

# SOWING GROWTH WITH CANADA'S SEASONAL AGRICULTURE WORKER PROGRAM



## 50 Years of Integrity

**CANADIAN GROWERS VALUE AND APPRECIATE SEASONAL AGRICULTURE WORKERS:** The Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program (SAWP) is an effective labour mobility program celebrating **50 successful years of collaboration** with the Canadian government, workers and their respective international governments. Employees participating in SAWP complete a season of work in Canada and then return to their home countries. Built on bilateral agreements with Mexico and Caribbean countries, SAWP includes carefully



constructed rules protecting Canada's seasonal workers. The program includes formal signed contracts that outline expectations of growers and benefits to seasonal employees. Local Liaison Officers are supplied by home countries and they work with Canadian officials to care for SAWP employees while they are in Canada. Internationally, the SAWP has won many awards as a successful labour mobility model. The program has been developed in cooperation and is reviewed annually with Canadian authorities, growers and participating countries working together on program improvements to safeguard labour rights for seasonal employees.

**SAWP WORKERS HELP FILL THE AGRICULTURE LABOUR SHORTAGE:** Research conducted by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) shows a critical gap between the demand for workers and the supply of available workers. This gap has doubled in the past 10 years to approximately 60,000 workers. By 2025, the labour gap is expected to grow to 114,000 workers. The job vacancy rate for the industry is higher than any other industry in Canada, at 7 per cent. This is resulting in \$1.5-billion in lost sales. SAWP helps to fill this critical labour gap. Feedback received in consultations with producers suggests that there would be no horticulture production in Canada without the SAWP. When Canadians are not available, international workers fill vacancies and help mitigate the risks associated with this labour gap. According to the Agri-Food Economic Systems report, every foreign worker participating in the SAWP creates 2 additional Canadian jobs.

### SAWP BENEFITS CANADA AND WORKER FAMILIES

The SAWP was created 50 years ago to address farmers unique workforce needs which include: rural location, handling of live plants and animals, and a high degree of seasonality. Seasonal paid workers make up 53% of Canada's paid agricultural workforce. Canadian farmers spend significant time and effort to recruit and retain Canadian workers, however seasonal farm work does not provide permanent year round jobs for Canadians and these positions are difficult to fill. Seasonal work is necessary and an integral part of our Canadian food system, providing safe and sustainable Canadian grown fruit, vegetables, meat and honey for grocery shelves here in Canada and abroad. This program benefits Canadians and farmers. It is also an incredibly important program for international workers, providing them with an income to support a better standard of living and education for themselves and their families.



### WHY DOES SAWP WORK SO WELL? SAWP GIVES OPPORTUNITIES TO GROWERS, WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES:

**High retention rate:** 80% of SAWP employees return to the same farm year after year (up to 45 years) which demonstrates the high degree of satisfaction workers have with Canadian farmers and the program;

**Canadian trained agricultural workforce:** Canadian growers receive a reliable and trained seasonal workforce that provides Canadian consumers with fresh produce;

**Solid employment:** SAWP provides seasonal employees with good jobs, that significantly enhance their lives, allowing them to financially support their families with incomes that pay for their children's education; and it also offers valuable on-the-job training in modern Canadian agricultural practises; and

**Annual Review:** SAWP is annually reviewed with ongoing improvements made every year to ensure issues are addressed by all governments and participants.



### WORKER'S RIGHTS: CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED RULES TO PROTECT SAWP EMPLOYEES:

- **Housing:** SAWP housing is provided by farmers and is annually inspected by local certified health inspectors;
- **Health Care & Workers' Compensation:** Ontario SAWP workers receive Health Insurance Plan & Workers' Compensation benefits from day 1;
- **Wages:** The Canadian Government determines and regulates prevailing wages for seasonal workers;
- **International Governments Support Workers:** Participating SAWP countries employ liaison officers in Canada who provide support to SAWP employees on a number of issues: non-workplace personal medical care, Worker Compensation issues, and personal issues;
- **Farm Integrity Inspections:** Canadian growers who participate in the SAWP program are subject to integrity inspections at any time chosen by the Federal Government's Integrity Services Department. If a grower breaks the rules, the employer is penalized, fined or banned from the program.

**HIRING CANADIAN WORKERS:** Canadian growers **recruit and hire Canadian workers first**, however, there are unique workforce challenges:

- Producers are located in **rural areas**;
- Many jobs are **SEASONAL** and are not full-time, year round positions that most Canadians are seeking; and
- **Critical, time sensitive seasonal crop cycles, weather conditions, and the handling of live plants and animals** mean growers need seasonal employees during peak periods to avoid devastating losses.

#### CANADIAN GROWERS COMPETITIVENESS FAST FACTS



**Seasonality:** The SAWP is an essential part of the success of the agriculture industry that fills short-term, seasonal positions. 53% of agricultural paid jobs are seasonal;

**Family Farm Competitiveness:** Seasonal programming for labour supports sustainability and strengthens competitiveness of family farms, restricting access to seasonal workers could result in fewer family farms;



**Canadian Grown Produce:** Seasonal agriculture workers support the availability of Canadian grown and local fresh vegetables, fruit, honey and other commodities; and

**Canadian Job Creation:** every foreign worker in the Seasonal Ag Worker Program creates 2 additional Canadian jobs.

#### FACTORS AFFECTING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF GROWERS AND PROCESSORS:

- **Agriculture and Agri-Food is a High Growth Industry:** Canadian farmers feed the world, and demand for Canadian food is growing. Farmers need a secure workforce to allow Canada to participate in new trade agreements and to remain 5th largest Agri-food exporter in the world.
- **U.S. Undocumented Farm Workers:** Canadian growers are competing directly with unregulated American wages related to illegal workers in the United States. Unauthorized U.S. immigrants represent the largest share of the total work force in farming occupations in most states, according to data from the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan think tank based in Washington, D.C.<sup>i</sup> The American Farm Bureau estimates there are 1.5 to 2 million hired farmworkers in the US and that 50 to 70 per cent of them are illegal.<sup>ii</sup>
- **Canada is losing its Agri-Food Primary Processing:** The Globe and Mail reported in January 2016 that food prices are outpacing inflation; rising 1.4% to 3.7%. One of the things increasing Canadian consumer food costs is that Canada is becoming increasingly reliant on imported food, losing 143 food manufacturing facilities and only building 63 between 2006 and 2014 according to the Ivey School of Business.<sup>iii</sup>

#### SEASONAL AGRICULTURE WORKER PROGRAM RESEARCH

When Canadian workers are unavailable, international agriculture workers are needed. These workers help to sustain farm businesses and create permanent full-time jobs for Canadians. According to *The Economic Impact of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in the Ontario Horticulture Sector* by A. Mussell from Agri-Food Economic Systems, every foreign worker in the SAWP creates 2 additional Canadian jobs. When the industry is short workers, Canadian jobs are at risk. Dr. Sara Mann from the University of Guelph and Dr. M. H. Budworth from York University have conducted extensive research on SAWP, including *Overcoming Labour Challenges in the Agri-Food Sector* and *Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program: Understanding the Social Impact*.



*"The SAWP is built on shared interests between nations. Canada benefits from access to a labour force that fills an important gap in a key industry. The home nations benefit from access to employment for their nationals as well as economic gain through remittances, money sent back to the family in the home country, and salary dollars that are spent in the home country – a boost to both economies." (Budworth & Mann, 2015).*

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council and the Conference Board of Canada have also completed research clarifying labour shortages in the industry and documenting the positive impacts of SAWP to alleviate risks due to job vacancies.

**AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD LABOUR TASK FORCE:** Canada's Agriculture and Agri-Food Labour Task Force recommends that SAWP be used as a programming model for addressing critical labour issues. The program is demand driven and includes the timely processing of paperwork. The LTF recommends that **no changes be made to the SAWP**.

**HUMA TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER PROGRAM REPORT:** The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) made no recommendations for any changes to the SAWP.

## SAWP CELEBRATES 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY



An important part of the Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program are the bilateral discussions that take place every year to continuously improve SAWP for seasonal employees. SAWP's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary was celebrated this year and highlighted the integrity and proud history of the program. This long-standing, special Canadian program provides real value to the lives of the seasonal workers and their families. Saint Lucia's Minister of Labour was one of the many dignitaries who participated in the ceremony. Below is his perspective on the continued relevance of the program and its meaningfulness to the lives of those involved.

### **Canada Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme: A Relevant Perspective By Hon. Stephenson King, Minister for Labour, Saint Lucia**

*The Canada Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme; now in its fiftieth year, has transformed families, changed economic fortunes, and built strong societies in the participating countries throughout the Caribbean region.*

*In most instances, the programme has eliminated among its people, the culture of social dependency and replaced it with the science of economic independence. Many citizens/families who were hopeless after the demise of the sugar and banana industries, are now optimistic by the opportunities offered by the programme, which has provided social and economic stability over the last fifty years.*

*Many who have benefitted from the programme have provided stability to their families, purchased property, built their homes, educated their children, and equipped society with first class professionals, thus providing management capacity to our small island states.*

*Today; more than ever before, at a time when friendly "First World Governments" are diminishing the value of diplomatic and economic cooperation in a changing global economic environment, Canada is considered the final bastion in defence of our Caribbean citizenry, whose only wish is to capitalize on the opportunities through the SAWP and venture into a "World of Opportunities" that can only transform our societies into true nations of independence.*



<sup>i</sup> [http://www.argusobserver.com/news/worker-shortage-coincides-with-immigration-decline/article\\_c3e12d34-3b49-11e6-9f57-bbb3c12182d5.html](http://www.argusobserver.com/news/worker-shortage-coincides-with-immigration-decline/article_c3e12d34-3b49-11e6-9f57-bbb3c12182d5.html)  
<sup>ii</sup> <http://qz.com/641886/donald-trumps-immigration-policy-could-lead-to-higher-food-prices-and-shortages/>  
<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/why-canadians-are-paying-more-and-more-for-groceries/article28359144/%3bisessionid=pCXfWvSjvqtgvhby89sJZLhvF1TgBprJJW/hpx2QvJDvlg2vkvfLg!-296783650/?ts=160127091948&ord=1>