

ADDRESSING AGRICULTURE'S LABOUR SHORTAGE

The **CANADIAN FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE** recommends:

- Increased immigration opportunities
- Solutions to address barriers facing under-represented groups
- Maintained access to international workers as a last resort
- Improved education and skills training

BACKGROUND

Like any industry, agriculture requires an adequate workforce to keep operations going. Farmers continue to identify chronic and critical labour shortages as one of the most pressing risks facing Canadian agriculture and a major constraint on both agricultural growth and global competitiveness. Agriculture is complex industry that faces unique workforce challenges due to rural depopulation and seasonal production of highly perishable products. In response to these challenges, the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industries have come together as a complete value chain to develop a permanent solution to this pervasive and urgent challenge: the Canadian Agriculture and Agri- Food Workforce Action Plan.

This action plan provides government and industry with a clear roadmap forward, laying out short, medium, and long-term action items focused on achieving two important goals:

1. To increase the supply of labour for skilled and unskilled workers;
2. To improve the knowledge and skills of workers in the industry

When looking to increase the supply of labour for skilled and unskilled workers, hiring Canadian workers remains the first priority for the Canadian agriculture industry. However, although wages in the agriculture sector have increased more quickly than wages in the Canadian economy as a whole, the sector is still currently unable to attract sufficient numbers of domestic Canadian workers. The most recent studies on Canadian vacancies in primary agriculture suggest that Canadian farms face a labour gap of 52,000 positions. Despite robust advertising and hiring efforts by Canadian farms, nearly all of these positions are filled by international agriculture workers. This lack of labour supply also has considerable bearing on the availability of successors within the agriculture industry. With the average age of farmers at 54 years of age, developing a robust labour supply of skilled



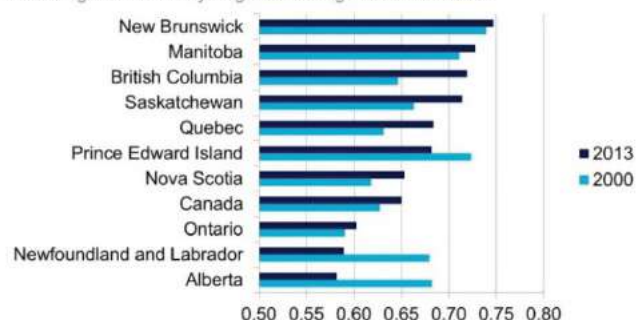
agricultural workers in Canada will provide considerable value to those looking for appropriate successors.

Agriculture has a unique interconnected industry that has unique workforce challenges:

1. There will always be a seasonal component with growing food (planting/harvesting)
2. Rural de-population
3. Perishable product tied to:
 - Handling of live animals and plants
 - Safety, security and sustainable food for Canadian consumers

Agriculture Wage Gap Has Narrowed in Most Provinces

ratio of agriculture hourly wages to average for all industries



WHAT'S NEEDED

The unique and multi-faceted challenges that contribute to agriculture's labour shortage in Canada require a comprehensive, multi-faceted response that includes immigration, outreach to under-represented groups, access to international workers, and improved education & skills training.

Increased Immigration Opportunities

Canadian agriculture presents a wealth of opportunities to integrate refugees into small communities across Canada, but to achieve this, agricultural workers need improved and enhanced pathways to permanent residency. Greater emphasis must be placed on increasing economic immigration in response to the critical labour shortages facing agriculture and agri-food. The government of Canada must work with rural communities, agricultural stakeholders and settlement agencies to assess rural Canada's capacity for refugee settlement and develop a broad-based strategy to integrate this wealth of agricultural experience with the opportunities presented by an industry with significant vacancies and strong growth potential.

Addressing barriers facing under-represented groups

In addition, an industry-wide career promotion initiative is needed to connect Canadians with the wealth of employment opportunities that exist in Canada's agriculture and agri-food industries. This initiative would provide an important foundation upon which to support further initiatives focused on the recruitment, retention and development of women, new Canadians, persons with disabilities, and aboriginals in agriculture and agri-food as they are currently under-represented. In the short term, a number of pilot projects have been launched to assess barriers to entry for under-represented groups and connect them to employment opportunities. Additional support is needed to expand these existing pilot projects and initiatives to increase their outreach and broaden their impacts.

Maintaining Access to International Workers as a Last Resort

Where domestic workers aren't available to meet the industry's workforce requirements, producers need a dedicated Canadian Agriculture and Agri-food Workforce Program through which they can hire willing agriculture workers from abroad. To ensure a sustainable workforce that can contribute to productivity expansion and allow rural Canada to become an agri-food engine for the Canadian economy; many of these workers also need pathways to permanent residency.

Many international agriculture workers who now have significant experience working in Canadian agriculture have expressed a strong desire to remain in Canada and fill these positions on a permanent basis. These workers have few options to pursue this permanency. This is resulting in a continued skills gap and increased training costs for Canadian farms. The CFA urges the federal government to move forward with an integrated and permanent labour solution

for the industry that would properly support Canada's export trade agenda and revitalize rural Canadian economies. The Workforce Action Plan recommendations provide a clear path forward to ensure the Canadian food and agriculture sectors can continue to operate at maximal capacity and maintain its strength in the marketplace – and farmers across Canada ask that candidates support this endeavor and its recommendations, including:

- Create a dedicated Canadian Agriculture and Agri-food Workforce Program to provide consistent and efficient access to international agriculture workers to support industry productivity, growth and future success;
- Improve and expand pathways to permanent residency for agriculture and agri-food workers;
- Seasonality of agriculture needs to be recognised 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;
- Create a single office for agriculture and agri-food Labour Market Information Assessments to ensure knowledgeable staff, timely Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) processing, and consistent treatment of these applications.

Improved Education & Skills Training

In order to improve the knowledge and skills of workers in the industry, the agriculture industry needs the federal government to work with industry to improve the quality of agricultural labour market information. Without detailed, regional information on workforce supply and demand, industry and government face significant constraints in their ability to make targeted responses to these chronic shortages. In order to achieve this, the federal government must to revitalize agricultural Labour Market Information by:

- Dedicating significant funding to the collection of regional agricultural workforce supply and demand information;
- Partnering with industry to improve tracking of wide wage rate information for agricultural occupations & update National Occupational Codes to better reflect modern agricultural occupations and skill requirements; and
- Articulating a clear vision for the improvement of agricultural education throughout the entire education system and ensuring skills development programming is flexible enough to accommodate on-farm training and other non-traditional workplace training requirements.

To view the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan in its entirety, visit www.cfa-fca.ca or www.cahrc-ccrha.ca

Founded in 1935, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) is the country's largest farmers' organization. Its members include provincial general farm organizations as well as national and inter-provincial commodity organizations. Through its members, CFA represents over 200,000 Canadian farmers and farm families.