situation seem more tolerable. This included their observations about the time-limited nature of their farm work, 'only for now', and that the work was a way of making their lives better in their home countries. This is a recognised coping mechanism of seasonal farm workers (Magana and Hovey, 2003). Self-compassion also included things that soothed and pacified, such as visiting certain places or providing themselves with emotional time-out.

Although many self-care and self-compassion behaviours involved physical activities and material objects, I am primarily concerned with how they enabled workers to physically or psychologically distance themselves from the farm and its work for the sake of their own wellbeing. Most of the examples I include relate to Home Farm where I spent enough time to see recognisable patterns of behaviour.

Many seasonal workers I spoke with were largely confined to their farms by circumstances, often with people who were not part of their preferred social network and with whom they could not always communicate easily. Their work was mentally unstimulating in its monotony. It failed to distract them from the ruminations and the low moods that several attributed to separation from home-country friends and family, and their sense of isolation whilst in the UK. Workers had various strategies to relieve the boredom of their paid work and for securing respite from their unpaid time on the farm. These included mind games, such as setting themselves work-related targets. They also included apparently frivolous activities, like playing practical jokes, singing or listening to music and modifying their working practices to assert their autonomy in what might have been acts of resistance, or to distance themselves from other workers.

Periodically, whilst harvesting asparagus or raspberries, I noticed some of Home Farm's workers taking themselves off to work in different areas of the field or polytunnel. This eliminated much of the awkwardness of working around one another, including dragging their fruit picking carts past one another in confined spaces but also helped to limit the psychological claustrophobia of being continually in one another's presence. The regularity with which this occurred led me to enquire about it and two workers described feeling more relaxed when physically distant from their co-workers. One added that her co-workers were 'too noisy' and that she preferred to work in peace and quiet. Perhaps ongoing conflict or disagreement increased her need for personal space, but the proximity of others, especially those of a different nationality seemed to make some workers more guarded and watchful, and to experience this for days on end would be emotionally taxing.

Other workers sometimes acted similarly, working from opposite ends of the polytunnels or striding ahead of others in the asparagus fields to create distance. This seemed to be an apparent contradiction of what they had previously told me, which was that being 'allowed' to talk whilst working supported their wellbeing. At Home Farm, three workers overcame this to an extent by singing, often in harmony and responding to one another's contribution. Whilst maintaining a physical distance they avoided the frustration and sense of claustrophobia of working around one other yet simultaneously retained a sense of unity and community, albeit selectively since their singing effectively excluded their Polish co-workers. Singing appears to have beneficial qualities for young adults, who may find it helps reduce anxiety and improve their wellbeing (Daykin *et al.*, 2016), and for Home Farm's workers it may have also provided an effective distraction from their monotonous work. Music also played a role for other workers who would not or could not join in the singing, several of them habitually listened to music, or in the case of one individual, recordings of Christian preaching. This seemed to fulfil a similar function, in that it temporarily enclosed him within his own world and reduced his awareness of others.

Workers are limited in what they can do, where they go and with whom they spend time by the material conditions in which they live and work on farms and the demands of their work. Getting respite and reprieve from the farm could be difficult but was important for their wellbeing. I was not told about it, nor did I see evidence to suggest that workers deliberately escaped the farm in order to avoid being called upon to work unexpectedly or at short notice, but this remained a possibility. A sense of being perpetually at work and on call without remuneration is a poorly acknowledged source of anxiety, insecurity and psychological discomfort for farm workers (Benson, 2008; Hellio, 2016; Griesbach, 2018). But this aside,

workers indicated that the farm created a sense of interminable limitation and confinement which made escape important:

> *Workers often feel trapped on the farm. They have limited scope to get off the farm and are anyway often too busy working to go anywhere. Being unable to just leave the farm at will, or go somewhere without someone else's cooperation are probably more oppressive than we realise especially because of the monotony of their work. Time passes slowly and their daily routine is unrelentingly predictable. And they interact with the same small group of people, day in, day out (Field Notes).*

Even if their co-workers and employers are congenial and their surroundings satisfactory, workers are deprived of all sorts of possibilities on farms. Perhaps this contributes to what some workers referred to as farms' jungle identity.

Workers on farms may have few opportunities to interact with people who are not associated with the farm, and may have few novel experiences during their season of work. Escape, whether physical or psychological cannot entirely overcome this, but it might at least provide some respite. I anticipated workers would complain about insufficient social contact, but instead, many longed for solitude, perhaps because that was preferable to their routine interactions with others on the farm. Solitude may also be an antidote to their enforced living and working conditions and their monotonous routines. Creating physical and psychologically distance from their everyday reality facilitates this (Conradson, 2005).

Workers are subjected to the relentless gaze of others including through supervisors' and employers' surveillance or supervision and through the sometimes-critical scrutiny of co-workers. This appeared to become more burdensome to the workers at Home Farm as the season progressed so that some developed what seemed to be almost a craving to be alone; what Benson (2008) described as workers' on-farm confinement driving them to wish for invisibility from co-workers and their boss.

By removing themselves from the gaze of others Home Farm's workers achieved temporary respite but this was made more difficult by their material circumstances, including inadequate bus services. Although the farm's mini-bus promised a viable solution its use was limited by

driver age-related insurance restrictions. Permitted drivers shouldered the responsibility for facilitating the others' temporary reprieve from the farm and simultaneously exercised considerable control over when this happened, who was included and where they went. A similar situation existed at Springwood where no minibus was provided but where one of the workers owned a car and often took others into the nearest city on rest days. Although no-one said as much it seemed that not all the workers benefited equally from the minibus, going out it in perhaps becoming a compromise and one which meant they were still under their co-workers' scrutiny so that some of its respite value was lost. Workers at Home Farm could also use the bikes (Figure 4) provided for them:

> *One of the Romanian workers was very excited to see that a big bundle of spare*
> *inner tubes had arrived to fix the bikes up ready for the season. Mia was laughing*
> *at the sight of him leaping around in the yard with glee. (Field Notes).*

Figure 4: Farm-owned bikes for use by seasonal workers.

The bikes had significant utility value, making it possible for workers to visit a nearby village's shop and Post Office but also represented freedom and escape from the farm because workers often used them to explore local lanes and villages. Scope to escape, explore and wander is highly beneficial for wellbeing (Roberts *et al.*, 2015), benefitting psychological as well as physical health (Pressman *et al.*, 2009). Workers at Home Farm described habitually visiting the same locations each year, therapeutically revisiting earlier social and emotional

experiences in ways that perhaps meant their memories became associated with those locations in ways supportive of their wellbeing (Gestaldo et al 2004). Exercise is itself supportive of wellbeing, because it facilitates physical escape and improves sleep quality (Pressman *et al.*, 2009). This aids stress management and causes the body to produce mood-lifting endorphins which can generate feelings of catharsis and release (de Coverley Veale, 1987).

On several occasions I saw Kamil quite literally running from the farm at the end of his working day, often closely followed by one or two others on bikes. The routine appeared to be a frequent if not daily occurrence for those individuals and seemed to have symbolic significance because they could have as easily cycled or run similar distances along tracks on the farm itself.

At my request, Tomasz provided some photos of things and places (Figure 5) important for his wellbeing on the farm and I recorded our conversation whilst he explained one of his preferred ways to escape:

> *Tomasz: '…and this is a picture of the place… if I want run or go to bike somewhere, I like this road because it's space everywhere….no people here, and not too much traffic yes? So this is absolutely the best place for me to run, because in city I don't like, because people are everywhere, here is the best for me. And this is err, here is asphalt yes? So it's comfortable to run, it's important for me because really I like run here if I have the power[15].*

> *HS: Why is it important... supposing you have the energy at the end of the day, is it a purely physical thing because you like to keep fit? Or is it more about your sense of wellbeing and your mental state?*

> *Tomasz: Yeah,… it's 50 50… I run because I want to have better condition, I will be more fit, and this is healthy. When I run it doesn't matter how I am tired because if I feel I have better condition, I am more healthy, I feel better in my head. And when I am running, I feel clean.' (Tomasz, Home Farm).*

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[15] We established that he meant having enough physical strength and mental energy after a day's work.

The concept of therapeutic places is well established (Gesler, 1992; Conradson, 2005; Lengen and Kistemann, 2012) and Tomasz's references to feeling 'better in my head' and 'clean' suggest that the secluded and people-free lanes surrounding Home Farm provided a physical and psychological retreat. Exposure to green space and nature (Cervinka *et al.*, 2012; Roberts *et al.*, 2015) can help mitigate mental fatigue and reduce hostility (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001; Hansmann *et al.*, 2007). Whilst escape to literal or metaphorical green place may initially seem irrelevant for farm workers working outside, they are often largely confined to polytunnels and packhouses. Besides, farmed environments, including those that I visited during this research, are often utilitarian, with an emphasis on efficient production, not aesthetics.

Figure 5: Tomasz's photo; 'the best place for me to run.'

Modern, productive farms are often nature depleted (Bell *et al.*, 2004; Ahnström *et al.*, 2013) and devoid of the natural elements which appear to be psychologically distracting and soothing and therefore supportive of wellbeing (Bell *et al.*, 2004; Saxby *et al.*, 2018; Roberts *et al.*, 2015). Having safe, easily accessed activities and places might, as Tomasz indicated, help workers achieve psychological distance from farms without resorting to excessive alcohol consumption:

Tomasz: 'Sometimes, I buy alcohol and drink because sometimes... I must drink to
survive here really, because without this probably it's impossible for me.......
HS: You said earlier you often feel worse later, you feel tired the next day and
that you've wasted time and money?
Tomasz: Yes.
HS: But at the same time you're saying that you drink to survive.
Tomasz: Yes.
HS: But you drink to survive knowing it has a detrimental effect?
Tomasz: Yes, but I don't care about this in this moment when I feel (bad)... I don't
have (the strength) to go nowhere, everybody's out there... my head is bigger and
bigger yes? (indicates his head is ready to explode). I need to escape.
HS: And you escape by running, cycling or drinking?
Tomasz: Yes. If I don't do train, I drink more. If I train normal, I drink a little but
not too much.' (Tomasz, Home Farm).

Alcohol use is a recognised challenge for communities of seasonal workers (Kim-Godwin and Bechtel, 2004; Stenbacka, 2018). This may be partly because of its somatic effects, including pain management and in aiding sleep (Waite, 2007). Its effects on people's behaviour means that it is a known stressor (Kim-Godwin and Bechtel, 2004; Gray, 2014), yet workers may use it to try to psychologically distance themselves from their work and forget their concerns (Waite, 2007). Workers at Home Farm and Springwood described alcohol being an important and socially acceptable part of their social interactions, including the times when they cooked communally and ate together. But, it is also likely that alcohol was implicated in at least some of the resentments and conflicts reported to me at Home Farm, where some workers complained about the exuberant and noisy behaviour of others. Of rather more concern was that some workers drank in solitude and to excess. This has been identified as a coping strategy in communities of seasonal workers who feel isolated but lack social support (Benson, 2012; Gray, 2014). For some workers, drinking to excess and/or in solitude was associated with what was apparently their viewing of sexually explicit films which provided a means of psychological escape in what may have been a time of enforced abstinence from intimacy and sexual activity.

At Home Farm, the caravan occupied by Helena and Kamil, two of the farm's returnee workers, had a large display of flowers and small food plants, including tomatoes and courgettes, growing outside (Figure 6). They had removed a large patch of mown turf to make

space for the plants and many more were growing in hanging baskets, in pots on the caravan's steps and on its windowsills. Although the other caravans' occupants had not followed suit one often had jam-jars of wild flowers on its picnic table outside or in its window:

> *Two jam jars of flowers were placed on a plastic chair outside of the girls' caravan…I wondered whether this was something that they often do, and what motivates them to do it. There's a danger that I'll read too much into this, but perhaps it reminds them of their home situation, or maybe they find the farm and their current accommodation especially bleak (quite possible since they are from a picturesque region of Romania). It is interesting that they are motivated to pretty the place up. (Field notes).*

Helena and Kamil responded to my comments and questions by explaining they do not like waste and that the plants, which they had brought back to their caravan from the neighbouring farm where they were working, were being thrown away. Their explanation made sense but seemed to only partially explain significant effort they put into making their garden. Access to natural environments can enhance wellbeing, feelings of social safety and help diffuse stress and frustration (Groenewegen *et al.*, 2006) and Kamil and Helena's efforts improved the aesthetic of a tidy but bland environment. But in relation to this discussion it seemed to be also something creative through which they could psychologically escape the farm. Enjoyable leisure activities can help to reduce stress (Pressman *et al.*, 2009) and create psychological distance from work which benefits wellbeing and in-work productivity (Binnewies *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, activities providing a focus for creativity and identity supports wellbeing (Max-Neef, 2010) as perhaps nurturing and enjoying the visual and even the gastronomic benefits of plants might do.

Church attendance amongst the workers I spoke with was low, partly because of the logistics of travelling there. But also, seasonal farm work often involves Sunday shifts in order that wholesalers and retailers have the produce they require on Mondays. Mia said that she used to routinely provide transport for workers to attend mass every week, but no-one ever asked to attend now, a change she attributed to the changing demographics of seasonal workers. But some workers indicated in their conversations with me that they did want to occasionally attend church, for reasons including solace and reflection, as much as for spiritual or religious fulfilment.

Figure 6: Helena and Kamil's garden at Home Farm

I gathered from what Pavel told me that his wish to visit the Pentecostal church in a nearby town to speak with people there would help meet his spiritual needs, but also provide relief from his ongoing interaction with farm and work-related individuals. He also liked to read his bible every evening, again because he found this to be spiritually comforting, as well as giving him emotional respite from the farm and his current circumstances. My research diary notes relating to our conversation include the following:

> *...he kept saying he wanted me to know about his church and his 'faith', although I can't remember how exactly he used this word. He kept saying that his heart is empty but when he's attending his church, he no longer feels empty. He kept putting his hand across his heart to illustrate this point, and then turning to me to ask 'do you understand?' (Field Notes).*

Other workers spoke of wanting to attend a Catholic church where a Polish priest said mass, because although they understood mass spoken in English it was a comfort to hear it said in their own language. It was also a reprieve from the daily obligation of listening to spoken English and the psychological and intellectual labour of constantly translating in their heads. After attending a Polish mass myself in the interests of my research, I noted the following:

> *How comforting it must be to attend a church where mass is said in their language, where they're surrounded by others speaking the same language (there were over 200 people there) and where they can take part in a familiar routine and ritual. After the service had finished, they were all hanging around in the carpark, talking and smoking. Some had locked up their cars and walked off into town, all in their finery, and with their kids all dressed up too. (Field Notes).*

Finally, Tomasz described taking matters into his own hands to find a place of emotional refuge by cycling to a small, rural church. He said that its Church of England affiliation did not matter to him as a Catholic, since he felt able to speak with God in any church:

> *'I was there sometimes, because… nobody's there [laughs], nobody's there, it is absolutely silent. And err, I like, sometimes I like to speak with God… in church. And… this is very old church, so it was interesting for me and exciting, something that is very old and have history. Nice place because for example around me is nothing. Is only fields, so if I have something like this, very nice.' (Tomasz, Home Farm).*

Taking notice of, and being absorbed by place, and features of places on a local scale is considered supportive of wellbeing (Phillips *et al.*, 2015), perhaps further increasing the value of this small, rural church for Tomasz.

Summary

This Chapter considered workers' psychological wellbeing on farms. This often related to farms' hard to articulate features, and included workers' evaluations which were frequently couched in terms of big or small, good or bad. These binary evaluations appeared to relate to the extent to which workers felt depersonalised and/or commodified by a farm's culture.

This chapter revealed that farms which grow labour intensive crops experience tensions, between treating workers as human beings, and making the most value of their value as units of labour. Whilst it is well established that treating people as commodities creates dissatisfaction and resentment, the link between this and workers' willingness to remain in or return to that workplace is less established. Processes of commodification play into workers' and farmers' narratives about 'good workers.' These narratives can support the wellbeing of some workers, but threaten that of others.

Farms' social groups are often strongly divided according to power and/ or national, ethnic or cultural characteristics. When those divisions were instigated by, or left unmanaged by those in authority, they were harmful to workers' wellbeing. Proactive management and leadership reduced their negative impact upon workers' wellbeing, but the nature of their work and their on-farm living arrangements still left workers with a lot of responsibility for 'getting along.'

Workers with healthcare issues, pre-existing or otherwise, depended on the fairmindedness and cooperation of their employer for access to health care. Self-care whilst on farms was difficult to achieve but was important and necessary, because workers experienced a concurrent sense of oppressive confinement and isolation.

Much of what workers experienced in relation to their psychosocial experiences on farms was mundane rather than extreme and was difficult to pinpoint. At the same time, workers' psychosocial needs seemed to be quite simple. These included being recognised as an individual, being kept safe, having their worth acknowledged, being treated fairly and hospitably, and with benevolence. Workers also required some autonomy and independence, opportunities for reprieve and escape, and to meet their own spiritual needs.

The Material Matters

Introduction

In this Chapter I present my findings about material conditions and processes which influence seasonal workers' on-farm wellbeing. These and workers' psychosocial experiences are associated, and it is not possible or desirable to disentangle the two. This is because what is tangible and observable helps to inform our understandings of social life, especially that relating to structural violence (Farmer, 2004).

This Chapter is presented as follows. The first section concerns workers' recruitment to farms via a third party, of becoming a returnee worker and the material effects of this, and of becoming 'surplus' to farms' requirements. The second section concerns the material experiences of seasonal workers' labour, including the embodied and wellbeing implications of farms' technology and operational processes. The third section concerns the accommodation and amenities utilised by workers on a day to day basis, including during their unpaid time on farms.

Recruitment and retainment

Before discussing my research findings, it is important to emphasise that according to UK employment law, most workers who contributed to this study were casual workers, not employees (Bexley, 2015). This important distinction means that although entitled to some in-work rights including pay at the National Minimum Wage, rest breaks and paid leave, they are not entitled to redundancy pay, minimum notice periods for the termination of employment or the right to be offered work. In presenting my findings I will therefore refer to workers' employment in an informal rather than in any legal sense, because this might be misconstrued as workers having entitlement to additional rights.

Gangmasters, labour providers and recruitment agencies all recruit and supply workers to farms but have slightly different remits. However, since these differences are not especially relevant to this Chapter, I refer to them both as the agency, which is how farmers and workers typically refer to them in casual conversation.

Table 4 provides information about the terms on which this research study's workers were employed:

	Southwold	Vale Farm	Home Farm	Springwood
On or off-farm accommodation:	None on the farm	All on-farm		
Returnee status:	Many returnees via employment agency. Preferences expressed by farm and by workers about return work. Some frequent returnees have been offered contract by farm, becoming *employees.*	Some returnees	High proportion of returnees, some through direct negotiation with farmer	High proportion of returnees, some through direct negotiation with farmer
Employee/ worker status and wages paid by:	Some permanent *employees.* But most workers subcontracted to farm by agency who paid their wages.	Workers paid wages by farm, even if initially recruited via agency.		
Intention to return to home country:	Various	All highly transient. Some returned to UK to work on another farm later in year.		
Intentions about returning to home country:	Three temporary workers interviewed via interpreter were amongst many at the farm who are semi-permanently resident in UK. Additional workers in UK temporarily intend to return home before year end.	All intended to return to their home countries before year end.	Some planned to return home for 'holiday' before returning to UK to harvest late crops (eg apples) on other farms.	Some intended to go home for 'holiday' before returning to UK to harvest autumn soft fruit at Springwood, or work on other UK farms.

Table 4 Terms upon which workers were engaged to work on farms in my research

Processes of recruitment

Having the correct number of workers available to work on a farm on any given day is a challenge for farmers, and one which tends to get more publicity than workers' underemployment and precarity (Martin, Philip, 2016). Many big farms operate a process of continually recruiting and laying off workers according to the farm's labour requirements on any given day so that workforces may be in constant flux. Food retailing drives this significantly, including the requirements of their just in time and quality control processes (Findlay and McCollum, 2013; Willoughby and Gore, 2018). But farms' workplace cultures and employers' values also affect how workers are recruited and dismissed, and workers' own levels of satisfaction with their experience of working there. In their ethnographies of seasonal farm workers in America, Benson (2012) and Holmes (2013) acknowledge that this is the case, yet farms' cultures' and employers' values continue to be downplayed in terms of how they affect the *wellbeing* of workers. Instead, the focus tends to be directed towards wider, external pressures of the industry.

Farm's cultures and values require more attention, because labour shortages are increasing workers' choices about where to work and on what terms. As labour shortages shift the balance of power slightly in workers' favour, some are reportedly accepting work on several farms, confident that they can then renege on their agreement with all but one farm at short notice. Doing this preserves workers' options and gives them more control, but frustrates farmers who must then conduct further, last minute recruitment negotiations (AHDB, 2019e). Returnee workers with a good understanding of how the UK's seasonal farming industry operates are well placed to exercise choice in this way and to their own advantage, knowing what sorts of farms and work to avoid and how to protect themselves from exploitation. To my knowledge workers who assisted my research were entirely autonomous in their work status, but a person's position on the autonomy-enslavement continuum is determined by multiple factors including the material circumstances of their employment and their worker-employer relationship. It is likely that many workers manage to avoid labour exploitation only through a combination of luck and judgement, and yet some workers did not recognise this. For example, Tomasz was highly sceptical about my claims that such abuses occur and that they might be more prevalent than society thinks. This was despite him describing in some detail the awfulness of some farms indicating the potential for workers on 'bad' farms to become downtrodden and exploited.

The workers I met in the course of my research had come to the work via different recruitment pathways, according to their personal circumstances and the way their farms operated. Several returnees had been contacted directly by farmers who hoped to secure familiar returnee workers whom they knew to be predictably 'good,' instead of recruiting 'new' workers with unknown attributes. Others had been recruited through employment agencies. This approach is favoured by some farmers, who see it as a cheaper, easier method of recruitment (Rohleder, 2016). Unlike the transient and home-country focused workers that I met at Springwood and Home Farm, many of those at Southwold were semi-permanently resident in the UK and 'on the books' of one or more UK based agencies co-ordinating available workers with those farms requiring labour. This could be for as little as one day, although workers often returned repeatedly to the same farm(s).

Most temporary and seasonal farm workers have zero hours contracts (Thomson *et al.*, 2018) which may be held with either an agency or a farm. Some of Southwold's workers had contracts with their agency who were responsible for paying their wages irrespective of where they took shifts, and this meant they could accept or refuse shifts as they wished, giving them a theoretical advantage of flexibility (Bloodworth, 2018). However, in practice this was often limited by their personal circumstances. For example, to take full advantage of the shifts on offer, workers needed their own transport because farms, including Southwold, are often too remote from reliable public transport networks. Some of Southwold's temporary workers indicated that social and financial precarity made them more likely to take work on 'bad' farms, because it compelled them to accept more of the work on offer, regardless of what the farm was like. In contrast, feeling more secure increased their sense of agency, empowering them to refuse work on 'bad' farms. As Alina explained via her interpreter, being selective about better working conditions then felt feasible:

> *'When will be the same money but better conditions of work because she's working in very cold temperatures sometimes, very difficult physically to manage, yes, she will go into different one, possible when will be same money or a better condition of work, yeah.' (Alina, via interpreter. Southwold).*

Even when workers' finances do not compel them to accept work regardless of a farm's awfulness they may be more vulnerable to 'bad' farms if new to an area. Reflecting on the anxiety associated with a lack of knowledge, Alina said:

> *'(it is a) kind of lottery because they're sending you to somewhere, some company farm... and you never know, where you are being, and how it will be there....*
> *(Alina, via interpreter. Southwold).*

Not knowing what to expect when turning up to work on an unknown farm can itself be intimidating and anxiety provoking but the dread of being sent to 'company' farms, described by other workers as 'big' farms, suggests that they are often difficult places to work and/or unpleasant. The workers from Southwold told me that settling into a geographical location and developing local networks there, including with employment agency staff and farms, offered them some protection against 'bad' farms, as Alho and Helander (2016) have also noted. Via her interpreter, Alina explained:

> *'(We) could say, for this place we don't want to work, in this… she could tell them her agency yes, in others ... [indicates no].' (Alina via interpreter. Southwold).*

Securing this protection against 'bad' farms relied on workers building relationships and social capital with people already on the farm and with the staff at the agency who liaised between workers and farms to cover shifts. And within this, establishing a reputation as a 'good', valued worker increased their likelihood of being recruited on merit, instead of recruitment depending on their social and familial connections:

> *'...what was good from first... they looked how people (were) working, not who is friend, or who is family… just looking for your contribution and how you manage with your work .... it was your work not (your) family ... no nepotism there, which is very important…' (Alina, via interpreter. Southwold).*

In this respect local networks, social capital and sound working relationships can be a double-edged sword. They can advantage and protect workers who are trying to decide where to accept work (Alho and Helander, 2016). But at the same time, they could lead to nepotistic corruption, which may itself be exacerbated by power imbalances between temporary workers and the people making decisions about what labour is needed and when (Sporton, 2013).

It occurred to me that a constant churn of 'new' workers, which is increasing on farms because of recruitment and retention difficulties (Tasker, 2018; Thomson *et al.*, 2018), could be a consequence of, but also a contributing factor to a farm's 'bad' status. This is, as workers explained to me, because stable, predictable work teams are more supportive of their on-farm

wellbeing. The lack of clarity about workers right to work in the UK after Brexit (ALP, 2017a), may mean that the turnover of workers will rise, and the workforce being increasingly comprised of 'new' workers (NFU, 2018c) could mean that more of them are vulnerable to exploitation.

Labour providers, agencies and big farms have for many years carried out transnational recruitment drives, sending representatives out to the sending countries or employing locally based agents to act on their behalf (Sporton, 2013; Alho and Helander, 2016). This can be more fruitful than trying to recruit workers remotely. Prospective workers are assisted in completing the paperwork which can be a significant barrier to non-English speakers or those with poor literacy skills, and the allocation of workers to farms may begin whilst workers are still in their home country. Being told about potential earnings and relieved of the onerous recruitment paperwork may leave prospective workers feeling quite seduced by the work offered, but recruiters who find it necessary to go to sending countries in order to secure enough workers are not always reliable or truthful about the realities of the work's terms and conditions (Preibisch, 2010). The UK's current shortages of workers is forcing recruiters to increasingly target remote, rural locations in the sending countries, pools of prospective workers in more urban ones having diminished, but people from remote, rural communities are often more impoverished and less literate (AHDB, 2019e). This may increase their susceptibility to false or inflated promises and make them more vulnerable to exploitation. Mia at Home Farm implied that agents may capitalise on this in order to recruit workers to the big, corporate farms of the sort universally disliked by the workers in this ethnography:

> '... people go to his office and say... I want to work in England...a lot say in London cos that's the only place they know... he's a bit like god....'I've got a very good farm for you...yes, I have farm in Yorkshire, you like this farm...' But I think he says that about all the farms. They get given a farm. I don't think they can even say I want a small farm, (or) a big farm...' (Mia, Home Farm).

I did not personally see any evidence of malpractice by recruiting agencies, but one farmer, Claire, described what appeared to be blatant exploitation by one agency's representative:

> '... (he) kept ringing up about their wages and one thing and another.... he'd worked over here a lot of years and he was sort of like a mafia king, he organised everybody, brought the girls here in his car, and there'd be money changing hands when they arrived, like taxi fares and things like that which is all completely

illegal, shouldn't be taking money off people...fair do's offering somebody petrol money but ... he held his hand out!' (Claire, Vale Farm).

As discussed in the previous Chapter, the choice of a 'small' farm mattered for the wellbeing of workers I spoke to and knowing how to avoid 'big' farms seemed to have its own wellbeing value. But workers who are 'new' and naïve about what seasonal farm work entails and what they have a right to expect can be shocked at the gulf between their expectations and the reality of what in fact happens on farms:

'...and I thought, this is normal here? ...something is wrong with these people, or maybe something is wrong with me, because something here is very, very strange. I don't understand what is going on here… they was like slaves, and everything what they do was like something what (you would) do to a slave, not a worker' (Tomasz, Home Farm).

Tomasz did not detail what his expectations had been before he arrived on that farm, nor did he say what or who had informed these expectations. But it was clear that they did not match the reality of the work. The hostility and lack of respect that workers were subjected to, and the relentless pressure under which they were forced to work fitted Tomasz's idea of slavery, not 'work.' It was clear from what he and other workers described, that these conditions are often considered 'normal' by seasonal workers, because they have not known farm work to be anything else.

None of the workers I spoke with openly disclosed that they had been purposely deceived about the farms to which they were recruited, but their facial expressions and tone of voice whilst recounting their experiences indicated bafflement, resentment and shame about being misled. Yet seasonal workers' circumstances often conspire against them in ways that they cannot anticipate, control or influence and the refusal of others, including some employers to accept responsibility means that they are *allowed* to assume responsibility (Benson, 2008; Scott *et al.*, 2012). To varying extents, this affords farmers and other stakeholders some psychological distance, perhaps helping them to avoid feeling quite as responsible for workers' experiences.

For some workers, recruitment by or via an agency can be advantageous. Via her interpreter, Alina at Southwold, who often worked shifts on different farms during the same week offered an example:

'...agency is a kind of mother… two days for one farmer, two days for next, one or two days for next… (but) one employer, one tax code…If you keep three tax codes... then automatically you will pay more taxes....(she) would need to be employed by three farmers. Now, via agency they pay one tax...it is a very important…because really she's working for one company....but subcontracted... it's important, yeah, and later (you must) call the tax office and talk about...really, agency is the mother... because people… have no idea how system work... and agency (has) taken this problem from them, they absorbing this and dealing with it taxes, payments, all this problem stuff......P60? how much? thank you! no problem!' (Alina, via interpreter. Southwold).

This sort of administrative support could of course be provided by farmers if they wanted to be more supportive and could include helping workers claim tax rebates. These become due once workers have worked enough hours to take them over their personal tax[16] allowance. But the administration required to sort this out can become a source of anxiety and confusion that workers do not want to bother their employer with (Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010). It did not occur to me that sorting tax rebates out once the season had ended would be difficult until Tomasz contacted me for advice about his own, weeks after he had returned to his home country. The problem appeared to be that the rebate could not be processed in his home country and was time limited. Waiting until he returned to the UK before processing it risked losing the rebate altogether, and Tomasz appeared to have received no guidance about how he could process his claim.

Some workers have clearly gotten wise to this, and at Southwold, Stella explained that some of them carefully calculate their earnings to reach but not exceed their personal UK tax allowance for that year. On reaching this threshold, they finish working in the UK and go back to their home country until such a time as their UK earnings would become part of the next tax year. Stella seemed rather critical of their pragmatism and implied that their earnings-related behaviours contravened 'good worker' behaviour. However, it is quite likely that in the absence of any assistance with their UK taxes, it makes no sense for workers to continue working, or for them to return to do subsequent periods of work within the same financial year. It is possible that some workers write off their tax rebates, having tried but failed to

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[16] During the 2017 season that I conducted my field work the UK personal tax allowance was £11,500 (HM Revenue and Customs, 2016). Workers are taxed at source, but all or much of this will be reimbursed, unless their earnings far exceed their personal tax allowance.

redeem them within the timeframe permitted, but no-one told me that this had happened to them. Had it occurred to me earlier in the season that cashing tax rebates in was not a straight forward process, I would have tried to find out more about workers' strategies for managing the problem. Some workers in other industries and/or UK based workers would probably seek advice and practical guidance from their trade union on such matters, but unionisation amongst farmworkers is low (Clutterbuck, 2017) and none of the workers I spoke to appeared to belong to one. This returns us to the point about the benefits of being employed by or through an agency (Thomson *et al.*, 2018).

Even having accrued the knowledge and developed the networks which help to protect workers against some of the challenges I have described, some workers still want to be employed by an agency. Iolanda told me she intended to come back to Home Farm the following year via an agency. This was despite Russell having invited her to return 'directly', and despite knowing that she would have to pay the agency a fee, whilst accepting Russell's invitation would avoid this. UK based recruitment agencies are not allowed to charge fees or impose conditions in exchange for finding someone a job (UK Government, 2019), and I could not work out if the agency she intended to use was UK based, or what the fee would be for. But Iolanda clearly expected to have to pay them, and was willing to do so, because she thought it would reduce the likelihood of interrogation by Border Control, which is what she had experienced the previous time she had arrived in the UK:

> *Apparently, they…had looked at her papers and wanted to know why she was*
> *here, how long she was staying for, did she have a job, did she have money, and*
> *all these questions. And she said, coming back next year but not through the*
> *agency will make it harder, more stressful... they asked me more and more and*
> *more questions…if I come through the agency they'll provide paperwork showing*
> *I'm here to do a job, so the police won't question me. I said that they surely*
> *shouldn't be asking you such questions because you have a perfect right to enter*
> *the country, to work or otherwise, and she agreed, but said she had found the*
> *experience very intimidating[17]. (Field Notes).*

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[17] Her experience coincided with a time when the UK Home Office was scrutinised for its increasing hostility. This included unlawfully deporting EU nationals with no fixed abode, introducing intimidating bureaucracy processes, and delegating border enforcement to public sector workers who were instructed to check the immigration status and nationality of those using everyday services including healthcare, education or banks (Carmel, 2018).

Our language differences prevented us from discussing the emotional impact of this experience in depth, but it had clearly left her feeling intimidated and humiliated. This led me to wonder whether the Border Force's hostility was intended as and/or interpreted as UK entry being conditional upon and legitimised by her labour value. Whilst this does not directly affect workers' experiences on farms, it adds to the air of hostility that workers perceive and might further discourage workers who are thinking about coming back to the UK.

Workers who are recruited by farmers directly, rather than through an intermediary, but who then find themselves on a 'bad' farm often avoid making a complaint, because this puts them at risk of losing their job as well as their accommodation (Scott *et al.*, 2012). In this respect, workers employed by or through an agency are perhaps at an advantage. They can request work elsewhere and relocate knowing that their access to accommodation and an income will continue. The farming industry's worsening labour shortages are giving workers more options but making things more uncertain for farmers. Not until I began writing up my findings did it occur to me that this might be one reason why some farmers prefer to recruit workers directly, although I do not believe that this motivated those who helped me with my own research.

When I remarked that their employment choices were improving because of labour shortages, workers at Home Farm seemed surprised, as though this had not occurred to them. I was bemused by their response, having assumed they were aware that fewer workers were returning and that farmers were getting desperate. Their response leads me to think that perhaps their anxieties are less about losing their work, and more about wanting to remain on particular farms.

Rural farms often have inadequate or unreliable public and digital services (Rural England, 2018), and this may make it harder for workers to independently arrange alternative or subsequent employment. However, that does not mean that it is impossible for them to find ways out of situations, or to get off farms which do not suit them. Having found somewhere to go, workers may leave their employer without labour at short notice:

> '...they said... y'know, we're going. And obviously we couldn't do a thing about it.
> And they just packed their bags and off they went!' (Claire, Vale Farm).

At an opposite extreme, many workers are genuinely satisfied with the circumstances in which they find themselves on a farm and keen to secure the option of returning the following year. They may therefore make a concerted effort to be well evaluated as 'good' workers (Binford, 2009). Farmers' recruitment of known workers as returnees tends to be quite informal. My observations suggest that it depends on an alignment of expectations, of having

131

had these met, and of being able to trust that they will continue to be met. Being able to persuade workers to come back as returnees vastly reduces farmers' time, effort and expenditure (MAC, 2013) and their familiarity with one another means that how things will be done the following season is easier to agree (Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010).

The number of returnee workers is falling (NFU, 2018c) but it is known that the farmers who are prepared to look after their workers, and who are proactive about getting workers back for subsequent seasons may have more success in getting enough workers (AHDB, 2019e). Looking after workers therefore represents a dual agenda, noted by Alho and Helander (2016), Bexley (2015) and especially Benson (2012), who repeatedly refers to farmers' efforts to act in their workers' interests whilst simultaneously nurturing returneeism for their own gain.

Farmers I spoke to valued returnees' in-context skills and sometimes their positive contribution to the work-place dynamic. Tacit knowledge of the work, perhaps gained over several seasons, is difficult to impart to others, and workers can become more skilled at their work through repeated processes of watching, doing and supporting each other (Alho and Helander, 2016). This means that they become more able to work cooperatively as a group and anticipate each other's actions and decisions with less verbal communication (Wells, 1996). Farmers contributing to my research indicated that a team with several returnees was worth more than the sum of its parts. This may be because the social interaction between people who are familiar with one another makes it more likely that they will learn from and with one another. This makes them individually as well as collectively more productive; that is, higher output for less effort (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). Farmers valued this, because they got more of their crop picked in less time, making their labour costs lower, but it also helped workers doing piece rate work to accrue higher earnings. However, it seems that becoming a returnee can itself become a process of commodification; returnees have higher 'good worker' value to farmers than 'new' workers do, farmers may deliberately nurture 'good worker' traits, as discussed in the previous Chapter, and then actively encourage those workers who have become an improved 'product' to return. This might be achieved by trying to meet workers' needs, making that farm seem like a more attractive proposition.

At the same time, Home Farm's workers appeared to be engaged in low level constant rivalry, not just in terms of speed and capability but also in terms of their 'fit' with the farm. This was illustrated by workers' interest in presenting the farm's produce in ways that cast them and the farm in a positive light, including their repeated intervention to show me how to bundle and pack asparagus more neatly. This sort of behaviour by workers is described by

Benson (2012, p. 162) as their investment in producing good products in order to 'strategically negotiate their own impermanent contract'.

Acquiring the status of a desirable returnee gives workers some protection against some of the challenges often associated with their work, as well as helping to boost their self-esteem. Workers that I spoke with did not think that farming's labour shortages had yet become bad enough that 'good' farms would indiscriminately employ anyone available. This meant that being invited back to a farm was still an accolade, and one which indicated that they were valued as *people*; not just as workers:

> *I asked (her) if she was invited back to Home Farm this year, and if so, was this*
> *important to her. She became very animated about this, and said yes, she was*
> *invited back, and yes, it was important to her because it demonstrated trust,*
> *respect and that (they) liked her as a person. She…explained she valued them*
> *rating her not simply as a worker, but as an individual. (Field Notes).*

Being invited back to a farm relieves workers of the chore of finding alternative work, of anxieties about it being on a 'good' or 'bad' farm, and of the emotional labour of becoming established within unfamiliar work contexts and communities. Familiarity between returnees and farms/farmers enables both parties to make informed choices about the workers' return. In such circumstances, workers who are viewed favourably by the farmer are probably better placed to negotiate favourable employment terms. One of Home Farm's returnees who was offered work for the season during which I collected my data decided to go somewhere else, because this suited her personal circumstances better. But half way through the season, she asked to come back to Home Farm after all. She later told me that she had felt able to make the request because she was known as a person, not just a worker, and was valued as such. Even though Home Farm had enough workers her request was met, because she was known to be a 'good worker', and because Mia and Russell felt some responsibility towards her. This informal but person-centric arrangement may be less common on bigger, more impersonal farms, where individual workers' identities are unknown, and where their individual skills and attributes are harder to keep track of.

Although they did not tell me how they set about doing it, some workers that I spoke to understand that tailoring their behaviour to the needs of farms they wanted to return to was useful. This might be described as self-regulation, conforming to farms' expectations (Findlay and McCollum, 2013). Workers indicated that they felt more confident that they would be invited back the following year if their employer knew them as an individual and by name, and when an invitation had not been offered, about broaching the subject. I noted my discussion about workers' proactivity in this respect with Russell, Home Farm's farmer:

> *He said they are 'keen to please' which might be an attempt to ensure ongoing work at the farm…some of their motivation might be to be asked back next year…some do ask in a very explicit way if they can stay longer in the season, and some ask repeatedly. But he can't always give an answer, because he doesn't always know whether the work will still be there. Sometimes the season ends earlier than expected because the weather spoils the crop or is so hot that the season is effectively compressed. (Field notes).*

Becoming 'surplus'

Workers that I spoke with seemed keen to establish themselves on 'good' farms, despite (or perhaps because of) the unpleasantness of seasonal farm work. Remaining on one 'good' farm for the entire season reduces upheaval and gives workers more time to establish themselves as prospective returnees. This does not necessarily prevent them from exploring alternatives, however. When accepting work, workers are typically advised how long the farm's anticipated period of work is in accordance with normal cropping periods and associated workload. They may however, be deliberately or unintentionally misled (Alho and Helander, 2016) and anyway, the weather, inconsistent maturation of crops due to normal biological processes and fluctuating retail demand can cause work to prematurely dry up, as the previous extract indicates. This inherent unpredictability therefore creates peaks and troughs in labour requirements that even the most careful workforce planning cannot account for.

Sometimes, the reduced need for labour is temporary, and redressed when another crop reaches maturity, but Home Farm has an additional, stop-gap strategy, which is to offer similar, temporary work on a neighbouring farm. When this strategy is put into action, Home Farm's workers remain in their accommodation, from which they can easily walk to the neighbouring farm. The rate at which they are paid is comparable, and they resume their normal Home Farm routine of work once its workloads increase again, often when a successive crop becomes mature enough to harvest. The NFU and ALP recommend this sort

of arrangement as a way of managing 'under-employment' (Tasker, 2018), but it relies on farmers within a given locality having a coincidence of need and being willing and able to cooperate.

This sort of arrangement is probably more appealing to workers comfortable, or at least tolerant, of doing less familiar work in a less familiar environment. Those who do not feel comfortable but who have an acute need to earn money might simply have to stifle their doubts. Iolanda told me that she appreciated Russell's efforts to support workers by arranging this stop-gap employment, but that she hated going to work on the neighbour's farm. She said its greenhouses' excessive temperatures, and the extraordinary and relentless pace at which the work was done was physically and emotionally punishing. Despite being a fast, efficient worker, able to significantly boost her week's earnings by going there, she often elected instead to take a rest day, which usually meant sleeping for hours.

Labour is a significant input cost in food production, and this means that most farmers are keen to shed 'surplus'[18] labour at the earliest possible opportunity (Lovelidge, 2011; Hellio, 2016). This can compromise workers as well as farmers. Workers may have to go to other farms where their wellbeing is less well supported, and farmers know that getting rid of 'good' workers may make them less inclined to return the following year. Sometimes, farmers try to manage this risk by retaining more workers than required, but this can create the same net result as careless labour-force planning; too many workers for them to all be optimally employed. A spell of bad weather, reduced orders, or a poorly performing crop might exacerbate this, frustrating workers who feel they have been misled about what they might earn. In these circumstances, farmers are unlikely to set people to work picking unwanted crops, because doing so would saddle them with avoidable labour costs. Instead, they might ration the work between all the workers on the farm. This resolves the farmer's problem, but workers resent it, as Elina explained in her reference to a farm where she used to work:

> '... very, very much people? No work, because it's very, very much people....no
> pay!' (Elina, Springwood).

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[18] The word 'surplus' is utilised as though workers were capital assets rather than people. This led me to wonder whether it would be applied to other essential workers, for example when healthcare or educational workers are made redundant in cost cutting exercises.

She and her co-workers insisted that they would not go back to a farm which did not give them enough work. As well as reducing their income, workers must also continue to meet all their outgoings, including for their on-farm accommodation. This is a good example of responsibility being shifted from an employer to their workers (Duke, 2011). But workers are getting wise to the dangers of ending up on farms with insufficient work and are using it as a criterion for choosing where to accept jobs, including by being more assertive about their terms. This includes by demanding guaranteed minimum hours of work before accepting a job (AHDB, 2019e).

Although there may appear to be a moral duty for them to do so, there is no legal obligation for farmers to find follow-on employment for their 'surplus' workers. Regardless of the circumstances leading to a 'surplus' of workers, decisions must be made about who stays and who goes. The criteria by which this was decided on the farms that I visited seemed rather arbitrary and left me wondering whether unscrupulous employers get rid of their less favoured workers by declaring them surplus. This also raises questions about whether workers hoping to be retained might become more compliant and productive as a way of improving their chances of being kept on.

Adopting a 'last in first out' approach is not a satisfactory approach for farmers whose 'last in' workers are 'good,' but whose well-established workers are less 'good'. Workers who hope to be retained by a farm probably realise that this relies on them being 'good', but have no clear, unambiguous criteria about what this entails, or how to gauge whether they are likely to succeed (Binford, 2009). This potentially anxiety-provoking situation is created in part by the inadequacies of zero-hours contracts, which fail to protect workers against arbitrary 'dismissal,' and which do not guarantee that work will be continually offered (McCollum *et al.*, 2012). I was interested to know what strategies farmers used to manage 'surplus' workers, and Mia described the difficulty of having to deal with this situation. On one occasion she had secured follow-on work on another small farm, where her 'surplus' workers would pick the same crops and earn similar wages to those on her farm. But the workers refused to go, opting instead to return to their home country half-way through the season. Their decision would have reduced their season's earnings considerably, but this may have seemed preferable to the intimidation of arriving at another farm mid-season, when workers' alliances and routines had already formed.

Whilst I was at Home Farm, two small groups of workers left before the season's end. The first occasion was due to inclement spring weather which destroyed a crop and reduced the volume of available work. Mia and Russell used their industry networks to secure follow-on

work and then, to use their words 'drip-fed' this news over several days to those whom they selected to leave. Their selection rationale was that none of those who were selected for 'dismissal' were returnees, all knew one another from their home country, and all had arrived as a group later in the season than other workers. This seemed to me to be possibly the most logical and fairest approach to take, and yet it was clear that the workers selecting to remain at Home Farm were unsettled by the process. It seemed that the logic of Mia and Russell's decision was not enough to allay fears that they might also being told to leave, illustrating the practical and psychological uncertainty that pervades seasonal farm work.

Those who had been selected to leave had only rudimentary English language skills and limited finances, and this may have made their move to another farm more challenging and intimidating. To help reduce their anxieties Mia paid for their train tickets, provided explicit written guidance about their train connections and helped them onto their first train with their numerous pieces of luggage. Whilst they may have felt disgruntled about no longer being required at Home Farm, this event illustrated how differently workers may be treated by farms. When we discussed this later, Tomasz described witnessing workers dismissed from other farms with only perfunctory explanations and half an hour in which to gather their belongings and get off the site, presumably with no other work lined up and with nowhere to stay.

Later in the season when the bulk of Home Farm's crops were harvested, and the prospect of insufficient work arose again, speculation began about who might be asked to leave, at what point and where they might go. On this occasion two workers who had been originally recruited only to harvest asparagus were redeployed, having been already retained at Home farm for several weeks longer than planned. I made notes about the conversation we had when I went to say goodbye to them:

> *I'd heard they were going to a small farm and they eagerly showed me its address… wanted to know where the farm was, is it a 'nice?' and 'good?' did I know the area… what is the weather like there. They were keen to point out that it's a small farm, but they were anxious… it must be unsettling to be shunted off to an unknown place you've never even heard of, to work with people you know nothing about. Does it feel worse when people you've become used to working with are staying? That Russell has found them a small farm (this is very important to them) where they'll do familiar work may make it easier for them… perhaps it's*

reassuring that someone's taken time to try to find the 'right' place…to feel cared
about, less like a commodity (labour) and more valued …. (Field notes).

Those who remained at Home Farm received regular updates from the two workers who left, and often told me about or showed me their news on their phones. Although slightly envious of their good fortune in securing work in a warmer, coastal location they expressed satisfaction and relief about them having gone to a 'good farm'. Although it was not their preferred choice, the two workers who went had a chance to grow their UK networks and secure new work opportunities[19].

When I talked to the workers who stayed at Home Farm about what had happened, one remarked, without being drawn or prompted by me, that Russell felt responsible for his workers because he knew them as individuals and was therefore more inclined to secure 'good' farms for his 'surplus' workers. If this assessment is accurate, it suggests that employment on one 'good' farm may enhance the chances of securing work on other 'good' farms subsequently, that workers benefit from employers' sense of social responsibility and from farmers' industry networks.

But farmers investing time and effort in finding sequential employment for workers are also helping themselves in the long term. Cooperation with other farms may help them to optimise their primary recruitment costs as well as making a seasonal job on their farm a more predictable and attractive proposition. Their workers may feel more confident of being supported in sequential work if and when work dries up. Workers finding themselves part of such networks of farmers may feel less precarious and more likely to consider returning to that farm, and as the competition for workers increases, may gain significance.

Whilst trying to make things easier for themselves, some employers seem to act rather counter-intuitively. I was told about one farmer, not involved with my research, who deliberately recruits all-new teams in the belief that such teams are easier to manage, and Mia knew of other farmers who sustain a churn of 'new' workers throughout their season, as a way of avoiding having to enrol them onto a pension scheme[20]. This is a mandatory requirement

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[19] One of the two who left planned (and had been invited) to come back to Home Farm the following year but did not. This may have been for many reasons but becoming 'surplus' and being moved on may have reduced his inclination, illustrating the value of retaining 'good' workers when possible.

[20] This was not the case at Home Farm. Several workers remained there for many months, harvesting successional crops. However, the terms proposed for seasonal workers' employment following Brexit will limit workers to a three month stay, after which they will be obliged to apply for a work permit, described by Ali Capper as a psychological disincentive for accepting work in the UK (Capper, 2019).

for temporary workers working for the same organisation for three months or more (The Pensions Regulator, 2019). Mia described the employer's pension contribution as 'inconsequential,' and suggested that farmers taking this approach do so because they want to avoid doing the time-consuming and onerous enrolment paperwork. This represents a cost in itself, because it takes the farmer, or perhaps a farm manager away from the ongoing task of harvesting crops which cannot be put on hold.

Very few of the seasonal workers that I met stood to benefit from being enrolled in a UK pension, because they were home-focused, with no intention of settling in the UK. Like many other seasonal workers, sending as much money home as possible was their priority (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). But regardless of workers' intentions, this illustrates how initiatives introduced to support vulnerable workers can sometimes have unintended consequences.

The farm 'machine'

When compared to farmers' and workers' accounts of bigger farms elsewhere, Home Farm's workplace regime seemed benign. And yet the work was unavoidably tedious and tiring, and even workers with experience of working at a more relentless pace on bigger farms sometimes felt pressured. The crops being worked on by the workers in my research are highly perishable, and as such will not 'stand' once they have matured, before beginning to deteriorate. As Basok describes, 'they don't just ripen from 8 o'clock Monday morning 'til 4 o'clock Friday afternoon' (Basok, 2002, p. 55). This means the work must be done quickly but carefully, to ensure produce is available in enough quantity, and at a quality and cost which acceptable to buyers. Factors which remain outwith farmers' control, such as the weather and crop performance must be overcome for this to be achieved, and this makes workers' efficiency crucial to the outcome.

Tools of the trade

Rising wages bills and the challenge of recruiting and retaining workers make farmers keen to explore how they might become more efficient, or be replaced for all or part of the task (AHDB, 2019d). Solutions designed to do this range from the highly technical, including robotics and automated pack-houses, through to low-tech interventions. Highly technical solutions require capital investment on a scale which small and medium sized businesses cannot meet, or to which farmers cannot commit because of the insecure contracts under which they supply buyers (AHDB, 2019d). Low tech solutions include closer supervision and surveillance of workers as discussed in Chapter 5, as well as practical and material

interventions. These include greenhouses, polytunnels, table top[21] systems, and the semi-automatic grading or the packing machines like those used by Home Farm and Springwood.

Asparagus grows optimally on free draining, sandy land with no shade from trees or buildings. Such conditions mean workers have no relief from intense sunshine, driving rain or biting winds which whip up the soil. This has an extraordinary ability to permeate clothing, abrading workers' skin and irritating their eyes. The unstable, sandy soil is tiring to walk on, sapping the energy from one's legs. Asparagus is cultivated in field-long mounds of soil, one metre wide and separated by deep trenches along which workers walk. Walking on the mounds is discouraged because it damages the asparagus crowns.

Taking a row of asparagus each, workers moved up the field in a line, behind a machine supporting a row of plastic crates at waist height. Workers cut asparagus spears of appropriate height and thickness with a very sharp knife at a specific point to avoid damaging the plant's crown. When the weather or early morning dew left things cold and wet, or when tiredness or ineptitude caused carelessness, cuts to the hands were more frequent, and these were immediately irritated by the sandy soil. Whilst I clumsily determined asparagus spears' maturity by measuring them against the length of my knife, skilled workers made intuitive judgements, working at twice the speed to hold and cut spears with one hand, passing them to the other to create small bundles. They placed these, uniformly orientated, into the plastic crates (*Figure 3*). The machine dictated the pace, moving ahead with workers following bent at the waist. By periodically cutting asparagus from their own row and the one adjacent, workers enabled me to catch up or gave others time to replace filled crates with empty ones. The job required constant vigilance, my inexperience made it hard to see the mature spears, and the trance-inducing monotony was relieved only for moments whilst the machine turned at the row's end. Periodically, one person drove the quad bike and trailer filled with crates of asparagus to the cold store, shifting it alone by hand before re-joining those who continued picking, perhaps cutting two rows simultaneously to sustain the pace. The work necessitated a posture and pace precluding active conversation, and there were long periods of silence. Despite this and the lack of obvious signalling between workers the work almost always proceeded efficiently and cooperatively.

Figure 7: An account of harvesting asparagus

Seasonal workers are typically engaged in labour-intensive, hands-on work, yet what they do and how they do it can be enabled but also sometimes constrained by material objects. These are often highly visible, but their ubiquity can mean that they cease to be 'seen', or considered

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[21] 'Table top' systems, in which strawberry plants are grown at waist or chest height in suspended cradles or on fixed 'tables' dramatically increase the proportion of clean, dry and unblemished fruit. It is ergonomically easier and more comfortable to pick from table tops, and labour costs are around twenty percent lower than for ground grown fruit. They make plant husbandry easier and the systems can include series of pulleys to raise and lower sections of the cradles, to maximise space and enable workers to pick at a height convenient for them. Some workers associated these systems with big farms which they disliked for other reasons (Lovelidge, 2011).

inconsequential (Miller, 2005). These things can all facilitate more comfortable and efficient work, but as I saw at Home Farm, they can also adversely affect workers. The polytunnels used on the farm to grow raspberries illustrate this. They improve the quality of the raspberries and enable workers to continue picking during wet weather (and therefore continue earning), but during very hot weather, they were a disadvantage, slowing workers down, making them uncomfortable and causing the raspberries to ripen more quickly so that more got wasted.

The introduction of labour-saving technology can sometimes mean that workers are paid less per unit to work on a crop, leaving them feeling aggrieved (Ortiz and Aparicio, 2006). This did not appear to be a complaint of the workers that I spoke with. However, new technology was clearly implicated in processes of intensification (Rogaly, 2008a). Instead of reducing the effort required of workers, labour-saving technologies can compel them to work faster and more relentlessly, a trend which can lead to farm work becoming dehumanised (Visser, 1986; Illich, 2001).

Raised expectations make greater physical demands of workers (Holmes, 2013), making them more susceptible to injury in what is already a high-risk occupation[22] . It can also force them to prioritise either the quality or quantity of what they pick, because attending to one almost always compromises the other. Retailers and consumers want food which is fresh and visually attractive, but also cheap, meaning that workers are expected to meet unreasonably high expectations (Benson and Fischer, 2007; De Grammont and Flores, 2010). More broadly and in the longer term, the technology and machinery which is introduced to increase efficiency, reduce reliance on human workers and reduce production costs can leave workers feeling as though they have less autonomy. When this happens, workplaces can become less convivial and less tolerable, so that the workplace's sense of community and cooperation is threatened (Illich, 2001).

Although Home Farm's workers had minimal contact with dangerous machinery, they did use very sharp knives to harvest asparagus. Inexperience made injuries more likely and discomfort, tiredness or inattention compounded the risk, as I discovered whilst trying to work quickly to avoid delaying other workers. As a novice asparagus picker, I found that working quickly was hard anyway because being able to spot the asparagus spears against the light-coloured soil is so difficult. I also had to learn to quickly differentiate between asparagus spears ready to pick, those which had 'gone over', and those which had not yet reached the

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[22] The agricultural industry has high rates of injury and death (HSE, 2018).

optimum size for picking. Having inadvertently cut my fingers with my asparagus knife, I wanted to nurse my small, but very sore, papercut like wounds, to prevent them from being contaminated by the sandy soil. But this slowed me down further, whilst also making me more anxious about slowing the others down.

As described in Figure 7 and is illustrated by Figure 8, even rudimentary machinery can dictate working pace, by obliging everyone to operate at the same speed. Whilst the familiarity between Home Farm's workers led them to simply adjust what they were doing, for example with faster workers replacing full crates with empty ones at moments which would allow slower workers to catch up, it did draw attention to and highlight who the slower workers were, myself included. However, this could potentially cause conflict and resentment between workers, with slower workers embarrassed and anxious, and faster workers, who feel constrained by slower co-workers, becoming irritated or resentful. Iolanda and Tomasz both described this in their descriptions of working on other farms where the regime was more pressured.

Figure 8: Home Farm's workers harvest asparagus, keeping pace with the picking rig

At Home Farm and Vale Farm, strawberries were cultivated in the traditional manner, at ground level in what are known in the industry as matted rows. These are long, sausage-shaped mounds of soil enclosed in plastic mulch. The strawberry plants grow through holes

punched at intervals through the mulch, along the mound's length. This system reduces labour requirements, making irrigation, weed control, plant hygiene and harvesting easier and quicker to do, but is being increasingly superseded by table-top or cradle systems (Garthwaite *et al.*, 2016). These were used by Springwood and can further reduce farm's labour requirements.

Relative to table-top grown fruit, matted row strawberries result in higher proportions of soiled, wet fruit which deteriorates quickly, is cosmetically unappealing and uneconomical to pick. The work is dirty and was universally disliked by workers that I spoke to, who described it as 'shit'. Their opinion accords with that of workers in Wells' ethnography of Californian farm workers, who described strawberries as the 'fruit of the devil' (Wells, 1996, p. 169) because of the musculoskeletal pain caused by the work and the respiratory discomfort they experienced whilst exposed to the damp, dust and agri-chemicals associated with strawberry production[23]. Even workers whose long experience enabled them to harvest strawberries very efficiently and earn more money than on other crops, told me they preferred to work on the other, less lucrative crops. Some found that shuffling along on their knees between the strawberry rows, dragging their picking sledges behind them enabled them to pick and therefore earn more. But this position was less sustainable than constantly stooping and standing upright again, whilst kneeling on the ground meant they got very dirty.

Mia described the particular difficulties that some of the tall, broad male workers with 'big hands' had with strawberry picking. These physical attributes were advantageous for some other jobs on the farm, but were a hinderance whilst kneeling between narrow rows of vegetation, handling easily damaged fruits. The physical awkwardness and dirtiness of the work, and workers' hunched positions when seen dotted across the field seemed undignified to me. This perhaps betrayed my own sensitivities more than it revealed theirs, since none referred to it, but their evaluation of the work as 'shit' may have been informed in part by their emotional response to the task's requirement to kneel. Because it is so disliked, farmers struggle to recruit people to pick strawberries, especially when these are being grown in matted rows, as Simon at Vale Farm described:

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[23] Non-organic UK grown strawberries have been found to have been treated on average with the following: 13 fungicides, 3 sulphur, 4 insecticides, 2 herbicides, 5 biological control agents, 3 physical control agents, 2 acaricides and 1 molluscicide (Garthwaite *et al.*, 2016).

'...the Romanian agent… say they go to him and they (ask) are the strawberries on the ground or are they raised up? Because since table tops and what not came into fashion, that's where they want to pick, they want to pick up here [indicates waist height]. They don't want to get down on their knees and pick in matted rows, and I think we've ended up with the ones that he hasn't had a job for at the end…he told me this himself, (as) soon as I mentioned matted rows, strawberries on the ground he said they just turn around and go away.' (Simon, Vale Farm).

Making a farm more attractive to workers through technological upgrades such as table top systems requires considerable investment (Lovelidge, 2011), and many farmers are wary of making this commitment because of Brexit related uncertainties, including labour shortages (Lang *et al.*, 2017). Whilst the UK's soft fruit industry has grown enormously over the past twenty years, a lack of further investment is likely to reverse this (British Summer Fruits, 2017a). If this happens, it is likely that soft fruit imports will increase, and that what is consumed in the UK will become less socially sustainable, because its supply chains will be more opaque and harder to scrutinise (LeBaron *et al.*, 2018).

At Home Farm, polytunnels helped to improve the quality of the farm's raspberry crops, by offering protection and extending the crop's season. They also meant workers could carry on earning money in bad weather; raspberries are easily damaged if handled when wet and are more likely to rot, so unprotected crops cannot be harvested in the rain. My field notes provide accounts of the physicality of their work at such times:

The rain was drumming on the polythene of the polytunnels. Workers get soaked when working on rows at the 'end'; actually the polytunnel's sides, because the polytunnel's sides don't go all the way down to the ground. The rain blows underneath, the ground was sodden, and we all had wet feet and legs. Full trays of fruit must be carried to the trailer, so you get soaked again. It was very windy and unsettled and the polythene was rucking and rumbling with every gust. It sounded like thunder. Despite being late July, it was quite cold. I was wearing a woolly hat, 2 fleeces and a water-proof coat, but was still cold and wet. (Field Notes).

The way in which raspberry plants, referred to as canes, are organised within the polytunnel can create further challenges for workers. At Home Farm, they were cultivated on long mounds of soil, in a similar fashion to the asparagus and strawberries previously described. The rows of canes were between one and two metres apart, canes within each row planted eight to each metre. In full growth they looked like a dense hedge, and when ready to harvest were described by Mia as the 'red wall' (*Figure 9),* because of the abundance of ripe fruit. The canes, which tend to arch towards the ground as the fruit ripened were supported by high-tension wires held at various heights by posts along the rows. Canes which would bear the following year's fruit were not tied in at this stage, so flopped into the aisles from which workers picked the fruit and along which they dragged their picking carts.

Figure 9: Facing the Red Wall

Workers could not simply bash them aside with their picking carts, because this caused damage and reduced the following year's productivity. I noticed that workers very occasionally became exasperated by the foliage thickets[24] through which they had to

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[24] Several workers utilised the favoured jungle metaphor in reference to the dense foliage within the polytunnels.

manoeuvre, and impatiently yanked canes out of the way. This frequently evoked mock sharp intakes of breaths from other workers and muttered comments about Russell wanting them to look after next year's fruiting canes.

Such responses were intended partly as jest, teasing one another in ways that helped to diffuse tension. But it *was* difficult for workers to work with the necessary haste, wrestling their carts past one other without damaging next year's canes, and without tipping their already picked fruit out of the precariously balanced punnets in their carts. Fruit which did get tipped out in this way was unsaleable, so that workers had to repick equivalent volumes to fulfil buyers' orders and sustain their own earnings.

Once able to discriminate between under or over ripe raspberries and those at the optimal stage for picking, workers were left virtually unsupervised. Which worker picked which row of raspberries was apparently arbitrarily decided, with grumbles from those who believed that they got more than their fair share of the despised 'end' (against the polytunnel's walls) rows 'again'. The curvature of the polytunnel's walls *(Figure 10)* reduced workers' head height, and restricted the ground space through which their picking carts could be dragged, making

Figure 10: Harvesting the 'end' rows can be hampered by the polytunnel's walls

their work uncomfortable and slow on 'end' rows. The fruit on 'end' rows was also sparser and of lower quality than on middle rows, because it got more weather damage. Workers harvesting these rows were themselves more exposed to the weather too, often having to navigate past great bags of rainwater which had collected in the polytunnel covering where it

was looped up at the side. Workers who bumped these bags of water as they passed risked getting soaked and having their harvested fruit spoilt. These things all reduced workers' picking speed and thus the money they earned. Such practical challenges and the natural ability of some workers to pick quickly and begin another row caused frequent log jams of workers and their carts in the aisles between rows of canes. Those who reached the end of their row first chose the row they would move on to. Naturally, most did their best to avoid the 'end' rows, in order to make their work easier and more lucrative.

 During Yorkshire's 2017 mini heat-wave, workers harvested raspberries from inside polytunnels in temperatures exceeding 35 degrees Celsius. At these temperatures, raspberries ripened and deteriorated quickly, reducing the volume of fruit which met retailers' exacting standards. This and the discomfort of working in such temperatures increased the time needed to pick an equivalent amount of fruit:

> *Pavel seemed a bit disgruntled. He was chuntering (without provocation from me) about making less and less (money) each week. This might be because he's tired, but he says the decent fruit is getting harder to find… they have to search for longer for the decent stuff. This must make being away from home even less tolerable. They must feel torn about wanting to go home whilst needing to keep earning more here. (Field Notes).*

Money making

In common with many transient workers (Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010; White, A, 2014) those I spoke to for my research were motivated to do the work by financial gain. Some hoped to achieve a target sum (White, A, 2014) for a specific project or goal, such as placing a deposit on a house in their home country. However, money is not necessarily the deal-breaker, and to assume workers' satisfaction is guaranteed by their earnings in isolation of other factors is naïve. Whilst some of Springwood's workers insisted that their sole criterion when selecting a farm was its earning potential, and that 'more money' was the only thing that mattered to them, they told me minutes later that they liked Springwood for reasons including that its workplace regimes were less punitive than those at other farms. Perhaps workers' professed priority of money is subsumed by other wellbeing needs once they are aware of the reality of being stuck on a farm for weeks or months. This recalibration of what mattered was

probably also informed by their comparison of different farms and might explain why some experienced workers were willing to make concessions about what they earned, providing some of the on-farm attributes identified in Chapter 5 were available.

Workers often explained to me that although poorly paid in relation to other UK employment, their work was often, in the context of their overall circumstances, lucrative for them:

> Elina: 'In Romania, every job but no money. Pay for one month (there) is pay here for two week' (Elina, Springwood).

Workers at Home Farm made similar comparisons. One worker said she had to work three times as long in Romania to match what she earned through her UK farm work. Offering these examples is not my attempt to defend seasonal workers' pay, but to emphasise that despite poor exchange rates since the EU referendum, UK seasonal farm work is still an attractive proposition for some. It also suggests that the falling numbers of available workers cannot be explained simply by reference to the wages they are offered. These are often comparable to other work requiring qualifications and skills at similar levels (MAC, 2013), but which is less gruelling, for example.

Rye and Andrzejewska (2010, p. 44) describe migrant workers adopting a 'purely instrumental' approach to work, which ought to make its social aspects less important, but this appeared not to be the case amongst those I spoke to. Several workers had rejected farms where they could have earned more but felt that some other aspects of their wellbeing would be undermined. Tomasz at Home Farm was one such worker: *'...I never come back to a (farm) where I have nothing more than money...'*. Once subjective opinions are taken into account, there may be little correlation between workers' actual pay and their satisfaction with it (White, D, 2016). This might mean that farmers who hope to improve their recruitment and retention of workers would be wise to prioritise other, non-monetary incentives, instead of only promoting increases in hourly or piece work rates.

Ensuring that workers' pay remains commensurate with their skill and the importance of their role on the farm, is difficult, and was raised as an issue by Luke at Southwold. He described how the difficulties of recruiting and retaining workers meant that he was at ever-increasing risk of being sanctioned for failing to fulfil orders placed by buyers to whom he was contracted. These sanctions are widespread in the industry (European Commission, 2018),

and put significant pressure on primary producers and therefore their workers. Luke explained that he used to successfully address temporary shortages by offering enhanced hourly rates but felt that temporary workers were becoming less interested in overtime and less willing to do shifts at short notice. Accounts such as these from farmers reinforce the sense that whilst workers are still doing seasonal farm work to improve their finances, money does not motivate them to the extent it once did. Or, perhaps they are becoming more confident about exercising their growing choice and therefore more willing to sometimes turn work down.

Luke also described workers in more skilled roles on his farm, including some machine operatives, complaining about the enhanced wages being offered to 'low-skilled' workers, as incentive to do overtime or work at short notice. This had a knock-on effect, with resentment growing between different groups of workers, and workers' sense of loyalty and willingness to be flexible about work declining. Consequently, he felt held to ransom, having to constantly negotiate to try to keep everyone happy and willing to cooperate. I did not have chance to ask his workers about this, but wondered if they might gain as much satisfaction from controlling negotiations as they did from securing enhanced rates of pay.

The workers I spoke with were paid at either piece rate or hourly rate according to the task being carried out, the crop they were working on, and their employer's expectations about the ease with which that task could be done. Modes of payment appeared to affect how workers thought about their work and consequently how they behaved. The potential for conflict when workers thought earning opportunities had been unfairly distributed could be considerable, and required thoughtful management by farmers:

> '*Once we started on piece work we tried to make sure that everybody was on it ... because y'know they're on hourly why can't we be on hourly..... if there was some hourly work to do we tended to pay them all by the hour until all them jobs were out the way, then everybody picked fruit, and that's all they did; piece work all day. And then anybody who wanted a little bit more work at night could pick potatoes or something like that, paid by the hour... but we never mixed the hourly and piece work .... we knew it didn't work. We'd have had a rebellion on our hands really [laughs]*'. (Simon, Vale Farm).

Home Farm's workers were paid an hourly rate to harvest asparagus which relied on them working at a satisfactory pace. Mia felt that this approach fostered cooperative working and gave workers the time they required to pick the crop carefully to reduce losses and damage. Besides, she felt that the impossibility of accurately attributing earnings to specific individuals made payment by piece rate inappropriate. But other farms took a different approach, and Mia referred to workers harvesting asparagus on other farms on piece rates. She said that they had expressed frustration to her about their low earnings and their employer's unrealistic expectations about output. Even when piece rate payment is used more appropriately, for example to encourage workers to pick more soft fruit to reduce what is lost because of over-ripening, it can still be easily exploited by employers. This is because piece rates are a deliberate psychological incentive to work harder and/or faster (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). They are associated with intensification (Rogaly, 2008a; Geddes and Scott, 2010) because they introduce the promise of higher earnings, which encourages rivalry between workers. Simon, at Vale Farm described having once employed a worker who consistently picked 'rubbish' fruit which buyers rejected but to which he had turned a blind eye, because that worker involuntarily acted as a pace setter, motivating the farm's other workers to pick faster.

> *'...now he was a really fast picker, but he picked nothing but rubbish!... I didn't put him next to them, so they couldn't see what he was picking, I'd put him so many rows across and they'd look at him and (think)... he can do it, aye...'*
> *(Simon, Vale Farm).*

Piece rates are not stipulated in the explicit terms that the national minimum wage is, and workers may have to work more intensively to achieve similar earnings (Rogaly, 2008a). In any case, because so many variables, including the weather and the crop's conditions, affect how much workers are able to pick, it is hard for employers to know how to decide what piece rates should be set at (Ortiz and Aparicio, 2006). Piece rates ostensibly give workers a choice about how hard to work, thus enhancing their sense of agency (Waite, 2007). But the outcome is not entirely within their control, and this can cause workers to strive even harder to be compliant and conscientious, to their employers' advantage (Scott *et al.*, 2012).

Several workers, most notably those at Springwood, expressed their preference for piece work, because this enabled them to reach their earning's targets sooner than when doing

hourly rate work. But this relies on employers having sufficient work for them, and on them not attempting to cut costs by, for example, sharing what work they do have between too many workers. Farmers' wage-related costs are being pushed up every year by the rising annual minimum wage rate (Gov.uk, 2019b), and farmers have to comply with these rates, even whilst workers are ostensibly doing piece work (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). Mia explained that in practical terms, workers who pick only one strawberry an hour are still paid the minimum wage rate for each hour that they work. Workers would be unlikely to be retained on these terms however, and this means that piece rate work can create additional precarity for 'slow' workers.

Maybe the sense that they were under pressure to work harder/faster, but for a poorly determined reward, was why some workers preferred hourly paid work, despite (almost always) earning more on piece work. This had not gone unnoticed by farmers, and Simon at Vale Farm expressed his frustration about workers no longer being incentivised by piece rates to the extent that they once were. He identified this as a notable difference between currently available workers and those whom he employed via the SAWS scheme:

> '...they'd rather work hourly rate and not go that fast and .... going back... that was the opposite, on piece work they just went like rockets, y'know, if the minimum wage was £5 then, they would be earning £10 an hour!' (Simon, Vale Farm).

Workers' preferences for piece work or hourly paid work seemed to be informed by their short-term plans, such as their desire to return to their home country at the earliest opportunity. Some of the workers at Springwood, for example, liked piece work because they could earn more in less time:

> Elina: 'When pick strawberry, pay you one for one box, very much money if you pick fast.
>
> Cristian: Piece work.
>
> Elina: Yes, piece work. And when the work timed, the money is not very nice.
>
> Cristian: Not as much. When it's the timed work you make maybe sixty pounds and when it's the piece work you make maybe one hundred.' (Springwood).

Being able to earn more money within a shorter period of time meant that they could go home earlier. For Springwood's workers, this was either for a short 'holiday', after which they would return to Springwood or some other UK farm to work, or to relieve relatives of the burden of child care, some having left babies and toddlers behind. This interlude was apparently timed to coincide with Springwood's fruit crops, which naturally matured in two distinct phases with a mid-summer lull. Farms requiring similar numbers of workers throughout the entire season might be less accommodating of this arrangement and this coincidence of need may have been one reason why Springwood's workers hoped to sustain their association with the farm. However, returning to the subject of workers' remuneration, it seemed that where piece work rates were difficult to achieve, or where too many workers were competing for too little work (not a complaint made by Springwood's workers), workers would probably have to stay in the UK for longer, or come back for a second phase of UK work, regardless of preference. In this respect, the amount and method of workers' earnings directly impacted their plans in the short and long term, and their on and off-farm wellbeing.

At Home Farm I saw that piece work sometimes caused conflict between workers, with some levelling accusations about co-workers 'stealing' fruit from other rows to their own advantage. Wells (1996) observed this same behaviour amongst the workers that she carried out research with. At Home Farm some workers complained that punnets of fruit had been deliberately excluded from the day's tally of who had picked what, or that payment had been misappropriated. Mia described that she had sometimes had to remind workers that 'their' produce was in fact hers, in her attempts to diffuse produce-related conflicts. I do not know if workers' accusations were justified, whether miscalculations were sometimes made in error, or whether there were deliberate miscalculations about who had picked what as a hostility towards specific individuals. Such conflicts never seemed to implicate Russell and Mia, and I suspect that at least some of these accusations were provoked by interpersonal conflicts. Piece rates have been related to reduced collaboration, and 'stealing' (Ortiz and Aparicio, 2006), making it unlikely that Home Farm's experiences were unique.

In relation to remittances, the general preference seemed to be for weekly rather than monthly payments. For this reason, Wiesia at Home Farm did not like working at the neighbouring farm, described in section 6.1.2, where workers were paid at the month's end. At Home Farm, workers were paid weekly, and they felt that this made it easier for them to budget their savings and remittances alongside their everyday money needs. Having done all of this, they knew what they had (or had not) got left for car-boot purchases and what they saw as their indulgences, including alcohol and cigarettes.

Not every worker felt compelled to chase all possible earning opportunities and some were disdainful of those who were. The following extract from my field notes refers to Home Farm:

> *A big discussion evolved ... about whether they would work that afternoon, stripping black plastic out of some redundant strawberry beds...some were saying they wanted to do it... but Wiesia was muttering she didn't want to do it. She said to me (without me seeking her opinion) 'money is not most important thing!' whilst indicating that this is what the (others) were saying... She was shaking her head and kept saying, 'not most important thing!' (Field notes).*

Having a choice about doing this dirty and despised work may have seemed like a false one for workers who felt under duress to send as much money home as possible, and perhaps accounted for workers' differing opinions about whether the work was worth doing. But the falseness of the choice may also have stemmed from the fact that workers had little else to do on the farm and had limited scope for leaving the farm's physical environment. Choosing to do the work might have been a pragmatic decision, earning money being preferable to an afternoon of boredom and what may have felt like uncompensated entrapment on the farm (Griesbach, 2018).

One activity that *did* inspire Home Farm's workers to turn work down, or to negotiate with Russell about when work got done, was to visit local car-boot sales or charity shops. These visits increased the value of workers' UK earnings, through the purchase of items that they then couriered or carried home for personal or family use, or to sell in communities where consumer goods are still expensive and difficult to procure. Mia occasionally accompanied them to car boot sales and said workers appeared bewildered by the quantity and quality of goods on offer, describing it as a sobering insight into the UK's wastefulness. One worker apparently enquired why British people discarded so much stuff which was neither worn out or broken, but all recognised the opportunity it presented. Several showed me their purchases, which included shoes for a toddler, washed and arranged to dry in the sun on their caravan's step. These cheaply made shoes, of a size quickly outgrown and thrown away had monetary and social value for the worker taking them home.

Everyday Domesticity

The on-farm environment in which seasonal workers exist whilst not engaged in paid work can be as significant for their health and wellbeing as their paid work (Benson, 2012; Holmes, 2013; Keim-Malpass *et al.*, 2015). Workers that I spoke to at Southwold Farm lived independently away from the farm, in privately owned or rented houses or flats, and I had no cause or opportunity to go there. Those workers made little or no reference to their accommodation, other than to describe the difficulty of getting to farms without their own transport. In this section I therefore focus on the provision made for workers' accommodation and amenities at Vale Farm, Home Farm and Springwood, where in common with many seasonal farmworkers (Hellio, 2016), workers lived on-site. First, I discuss what I understood of workers' accommodation, and in section 6.4.2 discuss what I learned about the amenities to which workers had access as part of their on-farm accommodation.

A Place to Stay

On-site accommodation has advantages but can also challenge workers' wellbeing. At worst, this amounts to workers being 'warehoused at night and carefully managed during the workday' (Benson, 2012, p. 190). On-farm accommodation is conditional upon workers continuing to do that farm's work and is a key indicator of employment-related vulnerability (Jayaweera and Anderson, 2008; Scott *et al.*, 2012). This is because becoming 'surplus' to the farm's needs, or voluntarily leaving a job removes a worker's right to remain in that accommodation (Scott *et al.*, 2012).

 The workers at Home Farm, Springwood and Vale Farm could, within a few minutes, walk to the packhouse, polytunnels or fields for work, or use their farm's quad bike to reach the farm's furthest fields, again within a few minutes. This was the primary advantage of their accommodation's proximity to work. Some workers described enjoying a few minutes of extra sleep in the mornings, of returning to their caravan for a lunchtime nap, and appreciating being able to do so when their working day had, as was frequently the case, begun at 05.00hrs. On-site accommodation also has its downsides however, and I address some of these shortly.

My own experiences of living in caravans out of necessity rather than choice means that I tend to view them very much as a compromise, however clean and well-presented they are. This made it difficult for me to think impartially about workers' experiences of staying in them. But at the same time, my own caravan-living experiences also made it easier to understand how much more difficult, time consuming and awkward everyday activities can

be, compared to living in a house, and how the relentless proximity of other people can become a source of stress.

Regardless of its construction, workers' on-farm accommodation is sometimes of poor quality. On some farms, it is reportedly dirty, poorly maintained and without sufficient space or amenity necessary for the numbers occupying it (GLAA, 2018). When comparing their current accommodation with that on previous farms several workers at Home Farm and Springwood told me that their accommodation there was 'good' and 'nice,' far better than that on previous farms. Some described substandard, overcrowded accommodation of the sort often associated with labour exploitation (Scott *et al.*, 2012). Previously, some had shared their accommodation with complete strangers and their complaints about this and other deficits in their accommodation had not been acknowledged or addressed. This was either because their employers were indifferent, or because workers' complaints were channelled through supervisors who did not care or did not have enough authority to get the problem resolved.

Substandard accommodation and workers' transience can, according to Bolt (2013), be mutually reinforcing, and emphasize workers' status as short term, replaceable labour. But farmers do not always operate so cynically, and many may be simply dissuaded from making improvements by the time and capital outlay that it would require. This may especially be true of farmers who lack confidence about their business's future. Their preference may be to limp from one season to the next, doing only essential repairs and maintenance and reassuring themselves that the caravans are, after all, occupied only for short periods of time.

Because the costs associated with workers' accommodation affects the farm's bottom line, farms will often seek to reduce them by filling caravans to capacity. Fewer caravans require fewer amenities and less maintenance and may also usefully reduce the volume of complaints from local residents who object to the visual impact of caravans on their community. This was a problem which Roger, at Springwood, had to contend with. But reducing the overall number of caravans and filling each to capacity is likely to increase the wear and tear each caravan suffers from its perpetually changing occupants. Workers tired and dirty from their work often struggle to look after their accommodation, even when it is carefully thought out and provisioned (Benson, 2008). Additionally, inhabiting space which is not home and in which workers have no stake does not encourage care and respect (Benson, 2012). Several workers told me about arriving on previous farms and being directed to decrepit, filthy caravans littered with the previous occupant's detritus, including decaying foodstuffs. Perhaps those employers had tried to reduce costs by not cleaning and carrying out routine maintenance, or

perhaps they thought workers would not be bothered by shabby accommodation (Gray, 2014), were undeserving or would wreck nice accommodation. These excuses may be made by employers who hope to absolve themselves of blame and responsibility (Holmes, 2013).

The practical challenge of keeping their caravans respectable made it seem remarkable to me that those used by the workers at Home Farm were always very neat and clean, regardless of the weather or how far the season was advanced. A multitude of factors are likely to influence this, but I suspect Mia's policy of making sure her caravans were never filled to capacity and workers feeling that they were received with hospitality significantly increased their willingness to keep the caravans in good order.

It occurred to me, after talking to Pavel at Home Farm about his home-country community that some farmers might attempt to rationalise the standard of accommodation they provide by comparing it favourably to workers' own homes. Pavel described some houses in his home village as often being over-crowded, often with collapsing roofs and broken window panes. He explained his intention to use some of his UK earnings to help his friends, neighbours and family to address these issues. The accommodation provided by 'good' farms might seem quite salubrious in comparison. But this risks workers' home circumstances being used to sanction or excuse inadequate on-farm accommodation, seasonal workers being '…different people…deserving of different standards of living' (Benson, 2008, p. 604). In any case, as Benson (2008), points out, however rudimentary workers' housing is in their home country, it is *home,* with positive associations and advantages which cannot be replicated on farms.

Standards of accommodation for seasonal workers living on site are partly determined by legal requirements including minimum sanitation standards, fire safety, facilities for food preparation and occupation density (Fresh Produce Consortium, 2018). Yet these standards are a blunt instrument, and quality is not determined solely by legal standards, which may in any case simply enable less favourable farms and farmers to sanction their provision, making it harder for workers to contest that farm's standard of accommodation (Benson, 2008). What I saw and was told whilst conducting my research suggests that farmers do have scope to support their workers' wellbeing by considering and investing in the accommodation provided, making it hospitable[25] and congenial, not simply legal. Some of the modifications would not require a significant cash investment over and above the legally required.

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[25] I have used hospitable to convey that accommodation thus described would feel welcoming, warm (in a literal and metaphorical sense) and generous in its provision. Its qualities would be conducive to workers' relaxation and facilitate their social and intimate relationships as well as their privacy.

When considering how workers' on-farm accommodation might be made more satisfactory for them it can be useful to consider its location, since this can signal farmers' attitudes to the presence and visibility of their workers (Ivancheva, 2007; Benson, 2012). Social bonds, however dysfunctional or asymmetrical they may be, inevitably develop when workers live on site and perhaps also work alongside their employer (Andrzejewska and Rye, 2012), and certain aspects of their lives will necessarily be overseen or even controlled by their employer. Because of what Gray (2016, p. 3) describes as the 'price of proximity,' this can cause workers to develop conflicted opinions about employers, who may be supportive and helpful but simultaneously exercise considerable control over workers and their labour.

Figure 11: Everyday domesticity on farms includes constant proximity to the workplace

The farmers at Home Farm and Springwood had, after considering what might be best for workers, adopted opposing strategies, so that workers' caravans at the former were within sight of the farmhouse and main farm buildings, whilst those at the latter were situated a similar distance from the farm house but obscured by hedging and buildings. The farms' respective layouts meant that Home Farm's caravans could not be anything other than secluded from the public road, whilst those at Springwood were highly visible to anyone driving nearby. I did not ask Mia or Roger why they had put the caravans in those particular locations and yet both volunteered explanations. This suggests that they had both given some thought to workers' preferences about their accommodation over and above its utility function. Mia's rationale was that some farmers did not care about their workers and tried to deliberately distance themselves from them, an observation made also by Benson (2012). She

felt that siting her workers' caravans closer to the farmhouse demonstrated to them that they were valued, and that she had no desire to hide them from her own view, or from that of visitors to the farm.

The workers at Home Farm with whom I discussed this said they liked having their employer nearby. It made getting help and advice easier and less stressful when things went wrong, and all of them seemed to be confident about knocking on the farmhouse door to do so. Mia also referred to the practical benefits of their close proximity:

> '...if workers are just in a field, with no access to buildings, and at... 10 o'clock at night your gas goes out; tough. You have to wait until the morning, because that's when the person comes back on...' (Mia, Home Farm).

In contrast, Roger, at Springwood had situated his workers' caravans in what he described as their 'own area'. He explained that he hoped this would be less inhibiting for workers than being closer to and more visible from the farmhouse, which might make them feel they were under constant scrutiny. Roger stated that workers ought to be able to act with impunity whilst not working, including by socialising all night and being noisy if they so wished. Although Mia did not mention the noise levels created by workers as part of this conversation, she had done so previously in relation to workers antagonising one another and had described sometimes going outside at night to ask certain workers to subdue their exuberant socialising.

Whether strategic or accidental, seasonal workers' accommodation is often arranged or designed in ways which inhibit normal home-life activities, including socialising and intimacy (Benson, 2012; Hellio, 2016), and Roger's approach may have gone some way to redressing this. Yet whilst his workers professed satisfaction, they might equally have become excluded and demeaned by the arrangement. Benson (2008) described the association between enclosed and hidden areas with people of lower status and with unsavouriness, and how farmworkers' confinement in such areas reminds them of their lower status. But he also describes how workers confined to the farm day after day can wish to become invisible to other workers and their boss, so that enclosed and hidden away spaces can become appealing (Benson, 2012).

On-site accommodation also has the drawback of creating an environment for workers where they have no clear material or psychosocial distinction between work and non-work, as illustrated by *Figure 11*. This photo shows the proximity of the polytunnels to the area used by workers to dry their clothes, this being equidistant between the polytunnels and the workers' caravan accommodation. In such circumstances, workers can feel that they are forever at work, even whilst not being paid (Hellio, 2016; Griesbach, 2018). Roger and Mia

both appeared sensitive about intruding upon workers' space by avoiding, as far as possible, going to their caravans at times when they were not engaged in paid work. They may have recognised that whilst seeking workers out in their caravans to negotiate working arrangements for the following day was work for them as employers, it represented no income for workers, as Benson (2008) describes. This had led to Mia using text messages and social media to negotiate with workers during their time off, but this itself creates risks and complex challenges around privacy, and illustrates the difficulty of getting things right, even on 'good' farms where employers want to make things better for workers.

Roger's and Mia's very different rationales regarding the siting of caravans seemed acceptable to their respective workers, none of whom complained about or remarked upon the arrangements other than to tell me that it made it easy for them to seek help and that they felt comfortable going to the farmhouse to do so. Accepting their farm's arrangements could however be a consequence of those farms having relatively benign workplace cultures, and had their working relationships been less positive, workers' opinions may have been very different. The point that I wish to emphasise is that farmers' decisions about accommodation may be interpreted in a multitude of ways. It may depend on a person's perspective and previous experience, and this may make it hard for farmers to know the 'right' way for things to be done without engaging in ongoing dialogue with workers about improvements and being willing to act on this. Even employers resistant to this sort of open dialogue and flexibility of provision might be forced to engage with it. This is because the quality of on-farm accommodation can be the make or break factor in workers' decisions about accepting work on and remaining or returning to a farm (AHDB, 2019e) and one over which they have significant control, unlike other factors which influence workers' employment choices, such as the farm's geographical location.

As well as their proximity to employers and their scrutiny caravans' locations and appearance convey strong visual messages to workers about the hospitality they might be afforded, and the likely equality in their relationship with the farmer. This includes what is, in my own opinion, the inevitably temporary appearance of caravans. Farmers' scope to make caravans look less temporary is constrained by compliance with planning law (Fresh Produce Consortium, 2018) and local communities can feel anxious about and become vigilant for signs of impending permanency and about the number of caravans placed on farms. This was the case at Springwood where local householders had complained that the well-presented caravans were an 'eyesore'. It was as though Springwood's workers did not require housing,

and this may illustrate the resentment sometimes directed towards workers and the facilities they require, despite society's need for their labour (Borjas, 2016; Iglicka *et al.*, 2016).

The way in which farms' accommodation is demarcated[26] can affect how temporary it feels and therefore how transient its occupants feel (Bolt, 2013). But obvious boundaries can create a sense of otherness and separation, whilst simultaneously increasing the sense that workers ought to be and are under surveillance. Home Farm's caravans were surrounded on three sides by a hedge which provided welcome shade in the summer and seemed a softer, less deliberate and less oppressive option than the sort of wire security fencing used on some farms. Hedging and soft landscaping around caravans might also help to diffuse the social tensions associated with bleak living arrangements (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001). Referring to a previous farm, Tomasz described the mood evoked there by its security fencing:

> *Tomasz: ' And what is I think, a little interesting, the camp there was erm… was closed, like... [gestures, draws a square on the table with his finger].*
>
> *HS: With a fence round it?*
>
> *Tomasz: With this, like err... [gestures a spiral shape, horizontally]*
>
> *HS: like barbed wire, you mean?*
>
> *Tomasz: Yeah, like in jail? Alcatraz? It was closed, like this? [again, draws a line with finger on table] And err, if you want go somewhere you have a code to open, but you can't open this gate from outside. It was closed.*
>
> *HS: Ok, you can let yourself out, but you can't let yourself in.*
>
> *Tomasz: And nobody who didn't work there can go inside. And I was; what is this!! (laughs)… Yeah, very, very high, this… [indicates spiral of barbed wire]'. (Tomasz, Home Farm).*

Farmers who employed workers through the SAWS had to always know their workers' whereabouts. If a worker absconded from the farm, or wanted to leave, their farming employer had to inform the Home Office. Perhaps the fencing described by Tomasz was a legacy of SAWS related anxieties about maintaining control of workers. A second explanation might be that the farm he described was 'big' in every sense, as described in the previous Chapter, and employed numbers of workers. This may have necessitated some sort of security

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[26] Guidance for the provision of seasonal workers' accommodation and its site specifies that a fence or other structure should delineate its boundary (Fresh Produce Consortium, 2018).

system which made it easier to identify people who were or were not legitimately on the farm.[27]

Acting on workers' feedback Springwood's and Home Farm's farmers ensured their caravans were under-occupied, two or three workers sharing each six-berth caravan. This afforded workers more privacy, space and scope to swap places if conflict arose. Language barriers, cultural differences, exhaustion and close confinement could, according to the workers who talked to me about this, create a volatile mix. This was especially the case when workers are sharing their living space with complete strangers, at least at the beginning of the season. When first employing seasonal workers Mia, at Home Farm used to decide each caravan's occupants, arranging things so that workers arriving with a spouse, partner or family member shared accommodation and other workers went into single sex caravans. But she had largely abandoned this practice because returnees typically liked to go back into 'their' caravan, and because most of them preferred mixed- sex occupancy. More recently she had therefore only made allocations on behalf of workers who were new to Home Farm and who did not have pre-existing connections with the farm's returnees. Mia remarked that workers almost always chose to share caravans with people of the same nationality, and this was largely the case during the summer that I was there.

Whilst at Home Farm, I noticed some workers drifted between caravans, swapping around periodically so that I lost track of who was where. Some reshuffles seemed to occur after disputes or when workers reorganised themselves because co-workers had left the farm, but they may also have arisen after intimate relationships developed or broke down. Other workers may have moved in the hope of getting more sleep and/or privacy, perhaps choosing a caravan with fewer or quieter occupants or where certain individuals were notable by their absence.

Workers' long days of physical toil make quality sleep and rest imperative but sleeping in a caravan makes this difficult. During the 2017 heatwave, work at Home Farm and Springwood often began at around five o'clock in the morning. This increased the quantity and quality of fruit which could be picked before it was exposed to the sunlight and heat which would spoil it. It also made the work less tiring and uncomfortable. Workers told me that they sometimes got far too hot whilst working, because much of their work had to be done in direct sunlight and often inside polytunnels where temperatures rose even higher. Employers are legally

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[27] This is not simply a case of keeping workers under surveillance. As described in section 5.2.1, farms are obliged by food standards and buyers' contracts to maintain detailed food traceability.

obliged to ensure workers' sun safety (TUC N.D), and Home Farm operated a split shift system during the hottest weather so that early morning work was followed by a lunch break of three or four hours, and then a late afternoon shift as temperatures dipped again. This avoided the most dangerous period of sun exposure but curtailed other evening activities including shopping and socialising and disrupted the sleep patterns of those unable to sleep in a very hot caravan at mid-day.

Several workers seemed to prioritise getting extra sleep time over their mid-day meal, and I wondered just how sleep deprived they were. They were not enjoying comfortable, lounging-around siestas whilst sleeping at lunchtime, but were instead retreating to caravans often too hot to fall asleep in. They then groggily re-emerged for their evening stint of work and returned to their caravans for a night of poor-quality sleep and another early morning start. At such times sleep ceased to be the escape from the farm that I described in Chapter 5. High temperatures and airlessness can cause a claustrophobic sort of insomnia, with workers laying awake ruminating and becoming anxious (Benson, 2008). Workers are often, in any case, bored and lonely, and are then more inclined to use alcohol to manage their unease and insomnia (Waite, 2007; Holmes, 2013).

Reflecting on my own experiences of living in caravans meant I could empathise about the debilitating effect of heatwave-related insomnia. I knew for example, that whilst heavy rain makes a caravan's internal temperatures more tolerable, it does not necessarily bring relief. This is because the rain's noise on the roof is likely to keep a caravan's occupants awake, but also prevent them from easily using conversation, music or films as to distract or entertain themselves.

Getting enough 'good' sleep in a caravan can be made harder by the smallness of the beds typically provided (*Figure 12*). I talked about this with Tomasz, who had emailed me a photo he had taken of the double bed in one of the caravans:

> Tomasz: 'It's important, this big bed! [laughs] because I can show you small bed, it is half of this bed and you must sleep here yes, in half of this bed. This is big bed [points to photo], very, very important, because I like big bed! [both laugh]. HS: Oh, I thought this photo was about having somewhere to hide away. Tomasz: Yeah, but… this was not my room this year! Wiesia had this room, not me. When she left I took this room. I connected 2 beds! I used string, to (tie) it very hard, and it was ok. But not the best, so this [pointing at photo] is very, very important really. Just bed' (Tomasz, Home Farm).

Figure 12: Tomasz's photo of a 'big bed'

Minimum lengths and widths of the beds provided for workers are stipulated in guidance provided for employers of seasonal workers (Fresh Produce Consortium, 2018). But caravans and their beds are designed for short term holidays, not weeks of use by people who are doing long days of physically demanding labour, as Tomasz's description illustrates. Caravans which do not have full occupancy, like those at Home Farm and Springwood, mean that workers can shift furniture around and avoid using the smallest beds. But where workers are in fully occupied caravans, as they are on many 'big' farms, this is not possible.

None of the workers that I spoke to about their caravan's sleeping arrangements talked about bed sizes and bedroom occupancy in relation to intimacy. And yet these things and the insubstantiality of caravan's internal walls must surely diminish the sense of them as adult spaces, normally associated with privacy, intimacy and undisturbed sleep (Benson, 2012; Hellio, 2016).

Amenity

This section is concerned with the amenities available to workers on farms. I am using the word amenity in reference to '*the more 'human' and pleasurable environmental aspects of (a building or place), as distinguished from the features of the house… considered in or by itself…(what is) a particular advantageous or convenient feature of this kind*' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019a). Workers indicated that amenities which support their comfort and contentment and relieve the claustrophobia of their on-farm confinement make farms more attractive as return destinations.

The accommodation and amenities provided for workers have far greater significance than simply material spaces or 'things' offering practical benefits, because as already described, workers are largely confined to the farm. Accommodation and amenities influence workers' affect and behaviour, dominating where they are and what they do when not actively engaged in paid work (Benson, 2008; Bolt, 2013; Keim-Malpass *et al.*, 2015), and workers often have to make the best of impoverished circumstances. I expected that this would include personalising the place in some way, so I was surprised to see that the caravans[28] into which I was invited were clean, very tidy but highly impersonal, with nothing to betray their occupants' identities. The only two exceptions were the caravan and its garden used by Helena and Kamil and the caravan which often displayed jam jars of wild flowers, both described in Chapter 5. On one level, this was unsurprising, given workers' limited time and energy for non-essential activities, but it still puzzled me. The workers may well have had photos and other mementoes on their phones and laptops, but the lack of any personalisation in their living spaces seemed extreme, especially for those workers who were at Home Farm for several months.

An absence of personal items is often associated with punitive and degrading institutions, and with those which deliberately diminish people's identities to increase compliance, such as prisons and armed forces. But whilst some farms may force workers to exist in punitive, deprived environments this was not an imposition that I associated with Home Farm. It was as though failing to display anything of themselves helped workers to avoid conflating their identity 'there' (at home) with 'here' (UK farm work), their emotional investment being very much focused on their home circumstances, not on those in the UK. These sorts of emotional discrepancies can cause discomfort (Goffman, 1963). However, as an area for investigation

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[28] Although I saw Springwood's caravans from the outside, I only went inside those at Home Farm. The considerable time that I spent at Home Farm meant that going into their caravans felt like less of an intrusion to me that it would have done at Springwood.

this was peripheral to my primary research questions and I can therefore only speculate about workers' reasons for apparently hiding evidence of themselves and whether this was deliberate.

In their efforts to improve the recruitment and retainment of workers, many farms are seeking to enhance their farm's amenity value, to make them more attractive than other farms offering work (Thomson *et al.*, 2018). Interestingly, what I saw and was told at Home Farm, Vale Farm and Springwood suggested that some farm-provided amenities were of declining interest to workers. The farmers at all three farms described how earlier cohorts of seasonal workers regularly played table tennis, football and snooker using equipment provided by the farms. Their use of this equipment had however declined to the extent that some of it remained untouched all summer. Workers had also regularly visited places of interest on their rest days, sometimes travelling considerable distances to see historic, cultural or natural sites. Although a handful of workers still occasionally did this, it was clear that their inclination had waned, but the reasons why were unclear.

Workers' access to transport, numbers of rest days and other enablers had not significantly changed on any of the farms, certainly not enough to explain such a significant shift in behaviour. And at all three farms farmers had concluded that many workers were simply less interested, preferring instead to engage in more solitary or passive activities, such as watching films, browsing the internet on their phones or using social media to contact friends and family at home.

This represents a general rather than an absolute change and is likely to be informed by a number of different factors, including perhaps, seasonal workers' increasing age (ParliamentaryLive.TV, 2018). It does however, draw attention to the importance of reliable internet connections and mobile phone reception which, even on farms not especially remote is often inadequate and slow (Rural England, 2018). Being only temporarily resident on a farm means that workers are not at liberty to address digital issues in any permanent or satisfactory way. If at home or permanently settled in the UK they might for example get a different contract, or complain to their provider, but on farms they are totally reliant on farmers acting in their interests.

Workers often depend on access through smart phones at their own expense, navigating the slow and unreliable service of rural areas. Compared to their urban counterparts, rural workers may have limited access to resources such as pay phones, cheap phone cards and free internet access in libraries and cafes. Getting top-up credit for mobile phones is difficult for workers

who cannot autonomously access shops or post-offices or get online. Free or subsidised internet access for seasonal workers is not yet widespread, but is probably one of the most attractive perks a farmer could offer, especially since it is now taken for granted in many public places. Some of these issues have emerged only relatively recently as digital access has become normalised in ways that mean workers' expectations and requirements have changed.

As well as providing entertainment and distraction, digital connectivity meets workers' psychological need for connectivity in a literal as well as a figurative sense with their home communities. Migrating for work demands more of people than just a physical relocation (Åhlberg, 2019), and it is important for workers to manage their separation from home, minimising the loss and opportunities that their absence risks. For workers I spoke to, reliable virtual contact with small children and partners or spouses left at home had practical as well as psychological importance. Digital connectivity can also add value to workers' earnings. Scope to electronically transfer money, search for and book travel tickets and secure work elsewhere represents considerable savings. This is because without digital access workers would have to temporarily leave the farm, forfeiting work and earnings and incurring costs to travel to a bank, library or travel agent, for example, to complete the same process. Internet access also enabled workers to arrange for goods purchased at car boot sales and charity shops to be couriered home. This was a cheaper and more convenient option than paying for and carrying excess baggage on flights back to their home countries. Getting goods couriered also reduced the amount of 'stuff' stored in workers' caravans; they could have goods packed up and collected by couriers within hours of purchasing it, making the entire process less onerous.

Farms have scope to exceed mandatory standards of accommodation and amenity by providing hospitable accommodation, demonstrating welcome and respect. The guidelines for farmers accommodating workers on site (Fresh Produce Consortium, 2018) show that beyond meeting health, safety and sanitation requirements farmers have little obligation to meet workers' broader needs and requirements. For example, they must provide beds and mattresses of specified dimensions and quality but are not obliged to provide bedding or bed linen. For UK based workers with access to a car this is perhaps not a great hardship; arriving at a farm with these bulky, heavy items may be tiresome but feasible. But workers coming temporarily from abroad are likely to be significantly inconvenienced, because they are forced to either buy those items on arrival or bring them from home. This could mean that they arrive with luggage disproportionately comprised of bedding and other household items. Workers may try to lessen this burden by arriving with only a sleeping bag instead of the sort of

bedding more often associated with permanent, adult sleeping arrangements. But in my own experience, sleeping bags are not conducive to high quality sleep, even in otherwise satisfactory circumstances.

Mia, at Home Farm described equipping her farm's caravans before workers' arrival each spring with bedding, bed linen, crockery and kitchenware, including bin liners and cleaning materials. Not having to bring these things with them allowed workers to pack more clothes, making it more likely that they would have items suitable for all weather eventualities and enough to regularly launder and dry their soiled clothes. I assumed that this sort of provision by farms was routine, but it appeared not. Home Farm's and Springwood's workers told me that they had had to buy or bring such things on other farms or 'rent' items including mugs, cutlery and plates, forfeiting deposits for items lost or damaged. That workers even thought to mention this to me suggested that they felt offended and belittled by the practice. As with the use of numbers, not names, getting workers to shoulder the cost of these small things demonstrated farms' focus on saving money, even if this meant having an unhappy workforce, and that workers were 'labour', rather than people. Almost inevitably, those farms which had shabby, fully-occupied accommodation with limited amenities, and where workers had to pay a deposit for their plate and mug, seemed to be those same farms on which 'bad' management and production practices occurred. This suggests that cost-cutting mentalities tended to permeate all areas of workers' lives there.

The provision of bedding and household items *per se* did not necessarily hold value for workers, although they undoubtedly appreciated the effort it saved them. However, Home Farm's workers valued it as a gesture of hospitality and goodwill which encouraged them to feel that they were 'the same as' Mia and Russell. Perhaps, costs and the practicalities aside, this goes some way towards explaining why some farms are resistant to the idea of making this sort of effort. Perhaps they are fearful about workers getting fanciful ideas about being equal which could flatten the farm's hierarchies, so that those who feel they have, or should have power and control over workers sense that it has been reduced (Benson, 2008).

 Mia admitted that she also made workers' beds up for them in readiness for their arrival and, if it was a cold day, turned the heating on, so that workers' caravans felt warm and welcoming when they arrived. This sort of hospitable behaviour may be more feasible on small farms with few workers and caravans, especially where staff turnover is low, and may be further evidence of the person-centric approach which reinforce workers' preference for small farms.

Such actions are small gestures of kindness and hospitality which require employers to invest a bit of time and small amounts of money. They also require trust that workers will not abuse the gesture or damage or steal items. Yet it is possible that such expenditure is recouped in terms of social capital. What I saw and was told by Mia at Home farm suggested that workers were consistently respectful of their accommodation and its contents and caused little or no damage or loss.

It is undeniable however, that 'nice' accommodation and amenities, however benignly intended, can be used to exert control over workers (Benson, 2012). This can include trying to keep the farm as efficient as possible by creating environments in which workers are more likely to self-regulate their behaviour, and be vigilant about their own health, safety and hygiene (Benson, 2008). Workers made no reference to this, perhaps because our language barriers prevented discussion of such intangible ideas, or perhaps because the influence that their 'nice' accommodation had upon them was too subtle to readily pinpoint and articulate to me. Regardless, most were undoubtedly mindful of the benefits of 'nice' accommodation and took care of it, so that as I mentioned previously, the caravans I went into were far cleaner and tidier than I thought possible for people doing materially dirty work.

Existing literature about seasonal workers' access to amenities often refers to bathrooms, handwashing facilities and toilets. These references typically relate to sanitation and hygiene (Keim-Malpass *et al.*, 2015), or to ways of controlling and exploiting workers (Scott *et al.*, 2012; Holmes, 2013), by dictating when they can access them. The caravans provided for workers at Home Farm and Springwood contained bathrooms and kitchens, an arrangement preferred by the workers that I spoke to about it. Many farms, especially those with large seasonal workforces provide such facilities in separate buildings shared between several caravans. This is a cheaper option for farms than providing those same facilities within each caravan, but the arrangement was disliked by every worker who referred to it in my own research.

There is an obvious practical inconvenience in leaving a caravan to wash, taking personal items along and being unable to leave them in the bathroom area. People may have concerns about such items being inadvertently or deliberately used by someone else or contaminated by other people's 'dirt' (Longhurst, 2001). None of the workers I spoke to described this explicitly but the idea of using shared bathrooms appeared to be an unpleasant if not offensive proposition. Several made expressions of disgust and shuddered theatrically whilst offering their opinions about communal shower blocks. Even whilst sharing with liked and trusted co-workers, workers value bathroom and toilet areas which feel safe, uncontaminated by others

and where no-one will intrude. The dirty conditions of seasonal farm work make access to decent bath or shower facilities particularly important for workers' physical health, comfort and self-esteem. That they are handling food all day means that this is also a food-hygiene issue. Inadequate bathing and laundry facilities can contribute to illness, exacerbate established conditions and impede recovery (Holmes, 2013; Civita, 2018). Workers explained to me that too many people in a caravan or having to go to another building to bath or shower was time-consuming and made self-care more onerous. As a result, their free time for rest and sleep, or for socialising including via phones and the internet with friends and family in their home country was reduced.

It is an uncomfortable truth that the three Ds work; dirty, demeaning and difficult (Aronowitz *et al.*, 2010) done by seasonal workers worldwide enables others in society to eat better for less cost (Medland, 2017; Gore, 2019). The terms and conditions of their work circumstances make healthier food choices cheaper for the rest of society, but harder for workers to eat healthily themselves. In addition to the implications for their nutritional needs, food's social value is lost when preparation and eating is reduced to a purely functional activity. Some workers I spoke to had previously worked on farms where, as with bathroom and shower facilities, kitchens were in communal buildings shared by the occupants of two or more caravans. This could mean waiting to use ovens and sinks and making do with rudimentary or dirty equipment and utensils in order to still have time to phone home and do laundry and shopping before going to bed. Preparing and eating meals can become a chore in these circumstances, with workers more inclined to eat low grade, pre-prepared foodstuffs.

The provision of kitchens inside the caravans at Springwood and Home Farm, adequately equipped and of sufficient capacity for the caravan's occupants enabled workers to cook and eat more healthily, often with or alongside other workers in ways important for social cohesion and networking. Some took turns to host co-workers for food and drink, and at Springwood workers had a ritual of weekend barbecues. Workers at Home Farm had access to a freezer at no cost, which may have helped them save money by buying food during their once a week supermarket visit, instead of relying on the small shops that were within cycling distance. As an additional bonus, the buildings which housed the freezer and washing machines at Home Farm had spare electric plug sockets, and workers used these to charge their mobile phones and laptop computers at no cost to themselves, which helped them to reduce their caravan's electricity bills.

Farms situated more than one mile from a launderette are advised to provide a laundry service or on-site laundry facilities, but some sinks and running hot water are deemed sufficient to

meet this requirement (Fresh Produce Consortium, 2018). Some of Home Farm's workers told me that they incurred considerable costs whilst working on other farms, washing and drying their clothes over the course of the season, because they had to pay to use the farm's coin-operated washing machines and clothes driers. From my perspective as an outsider, this seemed like a self-defeating strategy for farms to adopt. Seasonal workers are exposed to all weathers, and their clothes are regularly contaminated by soil, vegetation and squashed fruit. The fact that they are working with food stuffs, including some which are typically eaten uncooked, surely makes it paramount for public health and food hygiene reasons alone that they are able to properly, and regularly, launder and dry their clothes.

Clean clothes are also important for workers' own health, especially when they are working on crops treated with agri-chemicals (Civita, 2018). Workers' close and day-long contact with the foliage of crops like strawberries and raspberries means that their clothes and skin are unavoidably contaminated with what are often hazardous products[29]. Interestingly, none of the workers that I spoke to expressed concern about this, despite it being a recognised health threat for seasonal workers (Basok, 2002; Holmes, 2013; Gray, 2014), nor did they say that this made washing their clothes important. They were, however, concerned about having enough clean, dry clothes to be able to work comfortably, and to maintain their self-esteem. As a percentage of the farm's overall running costs, providing these machines for free was probably quite insignificant, yet were important for workers, who evaluated the farm more highly as a result.

Summary

My research findings suggest that the process of becoming, and the material reality of being a seasonal farm worker could affect someone's wellbeing considerably. It is clear that this was heavily influenced by pressure from food-supply chains, but farmers could help to mitigate the impact upon workers, including through the proper provision of equipment and carefully considered working practices. Technology intended to make the work easier could make the work harder by raising expectations about what workers could achieve, and farmers needed to be sensitive to this.

Decent accommodation was highly indicative of the respect and value placed upon workers, making an early impression upon newly arriving workers. Decent accommodation was

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[29] On average, crops like non-organic strawberries are treated annually with more than 20 agri-chemicals (Garthwaite *et al.*, 2016).

essential for workers' rest and recuperation and to facilitate positive social relationships between workers.

The long hours and rurality of seasonal farm work restricted workers to the farm, so that digital access and the means with which to leave the farm autonomously became more important.

This Chapter considered the material conditions of seasonal workers' on-farm experiences, and how these affect their wellbeing. These included the means by which they were recruited to a farm, including through intermediaries, or as a returnee. Although each recruitment route had its merits, workers' rights were reduced by their legal status as casual workers. Farmers' desperation for labour and intermediaries' vested business interests in recruiting workers may mean that workers have been and may continue to be given false accounts of farm work and what it offers. 'New' workers naïve to such practices appeared to be more likely to be recruited to 'bad' farms than those who already had some experience, or who had been advised by other, experienced workers about what to avoid.

A farm's culture significantly affected its treatment of workers, including its management of 'surplus' workers. In simple terms, the worse a farm was, according to workers' evaluations, the higher the workforce turnover was likely to be. This made the farm less desirable as a workplace destination. Farms subjectively evaluated as 'good' by workers appeared to be more likely to consider their needs, including by seeking stop-gap or follow on work on other farms fitting workers' good farm criteria, once their own farm no longer required their labour. For this reason, 'good' farms continued to protect workers, even after they had moved on.

Farms' efficiency requirements encouraged them to operate in ways not always conducive to workers' wellbeing. This included by intensifying the work and expecting more of workers in terms of the quality and high quantities of what they harvested. Various aids introduced to try to reduce labour costs risked increasing the effect of intensification, as could the use of piece rate work.

The temporariness of workers' employment on farms, farms' rural location and farmers' motivations to reduce costs could mean that the accommodation and amenities available to workers did not always meet their wellbeing needs. Small gestures by farmers, including their efforts to show hospitality and consideration towards workers in their provision of accommodation and amenities raised workers' estimation of the farm.

Conclusion

Introduction

This research set out to explore how on-farm factors might affect seasonal workers' wellbeing, and the ways in which their cumulative effects may influence workers' decisions to return to the farm. Within this broad aim I wanted to understand the on-farm factors and practices which workers considered relevant to their wellbeing, what farmers did to facilitate workers' wellbeing, and the ways that such things informed workers' decisions about return.

The decision to carry out this research was supported by the argument that seasonal workers' on-farm wellbeing is poorly understood, and that UK farmers are increasingly struggling to secure enough seasonal workers to pick and pack labour-intensive crops. As well as the moral imperative to support seasonal workers' wellbeing, there are practical benefits in helping farming employers identify ways of making their work more decent, so that workers feel encouraged to return for further episodes of work.

The UK's long-standing labour shortages worsened after the UK voted in 2016 to end its EU membership. Brexit, as the process of leaving the EU has become known, has created a unique situation in which the UK has limited its own access to workers from Eastern European countries. These workers had become established in recent years as the UK's biggest and most reliable source of labour. Labour shortages bring implications for the UK's production of fresh fruits and vegetables and its scope to increase output in line with rising demand. This is because fresh fruits and vegetables are highly labour-intensive, and there is currently no affordable and efficient technology with which human workers might be replaced.

Seasonal farm workers have been extensively researched in the past, but this research has tended to focus primarily on workers from Central and South American countries crossing United States' borders to work there or in Canada. In comparison, equivalent communities of workers in Europe have received little research attention. As well as the deficits relating to workers' geographical location, other gaps in the research evidence also persist. These include that because of imperatives to maintain food security, and because of the transience and 'invisibility' of seasonal workers, the interests and priorities of farming employers have been afforded more attention than those of workers. For this reason, workers' subjective accounts of their seasonal work, especially in relation to their wellbeing, are still poorly understood. There are also knowledge gaps about the experiences of the most transient seasonal workers. Existing research tends to focus on workers who are living a life of permanent or semi-

permanent absence from their home-countries, and on workers who are enduring exploitation and abuse at its most extreme. The workers who are the focus of my own research are, in contrast, highly transient and tend to experience on-farm living and working conditions which are impoverished but lawful. These are often the unintentional outcomes of a supply chain, in which the most powerful stakeholders exert downward pressure on their suppliers, pushing disproportionate shares of the risk and production costs onto less powerful stakeholders.

This research study's findings contribute to existing understandings of wellbeing by showing that a person's subjective account of their lived experiences, including day to day behaviours and interactions provide valuable evidence about their wellbeing. It suggests that the use of ethnographic methods, including participant observation, may facilitate nuanced and accurate evaluations of wellbeing to be made which compare favourably to those obtained by using formal wellbeing frameworks or evaluation tools.

The following section provides an overview of my research findings, including my central claim; recommendations which might inform farm practices to support workers' wellbeing, and suggestions for future research which would develop and build upon the findings of this thesis. This Chapter concludes with a short summary statement.

Central Claim

My research findings show that those farming employers and farms which best supported workers' wellbeing treated workers as people first and labour second. There is naturally a tension here, because farmers need workers' labour, and that need remains the primary objective for having workers on their farms. However, farms who find ways to balance these sometimes-competing priorities appear better equipped to meet workers' expectations about being treated with respect and dignity. These farms may be more likely to organise their work and provide accommodation and amenities with a 'people first' principle in mind.

What supported or detracted from workers' on-farm wellbeing was not attributable to one or a few things, but was an aggregation of many, interacting factors. At some point, these caused an individual to feel satisfied or dissatisfied with their workplace. This could, for example, be a combination of insidious inter-worker conflicts, having too much or too little work, or an inconsistency in the volumes of work available, or insufficient living space for workers to find privacy. All of these might be more tolerable in isolation, but unbearable in combination.

There is no prescriptive either/or approach to tackling workers' on-farm wellbeing. This is because every farm meets its workers' wellbeing requirements in some respects but not others, or meets them sometimes but not always, or meets the needs of some workers, but not others. This means that the evidence from one farm about what is 'good' or preferred by workers may appear to be contradicted by evidence from another. Regardless, the empirical evidence suggests that there are commonalities. These are often aligned with concepts of decent work (ILO, 2013), and contribute to a farm's overall culture becoming person-centric. It is to farms like this that workers indicated they would prefer to return for subsequent periods of work. Given the current and anticipated future labour shortages and the lack of affordable technology with which to replace human workers, this is a key issue.

Within this central claim I offer the following contributions.

The first contribution of my research is that farms supportive of workers' wellbeing are preferred as return destinations. Importantly, wellbeing seemed to arise primarily from satisfaction with the psychosocial and collective aspects of a farm, rather than from its material provision, or at individual scale. For this reason, even workers who were highly motivated to earn as much money as possible spoke about farms being 'good' in terms other than its wages, these often being secondary to other wellbeing components. This finding suggests that at least some of the workers may have made a trade-off, choosing either a farm where more money could be earned, or a farm with a workplace culture more conducive to wellbeing. This also suggests that when farms offered comparable remuneration, a choice would probably be made on the basis of factors described below.

By explicitly inviting workers to return for subsequent periods of work on their farm, farmers indicated that they valued those particular workers for more than just what they offered as a unit of labour. Such invitations could themselves bring social benefits, helping to create a cycle of social investment and loyalty from both parties. The effect of this may have encouraged farmers to 'look after' that worker and appears to have encouraged workers to return.

This research's second contribution is that farmers do have scope to support workers' on-farm wellbeing through a number of low-cost and simple measures. This is despite the extent to which on-farm practices are shaped and influenced by outside forces, and the tight margins that farms typically operate within. Fundamental to this is that farmers adopt a person-centric approach to the employment of their seasonal workers. Such an approach creates a workplace culture and encourages workplace practices conducive to workers' wellbeing. However, this

requires that the farmer(s) habitually consider workers' needs, and that they behave in ways which demonstrate workers' importance and centrality to the farm's business.

Person-centric farms seem to share some characteristics. The most fundamental of these is that the people who dictate what happens on the farm, such as the farming employer(s) or farm manager(s), have management skills. But also, and perhaps more importantly, they have leadership skills. These people determine the culture and operational style of the farm. Line management of workers, and the frequency and quality of interaction and dialogue between workers and their employers has great significance for workers' wellbeing. This includes what farming employers negotiate with their workers on a day to day basis, their willingness to intervene to manage conflict, resolve complaints and practical problems, the level of scrutiny they subject workers to, and whether this *feels* like supervision or surveillance. Farmers maintaining a permanent presence on their farm made it more person-centric and more supportive of workers' wellbeing. Person-centric farms ensured that someone was always available, regardless of the time of day, for workers who required assistance or help. This was usually of a practical nature but could equally be psychological and could be relied upon by workers. Where someone ostensibly performed this function but could never be found by workers, or promised to act but failed to do so, workers quickly realised that their employer had little interest in them as people, only as labour. Such availability probably required that the farmer or nominated contact person lives on site. The way farm businesses operate means that this is more often the case on small farms, and it is easy to see how workers' narratives about big is bad, small is good began to form.

Relatedly, there was a pattern to which workers referred to their employers or line managers on big farms using words such as he, boss or big boss, yet consistently referred to people in similar roles on small farms using their given names. This indicated a familiarity and confidence that appeared absent from their big farm experiences, but also implied an absence of social interaction and a depersonalisation mirroring that which workers themselves felt subjected to.

This brings us to the topic of names, numbers and commodification, a theme which arose repeatedly in my conversations with workers and which when referred to and expanded upon by workers was almost always accompanied by emotional expressions of resentment, sadness or anger. Workers' accounts of being either a name or a number suggested that they exclusively associated them with small or big farms respectively. That is, they were always referred to by name on small farms (and therefore as a *person,* the farmer knowing something of their personal and off-farm life and consequently capable of nurturing social connections

with them), but as numbers on big farms. This did not necessarily mean that their name was unknown or never used on big farms, but that the scale of the farm's operation prevented their employers from remembering their names and knowing them as individuals. This, and the relentless sense of urgency and processes of intensification with which workers had to do their work on big farms reduced them to units of human labour, commodities or an anonymous one of many. Processes of commodification have been previously recognised and described in relation to seasonal workers (Benson, 2008; Scott *et al.*, 2012; Vogt, 2013), but it appears that this has not been explicitly associated with workers' wellbeing, nor has it been noted that this has become a criteria by which workers choose which farms to return to.

A central characteristic of person-centred farms is that their accommodation and amenities exceed what is legally and mandatorily required to meet workers' wellbeing needs. For example, kitchen and dining facilities which enabled workers to prepare proper meals and which facilitated social mealtimes were conducive to workers' on-farm comfort. But in addition to making life materially easier, 'good' facilities indicated the respect for and value placed upon workers. Sometimes, these things helped to make a positive impression upon workers just arriving on farms, such as when they were shown to warm accommodation with beds already made up. Small gestures like these are relatively cheap to implement but demonstrate hospitality and welcome in a way that being directed to functional and clean but cold accommodation with unmade beds will not. In other words, wellbeing may be supported by what workers perceive to be farmers' intentions behind provision of 'good', well-considered accommodation, rather than solely on account of its material quality and standard.

Thirdly, my research found that workers' wellbeing was greatly enhanced by opportunities for physical and psychological relief from their day to day routine. This ranged from having choices about how to get the day's work done, to being provided with the physical means of getting off the farm. Respite and reprieve seemed especially important for seasonal workers living on site and who were subjected to processes of intensification. Technology intended to make the work easier may have raised expectations about what workers could achieve, and farmers sensitive to this, including by providing workers with at least occasional relief from tedious or intensive tasks, may be more able to support their workers' wellbeing.

Task variety and being able to exercise some control over how they are done also provided respite. This appeared to be more likely on farms where workers were known by name and as individuals, perhaps because the degree to which social investment occurred amongst people known to one another made them more likely to exploit, in positive ways, one another's individuality. Workers known by their employers to be good at certain tasks were afforded

more control over and responsibility for organising and supervising other workers engaged in those same tasks for example. The familiarity and trust that this generated was likely also to mean that workers were left to get on with their work with greater autonomy. This resulted in workers being supervised whilst working, instead of being kept under surveillance. It may have increased the likelihood of their opinions about how things should be done on the farm being respectfully considered, and that their efforts and achievements were noticed and applauded. This person-centric approach may, within the constraints of the industry, help create working environments in which workers feel more satisfied, because their work feels more 'good', in the terms outlined by Taylor, M, (2017b). Workers may be more likely to return to farms where they know they will have opportunities for such respite and reprieve, and where they can capitalise upon their existing status as a returnee. Equally, the labour of having to re-negotiate these things up-front may dissuade them from choosing to go to a 'new' farm instead.

Workers' accommodation could also preclude or provide respite and reprieve from the farm. The tensions that can arise within teams of seasonal workers makes escape and respite important for a harmonious season of work, but overcrowded accommodation can leave workers with little privacy and nowhere that they can rest away from their co-workers. Accommodation sufficiently under-occupied for workers to have privacy and to get sufficient rest and recuperation seemed more conducive to positive social relations between workers, and to more a more productive team of workers.

Since they are recruited on zero-hours contracts, workers can legitimately refuse work. But this right can be confounded by their constant on-farm presence, making refusal more difficult (Griesbach, 2018), as does the boredom and frustration of being on a 'jungle' farm (see section 5.2.1) with limited amenities. Improved amenities, including a means of getting away from the farm to do other activities autonomously, and without having to meet additional costs for transport could be helpful in avoiding extra work when their preference or better judgement is to refuse it.

The rurality and long hours associated with seasonal farm work could mean that workers were largely confined to their employing farm for the duration of their employment there. Good digital access supports their transnational wellbeing. This includes by enabling regular contact with their families and home communities, and making domestic and administrative arrangements such as booking trains, flights and couriers. The unreliability of digital services in many rural areas may pose a problem for farmers whose workers require this resource.

The fourth contribution of my research concerns workers' physical and mental health. These are important components of wellbeing (De Neve *et al.*, 2013; Department of Health, 2014) which can be greatly affected by processes of migration (Loue, 2009; Madden *et al.*, 2017), and by work which is decent, or otherwise (Taylor, M, 2017b). As part of their complex and often unpredictable lives, some seasonal workers arrived with pre-existing conditions which either flared up or become harder to manage once on farms. Seasonal farm work, including on-farm living conditions could exacerbate health conditions, but in addition, workers were often unwilling, or unable, because of psychosocial and/or material reasons, to take time off in order to access healthcare support. This included because they cannot afford to lose earnings, or because they were anxious about how they might be evaluated by their co-workers and employer. Some also felt that they cannot justify paying UK healthcare costs or had no physical means of autonomously accessing it.

My research finds that securing work on a 'good' farm benefits workers' wellbeing whilst they remain on that farm, but it may also have been a protective factor in their future work. This is because 'good' farmers may be more committed to helping 'surplus' workers find suitable follow-on employment on another farm with a person-centric culture. Working on one 'good' farm appeared to also protect workers by informing their expectations about what seasonal farm work ought to be like and what they would be prepared to tolerate. It is illustrative that the workers who contributed to my research, whilst accepting the tediousness and discomfort of their work and the inevitability of its precarity, had refused to tolerate exploitative or indifferent treatment by previous farming employers. For this reason, those with experience of working on 'bad' farms had elected to find work on other farms, where workplace practices and workplace cultures were more conducive to their wellbeing. For related reasons, workers who had secured work on what they evaluated as a 'good' farm made efforts to establish themselves there as returnees, including by attempting to meet farmers' expectations of 'good workers.'

Workers' willingness to exercise choice and autonomy by rejecting 'bad' farms and favouring other, 'good' farms may increase as the UK's agricultural labour shortage worsens. However, the positive effect of this will probably be countered by the effects of Brexit, which are discouraging workers' return, and by the proposed post-Brexit arrangements for temporary workers. These are likely to take the form of a work-permit scheme making it harder for workers to preferentially select farms. Whilst the proportion of the UK's seasonal farm work labour force coming from Eastern Europe may continue falling until and after Brexit, labour shortfalls will be at least partially addressed by temporary workers coming from non-EU

countries. Their on-farm wellbeing should be of no less concern than that of the current seasonal workforce, and this means that the findings of this research may continue to have relevance for those farming employers who seek to improve their workers' experiences.

Recommendations

First, I wish to restate my claim that, despite the extent to which on-farm practices are shaped and constrained by outside forces, farmers do have scope to implement changes which will benefit workers' on-farm wellbeing. Many of these are simple and relatively low-cost. Making some of these changes may encourage workers to return to that farm for subsequent seasons of work.

Preliminary findings from my research have already contributed to the 2018 Alston report (Alston, 2018), and to an Open Letter calling for improved recognition of food and farm workers and their labour conditions (Open Letter, 2019). But it is important to explore ways of disseminating the research findings more widely within the food and farming community. This is where my contact with the Association of Labour Providers may prove especially valuable, since they have already invited me to begin disseminating my findings to their membership through their members' newsletters. Based on my research claim and findings, I will suggest that the following may help to inform farms' practices, making them more supportive of workers' wellbeing.

My findings suggest that nurturing a more person-centric culture provides wellbeing benefits for seasonal workers on farms. Part of this cultural shift requires that farms consciously set out to think of workers as people, not as labour. This requires that what farms provide for workers routinely must expressly seek to exceed mandatory and legal stipulation. This cannot be a tick list approach; it requires that everyone with responsibility for and influence over a farm's seasonal workers commits to seeking the opinions, preferences and expertise of those at the 'coal face', or rather the 'red wall[30]' of seasonal work. Workers' preferences will vary according to any number of criteria, and it is therefore important to canvas their opinions about what works and what needs to be improved, and to ringfence time in which this is regularly revisited. I am not suggesting a wholesale shift to things being done in accordance with workers' preferences, simply that workers are properly consulted about how best to get tasks done, about how accommodation can be improved and how dialogue between different hierarchies of workers on the farm might be improved. Such consultation is likely to throw up

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[30] The 'Red Wall' (Figure 9) is how Mia at Home Farm describes overwhelming volumes of ripe fruit which must be harvested within a short space of time to avoid them being wasted. See page 141.

findings similar to those found by my own research, and farms can then decide which ones can realistically be implemented for the greatest effect. This might include, for example, that workers are provided with free laundry facilities and free internet connection, and that they are not expected to provide (or pay for) basic domestic essentials, such as bedding and kitchen ware.

Running a farm efficiently requires multiple skills which may have been honed over many years of repeated practice. These might include financial and business acumen, crop, soil and asset management and managing and repairing machinery and equipment. But skills in staff leadership and management may be overlooked. These are skills for which years-long courses of training exist in other industries. Some farmers may receive no training and have no access to trusted advice and support about how to manage and resolve staff-related issues. This may be a source of stress for farmers but also prevent their farms from operating as efficiently as they could, including because their workers' wellbeing remains compromised. It therefore seems sensible to explore the provision of training and support for students of agriculture and related subjects, as well as for people already running farm businesses which require seasonal workers. This might usefully include informal forums in which farming employers can exchange ideas and solutions for best practice in relation to leadership and management, so that farmers' support is closely tailored to their sector's needs.

It would be highly beneficial for workers' wellbeing for them to have significantly greater opportunity for respite and relief. These include the practical means with which workers can 'escape' the farm, preferably without recourse to farmers for transport. But psychological escape is also important, including being able to exercise autonomy about *how* to do various tasks, which tasks to do and whether to choose piece rate or hourly rate work. Highly specialised farms which concentrate on growing only one or two crops may have more difficulty facilitating this than farms which have a mix of crops, and consequently have a greater range of tasks and routines.

My research findings suggest that workers would greatly benefit from free, or at least very heavily subsided dental treatment whilst on farms. Some farms are already trialling incentives including free accommodation or paid-for travel to the farm to boost worker recruitment (AHDB, 2019e), and these have obvious financial benefits for workers. But as a goodwill gesture which also represents a cost-saving, free or heavily subsidised dental care would reduce workers' physical suffering and allow them to work at full capacity. This might help to reduce their anxieties about forfeiting work to attend appointments. What workers might save

in costs and what they gain in health and comfort would also positively affect their wellbeing, even once they had left the farm to return home.

Suggestions for future research

This study did not have capacity to explore the success or futility of seasonal workers' efforts to improve their life quality by doing UK farm work. Whether it actually does, or whether it simply resolves some wellbeing issues whilst creating others, including eroding workers' sense of place and belonging in their home country, is open to speculation. It would be informative to build on the findings of this thesis by exploring this question in depth.

Repeated episodes of seasonal farm work and the associated prolonged transience may undermine wellbeing, either by presenting new wellbeing challenges or by compounding the ones experienced in single episodes of transient farm working. To understand how or if workers' wellbeing deteriorates over time, or whether it improves because of acquired social capital in host countries, a longitudinal study of workers' life-course wellbeing would be of interest and help further the findings of this thesis. The findings of such a research study might be especially valuable for informing the practices of farming employers keen to recruit and retain workers so that they are willing to return to their farms year after year,

Working on a 'good' farm appears to protect workers against subsequent employment on 'bad', or at least, less 'good' farms. The transient and precarious nature of most seasonal farm work may make this particularly significant in wellbeing terms. For this reason, the processes and decision making which secure workers' subsequent employment on 'good' farms require investigation. Trends towards precarious employment across industrialised economies, including gig and zero hours work (Taylor, Matthew, 2017b; Bloodworth, 2018) could mean that such a research study might, in addition, contribute to the wellbeing literature more broadly.

As suggested in section 6.2.2, the turnover of workers may be sometimes driven by farming employers' attempts to avoid enrolling them onto pension schemes. However, the struggle to recruit and retain workers may mean that fewer farmers take this approach, and it would be informative to revisit this issue to assess if worsening labour shortages cause employers to rethink this strategy. Perhaps pension enrolment will seem a less onerous and time-consuming task than recruiting and retaining 'good' workers.

The UK's current population of seasonal farm workers are likely to be replaced partially or completely by workers of other nationalities post-Brexit. This may lead to changes in the discourse about 'good' workers. Tracing this and exploring the ways in which it changes and for what reasons might not advantage workers themselves but would offer insights into farmers' evaluations of workforces as they evolve because of political and social changes created by Brexit.

Concluding Statement

Seasonal farm work can be unavoidably dull, dirty and laborious, but workers were less discouraged by this than by their sense of becoming 'only' labour, instead of being seen as people. The wages offered by farms are an important headline attraction for workers looking for work. But it is evident that farms' other factors make bigger differences to workers' on-farm wellbeing, to the extent that workers sometimes choose to return to one farm despite being able to get higher wages at another.

The most important of these is a farm's person-centric culture. Almost everything that is bad or good about a farm is determined by the person(s) in authority. They set the tone. Workers appeared to be more tolerant of 'worse' material conditions on farms where they evaluated their employer as approachable, honest, just and fair-minded. Conversely, their tolerance for the work's material conditions was much reduced when they evaluated their employer as unfair, unknown and/or unapproachable.

Material things which appeared significant to workers' wellbeing are often relatively cheap and easy solutions to implement. These included services like free laundry facilities, items such as bigger beds, and work-place processes including a willingness to open dialogue with workers and negotiate with them. But some other improvements such as less densely occupied and/or more permanent accommodation would require long-term investment and planning, and the cooperation and consent of local planning regulations. Tight profit margins, market volatilities and Brexit related uncertainties, including around getting enough workers for their businesses to remain viable, may make farmers reluctant to make such investments.

This research has identified things important to workers' on-farm wellbeing and which inform their decisions about returning to a farm. But these findings must be considered in the context of transient workers' highly complex lives; a multitude of factors influence workers' employment choices, including where to go and for what duration. I understand, for example

that at least two workers who helped with my research did not return to their farms the following year, despite being adamant that they would, This was because of personal circumstances unrelated to their farm work. Workers sometimes also arrive with pre-existing conditions and their on-farm wellbeing will inevitably continue to be affected by their home-country circumstances. For these reasons it is not realistic or reasonable to assume that farmers will always have capacity to fully address workers' wellbeing.

My research findings cannot resolve all on-farm wellbeing challenges faced by seasonal workers, because so much of what happens on farms is externally determined and therefore not under farmers' or workers' influence. However, this research has provided insights about what farmers can be reasonably expected to do to make their farms a more supportive and satisfying environment to be in, and more attractive as a return destination.

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Appendix 1: Letter granting ethical approval

SAgE Faculty Ethics Committee
Ethics Application Pro-forma

Applicant Name:	Heidi Saxby
Applicant email:	h.saxby1@ncl.ac.uk
Academic Unit	School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
Supervisor email (if available)	Menelaos.Ghartzios@ncl.ac.uk
Category	Student Project (PGR)
Project Title:	Coping with transience: Investigating seasonal farm workers' sense of belonging and its effects on their work-related decisions
Start / End Date	28/09/2015 – 31/08/2018
MyProjects Reference (if available)	N/A
Reviewer 1	
Name:	Anil Namdeo (CEGS)
Date sent:	01/02/2017
Date comments received:	20/02/2017
Reviewer 2	
Name:	Dana Ofiteru (CEAM)
Date sent:	01/02/2017
Date comments received:	08/02/2017
Date comments provided to researcher:	24/02/2017
Date researcher confirmed amendments made:	N/A – no amendments required.
Faculty final approval date:	24/02/2017
Notes	**Working with human participants:** 20 participants recruited through the Association of Labour Providers to take part in a qualitative study involving questionnaires, observation, visual methods and interviews. **Use of personal data:** visual and text data will be collected with consent and stored on a secure Newcastle University server. The Committee considered that this was a well-considered study and that no amendment were required. Informal approval provided by email 24/02/2017.

1

Approved / ~~Not Approved~~ by the SAgE Faculty Ethics Committee

Signed by Professor Werner Hofer (Chair)

....

Date:

.....6/3/2017..............................

Appendix 2 Research Ethics Information Sheet and Consent Form

Newcastle University

Name of researcher: Heidi Saxby. **Contact**: h.saxby1@newcastle.ac.uk

Date:

Invitation: To take part in a research study about farm workers in UK horticulture

I am a PhD student from Newcastle University's School of Agriculture, and am inviting you to contribute to my research study about farm workers who may not settle permanently in the UK or who are employed on a seasonal basis.

What would I ask you to do, if you take part?

- I will ask you to tell me about your sense of belonging, whether this is affected by your working life and whether it influences your work-related decisions. Describing what it feels like to belong (or not) is difficult, especially when different languages are being spoken so to make things easier you will have access to an interpreter and will be invited to use a questionnaire, photographs, maps and other materials to help me understand your sense of belonging.
- I will record our group and individual discussions, so I am confident your opinions are accurately represented.
- In addition to these activities I will spend time on the farm talking to people whilst they work, and taking some photographs.

What will I do with your data?

- The results of the research will be used for my PhD thesis. Some results might be used for scientific journal publications or conference presentations once they are anonymised in accordance with your wishes (see below). The results will also be put in a research data base used by other researchers, which is a condition of the Economic and Social Research Council who funded the project. I will anonymise your data before it is put on the data base.

How will you be protected during this research?

- It is important that everyone helping with this research respects one another's contributions, and refrains from betraying the confidences/ disclosing identities of others.
- If you don't want other people to know you are part of this research, I will do what I can to make sure your identity is protected. You can decide to be anonymous for all, some or none of your data. You will have opportunities to discuss this and say (for example) that you don't want your name to be used in scientific publications or at conferences or that you don't want me to use photos in which your face can be seen. If you want to be anonymous you can choose a pseudonym.
- You can retrospectively amend or remove comments or photographs if you decide you don't want others to see them, as long as you do so before I begin writing up my research results.

What if you have concerns about the research?

- Please contact me if you have concerns. If you are not satisfied with my response you can contact my supervisors (details below) who are experienced in conducting research studies and supervising PhD students. You can contact them during or after the research study.
- You can leave the research at any time without having to give a reason.

What if you want more information before deciding whether to take part:

- You can contact me before agreeing to take part for an informal chat or to ask more questions at the following email address: h.saxby1@newcastle.ac.uk

Thanks for taking the time to read this; do get in contact if you would like to know more before deciding whether to take part.

Yours Sincerely

Heidi Saxby

Academic Supervisors:

- Dr Menelaos Gkartzios: Senior Lecturer in Rural Studies (menelaos.gkartzios@ncl.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0) 191 208 6615).
- Professor Alison Stenning: Professor of Social & Economic Geography (alison.stenning@ncl.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0) 191 208 8017).

Appendix 2 continued: Consent Form

Newcastle University

Name of researcher: Heidi Saxby

Contact: h.saxby1@newcastle.ac.uk

Consent form for participating in a research study about farm workers in UK horticulture

- I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet dated……………. I have had the opportunity to think about participating, ask questions and have these answered with assistance from an interpreter if requested **(……)**
- I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without any consequences. **(……)**
- I understand that I can choose how to have my research data anonymised and that everything will be anonymised before being put on a database for use by other researchers (….)
- I agree that the researcher can take photographs of me, and that I will decide what happens to those photos afterwards. (……)
- I understand and agree that information collected can be used for a thesis and for publications. (……)

Name of participant (print)…………………

Participant's signature:…………………….

Date:…………………………………….

Name and signature of interpreter (if used):………………………

Appendix 3 Examples of prompts and probes used in semi-structured interviews and unstructured conversation

1. Can you start by telling me a bit about how and why you came to the UK?
   a. Primary motivations (eg: money/ language learning/ social opportunities/long term career prospects/ get family away from….)
   b. Here alone/ with family/ friend?
   c. How long here/ how many seasons?
   d. Came straight from home country/elsewhere in UK? (elaborate)
   e. Recruitment route (agency/ friend/family network, return to same farm)
   f. Is there anything that you like/ dislike about being in the UK? (why? How does this affect you/your decisions?)
   g. What would you say to others who are thinking about moving to UK? (why/why not?)
   h. Do you think your goals/ ambitions/perspectives have changed since being here? (How/ in what ways?)
   i. How does this work fit into your year-long plan (eg: intentions to move to another farm to pick another crop when this one has finished?)

2. Can you tell me a bit about working here?
   a. Crops grown/ produced/ packed?
   b. Your role(s) is/are….?
   c. Alone or in shared accommodation? (with whom? Choice about this?)
   d. What do you like/ dislike about your work? (in what ways/ why?)
   e. Future plans? What are the influencing factors? (why/how?)

3. How does your current situation affect your sense of wellbeing/ quality of life/ happiness?
   a. Is/how is your sense of wellbeing affected by the physical locality you are in/ your work? Do you have any examples? (How/Why?)
   b. What do you deliberately do/ not do to improve your wellbeing?
   c. What is important to you in terms of your wellbeing/ what feels comfortable/ familiar/ comforting or reassuring?
      i. Are these things more important/ matter for different reasons than when you are at home? (in what ways/why?)

    d. Are there any things/ people that make you feel more like an outsider? (IE: what diminishes your sense of wellbeing?) (any examples/ how/ why?)

        i. Can you describe what it is about that place/ person/ group of people/ thing that makes you feel better/ worse in terms of your wellbeing (why/ how do you manage this?)

        ii. Do you have some examples of what might make these things/ situations/ people feel more comfortable/ welcoming/familiar?

4. Thinking about your employer and the food/farming industry, can you tell me about anything/anyone who increases/decreases your wellbeing?

    a. Activities?

    b. Languages spoken?

    c. Behaviour/ attitudes?

    d. Are you aware of anything that they deliberately do/avoid doing to help make you feel welcome/part of team/ valued (EG; Christmas/ Easter events, learning your language, organising work/accommodation so you are with people you like).

        i. What do you think your employer/ industry could/should do to help temporary workers and/or you feel as though you belong here/ are important?

5. Can you think of anything else that we haven't talked about that might help me understand your sense of belonging?

6. Return to question 2e: where do you see yourself/ what do you see yourself doing in a year/ the future?

    a. What sorts of things might affect that? (how/ why).

Appendix 4 Transcript extract

Date:	Transcript	Preliminary Codes
29.8.17	T: …if you do something wrong, one guy did this, I saw, there was something like this. You have 30 minutes to leave the farm, and really, you have 30 minutes, and they don't care if you don't have ticket, or money. It doesn't matter. There is gate and you must be [whistles and gestures to indicate offending worker must go through it]. We're not interested what you do. And they really did it. With people, if you did something what you can't do. HS: and when this happened, did other workers try to support that person who had to leave, or did they keep out of the way? T: I don't know. Probably sometimes yes, probably sometimes not. If somebody didn't have friends there, cos there was a lot like this. So if someone was there alone and people have reasons to don't like him, y'know, shit reasons, like nobody want to speak with him because he's worried that team leader don't like this person, then this person is alone. Everyone will look what this leader say, everyone do the same as this leader.	Intimidation/threat Precarity/vulnerability. Punishment/sanction. No back-up/place to go. Tied accommodation. Important to know farm's non-negotiable 'rules'/norms. Having no friends increases vulnerability. Team dynamics. Hierarchies. Tribalism. Coercion and control.

Preliminary codes	Codes	Theme
• Precarity • Zero hours • Agencies/ labour providers • Returneeism • Transience • 'It's a lottery' • 'Good' workers • People, or labour? • Honest description of farm/work on offer • Who you know/ nepotism • Criteria for selecting which workers leave • Being 'liked' or valued	• 'Flexible' workers	Recruitment and retainment
• Farmers' willingness to intervene/lead and manage • Conflict resolution • Being 'new' or a returnee • Workers' own personality • Racial/ ethnic/cultural differences • Language barriers • Size of seasonal workforce • Being able to escape • Tensions rise as season progresses	• Multiple divisions based on hierarchies and	Them and Us

1. **Examples of preliminary coding**