



Op-Ed:
**The Vital Role of
Temporary Foreign
Workers in Canadian
Agriculture**

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The Vital Role of Temporary Foreign Workers in Canadian Agriculture

There has been a lot of talk lately about the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), painting the program in a negative light and culminating in Minister Boissonnault's recent [commitment](#) to tighten access to the program and reduce the number of TFWs in Canada.

What was also clear in the Minister's announcement was the government's recognition of the important role that the program plays in supporting Canadian agriculture and domestic food security. By exempting seasonal and permanent, full-time jobs in primary agriculture, food processing and fish processing from the tightening measures linked to the TFWP, agricultural employers will continue to hire the people we need to grow, harvest, and pack produce that would otherwise risk being left in the field or nursery, on the tree, or on the vine.

While some may question why agriculture deserves unique treatment, the fact of the matter is that although approximately 70,000 TFWs worked in primary agriculture industries in Canada in 2023, there were still [28,200](#) agriculture jobs that could not be filled by Canadians, a number that is projected to grow to over 100,000 vacant jobs by 2030.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a stark reminder that without the TFWP, Canada's ability to produce food and agricultural products would be severely compromised. When borders were closed and the flow of TFWs was disrupted, the agricultural sector faced unprecedented challenges. Despite offering wages up to \$30 per hour at a time where many Canadians suddenly found themselves without work, farmers could not find Canadians willing to take agricultural jobs that are often located in remote rural areas, seasonal in nature, and can be quite labour-intensive.

Instances of worker abuse, though rare, do occur. The Canadian government [conducted](#) 2,122 inspections under the TFWP in the last fiscal year. Of those inspections, 94% of employers were found to be fully compliant. Historically, agriculture has been one of the best performing sectors when it comes to compliance. However, farmers take this very seriously and would be the first to say that any bad actors found to be taking advantage of their employees should be removed from the program.

While many Canadians only hear about the negative stories within the program, the reality is that most farmers have long-standing, positive relationships with TFWs. These employees choose to come back to those farms every year, often for decades.

We need to create a more permanent fix to Canada's chronic labour shortages in the agriculture sector by ensuring the agriculture streams are maintained to support farmers'



seasonal and temporary needs, while at the same time ensuring the TFWP supports pathways to permanent residency for experienced temporary foreign workers in sectors such as agriculture that demonstrate chronic labour shortages.

The Government of Canada is in the midst of a broad-based consultation aimed at renewing the agriculture streams linked to the TFWP. These consultations are an opportunity to refine the program, address the concerns that have been raised, and ensure that it continues to serve the best interests of Canadians, food security, and the workers who remain integral to its success.

These programs are incredibly complex and rushed changes should not be made until we allow these consultations to play out and ensure all perspectives can be heard.

We must all remember that the TFWP is not just about filling labour gaps; it's about sustaining an industry that feeds our country and contributes billions to our economy. Any changes to the program must be carefully considered with these broader considerations in mind. Worker protections are paramount to a sustainable and effective TFWP.

From our perspective, we need to stay focused on supporting the workers who are so essential to our farms and ensuring that Canadian agriculture remains strong and resilient. The future of our agriculture sector and our food security depends on it.

The Honourable Senator Black is a Canadian senator representing Ontario with strong ties with, and interests in, agriculture.

Keith Currie is the President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA). The CFA a farmer-funded, national umbrella organization comprising of provincial general farm organizations and national and interprovincial commodity groups. Through our members we represent approximately 200,000 Canadian farm families from coast to coast.