

INDUSTRY NEWS | PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES | SUPPORT FOR THE AGRICULTURE | AND MORE

AGRI WORKFORCE MATTERS

AUGUST 2026



**MOVING THE NEEDLE: KEY TAKEAWAYS
FROM THE CALGARY SUMMIT**

**CAHRC AND THE UNIVERSITY
OF GUELPH LAUNCH**

**EXPANDING AWARENESS OF
CAREERS IN AGRICULTURE
THROUGH INNOVATION AND WIL**

**SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH
OF INTERNATIONAL AG WORKERS**

**CONNECTING TALENT TO
OPPORTUNITY**



CAHRC-CCRHA
Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council
Conseil canadien pour les ressources humaines
en agriculture

OUR NATIONAL WORKFORCE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Canada's agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing sectors are experiencing severe chronic labour and skills shortages while growing one of Canada's largest employment and economic sectors. A national, actionable roadmap will create the desired workforce of the future that addresses immediate labour gaps and systemic issues. The National Workforce Strategic Plan (NWSP) has entered its next phase of work.

The initiative remains the same, industry stakeholders will embark on a new set of action items while continuing to amplify the great work already happening. Moving forward, the NWSP will maintain three working groups. As we acknowledge the shift toward AI, digitalization and automation, the workplan will reflect that and pursue actions that will better prepare the sector for adoption.



Funded in part by the Government of Canada's Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program



OUR VISION AND NEXT STEPS



Perception and Awareness of Industry and Careers

By 2030, the number of people entering the sector has increased due to positive perceptions of employment in the industry and greater awareness of the variety of occupations suited to various skill sets, the diverse communities in which careers are available and the paths to career advancement.

The perception of the industry and awareness of opportunities in the sectors is crucial to its growth and sustainability. This working group will amplify programs and bring greater awareness of career opportunities in agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing to potential employees — including newcomers to Canada, job seekers not already connected to the industry, members of underrepresented groups and secondary and post-secondary students.

Likewise, support will be given for employers looking to recruit a generation of employees to join the agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing sectors. As an industry that has been built on networking, it is paramount that we expand the network and invite those new to our industry in to gain expertise, knowledge and understanding on our common goal to feed people both in Canada and abroad.



People and Workplace Culture

By 2030, the sector is viewed as a desired choice for work in Canada by job seekers and workers

Industry initiatives are underway to identify workers coming from other sectors who have a valuable skill set for agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing. Industry is also working to highlight the technological opportunities to high school and post secondary graduates. Additionally, the expansion of work integrated learning opportunities allows students to explore career opportunities prior to entering the workforce. By crafting a narrative to show a pathway to success in the agriculture industry, recruitment will be less challenging. This working group will continue to develop resources and case studies to help outline best management practices the industry is using to support a safe and inviting workplace culture.



Immigration and Foreign Workers

By 2025, foreign workers are publicly recognized as a valued pillar of Canada's agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing workforce. By 2025, Canada has publicly accepted programs to facilitate the entry of foreign workers and new Canadians into Canada's agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing sectors .

The Immigration and Temporary Foreign Workers Working Group understands the importance of temporary foreign workers to Canada's agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing workforce. The working group has conducted research to develop policy recommendations to amplify the importance of the TFW programs. Recommendations also looked at ensuring there are clear paths to permanent residency for those who wish to use it, as well as the need for ensuring the proper infrastructure and supports are available for both employers and employees.

At this time the Immigration and Temporary Foreign Worker Working Group has concluded its strategic work. The members continue to meet when necessary to advance any new discussion pieces.



Skill Development

By 2030, a National Skills Strategy ensures that the sector's workforce is appropriately skilled.

While research shows the sector is well situated to make advancements in technology, there still remains some significant hurdles to overcome, both for primary producers and further down the supply chain in food and beverage manufacturing. It is important to note the increased use of automation and technology, while a proposed solution to the chronic shortage of labour, may not lead to a decreased demand for labour but instead change the skills sets required. It would also help improve the productivity and competitiveness of Canada's agricultural and food and beverage manufacturing sectors.

Many of the projects in this working group are ever green, each step of improvement, moving the industry forward. The development of the National Skills Strategy continues as a registry of the current and future skills needed for the agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing sectors. Using the National Occupational Standards, CAHRC has developed the Skills Inventory Framework



Skill Development

which outlines in varying detail what is required for a job. The aim is to provide this information to stakeholders, potential employees seeking job opportunities and employers looking to build job postings and develop responsibilities. It will also be promoted to curriculum designers to ensure the full set of skills are covered over the course of a program. This project was developed to support agricultural career as Food Processing Skills Canada has a well developed Learning and Recognition Framework for food processing careers!

CAHRC has also launched its geographical mapping of skills, highlighting where the skills needs are and if there are skilled individuals available to fill that gap.



Automation and Technology

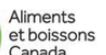
By 2030, automation and technology helps address labour demand and increases productivity and competitiveness.

The industry is experiencing a critical transition to automation and technology in each sector as it continues to experience shortages in labour. Although it is not the only answer to the falling labour supply, the Working Group will continue to examine the increased need for capital investments and its correlation to labour productivity. They will also investigate funding opportunities to increase the adoption of automation. Moreover, they will explore current programming available for upskilling and re-skilling of employees due to changes in technology.

As we make advancements in technology, we must also examine the risk along the way. Legal obligations and the regulatory environment on automation and technology is constantly adapting, so an environmental scan will be commissioned to understand what is currently regulated and where the gaps are.

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CAHRC's plan to address them, [click here](#).*



**GET INVOLVED:
A STRONG WORKFORCE
STARTS WITH YOU.**

info@cahrc-ccrha.ca





Dear readers,

While the summer is still in full swing and the days are still warm, Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector continues to stand at a defining moment. Across the country, producers, businesses, educators and industry partners are navigating a landscape shaped by uncertainty, from global market pressures and climate variability to rising input costs. At the same time the federal government is recognizing the importance of the Canadian agriculture and food industry through the [National Food Security Strategy](#) and the [National Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Strategy](#). Yet amid these challenges and opportunities, one truth remains constant: the strength of our sector depends on the strength of our workforce.

At the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC), we see every day that people are at the centre of our industry's success. While innovation, automation, and artificial intelligence are transforming how we grow, process, and distribute food, they are not a replacement for human expertise, they are a catalyst that raises the bar for skills, leadership, and adaptability. As highlighted in this issue, technology adoption across the value chain is accelerating, and with it comes an increasing need for a workforce that is equipped to thrive in a rapidly changing environment. This transformation is happening at a critical time. Labour shortages remain one of the most persistent challenges facing our sector, with significant workforce gaps projected in the years ahead. At the same time, demographic shifts, including an aging workforce, underscore the urgency of attracting new talent, supporting career development, and ensuring knowledge transfer across generations.

Through the National Workforce Strategic Plan (NWSP), we are working collaboratively with partners across Canada to turn these challenges into opportunities. The NWSP Summit was just held in Calgary June 10-11 and it was a great event bringing together industry, educators and government focus on the agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing workforce. As you will read in this

edition, the next phase of the NWSP is focused on advancing actionable solutions in key areas: strengthening skills development, enhancing employer capacity, supporting inclusive and resilient workplaces, and improving the perception and awareness of careers in agriculture. These priorities reflect a shared commitment to building a workforce that is not only sufficient in size, but strong in capability and future-ready. This issue also highlights the importance of connection, between employers and talent, between education and industry, and between innovation and practical application. Initiatives such as work-integrated learning, targeted HR training, and new partnerships are helping to open doors for students, newcomers, and underrepresented groups, while providing employers with the tools they need to recruit and retain the right people.

Importantly, we must also recognize that workforce development is not only about numbers and skills, it is about people and wellbeing. Supporting workplace culture, mental health, and inclusive environments is essential to long-term success. When individuals feel valued, supported, and connected, they are more likely to remain in the sector and contribute to its continued growth. Looking ahead, CAHRC remains focused on delivering practical tools, timely labour market insights, and collaborative solutions that support employers across the country. Our commitment is to ensure that Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector has the talent, leadership, and resilience needed to meet the demands of today while preparing for the opportunities of tomorrow. Together, we are strengthening not only our workforce, but the future of food in Canada.



Jennifer Wright
Executive Director
**Canadian Agricultural
Human Resource Council**



ABOUT CAHRC

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) is a national, non-profit organization focused on addressing human resource issues facing agricultural businesses across Canada.

This means representing and supporting agriculture in all forms, from farmers and ranchers to processors, packagers, food scientists, mechanics, veterinarians and much, much more.

We offer expertise and tools that can be tailored to meet the needs of owners, operators and workers throughout the sector.

This includes:

- Ag focused up-to-date HR training
- Wage subsidy and skill development programs
- Industry networking opportunities
- 1:1 HR consulting
- Insight on emerging issues like succession planning, finding skilled workers and improving farm safety.



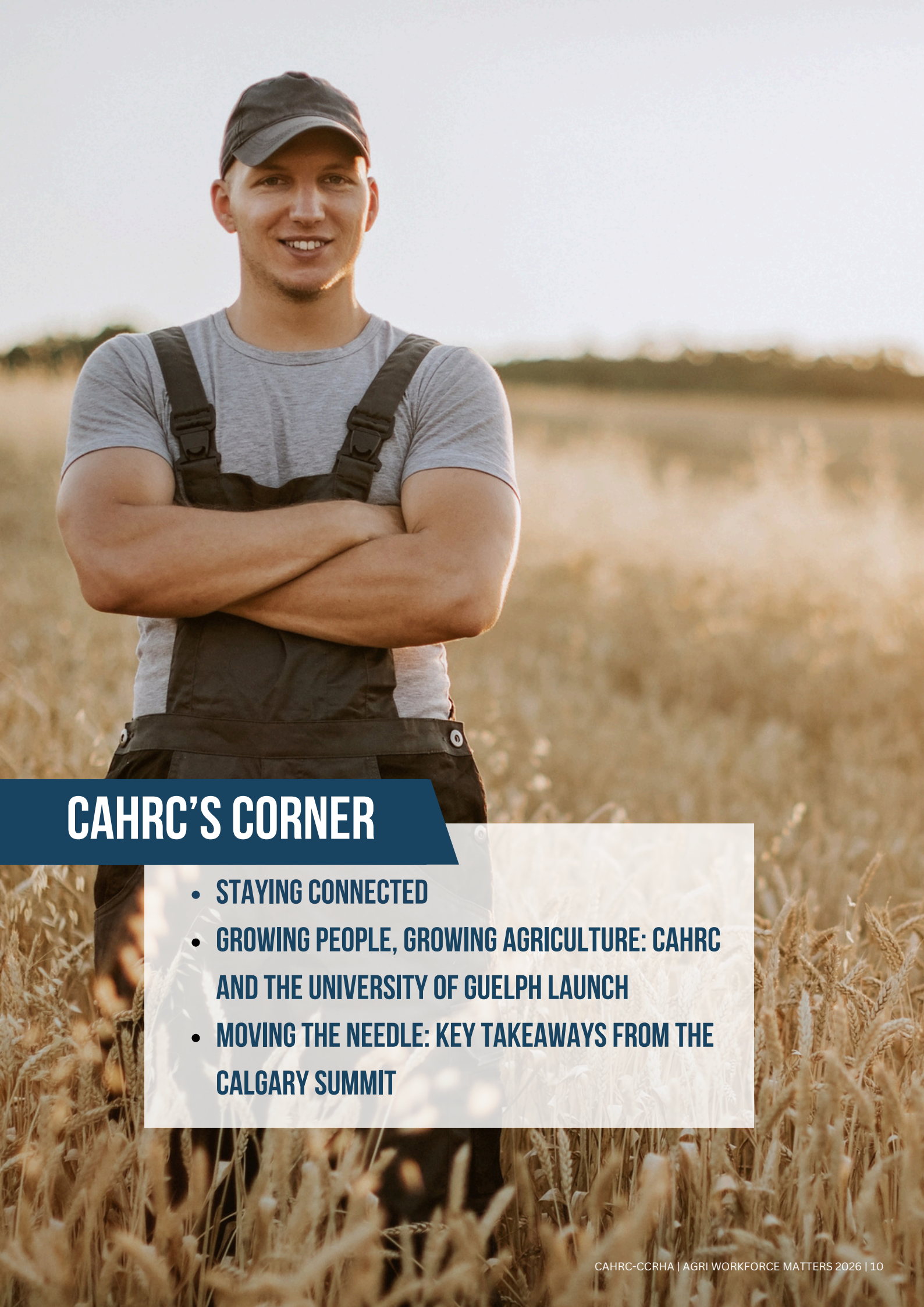
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*CAHRC's work is funded in part by the
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CAHRC'S CORNER

- **STAYING CONNECTED**
- **GROWING PEOPLE, GROWING AGRICULTURE: CAHRC AND THE UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH LAUNCH**
- **MOVING THE NEEDLE: KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE CALGARY SUMMIT**

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STAYING CONNECTED



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Want to strengthen Canada's agri-food workforce while showcasing your leadership? CAHRC's partnership program connects you with tailored HR solutions, exclusive industry insights, and national visibility. Join us in building a stronger, more resilient sector.

Contact us at outreach@cahrc-ccrha.ca to learn more.

CAHRC'S CORNER

GROWING PEOPLE, GROWING AGRICULTURE: CAHRC AND THE UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH LAUNCH

Canada's agriculture sector relies on a skilled and engaged workforce, yet labour shortages continue to challenge the industry's growth and long-term sustainability. As agricultural operations become larger, more specialized, and increasingly reliant on both domestic and international workers, the role of the farm employer continues to evolve. Today's producers are not only managing crops, livestock, and equipment, they are also leading teams, developing workplace culture, navigating employment regulations, and building long-term workforce strategies.

Recognizing the growing importance of people management in agriculture, CAHRC has partnered with the University of Guelph's School of Continuing Studies to develop **HR for Agriculture and Rural Enterprises**, a new elective course within the University's Certificate in People Management. The course has been specifically designed to address the unique human resource challenges and opportunities facing agricultural and rural employers.

This collaboration combines CAHRC's expertise in agricultural workforce development, labour market information, and HR best practices with the University of Guelph's long-standing reputation for delivering high-quality professional education. Together, the organizations have developed a practical and flexible learning opportunity that brings industry knowledge and academic excellence together in a way that is directly relevant to the agricultural sector.

"CAHRC brings a strong understanding of the agriculture industry and decades of experience in human resource management and labour market research to this partnership," says Jennifer Wright, Executive Director of CAHRC. "By combining our close connection to primary producers and agri-businesses with the University of Guelph's academic excellence and robust delivery infrastructure, we're building a meaningful collaboration to deliver practical, high-quality HR training tailored to the needs of Canada's agriculture sector."

The online course is designed for farm owners, managers, supervisors, team leaders, and rural business operators who are responsible for managing employees but may not have formal HR training. Through flexible, self-paced learning, participants will gain practical knowledge and tools that can be applied directly in their workplaces.

The curriculum covers key areas of people management, including workforce planning, recruitment and hiring, employee retention, workplace culture, compensation, leadership, compliance, mental health, and succession planning. It also addresses topics that are particularly important in agriculture, such as managing seasonal workforces, working with temporary foreign workers, navigating labour legislation and exemptions, and supporting increasingly diverse teams.

According to Nidia Cerna, Manager, Program Development at the [University of Guelph's School of Continuing Studies](#), the strength of the course comes from the expertise and industry perspective behind its development.

"When learners enroll in HR for Agriculture and Rural Enterprises, they're getting the collective knowledge of two organizations that genuinely care about this sector. CAHRC has spent years advocating for and supporting agricultural workers and employers across Canada. The School of Continuing Studies has been delivering educational programs that translate real-world knowledge into practical, flexible learning for decades. I'm proud to be working alongside the CAHRC team, and I'm looking forward to the impact that this learning experience will have in our learners."

The new course also supports the goals of CAHRC's National Workforce Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Agri-Food, which identifies workforce development, leadership, skills training, and employer capacity building as critical priorities for the future of the sector. By increasing access to practical HR education, the partnership aims to help employers strengthen their workforce strategies and create more productive, resilient workplaces.



Another benefit of the program is its accessibility. Delivered entirely online through the University of Guelph's learning platform, learners can complete the course at their own pace while balancing the demands of work, family, and seasonal operations. This flexibility helps make professional development more accessible to employers and employees in rural and remote communities across Canada.

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"We are thrilled to partner with the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) to develop innovative agricultural HR courses tailored

specifically for agribusiness professionals," says Dianne Tyers, Associate Vice-President, School of Continuing Studies. "This collaboration allows us to combine academic expertise with real-world insights, equipping professionals with practical, industry-relevant HR knowledge to attract, manage, and retain the talent they need to thrive in this dynamic industry."

As agriculture continues to evolve, investing in people will remain one of the most important factors in business success. Through this partnership, CAHRC and the University of Guelph are helping agricultural employers build the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to lead strong teams and support a thriving agricultural workforce for years to come.

To learn more or register, visit:
[uoguel.ph/hr-ag](https://uoguelph/hr-ag)

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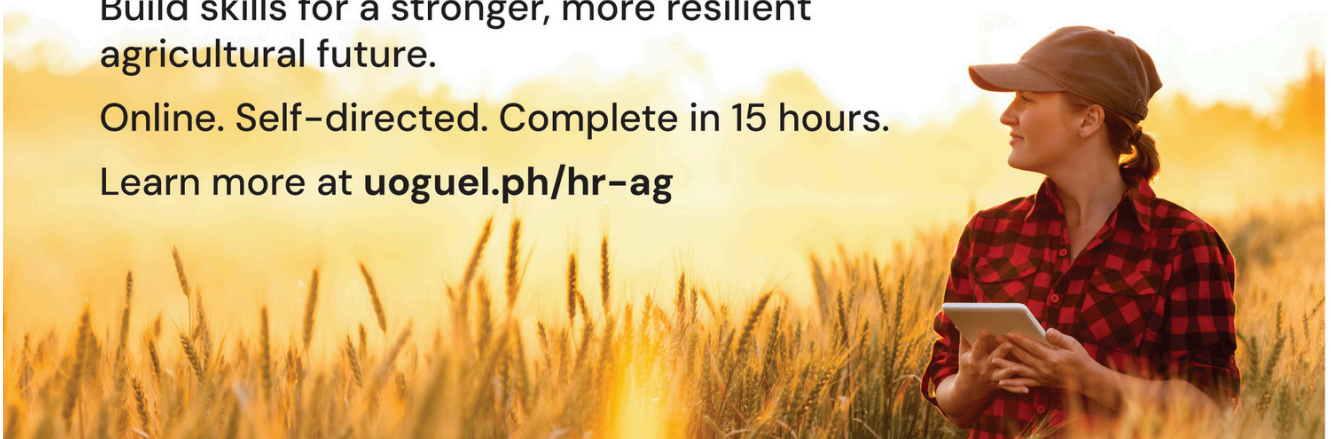
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CAHRC'S CORNER

MOVING THE NEEDLE: KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE CALGARY SUMMIT

The National Workforce Summit was held in Calgary June 10-11th. Over two days, leaders from across Canada's agriculture and food & beverage manufacturing sectors gathered to turn long-standing workforce challenges into coordinated action. The summit brought together producers, processors, educators, innovators, community leaders and policy experts to align evidence, policy and practice across the value chain.

Day 1 focused on framing the problem and spotlighting solutions. CAHRC's progress update underscored five years of work building a national skills database, automation readiness tools, and research into perceptions of agriculture, infrastructure gaps, compensation benchmarks and barriers for underrepresented workers. Phyllis MacCallum, Director of Research and Knowledge Mobilization at CAHRC, stressed that labour shortages threaten competitiveness, value-added growth and export potential and that a system-wide response spanning primary production through processing is essential.

Tyler McCann, Managing Director of the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute reminded attendees that structural trends, farm consolidation, squeezed margins, slowing capital investment and an aging operator base, are reshaping the sector.

Exports have risen in value more because of global commodity prices than increased volumes or value-addition, and private R&D and capital investment lag international peers. The message was clear: workforce strategy must align with innovation, trade and investment policies to sustain growth.

Cross-sector panels offered practical lessons. Trucking, manufacturing and construction showcased tactics for retention, targeted outreach and digital skills development. Community infrastructure emerged as a recurring theme: housing, transport, childcare, broadband and local services are not optional extras but fundamentals for recruitment and retention in rural regions. Case studies illustrated how multi-year planning and employer-municipal partnerships can transform small towns into thriving talent hubs.

Technology and AI dominated Day 1's afternoon sessions. Mark Patterson, Founder and Executive Director of Magnet, described the exponential rate of change and urged a focus on "adaptive capacity", improved data foundations, workflow redesign, testbeds and workforce reskilling, rather than piecemeal tool adoption. AI and automation can boost productivity but only if employers, educators and funders invest in the less glamorous infrastructure that makes digital transformation possible.

Day 2 shifted toward actionable pathways: attracting talent, immigration, workplace culture and immediate priorities.

Panels highlighted successful recruitment models for newcomers, Indigenous peoples and urban career-changers: hands-on exposure, micro-credentials, employer-informed short programs and storytelling that leads with roles rather than industry labels. Programs such as Agri-Edge and school-based experiential learning were showcased as scalable models.

Immigration emerged as a critical and complex issue. Panelists emphasized that temporary foreign workers remain vital for labour-intensive operations, especially in rural areas, and called for streamlined administration, longer permits and renewed pathways to permanent residency tailored to agricultural realities. Speakers noted that aggregate vacancy data can obscure acute local shortages and urged policymakers to consider rural-specific conditions.

HR experts pressed employers to prioritize leadership development, psychological safety, inclusive cultures and practical AI adoption in HR functions. Retention strategies centered on transparent hiring, robust onboarding, mentorship, visible career paths and modest pay premiums

combined with community-building activities that reduce stress for seasonal workers.

The summit closed with a call to act collectively. NWSP Phase Three will re-energize working groups, finalize the build of a skills framework highlighting emerging skills, and scale tools across the workforce strategy. Delegates left Calgary with a clear vision for the future: Addressing workforce challenges will require coordinated action across policy, employers, educators, and communities, with a focus on young people, we heard valuable lessons from other industries facing similar workforce pressures, the key takeaway was that we don't need to start from scratch, and there needs to be better alignment between training systems and industry if we're going to close the persistent gaps.

Solving workforce challenges will also require us to think long term, even beyond the next five-year agricultural policy framework. If the next twelve months delivers measurable results, expands LMI use, and develops durable employer-community partnerships, the NWSP Summit in Halifax in June 2027 will demonstrate the progress on the actions prioritized this year and continue to build on the NWSP from consensus into outcomes.



NWSP WORKFORCE SUMMIT 2027

Halifax, NS







PERCEPTION AND AWARENESS OF INDUSTRY AND CAREERS



EXPANDING AWARENESS OF CAREERS IN AGRICULTURE THROUGH INNOVATION AND WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

The Canadian agriculture sector is evolving at a fast rate through innovation, technology and sustainability with one challenge front and center: ensuring students and job seekers understand the diverse career opportunities available within the industry. Agriculture today extends far beyond traditional perceptions of farming - such as AI, automation and environmental sustainability - and recent national events highlight the growing importance of students exploring new career pathways through Work-Integrated Learning in helping shape the sector's future workforce.

Tech leaders from across Canada gathered at [Polytechnics Canada's annual Canada's Innovation Partners event](#), hosted at Humber Polytechnics from May 12-14. This event brought together leaders from industry, post-secondary institutions, and innovation-focused organizations to explore emerging technologies, applied research, and workforce development across and variety of sectors.

Throughout the conference, conversations emphasized the need to better connect students with industries undergoing rapid transformation and what this means for students and education today. Agriculture is a specific industry that intersects with technology, automation, engineering, data

analytics, sustainability, and business innovation. CAHRC had the opportunity to join in on this conversation and connect with educators and industry to chat about the innovation undergoing within the agriculture industry. There is a growing recognition that many students may not realize their skills and interests align with careers in the agri-food sector. Events like Canada's Innovation Partners play an important role in bridging the awareness gap by fostering collaboration between educators, employers and industry stakeholders for the future workforce.

The importance of experiential learning and industry partnerships was also a major focus at the [CEWIL Canada Pathways to Partnerships Conference](#), held in Ottawa on May 19-21. As a member of CEWIL, CAHRC is always happy to be a part of such a meaningful conversation among education representatives, students, government and community. CEWIL's annual conference explores how meaningful WIL opportunities can help students gain practical experience while strengthening workforce development across Canada. Discussions throughout the event reinforced the value of creating accessible pathways for students to explore careers they may not have considered, a similar mission of CAHRC's Growing Opportunities Program which plays an important role in changing perceptions of

agriculture by connecting students with meaningful hands-on experience.

CAHRC's Growing Opportunities Program and WIL play a critical role in changing perceptions and awareness among students from diverse academic backgrounds. Placements in areas within agriculture such as communications, engineering, environmental science, business and technology are helping demonstrate that agriculture is a modern, innovative, and a rapidly evolving industry with opportunities extending well beyond traditional agriculture.

As Canada faces ongoing workforce shortages and increasing demand for skilled talent, collaboration between employers, post-secondary institutions, and workforce development organizations will remain essential. National events like Canada's Innovation Partners and CEWIL: Pathways to Partnerships not only showcases innovation and emerging technologies but also highlights the importance of Work-Integrated Learning and exploring different career pathways for the next generation.



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PEOPLE AND WORKPLACE CULTURE





RETENTION AND PERFORMANCE IN CANADIAN AGRICULTURE



Employee retention and performance management have become defining challenges for Canada's agricultural sector. Labour shortages, demographic shifts, and increasing competition for skilled workers have placed significant pressure on farms to not only attract talent but also create workplaces where employees choose to stay. According to national labour market trends reported through CAHRC's LMI research, workforce shortages remain one of the most persistent risks facing agricultural employers across all commodities in Canada. These shortages affect productivity, operational stability, and long-term business sustainability.

Retention Challenges in Canadian Agriculture

Retention issues in agriculture stem from several structural realities. Many farms operate in rural or remote areas, making it difficult to compete with urban employers offering higher wages, shorter commutes, or more predictable schedules. CAHRC highlights that maintaining a strong agricultural workforce has become "the number one business risk management issue across all commodities" due to persistent labour shortages and high vacancy rates.

Demographic pressures intensify these challenges. [CAHRC's LMI](#) shows that a significant portion of the domestic agricultural workforce is nearing retirement age, with some provinces expecting more than one-third of their experienced workers to retire by 2030. This creates a substantial experience gap and increases the urgency for farms to retain existing employees while attracting new talent.

What Drives Retention in Agriculture?

CAHRC's LMI identifies several key factors influencing retention across Canadian farms. One major challenge is the perception of agricultural work among job seekers. Many individuals, especially those without prior exposure to farming, hold outdated assumptions about the nature of agricultural jobs, including concerns about the physical demands, limited career progression, and seasonal instability. These perceptions can discourage potential workers from entering or staying in the sector.

On the employer side, farms that invest in strong HR practices tend to retain employees more effectively. CAHRC's research highlights that employees are more likely to stay when they experience:

- Clear communication and expectations
- Fair and competitive compensation
- Safe, well-organized workplaces
- Opportunities for skill development and advancement
- Inclusive and welcoming environments for newcomers and underrepresented groups.

These findings align with national HR benchmarks showing that organizations with strong retention invest in culture, leadership, and career development—factors that directly influence employee loyalty and satisfaction.

Performance Management in Agricultural Workplaces

Performance management in agriculture must account for the sector's unique characteristics: seasonal labour cycles, diverse skill levels, physically demanding tasks, and the need for strict compliance with safety and food production standards. CAHRC emphasizes that effective HR management ensures “the right people with the right skills at the right time,” which requires clear expectations and consistent communication. Yet many agricultural operations, particularly small or family-run farms, lack formal HR systems. In some provinces, more than half of employers manage HR responsibilities themselves, leading to inconsistent performance practices and limited feedback structures.

A strong performance management system in agriculture typically includes:

- Clear job descriptions and performance expectations
- Regular check-ins during peak seasons
- Coaching and skill-building opportunities
- Objective, documented evaluations
- Recognition of strong performance.

These practices not only improve productivity but also contribute directly to retention. Employees who understand

expectations, receive feedback, and feel valued are significantly more likely to stay.

The Link Between Retention and Performance

Retention and performance are deeply interconnected. High turnover disrupts productivity, increases training costs, and reduces operational stability—especially during critical planting and harvesting periods. Conversely, strong performance management supports retention by creating clarity, fairness, and opportunities for growth.

CAHRC's LMI findings consistently show that farms with well-structured HR practices, such as clear communication, supportive supervision, and opportunities for skill development, experience stronger retention outcomes. When employees feel supported, understand their roles, and see a future within the operation, they are more likely to remain committed and perform at a high level.

Conclusion

Retention and performance management are critical pillars of a sustainable agricultural workforce in Canada. With labour shortages intensifying and demographic pressures mounting, farms must adopt intentional, well-structured HR practices that support employee engagement, development, and well-being. National and provincial research consistently shows that improving workplace culture, clarifying expectations, and investing in people are among the most effective strategies for keeping skilled workers in the sector.

As Canadian agriculture continues to evolve—embracing new technologies, diversifying its workforce, and navigating complex labour market realities—strong retention and performance systems will be essential to ensuring long-term productivity, competitiveness, and resilience.



IMMIGRATION AND FOREIGN WORKERS





SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS DURING A BUSY SEASON

As the planting season winds down and farms move into the next stage of the growing season, many international agricultural workers are carrying more than just physical exhaustion. Long workdays, physically demanding labour, unpredictable weather, and months away from family can take a significant toll on mental health and overall wellbeing. For many workers, the end of a planting season brings not only fatigue, but also feelings of stress, loneliness, homesickness, and emotional burnout.

Many international agricultural workers also experience what is often referred to as the “honeymoon stage” during their first days or weeks in Canada. At the beginning of the season, workers may feel excited, hopeful, and motivated by the opportunity to earn income, support their families, and experience a new country. Everything feels new and positive, and workers are often eager to perform well and adapt quickly. However, as the season progresses, the physical demands of agricultural work, long hours, language barriers, cultural differences, and separation from loved ones can begin to affect mental wellbeing. The initial excitement may gradually shift into fatigue, stress, frustration, or loneliness. Understanding this transition is important for employers and supervisors, as workers who appear to be coping well early in the season may require additional support later when emotional and physical exhaustion begins to build.

In many cultures, mental health is still not openly discussed, making it difficult for workers to ask for help directly. Some workers may not recognize the signs of **burnout, anxiety, or depression** until they are already struggling significantly. Common signs can include:

- Increased irritability or withdrawal
- Difficulty sleeping
- Loss of motivation
- Changes in appetite
- Fatigue beyond normal physical tiredness
- Increased conflict among workers
- Loss of concentration or productivity
- Expressions of hopelessness or excessive worry

Research across Canada continues to show that international agricultural workers face unique barriers when accessing mental health supports. Common challenges include language differences, limited transportation in rural areas, lack of awareness of available services, stigma surrounding mental health, and fear of speaking up about concerns. Many workers also experience anxiety related to job security and returning in future seasons, which can make them hesitant to seek help or report challenges. In addition, navigating the Canadian healthcare system can be difficult, particularly when culturally appropriate or multilingual supports are limited.

At the same time, farm owners are also under pressure managing increased cost of inputs, markets uncertainty, labour shortages, production timelines, operational demands and weather changes. Supporting worker wellbeing does not mean employers need to become counsellors or mental health experts. However, creating a supportive environment can make a meaningful difference in workers' overall wellbeing and workplace morale.

How Employers Can Support Workers' Mental Health

Small actions often have the biggest impact. Employers and supervisors can help create healthier workplaces by building trust, reducing isolation, and encouraging open communication.

Practical Tips for Supporting International Workers

- Check in regularly with workers
- Simple daily conversations such as “How are you doing?” or “How is your family back home?” can help workers feel seen and supported
- Encourage communication with family members
- Reliable Wi-Fi access and flexible opportunities for workers to video call their families can significantly reduce stress and homesickness
- Use communication platforms workers are already comfortable with
- WhatsApp groups can be used to share updates, safety information, wellness resources, transportation schedules, or community event information in workers' preferred languages
- Provide multilingual information
- Posters, videos, and orientation materials should be available in languages workers understand best, such as Spanish or Tagalog where applicable
- Reduce social isolation
- Organize occasional social events such as BBQs, soccer games, community outings, or cultural celebrations to encourage connection and morale
- Support transportation to town or community activities
- Access to grocery stores, religious services, parks, and recreational activities can greatly improve overall wellbeing
- Train supervisors on respectful communication
- Supervisors who understand cultural differences and mental health awareness can better recognize when workers may be struggling
- Normalize conversations about stress and mental health
- Workers are more likely to seek help when employers openly communicate that mental health is important and support is available
- Encourage peer support among workers
- Workers often feel more comfortable speaking with trusted coworkers first before approaching management or formal support services
- Recognize workers' contributions
- Small gestures such as celebrating milestones, acknowledging hard work, or providing meals during busy seasons can improve morale and workplace culture.

Mental Health Resources for Agricultural Workers Across Canada

Many organizations across Canada now offer specialized mental health supports for farmers, agricultural workers, and rural communities.

National Resources

- [Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing \(CCAW\)](#): Mental health and wellbeing resources
- [National Farmer Wellness Network Crisis Line](#): 24/7 confidential crisis support
- [Canadian Agricultural Safety Association \(CASA\) – Mental Health Hub](#)
- [Do More Ag Foundation](#): Mental health awareness and training for Canadian agriculture
- [Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada – Mental Health Resources](#): Federal mental health resources and agricultural wellbeing initiatives.

Alberta

- [AgKnow Alberta Farm Mental Health Network](#)

British Columbia

- [AgSafe BC Mental Health Resources](#)

Manitoba

- [Klinic Crisis Line](#)

New Brunswick

- [Farm Talk Care – Farmer Wellness Program](#)

Newfoundland and Labrador

- [811 Newfoundland and Labrador Mental Health Services](#)

Nova Scotia

- [Nova Scotia Mental Health and Addictions](#)

Ontario

- [Agriculture Wellness Ontario – International Agricultural Worker Wellness Program \(IAWWP\)](#)
- [Farmer Wellness Initiative](#): Free counselling support for Ontario's agricultural community
- [Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers \(OHCOW\) – Temporary Foreign Agricultural Worker Resources](#): Health and wellbeing resources for temporary foreign workers
- [Workplace Safety & Prevention Services \(WSPS\) – Mental Health Resources for Agricultural Workers](#)

Prince Edward Island

- [PEI Farm Centre – Farmer Assistance Program](#): Mental health and counselling support

Quebec

- [Au cœur des familles agricoles \(ACFA\)](#): Mental health and wellbeing support for Quebec's agricultural community

Saskatchewan

- [Farm Stress Line – Mobile Crisis Services Saskatchewan](#)
- [SaskAgMatters](#): Saskatchewan farm mental health resources and peer support initiatives

Territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut)

- [9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline Canada](#): National crisis support line available across all Canadian territories.



CAHRC-CCRHA

Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council
Conseil canadien pour les ressources humaines
en agriculture

Be Seen as a **Leader** in Solving Agriculture's #1 Challenge

CAHRC is the **national leader in workforce development for Canadian agriculture**. We provide research, training, and HR solutions that help the sector attract, retain, and develop a skilled, sustainable workforce. **By partnering with us, your organization plays a direct role in solving agriculture's most urgent challenge: people.**

Why Partner with CAHRC?

- **Make an Impact:** Support programs that strengthen agriculture's workforce and HR practices.
- **Expand Your Reach:** Connect with industry leaders, professionals, and stakeholders.
- **Elevate Your Brand:** Position your organization alongside a trusted, respected non-profit in agriculture.

Partnership Benefits



Industry Leadership

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Support programs and initiatives that make a tangible difference in workforce development and HR management.



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Strategic Connections

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READY TO MAKE A LASTING IMPACT?

✉ Jennifer Wright at jwright@cahrc-ccrha.ca

🌐 www.cahrc-ccrha.ca



**Do you have a story that
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SKILL DEVELOPMENT



BUILDING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE

Workforce development remains one of the greatest challenges facing Canada's agriculture sector. Through our [labour market research](#), CAHRC has consistently found that employers need reliable access to workers with the skills and knowledge required to meet evolving industry demands.

To support industry, CAHRC has developed a range of workforce resources, including more than 50 National Occupational Standards (NOS), occupational profiles, competency resources, and labour market tools. Building on this work, CAHRC has proposed a comprehensive Skills Framework for the sector.

CAHRC's proposed Skills Framework is intended to create a common approach to defining, organizing, and developing skills across agriculture. The framework will support recruitment, onboarding, training, career development, workforce planning, and curriculum design.

A key component of the framework is the organization of occupations into functional areas or job families that reflect career pathways across both primary production and supporting functions such as human resources, finance, supply chain, research, marketing, and sales. The framework also introduces a six-level proficiency model that

reflects career progression from support-level workers to owners, operators, and executives.

Leadership is recognized as a distinct skill category, with competencies such as coaching, strategic thinking, and building trust adapted to different levels of responsibility. To improve consistency, all skills would follow a standardized structure that includes a definition, performance indicators, and knowledge requirements.

The framework groups skills into five categories: Core Personal Effectiveness Skills, Core Industry Technical Skills, Functional Area Skills, Leadership Skills, and Occupation-Specific Skills. This approach will help organizations identify transferable skills, support career mobility, and build effective learning and development pathways.

As part of a broader workforce development initiative, the framework will support improved labour market intelligence, advance priorities identified in the National Workforce Strategic Plan, and help address barriers to employment. Its success will depend on continued industry engagement to ensure it reflects the needs of Canada's diverse agricultural workforce.



AUTOMATION AND TECHNOLOGY



THE WORKFORCE BEHIND CANADA'S FOOD SECURITY FUTURE



Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector is at the centre of two important national priorities: strengthening food security and accelerating the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI). While these initiatives are often discussed in terms of infrastructure, innovation, and technology, they share a common requirement, a skilled workforce capable of supporting a rapidly evolving food system.

The Government of Canada's National Food Security Strategy aims to strengthen domestic food production, expand food processing capacity, increase year-round fruit and vegetable production, and improve supply chain resilience. At the same time, Canada's National Artificial Intelligence Strategy is helping drive the adoption of technologies that can enhance productivity, sustainability, and competitiveness across the economy, including in agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing.

Together, these strategies reflect a sector undergoing significant transformation. Across the food value chain, businesses are increasingly adopting technologies such as precision agriculture, robotics, AI-powered decision-support tools, and advanced manufacturing systems. These innovations

have the potential to improve efficiency, support sustainability goals, and help address labour challenges. However, they also require workers with new skills and employers who are prepared to lead technological change.

The priorities outlined in Canada's Food Security and AI strategies highlight several areas where the National Workforce Strategic Plan is currently working with partners to enhance available workforce data and identify research needs.

First, digital skills and technology adoption will become increasingly important. Workers at all levels will need the ability to use and adapt to new technologies, from AI-enabled management tools and automated equipment to precision agriculture systems and advanced manufacturing technologies.

Second, leadership and change management capabilities will be critical. Technology adoption is ultimately about people, and managers, supervisors, and business owners play a key role



in supporting employee learning, navigating workplace change, and building cultures that encourage innovation.

Third, demand for skilled trades and technical occupations is expected to continue growing. Technicians, mechanics, equipment operators, automation specialists, and maintenance professionals will be needed to install, operate, and maintain increasingly sophisticated systems across farms, processing facilities, and supply chains.

Data literacy is another emerging priority. Modern agricultural and food production systems generate large volumes of information, creating opportunities for workers and managers to make more informed decisions. The ability to interpret and apply data will become an increasingly valuable skill across many occupations.

Finally, workforce attraction, retention, and knowledge transfer remain fundamental challenges. Even as technology advances, people remain the foundation of the sector.

Attracting new talent, retaining experienced employees, and transferring knowledge to the next generation will be essential to maintaining a resilient workforce.

For Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector, food security and artificial intelligence are not separate conversations. Both depend on the sector's ability to develop a workforce that is adaptable, innovative, and prepared for change. Technology can improve productivity and help address labour shortages, but it cannot replace the people who drive the industry forward.

As Canada works to strengthen food security and accelerate innovation, investment in workforce development will be just as important as investment in technology. Building the skills, leadership, and talent needed for the future will help ensure Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector remains productive, competitive, and resilient for years to come.



INNOVATION, INVESTMENT, AND COLLABORATION TAKE THE SPOTLIGHT AT THE 2026 AGRI TECH VENTURE FORUM



Canada's agricultural future was on full display in Toronto in May as industry leaders, investors, entrepreneurs, and innovators gathered for the **2026 AGRI Tech Venture Forum** on May 6–7 at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel. The annual event has become one of Canada's premier agtech conferences, bringing together stakeholders from across the agri-food ecosystem to explore the technologies, partnerships, and investments shaping the future of the sector.

The Forum placed a strong emphasis on commercialization and investment in Canadian ag-tech innovation. A standout feature of the program was the launch of the "Canadian Ag & Food Tech Launchpad" which was presented in partnership with FCC/FAC. This session gave emerging AgTech startups the opportunity to pitch their technologies directly to investors and industry decision-makers. The session highlighted the growing momentum behind Canadian ag-tech companies developing solutions in automation, AI, sustainability, food production, and farm efficiency. Throughout the discussions, investors emphasized the growing demand for scalable technologies to strengthen productivity, food security and long-term resilience across Canadian ag.

Among the startups featured during the Canadian Ag and Food Tech Launchpad was Verdi, a Vancouver-based ag-tech company focused on making irrigation automation more accessible for farms. Verdi has gained significant momentum within the agtech space following a recent \$6.5 million funding round led by Thrive SVG Ventures, with its extensive technology already being implemented across North America. Verdi's pitch in the Forum's Launchpad reflected practical innovation designed to address real-world challenges facing Canadian agriculture.

Another impressive pitch during the Canadian Ag and Food Tech Launchpad was Lyrata, a Toronto-based Agtech company developing sustainable solutions for indoor farming through its 3D-printed, reusable "smart soil" technology designed for sustainable indoor farming. Designed as a reusable alternative to traditional soil used in hydroponic systems, Lyrata's biodegradable soil solution aims to reduce waste and improve sustainability within controlled environment agriculture. The company's presentation highlighted the growing demand for innovative urban agriculture technologies that support more efficient and environmentally conscious food production systems.



The event also introduced a newly designed “Ag & Food Tech Solutions Lab,” an interactive forum focused on addressing some of agriculture’s most pressing challenges through innovation and collaboration. Discussions throughout the day explored topics ranging from AI-powered farm technologies and climate resilience to labor shortages and the scalability of emerging agri-food solutions.

The forum attracted participation from a wide range of organizations connected to agriculture and food innovation, including FCC/FAC, Protein Industries Canada, Bioenterprise Canada, Zone Agtech, and SVG Ventures THRIVE. The presence of both early-stage startups and established industry leaders reinforced the increasingly collaborative nature of Canada’s innovation ecosystem. The AgriTech Venture Forum aimed to foster meaningful dialogue and connection between innovators, investors, producers and industry organizations – giving

all parties the opportunity to reflect on the real-world challenges facing Canadian ag and the technologies that aim to solve them.

Events like the Agri Tech Venture Forum demonstrate the growing role of innovation in shaping the next generation of agriculture. From emerging startups to large scale industry collaboration, the conversations taking place in Toronto on May 6-7 made it clear that the future of Canadian agriculture will not be driven only by technology but by the partnerships and the people behind it.

We look forward to CAHRC’s attendance at next year’s Forum.



**LOOKING FOR A VOICE ON CANADA'S
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MATTERS

AROUND TOWN

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Find CAHRC here:

- **SOWING STRENGTH, HARVESTING LEADERSHIP, AUG 24**
- **TOGETHER WE GROW, SEP 8-10**
- **PLANT FORWARD ON THE PRAIRIES, SEP 21-23**
- **MUNICIPAL AG ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING FORUM, SEP 28-29**
- **CAPI EXCHANGE CONFERENCE, OCT 6-7**
- **CCFI PUBLIC TRUST SUMMIT, OCT 6-7**
- **FOOD FORWARD SUMMIT, OCT 8**
- **FSC A FUTURE BUILT ON SKILLS, OCT 13-14**

Other events:

- **CANADA'S OUTDOOR FARM SHOW, SEP 15-17**
- **COLD HARVEST & AQUACULTURE CANADA CONFERENCE, SEP 15-17**
- **2026 INTERNATIONAL PLOWING MATCH & RURAL EXPO, SEP 22-26**
- **WORLD DAIRY EXPO, SEP 29-OCT 2**

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