



GROWING FORWARD

MEETING THE HUMAN RESOURCE CHALLENGES
FACING AGRICULTURE TODAY AND TOMORROW



CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL
HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL

JANUARY 2007

IN ITS BROADEST TERMS, CANADA'S AGRICULTURE SECTOR COMPRISES: PRODUCERS; SUPPLIERS; SUPPORTING SPECIALISTS AND RESEARCHERS; INSPECTORS; PROCESSORS; TRANSPORTERS; WHOLESALE AND RETAIL GROCERS; AND RELATED WORKERS.

CANADIAN AGRICULTURE, AGRI-FOOD AND FARM PRODUCTION INDUSTRIES

Agriculture production is a \$130 billion-a-year industry in Canada. It is a significant contributor to the Canadian economy, accounting for 8.1 per cent of the total GDP and 13 per cent of employment. In 2005, our agri-food exports totalled \$26.22 billion.

Canada's agriculture sector represents an extremely diverse range of industries. It spans the horticulture industries that are responsible for growing fruits and vegetables, flowers, nursery products, sod and Christmas trees—amongst other commodities. It includes grain and oilseeds industries that supply wheat, mustard, flax, sunflowers and oils from canola, as well as pulses, such as lentils, peas, chickpeas and other beans. It also entails growers of special and non-traditional crops, such as buckwheat, herbs, non-timber, and other emerging commodities.

Agriculture in Canada also means dairy, poultry and livestock farms. These industries are responsible for milk products, such as butter, ice cream and yogurt; poultry, game birds, and eggs; as well as red meats, such as beef, lamb, pork, and venison. Agriculture even extends to our oceans where Atlantic salmon and various shellfish are farmed.

Industries in the Canadian agriculture sector are ever expanding. In recent years, organic farming has become a profitable agriculture industry. The production of functional foods and nutraceuticals are also making their mark in today's farming businesses.





WHERE TRADITION MEETS TECHNOLOGY

Agriculture is rooted in Canada's history. While its origins and evolution may differ from province to territory, farmer to rancher, and greenhouse to field, this sector has served to shape the country we live in today.

And, agriculture in Canada has changed dramatically in the information age. New technologies and computers have transformed the way we farm—and what we farm. Even the definition of agriculture is evolving as new commodities are developed, grown, and raised across the sector's diverse industries!

In Canada, agriculture industries are both 'hands-on' and 'high-tech'. In the course of a day, a farmer may be physically planting crops using precision farming sensors and GPS technology. They may be in the barn or greenhouse for part of the day, and at the computer using on-line banking or marketing their products for the remainder.

Agriculture is a sector that embraces both tradition and new technologies. Seeds and knowledge may be passed down from experienced farmers, but the computer and new inventions are equally important to maintaining a way of life—and staying competitive.

Agriculture is investing in the land, in food security, and in the health of all Canadians. Ensuring that Canada's agriculture sector can meet the human resource challenges of the 21st century is the key to industry stability, growth, and sustainability.

PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE COMPETITIVENESS OF CANADIAN AGRICULTURE.



As we worked toward the creation of CAHRC, stakeholders agreed unanimously that the Council's ultimate goal would be a prosperous and competitive agriculture sector. There was also agreement that to achieve this outcome, the Council would identify the best ways to alleviate labour shortages and facilitate the development of training programs relevant to today's needs.

- Merv Wiseman, CAHRC Co-Chair

Agriculture producers, employers and employees will all reap the benefits from the work of this new human resource council. By focusing on the HR challenges particular to the agriculture sector, we can ensure Canadian agricultural industries continue to thrive with a skilled and technologically advanced workforce.

- Terry Murray, CAHRC Co-Chair

HR CHALLENGES FACING TODAY'S AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Canada's agriculture sector faces a wide variety of human resource challenges. Some are more relevant to a particular industry or jurisdiction. Others are more applicable to a particular commodity or market. There are also human resource challenges common across the sector. These include difficulty attracting and retaining workers, and dealing with increased competition for specialized labour.

Finding solutions to help the agriculture sector as a whole to deal with these issues—as well as each and every farm, greenhouse, and co-operative—is an ambitious undertaking. It requires the leadership of industry, the support of governments, and the participation of all farm employers and employees.

For Canada's agriculture sector, this process has already begun.

On September 16, 2006, then Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, Diane Finley, welcomed the creation of the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. Led by industry, and funded by

government, the creation of a sector council for agriculture was more than three years in the making:

- In November 2003, participants from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the Canadian Young Farmers' Forum met with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to explore the formation of the council.
- In February 2004, a group of volunteers from across the country and representing a wide range of agriculture sectors came together as a Steering Committee for this project.
- The Steering Committee commissioned three pieces of qualitative and quantitative research to assess current human resource issues, and to gain tangible data and information to substantiate or refute the need for an agriculture sector council.
- A broad literature search and environmental scan was conducted on existing and emerging human resource and employment issues at

the international, national, and regional levels. The final report (February 2005) outlined five key human resource challenges that needed to be addressed:

- aging workforce and shortage of skilled workers;
 - recruitment and retention of qualified employees;
 - lack of awareness, and interest, in agriculture career paths;
 - shortage of seasonal and harvest labour; and
 - lack of training and continuous learning culture.
- Throughout 2004, 265 employers and 110 employees in agriculture across Canada were surveyed. The results indicated that there is an urgent need for more qualified labour throughout the agri-value chain.
 - In early 2005, 13 focus groups with agriculture producers were held across Canada to explore attitudes about the industry's human resource challenges and their recommendations for the

potential role of an agricultural sector council. A total of 145 people in each province were consulted during this process; the majority of which supported a sector council if visible results could be quickly achieved. Key findings regarding agriculture HR issues included:

- difficulty attracting and retaining skilled and unskilled workers;
 - lack of access to, and availability of, relevant training programs;
 - expected hours of work are barriers to recruitment and retention;
 - government legislation could be used more effectively to assist recruitment and retention efforts; and
 - sector image needs improvement.
- Based on these studies, and subsequent meetings of the Steering Committee, agriculture stakeholders decided in November 2005 to initiate the creation of a sector council. They also created an Interim Board of Directors to provide leadership to the council.



THE CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL REPRESENTS FARMING IN ALL ITS FORMS: RAISING TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL LIVESTOCK; PRODUCING, CULTIVATING, GROWING, HARVESTING OR COLLECTING CONVENTIONAL AND NON-CONVENTIONAL AGRICULTURE COMMODITIES; AND ANY PRACTICES PERFORMED AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF AN AGRICULTURAL OPERATION.



THE CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL

The Council—or CAHRC for short—is all about getting results.

The CAHRC **VISION** is a thriving and internationally competitive Canadian agriculture sector with a skilled, well-trained, and technologically advanced workforce.

The CAHRC **MISSION** is to identify and develop innovative solutions to human resource issues in response to the needs identified by the Canadian agriculture sector.

To accomplish this mission and achieve this vision, the Council must respond to the immediate human resource issues that are facing both employees and employers in this sector. CAHRC must also build a greater awareness amongst the agriculture industries, governments, and education institutions of human resource management issues and best practices—and the Council's role in addressing these issues.

There's a third tier to the Council's responsibilities: it must be representative of the many diverse agriculture industries in Canada and encourage increased partnerships with its stakeholders as projects are developed and implemented. Part of this duty rests in ensuring the agriculture industry is aware of the Council's existence—its purpose and its priority activities—and how the industry can be part of the Council's activities. This awareness must also extend to the education community and to governments across Canada.

The mission of the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council is guided by the Interim Board of Directors that represents commodity groups and regions across Canada.

Once the Council was created, the interim board set out to identify the priorities on which CAHRC should focus over the next 18 months. To do this, they formed two working groups to look at *Recruitment and Retention* issues and *Skills and Training* programs for agriculture workers and producers. The literature review and environmental scan, as well as the results of the surveys and focus groups, were central to this work.

The Council used the results of the working groups to develop several key activities that it has proposed for funding in 2007 by the Sector Council Program of Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

There is widespread recognition that traditional Canadian sources for agriculture labour are proving inadequate, and will continue to decrease over time. The environmental scan identified several factors that support this trend. In part, there are difficulties attracting farm workers due to the negative perceptions of careers in agriculture, and the limitations of some social employment programs in Canada for agriculture producers and workers. There are also difficulties accessing seasonal and harvest workers. With Canada's younger workforce diminishing, there is also increased competition among various sectors of the economy to obtain the labour the industry requires.

The agriculture sector has identified the need for a complete picture of the complexity and scope of labour shortages within its industry, including the availability of seasonal and harvest workers. The sector has also identified the need to gain a better appreciation of the relationship and implications of the economic and systemic factors preventing today's agriculture producers from securing an adequate workforce.

ACTION PLAN PROPOSAL:

“Gathering Labour Market Information to Establish Baselines and Identify Needs”

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council is proposing to help meet this need by developing a comprehensive, analytical report that assesses the ‘gaps and needs’ of labour requirements on both a regional and commodity basis. This report will illustrate the nature and scope of HR issues in the agriculture sector, supplemented by a projection of these issues over five years so decision makers can focus solutions on a long-term basis. It will analyze and identify potential and non-traditional sources of agriculture workers in Canada and selected countries around the world. The report will also explain and illustrate the causal relationship between elements of Canadian society that deter agriculture producers from securing a sufficient and reliable source of labour, and will examine best practices to attract and retain workers in the industry. Finally, this project will investigate networking possibilities and creative alliances to help the agriculture industry address these issues more efficiently.

Gathering labour market information to establish baselines and identify needs directly responds to research findings. In particular, it responds to the finding that the relationship between profitability in agriculture and its human resource status is under-researched—and that understanding this relationship is critical because profitability and HR status have circular links.

ACTION PLAN PROPOSAL:

“Finding Solutions to Labour Shortages in Agriculture”

Holding seminars and other workshops are essential for establishing a large-scale information network amongst agriculture stakeholders. Participants in the focus groups, for example, concluded that creating and maintaining this kind of network would be one of the key benefits of having an agriculture sector council.

Following the development of the ‘gaps and needs’ report, therefore, the Council proposes to organize a two-day seminar involving representatives from industry and government, as well as HR experts, to determine the priorities and strategies necessary to facilitate recruiting and retaining agriculture workers.



Expected Results:

The baseline analysis report will be used extensively by CAHRC and all its members to address present and future recruitment and retention needs. It will serve as a quick reference guide to facilitate the development of strategic interventions and priority action plans. It will also serve to identify emerging challenges that will need to be considered to ensure the long-term competitiveness of Canadian agriculture.

The report is expected to lead to regulatory policy and program improvements. It is also expected to identify alternative labour sources that can increase the pool of agriculture producers and workers for the industry. Identifying alternative labour sources may also lead to increased stakeholder and

government collaborations to create new opportunities for agriculture labour workforce pools.

The seminar seeks to generate greater awareness amongst interested Canadians of the causes and consequences of labour shortages in the agriculture sector. Its objective is also to initiate an action plan that identifies ways to achieve short- and long-term policy solutions to recruitment and retention needs.

Overall, the seminar is expected to build a stronger relationship between government and industry, so that they can work more collaboratively to address agriculture HR issues.

SKILLS AND TRAINING

Technology in the agriculture sector has developed more rapidly in the 20th century than in all previous history. To survive and thrive in today's competitive information economy, agriculture producers, farm managers, and other workers in the agriculture sector must keep up-to-date on innovations and new technologies being used in their work community. They need to be skilled in the use of computers and other technological equipment, which may require training today—and on-going training in the future.

A number of training programs and recognition methods currently exist across Canada, but many are not readily accessible, nor are they well known. There are also no present national occupational standards or a core set of competencies from which to develop future education and training curricula. Compounding these issues is the fact that Canada's agriculture sector has not traditionally focused on fostering a culture of training and on-going learning.

The environmental scan identified the need for both technical and management skills in Canada's agriculture workforce. Based on the research of 226 training programs offered in Canada, the scan concluded that the majority of course offerings focused on production techniques, management, and skills rather than business management and leadership. It also concluded that courses primarily targeted new farmers or younger farmers with less than 10 years experience.

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council is working to change this situation. Over the long term, the Council is working to build a framework for curriculum development in the agriculture sector through several activities. It is also seeking to create core curriculum modules. In order to complete these two tasks, several short-term initiatives need to take place.

PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENTS DEPEND ON INVESTMENTS IN R&D, INNOVATION AND PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE, REMOVAL OF REGULATORY IMPEDIMENTS AND IMPROVEMENT IN SKILLS AND LABOUR FORCE QUALITY.

- FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL WORKING GROUP ON ECONOMIC ANALYSIS PROGRESS REPORT, FEBRUARY 2006



ACTION PLAN PROPOSAL:

“Compiling a Comprehensive Inventory of Learning Programs across Canada”

The Council is proposing to set up a repository of information on all the training programs currently available across Canada. To establish this ‘one-stop-shop’, the Council is proposing to gather information on available learning programs and best practice recognition methods in the agriculture sector to create an extensive inventory database. This information will help the Council and the agriculture sector to identify the gaps in current programs and address skills needs. It will also help to facilitate industry access to appropriate training resources, and improve the ability of learning institutions to develop new training programs.

This project will build on existing research of training programs and take into account the input of agriculture participants in surveys and focus groups. Training on human resource management and government labour regulations were some of the gaps identified in these studies, as well as the need for additional national occupational standards to be developed.

PROPOSED PILOT PROJECT:

“Developing Curriculum for the Ornamental Sector and Course Material”

Working with the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association, and building on its *National Occupational Standards for Certified Horticultural Technicians*, the Council is seeking to develop a curriculum to enhance the image and skills of workers in the ornamental sector, and enable their movement across Canada.

Specifically, the proposed pilot project is designed to increase and standardize the professional status of workers, provide a way to recognize new and existing skill sets, and improve the ability of learning institutions to develop and administer appropriate training programs. The project also entails the development of course material based on the new curriculum for use by the education institutions that deliver these courses.

Virtually all agriculture HR research studies have found that there are difficulties accessing and maintaining employees in agriculture—and that this problem is worse in horticulture than in other segments of the agriculture sector. The need for specialized production skills in many horticulture industries may be one

reason for this situation. The need for more basic ‘employment’ skills, such as interpersonal and communications skills may be another.

Expected Results:

Combined, these two skills and training activity proposals are expected to form the foundation on which the Council can build future curricula and core curriculum modules. By addressing existing training program gaps, the results of these activities will be the first step in creating a more skilled agriculture workforce in Canada.

The learning program database is expected to address gaps in today’s agriculture training programs by ensuring any new training and recognition programs are integrated into existing programs—or used in a complementary process. It is also expected to help establish effective partnerships to address current deficits in learning opportunities.

With this information, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council will be able to identify commonalities among training programs and skills needs in order to initiate a future project that will link competency standards to available training resources.

The Council will also have the information necessary to initiate partnerships with learning institutions, government, and other organizations to establish common core skills and training needed in the sector.

In addition, the pilot project is expected to provide the basis for establishing a framework for future national occupational standards and curriculum development projects across the agriculture sector. In particular, it is expected to facilitate access to appropriate training and enhance workforce skills via increased training. It is also expected to encourage greater collaboration and awareness within the sector and different levels of government on human resource management issues.





FUTURE DIRECTION OF CAHRC

The activities proposed by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council for 2007 are just the beginning. Once the Council is fully operational, and CAHRC has started to build partnerships with key stakeholders, it will initiate more activities and programs to ensure significant progress is made in addressing Canada's agriculture human resource issues. In particular, the Council will strive to improve the current availability of training programs for the agriculture labour force of today—and tomorrow. It will also work hard to help the agriculture sector alleviate the labour shortages prevalent in its industries, and improve the image of agriculture as a profitable and fulfilling career

STRUCTURE OF THE CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL

INTERIM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Co-chaired by Terry Murray of Wild Rose Agricultural Producers in Alberta and Mervin Wiseman of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture, the Interim Board of Directors is composed of representatives from commodity and provincial groups across Canada. Members include:

Agricarrières | www.agricarrieres.qc.ca
Agriculture Producers of Saskatchewan | www.apas.ca
Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick | www.nbfarm.com
British Columbia Agriculture Council | www.bcac.bc.ca
Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance | www.aquaculture.ca
Canadian Federation of Agriculture | www.cfa-fca.ca
Canadian Herb, Spice & Natural Health Products Coalition | www.nationalherbspice.com
Canadian Horticulture Council | www.hortcouncil.ca
Canadian Nursery Landscape Association | www.canadanursery.com
Canadian Young Farmers' Forum | www.cyff.ca
Keystone Agricultural Producers | www.kap.mb.ca
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Agriculture | www.nlfa.ca
Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture | www.nsfa-fane.ca
Ontario Federation of Agriculture | www.ofa.on.ca
PEI Federation of Agriculture | www.peifa.ca
Union des producteurs agricoles | www.upa.qc.ca
Wild Rose Agricultural Producers | www.wrap.ab.ca

STABILITY, GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY IN AGRICULTURE REQUIRE SKILLED PEOPLE AT ALL LEVELS AND **STRONG INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP.**

OBSERVERS AND EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (*Observer*) | www.agr.gc.ca
Agricultural Institute of Canada (*Ex-officio*) | www.aic.ca
Association of Canadian Community Colleges (*Ex-officio*) | www.accc.ca
Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council
Executive Director (*Ex-officio*) | www.cahrc-ccrha.ca
Human Resources and Social Development Canada (*Observer*) | www.hrsdc.gc.ca

COMMITTEES

The work of the Council is also directed by several committees: the Executive, Governance, Communications, and Project Steering committees.

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL

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SECTOR COUNCIL PROGRAM PARTNERSHIPS AT WORK

www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/hrp/corporate/init_sector.shtml

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council is financially supported by the Sector Council Program of Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

WHAT IS A SECTOR COUNCIL?

No single player in the Canadian labour market or economy is capable of creating a context to improve global competitiveness. This challenge can only be achieved through co-operation among a strategic alliance of all the players in the Canadian labour market—individuals, company owners, corporate leaders, labour, government, and educators. Together, these groups can create the conditions necessary for Canadian industries and businesses to be competitive. They can also create the conditions for all Canadians to be able to participate more effectively in the labour market.

The concept of sector councils originated in Canada more than 15 years ago. A sector council is an industry-driven, government-funded

association that is designed to enhance an economic sector's competitiveness by:

- supporting projects that develop tools to help employers retain, renew, and recruit skilled workers;
- finding co-operative solutions to common human resource challenges; and
- working together to identify and address emerging human resource issues.

The overall goal of sector councils is to improve the quality of the Canadian labour force, and to assist industries to be more flexible in meeting changing competitive demands. The activities of a sector council typically include the development of apprenticeships, career awareness initiatives, job banks, occupational certification, occupational standards, training tools, and youth initiatives.

Canada's Sector Council Program has become a proven model for dealing with a variety of human resource issues. There are currently more than 30 sector councils funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada.