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## **Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities Study on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program**

Submitted by:

**National Cattle Feeders' Association (NCFA)**

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### **Introduction**

The National Cattle Feeders' Association (NCFA) works to improve the growth, sustainability, and competitiveness of the cattle feeding sector in Canada. We thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide comments as part of its study of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), including its impacts on the labour market and how effectively it meets labour needs—particularly in rural Canada.

The cattle feeding sector is a vital component of Canada's beef industry and of the broader Canadian agricultural economy. Ensuring access to a stable, reliable workforce is essential not only to our sector's viability, but to the continued economic strength of rural communities across the country.

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### **Economic Importance of the Beef Sector**

Canada's beef industry:

- Contributes **\$14.5 billion in farm cash receipts annually**
- Contributes **\$34.2 billion to national GDP annually**
- Supports **347,000 jobs**, with each job generating an additional **3.9 jobs elsewhere in the economy**

As a cornerstone of rural Canada, the beef sector drives economic growth, sustains small communities, and supports significant upstream and downstream economic activity. Strategic government investment would enable the sector to further expand its economic contributions across rural Canada.

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## Labour Shortages: A Critical Limiting Factor

Labour has long been identified as one of the most significant constraints facing our industry.

A Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) study reported that in 2022, labour shortages cost Canada's agriculture sector **\$3.5 billion in lost sales**, with the beef sector accounting for approximately **\$435 million annually**.

Key labour trends include:

- The **peak domestic labour gap** is projected to increase by 7%, from **2,440 workers in 2023 to 2,610 by 2030**.
- **Domestic employment is forecast to decrease by 13%** due to a shrinking domestic labour supply.
- **Foreign workers are expected to fill 68% of the domestic labour gap by 2030.**
- Agriculture's **labour shortage has more than doubled in the past decade**, despite increasing reliance on temporary foreign labour.
- A 2019 CAHRC survey found that **50% of agricultural employers could not hire all the workers they required**.

Canada's fed cattle sector continues to face persistent challenges in recruiting Canadian workers. These roles involve physically demanding work, often in harsh climates and rural locations. Despite consistent recruitment efforts, domestic interest remains limited.

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## The Temporary Foreign Worker Program: A Measure of Last Resort

Cattle feeders make every effort to hire Canadians first. The Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) process mandates extensive domestic advertising and recruitment, including outreach to underrepresented populations and persons with disabilities. Employers must demonstrate these efforts prior to approval.

Securing workers through the TFWP is costly, time-consuming, and administratively burdensome. For this reason, it is used strictly as a **measure of last resort** to augment—not replace—the domestic workforce.

Importantly:

- Many TFWs are employed in **permanent, full-time roles**, not seasonal work.
- Employers typically begin the process of transitioning these workers to **permanent residency** soon after arrival.
- These individuals become integral members of rural communities—bringing families, purchasing homes and goods, and contributing to the tax base.

Contrary to common perception, these roles are not exclusively “low-skilled.” Many TFWs are experienced livestock handlers with formal education and specialized training, including veterinary technicians, pen riders, and individuals trained in animal science and husbandry. While entry-level labour is required, the sector also depends on skilled and semi-skilled professionals.

A report from the Simpson Centre for Agricultural and Food Innovation and Public Education (“Grown Locally, Harvested Globally: The Role of Temporary Foreign Workers in Canadian Agriculture”) found that between 2016 and 2018, beef sector employment grew by 1,427 workers. Of these:

- **75% (1,058 workers)** were hired from the domestic Canadian workforce
- **25% (369 workers)** were hired through the TFWP

While this study is several years old, it demonstrates the trend that the sector prioritizes domestic hiring, using foreign labour only to fill persistent gaps.

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### **The Urban–Rural Divide**

Canada’s unemployment challenges are largely concentrated in major urban centres. Rural Canada faces a very different reality—ongoing depopulation and chronic labour shortages.

It is unrealistic to expect significant numbers of unemployed urban Canadians to relocate to rural communities in the short to medium term. Addressing this structural divide will require a sustained, coordinated strategy, not minor policy adjustments.

The Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan, developed by industry and government leaders through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Value Chain Roundtables, provides a comprehensive roadmap to build the domestic workforce. NCFA strongly urges federal and provincial governments to adopt and meaningfully implement this plan.

However, attracting Canadians to rural communities requires more than job availability. Rural areas often lack:

- Reliable and affordable internet
- Career opportunities for spouses
- Childcare services
- Schools and health care access
- Recreational and cultural amenities
- Adequate housing
- Places of worship and community infrastructure

Without investment in these foundational services, rural communities cannot grow, and without growth, they cannot expand their local labour pool.

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## Recommendations

The solution to building a reliable workforce in rural Canada lies in a balanced approach: easing access to foreign labour while simultaneously investing in long-term domestic workforce development.

NCFA recommends the Government of Canada:

- 1. Develop a sector-specific agricultural labour strategy**  
Recognize that seasonal and year-round agricultural labour require different policy approaches, and that foreign labour will remain necessary for the foreseeable future.
- 2. Maintain and improve access to the TFWP for agriculture**  
Ensure that program administration is efficient, timely, and responsive to the realities of rural employers, while maintaining strong worker protections.
- 3. Invest in rural infrastructure and services**  
Support broadband access, health care, childcare, housing, and community amenities in rural regions that lack the tax base to independently provide these services, but cannot grow its population without them.
- 4. Invest in a national promotional campaign highlighting careers in rural-based sectors, including agriculture**  
Promote agriculture as a modern, skilled, technology-driven industry offering meaningful and stable careers.

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## Conclusion

Canada's cattle feeding sector is committed to hiring Canadians first and building strong rural communities. However, persistent and growing labour shortages threaten the sector's competitiveness and limit its economic contribution.

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program remains an essential tool to sustain agricultural production and rural economic stability. At the same time, long-term investment in rural infrastructure and domestic workforce development is critical.

With thoughtful, evidence-based policy and strategic investment, Canada can strengthen both its agricultural workforce and the rural communities that depend on it.