

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
- **Better Communications:** Ongoing consultation between producers/ag industry and government departments on ag labour issues

SEED CORN GROWERS OF ONTARIO

AG WORKER SHORTAGE: WHAT THIS MEANS



SEED GROWERS

It all starts with seed: Producing seed = seasonally intensive work that includes handling of **live plants**. Seed is the starting point for growing crops that produce food, feed and other bio-products for both domestic and export markets. Growing seed requires more time, expense and expertise to produce than commercial crops. Seed requires extra help at seeding and harvest and there are many labour intensive jobs such as rogueing (the removal of genetic off type plants), as well as, cleaning, conditioning and processing operations. One extremely important labour intensive job that the seed industry requires is corn detasseling.



→The Seed Corn hybridization process entails **cross pollinating** male and female

plants in the field which requires intensive work including the detasseling process. Over 4,000 workers are needed in a short 2 to 3 week time period in southern Ontario where 95% of Canada's seed corn is grown because of its unique growing season, ideal weather conditions, and fertile soil. **Access to seasonal workers with unique, special skills and experience is a must – ag worker shortages are not an option.**



→In order for Seed Corn Growers to meet Canadian Food Inspection Agency's requirements, seed corn growers need to access a substantial number of workers in a very short amount of time. If the work does not get done then the seed crop will not pass inspection which means a total loss of crop for seed corn growers – a devastating farm gate loss of a year's worth of work and investment by individual seed growers. **Access to seasonal workers with unique, special skills and experience is a must – ag worker shortages are not an option.**

THE SEED SECTOR



Canada is recognized worldwide as a leading producer, processor and exporter of high-quality seed for a wide range of crops. Many hours of labour and years of work goes into every bag of seed. It starts with the research and innovation work in the lab that improves yields for farmers and nutrition for consumers, research trials in the field, rigorous seed grower protocols ensuring seed purity and consistent yield, and careful and meticulous processing - all include complex technologies investing millions annually in seed research and development. Canadian seed exports were

valued at approximately \$450 M in 2012 and increasing. **The implied employment effect of the seed industry is 57,420 jobs and \$1.67 B in wages and salaries, and generates about \$81.9 million in tax revenue. Total economic impact (direct and indirect) of the seed industry in Canada is estimated at \$5.61 B.**

FARMERS

Canadian farmers are seed producers' customers. Quality seed is a must to provide consistent yield for farmers. Much of the innovation for increased productivity and market opportunities for farmers is delivered by seed. **Farmers rely on seed corn growers**, with over 2 M acres of grain corn grown in Ontario and innovation driving expanded corn acreage opportunities. **Worker shortage** for the seed industry means: **Less Canadian seed producers able to operate sustainable farms, Less varieties available to Canadian farmers & Higher Prices.**

CANADIAN ECONOMY & EXPORTS

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

Agriculture & Agri-Food worker shortage contributes to:

- hollowing out and economically suffocating rural communities across Canada;
- worsening Canada's rural de-population;
- lost wages & jobs for Canadian 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



HIRING CANADIAN WORKERS: AG INDUSTRY'S FIRST PRIORITY

The seed industry recruits and hires Canadian workers first, however, there are unique workforce challenges involved in seed growing and production which include:

- Seed growing and processing are located in **rural areas**;
- These are seasonal jobs that **will never create permanent positions** which most Canadians are seeking;
- Hybrid cross-pollination and other work is **highly technical involving unique and special skills**;
- **Critical, time sensitive seasonal crop cycles and weather conditions** mean growers need uniquely skilled workers during peak periods to avoid devastating losses;
- A high number of **owner/operators are retiring in the next 5 to 10 years**, which is creating a new demographic challenge for the grain and oilseed industry;
- Traditionally southern Ontario's youth participate in detasseling crews. However, accessing a substantial number of agriculture workers in such a short amount of time for seed corn detasseling is becoming increasingly difficult due to **provincial labour regulations** and **less youth availability** for this sort of manual labour, creating worker access issues for smaller acreage seed corn growers.

AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMMING

For hiring international agriculture workers there three streams of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP):

- **Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program** is a well-run internationally recognised program which allows access to workers from 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, Guatemala, Australia, and New Zealand, etc. **These workers are not allowed to return to Canada after 4 years of seasonal work.**
- **Main TFWP** needs to be used for agriculture workers for commodities not on the National Commodity List (NCL).

ISSUE BACKGROUND: THE "4 IN 4 OUT RULE"

Workers using the main TFWP and the Agriculture Stream must return home after working in Canada for a total of four years, and must remain there for four years before coming back. This new cumulative duration rule change is commonly referred to as the "4 in 4 out" rule and acts as a cap on returning seasonal workers that are uniquely trained with special skills which the industry needs. For seasonal growers and farmers the current regulatory environment is causing:

- **Restricted access to the uniquely skilled workers needed to do the job**
- **Skills deficit for agricultural employers**

Issues with the "4 in 4 out" Agriculture Stream rule change 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.

ISSUE BACKGROUND: THE NATIONAL COMMODITY LIST (NCL)

In order to qualify for the SAWP or the Agriculture Stream the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, the producers' commodity needs to be listed on the National Commodity List (NCL). **Unfortunately, Seed Corn is not listed on the NCL** so growers do not qualify for SAWP or the Agriculture stream. There is no clear path or guidelines explaining how to have seed corn or other commodities listed on the NCL. **Issues related to not being included on the National Commodity List is affecting access to seasonal workers needed for many commodities such as seed corn growers, grains and oilseed farmers, forage growers, maple syrup producers.**

THE SOLUTION

The Seed Corn Growers of Ontario support 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 can't be filled through the domestic workforce.**

- **National Commodity List - Broaden Access to Workers For All Commodities:** *"Delink the National Commodity List from the Agriculture Stream OR expand the list to include a more comprehensive commodity list for agriculture and clarify the process for inclusion on the NCL to ensure all employers within the agriculture industry."*
- **Ag Stream Cumulative Duration – "4 in 4 out":** *"Similar to SAWP, remove 48 months 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."*

SEED CORN GROWERS NEED ACCESS TO AG WORKERS TO GET THE JOB DONE

Because the seed hybridization process is so time sensitive, when Canadians are unavailable, some reasonable regulatory flexibility is needed to allow **Seed Corn Growers** access to international agriculture workers when the pollination process requires it. International agriculture workers already in Canada should be allowed to detassel corn for 2 to 3 weeks. Early season crops include: asparagus, lettuce, and strawberries. Late fall crops include: cucumbers, pumpkins, cabbage, apples and Christmas trees. Many smaller seed corn growers already have international agriculture workers on their farm for the harvesting of these other commodities. Due to the planting and growing cycles and the immediacy of the work involved, work permits and paperwork should be processed before the agriculture worker arrives in Canada.

Ag Worker Shortage What This Means

Seed Corn Growers of Ontario
Canadian Ag & Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan
A Future for Farmers & Food Production



Canada's Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector

Employs 2.3 M Cdns 6.6 % of GDP
\$108.2 B GDP \$56.4 B in exports - 5th largest

Seed Growers

It all starts with seed:

starting point for growing crops producing food, feed & bio-products



Access to seasonal workers needed:
- seeding & harvest
- roguing, cleaning, conditioning, processing operations & **corn detasseling**
Worker shortages are not an option

Seed Corn Growers



Corn Detasseling:

In a short 2-3 week period over 4,000 workers are needed in S. Ontario where 95% of Canada's seed corn is grown

How do we grow the AgriWorkforce?



- Hire Canadians first
- Lots of jobs and opportunities
- Competitive wages & benefits

Did you know?

International ag workers create Canadian jobs

- Every seasonal ag worker → 2 additional Cdn Agri-Food jobs
- Every beef sector worker → 4.2 additional Cdn jobs
- Every de-boner butcher → 6 additional Cdn trimmer jobs



Agri-Retail



Seed Sector

- \$450 M exports
- 57,420 jobs & \$1.67 B wages
- \$81.9 million tax revenue
- \$5.61 B economic impact to

Processing & Seed Distribution



Canadian Farmers rely on Candian Seed Growers

Agriculture Worker Shortage

- Less Cdn seed producers able to run sustainable farms
- Less varieties available to Cdn farmers & higher prices

Worker shortages are not an option



Export & Free Trade Deals



Cdn seed companies and plant breeders are involved in germplasm exchange, global research and development programs, contract production for export & marketing new varieties imported into Canada that farmers need to remain competitive.

Ag & Agri-Food Worker Shortages

- Lost wages & jobs for Canadian workers
- Lost export opportunities and farm gate returns
- Hollowing out & economically suffocating rural communities



What worker shortages mean:

- Less Canadian product availability
- Higher food prices for Canadian consumers



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