



CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL
HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL

CONSEIL CANADIEN POUR LES
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CAHRC-CCRHA

FINAL REPORT:
ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO AGRICULTURE EMPLOYMENT AND
EXPANDING THE AGRICULTURE WORKFORCE PILOT PROJECTS

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Overview

This final report presents a summary of the activities completed during the Addressing Barriers to Agriculture Employment and New Opportunities for Expanding the Agriculture Workforce project.

Initial Research

In August 2014, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) initiated a comprehensive research project of the opportunities and barriers to participation for traditionally underrepresented populations in the Canadian agricultural workforce. The objectives of this research project were to:

- Research and summarize the characteristics of underrepresented groups in the agricultural workforce as described in publicly available data (i.e., Internet sources);
- Research and summarize existing programs and services that assist individuals into the workforce;
- Conduct interviews with organizations directly involved in labour force development among underrepresented groups (e.g., employment services agencies);
- Develop criteria to be used to select three underrepresented groups for further analysis; and
- Provide recommendations of three underrepresented groups for further analysis.

The aim of this initial research project was to identify three underrepresented groups for further research and analysis. The findings from this initial phase of research were summarized in a report titled, *Recommendations Report for Underrepresented Groups*, submitted to CAHRC in November, 2014. The three groups identified and recommended for further analysis as a result of this initial research were: indigenous people, immigrants, and persons with disabilities. These recommended groups were validated by two project steering committees: the addressing barriers working group, and the labour market information steering committee.

Consultation with Employment Services Agencies Working with Underrepresented Groups

Following the submission of the *Recommendations Report for Underrepresented Groups (Nov. 2014)*, barriers to employment for the three identified groups were investigated through 16 one-on-one interviews and 3 web focus groups with employment services agencies.

This phase of research resulted in the identification of barriers to employment for each of the three underrepresented groups, strategies to support employment participation by each underrepresented group, and supports offered by employment services agencies.

Barriers to employment that were identified included:

- For indigenous people – transportation, communication, discrimination, poverty, location of reserves, and differences in lifestyles;
- For immigrants – unfavorable attitudes of employers, lack of understanding about industry, transportation, language barriers, cultural differences, lack of Canadian work experience, isolation, and seasonal nature of work; and
- For persons with disabilities – attitudes of employers, lack of understanding about industry, transportation, requirement to job carve, lack of work experience, and lack of education.

Strategies identified to support employment participation included:

- Education strategies;



- Communication strategies;
- Strategies to address transportation barriers;
- Strategies to address communication challenges;
- Strategies to address unfavorable attitudes of employers;
- Strategies to address lack of information about agriculture industry; and
- Strategies to address language barriers.

Supports identified as offered by employment services agencies included:

- One-on-one employment counselling;
- Job readiness skills training;
- Financial supports to assist clients in job searches, job starts, and training program costs;
- Cover letter development;
- Help with job searches;
- Job interview practice;
- Labour market information and job postings;
- Resume development; and
- Access to computers, printers, and fax machines.

This research was compiled into a report titled, *Summary Report for Consultations with Representatives of Employment Agencies Working with Underrepresented Groups: Interview and Web Focus Group Findings*, submitted January 2015.

Following the identification of barriers and supports research, the next stage focused on industry validation.

Industry Validation of Options for Addressing Employment Barriers

To obtain feedback from industry stakeholders, 6 in-person focus groups were conducted in various locations across Canada, including:

- Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (Feb. 18, 2015)
- Edmonton, Alberta (Feb. 18, 2015)
- Guelph, Ontario (Mar. 3, 2015)
- Kentville, Nova Scotia (Mar. 4, 2015)
- Regina, Saskatchewan (Mar. 13, 2015)
- Ottawa, Ontario (Mar. 24, 2015)

In addition to the identified barriers to employment and suggestions to address employment barriers for each underrepresented group, focus group participants also discussed employers' ability to find and keep employees. The employers that participated in the in-person focus groups expressed deep concerns about finding and keeping employees for their operations. Many relied on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program or Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program to find employees.

With respect to the previously identified barriers to employment and suggestions for improving participation for each underrepresented group, focus group participants validated those findings by agreeing the identified barriers were indeed barriers to employment, and the suggestions provided to address those barriers could assist in increasing participation in employment for those groups.



The information obtained during the industry validation activities was summarized in a report titled, *Final Report: Options and Opportunities for Attracting Non-traditional Workers to the Agriculture Industry*, submitted March 2015.

Following the completion of this research, a recommendation was made to move forward with pilot projects to employ people from the underrepresented populations.

With a recommendation made to move forward with several pilot projects, the consulting team developed a methodology including several phases of activities. These included:

- Identifying innovative approaches to increase agricultural employment (through the development of 15 success case studies);
- Identifying common success criteria across 15 case studies;
- Identifying parameters of 3 pilot projects;
- Recruitment and selection of pilot project sites;
- Conducting the pilot projects;
- Developing a hiring guide for underrepresented groups; and
- Evaluating the pilot projects.

Success Case Study Development

Through previous phases of research, success stories were identified by project stakeholders (e.g., interviewees, focus group participants, addressing barriers working group members, advisory committee members). In addition, project stakeholders were asked for recommendations during an in-person meeting in Ottawa in March, 2015. Email invitations and follow-up telephone calls were made to schedule interviews with persons recommended to develop the case studies. The list of interviewees resulting in case studies included:

Indigenous People

- Jennifer Kewageshig - Saugeen First Nation Amphitheatre
- Sally Harvey - Landscape Ontario
- Terry Brodziak - Saskatchewan Indian Equity Foundation Inc.
- Trevor Kempthorne - First Nations Agriculture Association
- Jeremy Janzen - HyLife

Immigrants

- Allen Tyrchniewicz - University of Manitoba, Internationally Educated Agrologists Post-Baccalaureate Diploma Program
- Chuck Stallard - Highline Mushrooms
- Jennifer Jeffrey - PEI Association of Newcomers to Canada
- Robert Ouellet - Agriculture Employment Centre of the Union des Producteurs Agricoles
- Jeff Clark & Desiree Robertson - Kitchen Partners
- Severin Habetler - Maple Leaf Pork
- Jolayne Farn - Van Raay Paskal Farms

Persons with Disabilities



- Bob Santos - Link Up Employment Services
- Cory Quigley - Saskatchewan Abilities Council, Partners in Employment
- Jeff Withers - Leads Employment Services

Common Success Criteria from Case Studies

Across all case studies, common success criteria were identified. The common factors that contributed to successful employment of the underrepresented groups included:

- Excellent Partnerships Between Employment Services Agencies and Employers;
- Presence of a Champion;
- Commitment to Follow Up and Address Work Placement Problems;
- Win-Win for Employer and Client;
- Address of the Unique Aspects of the Underrepresented Groups; and
- A Plan to Address Transportation Challenges.

Excellent Partnerships Between Employment Services Agencies and Employers

The case studies identified and demonstrated examples of employment services agencies that had established long-standing positive relationships with employers. The agencies actively sought out employers to find employment opportunities for their clients. They took initiative to fully understand the job requirements by visiting job sites to observe the work being performed. They were committed to maintaining open and trusting relationships that would be sustained over the long term. The case studies also identified examples of employers who valued the development of long standing positive relationships with employment services agencies. In both cases, the working relationships were viewed as partnerships that benefited both clients and employers.

Presence of a Champion

The case studies identified many “champions” either in employment services agencies or agriculture operations who were highly committed to the cause of successfully placing individuals in work. These individuals illustrated excellent leadership skills, enthusiasm, and commitment to positive working relationships with partners, belief in the skills and abilities of employees, as well as excellent coordination and project management skills.

Commitment to Follow Up and Address Work Placement Problems

A critical aspect of successful employment of members of under-represented groups is providing follow up and support to clients on the job and finding solutions for problems that interfere with their success. The case studies illustrated that problems with work placements do occur; however, with regular follow up and support, solutions can usually be found that result in a positive employment outcome.

Win-Win for Employer and Client

A consistent finding among case study interviewees was the belief that both the individual and the employer should benefit from the job placement. Representatives of employment services agencies were committed to placing their clients in jobs that improved the profitability of the agriculture operation at the same time providing their clients with rewarding work.

Address of the Unique Aspects of the Underrepresented Groups

The case studies illustrated the commitment of both employment services agencies and employers to recognize and address the unique aspects of each group in order to create effective job placements. Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and immigrants each have unique characteristics that must be considered for successful employment outcomes.



A Plan to Address Transportation Challenges

Transportation was consistently identified as a significant employment barrier among the underrepresented groups. There were some examples of companies that have devised methods to overcome the transportation issue and suggestions for how the barrier could be addressed. Without a commitment to address the transportation issue it seems unlikely that members of the underrepresented groups will be able to be successfully employed in agriculture outside of urban areas.

All case studies were compiled into a report titled, *Case Studies Report - New Opportunities for Expanding the Agricultural Workforce Pilot Projects with Underrepresented Groups*, submitted April, 2016.

Pilot Project Parameters

Before approaching underrepresented groups and employers to invite their participation in the pilot projects, the project managers and advisory committees outlined several pilot project parameters or goals which were used to evaluate those who expressed interest in participating in the pilot projects. The goals of each pilot project were that:

1. Each employment services agency will place 20 clients in agricultural jobs that could lead to long-term employment.
2. Individuals will be placed on existing farms or agricultural businesses rather than promoting the development of new agricultural operations.
3. Individuals must be employed for at least four months.
4. Placements will occur between September 2015 - September 2016.
5. Two employment coordinators will be hired to work with employment services agencies to place clients in agricultural settings.

With the pilot project parameters identified, invitations to participate in the pilot projects were then developed to solicit interest from employment services agencies and agriculture employers.

Recruitment and Selection of Pilot Project Sites

Recruitment for the pilot projects was initiated through the development of an Expression of Interest Invitation. The Expression of Interest Invitation was distributed in August, 2015 to more than 150 agricultural employers, 35 employment services agencies, and dozens of industry associations. Of those contacted, eleven employers and eight agencies expressed interest in participating.

Each employer that expressed interest was asked to assess themselves against the pilot project parameters. Employers that could meet the majority – if not all – of the parameters were identified. These employers were then compared against the employment services agencies that expressed interest to determine if a geographical match could be made. Based on this comparison, two sets of employment services agencies and agriculture employers were chosen to participate in the pilot projects. They were:

1. Calgary Catholic Immigration Society + Sunterra and All Seasons Mushrooms (immigrant population)
2. Saskatchewan Abilities Council + Olymel (persons with disabilities)

Conducting the Pilot Projects

With two pilot project matches identified, a Request for Proposal (December, 2015) was developed to hire two employment coordinators, one for each location. The roles of each employment coordinator were to:



- Coordinate the placement of clientele in agriculture operations;
- Work closely with job seekers to understand the specific needs of the clientele;
- Identify agriculture employers that have job openings available and are interested in employing newcomers to Canada and persons with disabilities;
- Initiate active outreach activities to find potential employers and to visit job sites to learn about the jobs available in order to assist with making appropriate job placements;
- Inform potential employers about the services available through employment services agencies;
- Work with the employer and the employment services agency throughout the placement process to ensure both are satisfied with the placement and to troubleshoot problems as required;
- Work with employers to review and/or create job specifications and job descriptions;
- Arrange for a job fair(s) at the employment services agency with selected agricultural employers;
- Arrange activities that promote communication and understanding of agriculture employment opportunities such as agriculture site visits for other employment staff within the organization and hosting information sessions for agriculture employers;
- Provide or arrange for cultural sensitivity training, if required;
- Provide guidance to develop or adapt an orientation program including safety training, if required;
- Provide information about local or regional organizations (e.g., ethno-cultural), if required;
- Assist in monitoring progress of client(s);
- Conduct an interim evaluation with all stakeholders and be prepared to make adjustments to the placement if necessary;
- Document project activities, outcomes, lessons learned, and suggestions for improvements; and
- Submit regular matching (progress) reports.

Two employment coordinators were hired from the applications received. Following the hiring of the employment coordinators, an orientation package was developed specific to each employment services agency. The package included:

- Information about the Addressing Barriers in Agriculture project and the activities that were completed up to the point of hire;
- Information about the employment services agency (e.g., mission, vision, mandate, contact person, confidentiality agreement);
- Information about The Competency Group (e.g., what the company does, its role in the pilot projects, contact person);
- Information about CAHRC (e.g., what the organization does, its role in the pilot projects, contact person);
- An orientation checklist; and
- The template for the monthly matching report to be completed by each employment coordinator.

Each employment coordinator then developed a project work plan to be followed for the duration of the project, reporting on progress against that work plan as part of the monthly matching report.

Developing a Hiring Guide for Underrepresented Groups

Using the information gleaned to this point, the consultants developed a guide for finding and keeping employees for agriculture operations targeted at underrepresented groups. This guide features information and tips related to:

- Identifying populations of interest;



- Locating and engaging with employment services agencies
- Recruitment (i.e., developing job descriptions, creating job advertisements, contacting employment services agencies);
- Selection and hiring (i.e., planning the selection process, reviewing job applications, preparing for and conducting candidate interviews, conducting reference checks, offering employment);
- Valuing diversity in the workplace;
- Planning considerations for underrepresented populations; and
- Retention (i.e., creating opportunities for communication, offering promotions, offering benefits, addressing grievances and job dissatisfaction).

The *Finding and Keeping Employees Hiring Guide* was submitted in September, 2016.

Summative Evaluation of Pilot Projects

To conduct the summative evaluation of the pilot projects, reviews of monthly matching reports submitted by each employment coordinator and questionnaire responses from employment services agency employment coordinators and supervisors were completed.

Matching reports were prepared by each employment coordinator beginning January 2016 from the Calgary Catholic Immigrant Society (CCIS) pilot, and March 2016 from the Saskatchewan Abilities Council (SAC) pilot. The matching reports provided details on monthly employer outreach, employment workshops, applicant experiences, and challenges encountered. The questionnaires provided details on strengths of the pilot projects, challenges encountered, lessons learned, and recommended changes.

Number of Applicants and Hires

The employment coordinators for each pilot project were successful in contacting several new agriculture employers each month. Overall, many employers were receptive to the idea of employing or considering employing immigrants and persons with disabilities. As of September 2016, **52 new hires** occurred as a result of the pilot projects. The CCIS project assisted 195 applicants, of which 43 people were hired by agriculture operations. The SAC project assisted 25 applicants, of which 9 were hired by agricultural operations.

Applicant Perspectives

There was a range of experiences reported by the applicants to the pilot project employment coordinators. The employment coordinator for the CCIS project reported that applicants' experiences with employment placement initiatives was generally positive; however, there were other contributing factors that affected the success of employment matching for immigrant populations. For example:

- For some applicants, taking English classes was more important than searching for a job;
- For some applicants, travelling to a rural location was not an option because they did not have transportation; and
- For some applicants, there were unmatched expectations. Applicants were provided with a job offer which was below their skill level (i.e., they possessed Bachelor and/or Masters degrees).

The experience of the applicants from the SAC project was also positive. The employment coordinator conducted follow up with clients and employers on a monthly basis. All clients reported the jobs were going well and employers were satisfied with the placement. In some instances, the original employment term was extended and an employee was given a pay increase after just one month of employment.



Strengths of the Pilot Projects

Employment services agencies identified several strengths that resulted from participation in the pilot projects. These strengths can be summarized under the headings: Working Through an Employment Services Agency and Placements and Partnerships.

Working Through an Employment Services Agency

Operating each pilot project in conjunction with an employment services agency was identified as a strength by both pilot project sites. Agency supervisors indicated that the availability of a dedicated staff member with an agricultural background and interest in the agricultural sector who could work with and agriculture employers was very beneficial.

The employment coordinators appreciated the support received from experienced team members within the employment services agencies. Working with an employment services agency also provided the coordinators with access to the support and services of satellite offices or employment services agencies in other communities aside from the designated pilot site.

Placements and Partnerships

Through sustained efforts in reaching out to existing and new employers, CCIS and SAC now have an expanded network of agriculture employers that can be nurtured for continued partnerships. The outreach activities also provided agriculture employers with a better understanding of the services that CCIS and SAC (and other employment services agencies) provide as well as the type of clients available for hire.

Challenges Encountered During the Pilot Projects

Many challenges were encountered by employment coordinators as they sought to match potential employees with potential employers. These challenges can be summarized under five headings:

1. Logistical Challenges for Prospective Employees;
2. Educational and Certification Challenges for Employers and Employees;
3. Lack of Understanding about the Agriculture Industry;
4. The Rural Nature of Agriculture; and
5. Lack of Industry Support.

Logistical Challenges for Prospective Employees

Logistical challenges identified by employment counsellors included a shortage of local available housing, lack of public transportation, seasonal work, long or irregular hours, and lack of flexibility in obtaining full- or part-time work depending on the employee's specific needs. Moreover, employers were often looking for employees who were considered 'jack of all trades', which made employment matching difficult as these kinds of employees are difficult to find.

Educational and Certification Challenges for Employers and Employees

Barriers also exist in hiring with respect to education, certification, and qualification. Some applicants held qualifications such as university degrees and preferred not to consider a job in agriculture because of this qualification. Also, minority groups such as newcomers to Canada may not be considered suitable for employment due to language barriers and not possessing a Canadian driver's licenses. The possession of a Class 1A driver's license was also reported to be a barrier for prospective employees. Employment coordinators identified that a shortage of training on heavy equipment and farm machinery imposed a barrier in terms of meeting required job qualifications.



Lack of Understanding about the Agriculture Industry

Employment coordinators indicated there appears to be an implicit lack of interest in careers in agriculture based on a lack of understanding of the opportunities in this sector and the perception that working in agriculture is not considered 'fashionable' or 'cool'. Addressing this information void could provide a more holistic and balanced view at what a career in agriculture may offer.

The Rural Nature of Agriculture

The rural nature of agriculture presented challenges in a couple of ways. For many job openings, the clients would need to relocate to rural areas. Aside from the physical relocation, clients would also need to find accommodation, religious institutions, ethnic food, jobs for spouses, schools for children, and community support services. For many persons with disabilities, relocation was not an option at all.

Another challenge with respect to the rural nature of agriculture is that people looking for work or employers looking for workers may not have an employment services agency in their community. The employment coordinators worked with employment services agencies in rural locations, when possible, but there were many communities that did not have this service. For example, the employment coordinator for the SAC project received a call from a farmer in Meath Park but was unable to assist due to lack of knowledge about potential clients or employment services agencies in that specific area.

Lack of Industry Support

Challenges were identified related to lack of buy in from the agriculture industry and lack of existing formal partnerships with employers. The employment coordinator for SAC found that although farmers seemed genuinely interested in the pilot project, some farmers could not envision how hiring a person with a disability would benefit them.

The CCIS employment coordinator heard frustration from primary agriculture employers in not being able to secure the employees they need. This frustration was further exasperated by restrictions in place by the federal government which prevents immigrants with a farming background to access permanent residency status more readily.

Employment coordinators found a lack of formal partnerships among ministries of agriculture, employment services agencies, and agriculture employers. While the pilot projects made positive gains in establishing partnerships, more work is needed to advance the agriculture industry.

Lessons Learned

The pilot projects enabled networks to be established between the two employment services agencies and agricultural employers that will continue to be developed. The pilot projects laid the ground work for other employment services agency staff to build on the accomplishments achieved to date and to develop new goals and strategies to continue the work moving forward. The barriers that were identified for each group in the pilot projects with respect to finding work in the agriculture industry will be ongoing; however, as strategies are developed and shared, the industry should see a positive increase in participation of persons from traditionally underrepresented groups.

Recommended Changes

Employment coordinators and employment services agency supervisors offered suggestions for moving this initiative forward. These included:



- Refining the approach to target one or two sectors of the industry (e.g., processing) and more in-depth work with one or more of the agricultural associations;
- Working more closely with rural communities to develop community profiles or reports to assist in relocation efforts;
- Establishing formal partnerships with employers (i.e., written, signed agreements);
- Focusing on grass roots of industry to garner buy in for the project; and
- Clarifying the role of government, specifically supports that could be provided and the parameters surrounding those supports.

The evaluation activities and findings were summarized in a report titled, *Summative Evaluation Report of the Researching Barriers to Agricultural Employment Pilot Projects*, submitted September, 2016.



List of Previously Submitted Resources Identified in this Report

The following previously-submitted resources were identified in this report. To obtain copies of these documents, please contact CAHRC.

- *Recommendations Report for Underrepresented Groups* (November, 2014)
- *Summary Report for Consultations with Representatives of Employment Agencies Working with Underrepresented Groups: Interview and Web Focus Group Findings* (January, 2015)
- *Final Report: Options and Opportunities for Attracting Non-traditional Workers to the Agriculture Industry* (March, 2015)
- *New Opportunities for Expanding the Agricultural Workforce Pilot Projects with Underrepresented Groups* (April, 2016)
- *Expression of Interest Invitation* (July, 2016)
- *Request for Proposal: Agriculture Employment Coordinator* (December, 2015)
- *Matching Report Template (as part of the Orientation Package)* (December, 2015)
- *Finding and Keeping Employees Hiring Guide* (September, 2016)
- *Summative Evaluation Report of the Researching Barriers to Agricultural Employment Pilot Projects* (September, 2016)