

**ADDRESSING LABOUR SHORTAGES IN THE
AGRICULTURE & AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY
THROUGH A NATIONAL
WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN**

**Prepared by the Labour Task Force
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- Value Chain Roundtables including Chairs and Members of:
 - Beef Value Chain Roundtable
 - Food Processing Value Chain Roundtable
 - Grains Value Chain Roundtable
 - Horticulture Value Chain Roundtable
 - Organics Value Chain Roundtable
 - Pork Value Chain Roundtable
 - Pulses Value Chain Roundtable
 - Seafood Value Chain Roundtable
 - Seed Value Chain Roundtable
 - Sheep Value Chain Roundtable
 - Special Crops Value Chain Roundtable
- Industry Associations including:
 - national, provincial, and regional associations
 - general and commodity specific organizations
- Education including:
 - educational institutions
 - education related associations
- Agriculture and Agri-food businesses including:
 - small, medium, and large businesses
 - primary production, seafood, and food processing businesses

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Executive Summary

Industry stakeholders have expressed significant concern about the immediate labour challenges facing Canadian agriculture and agri-food businesses and the risks to their viability and growth into the future. As a \$100 billion dollar industry that contributes 8% to Canada's gross domestic product and employs 2.1 million Canadians, this issue is urgent, cross cutting and merits focused attention. As a result, the Chairs of the eleven Value Chain Roundtables that are representative of the industry launched a Labour Task Force mandated to research and prepare plans to mitigate risks to the agriculture and agri-food sector as a whole. The Labour Task Force conducted extensive consultations with industry stakeholders over the last year, working to examine issues and identify solutions. It launched three separate Working Groups to support the research and ensure full coverage of important lines of enquiry. The details of that effort are presented here including the resulting **Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan**, designed to address the immediate and pervasive issue of an inadequate supply of workers currently impeding Canadian agriculture and agri-food business operations and their future growth potential.

This report presents the work of the Labour Task Force along with its findings and recommendations. It defines the specific objectives and activities of a national **Workforce Action Plan** for the agriculture and agri-food industry along with the pathway to implementation details to ensure its success. The Labour Task Force recommends that industry and government partner to deliver on the action plan, collaborating to champion the effort and provide the requisite political and financial support for this important initiative that serves to secure the future stability and success of Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry.

Workforce Action Plan for Agriculture & Agri-Food

The Labour Task Force has prepared a consolidated national **Workforce Action Plan** for the agriculture and agri-food industry, including the seafood sector, to address the critical concerns of labour shortages and skills requirements for all commodities, in all regions of Canada. Specifically, the plan includes the following main activities:

1. **Increase the Supply of Labour** - to meet immediate and future requirements for skilled and unskilled workers; and
2. **Improve the Knowledge and Skills of Workers** - to meet immediate and future labour requirements of the industry.

These activities are necessary for the industry to remain viable, competitive and a significant contributor to the economic health of the country. Through the

implementation of this plan, improvements to recruitment, employment and retention for the industry can be realized in the short and long term.

The following critical research and development activities are included in the plan:

1. Increase the Supply of Labour to Meet Immediate and Future Requirements for Skilled and Unskilled Workers

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes immediate action to improve access to domestic and foreign labour and to address the longer term supply requirements by increasing the size of the labour pool for the agriculture and agri-food industry.

1.1 Improve Access to Temporary and Seasonal Labour

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes access improvements to temporary and seasonal workers for industry stakeholders to ensure labour needs are met in a standardized, efficient manner.

1.2 Improve Access to Domestic Labour

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes access improvements to Canadian workers to facilitate the employment of more Canadians to fill requirements for agriculture and agri-food positions now and into the future through the following:

a. Develop A Jobs Resource Centre for Industry

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes the development of a centralized mechanism to support career promotion for the agriculture and agri-food industry as a whole. This includes the development of a searchable and robust **On-line Jobs Resource** which clarifies the vast number and types of jobs, job requirements and career pathway options within the agriculture and agri-food industry for job seekers, students, teachers, guidance counselors, and employees to improve awareness, interest, enrolment, recruitment, employment and retention (leveraging existing tools)

b. Develop Career Promotion Initiative and Tools for Industry

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes the development of a collective and integrated career promotion initiative including a centralized repository for ease of use and access to all materials to increase the future labour pool. This includes the development of industry wide career promotion tools directed toward job seekers, teachers, guidance counselors, and employees, for use by all stakeholders within the industry including employers, associations and educational institutions to improve awareness, interest, enrolment, recruitment, employment and retention for

the industry (leveraging existing tools and marketing efforts of all within the sector)

2. Improve the Knowledge and Skills of Workers to Meet Immediate and Future Labour Requirements

The ***Workforce Action Plan*** includes improvements to the knowledge and skills of Canadian agriculture workers to facilitate their retention and future employability as technological and innovation enhancements change job requirements for agriculture and agri-food positions through the following:

2.1 Develop A Learning Resource Centre

The ***Workforce Action Plan*** includes the development of a centralized mechanism to support skills and knowledge education/training for the agriculture and agri-food industry as a whole. This includes the development of a searchable ***On-line Learning Resource*** to improve access to agriculture and agri-food learning options in all their forms across Canada for students, job seekers, employees, employers and education administrators (leveraging existing tools).

2.2 Align Training with Industry Needs

The ***Workforce Action Plan*** includes improved alignment of training and education program offerings with industry needs through partnership and structured curriculum review to ensure Canadians gain the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in modern agriculture and agri-food workplaces and to enhance the enrolment in these programs and ultimately increase the pool of highly trained graduates.

2.3 Increase Investment in HR Mgmt and Training

The ***Workforce Action Plan*** includes improved Human Resource Management knowledge for industry employers, managers and supervisors with increased use of best practice management techniques and increased investment in training and skills development to enhance recruitment, employment and retention of agriculture and agri-food workers in Canadian operations.

Pathway to Implementation

The Labour Task Force has defined the appropriate approach, collaborators, leaders and timeline to ensure the success of the ***Workforce Action Plan***. Careful consideration of the immediacy of the requirements and the involved complexities have

informed these recommendations regarding the pathway to implementation to ensure industry expertise, research, best practices and tools are fully leveraged. The pathway to implementation includes the following:

The Labour Task Force recommends that this initiative be conducted as a collaborative effort, with an approach that facilitates the full and continued participation of industry stakeholders across the agriculture and agri-food sector including associations, businesses, sector councils, education institutions and government ministries. Stakeholder participation and contributions to the work are mandatory to ensure the initiative remains focused on priority industry needs. This initiative will leverage existing research, materials, tools, expertise, and efforts of partnered stakeholders from all commodities within the agriculture and agri-food industry and all regions of Canada to reduce duplication of efforts and ensure collaborative messaging that promotes interest, loyalty and secures a qualified workforce for the success of the industry's future.

The Labour Task Force recognizes the scope and breadth of the plan and the need for dedicated resources to oversee all elements. It is recommended that this initiative be led by an organization with the mandate, experience and capacity to undertake this work. The role of the lead organization will be to manage the contributions of industry stakeholders and partners, conduct all research elements, oversee all development activities, gather the input and perspectives across the industry to support full validation of materials, support the finalization of all outputs to be meaningful and meet industry needs, disseminate results and ensure the overall success of the initiative. The Labour Task Force recommends the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council function as the lead organization to deliver the plan leveraging their extensive experience in addressing these issues for the industry. It is also recommended that the members of the Labour Task Force continue their commitment to this initiative and function as an advisory committee working with the lead organization to provide strategic guidance and support the implementation activities to drive results and address the short and longer term goals associated with the ***Workforce Action Plan***.

The Labour Task Force stresses that it is urgent and essential that this initiative begin immediately as the issues of labour shortage are pervasive, affecting current operational success and damaging to the future health of the industry and the economy.

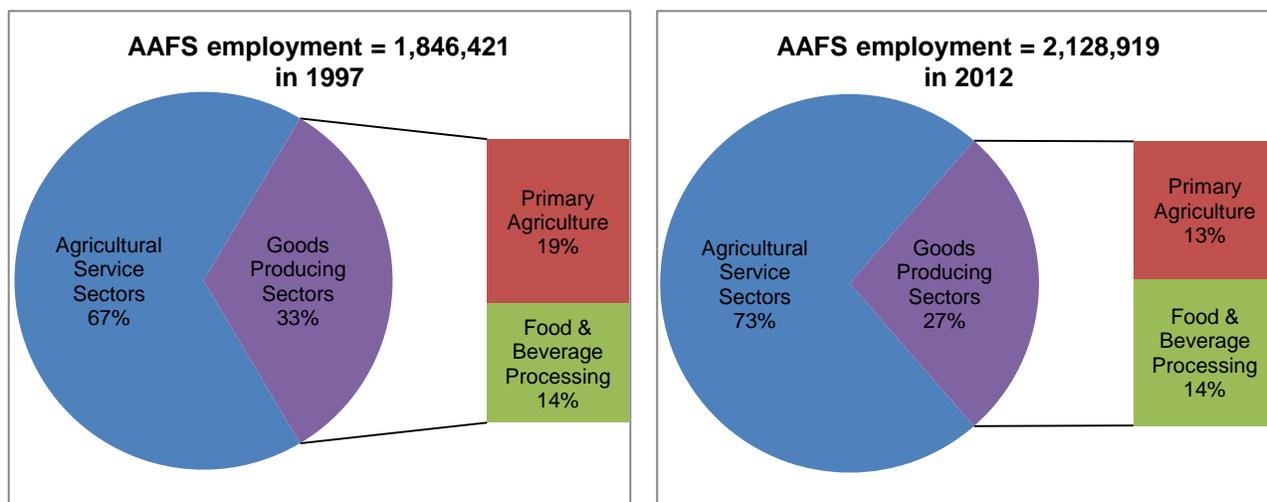
Through committed partnerships and investments between industry and government in this collaborative approach, the agriculture and agri-food system can be supported with the requisite supply of workers that have the knowledge and skills to successfully meet employer needs today and into the future.

SECTION 1: Labour in the Agriculture & Agri-Food Industry

1.1 Background

The agriculture and agri-food industry, including the seafood sector is a very large contributor to Canada's economy and success. It encompasses several industries including the farm input and service supplier industries, primary agriculture, food and beverage processing, aquaculture, food distribution, retail, wholesale and foodservice industries. In 2012, the Agriculture and Agri-Food System (AAFS)¹ employed 2.1 million people and accounted for 1 in 8 jobs in the Canadian economy, or 12% of total Canadian employment. This is dominated by occupations in the service industries (input suppliers, foodservice, retail/wholesale), which accounted for 73% of the total for the AAFS. The goods producing industries, i.e. primary agriculture and food processing, accounted for the remaining 27%.

Overall, employment in the entire AAFS has increased by 282,498 workers, or about 1% per annum due to the growth in service related occupations (+32% in foodservice, +17% in input suppliers and +17% in retail/wholesale).

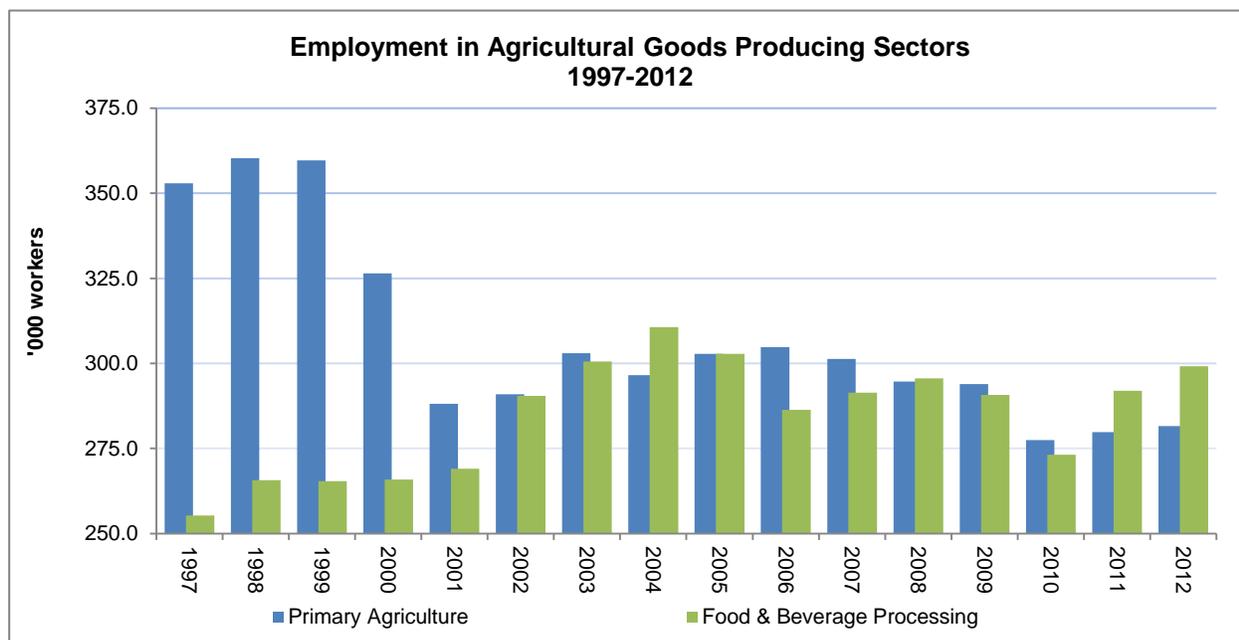


Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2013 and AAFC's Research and Analysis Directorate (RAD) calculations.

The overall proportions of workers in each category, however, has changed slightly over the last 15 years with the goods producing sector declining by 6% due exclusively to a drop in the share of employment in primary agriculture. The number of workers in primary agriculture has declined by 20% since 1997, or -1.35% per year to 281,600 workers in 2012. For the food processing industry, following a period of growth in the late 90s and early 2000s, employment has remained relatively stable since 2006

¹ The Agriculture and Agri-Food System comprises occupations in the following categories: Primary Agriculture, Food and Beverage Processing, Foodservice, Food Retail/Wholesale, and Input and Service Suppliers, as published by the Department in "An Overview of the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food System – 2013".

steadying at about 0.5% growth per annum. In 2012, the number of workers in the food and beverage processing industries was 299,200.



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2013 and AAFC RAD calculations.

In an industry with declining labour resources, many operators have turned to a number of capital intensive, labour saving technologies developed to facilitate, automate and mechanize all stages of the production cycle. For instance, in the horticulture industry, there are a number of commercially available technologies designed to reduce operator’s reliance on manual labour for simple tasks (e.g., transplanting machines and equipment, both operator-led or through an automated GPS positioning system, automated pesticide sprayers, mowers and weed control systems, harvest assist and robotic harvesting equipment, automated processing lines and finally automated defect sorting to aid in the grading and packing of final products).² The agriculture and agri-food industry contributes \$101.1 billion to the Canadian economy each year, representing 8% of total GDP, an increase of 32% since 1997.³ Over the same period, farm cash receipts experienced an 80% growth to reach \$54 billion in 2012 whereas manufacturing sales grew 68% to \$97.3 million.⁴

² Vineland Research and Innovation Centre; State of the Industry: A Review of Labour-Saving technologies for Horticulture; a report prepared for the Horticulture Value Chain Roundtable’s Labour Working Group, March 28, 2013.

³ Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, “An Overview of the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-food System,” 2013. Information for GDP reflect 2011 data.

⁴ Statistics Canada, 2013; Farm Cash Receipts, Table 002-0001 and Manufacturing Shipments, Monthly Survey of Manufacturers, Table 304-0014.

Regionally, the agriculture and agri-food industry, including the seafood industry, is an important source of economic activity in many provinces. In Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island for instance, these food producing sectors account for 13% and 10% of provincial GDP respectively and the AAFS as a whole accounts for 17% and 15% of total provincial employment. The largest distribution of the sector's GDP and employment however, remains in Ontario, Quebec and Alberta, which together accounted for 69% of total agriculture and food processing GDP and 70% of total employment for the industry.⁵

1.2 Factors Affecting Employment in the Sector

The Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector has unique features which impact the availability, access, costs and retention of labour for the industry. These include:

- labour shortages caused by an aging workforce and a general reduction in the number of available workers in the Canadian labour force;
- increasing competition for labour from other industries (e.g., oil, gas, mining, construction, and technology, etc.);
- unique requirements of Canadian agricultural jobs (e.g., transportation, accommodation, extensive training, competitiveness wage rates, physical demands of work, non-office settings);
- the location of many agriculture and agri-food businesses in rural areas that may prevent some businesses from attracting workers due to distances to services (e.g., health, education, recreation, language, settlement, etc.) and urban amenities;
- the high level of seasonality of work in primary production and to some extent the processing sectors;
- the wide variation in occupations in the sector, where commodities and sub-industries are competing with one another for labour;
- shorter growing/harvesting cycles associated with the Canadian climate, resulting in shorter (and less attractive) terms of seasonal employment compared to competitors in warmer climates such as California;
- tight margins which can affect an operator/processors' ability to pay competitive wages;
- changes in the source of labour on the farm, i.e. less reliance on family labour and a general movement towards hired employees;
- a negative view of employment opportunities within the agriculture and agri-food sector held by many in the general public which seriously impacts the number of students who seek educational programs related to the sector and the recruitment of workers into the industry;
- lack of education in schools about food, food production, farming, food processing, career options, viability of professions in agriculture and agri-food;

⁵ AAFC. "2013 Overview of the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-food System," 2013, p.50-51.

- lack of coordinated recruitment and retention efforts for the industry to address unique factors of work, location, competition for labour, wages, skill/knowledge requirements, and HR management needs and training required to support employers;
- lack of coordinated effort to promote the industry as a source of viable career options and increase the enrolment of students into industry related programs; and
- lack of investment in education and training for the sector impacting worker loyalty, development and preparation for future requirements, and retention of a sustainable workforce.

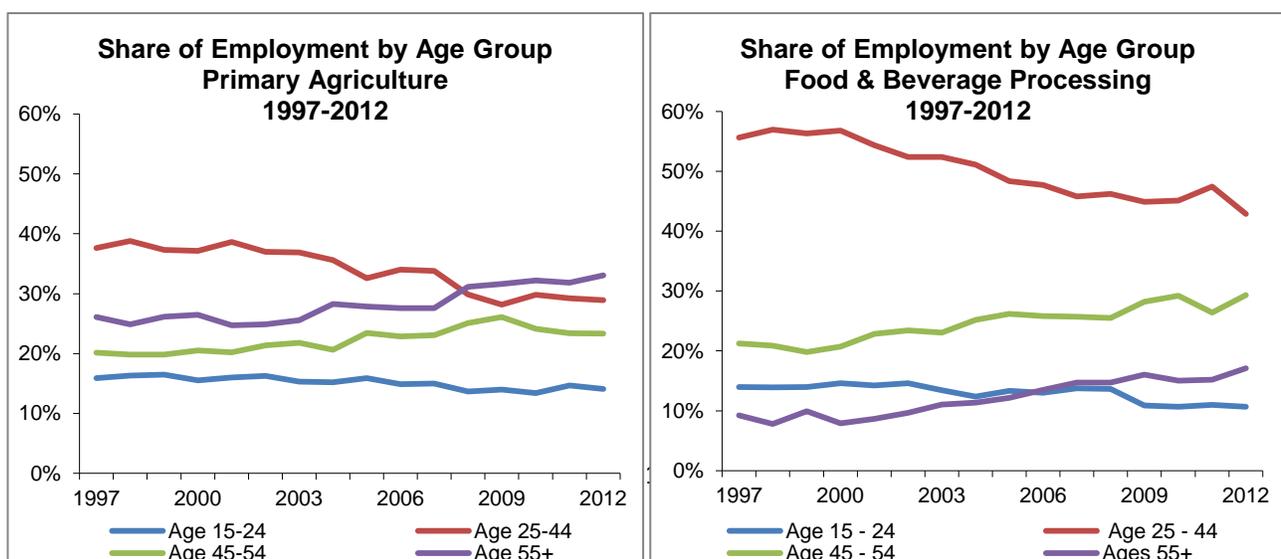
1.2.1 Seasonality

Due to the perishable nature of certain agriculture or seafood products, having a reliable and capable staff to harvest, process or package during peak periods is critical to businesses' ability to get products to market. Of the 297,683 paid employees on farms in 2010, 185,624 were seasonal⁶. Higher proportions of seasonal employees were reported in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and British Columbia at 77.5%, 74.2%, 72.8% and 70.9% respectively compared to 60.8% and 57.2% in Ontario and Quebec⁷.

Like primary agriculture, seasonal work plays an important role in some processing sectors, in particular, fruit and vegetable and seafood, which have extreme peak production periods due to the seasonality of their inputs. Processing businesses with peak seasonal labour demands have a challenge attracting and retaining domestic workers who are more inclined to choose permanent year-round employment options

1.2.2 Labour Shortages

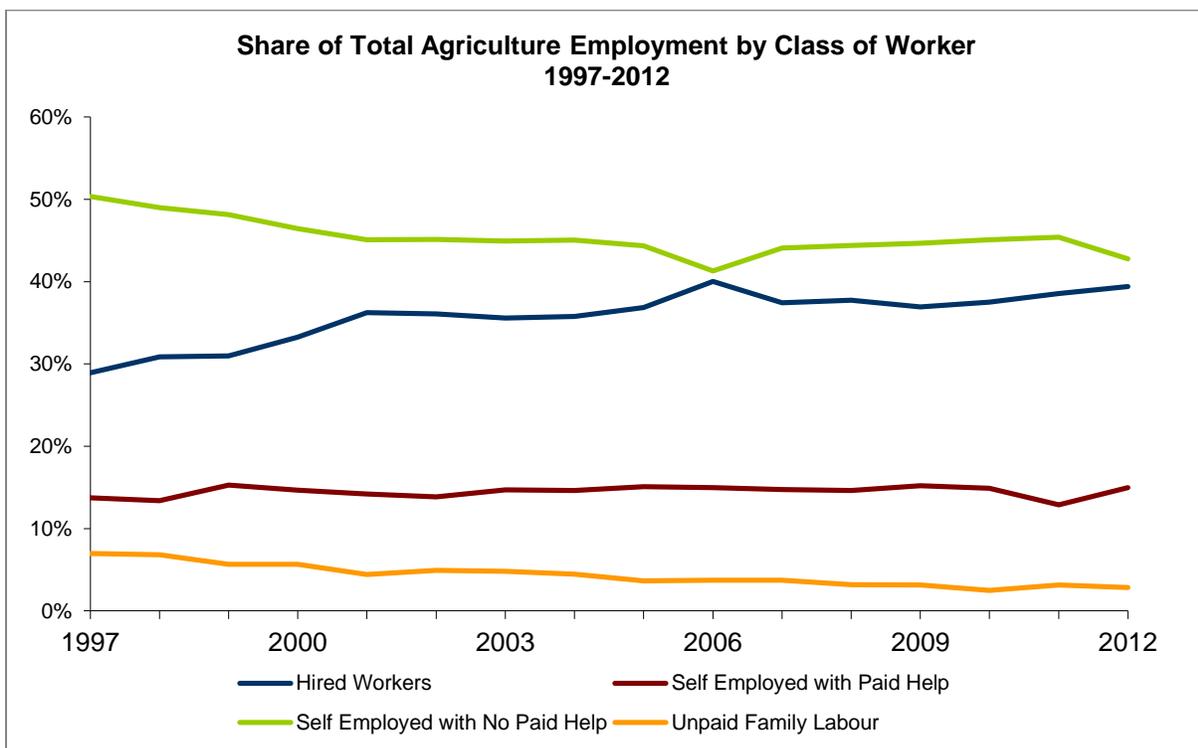
As in many industries within the Canadian economy, the domestic workforce is aging. Since 2008, the largest share of workers in primary agriculture was over 55 years; this is also the fastest growing category in the food processing industry. In 1997, workers in aged 55 and older accounted for 26% of employment in primary agricultural



occupations; this has increased to 33% in 2012. The share of younger workers aged 25-44, which has historically made up the largest proportion of workers on the farm, has fallen from 38% in 1997 to 29% in 2012.

Within the food and beverage processing industry, although the 25-45 age group continues to represent the largest share of employees in this industry, its share has declined about 2% per annum, from 56% in 1997 to 43% in 2012. On the other hand, the proportion of workers aged 55 or over has been increasing annually to reach a share of 17% in 2012, from only 9.2% in 1997. In addition, the second oldest cohort, those aged 45-55, who make up the second largest share of workers in the processing industry, accounted for 29% of workers in 2012; this is up from 21.2% in 1997 or about 3% per annum. With this aging workforce, the agriculture and agri-food industry is at a critical point where it must attract and retain new employees and maintain an adequate supply of labour, with the appropriate expertise, in order to remain economically viable and competitive in the long run.

With agricultural operations increasing in size, the class of worker on the farm has changed slightly over the last 15 year. Many agricultural employers have reduced their reliance on unpaid family labour, and have turned to hired workers, to maintain their level of production over the long run. Although employment in agriculture and agri-food industries continues to be dominated by self-employed workers, the share of hired workers, domestic and/or foreign, has increased from 29% in 1997 to 39% in 2012. The industry is committed to engaging workers from the available domestic labour pool, but shortages persist.



Source: Statistics Canada, Annual Labour Force Survey, 2013, via Research and Analysis Directorate, AAFC.

According to an AAFC Strategic Issues Tracking Survey of agricultural producers, 9% of farmers in 2013 mentioned labour shortages as the single most important issue facing Canadian agriculture, up from 1% in 2011⁸. Labour shortages were mentioned more by those in Atlantic Canada (19%) and Quebec (15%), than Ontario or the Prairies, and by larger operations (13% with sales of \$250,000 or more) and incorporated farms (13%)⁹.

In addition, a 2009 study conducted by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council estimates that vacancy rates in the agriculture industry are about 10% for small farms (197 vacant positions compared to a total reported 2009 workforce of 2,066 workers, including owner/operators) and were most acute in seasonal occupations, with 27% percent of the demand for seasonal workers on small farms unfilled¹⁰. On larger farms, vacancies were estimated at about 9% (or 25,000 job vacancies) for non-seasonal positions across the entire sector and 20% (16,560 vacant positions) for seasonal positions¹¹. The labour shortages are prevalent across all types of farm operations and positions, but were most acute in Atlantic Canada (17%) and British Columbia (15%)¹². General farm workers, machinery mechanics and operators, supervisors and managers were identified as the most difficult positions for which to recruit candidates¹³.

In a national study, conducted by the Food Processing HR Council, food and beverage processing firms reported that they face the biggest challenge in finding appropriate candidates for the following occupational categories: skilled workers and operators (32%), precision workers (27%); labourers (25%); supervisors (20%) and technicians/technologists (18%). Moreover, the processors expected these same occupations to continue to be difficult to fill over the next 5 years¹⁴. A survey by the the Canadian Seed Trade Association several years ago indicated the same trends with aging of the workforce and a serious shortfall of trained people to replace them.

1.2.3 Recruitment and Retention

It has been difficult for both farm operators and food processors to recruit and retain employees due to competition from other sectors, such as the oil industry, and the challenge in finding candidates with the necessary technical skills required for on-farm

⁸ AAFC. "Strategic Issues Survey Wage 4, Agricultural Producers," 2013, p. 17.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. "Labour Market Information, Focus on Small Farms in Canada, 2011," 2011, p. iii.

¹¹ Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. "Labour Market Information on Recruitment and Retention in Primary Agriculture," 2009, p.2.

¹² Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. "On-Farm Work Experience Program, Feasibility Study," 2012, p. 12.

¹³ Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. "On-Farm Work Experience Program, Feasibility Study," 2012, p. 13.

¹⁴ Food Processing HR Council. "Full Report-Who is Processing Your Food? 2011 Food and Beverage Labour Market Information Study," p.19.

and processing operations. In addition, difficult working conditions and the location of many agriculture and agri-food businesses in rural areas may prevent some businesses from attracting workers due to distances to services (e.g., health, education, recreation, language, settlement, etc.) and lack of urban amenities in rural areas.

AAFC’s 2012 National Renewal Survey also showed that a vast majority of producers that had paid labourers do not have a written Human Resource (HR) plan¹⁵. Overall 9% of producers that had paid labourers had a written HR plan that identifies strategies to attract and retain good employees¹⁶.

Although the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry prefers to hire domestic workers, in some cases, they must turn to various human resource programs to hire temporary foreign workers to fulfill their human resource needs. These include the various programs and streams of the Temporary Foreign Worker program (TFWP) administered by Employment and Skills Development Canada (ESDC) and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) which include the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), the Agricultural Stream, and the Streams for Lower-Skilled and Higher-Skilled Occupations for primary agricultural occupations and non-primary agricultural occupations. The specific terms and conditions and administrative structure vary under each TFWP stream, however some common elements include requirements that employers:

- Formally show that they have taken reasonable steps to recruit local workers;
- Pay workers a specified prevailing wage; and
- Ensure working conditions provided are consistent with federal and/or provincial standards.

Table 1 : Comparison of Program Options and Criteria for Agricultural Workers under the TFWP

Criteria	SAWP	Agricultural Stream	Low Skilled Stream	High skilled Stream
Source country	Workers must be from Mexico or Caribbean	N/A	N/A	N/A
Occupational skill level	Positions can be in lower or higher-skilled occupations	Positions can be in lower or higher-skilled occupations	Only low-skilled positions	Only high-skilled positions, e.g., management, professional, scientific, technical or trade occupations.
Industry Sector	Activities must be	Activities must be	Production is NOT	N/A

¹⁵ AAFC. “2012 National Renewal Survey-Business Development Program-Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation, final Report,” July 2012,p. xvi.

¹⁶ Ibid.

	related to on-farm primary agriculture and commodity must be included on the National Commodities List	related to on-farm primary agriculture and commodity must be included on the National Commodities List	included on the <i>National Commodities List</i>	
Transportation	Employer must pay for round-trip transportation costs*	Employer must pay for round-trip transportation costs***	Employer must pay for round-trip transportation costs***	N/A
Work Permit details	Less than 8 months; no maximum number of years; specific to employer	Less than 24 months; renewable to maximum 4 years; work permit specific to employer	Less than 24 months; renewable to maximum 4 years; work permit specific to employer	Work permit specific to employer
Housing	Employer must provide housing **	Employer must provide on-farm housing or off-site housing****	Employer must help the TFWs find affordable and suitable housing	N/A
Insurance	Employer must pay for private health insurance until the worker is covered by the appropriate provincial/territorial health insurance plan***	Employer must pay for private health insurance until the worker is covered by the appropriate provincial/territorial health insurance plan***	Employer must pay for private health insurance until the worker is covered by the appropriate provincial/territorial health insurance plan***	N/A
Wages	Must meet or exceed the wages indicated on the National Commodities List wage tables *****	Must meet or exceed the wages indicated on the National Commodities List wage tables *****	Must pay the prevailing (median) wage set by ESDC/Service Canada, for the specific occupation and geographic region*****	Must pay the prevailing (median) wage set by ESDC/Service Canada, for the specific occupation and geographic region*****

Source: Adapted from ESDC Agricultural Workers-Comparison of Program Options and Criteria

*Costs can be partially recouped from the TFW's salary (except in BC).

** Costs cannot be recouped directly or indirectly from the TFW's salary (except in BC).

***Costs cannot be recouped directly or indirectly from the TFW's salary.

**** Employer can deduct a maximum of \$30/week from the TFW's salary unless applicable provincial/territorial labour standards specify a lower amount.

***** For unionized positions, wage is established under a collective agreement.

ESDC reports that in 2012, there were a total of 202,510* temporary foreign workers on positive labour market opinion positions in Canada, of these 39,700* or 20% were employed in agricultural positions. Agriculture related occupations also comprised some of the top occupational groups for which temporary foreign workers were sought.

Although general farm workers were generally the top occupational group for which foreign workers were sought, this category ranked second in 2012 with 17,290 foreign

workers, harvesting labourers were fourth and nursery and greenhouse workers were sixth at 12,255 and 9,045 foreign workers respectively. It should also be noted that occupations in the food processing industry, specifically industrial butchers/meat cutters/poultry preparers and related workers ranked 18th in 2012 with 1,870 foreign workers.

Table 2: Top 10 Occupational Groups for Temporary Foreign Workers*

Position	Occupation	2011	2012
1	Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers and related occupations	12,385	17,755
2	General Farm Workers	16,410	17,290
3	Babysitters, Nannies and Parents' Helpers	15,680	16,485
4	Harvesting Labourers	12,805	12,255
5	Cooks	7,060	11,260
6	Nursery and Greenhouse Workers	7,500	9,045
7	Food Service Supervisors	3,570	7,020
8	Truck Drivers	2,765	5,035
9	Other Performers	2,955	3,890
10	Light Duty Cleaners	2,500	3,885
...
18	Industrial Butchers & Meat Cutters, Poultry Preparers & Related Workers	n.a.	1,870

*: According to the number of temporary foreign workers positions on positive labour market opinion, Source: Employment and Skills Development Canada, http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/foreign_workers/lmo_statistics/index.shtml, Tables 1, 7 and 9 accessed May 2013.

There are some regional differences in the number and occupations for which foreign workers are sought. In 2012, industrial butchers, meat cutters, poultry preparers and related workers ranked first in Manitoba whereas fish plant workers were the primary occupation for which foreign workers were sought in both Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. That same year, general farm labourers ranked first in Nova Scotia and Ontario, whereas harvesting labourers were number one in both Quebec and British Columbia.¹⁷

1.2.4 Education and Training

There are a number of factors affecting agricultural employers and employees' access to education and training. These include: the pace of agricultural business operations

¹⁷ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/foreign_workers/lmo_statistics/annual-top-occs.shtml#tab1, accessed on September 25, 2013.

(not 9-5) which can often limit their ability to leave the farm; the remote, rural location of their businesses that can limit access to conferences, workshops, central/urban universities; price (may include travel and accommodation costs, actual event cost or indirect costs associated with taking time off work); the length of training or educational program; and the availability of training appropriate for various levels of farm experience.¹⁸

According to a 2012 national survey of agricultural producers, the majority of producers, including their spouse, partners or employees, participated in a number of farm business management learning opportunities in the past 5 years¹⁹. The most popular learning opportunities were: self-study (63%); workshops or seminars (61%); written farm business management information from a wide range of sources (53%); conferences (50%); advisory services (47%) and courses (43%)²⁰.

For the services sector the picture is somewhat different in that wages and working conditions are competitive but the pool of trained graduates is insufficient to meet the current needs and this will be exacerbated with retirements of baby boomers in the near future. Sufficient quality education programs already exist but enrolments are too low to meet the demands. A coordinated effort is needed to enhance the appeal of these occupations and thus the enrolments in the programs.

¹⁸ Skills, Training, Education & Retention Working Group Considerations: Identifying Gaps and Proposing Solutions, January 2013.

¹⁹ AAFC. "2012 National Renewal Survey-Business Development Program-Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation, final Report," July 2012,p. 55.

²⁰ Ibid.

SECTION 2: Creation of the Labour Task Force (LTF)

Beginning in 2003, sector-specific roundtables that involve participation from across the value chain were established by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). These roundtables were designed to build a strengthened industry-government partnership, in order to facilitate industry discussions along the value chain such that they can increase competitiveness, address inefficiencies, gain recognition for world-leading Canadian capabilities and capture additional market shares in domestic and international markets. In addition, the VCRTs provide industry a venue to influence policy and program developments under the federal agricultural policy framework, such as Growing Forward.

Current sector-specific Value Chain Roundtables (VCRTs) include: beef, food processing, grains, horticulture, organics, pork, pulses, seafood, seeds, sheep and special crops. The majority of these have identified the access to an adequate supply of skilled and trained labour as a cross-cutting impediment to the competitiveness of Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector in a rapidly changing global economic environment. When the VCRT Co-Chairs met at the annual All Chairs Meeting in December 2011, the aforementioned labour challenges were raised.

Industry Co-Chairs agreed to create a Labour Task Force (LTF) to review and propose short and long term solutions to the labour concerns affecting the agriculture and agri-food industries. The LTF was expected to facilitate dialogue between all roundtables and throughout the value chain in response to those labour issues which are common to all sectors.

2.1 Mandate of LTF

The LTF is intended to be a solutions-oriented forum for dialogue between government and representatives from the eleven Value Chain Roundtables, to identify short and long term solutions to labour issues that impede the competitiveness of the sector, and to establish a dialogue with ESDC, CIC and other interested parties on short and long term objectives for labour programs and skills development.

Specifically, the objectives of the LTF are to:

1. Develop an overall long-term strategy to address labour shortages and skills development and training issues in the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry, including the seafood industry (including existing programs);
2. Investigate potential information sharing and education sessions that would increase general hiring success throughout the value chain, including how to utilize the ESDC/CIC programs; and,
3. Propose action items which the industry can tackle collectively to improve the labour situation.

2.2 LTF Membership

The LTF is an industry and government forum for dialogue on labour issues. It was co-chaired by one industry member and a senior executive from AAFC. Advice and strategic secretariat support were provided by AAFC.

The LTF is composed of:

- Industry representatives identified by each of the eleven Value Chain Roundtables,
- Officials from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) now Employment Skills Development Canada (ESDC), and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) participated as observers.

Members include:

Co-Chairs		
Industry	Bryan Harvey	University of Saskatchewan
Government	Sheila Jones	Director, Horticulture and Cross Sectoral Division, AAFC
Roundtable Members		
Beef	Bryan Walton	GM, National Cattle Feeders' Association
Food Processors	Susan Yaeger	Sr Manager – HR & Foreign Recruitment, Maple Leaf Foods
Grains	Richard Phillips	President, Canada Grains Council
Horticulture	Tom Baker	Flowers Canada
	Brian Gilroy	Ontario Fruits and Vegetable Growers Association
	Ken Forth	Chair, Labour Committee of the Ont. Fruit & Vegetable Growers Assoc.; President, Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services
Organic	Jodi Koberinski	Executive Director, Organic Council of Ontario
Pork	Frank Novak Mark Chambers	Alberta Pork Production Manager, Sunterra Farms
Pulses	Vicki Dutton	Seed Grower/Producer, Director SPG Board, FIRM: Toepfer also Alternative Director, Pulse Canada
Seeds	Bryan Harvey	Professor Emeritus (Plant Sciences), University of Saskatchewan
Seafood	Lisa Fitzgerald	Executive Director, Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council

Special Crops	Connie Kehler	Executive Director, Canadian Herb, Spice and Natural Health Products Coalition
Sheep	Bill Gibson	Lamb Producer

2.3 Summary of Work Accomplished

At their inaugural meeting, members of the Task Force identified three main areas for further dialogue and formed three Working Groups to address these issues. They are:

- (1) challenges in attracting and retaining domestic workers, including a mismatch between agricultural education and training programs and skills required by industry;
- (2) challenges in sharing complex information around government programs and educational opportunities to intended target audiences and;
- (3) challenges with the policies of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) in helping to address short to medium labour requirements.

The LTF met periodically to review the progress of the Working Groups and provide guidance and feedback on their initiatives. They also discussed consolidation of working group efforts, findings and their recommendations toward the preparation of this **Workforce Action Plan** with clear activities to address labour challenges for the industry today and into the future.

SECTION 3: The Working Groups

The Labour Task Force identified the need for three separate lines of enquiry to support their efforts and established three Working Groups. Each group was provided with a clear mandate, and developed from that terms of reference, objectives, work plans and established a representative stakeholder membership to accomplish their activities.

3.1 Skills, Training, Education, and Retention Working Group (STERWG)

3.1.1 Mandate of STERWG

To identify and propose measures to address gaps in skills development, training, and education in the context of the attraction and retention of workers in the agriculture and agri-food sectors.

3.1.2 STERWG Membership

Name	Title	Firm
Connie Kehler (Co-Chair)	Executive Director	Canadian Herb, Spice and Natural Health Products Coalition
Portia MacDonald-Dewhirst (Co-Chair)	Executive Director	Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council
Bryan Harvey	Professor Emeritus, Plant Sciences Dept.	University of Saskatchewan
Colleen Smith	Director	Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc.
Peter Enright	Director, Farm Management & Technology Program	McGill University
Johanna Oehling	President	Food Processing Human Resources Council
Sally Harvey	Manager of Education & Labour Development	Landscape Ontario
Vicki Dutton	Producer / Processor Director, SPG Board Director, Pulse Canada	Toepfer Saskatchewan Pulse Growers Pulse Canada

3.1.3 Summary of Work Accomplished

Between November 2012 and July 2013, the STERWG held five conference calls to support a comprehensive review of current training, tools and services available to the agricultural community to support the attraction and retention of workers. The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) prepared a report to support the working group activities entitled *Agricultural Tools and Services Relevant to the Labour Task Force Initiative* and an accompanying *Agricultural Tools & Services Summary Matrix*. These documents were circulated widely amongst stakeholders to capture the various sources of agricultural and agri-food based skills, education, training and

services made available to the industry from associations, sector councils, public and private training institutions and provincial/federal programs.

These reports include sections that outline the available reference materials for key topics of consideration: occupational information, career awareness, recruitment and selection, retention, training and professional development. Each section includes a list of available materials that are broadly relevant to all of agriculture and agri-food (industry-wide tools) as well as a section for materials that have been developed to support a specific occupation within a specific commodity (commodity-specific tools). The drafts are an important contribution to the LTF mandate and were used as tools to help the working group identify gaps in training and resource offerings and inform discussions regarding the dissemination of information. Although not an exhaustive inventory, it is a robust compilation, useful for industry stakeholders as a resource of all education, skills training and development programs and resources available to support recruitment and retention for the industry. The reports informed the work of all working groups and **are recommended to be maintained into the future.**

In order to determine gaps and priority issues, the STERWG developed a survey to obtain WG member and industry stakeholder perspectives on questions related to education, skills, training, development, recruitment and retention programs currently available. Six priority themes emerged around existing training and educational resources and their effectiveness, learning seekers knowledge of these programs and training programs role as a tool for recruitment and retention.

Further work was conducted to refine the compiled perspectives and develop recommendations to support the LTF efforts. This was accomplished with much input from a variety of industry stakeholders. The recommendations put forward to the Labour Task Force reflect the need for facilitated collaboration across jurisdictions and a dedicated effort to create a **Workforce Action Plan** that addresses labour requirements for the industry in both the short and long term.

3.2 Information Sharing Initiatives Working Group (ISIWG)

3.2.1 Mandate of ISIWG

To propose initiatives to improve current information sharing capabilities regarding available skills, training, education and hiring programs for the Canadian agriculture and agri-food sectors.

3.2.2 ISIWG Membership

Name	Title	Firm
Brian Gilroy (Chair)	Chair	Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers Assoc. Ontario Apple Growers
Jodi Koberinski	Executive Director	Organic Council of Ontario
Johanna Oehling	President	Food Processing Human Resources Council
Ken Linington	HR Director / Policy Advisor	Flowers Canada (Ont) Inc. / Labour Issues Coordinating Committee, Flowers Canada Growers Inc.
Lisa Fitzgerald	Executive Director	Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council
Portia MacDonald-Dewhirst	Executive Director	Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council

3.2.3 Summary of Work Accomplished

The ISIWG has built upon the work of the STERWG, but from an information sharing perspective. The working group has held three conference calls to review CAHRC's draft report entitled *Agricultural Tools and Services Relevant to the Labour Task Force Initiative* and accompanying *Agricultural Tools & Services Matrix* discussing ways to improve current information sharing capabilities to defined target audiences. Members also aided in populating the matrix focusing on the information sharing methods currently utilized by the agriculture and agri-food industries. They also explored an example of an information sharing tool used by CAHRC: AgriPathways, which is designed to assist employers and employees with career options and progression in primary agriculture and AgriTalent, a search engine for people looking for training and education programs in agriculture-related fields.

The working group also compiled a document that identifies information sharing mechanisms in the industry. This report outlines who shares information, what manner it is shared and with whom it is shared. All target audience groups that comprise the industry were identified, the categories included: Government (federal and provincial), Associations – Trade Organizations (National, Provincial), General Farm Organizations (National, Provincial), Agricultural Businesses (Farms, Processing Organizations, Suppliers), Agricultural Business Employees (workers, supervisors, managers, owners), Education (schools at all levels, private training institutions, boards of education, education associations, educational influencers: teachers, guidance councillors), General Public (youth, job seekers, broad labour market, parents and influencers), Businesses that support Agricultural Businesses (advisors: consultants and organizations, financial institutions, third party suppliers of labour, suppliers, insurance companies). Dissemination mechanisms and content were also defined and included the following categories: Direct communications, Indirect communications, Industry events, Industry media or publications, General media or publications.

The findings of this working group's efforts indicate that information is not shared well within this industry. Stakeholders are not aware of the efforts of their colleagues or the best practices that can be leveraged. There is also a lack of coordination of efforts across jurisdictions and commodity areas. They recommended to the Labour Task

Force the need for collaborative efforts to address labour concerns to avoid duplication and ensure all can leverage effective methods. The approach they put forward is a partnership based, inclusive model, where industry is supported to continue their information exchange and that any activities designed to support labour recruitment and retention be inclusive of broad industry participation across jurisdictions and commodity areas.

3.3 Policy and Programs Working Group (PPWG)

3.3.1 Mandate of PPWG

To present, with one voice, the agriculture and agri-food sectors' specific concerns and proposed solutions with the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) and the various streams of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) for discussion with the responsible federal government departments.

3.3.2 PPWG Membership

Name	Title	Firm
Mark Chambers (Chair)	Production Manager	Sunterra Farms
Bryan Walton	CEO	National Cattle Feeders' Association
David Tharle	Chair Member	Agriculture Industry Labour Council - Alberta (AILCA) Beekeepers Commission of Alberta - Labour Cttee
Debra Hauer	Project Manager	Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council
Ken Forth	Chair President	Labour Committee of the Ont. Fruit & Vegetable Growers Assoc. Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services
Susan Yaeger	Senior Manager, HR & Foreign Recruitment	Maple Leaf Foods

3.3.3 Summary of Work Accomplished

The TFWP which includes the SAWP, the Agricultural Stream, and the Streams for both Lower-Skilled and Higher-Skilled Occupations for primary agricultural occupations and non-primary agricultural occupations is a great resource to be able to access labour to fill short-mid term shortages. Without this program agriculture industries would suffer immensely and not be able to operate. Canadians benefit from these programs as well as the economy in Canada. Being able to access the TFWP keeps businesses operating and fellow Canadian workers employed. Employment of TFWs provides many economic benefits including increased spending, increased production, and available exports. Many agriculture and agri-food businesses use the TFWP to support the transition of temporary foreign workers to permanent residence status. It is a great way to determine if TFWs are a long-term fit for the Canadian economy. With the increasing pressure on labour shortages we need to ensure the TFWP is working within the Canadian business context to be competitive with our counter parts in the United States. The more primary production and processing that occur in Canada, the better it is for the Canadian economy.

Between November and February 2013, the PPWG met four times via conference call to discuss their respective industries' concerns with, and proposed solutions to, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and more specifically the Agricultural Stream. The initial list was very lengthy, but, through detailed discussions and education of program details, misinformation was corrected allowing members to narrow this list down to a total of 29 divided into nine categories each for ESDC and CIC as follows²¹:

- ESDC: Housing, Worker Benefits, Labour Market Opinion, Communication, Transportation, Wage, Promotion, Eligible Commodities, Training
- CIC: Worker Permit Processing, Communication, 48 month limit, Role of Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), Spouse and Family, Provincial Nominee Program, Canadian Embassies and High Commissions abroad, Language Requirements, Visas and Permanent Residency

These were compiled into two documents, prioritized (high, medium, low) and shared with broader industry for comments and confirmation. The documents were then discussed with ESDC and CIC at a face to face meeting held March 21, 2013. Both ESDC and CIC provided formal written responses indicating items which could or could not be resolved and items for which there could be further industry/government discussion and collaboration. Outstanding issues for further clarification were again discussed at the interim LTF meeting in May 2013. Results of these discussions are included in the matrix of Attachments 1 and 2.

On April 29 2013, ESDC and CIC announced reforms to the TFWP which created a new working environment for the PPWG. The SAWP, the Agricultural Stream and other agricultural primary occupations would be exempted from the majority of these changes as long as they fall under the primary agriculture definition, see box. This posed a new challenge for the PPWG and a new set of concerns, namely that related to the definition of primary agriculture to ensure that all producers would benefit from this exemption. PPWG has held an additional conference call with ESDC on this specific issue on June 26, 2013.

Under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulation*, section 315.2, primary agriculture is defined as work that is performed within the boundaries of a farm, nursery or greenhouse and involves:

- the operation of agricultural machinery;
- the boarding, care, breeding, sanitation or other handling of animals, other than fish, for the purpose of obtaining animal products for market, or activities relating to the collection, handling and assessment of those products; or
- the planting, care, harvesting or preparation of crops, trees, sod or other plants for market.

Excluded activities include:

- the activities of agronomists or agricultural economists;
- landscape architecture;
- the provision of feed lot services;
- the preparation of vegetable fibres for textile use;
- activities related to commercial hunting and trapping; or
- veterinary activities.

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/foreign_workers/agriculture/seasonal/index.shtml#tab1

²¹ For a complete listing of all the concerns raised, by category, please see Attachments 1 and 2.

The results of the efforts of this working group point to the need for a consolidated approach to address recruitment and retention issues for the agriculture and agri-food industry. They put forward recommendations to the Labour Task Force to immediately improve access to labour required for producers and processors and to work in a more collaborative and structured manner with the federal departments delivering programs and policies to ensure they meet the needs of the industry.

SECTION 4: Findings and Recommendations

The Labour Task Force has conducted extensive consultations with industry stakeholders over the last year, working to examine issues and identify solutions to the growing challenges associated with accessing qualified labour. The Labour Task Force, along with its three working groups, engaged in research and discussions to fully explore perspectives of the current labour situation in all regions of Canada and for all organizations within the agriculture and agri-food industries. The various commodity-based Value Chain Roundtables were consulted, as were numerous industry experts and key stakeholders across the country including educational partners. The Task Force also worked with various government policy and program professionals at AAFC, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to clarify existing policies, departmental priorities, and planned program changes to determine impacts both short and long term on labour for the industry.

This effort has resulted in the development of a national **Workforce Action Plan** for the agriculture and agri-food industry, with detailed activities to address immediate and long term challenges with the labour force. Extensive consideration has also been given to the pathway to implementation for the action plan and the details are outlined here to ensure the success of this critical initiative.

The Labour Task Force recommends that industry and government partner to deliver on the national **Workforce Action Plan**, collaborating to champion the effort and provide the requisite financial and political support for this important initiative that serves to secure the future stability and success of the agriculture and agri-food industry. The details are presented below.

4.1 Workforce Action Plan for Agriculture & Agri-Food

The Labour Task Force has prepared a consolidated national **Workforce Action Plan** for the agriculture and agri-food industry as a whole to address the critical concerns of labour shortages and skills requirements for all commodities, in all regions of Canada.

A vast number of Canada's agricultural and agri-food businesses are being impacted by a labour shortage. That is, they are unable to meet their production capacity and realize their business goals because they are unable to access and meet their labour requirements. This is a wide reaching problem impacting most commodity groups and sub-industries of the sector.

To compound the problem, agriculture and agri-food businesses are in fierce competition for labour with other industries as the labour shortage is a function of

Canada's workforce demographics. The sector is currently competing for talent with other industries that are able to afford higher wage rates, employ their personnel in urban, high density regions, offer full-time employment options, and involve less physically demanding working conditions.

The sector must not only focus on meeting its current workforce requirements for continued health of the industry, it must also be strategic to sort out how best to ensure an adequate supply of labour for the future. The future success of agriculture and agri-food businesses and the growth of the industry as a whole depend on addressing this issue now. Future operational success, expansion and innovation are not possible if the industry does not increase youth interest, focus on effective recruitment channels, invest in knowledge and skills advancements, and expand retention practices to secure the labour pool required for the future.

By consolidating efforts and facilitating the industry to work together to address this issue, achievements can be made to increase the labour supply and improve access to qualified workers now and into the future. This is necessary for the industry to remain viable, competitive and a significant contributor to the economic health of the country. Through the implementation of the **Workforce Action Plan**, improvements to recruitment, employment and retention for the industry can be realized in the short and long term.

The following critical research and development activities are included in the plan:

[4.1.1 Increase the Supply of Labour to Meet Immediate and Future Requirements for Skilled and Unskilled Workers](#)

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes immediate action to improve access to domestic and foreign labour and to address the longer term supply requirements by increasing the size of the labour pool for the agriculture and agri-food industry.

4.1.1.1 Improve Access to Temporary and Seasonal Labour

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes access improvements to temporary and seasonal workers for industry stakeholders to ensure labour needs are met in a standardized, efficient manner.

The TFW program is a tool designed to support access to labour for the agriculture and agri-food industries, when domestic labour options are unavailable. Without an effective means to access foreign labour to meet current demands, businesses are at risk for failure.

Bringing in foreign workers is not a lower cost option and is not one that is ideal for the longer term. The extra recruiting efforts, costs of airfare and increased wage rates add to the costs of production which disadvantage Canadian businesses as they work to be competitive in exporting their products. It has been estimated by one primary agriculture company that the cost to hire a low skilled temporary foreign worker over a two year duration through the Agriculture Stream will cost the company over \$12,000 more than hiring a Canadian. See table 3 below.

The TFWP is designed to address short to medium term issues with Canada's current labour supply and are essential to business success. The Labour Task Force recommends that specific improvements be made to ensure Canadian businesses have effective access to the labour they require through programs and processes that are reasonably easy to access, quick to execute, and that are streamlined to support businesses to meet their requirements and ensure they can be as effective and competitive as possible.

Table 3: Comparison of Estimated Costs Associated with Hiring a TFW and a Canadian

Ag Stream (NOC 8431)	Low Skilled TFW	Low Skilled Canadian
Advertising	\$ 100.00	\$ 100.00
Return Airfare	\$ 1,000.00	
Admin Time (Costs)	\$ 500.00	\$ 25.00
Rent Subsidy	\$ 7,200.00	
WCB	\$ 3,500.00	
Benefits at hire	\$ 400.00	
	\$ 12,700.00	\$ 125.00
Out Side Ag Stream (NOC 8253)	Skilled TFW	Skilled Canadian
Advertising	\$ 100.00	\$ 100.00
Admin Time (Costs)	\$ 500.00	\$ 25.00
Benefits at hire	\$ 400.00	
	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 125.00

The following activities are included in the plan:

- develop a centralized resource for information and assistance to facilitate employment of temporary foreign workers in the agriculture and agri-food sector to fill industry needs in a standardized, efficient manner. Such a resource will help the industry become more efficient in its use of the TFW

program and in turn help ESDC be more efficient and reduce the time required to process applications.

- develop a workable “agriculture and agri-food” stream for employment of TFWs directly into the industry, in addition to the current SAWP. This stream to be managed by units dedicated to the industry with knowledge and understanding of the market and related labour pools. The current narrow focus of Primary Agriculture and SAWP is not in sync with the current value chain concept on which our industry’s viability depends. It is important to understand the chronic, year round labour shortages that many food processors experience, have a direct effect on primary agriculture. If processors cannot process then farmers cannot farm. The current “Ag Stream” is too closely aligned with the SAWP and does not reflect current practices in today’s workforce. Having a specific “workable” stream for primary agriculture and agri-food will streamline the process and make it more efficient for applicants and ESDC. Streamlining the process will help make the system more efficient.
- facilitate interdepartmental activities between AAFC, CIC and ESDC to coordinate, streamline and revise requirements as necessary, supported by industry stakeholders. Communication between these departments and industry is paramount in ensuring we continue to understand each other’s stance on where we are at with current issues and to ensure the program is working for all parties.
 - Work with ESDC to address the following:

Processing times: with the implementation of a user fee of \$275 per worker for Labour Market Opinions (LMOs), applicable for all occupations that are not considered primary agriculture, it is recommended that service standards of no more than 10 business days be established for initial review of an LMO application when an application is fully completed. 75% of the applications should be reviewed and receive ruling within 10 business days, as this is the service standard for processing a Canadian Passport. If further review is required, employers should be required to answer within a similar timeline and final decisions should be delivered no later than 5 days after receipt of the employer’s response. Long processing times make it difficult to plan for staffing operations. Shortening this will help deal with the “short-mid” term labour needs in the current labour environment.

Communication: interpretation of regulations and policies as they apply to the agriculture and agri-food stream should be made available to all stakeholders. It is suggested that an agriculture/agri-food sector TFWP manual be established for reference by both officers and employers. The manual should be reviewed every 6 months and updated annually. This should be an online manual accessible for all stakeholders to access. A specific officer or unit should be designated to the agriculture/agri-food portfolio to ensure consistency. There should also be regular interaction between agriculture industry representatives and policy makers in order to be able to review the policies involved with Canadian agriculture using the TFWP.

Housing: clarity concerning the housing definition related to bunk housing was to be provided by ESDC on the website. Recommendations are that housing requirements only be required for Section A in the proposed agriculture stream (see Appendix 7.4) and Section B for low skilled positions. Section B low skilled should be no more than 30% of gross income. Adding housing requirements adds cost to hiring TFW that would not otherwise be incurred when hiring Canadians.

Transportation: If the employee terminates their employment prior to the end of the contract, they are responsible for their return airfare.

Health coverage: LTF was to provide ESDC with concrete examples and Alberta provincial legislation to conduct and analyze the situation. It is proposed that Section B of the proposed agriculture stream (see Appendix 7.4) have the requirement that health coverage is provided equivalent to Canadians currently employed in the workplace by the employer (i.e., if the employer provides extended health coverage at a group rate then this should be considered equivalent). At the minimum all TFW must be covered for workplace accidents. Using different requirements for TFW than Canadians makes it extremely difficult to manage a business. Most companies have group plans, all or none. The cost to the company needs to be the same for both.

Wage rates: Wage rates need to be more realistic with what employers are paying Canadians. The required rates on the *Working in Canada* website (which apply for the Streams for Lower-Skilled Occupations and the Stream for Higher-Skilled Occupations) are much

higher than what producers pay Canadians and there are huge geographic issues. Having higher wage rates for TFW discriminates against Canadians employed by the same companies. It also puts business at a competitive disadvantage with our US counterparts as we will end up having higher costs.

- Wage rates need to be set by the specific industry that are realistic for employers and reviewed annually.
- Wage rates under Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA) should continue to be recognized as prevailing wage rates. Workers should be paid the CBA wage rate for the NOC in which they are working. For unionized positions, employers must offer their TFWs the same wage rate as established under the collective bargaining agreement. If a worker is awarded a different position under the terms of a CBA, but still within the same NOC, they should be paid the appropriate rate and allowed to work in that position without LMO approval during the validity period of their work permit. If a worker applies for a position outside the CBA, application for LMO and work permit approval for the appropriate NOC should be required. Reasonable wage increases should be allowed up to 15% without applying for a new LMO.

Language benchmarking: Primary agriculture occupations are exempted from the new language program requirement. We view the implementation of language benchmarking as restrictive to both the retention of workers and to source country selection of appropriate labour. While we acknowledge that functional language skills are a necessary part of successful community and workplace integration, rather than an across the board designation, we suggest that a responsible employer can assess whether the worker is able to work safely and productively prior to applying for provincial nomination. It can be difficult to recruit TFW with the skill set and the language benchmark. We agree there should be some basic English or French language requirements but at times the assessment by processing officers is variable and some get denied based on this. This is an issue for agri-food employers.

Transition to a Canadian workforce: Of great concern is the reference to having a “firm plan in place to transition to a Canadian workforce” for non-primary agricultural occupations. Given the current

labour pool, especially in western provinces, combined with the miniscule rate of Canadians who will consider moving for a position in the agri-food industry, hiring strictly Canadians is not a feasible means to support our industry. If this term refers to supporting the immigration of selected TFWs we would welcome recognition of our dual intent in the employment of TFWs with the intent to retain under provincial nominee programs. A fast track method for permanent residency for selected workers would assist in retention and create stability for all stakeholders, foreign workers, their families, employers and communities.

- Ongoing efforts are in place to hire existing Canadians into the agricultural workforce. This is the number one priority of employers and the route that makes most sense. There are also efforts in place to support agriculture in the classroom as more and more people are growing up in urban areas and need to have some education on food production. Efforts are in place to highlight the opportunities in agriculture for youth today. Employers are also committed to on the job training to enhance the skill level of employees.
 - Once this route has been exhausted, employers then turn to the TFWP. The intent is to bring employees in under the TFWP and then transition them to permanent residence. The goal of employers is to have a sustainable workforce to produce safe healthy food efficiently.
 - If industry is hiring under “dual intent”, to transition the TFW to a permanent resident, then it is suggested that the employer be able to indicate this on the LMO application in order to satisfy the CIC processing officer that the candidate may permanently stay in Canada and to alleviate the issue of satisfying the officer of the intent to return home after the duration of the work permit.
- Work with CIC to address the following:

Processing times: Services standards need to be held to a reasonable level. Based on previous performance indicators, we would suggest that 30 day turnaround from Vegreville, for either electronic or paper applications should be considered a minimum service standard. At the overseas offices, we ask for a minimum service standard for all agriculture and agri-food TFW applications of 2 months. Having long processing times makes it really difficult to

conduct labour planning. When it can take up to 12 months to hire a TFW, it becomes impossible to plan and hire in the current labour market.

Communication: Interpretation of regulations as they apply to the agriculture and agri-food stream should be made available to all stakeholders. It is suggested that an agriculture/agri-food sector TFWP manual be established for reference by both officers and employers. The manual should be reviewed every 6 months and updated annually. This should be an online manual accessible for all stakeholders to access. There should also be regular interaction between the agriculture industry representatives and policy makers in order to be able to review the policies involved with Canadian agriculture using the TFWP.

4.1.1.2 Improve Access to Domestic Labour

The **Workforce Action Plan** provides access improvements to Canadian workers to facilitate the employment of more Canadians to fill requirements for agriculture and agri-food positions through the following:

A. Develop A Jobs Resource Centre for Industry

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes the development of a centralized mechanism to support career promotion for the agriculture and agri-food industry as a whole. This includes the development of a searchable and robust **On-line Jobs Resource** which clarifies the vast number and types of jobs, job requirements and career pathway options within the agriculture and agri-food industry for job seekers, students, teachers, guidance counselors, education administrators, and employees to improve awareness, interest, enrolment, recruitment, employment and retention (leveraging existing tools).

- Leveraging existing research and tools including AgriPathways, develop a consolidated online reference tool as a hub for the industry that identifies up to date labour market information: jobs by level and commodity, identifies job requirements, identifies career pathways, wage levels, and provides job seekers and employees with information they need to make informed decisions about their careers (reference tool will be visually interesting and provide access to career promotion videos, interactive tools).
- Develop the online searchable resource to convey information about learning requirements and connect users including those in search of retraining and/or upgrading of skills and those exploring or considering the sector with access to information about learning options.

- Develop the online resource to include an automated maintenance mechanism to ensure content is updated on a continued basis.
- Maintain resource by conducting ongoing research and information exchange forums to capture emerging trends on jobs, job requirements and career pathways.
- Leverage resource as a workforce planning tool and potential education gap identifier to clarify labour market information and requirements for all stakeholders within the industry including job seekers, employers, employees, associations, governments, and educational institutions.

B Develop Career Promotion Initiative and Tools for Industry

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes the development of a collective and integrated career promotion initiative including a centralized repository for ease of use and access to all materials to increase the future labour pool. This includes the development of industry wide career promotion tools directed toward job seekers, students, teachers, guidance counselors, and employees, for use by all stakeholders within the industry including employers, associations and educational institutions to improve awareness, interest, enrolment, recruitment, employment and retention for the industry (leveraging existing tools and marketing efforts of all within the sector)

- Develop compelling and comprehensive messages and tools including competitive angles to encourage interest, promote careers and attract a sustainable workforce in agriculture and agri-food for youth, job seekers, and existing employees (e.g., videos, grade specific classroom resources including curriculum linked Teacher Guides, toolkits for circulation to educational and industry stakeholders for distribution)
- Develop all materials in collaboration with key stakeholders and with specific messaging for each target audience
- Disseminate all materials through a centralized repository integrating the materials in the Jobs Resource Centre to support ease of access. Broadly promote materials to target audience groups and to industry stakeholders to ensure their use.

4.1.2 Improve the Knowledge and Skills of Workers to Meet Immediate and Future Labour Requirements

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes improvements to the skills of Canadian agriculture workers to facilitate their retention and future employability as technological and innovation enhancements change job requirements for agriculture and agri-food positions through the following:

4.1.2.1 Develop A Learning Resource Centre

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes the development of a centralized mechanism to support skills and knowledge education/training for the agriculture and agri-food industry as a whole. This includes the development of a searchable **On-line Learning Resource** to improve access to agriculture and agri-food learning options in all their forms across Canada for students, job seekers, employees, employers, and educators (leveraging existing tools).

- Consolidate existing research to define all current education and training options for the agriculture and agri-food industry including traditional and non-traditional learning opportunities.
- Leverage existing tools including AgriTalent to compile the results of the assessment into a searchable online resource that provides easy access to commodity specific, and region specific learning options relevant to all types of learning seekers in the agriculture and agri-food industry to facilitate improvements for recruitment, training, professional development and retention.
- Develop the online resource to include an automated maintenance mechanism to ensure content is updated on a continued basis.
- Develop the online searchable resource to include descriptive options that identify criteria related to the quality of the program evaluated by various perspectives (e.g., list of learning objectives, last update of program, basis of curriculum design or update, types of learning assessment, learner feedback, employer feedback).
- Conduct an assessment to fully profile the information needs of learning seekers including the communications messages and marketing avenues that work best to reach various target audiences (youth, general labour market, ag and ag-food workers, supervisors/managers, employers, newcomers to Canada) for the purposes of improving recruitment and retention in the agriculture and agri-food industry. Include an analysis of interest with various learning formats and explore issues of access and barriers to support improvements. Also include an assessment of how learners identify their learning needs and what options are desirable (e.g., self-assessments, checklists) for the various target groups.
- Develop the online searchable resource to connect and convey information about occupational requirements and career pathways to highlight transferability of skills and clarify future job options for learning seekers.
- Develop the online resource to include a feature to capture user feedback to formally assess quality and effectiveness of the tool and track input from a grassroots level.

4.1.2.2 Align Training with Industry Needs

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes improved alignment of training and education program offerings with industry needs through partnership and

structured curriculum review to ensure Canadians gain the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in modern agriculture and agri-food workplaces and to enhance the enrolment in these programs and ultimately increase the pool of highly trained graduates.

- Develop a comprehensive assessment tool, leveraging existing research, to identify the current training and education gaps by analyzing the current state of training options against the occupational requirements for all occupations within the agriculture and agri-food industry. This will involve working with associations, industry and educational stakeholders to leverage existing analyses and to coordinate development.
- Support education and training institutions to recognize industry needs and address unmet learning requirements. Facilitating industry/education connections and provide guidance on specific programming gaps, work with stakeholders to support enhancements and new programming content that meet job requirements and industry needs.
- Develop a plan to support continued alignment of industry needs with education offerings by facilitating strong partnerships between stakeholders and outlining a review cycle that ensure new and emerging industry needs are clarified and communicated to education for program development purposes.

4.1.2.3 Increase investment in HR Mgmt and Training

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes improved Human Resource Management knowledge for industry employers, managers and supervisors with increased use of best practice management techniques and increased investment in training and skills development to enhance recruitment, employment, safety and retention of agriculture and agri-food workers in Canadian operations.

- Conduct an initiative to identify, quantify and educate the sector on the benefits of training and development from the perspective of various target groups to ensure the value of investing time and resources to training (both technical and business management training) as a means to improve business success and ensure links to profitability are well understood. This will involve the development of self-assessment tools, guides and checklists to ensure adequacy of knowledge and practice in Training and Development investments and help clarify gaps for individual stakeholders. This is an important aspect of improving recruitment and retention and can be supported by leveraging specific job requirements data that have been developed and by with working industry stakeholders.
- Conduct an initiative to identify, quantify and educate the sector on the benefits of effective Human Resource Management to clarify the return on investment (ROI) for focused skills upgrading for employers and employees in management positions on key topics to promote success in managing people effectively. This will involve the development of self-assessment tools, guides

and checklists to ensure adequacy of knowledge and practice in HR mgmt and help clarify gaps for individual stakeholders. This can be supported by leveraging existing materials and working with educational institutions and associations who focus on this aspect.

- Support access to effective HR management learning opportunities for all agriculture and agri-food stakeholders with consideration for cost, duration, location. Leverage existing resources and program offerings and expand accessibility of key content by supporting the development and delivery of workshops, webinars, e-learning, and self-study programs and guides. It is business owners and managers that have the greatest impact on recruitment and retention for the industry and are the most in need of professional development support in the area of HR management.

4.2 Pathway to Implementation

The Labour Task Force has conducted broad research to outline the activities of the **Workforce Action Plan** and are committed to supporting the success of this initiative in order to address the critical and immediate concerns of securing the industry's labour force and improving its knowledge and skills. They have also spent considerable time identifying the appropriate approach, methodology, timeline, collaborators and leaders to ensure its success. Careful consideration of the immediacy of the requirements and the involved complexities, along with ensuring industry expertise, research, best practices and tools are fully leveraged to support the activities of this initiative has resulted in recommendations regarding the pathway to implementation.

4.2.1 Approach

The Labour Task Force recommends that this initiative be conducted as a collaborative effort, with an approach that facilitates the full and continued participation of industry stakeholders across the agriculture and agri-food sector. Central to ensuring the **Workforce Action Plan** is a success are the establishment of partnerships and the involvement of industry associations, agriculture and agri-food businesses, education, and various ministries within provincial and federal government. Stakeholder participation and contributions to the data gathering, analysis, development, validation, communications and maintenance aspects of the work are mandatory to ensure the initiative remains focused on priority industry needs. This initiative will leverage existing research, materials, tools, expertise, and efforts of partnered stakeholders from all commodities within the agriculture and agri-food industry and all regions of Canada to reduce duplication of efforts and ensure collaborative messaging that promotes interest, loyalty and secures a qualified workforce for the success of the industry's future. The Labour Task Force recommends the continued involvement of the many stakeholders that have contributed to the development of this **Workforce Action Plan** including

national associations, sector councils, education and government ministries to support success. Specifically, it is also recommended that the members of the Labour Task Force continue their commitment to this initiative and function as an advisory committee to support and guide the implementation activities associated with this plan.

The Labour Task Force recognizes the scope and breadth of the Plan and the need for dedicated resources to oversee all elements. It is recommended that this collaborative, stakeholder based initiative be led by an organization with the mandate, experience and capacity to undertake this work. The lead organization will work with the support of industry and government to oversee all aspects of the initiative and manage all activities of the plan. This will involve engaging with key stakeholders including industry associations, government, education, and agriculture businesses to work in a collaborative manner to achieve results and deliver on the plan. The role of the lead organization will be to manage the contributions of industry stakeholders and partners, conduct all research elements, oversee all development activities, gather the input and perspectives across the industry to support full validation of materials, support the finalization of all outputs to be meaningful and meet industry needs, disseminate results and ensure the overall success of the initiative.

The Labour Task Force recommends that this initiative be led by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. The Council is well positioned to carry out this project as its mandate is to address human resource issues facing Canada's agricultural industry. The Council has vast experience facilitating collaboration with industry leaders, governments and educational stakeholders to research, develop and communicate innovative solutions to challenges in agricultural employment, management and skills development. Its objective is to work toward an adequate, reliable, well-trained, and progressive work force that will strengthen the ability of the agricultural community to thrive and be successful in an internationally competitive marketplace. The Council has worked with industry stakeholders to prepare foundational materials in support of improving access to a strong labour pool and ensuring workers have the required knowledge and skills for future success. These would be fully leveraged as part of this initiative.

This organization has extensive experience conducting labour market information research for the agricultural sector and supporting labour needs of industry stakeholders. The Council has developed a multitude of resources to assist those within the agricultural community to access job information, promote careers in agriculture and identify the training programs available to support worker needs. It has also led a variety of research initiatives to address critical workforce issues. The Council is about to initiate research working with government ministries and provincial stakeholders to develop a collaborative and cohesive approach to defining the agricultural labour market. This effort will result in a labour supply and demand model of the agriculture

industry to accurately reflect the ever changing needs of the sector, work that will support the **Workforce Action Plan**. The Council has also been an active participant in the working groups of the Labour Task Force, providing background materials, input and research support to assist with the initiative.

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council is an organization with the mandate, experience and capacity to undertake this initiative that will engage key stakeholder participation and investment to work in a collaborative manner to achieve results.

In these ways the Labour Task Force is recommending the continued involvement and investment of key stakeholders to work together in a structured, collaborative manner to launch the **Workforce Action Plan** and ensure its activities result in improving the overall labour supply for the industry and improving the knowledge and skills of the agriculture and agri-food workforce.

4.2.2 Timeline

Due to the immediacy of the issues involved and the need for agricultural and agri-food businesses to secure workers for their operations today, the Labour Task Force recommends that this initiative begin immediately. The industry is already faced with the inability to fill positions with a clear and negative impact on current viability and future sustainability. It is imperative that clear and purposeful action be taken as soon as possible to start mitigating risks to the health of the sector.

4.2.3 Next Steps

In order to ensure the successful implementation of the **Workforce Action Plan** put forward here by the Labour Task Force, the plan is being disseminated to key stakeholders, including senior officials in government, so that they may advise on their level of interest and support for collaboration in these activities. Based on positive interest and feedback from industry and government, including the availability of funding support, the Labour Task Force recommends that this initiative be launched. Launch activities will involve the development and dissemination of a proposal to secure the requisite partnerships and stakeholder participation to implement the **Workforce Action Plan** and begin to address the critical labour issues facing the agriculture and agri-food industry in a focused and collective way.

SECTION 5: Conclusion

The Labour Task Force recommends that industry and government partner to deliver on the ***Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan***, collaborating to champion the effort and provide the requisite political and financial support for this important initiative that serves to secure the future stability and success of Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry.

The ***Workforce Action Plan*** has been developed based on extensive industry research and consultation which clarified the pervasive challenges of the labour shortage and highlighted the need to address two priority objectives:

- **Increase the supply of labour** - to meet immediate and future requirements for skilled and unskilled workers; and
- **Improve the knowledge and skills of workers** - to meet immediate and future labour requirements of the industry.

The activities of the plan address these two objectives, and through its implementation, improvements to recruitment, employment and retention for the industry can be realized in the short and longer term.

It is urgent that due focus and attention be given to these activities now and that the agriculture and agri-food sector champions the ***Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan*** as a collective, this is necessary for the industry to remain viable, competitive and a significant contributor to the economic health of the country.

Through committed partnerships and investments between industry and government in this collaborative approach, the agriculture and agri-food system can be supported with the requisite supply of workers that have the knowledge and skills to successfully meet employer needs today and allow for continued prosperity, competitive advantage and growth of the industry into the future.

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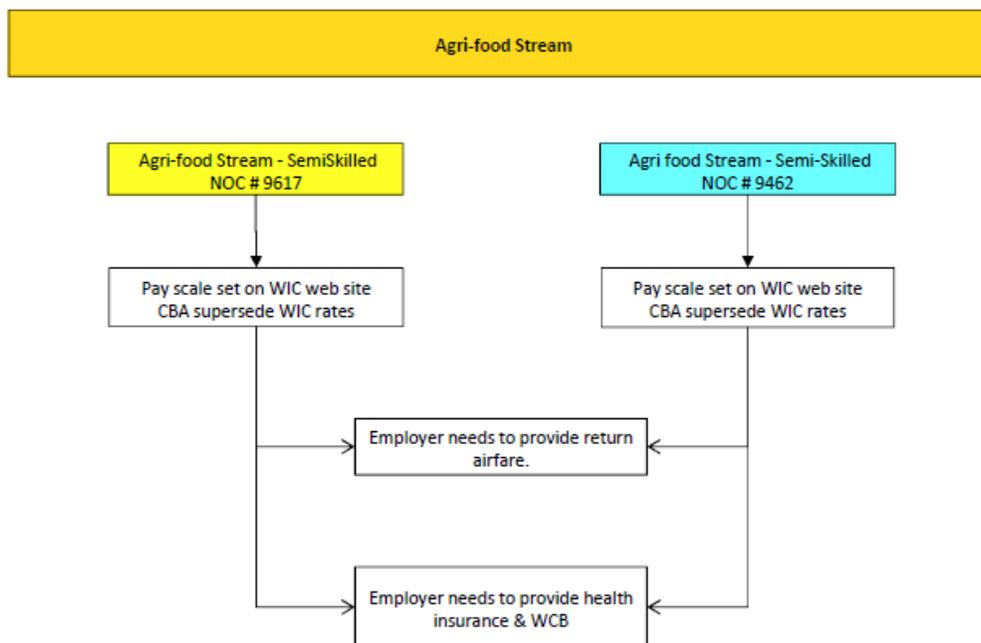
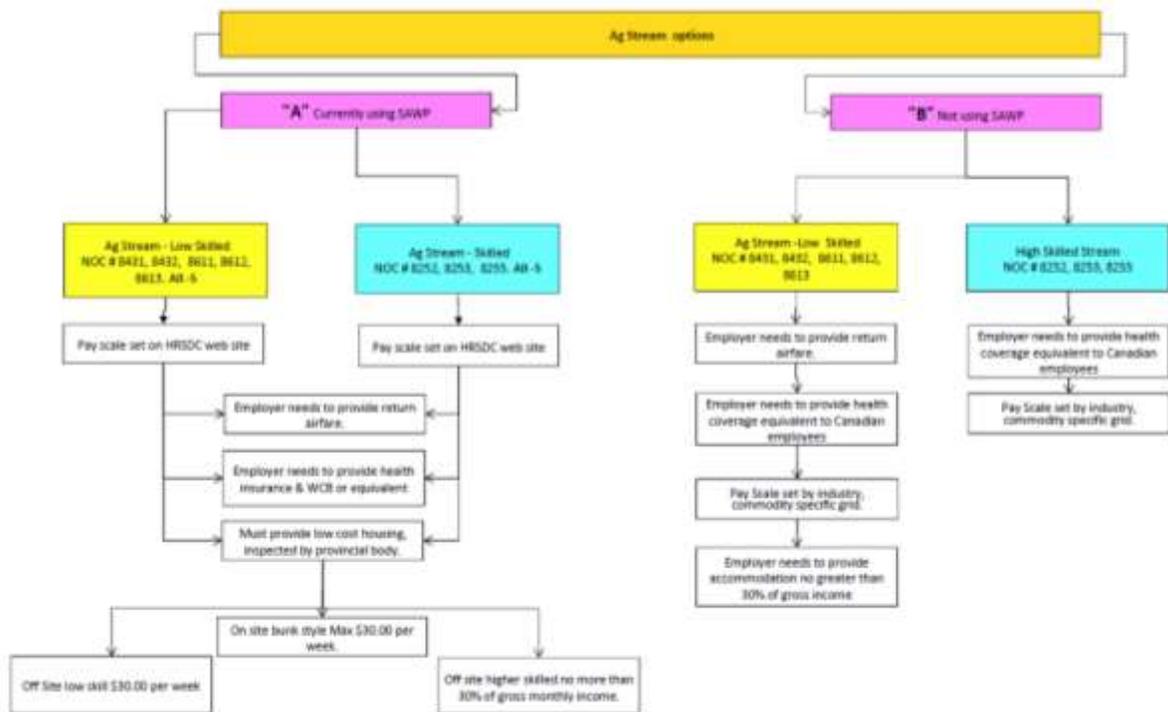
SECTION 7: Appendices

7.1 List of Abbreviations

AAFC	Agriculture and Agri-food Canada
AAFS	Agriculture and Agri-food System
CAHRC	Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council
CBSA	Canada Border Services Agency
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreements
ESDC	Employment and Skills Development Canada
HR	Human Resource
ISIWG	Information Sharing Initiatives Working Group
LMOs	Labour market opinions
LTF	Labour Task Force
NOC	National Occupational Classification

PPWG	Policy and Programs Working Group
ROI	Return on Investment
SAWP	Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program
STERWG	Skills, Training, Education, and Retention Working Group
TFW	Temporary Foreign Worker
TFWP	Temporary Foreign Worker Program
VCRTs	Value Chain Roundtables

7.2 PPWG Proposed Agriculture & Agri-Food Stream



7.3 Information Sharing Initiatives Working Group Recommendations

The ISIWIG was tasked to propose initiatives to improve current information sharing capabilities regarding available skills, training, education and hiring programs for the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry including the seafood sector.

Recommendations:

1. Increase information exchange opportunities and mechanisms across all jurisdictions and sub-industries within agriculture and agri-food to ensure all can leverage efforts and benefit from best practices. For example, Value Chain Round Tables, Labour Task Force.
2. Increase collaboration across industry for activities to support increased recruitment and retention including career awareness, training options and hiring opportunities to reduce duplication and support the promotion of the industry as a whole in a manner that appeals to a variety of target audiences.
3. Ensure adequate focus on each target audience group and ensure the messages are prepared and delivered in ways that meet the unique needs of each group.
4. Leverage existing communications channels (associations) and tools to deliver key messages.