

# SUSTAINABILITY OF CANADA'S AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE

## CANADIAN AGRICULTURE & AGRI-FOOD WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN



*A Future for Canadian Farmers & Canadian Food Production*

### WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN: BACKGROUND

The *Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan* (WAP) is a roadmap designed to address the sector's critical and pervasive labour shortages which have been identified as the biggest business risk management issue for the industry. The plan is a collaborative effort developed by the national Labour Task Force (LTF), comprised of industry representatives from every aspect of the agriculture and agri-food value chain, including the seafood sector, over the last three years. The *Action Plan* provides government and industry with short, medium and long-term action items focusing on:

1. Increasing the supply of labour for skilled and unskilled workers; and
2. Improving the knowledge and skills of workers in the industry.

### HIRING CANADIAN WORKERS: AG INDUSTRY'S FIRST PRIORITY

Canada's Agriculture & Agri-Food industry employs 2.3 M Canadians and is full of high quality career options with competitive wages and benefits. In spite of employers expending extensive efforts on recruitment and retention for Canadian workers, critical labour shortages continue to be pervasive for the agriculture value-chain. **Statistics Canada Job Vacancy and Wage Survey data** backs this up, clearly showing agriculture is encountering significant difficulties with ongoing job vacancies in spite of vigorous recruitment.

### AGRICULTURE: A UNIQUE INDUSTRY

Unlike other industries, which were reported as abusing the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, the agriculture industry has a long record of respecting the Federal Government's robust programming. For fifty years the Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program, used by some commodities to supplement the Canadian workforce with international agriculture workers during peak periods, has received international recognition as a best practice model.

The agriculture industry needs workers with unique skills and has workforce challenges including:

- **Rural De-population:** employment in rural areas makes it difficult for employers to access and attract workers;
- **Perishable Product:** handling of live animals and plants, food safety and security requirements for Canadian consumers; and
- **Seasonality:** there will always be a seasonal component to agriculture which restricts ability to provide full-time permanent jobs.

The Workforce Action Plan solution prioritizes hiring Canadian workers and includes a plan for a long term sustainable labour supply which will create more Canadian jobs within the industry and within the broader economy.

### WHAT'S NEEDED: SHORT TERM

When Canadian workers are unavailable, agricultural employers need access to international agriculture workers:

- Improve **pathways to permanency** allowing agriculture and agri-food workers access to a viable pathway to permanent residency through the Express Entry Program;
- Create a **dedicated Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Program** to provide consistent and efficient access to international agriculture workers to support the industry's productivity, growth and future success;
- **Recognize the Seasonality** of agriculture by removing existing caps on the duration of stay for those Agriculture Stream workers brought in to address acute, seasonal labour needs that can't be filled through the domestic workforce; and
- **Create a Centre of Specialization** (single office) for the Agriculture Stream and the agri-food industry to ensure knowledgeable staff, timely LMIA processing and consistent treatment of these applications.

### WHAT'S NEEDED: MEDIUM - LONG TERM

To address the chronic agriculture worker shortages fully implement the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan:

- **Collect enhanced Labour Market Information** including development of **wage rate methodology** and process that reflects the agriculture industry actual wages, working towards an acceptable transparent wage rate process for industry and the Federal Government.
- **Improve Access to Domestic Labour:**
  - Develop a Jobs Resource Centre for Industry; and
  - Create a National Career Promotion initiative and tools for industry to attract more Canadian workers.
- **Improve Knowledge & Skills of Agriculture Workers:**
  - Develop a Learning Resource Centre;
  - Align Training with Industry Needs; and
  - Increase Investment in HR Management and Training.

# AGRICULTURE WORKER SHORTAGE: WHAT THIS MEANS

## CANADIAN PRODUCERS

Agriculture = intensive labour that includes handling of **live animals and plants**. Dependable, sustainable and experienced agriculture workers are a must because:

- **Canadian livestock producers:** Canadian farmers are committed to the highest standard of animal care. Access to workers that are skilled and experience in animal husbandry is a critical component of ensuring the highest standards of animal care. **Livestock require care 24 hours, 7 days a week and 365 days a year - ag worker shortages are not an option.**
- **Canadian crop and vegetable producers:** Canadian farmers are restricted by a very short growing season and intensive growing schedules which are dependent on weather conditions. **A large ag workforce is required to plant and harvest in a short period of time – ag worker shortages are not an option.**

## CANADIAN PRIMARY PROCESSORS

Agri-Food = handling of **perishable product** involving **food safety**. Dependable, sustainable and experienced agri-food workers are a must. The **Agri-Food worker shortage contributes to:**

- over 1,000 meat processing job openings are not being filled across the country;
- empty agri-food work stations and plants working at 70% capacity; and
- Canadian agri-business unable to meet current production targets for domestic consumer demand.

## CANADIAN CONSUMERS

The **Agriculture & Agri-Food worker shortage contributes to:**

- losing our Canadian value-added advantage with live cattle and hogs having to be shipped out of Canada to be processed in the US and processed meat imported to Canada.



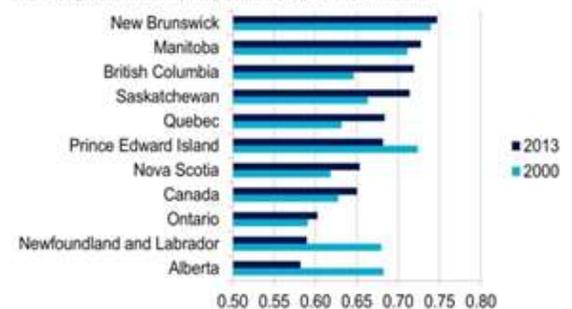
This means:

**Less Canadian product** availability  
**Higher food prices** for Canadian consumers

Canadian Agricultural Wages are increasing more quickly than other industries

Agriculture Wage Gap Has Narrowed in Most Provinces

ratio of agriculture hourly wages to average for all industries



Graph represents primary agriculture statistics including aquaculture  
Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, Conference Board of Canada, Statistics Canada

- Affordable food and global competitiveness affect Canadian farmers who have restricted profit margins; Canadian farmers are price takers not price setters; and
- Canadian agricultural employers compete against much lower wages in developing countries & US.

## CANADIAN ECONOMY & EXPORTS

Currently 1 in 8 Canadian jobs are from Canada's Ag & Agri-Food sector. The Ag industry employs 2.3 M Canadians, representing \$108.2 B and over 6% GDP. Canada is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of Ag & Agri-Food products.

**Agriculture & Agri-Food worker shortage contributes to:**

- hollowing out and economically suffocating rural communities across Canada;
- worsening Canada's rural de-population;
- lost wages & jobs for Canadian workers;
- farmers & processors losing export opportunities and farm gate returns putting agri-business at risk; and
- jeopardizing Canada's global market position as an Agriculture & Agri-Food export leader.



# IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

## CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS



mushrooms.canada



CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL



CONSEIL CANADIEN POUR LES RESSOURCES HUMAINES EN AGRICULTURE

## SUPPORTING PARTNERS



HORTICULTURE VALUE CHAIN ROUNDTABLE

ORGANIC VALUE CHAIN ROUNDTABLE

AILCA AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY LABOUR COUNCIL OF ALBERTA

SPECIAL CROPS VALUE CHAIN ROUNDTABLE

The Agriculture & Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan is supported by 64+ Implementation Partners

# Ag Worker Shortage What This Means

Labour Task Force  
Canadian Ag & Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan  
A Future for Farmers & Food Production



## Canada's Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector

Employs 2.3 M Cdns      6.6 % of GDP  
\$108.2 B GDP      \$56.4 B in exports - 5th largest



Farm



### Ag Worker Shortage

Livestock require care 24/7/365  
Worker shortages are not an option



Feedlot

### How do we grow the AgriWorkforce?

- Hire Canadians first
- Lots of jobs and opportunities
- Competitive wages & benefits



### Did you know?

#### International ag workers create Canadian jobs

- Every beef sector worker → 4.2 additional Cdn jobs
- Every de-boner butcher → 6 additional Cdn trimmer jobs
- Every seasonal ag worker → 2 additional Cdn Agri-Food jobs



### Agri-Food Worker Shortage

- Over 1,000 jobs unfilled
- Operating at 70% capacity due to shortage
- Unable to meet domestic consumer demand

Meat Processing



### Agri-Food Worker Shortage

- Live cattle and hogs shipped out of Canada to US for processing
- Losing value added advantage



Retail Stores



Export & Free Trade Deals



### Ag & Agri-Food Worker Shortages

- Lost wages & jobs for Canadian workers
- Lost export opportunities and farm gate returns
- Hollowing out & economically suffocating rural communities



### What worker shortages mean:

- Less Canadian product availability
- Higher food prices for Canadian consumers



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