



Non-family Labour in the Swiss Agriculture: A Status Report and Future Prospects

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Although agricultural labour productivity has been increasing due to technical progress, agricultural holdings continue to be under price pressure. We argue that we need to critically engage with Swiss production conditions from the workers' perspectives. This paper focuses on the working conditions of non-family farm workers and their future prospects. In relating the changing production conditions to the idea of domestic fair trade, we investigate existing initiatives' potential to create better working conditions. We draw on interviews with migrant workers, farmers, and different representatives of agricultural labour in Switzerland. The results show that non-family labour is physically strenuous work with flexible working hours, low wage payment, and little recognition. While introducing a domestic fair trade label is a step in the right direction, it still only improves the working conditions for a fraction of all non-family workers. Therefore, it cannot be a substitute for stronger unions and government regulations.

Keywords: Non-family labour, Domestic fair trade, Agriculture, Switzerland

JEL classifications: J3, J5

1 Agriculture in Switzerland – *bunnies and happy cows?*

Agriculture in Switzerland faces drastic changes – for better or for worse. In light of the experiences of World War II, the Swiss government used to prioritize the supply of food and hence, fostered the agricultural sector. However, this practice changed in the 1990s. With the introduction of agrarian reforms, the focus shifted from food supply to competitiveness and a multi-functional agriculture (BLW 2009). At the same time, the agricultural markets are being liberalized. Protection measures from the state have gradually witnessed a transition from price-supporting mechanisms like subsidies to price-neutral direct payments. Those direct payments base on the idea of multi-functionality. They are, inter alia, supposed to compensate farmers for their environmental contributions (see e.g. Bosshard et al. 2011). As a consequence of this structural change, the number of farms is declining and farm size has increased to an average of 18ha (BFS 2013). Despite these developments, most farms (around 95 %) in Switzerland are still family farms¹ (SBV 2013). The majority of people working in agriculture are 'family members' (*familieneigene Ar-*

beitskräfte). However, non-family labour (*familienfremde Arbeitskräfte*) has been a significant factor in Switzerland since long before the beginning of industrial agriculture and it can be safely assumed that the dependence on non-family labour is not going to fade away in future. Even though productivity in agriculture has increased due to technology, agriculture is tied to land. Hence, work cannot be outsourced to low-wage countries. For this reason, as Terray (1999) argues, workers from low-wage countries are 'imported' – a phenomenon that he describes as 'domestic outsourcing'².

However, while the government increasingly takes ecological issues into account, the topic of non-family labour is strangely absent from all official publications on agriculture (see BFS 2013, EVD 2010). In the explanatory paper to the agricultural policy 2014-17, there is only one sentence concerning non-family labour (EVD 2011: 88, translated):

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¹ There is no official definition of a family farm in the Swiss context. However, the most important points that are generally attached to this concept are (a) that the farm is in possession of or leased in by a family or a member of the family; (b) that the family manages the farm collectively and does the larger part of the work and (c) that the family earns the major part of its income in agriculture (SBV 2013).

² From the expression 'délocalisation sur place' (strictly translated as "outsourcing at home"), original and translation from Terray (1999).

“The goal in the field of social issues [in agricultural policies] aims at improving the salary per worker by 1.6% per year. The goal is chosen in such a way, that it includes the non-salaried workers (family labour) as well as the salaried labour (non-family labour) in agriculture.”

Addressing the fact that only little attention has been paid to non-family labour, this paper intends to open a discussion in this matter. We argue that the working conditions of non-family employees are caught in an anachronistic conception of agricultural labour working on family farms, while at the same time an increasingly competitive market exacerbates labour conditions. In this article, we discuss the working conditions of non-family labour for migrant workers and critically explore approaches to tackle their difficult working conditions.

In order to grasp the scope of non-family labour in Switzerland we first present a short overview of the development of demand for non-family labour. Subsequently, we show empirical insights into the working conditions of agricultural labour for migrant workers³. In the third part, we discuss the idea of domestic⁴ fair trade as a solution to improve working conditions. We present the case of *Bio Suisse*, an organic label and pioneering organization in adopting fair production conditions as part of certification processes. Moreover, we include the perspective of farmers on working conditions of non-family labour. The conclusion summarizes the argument and points to future prospects.

2 From servants and ‘saisonniers’ to the free movement of workers

While medium sized farms used to have a farm hand (*Knecht*) and large sized farms employed several servants (*Dienstboten*), these relations changed after World War II. The local farm hands (*Knechte*) and maidservants (*Mägde*) disappeared within a few decades almost entirely and were replaced largely by migrant workers (Baumann and Moser 1999: 396). With the permission of the national authorities, the Swiss Farmer’s Union actively recruited workers from Italy, Spain, Portugal and former Yugoslavia – most of them as ‘saisonniers’. The ‘saisonnier status’ refers to a specific residence permit, which allowed the workers to stay and to work in Switzerland only for a limited number of months per year⁵. Since the post war economic boom was expected

to last only temporarily, this immigration policy aimed at a ‘rotation’ of workers to prevent immigrants from staying permanently (Hoffmann-Nowotny 1985). After being subject to growing criticism, the ‘saisonnier status’ was first abolished for Non-EU-citizens in 1991 and finally for EU-citizens in 2002 (Acherman and Efonayi-Mäder 2003). Instead, the bilateral agreement with the European Union on free movement of workers came into force in the same year. It ensures that EU/EFTA-citizens are allowed to move freely between the countries and to work in Switzerland for up to three months without a residence permit. In this case, the employers or seasonal workers only have to notify the authorities. The freedom of movement was extended to the EU-8 states in May 2011. Since then, citizens from these countries are granted equal access to the Swiss agricultural labour market.

Today, more than 160 000 people work in the agricultural sector in Switzerland, more than 30 000 of which are non-family labourers (BfS 2013). According to the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics, nearly half of the non-family labourers are migrant workers (BfS 2014). However, this number does not comprise all workers, as the census only registers the ones who were employed in an agricultural holding at the beginning of May. Therefore, the number of seasonal workers⁶ that have not been registered by the Federal Office of Statistics needs to be added. Remarkably, the number of seasonal workers has more than doubled in the last three years. While some 13 000 seasonal workers were registered for agricultural work in 2010, the number increased to almost 30 000 in 2012 and 2013 (BfM 2014). This means that there are around 60 000 non-family workers employed in the Swiss agriculture, which is almost one third of all people working in this sector. Moreover, it is assumed that an unknown number of undocumented migrants work in agriculture too (see Achermann and Efonayi-Mäder 2003; Alleva and Niklaus 2004; Efonayi-Mäder et al. 2010; Longchamps et al. 2005).

3 Methods

Our work draws on empirical data on non-family labour in the Swiss agriculture using qualitative research methods⁷. The material consists of interviews with eight migrant workers, two representatives of placement agencies of the Swiss Farmers’ Union (SFU), four representatives of three different labour unions, six farmers, and with one repre-

³ While it is common to use the term foreign labour (ausländische Arbeitskräfte) in Swiss politics, we use the term migrant workers in order to describe non-Swiss employees. It embraces all individuals working in Switzerland without being in possession of a Swiss citizenship, regardless of different residential permits.

⁴ Domestic here refers to the fact that production as well as consumption of good lie in the same country, as against „fair trade“ that generally implies improving working conditions of workers in the Global South through conscientious purchases.

⁵ The ‘saisonnier’ permit was created in 1934 when the Swiss government took measures to regulate the immigration of migrant workers. The Federal Council annually fixed a quota for labour permits according to the needs of economic branches. Important characteristics of the ‘saisonnier status’ were that the ‘saisonniers’ were neither allowed to change the canton they worked in nor to bring family members. Furthermore, the permit had to be renewed every year (ANAG 1934).

⁶ We use the term seasonal workers to describe individuals, who live and work in Switzerland for up to three months, and, therefore, do not need residence permits. They are, however, subject to registration with the authorities.

sentative from 'Bio Suisse', a Swiss label for agricultural products. The access to the fieldwork was initiated by contacting labour unions, the SFU placement agencies, farmers and a broad range of migrant organisations and associations. While interviews with 'experts' from labour unions and SFU placement agencies as well as with farmers could be arranged often upon first direct contact by the authors, all of the interviews with migrant workers were arranged through one or even several gatekeepers⁸. The interviews

were conducted by the authors of this paper themselves. The durations of the conversations were between 1 and 2 hours. The interviews with the migrant workers were analysed in a three-step procedure by drawing on the theoretical coding and the grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin (1990). As for the expert-interviews⁹, the transcriptions were analysed in a four-step procedure according to Meuser and Nagel (1991). All in all, the data consist of 21 interviews:

Table 1: Data and method

Method	Goal	Number
Expert-interviews	Access to non-family employees	8 interviews with experts
	To grasp agricultural working conditions and domestic fair trade initiatives from different perspectives	2 Interviews with a representative from the union A
		2 Interviews with 2 representatives from the union B
		1 Interview with a representative from the union C
		2 Interviews with 2 representatives from the SFU placement agencies
1 Interview with a representative from an organic label		
Semi-structured interviews with agricultural employees	To grasp the working-conditions from the perspective of the employees	8 interviews with migrant workers
		2 workers from viticulture
		4 workers from cultivation of vegetables
		2 workers from cultivation of herbs
Semi-structured interviews with farmers	To grasp the working-conditions and domestic fair trade initiatives from the perspective of the employers	6 interviews with farmers
		1 small organic-dynamic farmer with different branches
		1 medium vegetable farmer
		3 large farmers (2 vegetable farmers, 1 farmer & trader)
		1 farmer on a community-based farm

4 Working conditions of non-family migrant workers

4.1 Individualized labour relations and access to the labour market

In Switzerland, agricultural employment is not subordinated to the Swiss labour law. This explains why there is no consistent labour related legal framework for agriculture. In contrast to the service and industrial sector, labour relations in agricultural holdings are not subject to a collective labour agreement. Instead, a labour relation between a non-family employee and his/her employer is only regulated by the law of minimal provisions in the Swiss Code of Obligation (Art. 319-362 OR), by the so-called 'standard employment contracts', and by what is contained in an individual employment contract.

Contrary to collective labour agreements, 'standard employment contracts' are not contractual arrangements, but regulations that are decreed by cantonal authorities. This means that each canton regulates directly applicable provisions (Art. 360, para. 1 OR) in matters of content and termination of a labour relation independently (Art. 359 para. 1 OR). Furthermore, the terms stated in individual contracts take precedence over wages and working conditions stipulated in the 'standard employment contracts'. Hence, the 'standard employment contracts' are a weak instrument for the protection of the employees as they allow for deviations at the expense of the workers.

⁷ The empirical data was collected for a study at the University of Neuchâtel and for a research project within the framework of the NCCR North-South's JACS Alps programm.

⁸ Different 'gatekeepers', such as labour unionists, SFU placement agents, and private persons either introduced the researcher directly to the migrant interview partners or to another 'gatekeeper'. Concrete second 'gatekeepers' were for example the manager of an agricultural holding or a private person who is known to the migrant community in a village for translations in private matters.

⁹ The interview partners were addressed as experts, as they have privileged access to agricultural workers (Meuser and Nagel 1991).

As a result, claims to labour related rights of agricultural workers result in individual case suits, in which the aggrieved party has to prove its case. The interviewed unions and the SFU employment agencies play an important role in case of disputes between employers and employees. While the unionists see their main tasks in representing the interests of the workers and in supporting them individually in case of a lawsuit, the employment agencies mainly serve as mediators in case of disputes and misunderstandings in everyday life.

In order to be able to struggle for labour related rights or to respond to difficulties in everyday work, the question arises whether and to which extent workers are informed about their rights and duties as well as about official labour regulations. Our empirical findings show that access to information depends largely on the language skills of the migrant workers and/or their social networks, i.e. their access to people who can translate and inform them.

All interview partners from both labour unions and recruitment agencies of the SFU consider it as their task to inform the agricultural employees about their rights and duties. However, there is a difference between their access and approach to migrant workers. The interviewed recruitment agencies mainly answer questions when contacted, often by telephone. The unionists inform actively by locating and visiting the workers, and by distributing information flyers in different languages. Both agree that migrants working in agriculture often have little knowledge of their rights.

Looking at the perspective of the interviewed migrant workers, they stress out three aspects important to know before starting their employment; how many hours they have to work, the amount of the salary and whether the labour contract is temporary or open-ended. From their perspective, it is much more important to know that they have a permanent labour contract than a cancellation period or whether they have to work on holidays. This is explained by the fact that an open-ended labour contract enables the registration for a residence permit, which is one of the most important aspects for the interviewed migrant workers.

Travelling to Switzerland to work in agriculture is not a spontaneous decision. The above mentioned information is significant for the decision process whether to move to another country. In this process the interviewed workers evaluate their perspectives in their home countries and gather information about working conditions and oppor-

tunities in Switzerland. All of the eight interviewed migrant workers had a job and a stable financial income in their home countries. Apart from one, none of the interview partners had previously worked in the agricultural sector.

Workers can access the agricultural labour market in Switzerland through 'formal' or 'informal' recruitment. In the formal recruitment procedure, official agencies specialised in the placement of foreign workers, such as the SFU placement agencies, act as intermediaries. The informal recruitment goes via social networks of migrant workers and 'chain migration': information about employment opportunities is often spread by word of mouth in the hometowns of migrant workers. Both recruitment forms correspond to the Swiss admission policy for migrants. Typically, our interview partners from Portugal – as workers from a 'traditional' recruitment country – found their employment in Swiss agriculture through social networks, while other interview partners from Poland and Slovakia – as workers from 'new' recruitment countries – found their employment through official placement agencies.

4.2 "I am a human being" – Feeling unappreciated at work

All of the eight interviewed migrant workers were either employed in a regular employment in the horticultural sector or had at least a one-year contract at the time of the interview¹⁰. Moreover, all interview partners were in possession of a resident- or settled foreign nationals permit (B- and C-permit) or a short-term residence permit (L-permit). The results show that the working conditions of our interview partners vary according to the agricultural enterprise (size, number of employees, vegetable and herbs farming or viticulture) and their functions as employees. With regard to the salaries, the gross wages of the interview partners are between 2900 and 3750 Swiss francs per month¹¹. Those who live in an accommodation provided by their employer will face a deduction for rent ranging between 345 and 650 Swiss Francs. One of the interview partners had worked as a seasonal employee before he got employed in a regular labour relation in the same agricultural holding. Remarkably, with 1600 Swiss Francs per month, his salary as a seasonal worker was significantly lower compared to 3400 Swiss Francs per month as a permanent employee. Furthermore, employees in the same agricultural holding with a resident- and settled foreign nationals permit (B- and C permit) receive a higher salary for the same function than workers with a short-term resident permit (L-permit).

¹⁰ Due to the difficult access to non-family migrant workers, our sample does not include seasonal workers. We assume that their working conditions differ from non-family workers with a long-term contract.

¹¹ The median salary in Switzerland (in 2010) was 5979 Swiss Francs (BfS 2011). In 2014, the indicative salary for temporary employees or workers without experience in agriculture is 3'200 francs a month. The indicative salary has been negotiated yearly between the Swiss Farmers' Union and the 'Working group of professional associations of agricultural employees' (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Berufsvverbände landwirtschaftlicher Angestellter) since 2004 and has been supported by the 'Swiss Union of Women Farmers' (Schweizerischer Bäuerinnen- und Landfrauenverband) since 2008. It is important to note that indicative salaries for non-family labour are not legally binding, but serve as orientation only.

In theory, the interviewed workers in the vegetable and herb growing holdings officially work 55 hours a week. In practice, the actual daily working hours are determined by season, orders of retailers, and the demand of consumers. As a result, our interview partners stated that they usually work around nine hours a day in winter and between 11 and 13 hours a day in summer. In viticulture, the migrant workers normally work around 50 hours a week. During grape harvest, however, they work between 70 to 80 hours a week. Furthermore, having flexible working hours makes it difficult for workers to estimate at what time they can finish work and go home.

On the whole, the migrant workers perceive their wages as low and the amount of working hours as high, which affects their organisation of everyday life. For example, it is difficult for some to buy groceries or clothes for their children, particularly when they have to work on Saturdays or longer than expected in the evening. The interview partners stress their need for more leisure time. Additionally the everyday life can be characterized by pressure and stress, as is illustrated by one of the interviewees:

“I am a human being, I cannot do more than I am able to. You have to know the people, the human beings. I am not a machine. For them [employers] it is not like that: Go! Go! Go!” (Interviewed employee in viticulture)

Those workers who live or who had lived in an accommodation of the agricultural holding feel that they do not have enough privacy. Not only do they perceive their residences too close to their workplaces, but they feel uncomfortable about being dependent on their employers. Under these circumstances, the migrant workers feel controlled by their employers. Some interviewed workers even have the feeling that their employers do not accept illness at all. For example, one of the interview partners states that his employer called his doctor before his doctor's appointment in order to prevent a sick certificate. Consequently, the interview partner changed his doctor in order to escape his employer's interference. However, the employer demanded the phone number of his new doctor, which the interview partner reluctantly gave him in order to avoid a dispute. When another interview partner had a serious accident, his employer called the doctor and asked for medical advice instead of taking him to the doctor. In retrospect, the migrant worker concerned thinks that he should have gone to the hospital instead of suffering pain for several days in his room. The lack of appreciation is another topic that came up in the interviews:

“If I do my job well, I expect at least a few nice words. But here I have the feeling that I am a statistical number. Whether I stay or not, they don't care. That is why I want to find a new job, where I am being seen as a human being”. (Interviewed employee in herb growing holding)

The interview partners understand (lack of) appreciation of their work in various ways. Whereas some employees mentioned an ungrateful employer and/or supervisor, others included the perspective of consumers who do not recognise the toil behind a product. Quite a few think that their hard working conditions reflect a general disregard towards agricultural work.

As to job security, the interviewed migrant workers feel secure. Not one of the interview partners is afraid to lose his/her employment and all of them are part of stable labour relations. In fact, the migrant workers are conscious about the low requirements of their employment, namely that no or only little language skills, no qualifications and no work experience are demanded. Also, according to our interview partners from the SFU placement agencies, it is difficult for them to find Swiss job seekers willing to work in agriculture. Therefore, all interviewed partners (migrant workers, unionists, SFU placement agents) agreed that there is a demand for labour in the Swiss agriculture that migrant workers satisfy to a certain extent. At the same time, owing to dissatisfaction with labour conditions and upwardly mobile future expectations, all interviewed migrant workers wish to change jobs.

4.3 The difficulties of collective bargaining

As already hinted at above, the empirical results from the perspective of the interviewed unionists show that the work of labour unions is constricted to activities on individual cases. It is difficult for migrant workers, particularly for seasonal workers, to organize in a collective movement in order to achieve improved working conditions. The reasons are manifold, ranging from social isolation, language and communication difficulties, mistrust in unions, fear of losing the job, to limited resources and availability of unions. The work places of the agricultural workers are often geographically remote and fragmented, which makes it difficult for the workers to assemble and to build trust among them. Not only are the offices of the unions most of the time closed during the free time of agricultural workers, the offices themselves are often located in cities, far away from agricultural work places. As one of the interviewed unionists states, it takes gatekeepers to build trust:

“If there is one person in the group who trusts us and who is a member of our union, then the others join, too. That is what we have experienced. But you need a gatekeeper.” (Interviewed unionist)

As for individual case suits, the concerned employees have to expose themselves and provide proof. According to the interviewed unionists, most of the workers are only willing to risk this when they already have another job. A lawsuit is also difficult if workers have already returned to their home countries and have to come back to Switzerland for a legal process. In addition, some unions only take on cases if the workers are members of the union, which is rarely the case for migrant workers. Finally, the resources of the unions are limited either because they are small or because they set higher priorities in other sectors than agriculture.

The larger labour unions, for example, evince limited interest in agricultural workers. Finally, the fact that the size of the agricultural sector varies from one canton to another renders collective union activities difficult on the national level.

4.4 Heterogeneous and flexibilised working conditions

In sum, there is not ‘one’ working condition in the Swiss agriculture. The working and living conditions of migrant workers in Swiss agriculture result from various factors such as heterogeneous labour regulations, individualized and special labour relations with supervisors and employers, as well as individual needs and goals. However, as all interview partners agree, agricultural labour is physically demanding work, particularly in the horticultural sector. Additionally, it is not acknowledged as valuable work in society but associated with dirty and unqualified work. The fact that the relation between employers and employees is often characterized by paternalism and hierarchical organization structures seems to remain unchallenged. In extreme cases, when employers exert excessive control over their employees and the latter are to follow instructions without being allowed to express their opinions, as one of the interviewed unionists said, working conditions are outright anachronistic. Nonetheless, we find it very important that the migrant workers are not seen as victims. Instead they are active agents developing strategies to counter difficulties in the everyday working life and negotiating their labour relations¹². The negotiations, however, seem to take place primarily on an individual level.

5 Initiatives of domestic fair trade and their potential to improve working conditions

Having presented our findings on the difficult working conditions of migrant workers, we now discuss the idea of domestic fair trade as a novel solution to improve working conditions. Starting from the emergence of the concept, we then go on to present the case of Bio Suisse, an organic label and pioneering organization in the field of domestic fair trade. Finally, we present further empirical findings on working conditions and their future prospective, this time from the point of view of the farmers.

5.1 The Idea of domestic fair trade

The idea of “fair trade” emerged in the 1980s as an attempt by the global North to counter worsening terms of trade for agricultural products. These tendencies included high price volatility for small producers and cruel working conditions for workers and farmers across continents in the Global South. The first fair trade label, Max Havelaar, implemented the idea in 1988 (Alvarado 2009; Huybrechts and Reed 2010). Fair trade is often deemed as a “trading

partnership (...) between producers in developing countries and commercial buyers who wish to purchase and market products based on stable and ‘fair’ prices and production criteria, which respect labour and environmental standards” (Hurst 2007: 64).

The idea of domestic fair trade is an exercise in extending the discourse of fair trade to production in the Global North. It is assumed that issues of adverse working conditions exist in Global North too, and that national legislations prove to be unable to abolish them. Hence, the justification for domestic fair trade movement is born (Howard and Allen 2008). A pioneering effort in the United States, the Domestic fair trade association (DFTA) was convened in the year 2007, though a preceding working group had been in operation earlier (Brown and Getz 2008).

The idea of domestic fair trade, as with “fair trade”, remains a deeply contested one. To sum up, domestic fair trade activists, organisations and institutions may seek inspiration from and advocate at least one or more of the following ideas; anti-globalisation discourse, organic and sustainable agriculture, justice across value chain in production, seeking correct wages and conditions for farm workers and reformulating social and economic relations at large (see Brown and Getz 2008; Fridell 2006; Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al 2010). On the other hand, while the goals of individual organisations may well differ; fair trade movement has not been able to emerge as an alternative to neoliberalism (Fridell 2006). Brown and Getz (2008) criticise the idea of domestic fair trade based on its overemphasis on “family-scale farms” and “food localism” and its overt bias towards the farmers, leaving out the agricultural workers.

The outcome of negotiations, however, stands or falls with the role and strength of the agricultural workers at the bottom of the production and trading chain (Schumacher and Eichert 2010). We elaborate on these aspects in the following section. While there are studies about institutions, organisations and practices of fair trade in other countries in Europe, only few studies focus on Switzerland (Becchetti and Constantino 2010; Izcarra et al. 2009; Ozcaglar-Toulouse et al 2010).

5.2 Initiatives of domestic fair trade in Switzerland: *Bio Suisse*

An interesting case in point is Bio Suisse, the federation of Swiss organic farmers and owner of the organic label Bud. So far, the Bio Suisse standards have focused on ecology and animal welfare. But seven years ago, they included aspects of social accountability and fairness in the value chain in their standards and hence, turned towards the idea of domestic fair trade. Accordingly, two of the dominant concerns of Bio Suisse are (a) minimum working conditions in

¹² The interviewed workers deal with difficulties in various ways: Some of the interviewed migrants directly confront and talk to their co-workers, supervisors or employers in order to resolve conflicts. Other strategies are refusing to work or using specific communication forms such as humour or unresponsive silence in the event of confrontation. Moreover, the interviewed agricultural workers withdraw themselves from the control of their employer by moving their residences away from their workplaces.

the production process ('social requirements', Bio Suisse 2014: 29) and (b) fair trade relations across the value chain ('fair trade relations', *ibid.*: 31). We here focus on the social requirements regulating the working conditions of agricultural labour. Bio Suisse obligates farmers to state and to document in written form the rights and regulations relating to tasks, salaries and deductions, termination of contract, working hours, illness, accidents and maternity. A written working contract that complies at a minimum with the 'standard employment contract' is mandatory. Inter alia, Bio Suisse defines rules concerning salary (has to cover the basic needs and conform to the indicative/customary salary), working hours (e.g. overtime needs to be compensated) and the quality of accommodation, if provided. Moreover, it states that workers have the freedom of assembly as well as the right to negotiate their working conditions – individually as well as collectively (see Bio Suisse 2014).

Such regulations depend on control mechanisms. Bio Suisse farmers need to sign a self-declaration and to document their interactions with labourers in written form. An independent certification organization controls compliance as part of the usual yearly control of label standards. This organization, however, does not assess the working conditions by talking to the workers, but only verifies the existence of a written contract, documentation and a signed self-declaration.

Albeit this type of assessment can be criticized, it is still more comprehensive than the existent state-run control mechanisms. When the bilateral agreement with the EU on free movement of workers came into force in 2002, Switzerland introduced measures to prevent wage dumping. A tripartite commission (composed of employer, worker and state representatives) controls whether wage levels fall below the customary wages of the respective cantons and sectors – a statistical number. If this is the case, the executive organ (on cantonal or national level) can establish binding 'standard employment contracts' with a minimum salary. The tripartite commission only executes controls in the form of a control sample or on suspicion. This is a major difference to the Bio Suisse approach, where every farm is controlled yearly. In this respect, the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (Seco) recently published a report evaluating incidences of wage dumping in the Swiss labour market. Accordingly, out of 248 farms inspected by the government, wage dumping could be found in only 4% of cases. However, in terms of seasonal labourers working in Switzerland for up to three months, only 36 farms were inspected (Seco 2013).

5.3 Perspective of farmers: Under economic pressure

From the perspective of farmers, the working conditions and wage payment of non-family labour are related to the question of government policy in the context of liberalization. The interviewed farmers state that the government wants them to become more competitive. In that regard, the farmers view two pathways for the future: first to rationalize further or second to produce niche products that cater to niche markets. However, all six interviewed farm-

ers are convinced that both pathways will work only for a small minority of farmers.

As to the working conditions of their employees, all interviewed farmers state that they want to pay decent salaries. But from their perspective, it has become increasingly impossible to produce with lesser costs while still complying with Swiss requirements for social and ecological standards:

"We [farmers] also want to take care of the environment and to be good employers. But it is not possible now. See, to keep up the old system with the new prices, that won't work anymore." (Interviewed vegetable farmer)

The interview partners repeatedly referred to other European countries and to the differing agricultural and legal systems. From their perspective, other countries are able to produce in a cheaper way, as one farmer argues:

"Look at Spain with the tomatoes and so on. Or at Germany with the asparagus. There, they hardly pay any salaries to their workers. Go and see how they [those workers] live. That's why they can sell so cheap." (Interviewed vegetable farmer)

Without support and protection from the state, all interviewed farmers insist, Swiss farms cannot produce for the prices prevailing in the European market. They would be forced to lower social standards as well as salaries – even if this is not at all what the interview partners want to do.

As to the concept of a label for domestic fair trade, the idea was perceived ambivalently. While all of the interviewed farmers as well as SFU, labour union and Bio Suisse representatives considered improved agricultural labour conditions as an important matter, they argued that the fundamental issues of liberalized agricultural markets cannot be solved by adding yet another label to the many existing ones. The farmers are rather afraid that the pay-off for farmers will not be enough to ensure higher standards. Furthermore, adding a new label that combines the separate discourses of 'domestic' and 'fair' trade might confuse consumers. If requirements for social conditions of labour are included into an already established label such as the Bud, it has the potential to gain the support of the producers and consumers. However, this would limit the standards to the farmers producing according to the *Bio Suisse* regulations. Furthermore, it would increase the price difference between organic and conventional products.

6 Conclusion: New constellations of interests and power needed

Current reforms in agriculture push towards more competition and efficiency and therefore challenge social and ecological standards. Although family farms continue to be the main form of agriculture in Switzerland, non-family labour continues to provide a considerable part of the work force. Especially the number of seasonal labourers

from EU countries working for a limited period of up to three months has increased significantly. As a consequence, the numbers of non-family labour, including seasonal workers, amounts to more than one third of all people working in agriculture, with three-quarters of all non-family labour being migrants (BFS 2013; BfM 2014).

The extension of the freedom of movement of people to EU-8 countries has brought some alleviation to the farmers and to the SFU placement agencies in Switzerland. It mainly led to a higher availability of workers and less administrative work. Simultaneously, there has been a shift from one-year work contracts to seasonal work contracts. In light of these changing circumstances, the working conditions of agricultural non-family labour are under pressure. Despite these developments, labour conditions in Swiss agriculture have hardly ever been an issue in official policy documents.

We see three major approaches to improve the conditions of non-family agricultural labour in the Swiss context. Firstly, workers can organize themselves collectively and fight for improved working conditions together with unions. As discussed above, agricultural labour is difficult to unionize for a variety of reasons. The problems range from social isolation with their work places often being geographically remote and fragmented to questions of resources and interests of the unions. As long as the labour conditions differ according to cantons, this fact additionally hinders comprehensive improvements.

Secondly, the state can define binding rules to ensure basic standards and introduce more labour regulations for the agricultural sector. In order to prevent wage dumping, for example, the federal council can introduce a minimum wage, regulated in a national binding standard employment contract. Legally, this is possible if wage payment reportedly falls below a salary customary within an industry in practice. The aspect of wage dumping is not a new subject in the public debate. Former national council Christian Grobet, for instance, problematized the willingness of workers from East European countries to work for lower wages and put forward a proposal for the introduction of a minimum wage for migrant workers in 2001¹³. Since then, the parliament has received three more proposals to introduce a national standard employment contract for agricultural workers¹⁴. All of them were dismissed in parliament.

More fundamentally, we argue that workers in agriculture should be guaranteed the same legal terms as other workers in Switzerland – namely protection by the Swiss labour law as well as a collective labour agreement. A further alternative to these government regulations was suggested by one

of our interview partners of a labour union. Minimum working conditions of agricultural labour could be mandatorily attached to the government subsidies that are paid directly to the farmers – as it is already done today with environmental concerns. The introduction of such a measure not only acknowledges the difficulties of agricultural labour, but also takes into account the concerns of farmers about not being able to compete in a liberalized market.

Thirdly, labels ensuring fair working conditions in the frame of domestic fair trade can offer solutions within a liberalized market without more state-defined binding rules. When being integrated into an existing label, they count on the consumers' willingness to pay a premium for better domestic labour conditions of non-family labour in agriculture. In contrast to international fair trade – which mainly focuses on bridging the divide between the Global North and Global South by appealing to the conscience of northern consumers – 'domestic' fair trade appears more intimate and, hence, politically charged. The discussion about domestic fair trade is entangled with discussions about governmental support for agriculture and migration policies. Consequently, the definition, enforcement as well as the consumers' willingness to pay a premium for improved domestic labour conditions might become politicized in a complex manner. Finally, there are more fundamental issues with the idea of a domestic fair trade label. Adopting the concept of domestic fair trade means accepting the 'laissez-faire' policy of leaving the negotiation of basic working conditions of non-family agricultural workers to a liberalized market.

We have shown in the paper that wages and salaries are not the only issues affecting the working conditions and perceptions of agricultural labourers. Additionally, we found a lack of appreciation from the side of their employers, anachronistic labour relations between employer and employee, flexible and long working hours and low social mobility. It seems that the continuous demand for labour in agriculture is currently not met by an appreciation of the work by society, but with an on-going expansion of the labour recruitment from low-wage countries. In this context, domestic fair trade by Bio Suisse is one effort to improve the situation of agricultural labour. However, it is not a solution to society as a whole, as it only concerns a fraction of non-family agricultural labour in Switzerland. Leaving negotiations of working conditions to a liberalized market, it could even complicate collective unionisation and efforts to improve labour conditions. Therefore, domestic fair trade cannot substitute government regulations. To this end, new constellations of interests and power that allow measures on a governmental level are needed. We consider the introduction of a national standard employment con-

¹³ The motion was eventually written off, because it was pending for too long (01.3315 Motion 2001).

¹⁴ In 2001 national councillor John Dupraz, farmer himself, put forward a parliamentary initiative in order to set aside cantonal advantages and disadvantages for the farmers (01.449 Parliamentary initiative 2001). In 2003 a minority of the commission for economy submitted a parliamentary motion (03.3002 Motion 2003). The last effort to introduce a national standard employment contract was initialized by Andy Tschümperlin with another motion in 2010 (10.3677 Motion 2010).

tract an important first step, because we hope it will improve working conditions in the Swiss agriculture.

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