

# 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.

### PRODUCERS

**Grain and oilseed farmers** = seasonally intensive workload that includes handling of **live plants**. Growing crops requires hard work and dedication involving significant risk for today's farmers. There are 43,000 Canadian canola farmers who grow 20 M acres of canola, mostly in the western provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba which generates one quarter of all farm cash receipts. Canola acreage continues to increase because of the profitability and resilience of the crop. Worker shortages for producers has been identified as a top risk issue by Farm Credit Canada as farmers encounter unique workforce issues making it difficult to find workers to drive their equipment for seeding and harvest. These issues include:



→**Seasonality:** Due to the short Canadian growing season, crop farming of canola and other crops cannot offer the long-term permanent jobs most Canadians are seeking. Because of the seasonal nature of farming which is also weather dependent, it means very long days and hard work until the farmer finishes seeding or harvesting. Delays in seeding and harvesting can be devastating to a farmer's annual income. **Access to seasonal workers with unique and special skills is not an option.**

→**Skills:** To buy a tractor today a farmer needs to make an investment of over half a million dollars. Driving today's tractors and combines is similar to stepping into a cockpit of an airplane. GPS and other innovative technology and computer systems help to ensure sustainable crop practices but it also means equipment operators need to have a high level of technological skill. There is significant on the job training involved in training workers to drive tractors, combines and grain trucks and it is also critical to include training regarding field locations which are located over vast distances in rural regions that do not have road signs. Without uniquely skilled seasonal agriculture workers there is a significant safety risk and there is also the risk that the wrong field could receive the wrong crop input application which would be devastating to a farmer's annual income. **Access to seasonal workers with unique and special skills is not an option.**



### CANADA + OIL = CANOLA

Canadian-grown canola contributes \$19.3 billion to the Canadian economy each year, **including more than 249,000 Canadian jobs and \$12.5 billion in wages**. Canola oil and canola derived products are consumed by Canadian consumers and exported around the world. Demand for canola continues to grow as the world learns more about its advantages for human health and as a source of high-quality feed and biofuel feedstock.



Canada's canola processing industry transforms harvested seeds into oil and meal, which are then manufactured into a wide variety of products. Canada's 14 crushing and refining plants have the capacity to crush about 10 million tonnes of canola seed, and produce about 3 million tonnes of canola oil and 4 million tonnes of canola meal annually. The main canola products

are oil for human consumption and meal for livestock feed. Canadian biofuel and bioproducts are another value-added Canadian innovation.

**Canola Exports:** Canola exports 90% of its canola seed, oil or meal to over 50 markets around the world, bringing billions of dollars into Canada. The biggest buyer of canola oil and meal is the United States, accounting for 62% of oil exports and 96% of meal exports in 2015. The most important destinations for seed in 2015 were China, Japan, Mexico, Pakistan and the U.S. (8.3 million MT). The canola industry anticipates significant production and export growth from the new trade opportunities. To achieve this, more agriculture workers will be needed.



### 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.



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

The grains and oilseed industry **recruits and hires Canadian workers first**, however, there are unique workforce challenges:

- Grain growing and processing are located in **rural areas**;
- These are seasonal jobs that **will never create permanent positions** which most Canadians are seeking;
- Work is **highly technical involving unique and special skills**;
- **Critical, time sensitive seasonal crop cycles and weather conditions** mean growers need uniquely skilled workers during peak periods to avoid devastating losses;
- A high number of **owner/operators are retiring in the next 5 to 10 years**, which is creating a new demographic challenge for the grain and oilseed industry.

## FEDERAL AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMMING

- **Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program** is a well-run internationally recognised program which allows access to workers from Mexico and the Caribbean countries. These workers can return year after year without restriction.
- **Agriculture Stream** allows access to agriculture workers from other countries such as the Philippines, Guatemala, Australia, and New Zealand, etc. **These workers are not allowed to return to Canada after 4 years of seasonal work.**
- **Main Temporary Foreign Worker Program** needs to be used for agriculture workers for commodities not on the National Commodity List (NCL).
- **International Experience Canada Program** allows farmers to employ student workers through the working-holiday visa program

## INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE CANADA

The IEC is a historical and foundational part of our agriculture industry and the exchange goes both ways. IEC programming has been under review. As a result program applications did not open in January as it usually does and there has been discussion of cutbacks to numbers, allowing less students to enter Canada. **Farmers across Canada count on this IEC program. Keeping this program intact helps our farm economy, boosts our tourism industry and strengthens our image abroad. Let's not change something that's working.**

## THE "4 IN 4 OUT RULE"

Temporary Foreign Workers including the TFWP's Agriculture Stream workers, must return home after working in Canada for a total of four years, and must remain there for four years before coming back. This new cumulative duration rule change is commonly referred to as the "4 in 4 out" rule and acts as a cap on returning seasonal workers that are uniquely trained with special skills which the industry needs. For grain and oilseed farmers the current regulatory environment is causing: **Restricted access to workers with unique and special skills that are needed to do the job and a skills deficit for agricultural employers. Issues with the "4 in 4 out" Agriculture Stream rule change is affecting 9 of the 12 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Value Chains, including: Bee Health, Beef, Grains, Horticulture (Ag Stream users), Organics, Pulses, Seed, Sheep, and Special Crops.**

## THE NATIONAL COMMODITY LIST (NCL)

In order to qualify for the TFWP's Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program or the Agriculture Stream, the producers' commodity needs to be listed on the National Commodity List (NCL). **Unfortunately, grain and oilseed are not listed on the NCL so crop farmers do not qualify for SAWP or the Agriculture Stream.** There is no clear path or guidelines explaining how to have commercial canola or other grains and oilseed crops listed on the NCL. **Issues related to not being included on the National Commodity List are affecting access to seasonal workers needed for many commodities such as grain and oilseed farmers, seed corn growers, forage growers, maple syrup producers and many others that have requested to be added to the NCL.**

## THE SOLUTION

Today, agriculture, just like other industries, has become a global workplace. Improving Canada's seasonal programming will enable farmers to meet their seasonal labour needs, it can provide economic support for workers from developing countries, and ongoing agricultural cultural exchange that allows for a trade of ideas, innovation and technology. The Alberta Canola Producers Commission supports the **Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan's** recommendations, when Canadian workers cannot be found, better access to international agriculture workers is needed to address **acute, seasonal labour needs that can't be filled through the domestic workforce.**

- **International Experience Canada (IEC)** – *Recognize that farmers use this program to access students who work on their farms as seasonal workers. Stop cutbacks to IEC program numbers and open the program in January so farmers are able to organize their seasonal workers before 2016 seeding and other seasonal needs.*
- **Ag Stream Cumulative Duration – "4 in 4 out":** *Similar to SAWP, remove 48 months duration cap on Agriculture stream workers if the employer is bringing in seasonal workers that stay no longer than 8 months at a time and who are then outside Canada for 4 consecutive months.*
- **National Commodity List - Broaden Access to Workers For All Commodities:** *Delink the National Commodity List from the Agriculture Stream OR expand the list to include a more comprehensive commodity list for agriculture and clarify the process for inclusion on the NCL to ensure all employers within the agriculture industry have access.*