



## Agriculture Forecast to 2029

# How Labour Challenges Will Shape the Future of Agriculture in British Columbia

A significant employer with a bright production outlook, British Columbia's agriculture sector faced a costly labour gap in 2018, and that gap is expected to widen over the next decade.

## Provincial Overview

British Columbia's agriculture sector employed 46,300 people, which is 13% of Canada's agricultural workforce. Nearly half of these workers (47%) are concentrated in the 'tree fruit and vine'\* industry and the 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture' industry.

British Columbia accounts for a considerable share of Canada's agricultural employment. In 2017, the province employed the highest share of workers in two of the country's agriculture industries—'tree fruit and vine'; and 'aquaculture'. British Columbia was also the second-largest employer of the country's 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture' workers.

Within the province, British Columbia's agricultural employment is concentrated in horticulture. Combined, the 'field fruit and vegetable', 'tree fruit and vine', and 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture' industries account for one in two workers within the province's agriculture sector. Other important employers include 'beef', and 'poultry and egg', each accounting for a respective 6% of workers.

British Columbia's agriculture sector trails only Ontario and Nova Scotia in its reliance on foreign workers: 23% of the province's workforce is foreign workers.

In 2017, the province was unable to find enough workers and 3,100 jobs went unfilled as a result of labour shortages. Those shortages resulted in production losses and delays, as well as \$216 million in lost sales.

\* The Labour Market Information data classifies Canada's agriculture sector into 11 commodity areas: 1) 'apiculture'; 2) 'aquaculture'; 3) 'beef'; 4) 'dairy'; 5) 'field fruit and vegetable'; 6) 'grain and oilseed'; 7) 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture'; 8) 'poultry and egg'; 9) 'sheep and goat'; 10) 'swine'; and 11) 'tree fruit and vine'.

## In 2017, British Columbia's agriculture sector employed 46,283 people.

The province was unable to fill **3,100 jobs**, which cost the industry **\$216 million**, or **6.6%** of sales.

By 2029, the province will have **15,200** more jobs than the domestic labour force can fill.

Looking to the future, British Columbia's labour gap is predicted to widen even further, with an estimated 15,200 jobs going unfilled by 2029

## Labour Forecast

A growing demand for labour and a declining supply of domestic workers will widen British Columbia's labour gap considerably.

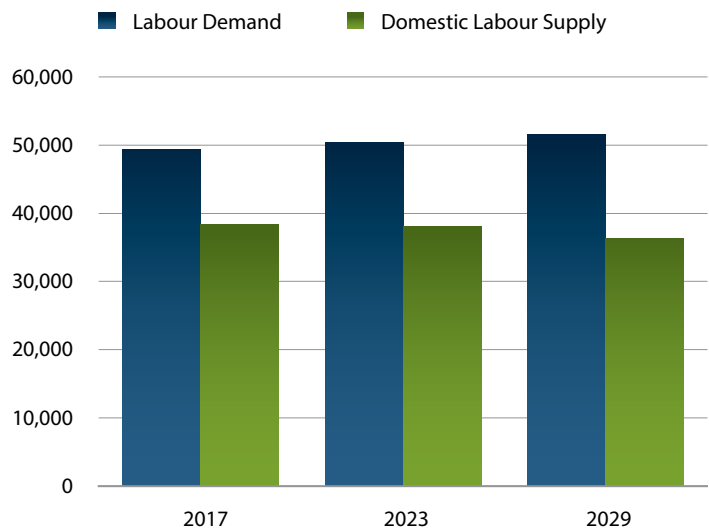
While the demand for agricultural workers in British Columbia is expected to grow from 49,400 in 2017 to 51,500 in 2029, the supply of domestic workers is predicted to decline from 38,400 to 36,300 over the forecast. As a result, the gap between the number of workers needed and the domestic workers available will widen by 2.8% per year. This means that over the next decade, the number of jobs that can't be filled with domestic labour will increase from 11,000 to 15,200. In other words, by 2029, just under one in three agriculture jobs in this province (30%) are at risk of going unfilled.



British Columbia's second-biggest employer, the 'tree fruit and vine' industry, will consistently see the largest gap between its labour requirements and the available domestic supply of workers, rising from 5,500 jobs potentially going unfilled in 2017 to 6,300 jobs in 2029. However, the 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture' industry, which is the province's largest agricultural employer, will see its labour gap widen the most, with the number of jobs that can't be filled by the available domestic labour force rising from 4,000 in 2017 to 5,100 in 2029.

From an occupational perspective, British Columbia's agriculture sector will have the most trouble filling general farm worker positions and nursery and greenhouse worker positions. Indeed, by 2029, there will be as many as 9,700 general farm worker jobs and 2,000 nursery and greenhouse worker jobs that can't be filled by the available domestic labour pool.

## The Labour Gap Widens for British Columbia's Agriculture Sector





## Based on our 2018 survey of the province's agricultural employers:

- **52%** could not find enough workers
- **50%** of employers who experienced labour shortages lost sales as a result
- **34%** reported zero Canadian job applicants for job postings

## Meeting the Challenge

British Columbia's agriculture sector has one of the largest labour gaps, relative to demand, in Canada. Looking ahead to 2029, that gap is expected to grow until it reaches 30% of the total demand for labour. In other words, just under one out of three agriculture jobs in the province is at risk.

Although the province has been successful in filling much of this labour gap with foreign workers, this solution makes it highly vulnerable to changes in foreign-worker policies. In addition, as the gap widens, more jobs can be expected to go unfilled, even if continued reliance on foreign workers remains feasible.

To address its agricultural labour issues, the province will need to overcome a number of key challenges:

- The province's biggest employer, the 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture' industry, is characterized by seasonal fluctuations that negatively affect workforce retention.
- The province's agricultural operations are confronted with higher-than-average turnover rates, both voluntary and involuntary.
- A high reliance on foreign workers puts the province's agriculture sector at risk, as policy changes could reduce or eliminate this source of labour.



However, the province's agriculture sector also has strengths that it could leverage:

- Farm operations in this province are located closer to larger population centres.
- A continued influx of international migrants to the province could provide a labour source in the coming years.
- Finding ways to communicate the benefits of agricultural work to a younger demographic could help to attract more young workers.
- The sector has the potential to use training programs, mentorships, and internships to create more skilled labour.

As the labour gap widens, British Columbia will need to find ways to strengthen the domestic labour pool in order to avoid financial losses due to labour shortages and to manage its reliance on foreign workers in future.

To read the accompanying report, or to access additional provincial, commodity, or national fact sheets and reports, please visit [www.AgriLMI.ca](http://www.AgriLMI.ca).



## About This Fact Sheet

The data cited in this fact sheet is based on an update to the Labour Market Information (LMI) study that the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) undertook between 2014 and 2016. Information was collected by modelling labour demand and supply by province, commodity, and occupation; conducting a survey of more than 1,700 sector stakeholders; and validating the results through webinars as well as an advisory group presentation.

The study was initiated by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council (CAHRC), a national, nonprofit organization focused on addressing human resource issues faced by agricultural businesses across Canada. For more information about the Council and its products and services for Canada's agriculture sector, please visit [www.cahrc-ccrha.ca](http://www.cahrc-ccrha.ca).

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