

*Strengthening Human Resources in Agriculture***CAHRC in the News:****Thousands of skilled ag jobs will likely go unfilled ; Right now, no one can say with certainty just how great the demand will be****Ontario Farmer****Published: June 9th, 2015****Byline: ALEX BINKLEY, ONTARIO FARMER****Page: A13**

The growing size and technological sophistication of Canadian farms are driving a demand for skilled employees but just how many are needed is the big unknown.

Earlier this year Mike Hoffort, CEO of Farm Credit Canada drew attention to the issue. "We estimate that 74,000 agriculture jobs will be created by 2022, but without changes, one third will go unfilled."

Hoffort "flagged an issue that will become increasingly crucial to the agriculture sector," Debra Hauer, project manager at the Canadian Agriculture Human Resources Council (CAHRC), said in an interview. "It's not going away."

However no one can say with any certainty how many skilled workers are needed currently as well as in the future, she added. To get answers, CAHRC has launched four research projects to determine both the number of workers and the kinds of skills the sector requires. However the need for more employees isn't surprising with farms becoming larger through the takeover of smaller ones and the increased use of complex machinery and technology, she added.

For example, just in the last couple of years aerial drones have become available as a way for farmers to monitor growing conditions in fields and pastures. However producers or their employees have to learn to operate them properly to benefit.

Hauer notes that Hoffort's numbers were based on data that is more than four years old. Since then the value of the Canadian loonie has dropped as have energy prices that could make Canadian agriculture and food exports more competitive, which could lead to even more exports.

Humphrey Banack, 1st Vice-President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, says farms and food processors face ongoing problems finding labour. "Our challenge is finding enough skilled workers to operate modern machinery." Changes to the Temporary Foreign Workers Program hasn't made the task any easier. CFA plans to put a lot more emphasis on the labour issue in the coming months working with CAHRC and other groups to find answers.

The research projects include consulting a wide cross section of the agri-food industry on developing a national labour supply and demand forecast, undertaking an in-depth study of jobs and skills needed on farms, preparing an action plan for training workers for agriculture occupations and encouraging more women to enter the agricultural workforce.

"Before you can fix a problem you have to know exactly what your problem is," explains Mark Wales, Chair of CAHRC. "This research is going to answer that key question for Canada's agricultural labour situation, and give direction to the Council in the development of the corrective policies, training and other actions."

"The agricultural labour issues have reached a critical point," explains Portia Mac-Donald-Dewhirst, CAHRC Executive Director. "By building our labour market intelligence, evidence based policy can be developed and the industry can create meaningful plans to drive progress and find meaningful solutions."

The Council expects to release information in late 2016 on an Agricultural Supply and Demand Forecast Model that will set out the number of workers needed by commodity group across the country. It will also look at what discourages First Nations people



as well as new and older Canadians from seeking agriculture employment. The Conference Board of Canada is assisting CAHRC with this project.

The study on the jobs available on farms will continue research on defining the skills needed on modern farms. “Over 70 industry leaders are guiding this effort to ensure accuracy and the development of meaningful tools and resources to support career awareness, selection, training, performance management, and business planning for the sector.

“To date, 20 National Occupational Standards have been developed with input from 270 industry stakeholders for the pork, sheep, aquaculture, beef and poultry commodities. ... Enhancements are being made to the online learning resource for the industry, AgriTalent. The development of a National Agricultural Job Board with commodity specific and regional components is also ongoing with the launch of a pilot planned for the fall of 2015.”

The workforce training action plan is using information from the 12 Agriculture Canada Value Chain Roundtables to look at farm labour management and worker shortages. Sixty organizations are participating in this project to clarify the impacts of labour shortage on competitiveness across all commodities and regions of the agriculture and agri-food sector including the need for foreign workers.

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