GRAIN AND OILSEED
Labour market information and forecast 2023-2030

Key Findings

- The grain and oilseed industry generated over 40 per cent of revenues in the agriculture sector while employing just 10 per cent of the sector's workforce (domestic and foreign).[1]
- The industry faced 2,300 vacancies in 2022, which resulted in an estimated loss of $1.27 billion in total sales.[2]
- The industry will continue to witness productivity gains in the coming years due to improvements in technology, which will decrease total labour demand but increase demand for skilled workers.
- The industry's workforce will change dramatically over the next 8 years, as 36 per cent of current domestic workers retire. This makes attracting new workers to the industry even more important to sustain productivity.

Current Workforce

- The grain and oilseed industry employed over 41,100 domestic workers during peak season, accounting for 12 per cent of domestic agriculture employment in Canada.[3]
- The industry has three main occupations: managers in agriculture (51 per cent of the domestic workforce), farm machinery operators (17 per cent), and harvesting and livestock labourers (16 per cent).
- The industry employed around 1,800 foreign workers in 2022, accounting for 4 per cent of the workforce.[4]
- Foreign worker employment has only increased 6 per cent in the grain and oilseed industry since 2017, compared to over 30 per cent in Canada's agriculture sector.
- The grain and oilseed industry experienced a peak vacancy rate of 6.7 per cent in 2022, leaving an estimated 2,300 positions unfilled.[5] This vacancy rate was only slightly below the 7.4 per cent posted by the entire sector.[6]
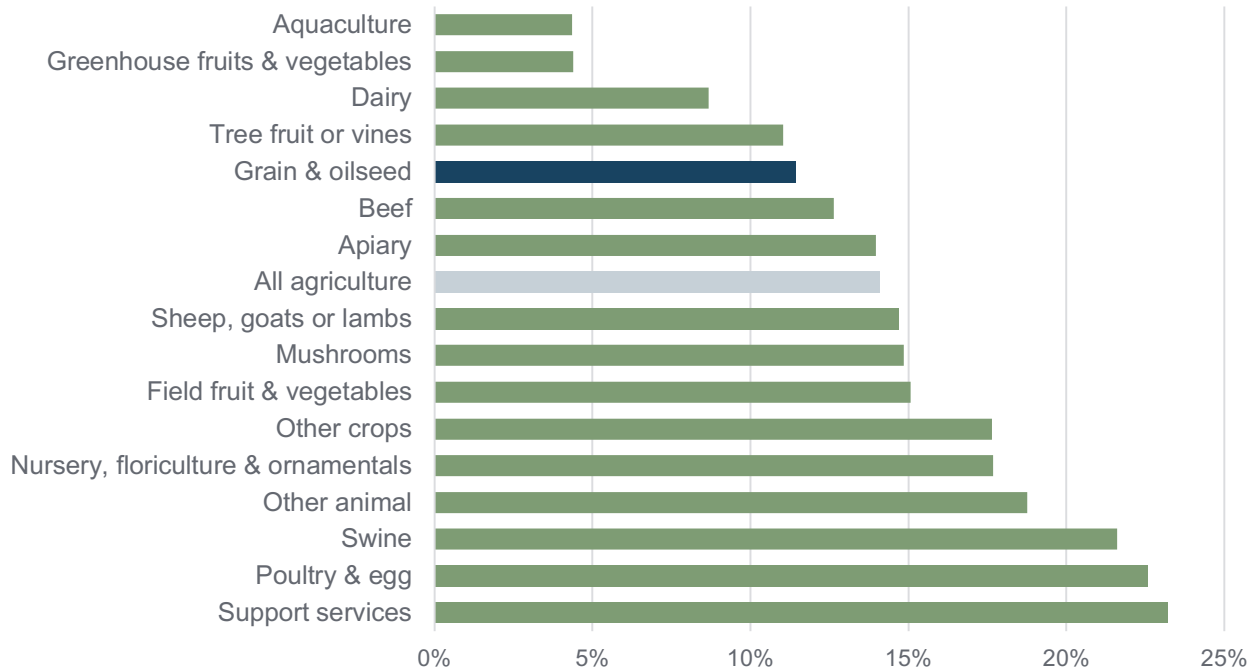
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[1] Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada. | [2] Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023 (n=10). Total sales from Statistics Canada, Table 32-10-0045-01. | [3] Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada. | [4] Foreign workers include workers brought in through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program or Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. Does not include immigrants or permanent residents. | [5] Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada Model of Occupations, Skills and Technology. | [6] Statistics Canada, Job Vacancy and Wage Survey (custom data).

Employer Survey Insights

- Two in five employers in the grain and oilseed industry were unable to find all the workers they required in 2022.[7]
- Almost half (47 per cent) of employers reported that they received no domestic applicants for their job postings and 28 per cent received only one or two applicants.[8]
- Job vacancies resulted in an estimated loss of $1.27 billion (3.1 per cent) of total sales in the grain and oilseed industry in 2022.[9]

- The seasonal nature of the work, manual labour requirements and rural work locations continue to be the top recruitment challenges for the industry, as is the case in many other agriculture industries.
- Employers in the grain and oilseed industry struggle more when it comes to finding workers with the required skills (31 per cent of employers) than the overall sector (19 per cent of employers).[10]
- Despite having the highest wages out of all industries in agriculture, the grain and oilseed industry still reported a turnover rate of 11 per cent in 2022 (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Grain and oilseed industry has one of the lowest turnover rates.
Voluntary turnover rates,* per cent, 2022.

Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023.

* The voluntary turnover rate is the number of voluntary departures as a share of the total number of workers in a year. Voluntary departures are comprised of workers who quit, including seasonal workers who leave before contract completion.

[7] Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023 (n=84). | [8] Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023 (n=111). | [9] Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023 (n=10). Total sales from Statistics Canada, Table 32-10-0045-01. | [10] Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023 (n=105, 724).

Labour Market Forecast

- Peak labour demand is forecast to decrease 9 per cent, from 43,600 in 2023 to 39,800 in 2030, driven by productivity gains and moderate production growth.[11]
- The industry is expected to see 12,700 workers retire between 2023 and 2030; meanwhile, 2,200 immigrants and 6,500 school leavers are projected to enter the workforce.[12]
- Domestic employment is projected to decline by more than total employment demand, decreasing 10 per cent over the next 8 years due to additional decreases in the supply of domestic labour.

- The peak domestic labour gap in the grain and oilseed industry will increase 12 per cent over the next 8 years, from 3,280 in 2022 to 3,680 by 2030 (Chart 2).[13]
- The total number of foreign workers employed throughout the year is expected to increase from 2,000 in 2023 to 2,390 in 2030.
- Softer labour markets will lead to fewer job vacancies in 2023; however, vacancies will remain around 1,600 over the next 8 years, despite increasing foreign worker employment.
- Around 40 per cent of these vacancies will be farm machinery operators and 42 per cent will be farm labourers (harvesting and livestock).

Chart 2: The peak domestic labour gap grows despite declining total demand.
Number of workers required at peak season in the grain and oilseed industry, forecast.
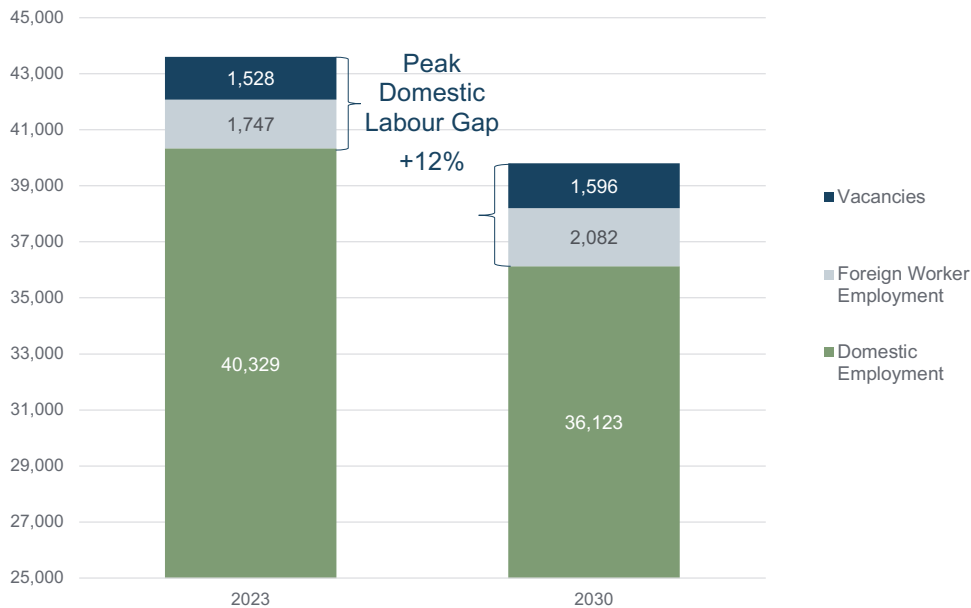
Source: The Conference Board of Canada's Model of Occupations, Skills and Technology.

Foreign workers include workers brought in through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program or Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. Does not include immigrants or permanent residents. The peak number of foreign workers is less than the cumulative total employed over the year since not all workers will be employed simultaneously.

[11] Peak labour demand is equal to the number of Canadians employed at peak, plus the number of foreign workers employed at peak, plus the number of vacancies at peak. | [12] School leavers is the number of workers finished school (all levels of education) and entering the workforce. | [13] Domestic labour gap is the difference between the total number of workers required and the number of domestic workers employed which equals foreign worker employment plus the number of vacancies. Estimated at peak to reflect maximum demand during seasonal peaks in agriculture.

Building the Future Workforce

- Increases in productivity will help decrease labour demand in the grain and oilseed industry over time, partly offsetting the relatively large wave of retirements coming in the next few years. Finding employees with the skills to work with technology and machinery will be key to maintaining such productivity increases.
- A relatively small proportion of immigrants seek employment in the industry each year, mainly due to the rural location of these farms. Offering support for workers to relocate to rural areas and creating appealing, sustainable rural communities for workers and their families could help overcome this hurdle.

About the Grain and Oilseed Industry

This factsheet pertains to the 'grain and oilseed' industry as defined by Statistics Canada as NAICS 1111. The industry encompasses the cultivation, processing and distribution of various oilseeds and grains, which play a pivotal role in food production, livestock feed, biofuels and numerous industrial applications.

The industry includes farm operations that produce a wide variety of crops, with canola, wheat, soybeans and feed corn being the industry's key products. Other industry products include pulses (such as lentils and dry peas), barley, oats and fodder crops.

Canada's grain and oilseed industry is geographically concentrated in Western Canada: Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

About This Factsheet

The data cited in this factsheet is based on a Labour Market Information (LMI) study that took place between March and September 2023. This study involved modelling labour demand and supply by province, commodity, and occupation; conducting a survey of more than 1,400 sector stakeholders; and validating the results through webinars as well as an advisory group presentation. For more information about this LMI study, please see the National Report.

The study was initiated by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource 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.

This research was conducted by The Conference Board of Canada, our country's foremost independent organization for applied research. Through the use of sophisticated data modelling, best-in-class forecasting and multi-method research approaches, they deliver research to help leaders take action.