

April 17, 2024

The Hon. Marc Miller, PC, MP
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

The Hon. Randy Boissonnault, PC, MP
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages

RE: Recent Changes to the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP)

Dear Ministers Boissonnault and Miller,

We write today on behalf of Canada's agri-food sector, representing the primary and processing links in the chain that grow, process, package and ship the food from field to grocery store shelves. As with most sectors, our supply chain relies on people to perform critical functions like planting and livestock handling, harvesting and washing vegetables, transporting livestock, meat poultry and egg processing, sorting, canning, and packaging and labelling. We recognize that industry has an important role to play in addressing labour shortages in our sector. That is why we have launched the National Workforce Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Food and Beverage Manufacturing which recognizes the need to focus on skills development, automation and technology, as well as industry perceptions and promoting careers in our sector.

Despite recent comments which point to a recovering labour market, it is not the reality for many companies, especially those in rural areas. According to the Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council (CAHRC), Canada's agriculture sector experienced a peak vacancy rate of 7.4% in 2022, which resulted in over 28,200 unfilled jobs and a staggering \$3.5 billion in lost sales. With respect to processors, Food Processing Skills Canada (FPSC) says many processors cannot find enough people to fill positions, with data suggesting almost 50,000 job vacancies; and almost all experience chronic recruitment and retention difficulties.

Ministers, this labour scarcity is not new information, nor is it a shifting reality. Demographically, Canada's workforce is shrinking. For example, CAHRC's data shows Canada's agriculture industries will see 85,300 retirements over the next 8 years, almost 30 per cent of the current agriculture workforce. Over the course of several months in 2022, industry engaged frequently with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), as well as the former Ministers of these same departments resulting in the creation of the TFWP Workforce Solutions Road Map. The Road Map was an indication of positive progress.

The recent changes to the TFWP announced on March 21st are emblematic of a larger issue; a fundamental disconnect between the agri-food sector and the immigration and employment

ministries. Recent comments, such as the suggestion that our sector is inappropriately reliant on temporary foreign workers, are concerning and mislead the public. Employers must demonstrate the lack of available Canadian workers for the position in question before participating in the program. Agri-food employers go to considerable lengths to recruit Canadians, before going to further lengths, cost and uncertainty to recruit from abroad. Minister Miller’s recent comments, that Canadians have become “addicted” to TFWs undermines the legitimacy of the program. Industry, through forums like CAHRC, are working together with the Government of Canada to solve the food sectors labour challenges in the long-term, but announcements like these, with conceivably no consultation with our industry, undermines these efforts.

We urge the Government of Canada to consider the implications of creating an even tighter labour market for the agri-food sector than already exists, and the impact of a decision such as this on food security and affordability. To rectify what we view as a disconnect, we are requesting a meeting at a farm or in a processing plant where we can discuss the unique labour requirements of our sector, the realities of our use of the TFWP, as well as the adverse effects of this recent announcement.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to continuing the dialogue. Please direct inquiries and replies to Lauren Martin, Senior Director of Government Relations and Policy (lauren@cmc-cvc.com) at the Canadian Meat Council.

Sincerely,



Chris White, President & CEO
Canadian Meat Council



Kristina Farrell, Chief Executive Office
Food & Beverage Canada



Keith Currie, President
Canadian Federation of Agriculture



Ron Lemaire, President
Canadian Produce Marketing Association



Rene Roy, Chair
Canadian Pork Council



Martin Barnett, Executive Director
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Dennis Prouse, Vice-President
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Will Lowe, Board Chair
National Cattle Feeders Association



Marcus Janzen, President
Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada

Mushrooms Canada



Tim Kennedy, President & CEO
Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance



Mark Hubert, President & CEO
Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors



**Canadian
Cattle
Association**

Nathan Phinney, President
Canadian Cattle Association

- cc. The Hon. Minister Lawrence MacAulay, PC, MP
Irek Kusmierczyk, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce
Development and Official Languages