

SUMMATIVE FARM PROFILE REPORT

Recruitment and Retention Practices used in Primary Agriculture



Project Overview

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) was created to address human resource issues facing agricultural businesses across Canada. CAHRC works with industry leaders, governments, and education stakeholders to research, develop and communicate solutions to the challenges in agriculture employment and skills development.

CAHRC is led by industry and funded by the Sector Council Program of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). For more information about CAHRC, visit www.cahrc-ccrha.ca.

CAHRC representatives visited and interviewed a number of agricultural employers across Canada. During the visits, the CAHRC representatives asked about the strategies and/or practices that the agricultural employers were using to attract and retain workers. The representatives also talked to a sampling of workers at each location to hear about recruitment and retention practices from the worker's perspective.

Interview notes and observations were used to develop farm profiles describing the recruitment and retention practices used by the agricultural producers that were visited. This report reviews and summarizes the recruitment and retention practices used by the profile participants.

Please note that the findings in this report are based on anecdotal information provided to CAHRC representatives during farm profile interviews. As such, information and findings have no statistical validity.

About the Profile Participants

The profile participants were identified by key informants from government commodity and industry organizations, and CAHRC made an effort to include as many participants as possible. Profile participants included farms and other primary production operations from across Canada, representing a variety of commodities, as follows:

Farm	Prov.	Type of Operation	Size of Operation	Full-time Year-round Employees	Seasonal and/or Part-time Employees
Headline Holsteins Ltd.	NL	Dairy Farm	400 milking cows, plus an additional 500 dry cows, replacement heifers and calves, 1100 acres in crops	12 to 14	2 to 4 seasonal workers during the crop growing season
Brookfield Gardens	PE	Garden Vegetables	280 acres of vegetable gardens	9	10 to 15 during the growing season
Ferme Aston inc.	QC	Dairy Farm	550 milking cows, plus an additional 500 dry cows, replacement heifers and calves. Also grain fed veal.	14	Minimal
Le Potager Mont-Rouge	QC	Market Garden Fruits and Vegetables	350 acres of fruits and vegetables	3	30 during the growing season and up to 65 during harvest, including 8 temporary foreign workers
Bayview Flowers	ON	Greenhouse	31,000 square meters of greenhouse coverage growing flowers and ornamentals on four sites.	90	30 to 40
Schouten Corner View Farms Ltd.	ON	Dairy, Feed and Cash Crops	550 milking cows, plus an additional 750 dry cows, replacement heifers and calves. 1800 acres of feed crops and 1800 acres of cash crops	12	Minimal
Hytek Ltd.	MB	Hog Producer	Canada's largest pork producer - finishing more than a million hogs per year	500 in hog production	Minimal
Kurtz Farms	SK	Grain Farm	5,000 acres in grains, highly mechanized	3	4 during seeding and harvest
'Anonymous' Grain Farm	SK	Grain Farm	15,000 acres in grains, highly mechanized	5	10 seasonal workers during seeding and harvest
Pound-Maker Agventures Ltd.	SK	Cattle feed lot	Capacity of 28,000 head	35 in production	Minimal
Highland Feeders	AB	Cattle feed lot	Sixth largest feedlot in Canada with a capacity of 36,000 head	50	Some people are laid off if cattle numbers are low
Linnaea Nurseries Ltd.	BC	Plant Nursery	12,000 square meters of greenhouse coverage on a 60 acre site	15	30 seasonal workers during the growing season
Marine Harvest Canada	BC	Aquaculture - Salmon Farming	8 hatcheries and 35 marine farm sites producing 40,000 tonnes of salmon per year	300 in production	Minimal

Note: Four of the larger farms are vertically integrated, and operate processing facilities of some kind in addition to being involved in production. Agricultural processing is outside the scope of this study.



OFAC Animal Agriculture Photo Library

Business Size by Number of Employees

General Assumption – the greater the number of employees in a business, the more complex the business, and the greater the need for formal human resource policy.

The following farm profile operations are based on the total number of employees — including part-time and seasonal workers:

Businesses with 15 or less full-time and/or part-time/seasonal workers

Assumptions

- Business owners and/or managers can stay on top of all facets of the business without formal policy
- Owners and/or managers often work alongside employees, and know the work
- Owners and/or managers know all staff personally – relationships naturally exist
- Training is informal – the owner, managers, or senior workers train new workers
- Formal mission, vision, and value statements do not exist but all workers know how things should be done

Farms in this category

- Headline Holsteins Ltd.
- Anonymous Grain Farm
- Kurtz Farms
- Ferme Aston
- Schouten Corner View Farms Ltd.

Businesses with 16 to 50 full-time and/or part-time/seasonal workers

Assumptions

- Business owners and/or managers may use formal policy to stay on top of all facets of the business
- Owners and/or managers do not normally work alongside employees
- Owners and/or managers may not normally know all staff personally — relationships are sporadic
- Training may be formal – senior and/or experienced workers may train new workers
- Formal mission, vision, and value statements may exist – to make it clear to workers how things should be done

Farms in this category

- Linnaea Nurseries
- Highland Feeders
- Pound-Maker Agventures
- Brookfield Gardens
- Le Potager Mont-Rouge

Businesses with 51 or more full-time and/or part-time/seasonal workers

Assumptions

- Business owners and/or managers require formal policy to stay on top of all facets of the business
- Owners and/or managers do not work alongside employees, and may not know the work
- Owners and/or managers do not know all staff personally — relationships with junior staff are rare
- Training is formal and based on policy
- Formal mission, vision, and value statements exist and enforced

Farms in this category

- Hytek Ltd.
- Marine Harvest Canada
- Bayview Flowers

General Approaches to Human Resource Management

The following general approaches to human resource management are used to improve the effectiveness and success of worker recruitment and retention. Based on the information provided by the participants, each practice and the number of farms using that practice are outlined below:

HR Management Practice	Of all farms, the number using this practice	Of farms with 1 to 15 workers, the number using this practice	Of farms with 16 to 50 workers, the number using this practice	Of farms with 51 or more workers, the number using this practice
Have formally defined mission, vision, and/or value statements	6 out of 13	1 out of 5	2 out of 5	3 out of 3
Use a formal human resource plan or strategy	3 out of 13	0 out of 5	0 out of 5	3 out of 3
Use an employee manual of some kind	6 out of 13	0 out of 5	3 out of 5	3 out of 3
Work to build relationships with staff – e.g. open door policies, owner or manager availability and approachability	12 out of 13	5 out of 5	5 out of 5	2 out of 3
Place emphasis on staff development – through providing access and/or funding for relevant education and training (internal or external)	7 out of 13	3 out of 5	2 out of 5	2 out of 3
Have in place or are contemplating some kind of performance-based compensation program — individual or team	3 out of 13	1 out of 5	0 out of 5	2 out of 3
Be actively involved in local community	7 out of 13	2 out of 5	4 out of 5	2 out of 3
Be involved with cooperative learning programs with training providers	4 out of 13	0 out of 5	2 out of 5	2 out of 3



Profile Participant Recruitment Practices

Recruitment practices are linked to general human resource management approaches and to retention practices. Some of the more innovative recruitment practices mentioned by farms include:

- Targeting people from specific ethnic groups for recruitment. One of the business owners is originally from India, and targets female Indo-Canadian workers (new immigrants to Canada and first generation Canadians) for seasonal positions. These workers are more comfortable working for and with people from their home country. Language barriers for new immigrants are minimized. Many seasonal workers return year after year to work during peak seasons.
- Targeting retired people and/or people on a pension. Several farms target people who have retired from farming or other careers who want to (or have to) continue working full-time, seasonally, or part-time. Overly strenuous work may not be appropriate for some older workers.

The following recruitment practices were mentioned by the profile participants as ways to improve the effectiveness and success of recruiting workers.

Recruitment practices mentioned by the profile participants	Of all profile participants, the number using this practice	Of profile participants with 1 to 15 workers, the number using this practice	Of profile participants with 16 to 50 workers, the number using this practice	Of profile participants with 51 or more workers, the number using this practice
Encourage word of mouth recruiting as a method for attracting new workers	11 out of 13	5 out of 5	4 out of 5	2 out of 3
Pay referral fees to workers who persuade a friend or acquaintance to come to work	1 out of 13	0 out of 5	1 out of 5	0 out of 3
Provide new employees with structured, formal orientation	3 out of 13	0 out of 5	0 out of 5	3 out of 3
Consider all sources of labour including non-traditional groups (retired workers, ethnic groups or foreign workers programs)	4 out of 13	1 out of 5	3 out of 5	0 out of 3
Seek workers with an agricultural background	8 out of 13	5 out of 5	2 out of 5	1 out of 3
Hire local people (with roots in the area) where possible	12 out of 13	5 out of 5	5 out of 5	2 out of 3
Pay workers competitively compared to other agricultural sector employers	13 out of 13	5 out of 5	5 out of 5	3 out of 3
Get involved with cooperative learning programs with training providers	4 out of 13	0 out of 5	2 out of 5	2 out of 3

Profile Participant Retention Practices

Retention practices are linked to general Human Resource management approaches and to recruitment practices. Some of the more innovative retention practices used by the profile participants include:

- Team performance bonus program. Team performance bonus programs are generally used in situations where performance can be measured and a team of people can influence production. One of the participants operates hog barns. Where the number of piglets weaned per sow exceeds goals, all the workers in the barn share a cash bonus. This can mean thousands of dollars of bonus for each worker in a good year, and encourages all workers to be efficient.
- Housing for local workers. Some producers have extra housing on site that can be rented to workers for reasonable rates. Providing worker housing reduces travel time and provides an inexpensive place to stay.
- Access to farm equipment. One farm is highly mechanized, and workers are often the owners of smaller farms. The business owner allows the worker to use the equipment on their own farm for no charge (subject to availability) Access to farm equipment provides a non monetary benefit, appreciated by the worker.
- Transportation to and from work. Several of the participants have a pick-up service to help employees get to the work site. By providing transportation, the employer is helping to remove barriers to transportation and helping employees to arrive at work on time.

The following retention practices were mentioned by the profile participants as ways to improve worker retention.

Retention practices mentioned by the profile participants	Of all profile participants, the number using this practice	Of profile participants with 1 to 15 workers, the number using this practice	Of profile participants with 16 to 50 workers, the number using this practice	Of profile participants with 51 or more workers, the number using this practice
Provide workers with opportunities to advance	8 out of 13	2 out of 5	3 out of 5	3 out of 3
Try to promote from within	7 out of 13	2 out of 5	3 out of 5	2 out of 3
Provide workers with work time flexibility	8 out of 13	4 out of 5	3 out of 5	1 out of 3
Provide medical, dental, and or disability coverage	7 out of 13	1 out of 5	4 out of 5	2 out of 3
Contribute or match contributions to worker pensions	5 out of 13	2 out of 5	1 out of 5	2 out of 3
Provide wage incentives for people who work long hours	5 out of 13	0 out of 5	3 out of 5	2 out of 3
Offer return to work incentives for seasonal workers	3 out of 13	0 out of 5	2 out of 5	1 out of 3
Provide workers with tool and/or clothing allowances	6 out of 13	1 out of 5	3 out of 5	2 out of 3
Sponsor or fund worker lunches or social events	6 out of 13	3 out of 5	3 out of 5	0 out of 3



Human Resource Challenges

The profile participants mentioned a variety of challenges that impact their ability to recruit and retain workers. Challenges include:

Agricultural wages and benefits tend to be less than other industries.
Many agricultural employers rely on a pool of 'farm kids' or 'farm workers' that is shrinking... or not available in some communities.
The culture of worker safety is not as well entrenched in the agricultural sector as it is in some other sectors of the Canadian economy.
Effective Human Resource management takes a lot of time and requires a lot of paperwork.
Most new hires go through a learning curve. In times of high turnover this learning curve becomes a critical issue.
The agricultural lifestyle that attracts people to the agricultural sector does not necessarily align with the culture of productivity that is common in larger successful businesses.
Lack of public transportation is a key reason why workers leave. Many workers do not have access to vehicles to get to the farm.
Many local workers come from the city and have never worked on a farm before.
Workers need to be trained on new types of technology used in the agricultural sector.
There are few opportunities for career advancement on many farms.
It is challenging to keep a repetitive work environment interesting.

Summary – Practices in Recruitment and Retention

Each agricultural business is unique and has different needs and resources that impact their ability to recruit and retain workers. The Canadian agricultural producers that were visited as part of this project use a wide variety of recruiting and retention practices. This report identifies a number of practices used by agricultural producers who participated in the farm profiles. The practices most appropriate to an individual producer will depend on:

- The region of Canada where the producer operates
- The product grown or raised by the producer
- The number of permanent workers the producer employs
- The number of seasonal or temporary workers the producer employs
- The opportunities for workers in other sectors of Canadian industry in the region

Agricultural businesses are encouraged to select and implement positive practices from this report (and from other sources) that may be appropriate and beneficial to their specific situation.



Recruitment and Retention Practices Mentioned by Profile Participants

Develop a defined mission, vision, and/or value statements.
Develop a formal human resource plan or strategy.
Develop and use an employee manual.
Work to build relationships with staff – e.g. open door policies, owner or manager availability and approachability.
Provide opportunities for staff development.
Consider performance-based compensation program – individual or team.
Get involved in local community affairs.
Get involved with cooperative learning programs with training providers.
Encourage word of mouth recruiting as a method for attracting new workers.
Pay referral fees to workers who persuade a friend or acquaintance to come to work.
Provide new employees with structured, formal orientation.
Consider all sources of labour including non-traditional groups (e.g. retired workers, ethnic groups or foreign workers programs).
Seek workers with an agricultural background.
Hire local people (with roots in the area) where possible.
Pay workers competitively compared to other agricultural sector employers.
Consider housing and transportation benefits as part of the compensation package.
Provide workers with opportunities to advance within the company. Promote from within where possible.
Provide workers with work time flexibility.
Offer benefits when possible (e.g. medical, dental, disability insurance, contribute to or match contributions to worker pensions or retirement accounts).
Offer return to work incentives for seasonal workers.
Offer benefits that are meaningful to employees (e.g. tool and/or clothing allowances).
Recognize accomplishments by sponsoring lunches or social events to recognize accomplishments or celebrate success.

