



CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL
HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL

CONSEIL CANADIEN POUR LES
RESSOURCES HUMAINES EN AGRICULTURE

Today's and Tomorrow's Farms: Employment and Skills Development



Executive Summary: 2010 Regional and National Forum Proceedings

About the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council

The **Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council** (CAHRC) has a vision of a qualified and motivated workforce that is sufficient to sustain a profitable Canadian agriculture industry. CAHRC represents Canadian agriculture and agri-business in all its forms, and was created to address the human resource issues facing agriculture businesses across the nation.

In order to achieve this goal, the Council's mission is to research, develop, and communicate solutions to human resource issues identified by Canadian primary agriculture.

Context

From smaller niche farms to sprawling grain operations, and dairy farms to expanding greenhouses, Canadian agriculture is diverse in its offerings. Despite regional and sectoral differences, one common challenge unites them all: there is a critical need for skilled workers in the sector.

That's the take-home message from the series of five forums hosted by the Canadian Agricultural

Human Resource Council (CAHRC). CAHRC convened stakeholders in five locations across the country – Moncton, Longueuil, Guelph, Langley and Calgary – to address what is being done, and what has been done, to minimize the growing shortage of skilled workers in the agricultural sector within Canada and around the world.

Farm operators across the country have reported a need to look farther afield for farm labour, often outside our borders. Couple that with the move towards increasingly complicated equipment, and farm owners across the country are noting there are big boots to fill with respect to workers and the need for technical training.

Industry Recommendations

Engage Youth: Share Compelling Career-Opportunity Stories

If the agriculture and agri-food sector is to reach and inform a younger target audience, it must present a more attractive, compelling story to Canadian youth. Information about careers in farming needs to be integrated into school curricula of all K to 12 school programs across Canada, with more in-depth initiatives beginning as early as Grades six and seven.



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There is a need to change the attitude of parents, teachers and guidance counsellors in order to offer a modern, up-to-date perspective of farming. Existing farmers can play a role in promoting and advocating career opportunities within the family farm or the industry in general.

These changes in public perception can build on the relationship of farming and its related industries, with renewable resources – an attraction for youth. Conventional agriculture – as well as alternative and niche sectors – need to tap into the moral purpose many young Canadians increasingly seek in their career choices.

A new image must be developed and communicated to youth about farming and food production as ‘cool’, diverse, interesting and potentially lucrative. Agriculture is a tech-friendly, forward-thinking industry comprised of many different career options, some of which have yet to be created.



Provide Easily-Accessible Industry-Focused Training and Education

Training and education programs must meet the needs of both industry and students. The need for workers to receive post-secondary training increases as agriculture evolves in its size and complexity. The skills taught by post-secondary institutions must be relevant to the needs of the employer and the industry.

Farm operations are growing increasingly dependent on high-tech systems and machinery, and mistakes with these systems are costly. There is an essential benefit to formal education and training. Ongoing training is also essential, as is the importance of basic human resource tools in performance management, and health and safety.

There is also a need to invest in leadership training and development. Rural communities across Canada generally suffer from a lack of effective leadership in their community. New leaders are needed to fill that gap, and must be identified and trained accordingly.

Careers in the agri-food sector must be viewed as relevant, exciting and reasonably lucrative. Accessible education and training opportunities must also be readily provided and supported to limit barriers to entry for those interested in the sector.

Apprenticeship is a Model that Works

On-the-job training through apprenticeship programming provides highly-skilled labour to Canada’s agri-food sector, while simultaneously meeting student needs. Students earn money while they are learning, and employers benefit



from knowing that their employees have the education and practical background to do the job effectively.

Because apprenticeship is a standardized program, it means that each apprentice receives the same training. This continuity within the trade designation provides a much greater level of industry confidence in the employee, and better workplace value that justifies the greater wage the employee will command in their career.

Most importantly, employees will be much better versed in many facets of farm operations, with particular focus on farm safety, farm food safety, and required regulations. With hands-on training and a journeyperson accreditation, skilled labour retention may become a lesser concern to employers over time, and employees may even be able to work between different regional businesses, creating full-time employment out of multiple part-time jobs.

Provide Effective Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector Promotion

Participants in Canada's agri-food sector need to get better at self-promotion. They need to be vocal about the joys – and challenges – to the rest of the industry, as well as the general public.

Over the last several years there has been an attitude shift among Canadian consumers – a renewed willingness to seek out and purchase local farm products. Producers, industry organizations, and all levels of government must work together to promote the positive messages of buying local, while underlying the importance of economic sustainability for Canadian farmers.



At the same time, farmers that have found success in diversification, of newly-discovered production efficiencies, and even of new production opportunities, need to share their approach to further reveal the vibrancy of the sector.

There is great pride in farming and the Canadian agriculture industry. When promoting the attractiveness of careers in the sector, the industry must harness and communicate this pride, as well as the non-monetary benefits that are available in a career in agriculture.

Increased Immigration is Essential

Rural communities need human resources to remain sustainable in economic and social terms. If a rural community's labour pool can be enhanced with an influx of new immigrants, then immigration must not only be supported from a regulatory point-of-view, but actively promoted.



Share Best Practices with Other Sectors

The passionate and competent individuals and groups that have already worked to address human resource challenges in Canada's agri-food sector must be encouraged to share that information across organizations and commodities for the benefit of the sector.

Canada's agri-food sector must also be willing to share its experience with groups in other industries, particularly those that are working to address their own human resources challenges. Sharing new approaches, market research, and successes and failures can help grow the pool of information and ideas that will ultimately help all sectors take a new approach to career promotion.

Communicate Within the Sector

Farmers face a changing industry, and must embrace new business management techniques, technologies and procedures. Regions across

Canada share more commonalities than differences. All stakeholders in the agriculture and agri-food sector should continue to talk amongst themselves, sharing their successes, challenges and issues.

In light of new markets and the requirement to do many things differently, sound human resource management practices are a key to survival. Farm organizations must continue to call on their memberships for assistance.

Stakeholders should also communicate with their CAHRC representatives on the Board of Directors and CAHRC staff about their concerns, comments and suggestions as they relate to human resource development.

Conclusion

The Regional and National Forums held between February and June 2010 are a key element of the Council's Communications and Outreach initiatives. The goal is to communicate the importance of human resources to the success of primary agricultural organizations. Sound human resources in employment and skills development are essential to assist these organizations to prosper and to grow, especially with the increased competition that exists in today's globalized economy.

The information obtained over the course of these forums will help to guide the continued efforts of the Council to address the human resource needs of primary agriculture in Canada.



Photos on pages 1-3: Fields for Your Future Project – BC Ministry of Agriculture, B.C. 4-H, BC Youth in Agriculture Foundation, B.C. Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation **Photo on this page:** Courtesy of Tom Henry, Stillmeadow Farm, B.C.



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