

SUSTAINABILITY OF CANADA'S AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE

CANADIAN AGRICULTURE & AGRI-FOOD

WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN



A Future for Canadian Farmers & Canadian Food Production

WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN: BACKGROUND

The *Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan* (WAP) is a roadmap designed to address the sector's critical and pervasive labour shortages which have been identified as the biggest business risk management issue for the industry. The plan is a collaborative effort developed by the national Labour Task Force (LTF), comprised of industry representatives from every aspect of the agriculture and agri-food value chain, including the seafood sector, over the last three years. The *Action Plan* provides government and industry with short, medium and long-term action items focusing on:

1. Increasing the supply of labour for skilled and unskilled workers; and
2. Improving the knowledge and skills of workers in the industry.

HIRING CANADIAN WORKERS: AG INDUSTRY'S FIRST PRIORITY

Canada's Agriculture & Agri-Food industry employs 2.3 M Canadians and is full of high quality career options with competitive wages and benefits. In spite of employers expending extensive efforts on recruitment and retention for Canadian workers, critical labour shortages continue to be pervasive for the agriculture value-chain. **Statistics Canada Job Vacancy and Wage Survey data** backs this up, clearly showing agriculture is encountering significant difficulties with ongoing job vacancies in spite of vigorous recruitment.

AGRICULTURE: A UNIQUE INDUSTRY

Unlike other industries, which were reported as abusing the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, the agriculture industry has a long record of respecting the Federal Government's robust programming. For fifty years the Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program, used by some commodities to supplement the Canadian workforce with international agriculture workers during peak periods, has received international recognition as a best practice model.

The agriculture industry needs workers with unique skills and has workforce challenges including:

- **Rural De-population:** employment in rural areas makes it difficult for employers to access and attract workers;
- **Perishable Product:** handling of live animals and plants, food safety and security requirements for Canadian consumers; and
- **Seasonality:** there will always be a seasonal component to agriculture which restricts ability to provide full-time permanent jobs.

The Workforce Action Plan solution prioritizes hiring Canadian workers and includes a plan for a long term sustainable labour supply which will create more Canadian jobs within the industry and within the broader economy.

WHAT'S NEEDED: SHORT TERM

When Canadian workers are unavailable, agricultural employers need access to international agriculture workers:

- Improve **pathways to permanency** allowing agriculture and agri-food workers access to a viable pathway to permanent residency through the Express Entry Program;
- Create a **dedicated Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Program** to provide consistent and efficient access to international agriculture workers to support the industry's productivity, growth and future success;
- **Recognize the Seasonality** of agriculture by removing existing caps on the duration of stay for those Agriculture Stream workers brought in to address acute, seasonal labour needs that can't be filled through the domestic workforce; and
- **Create a Centre of Specialization** (single office) for the Agriculture Stream and the agri-food industry to ensure knowledgeable staff, timely LMIA processing and consistent treatment of these applications.

WHAT'S NEEDED: MEDIUM - LONG TERM

To address the chronic agriculture worker shortages fully implement the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan:

- **Collect enhanced Labour Market Information** including development of **wage rate methodology** and process that reflects the agriculture industry actual wages, working towards an acceptable transparent wage rate process for industry and the Federal Government.
- **Improve Access to Domestic Labour:**
 - Develop a Jobs Resource Centre for Industry; and
 - Create a National Career Promotion initiative and tools for industry to attract more Canadian workers.
- **Improve Knowledge & Skills of Agriculture Workers:**
 - Develop a Learning Resource Centre;
 - Align Training with Industry Needs; and
 - Increase Investment in HR Management and Training.

CANADIAN HONEY VALUE CHAIN & CANADIAN FARMERS AGRICULTURE WORKER SHORTAGE: WHAT THIS MEANS



CANADIAN BEEKEEPERS

Investment in workers is the honey industry's number one input cost. Beekeeping = full time,

seasonally intensive work that includes handling of **live bees**. Dependable, sustainable and experienced agriculture workers with unique skills are a must because:

Canadian Beekeepers are committed to the highest standard of care for their honey bees. Honey bees are being challenged with invasive parasites such as Varroa and Tracheal Mites and pests like the small hive beetle. Skilled apiary technicians are needed to provide the bees quality care following best management practices and protocols. **Access to full-time seasonal workers that are uniquely skilled and experienced is a must – ag worker shortages are not an option.**



Beekeepers have an interdependent relationship with other Canadian farmers.

Canola seed, blueberry, cranberry, and orchard fruit growers, count on bee keepers for pollination services. Canola is the most valuable crop produced in Canada with a critical link to insect pollination, generating \$7.3 billion in 2013. The production of the hybrid canola seed requires precisely timed and thorough insect pollination to bring together the separate genetic lines of the male and female parent plants. Each season approximately 80 thousand honey bee hives are placed for canola seed production along with Alfalfa Leafcutting Bees in the fields. Researchers have found that in canola, bee pollination can also encourage higher yields for commercial canola. **Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food count on bee pollination – ag worker shortages are not an option.**



BEEKEEPING INDUSTRY

Some beekeepers specialize in supplying pollination services, often charging fees for hive rentals, while others derive most or all of their income from the sale of honey, beeswax, bees and other bee products.

In 2014 Canada's 8,777 beekeepers produced 81 million pounds of honey worth \$201 million dollars. 455,700 of Canada's 694,000 hives (67%) were kept in the three Prairie Provinces, producing 71% of total Canadian honey production volume.

The total agricultural economic contribution of Honey bees in 2013 from canola production (\$3.66B) and other agricultural crops (\$733 M) can be estimated at \$4.4 B.



CANADIAN CONSUMERS

Canadian consumers appreciate Canadian honey products. Canadian honey meets the high safety standards of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency which is important for Canadian consumers. Beekeeping requires **seasonal**, full-time workers with unique skills. **Worker shortage** for the industry means:

Less Canadian honey and Alfalfa Leafcutting Bees, Less Canadian quality honey products available & higher prices for Canadian consumers.



Beekeepers need seasonal workers for only a few months out of the year.



CANADIAN ECONOMY & EXPORTS

Currently 1 in 8 Canadian jobs are from Canada's Ag & Agri-Food sector. The Ag industry employs 2.3 Million Canadians, representing \$108.2 Billion and over 6% GDP. Canada is the 5th largest exporter of Ag & Agri-Food products.

Agriculture & Agri-Food worker shortage contributes to:

- a hollowing out and economically suffocating rural communities across Canada;
- worsening Canada's rural de-population;
- lost wages & jobs for Canadian rural and urban workers;
- farmers & processors losing export opportunities and farm gate returns, putting agri-business at risk; and
- jeopardizing Canada's global market position as an Agriculture & Agri-Food export leader.



UNIQUE SEASONAL CHALLENGES



Canadian Honey Council

HIRING CANADIAN WORKERS: AG INDUSTRY'S FIRST PRIORITY

The honey industry recruits Canadian workers first, however, there are unique workforce challenges involved in the honey industry which include:

- Beekeeping and processing are located in rural areas where flora and crops are plentiful, and
- These are unusual seasonal jobs which will never create permanent positions which most Canadians are seeking; they require long hours, often working weekends and nights.

When Canadian workers are unavailable, Canadian Beekeepers need access to international agriculture workers with unique and special skills, willing to work in Canadian rural areas for a few weeks to several months during the season.

FEDERAL AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMMING

- **Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program** is a well-run internationally recognised program which allows access to workers from only Mexico and the Caribbean countries. These workers can return year after year without restriction.
- **Agriculture Stream** allows access to agriculture workers from other countries such as the Philippines, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Australia, and New Zealand, etc. **These workers are not allowed to return to Canada after 48 months accumulated seasonal work.**
- **The main Temporary Foreign Worker Program** needs to be used for agriculture workers for commodities not on the National Commodity List (NCL) including Canada's largest agriculture sector: Grains and Oilseeds.

ISSUE BACKGROUND: THE "4 IN 4 OUT RULE": Currently Temporary Foreign Workers including those in the TFWP's Agricultural Stream must return home after accumulating 48 months of working in Canada and must remain there a full four years before coming back. This is the new cumulative duration rule commonly referred to as the "4 in 4 out" rule. It acts as a cap that restricts access to workers with unique and special talents, causing a skills deficit. This rule is currently applied to the seasonal workers Canadian Beekeepers access from several countries including the Philippines and Nicaragua. In many cases the individuals are in their home country longer during the year than they are in Canada.

This is causing:

- **Restricted access to unique and special skilled workers needed to do the job:** Canadian Beekeepers need access to the specialized skills and knowledge provided by workers from countries such as the Philippines, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Australia, and New Zealand etc. **The Agriculture Stream needs to allow seasonal workers to return on an ongoing seasonal basis.**
- **Skills deficit for agricultural employers:** Canadian Beekeepers who are using the Agriculture Stream to access seasonal workers have invested significant time and money into on-the-job training, skills that are not available in the classroom. Under the current rules, uniquely trained seasonal workers from countries such as the Philippines, Guatemala, Australia, and New Zealand, etc. are not allowed to return to Canada for 4 years. This means the investments beekeepers and other producers have made with workers will be leaving Canada, creating a huge skills gap for farmers and the industry. **Workers are looking ahead and Canada is already losing these highly trained, seasonal workers with unique and special skills to our trade competitors. The Agriculture Stream needs to allow seasonal workers to return on an ongoing seasonal basis.**

This "4 in 4 out" regulatory seasonal worker issue is affecting 9 of the 12 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Value Chains, including: Bee Health, Beef, Grains, Horticulture (Ag Stream users), Organics, Pulses, Seed, Sheep, and Special Crops.

THE SOLUTION

Today, agriculture, just like other industries, has become a global workplace. Improving Canada's seasonal programming will enable farmers to meet their seasonal labour needs, it can provide economic support for workers from developing countries, and ongoing agricultural cultural exchange that allows for a trade of ideas, innovation and technology. The Canadian Honey Council supports the **Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan's** recommendations. When Canadian workers cannot be found, better access to international agriculture workers is needed to address **acute, seasonal labour needs that cannot be filled through the domestic workforce.**

"Similar to SAWP, remove 48 months per calendar year duration cap on Agriculture stream workers if the employer is bringing in seasonal workers that stay no longer than 8 months at a time and who are then outside Canada for 4 consecutive months."

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL

PARTNERS



Horticulture
tables rondes sur la chaîne de valeur

Produits biologiques
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