



#6, 11010 - 46<sup>th</sup> Street SE  
Calgary, AB T2C 1G4  
Tel 403-769-1519  
Fax 403-209-3255

## **National Agricultural Labour Strategy**

Online consultation opened on June 27, 2022 and will close on September 28, 2022. [Program details can be found here](#) or questions directed to [aafc.AGLS-SMAG.aac@agr.gc.ca](mailto:aafc.AGLS-SMAG.aac@agr.gc.ca).

Canada's agricultural sector is an important engine of economic growth and social well-being that feeds millions of people in Canada and around the world. However, it faces unique labour challenges that hinder the productivity of agricultural and processing operations, result in lost economic potential, and create stress for employers and workers alike.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) is developing a sector-specific strategy to address chronic labour shortages in farming and food processing. Our goal is to develop solutions that consider unique regional and sub-sector concerns. This will better position the sector to address short-term pressures and advance long-term solutions to help farmers and food processors meet their needs.

### **Key questions for discussion:**

1. What has your experience been with recruiting and retaining workers in the agricultural and agri-food sector?
2. What are the future skills and technology needs of the sector?
3. What potential solutions should be explored to help address labour shortages in the sector?

### **Background:**

A chronic shortage of labour is the single largest challenge confronting Canadian agriculture and agrifood. And the issue is not new; multiple organizations have developed reports on the impact and issues involved with labour shortages; along with recommendations for improvement. These reports include the [Canadian Agriculture Human Resources Council's \(CAHRC\) Agri Labour Market Impact](#) Study; and their current work on a Workforce Strategic Framework for Agriculture and Food & Beverage Manufacturing; as well as the [Conference Board of Canada's Sowing the Seeds of Growth](#). It is projected that more than one in four jobs in the beef industry is at risk of going unfilled if additional sources of labour can't be found.

According to the CAHRC report, which examines workforce issues in the agricultural sector to 2029, current chronic workplace shortages in the beef sector compounded by high rates of retirement will result in beef producers experiencing the second largest decline in labour supply within agriculture over the forecast period. Each year, labour shortages cost the beef industry \$435 million in lost sales. Lost sales across all of agriculture are some \$2.9 billion annually.

We appreciate Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) lead on sector-specific strategies to address chronic labour shortages in farming and food processing. The beef value chain is interdependent – starting with producing and raising the calves until they are ready to be sent to feedlots and then sent



#6, 11010 - 46<sup>th</sup> Street SE  
Calgary, AB T2C 1G4  
Tel 403-769-1519  
Fax 403-209-3255

for processing. All of these different stages in beef production have unique labour requirements to ensure the success of the industry. While this submission will focus mainly on the labour needs of feedlots (cattle feeders), it is critical that all parts of the beef value chain can access the required labour.

### **Questions:**

#### **1. What has your experience been with recruiting and retaining workers in the agricultural and agri-food sector?**

The response to this question is separated into two parts – a) domestic and b) foreign labour.

##### **a) Domestic Labour**

- Cattle feeders require skilled employees (farm managers, nutritionists, pen riders, vets)
- Feedlots also employ general labourers (unskilled)
- Most of these employee requirements are for a full-time basis
- Cattle feeders post jobs widely but receive extremely few Canadian applications; many of which then do not show up for the interview; and even less remain on the job. Therefore, feedlots are constantly recruiting
- 51% of farms have reported receiving no Canadian applicants for posted jobs due to:
  - Difficulty relocating to rural locations (housing, jobs for other family members, daycare)
  - Difficult working conditions (extreme weather, physically demanding, irregular hours)

##### **b) Foreign Labour**

Due to the extreme difficulty accessing domestic labour; many farms rely on foreign labour to care of their animals. Presently, the main route to foreign labour is through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). However, there is some use of the Seasonal Agriculture Workers Program (SAWP). There are significant issues with hiring foreign labour, including:

- Cost of applying, transporting, training and maintaining Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW)
- Extremely lengthy time period for the processing of Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) applications
- Significant housing expenses for TFWs must be incurred up-front. Employers need to secure a rental property and have that inspected and cleared prior to submitting an LMIA for approval. This requires employers to rent properties for 3-4 months prior to the arrival of any TFWs. Thousands of dollars are paid for a property that sits empty
- As the majority of housing requirements for foreign labour in the fed cattle sector is year-round (as compared to seasonal), TFWs are provided with housing that is entirely comparable, if not identical, to that of other Canadians who live and work within the same local area. There needs to be recognition of the different housing requirements between seasonal and full-time employment under the requirements for LMIA's
- LMIA has a set wage and no increases to that wage is permitted. Feedlots need the ability to increase wages after the 3-month probationary period if the employer feels the TFW is able



#6, 11010 - 46<sup>th</sup> Street SE  
Calgary, AB T2C 1G4  
Tel 403-769-1519  
Fax 403-209-3255

- to take on additional responsibility. This is only fair to the TFW to stay at competitive wages if they continue to show their willingness and skills to work
- Challenge moving a good TFW to a permanent residence status. The length of time with the LMIA does not allow for the time necessary to apply for permanent residency and meet all its requirements. The Canadian cattle industry works to form long term relationships with foreign workers and generally sources employees for longer term employment, rather than on a seasonal basis
  - Currently there is no path for seasonal workers to get permanent residency as they do not fit the continuous time of working in Canada. Many individuals would be interested in immigrating with their families to Canada but are unable, often because they do not have the education requirements of TFWs. If provided the time and opportunity, many could meet the English requirements, and many of these individuals have worked in Canada for over 15 years and would like to remain permanently. An option would be a long-term Seasonal Agricultural Workers (SAW) program.

## **2. What are the future skills and technology needs of the sector?**

- **Trucking** - There is a current and growing driver shortage in Canada. According to [a recent report by Trucking HR Canada](#), approximately 55 000 driver jobs will be vacant by 2023. Agriculture is one of the industries where the shortage of truck drivers is even more pronounced, as we have seen in recent issues like covid and border shutdowns. In addition, many truck drivers do not want to take on the additional responsibility of moving live animals. Other challenges include:
  - The average cost of Class 1 MELT training in Alberta is \$10,000 not including time away from work, employee wages, travel and accommodations raising the costs to \$12,000+
  - Insurance companies are refusing to insure drivers under the age of 24 or without at least 2 years driving experience
  - Many TFWs have even more difficulty receiving a Class 1 driver's license given that their experience and license from a different country is not recognized in Canada
- **Veterinarians** - Access to veterinarians, especially in more remote rural areas, and large animal vets has been an issue. Even the CFIA is continually looking to fill veterinary positions. The primary source of veterinarians in Canada has been through immigration, mostly by graduates of veterinary colleges not accredited by the Council on Education (COE) of the American Veterinary Medical Association.



#6, 11010 - 46<sup>th</sup> Street SE  
Calgary, AB T2C 1G4  
Tel 403-769-1519  
Fax 403-209-3255

### **3. What potential solutions should be explored to help address labour shortages in the sector?**

The following recommendations are intended to support both short and long-term employment of Canadians in the agriculture and agri-food sectors; encompassing both domestic labour requirements as well as foreign workers.

#### **Recommendation 1: Incentivize jobseekers to fill agriculture and agri-food vacancies in rural Canada**

The majority of Canadians reside in urban centers whereas the majority of agriculture employment is in rural locations. Programming to encourage urban jobseekers to look for work and reside outside of urban areas could increase the availability of domestic labour in rural Canada. As an example, relocation assistance to offset the costs of relocating the jobseeker and their family.

#### **Recommendation 2: Improve awareness of agriculture and agrifood related careers**

Increase public and jobseeker awareness of agriculture careers by providing funding and increased coordination with immigration serving societies and employment agencies to promote agriculture industry awareness, including social media campaigns focused on showcasing the career opportunities in the agriculture sector.

#### **Recommendation 3: Increase support for automation in the agriculture and agri-food sectors**

Develop a dedicated funding stream that would support both research and adoption of automation and robotics; and ensure the availability of the internet into rural locations.

The cost of automation and the technical knowledge of automation and robotics may be preventing further adoption of advanced technology in the beef sector. Some usage is occurring around traceability technology, often times regulations are not keeping pace with the technology available; and a lack of accessibility to the internet is limiting its usage.

#### **Recommendation 4: Support improving Human Resources practices and capacity**

Develop a funding source to allow industry to secure training to improve human resource business skills to attract and retain workers, reduce turnover and reliance on TFWs.

Many small to medium size employers may not have capacity for a full-time human resource department, and employers could benefit from enhancing soft skills in onboarding, training and retaining workers.



#6, 11010 - 46<sup>th</sup> Street SE  
Calgary, AB T2C 1G4  
Tel 403-769-1519  
Fax 403-209-3255

### **Recommendation 5: Streamline and increase the timeliness of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program**

Establish a 'Trusted Employer' designation within the Temporary Foreign Worker's Program to reward employers with a good status working with foreign employees.

For the TFWP, simplify permit renewals, uphold the two-week processing time for LMIA's, and establish an employer hotline. And improve immigration options specific for sectors with the greatest need including the agricultural and trucking sectors.

### **Recommendation 6: Increase pathways to permanent residence for foreign workers**

Streamline and increase pathways to permanent residence for TFWs already in Canada by increasing the numbers of immigrants allowed to apply for permanent status, and increase the duration of the LMIA to allow foreign workers the appropriate amount of time to meet all the necessary requirements of permanent residency.

### **Recommendation 7: Designate truck driving as a skilled trade**

Making truck driving a skilled trade would provide an opportunity for increased enrolment in this occupation for Canadians, as well increase foreign labour with these skills. This simple change would make a significant difference to the drastic need for truck drivers in the ag industry, as well as other sectors. Changing this designation will provide a number of key benefits including:

- providing a National Occupational Classification (NOC) code so foreign workers with a Class 1 licence can be targeted and brought into Canada through the TFWP
- Supporting Class 1 training and recognition and transfer of Class 5 or Class 1 equivalent experience/license from other countries
- Increasing access to student loans and grants encouraging more participants into the program; and it would allow provincial MELT programs to be eligible for use under RESPs
- Allowing for the ability to have driving endorsements for different skill sets, such as an agriculture endorsement.