ALBERTA
Agriculture labour market information and forecast 2023-2030


Key Findings

- Half of agriculture employers in Alberta were unable to hire all the workers they required in 2022, leading to cancelled expansions and lost sales.
- Nearly 40 per cent of the current domestic workforce is expected to retire between 2023 and 2030, creating a substantial need for new workers. Ensuring that these new workers have the essential skills and knowledge is vital to the sector's success.
- Foreign workers will be increasingly relied upon in the agriculture sector, filling 61 per cent of the peak domestic labour gap by 2030.[1]
- Labour challenges in Alberta's agriculture sector are expected to continue as the domestic labour gap grows 7 per cent over the next 8 years, reaching over 4,800 by 2030.[2]
- Despite the forecasted rise in the number of foreign workers, 1,900 positions will be vacant in 2030. Without proactive intervention, these persistent vacancies could impede the sector's growth.

Current Workforce

- Alberta has the third largest agriculture sector in Canada, employing nearly 56,700 domestic workers during peak season in 2022, equivalent to 16 per cent of the country's domestic agriculture workforce.[3]
- Beef farming is the largest agricultural employer in the province, employing 25 per cent of the sector's workforce, followed by grain and oilseed, employing 18 per cent (Chart 1).
- Five per cent of the province's agriculture workforce (around 2,600 persons) are foreign workers.[4] This is a relatively lower share than most other provinces. Over 40 per cent of foreign workers employed in Alberta work in the greenhouse and nursery industry.
- The industry had approximately 2,600 positions that went unfilled at peak season in 2022.[5]
- The beef and the grain and oilseed industry have lower vacancy rates compared to other industries in agriculture, resulting in a lower overall vacancy rate in Alberta. The estimated vacancy rate for the sector was 5 per cent, which is lower than 7.4 per cent across Canada.

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[1] Foreign workers include workers brought in through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program or Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. Does not include immigrants or permanent residents. | [2] 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. | [3] Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada. | [4] Statistics Canada, Table: 32-10-0218-01. Includes workers from the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP). | [5] The Conference Board of Canada Model of Occupations, Skills and Technology.

Chart 1: The beef industry employs 25% of agriculture workers in Alberta.
Share of employment (domestic and foreign workers) at peak, 2022, Alberta.
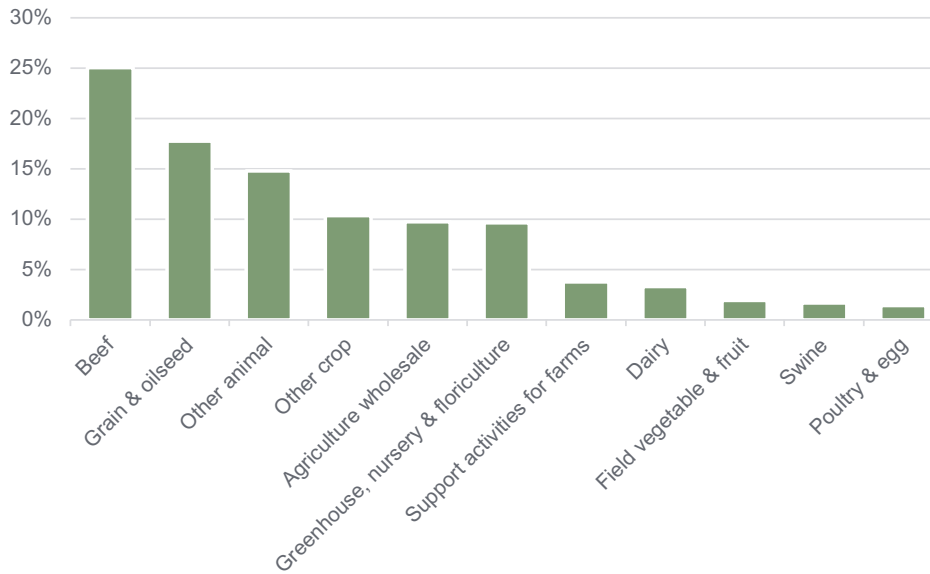
Source: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

*Other crop is primarily mixed crop farming and hay farming. Other animal is primarily mixed livestock farming and horse and other equine production.
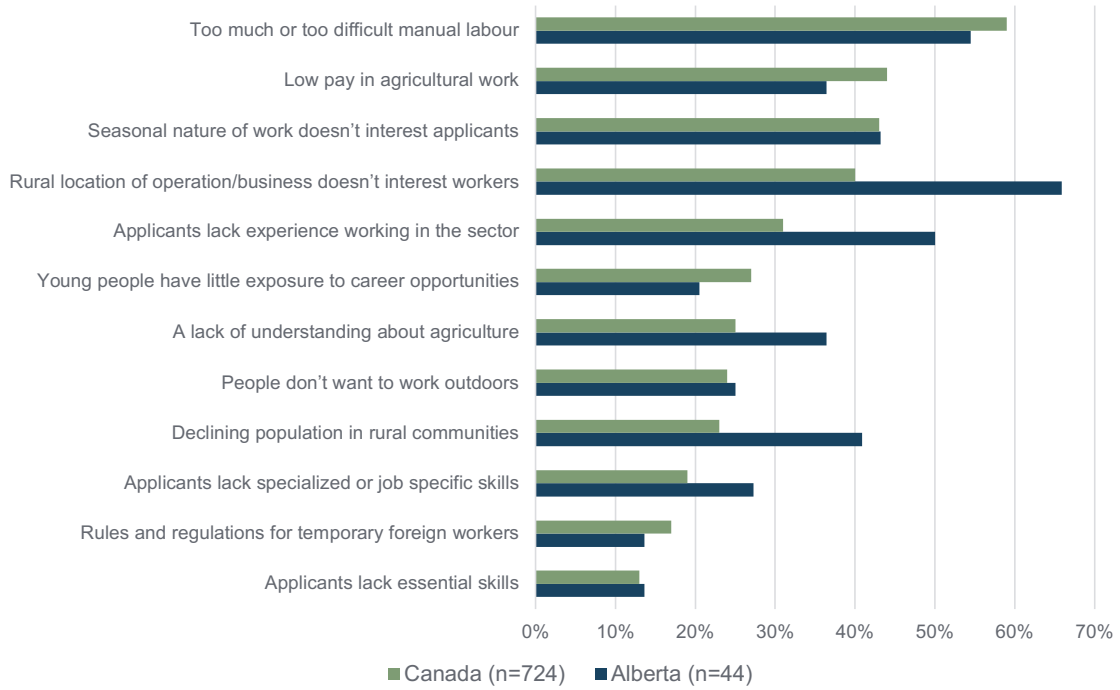
Employer Survey Insights

- Almost half (49 per cent) of Alberta's agriculture employers were unable to find all the workers they required in 2022. This shortfall was even higher (53 per cent) for those in the animal production industries.[6]
- A quarter (24 per cent) of employers in Alberta received no domestic applicants for their job postings and 30 per cent received only one or two.[7]
- As a result of job vacancies, 56 per cent of employers said they delayed or cancelled expansion plans, 78 per cent reported lost sales and 100 per cent reported that these vacancies caused excessive stress for owners and staff.[8]

- Two-thirds of employers in Alberta cite declining rural populations as the main cause of their struggle to find workers (Chart 2).[9]
- Over 27 per cent of employers stated that they struggle to find candidates with the specialized skills required for their positions, underscoring the importance of training programs.[10]
- Alberta had a voluntary turnover rate of 14 per cent in 2022, on par with the national average.[11]

[6] Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023 (n=37). | [7] Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023 (n=45). |
[8] Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023 (n=18). | [9] Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023 (n=44) |
[10] Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023 (n=44). | [11] 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. Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023.

Chart 2: Rural location and lack of experience in the sector impede recruitment.
Share of employers.
Q: What are the top five factors that make recruitment of workers at your agricultural operation more difficult?

Too much or too difficult manual labour
Low pay in agricultural work
Seasonal nature of work doesn't interest applicants
Rural location of operation/business doesn't interest workers
Applicants lack experience working in the sector
Young people have little exposure to career opportunities
A lack of understanding about agriculture
People don't want to work outdoors
Declining population in rural communities
Applicants lack specialized or job specific skills
Rules and regulations for temporary foreign workers
Applicants lack essential skills

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%

■ Canada (n=724)   ■ Alberta (n=44)

Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey 2023.

Labour Market Forecast

- Over the short term, the agriculture sector is still recovering from the 2021 drought, leading to higher employment levels in 2023 than in 2022. At the same time, a weaker economy is anticipated to reduce job vacancies in 2023.
- Over the long term, steady production and labour productivity gains will result in a slight decrease in labour demand from 63,800 in 2023 to 62,900 in 2030.
- Decreasing labour supply, mainly driven by retirements, will cause peak domestic employment in the sector to decrease 2 per cent between 2023 and 2030, reaching 58,000 workers.
- As a result, the peak domestic labour gap will grow 7 per cent over the next 8 years, reaching over 4,800 positions in 2030 (Chart 3).
- The sector is expected to see 38 per cent of its current domestic workforce retire between 2023 and 2030, equaling 18,500 workers, and 64 per cent

of these retirees will be managers in agriculture, including farm owner-operators and hired managers.
- Over the next 8 years, 3,600 immigrants and 8,000 school leavers are projected to enter the workforce. Almost 30 per cent of these new workers will take labourer positions and 24 per cent will become specialized livestock workers or farm machinery operators.
- The total number of foreign workers employed in the sector is projected to increase to around 3,600 by 2030. The foreign worker share of the peak domestic labour gap is expected to increase from 46 per cent to 61 per cent by 2030.
- Despite the increase in foreign workers, 1,900 job vacancies will remain unfilled by 2030. Over 300 of these vacancies will be in the grain and oilseed industry and 260 in the beef industry. This represents a structural level of vacancies that limit the sector's potential without further intervention.

Chart 3: The peak domestic labour gap is persistent over the forecast period.
Number of workers required at peak season in Alberta.
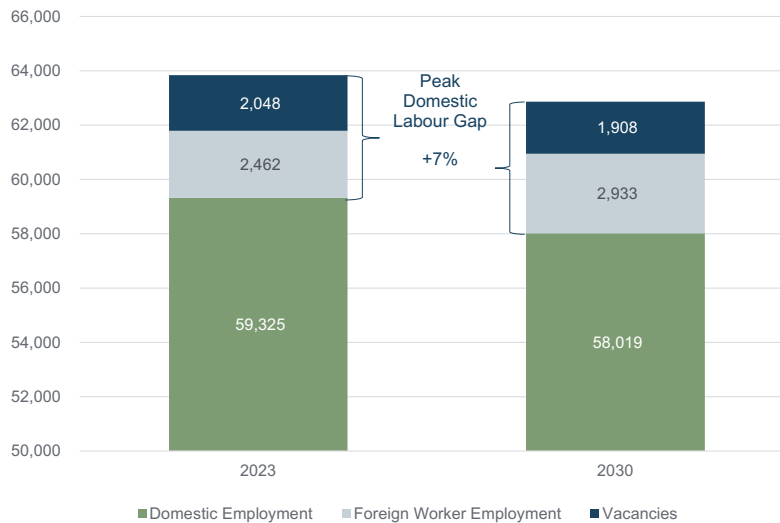
Source: The Conference Board of Canada's Model of Occupations, Skills and Technology.

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.

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[12] Based on The Conference Board of Canada Model of Occupations, Skills and Technology (MOST). | [13] School leavers is the number of workers finished school (all levels of education) and entering the workforce. | [14] Labourer positions include livestock labourers (17%), harvesting labourers (7%), and greenhouse and nursery labourers (4%).

Building the Future Workforce

- Alberta's growing young population provides a unique advantage. Alberta's population aged 15 to 24 is expected to increase 14 per cent over the next 8 years, compared to an expected 1 per cent decrease in the rest of Canada.[15] Attracting these young individuals to careers in agriculture will be key.
- The agriculture sector in Alberta will face a larger than average number of retirements over the coming years, especially in the beef industry, and the grain and oilseed industry. Ensuring new workers have the skills and knowledge to replace experienced workers will be crucial to maintaining productivity and growing the sector.

Agriculture Sector Definition

CAHRC's definition of agriculture includes crop and animal production (NAICS 1111, 1112, 1113, 1114, 1119, 1121, 1122, 1123, 1124, 1125 and 1129), support services (NAICS 1151 and 1152) and agriculture wholesale industries (NAICS 4111 and 4183).

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; conducting five regional focus groups; and validating the results through webinars as well as an advisory group presentation. For more information about agriculture LMI, please visit www.cahrc-ccrha.ca/programs/agri-lmi.

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.

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[15] Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

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