Steering Committee for the Agriculture Sector Council Project:

Report on Employers-Producers Survey on Human Resources in Agriculture 2004

GPC Public Affairs
Strategic Communications, Government Relations and Opinion Research

CFA FCA

Background

- The Agriculture Sector Council Project was looking to obtain information from producers and their employees to help provide direction and guidance to the Steering Committee for the Agriculture Human Resources Sector Council. The Steering Committee is comprised of a group of Stakeholders representing all major commodities and organizations from all regions of Canada.
- GPC was asked to provide the Steering Committee with a package of consulting services aimed at obtaining information on training and HR issues from employees and employers/producers working in the Agricultural industry.
- Specifically, GPC provided the Steering Committee for the Agriculture Human Resources Sector Council with services including questionnaire design, programming and hosting of two surveys (English and French), compilation of the data, analysis and reporting of the results.
- This report provides feedback from the employer survey. The employee survey is under separate cover.

Methodology

- Some surveys were also completed by mail and then entered into the on-line system
- A survey was completed by 265 employers. This sample size has an associated margin of error of +/- 5.9%, 19 times out of 20.
- CFA had drafted two questionnaires hoping to get feedback from producers and the their employees
- The survey questionnaire was designed by GPC Research in collaboration with the Steering Committee project team.
- Once the Steering Committee approved the questionnaires, they were tasked with sending links out to producers and their employees asking them to complete the surveys.
- The employers were presented with an introductory e-mail which invited them to complete the survey and a link which brought them into the survey. The survey was hosted by GPC Research and kept live from February to mid-March
- A copy of the questionnaire used for the employers is appended.

Section 1:

General Information

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Importance of Commodities

Please select the type of commodities you are currently involved in as an employer by placing an "x" in the first column. For each of the selected commodities, please rate its importance to you using a scale of 1 to 7 where *1 means "not at all important", 7 means "very important" and the mid-point 4 means "moderately important".*

Commodities	% of respondents involved in commodities	% giving "high importance" (5, 6, 7)	Commodities	% of respondents involved in commodities	% giving "high importance" (5, 6, 7)
Poultry (eggs)	1%	100%	Potatoes	5%	77%
Pork Feeding	5%	100%	Beef	11%	73%
Dairy cattle	25%	96%	Corn, Cereal grains	31%	69%
Floriculture	4%	91%	Tree fruits	6%	67%
Landscape & garden centers	29%	90%	Culinary/Medicinal Herbs	3%	57%
Pork breeding	4%	90%	Vegetables (greenhouse)	2%	57%
Nursery crops	20%	89%	Exotic livestock	2%	20%
Berries	11%	86%	Tobacco	1%	0
Poultry (meat)	2%	80%	Fur	0	0
Spice crops	2%	80%	Mushrooms	0	0
Other	9%	80%	Pregnant mares' urine	0	0
Vegetables (fresh)	13%	79%	Wild botanicals	0	0
Fodder crops	22%	79%			

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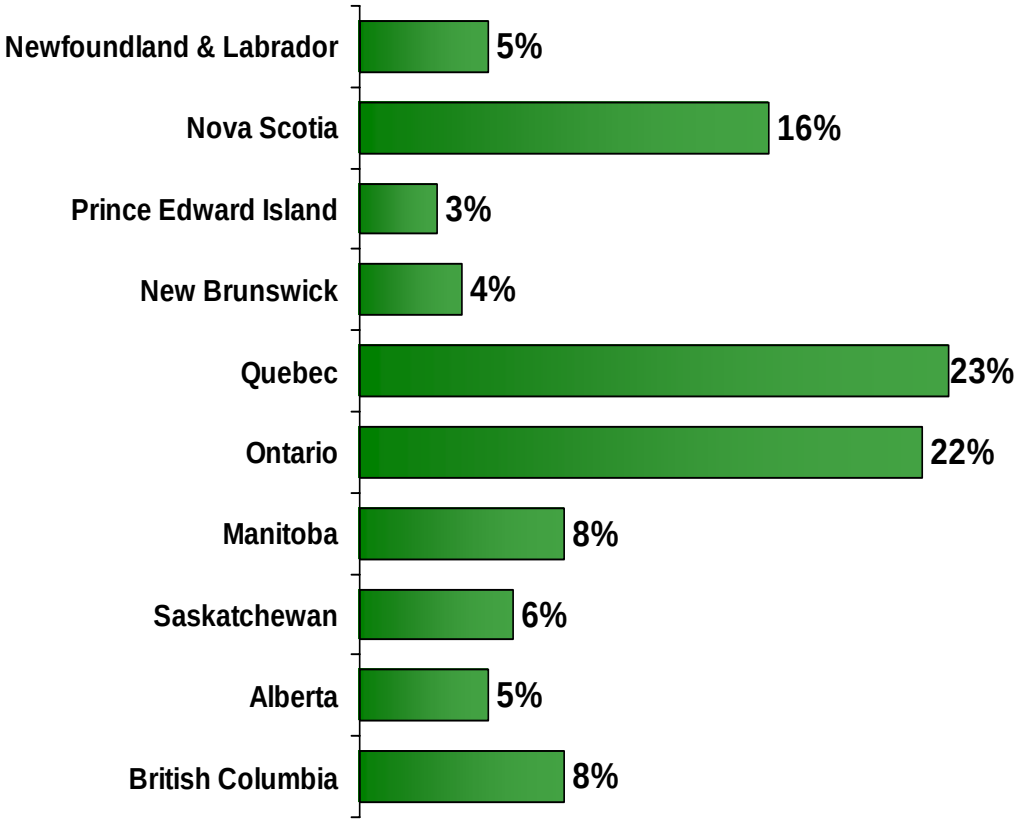
Location of Farms

Please select the province or territory in which your farm(s) is/are located.

- It is interesting to note that the highest percentage of completed employer surveys comes from farms located in Quebec, followed very closely by Ontario.
- Nova Scotia was the next highest participant in the survey.
- Surprisingly the prairie provinces averaged only 19% per cent of the responses to the survey although they comprise 52% of the total number of farms in Canada farm population.
- Ontario and Quebec represent 45% of responses to the survey and make up 37% of the total number of farms in Canada.



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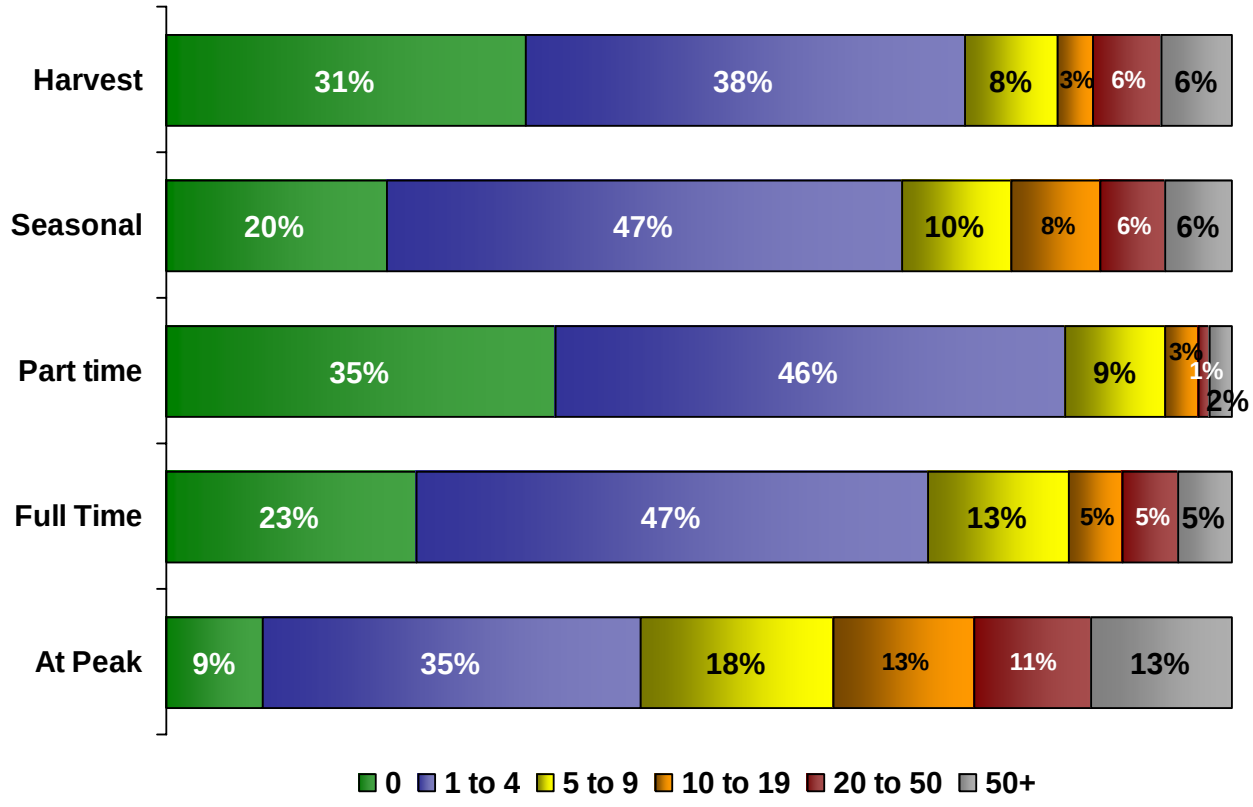
Numbers of Employees

- 38% have 1-4 harvest employees, with 15% of employers retaining the services of more than 10 harvest employees.
- 47% have 1-4 seasonal employees, with 20% retaining the services of 10+ seasonal employees.
- 46% have 1-4 part-time employees, with only 2% retaining the services of 50+ part-time employees
- 47% have 1-4 full-time employees, with 15% retaining the services of 10+ full-time employees.
- 1/3 have 10+ employees at peak, 1/3 have 1-4 at peak, 20% have 5-9 at peak and **9% have 0 employees at peak.** This seems to indicate that almost 10% of farms are either run by a sole proprietor or by family members who do not draw a salary.

Numbers of Employees



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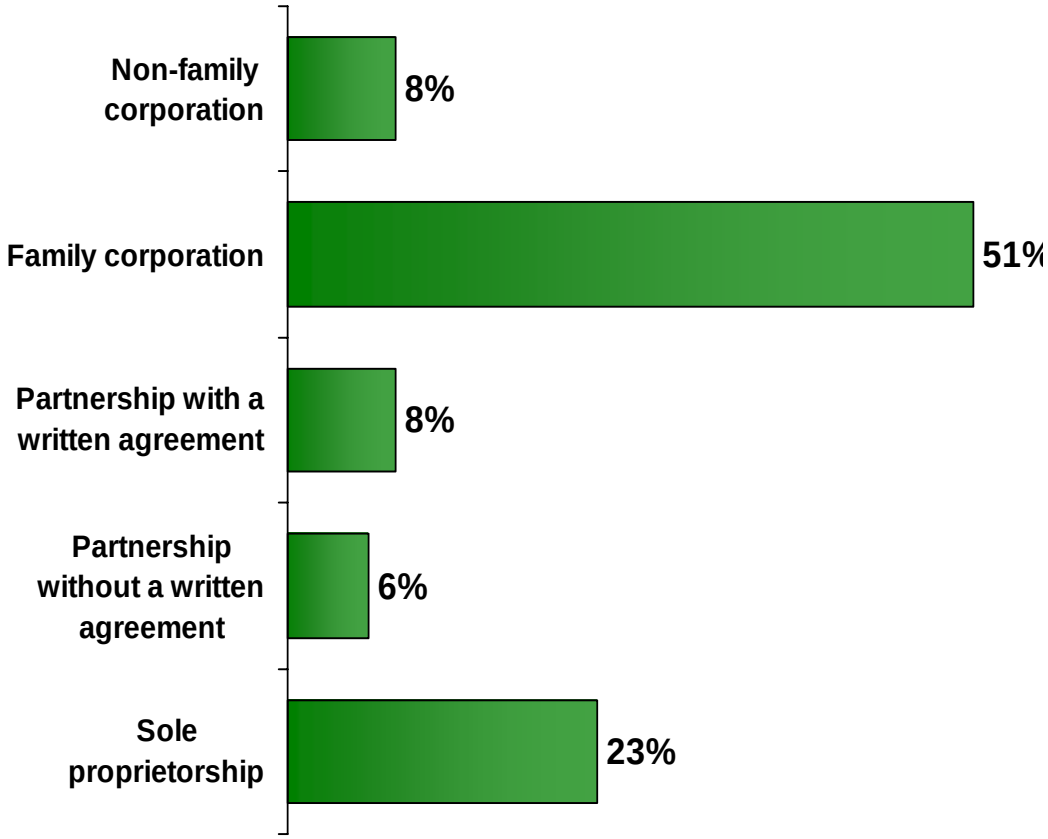
What is the operating arrangement of this agricultural operation?

- **More than half** of the respondents indicated that the working arrangement of their agricultural operation is a **family corporation**.
- Almost 1 in 4 (23%) agricultural operations are sole proprietorships.
- Non-family corporations and partnerships with a written agreement each comprise 8% of the operating arrangements.
- Partnerships without a written agreement make up the smallest number of operating arrangements at 6%.



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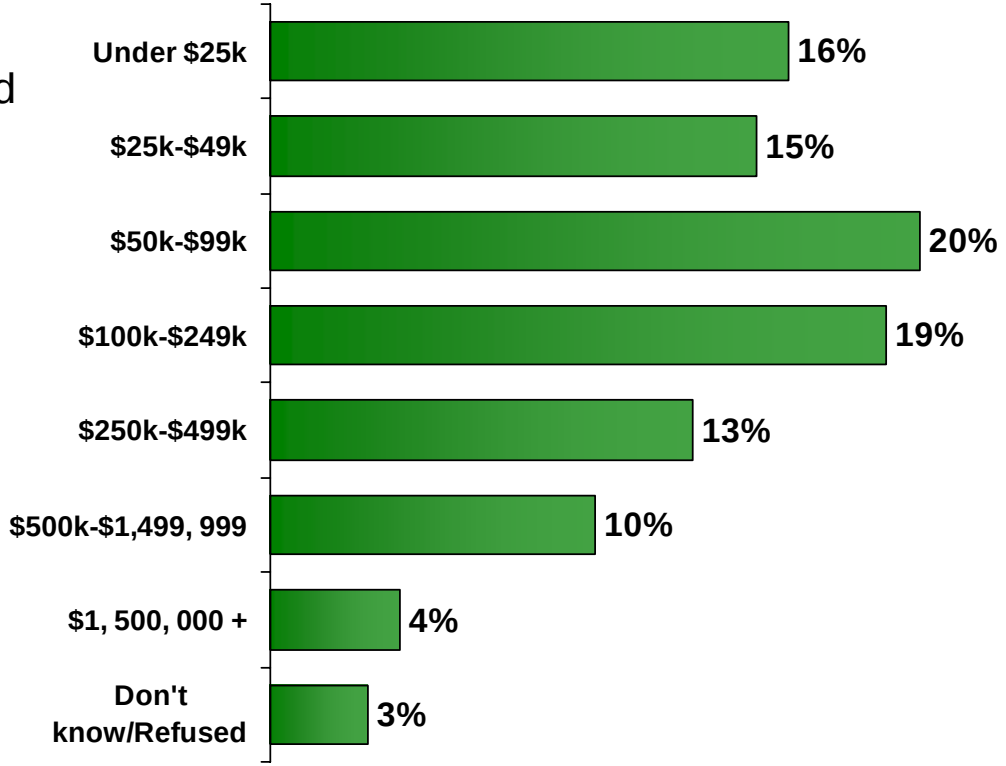
Annual Payroll

Please select the salary range that applies to your gross annual payroll (including yourself) (before taxes).

- 16% of respondents indicated that their payroll is **less than $25K**, which seems logical given that 10% indicated they pay no salary at peak season.
- 15% indicated that it is between $25K and $49K.
- 1/5 have a payroll between $50K and $99K.
- Almost 1/5 have a payroll between $100K and $249K.
- 13% indicated a payroll between $250K and $499K.
- 1 in 10 have a payroll between $500K and $1.49K.
- 4% indicated a payroll of more than $1.5K.



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Section 2:

Access to Labour

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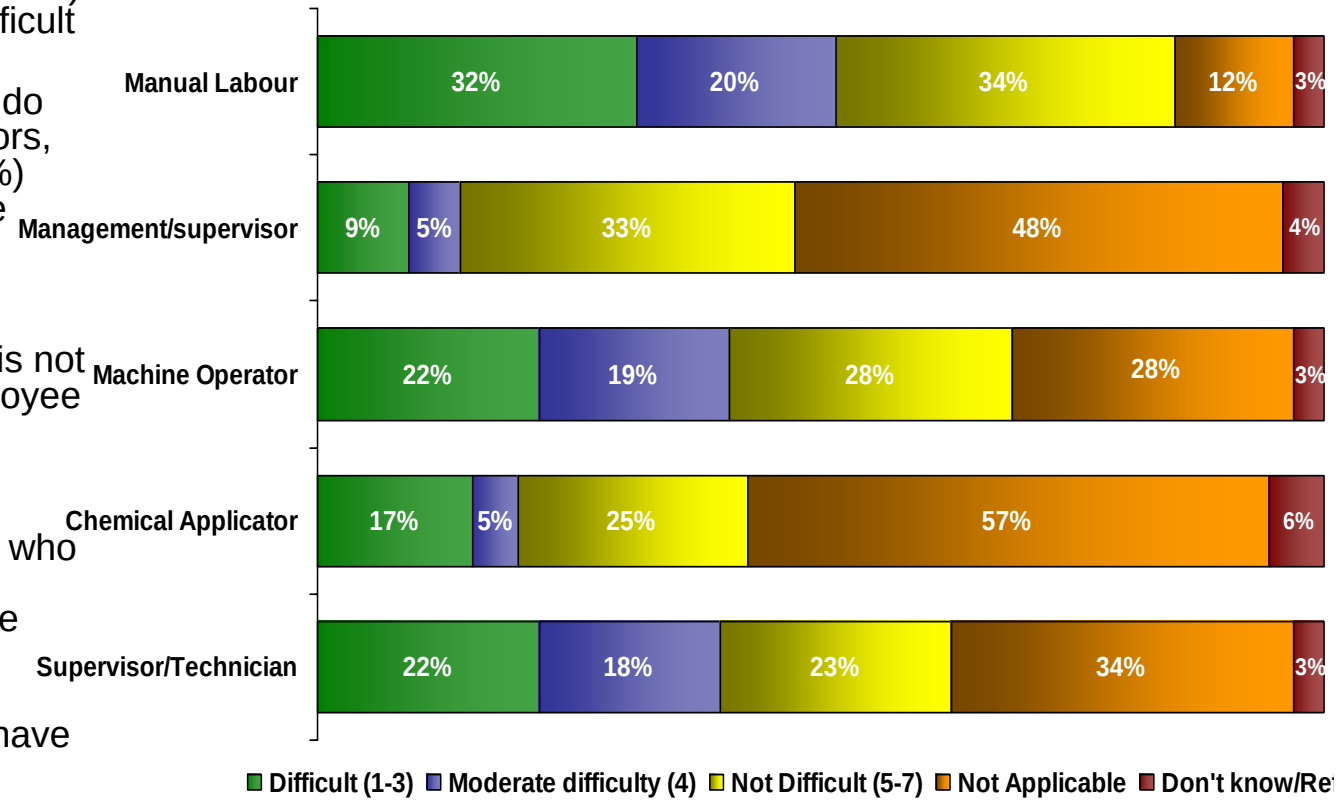
Hiring Employees (1)

Please rate the level of difficulty you have had in hiring appropriate employees for each of the following positions. Please use a 7-point scale.

- Results indicate an almost even split between those indicating they have difficulty hiring manual labour (32%) and those indicating it is not difficult (34%) to hire manual labour.
- Almost half of the respondents do not hire management/supervisors, but of those who do, most (33%) indicated it is not difficult to hire appropriate employees in this category.
- Slightly more of those who hire machine operators indicated it is not difficult to this category of employee as those who find it difficult.
- Again, the vast majority of respondents (57%) do not hire chemical applicators. Of those who do, more indicated they had no difficulty hiring (25%) than those indicating it was difficult (17%).
- Again, it is almost evenly split between those indicating they have difficulty hiring supervisors/ technicians (22%) as those indicating it is not difficult (23%) this category of employee.



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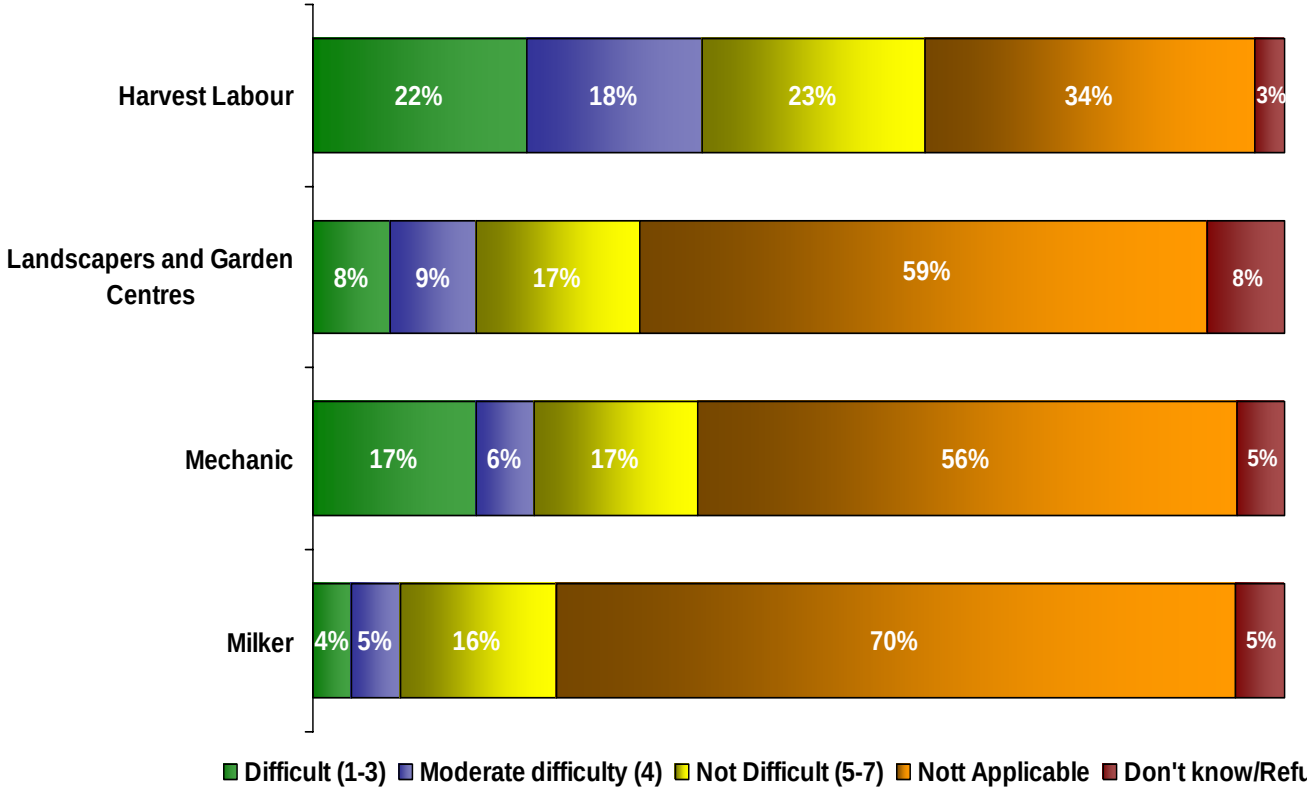
Hiring Employees (2)

Please rate the level of difficulty you have had in hiring appropriate employees for each of the following positions. Please use a 7-point scale.

- Again, those who had difficulty hiring harvest labour (22%) and those who had no difficulty (23%) are almost the same.
- The vast majority of respondents (59%) do not hire landscapers and garden centre employees. Of those who do, however, more(17%) indicated they do not have difficulty than those who said they did (8%).
- Of those who indicated they hired mechanics, the exact same percentage had difficulty hiring as those who did not (17%).
- Only ¼ of respondents hire milkers, and of those 16% had no difficulty while 4% had difficulty hiring appropriate employees in this category.



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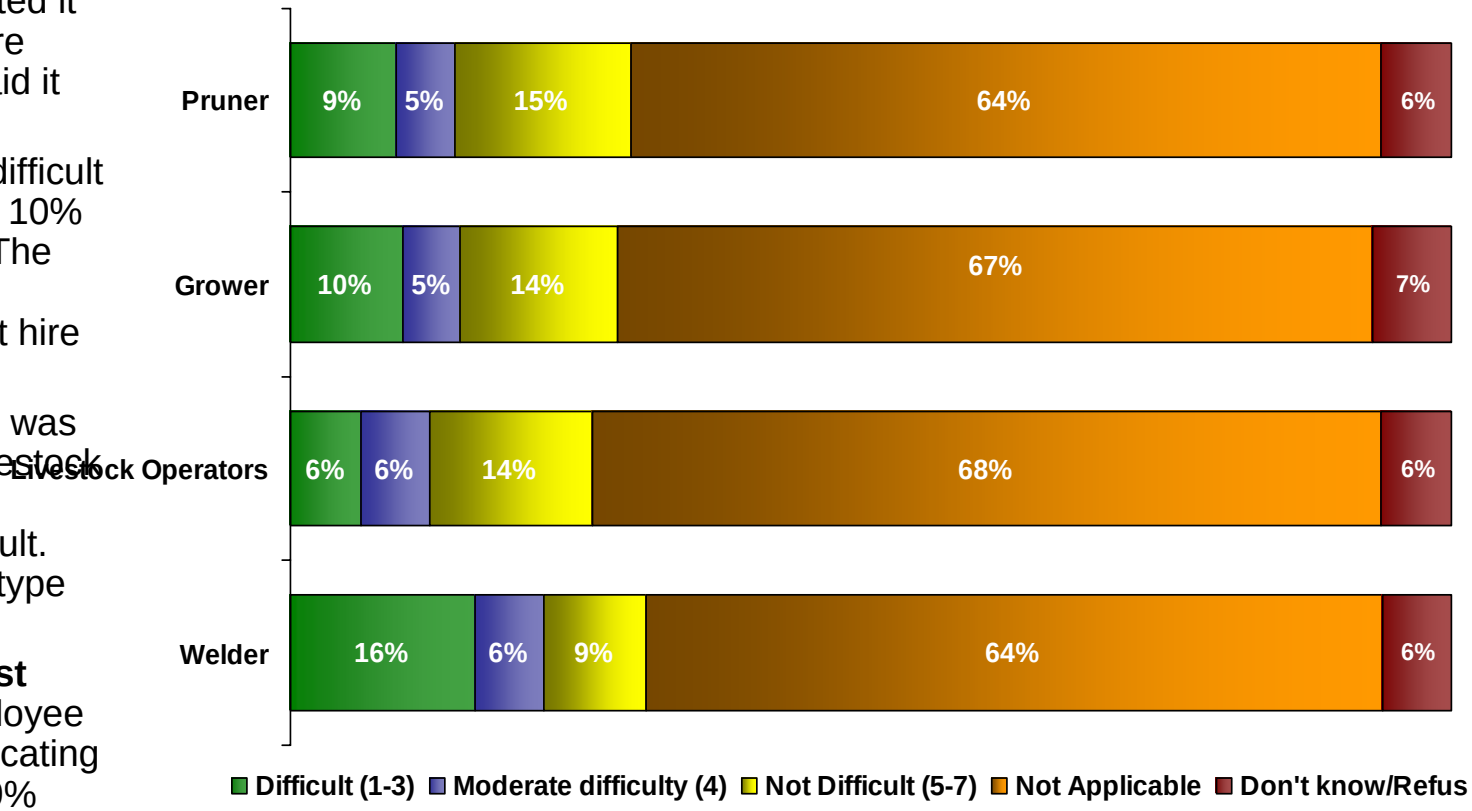
Hiring Employees (3)

Please rate the level of difficulty you have had in hiring appropriate employees for each of the following positions. Please use a 7-point scale.

- Of those who use their services, 15% indicated it was not difficult to hire pruners, while 9% said it was difficult.
- 14% said it was not difficult to hire growers while 10% said it was difficult. The vast majority (67%) indicated they did not hire growers.
- Similarly, 14% said it was not difficult to hire livestock operators, while 6% indicated it was difficult. 68% do not hire this type of employee.
- **Welders** are the **most difficult** type of employee **to hire** with 16% indicating a difficulty and only 9% indicating it is not difficult.



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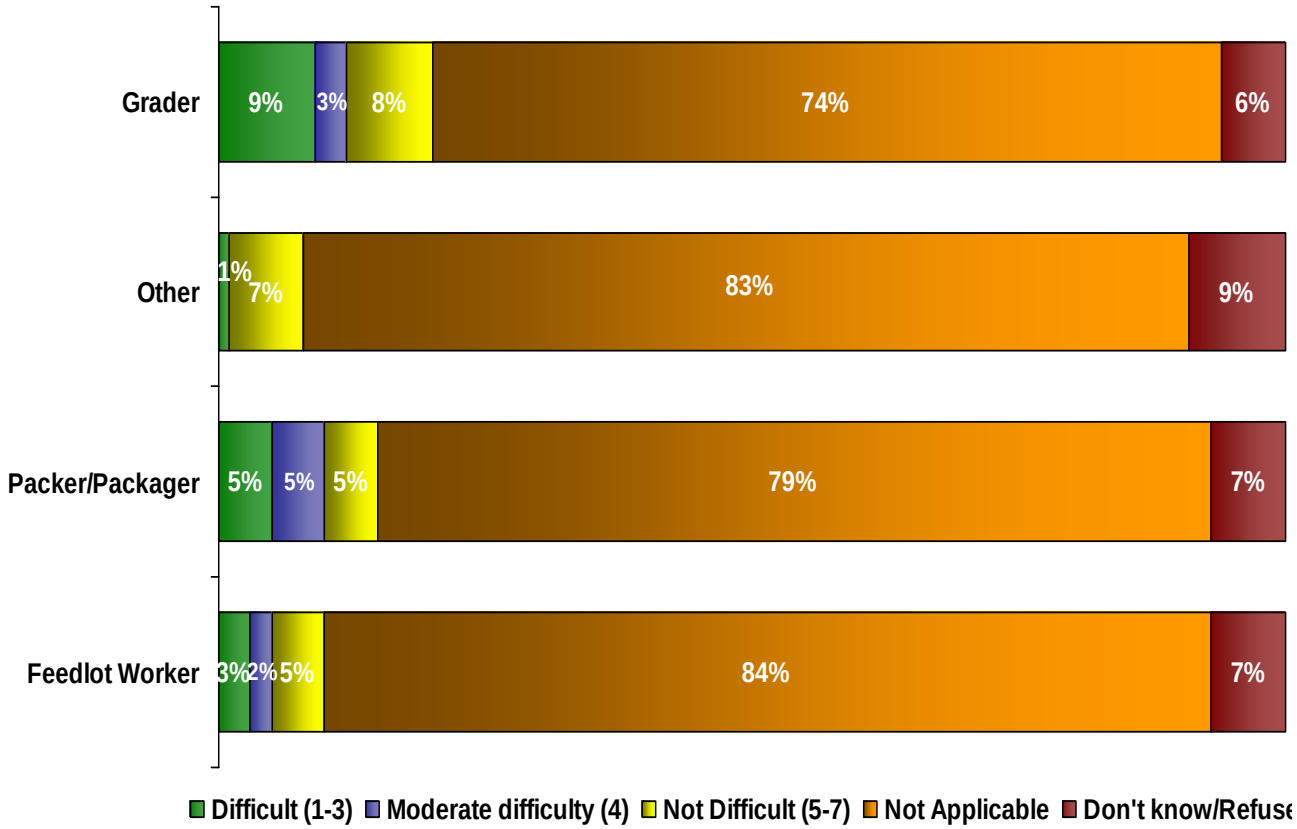
Hiring Employees (4)

Please rate the level of difficulty you have had in hiring appropriate employees for each of the following positions. Please use a 7-point scale.

- Most participants did not hire graders, packers/packagers or feedlot workers. Of those who do, again respondents are almost evenly split between those who have no difficulty hiring appropriate employees and those who have difficulty.
- 7% of respondents said they had no difficulty hiring other types of appropriate employees.



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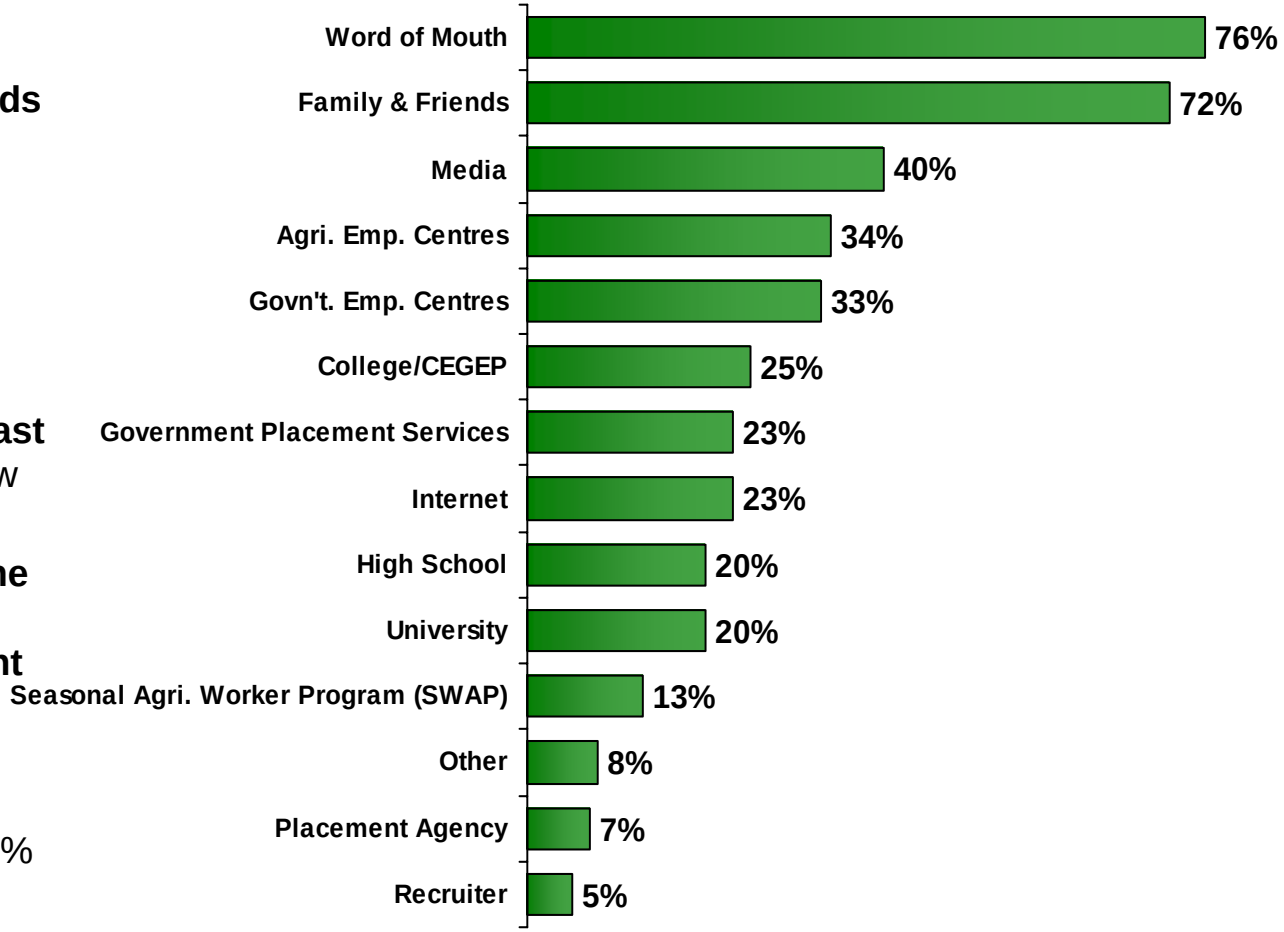
Recruiting New Employees

Which of the following methods have you used to recruit new employees in the past 5 years? Please check all that apply.

- Participants put a great deal of stock in **word of mouth and referrals from family and friends** as the **most commonly used methods** for recruiting new employees.
- Placing ads in the media is the next preferred method at 40%.
- **Professional recruiters and placement agencies** are the **least used methods** for recruiting new employees.
- Only **13%** of respondents **use the SWAP program,** while **1/3 use Agriculture and/or Government Employment Centres.**
- **1 in 5** respondents **use high schools and universities** to recruit new employees, while 25% use college or CEGEP.



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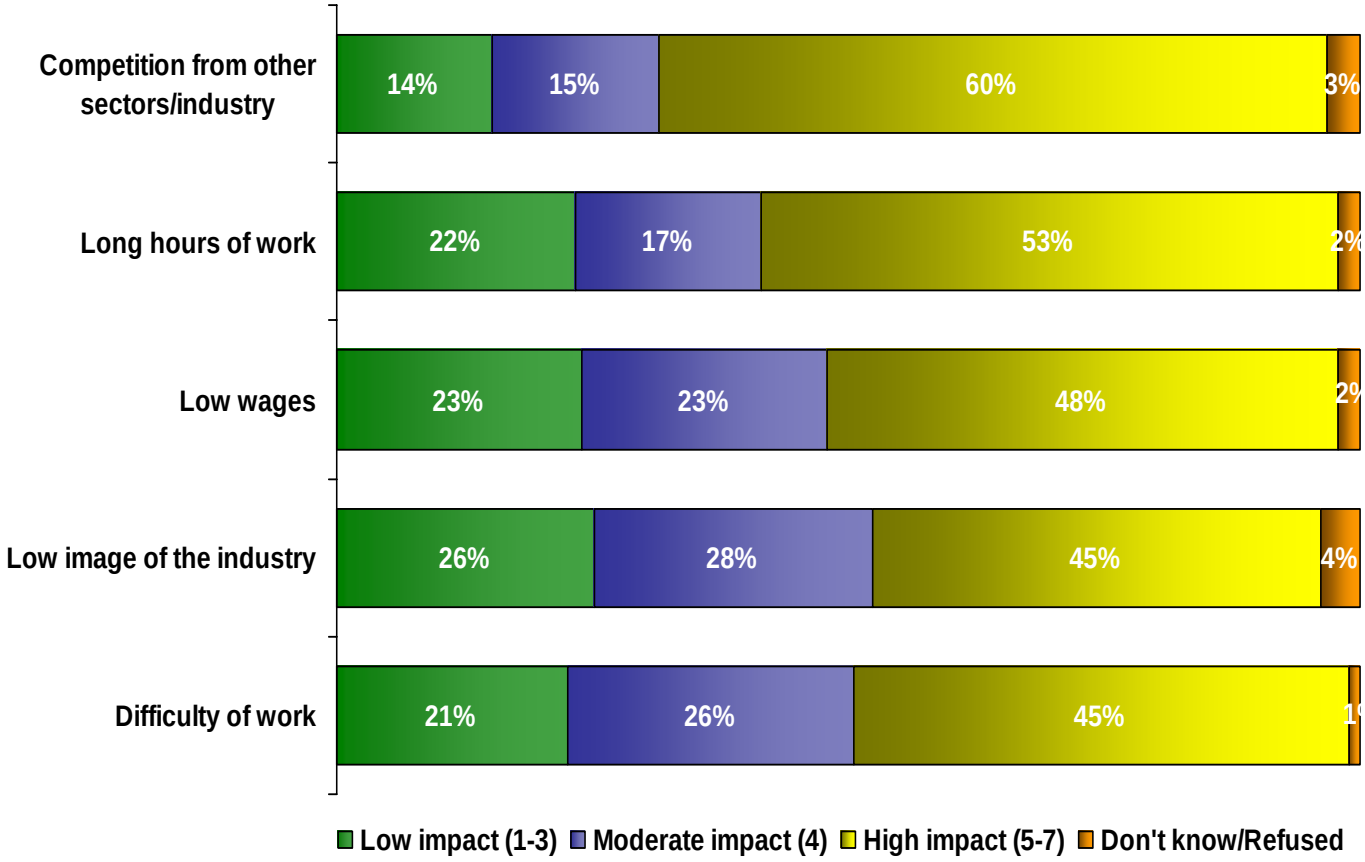
Impact of Factors on Finding Employees (1)

Rate the impact each of the following factors has on your ability to find suitable employees for your farm. Please use a 7-point scale.

- **Competition from other sectors/industry is the number one reason** why it is difficult for employers to find suitable employees for their farm.
- Having said that, the next **four most significant factors** perhaps explain why this is **so—long hours of work, low wages, image of the industry and difficulty of the work**.
- Almost half of the respondents indicated these factors had a high impact on their ability to find suitable employees for their farm.



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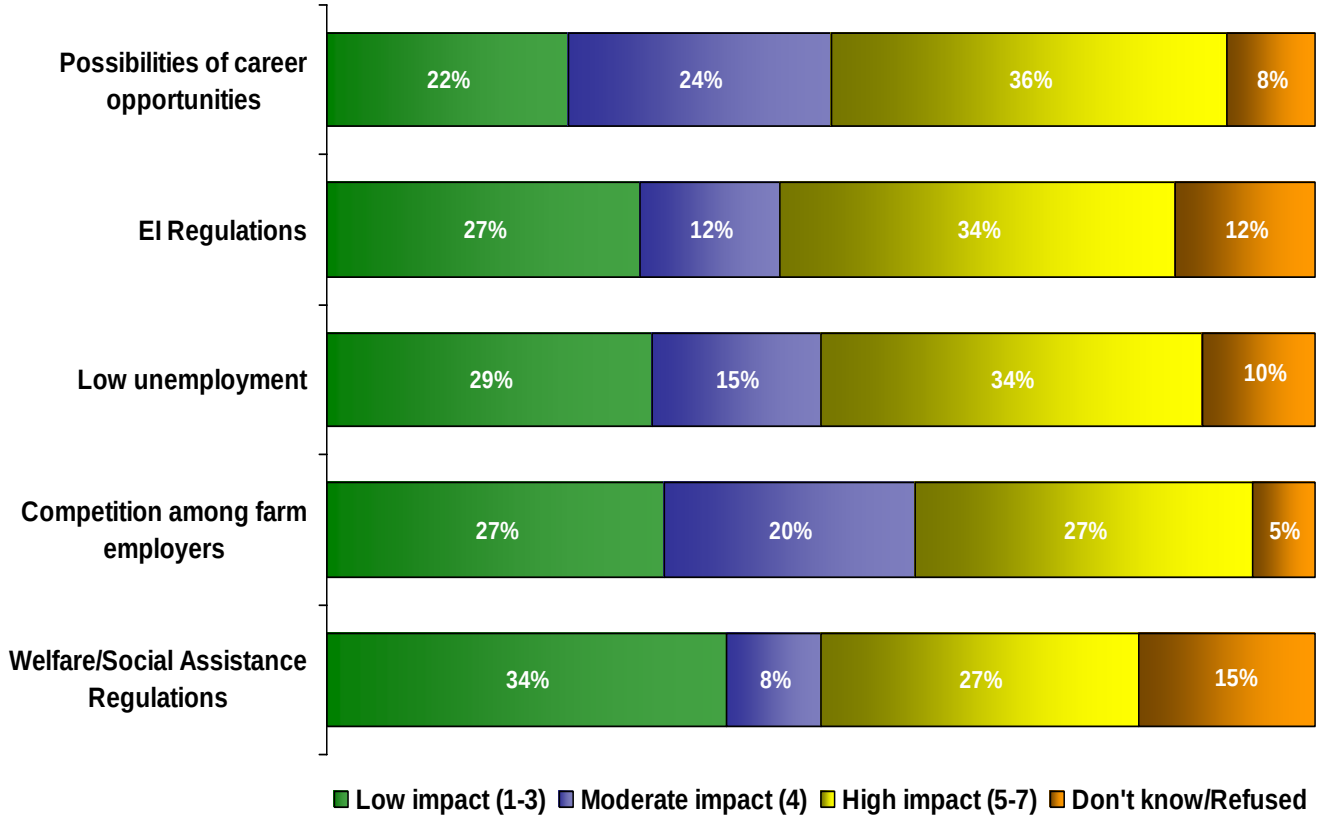
*Note: does not add to 100% because "not applicable" is omitted

Impact of Factors on Finding Employees (2)

Rate the impact each of the following factors has on your ability to find suitable employees for your farm. Please use a 7-point scale.

- To a lesser extent, respondents indicated that the **possibilities of career opportunities, EI regulations and low unemployment have an impact** on employers' ability to find suitable employees for their farm.
- **Competition among farm employers is evenly split** between those who say it has a high impact and those who say it has a low impact (27%).
- **Welfare/social assistance regulations have more of a low impact** (34%) than a high impact (27%).



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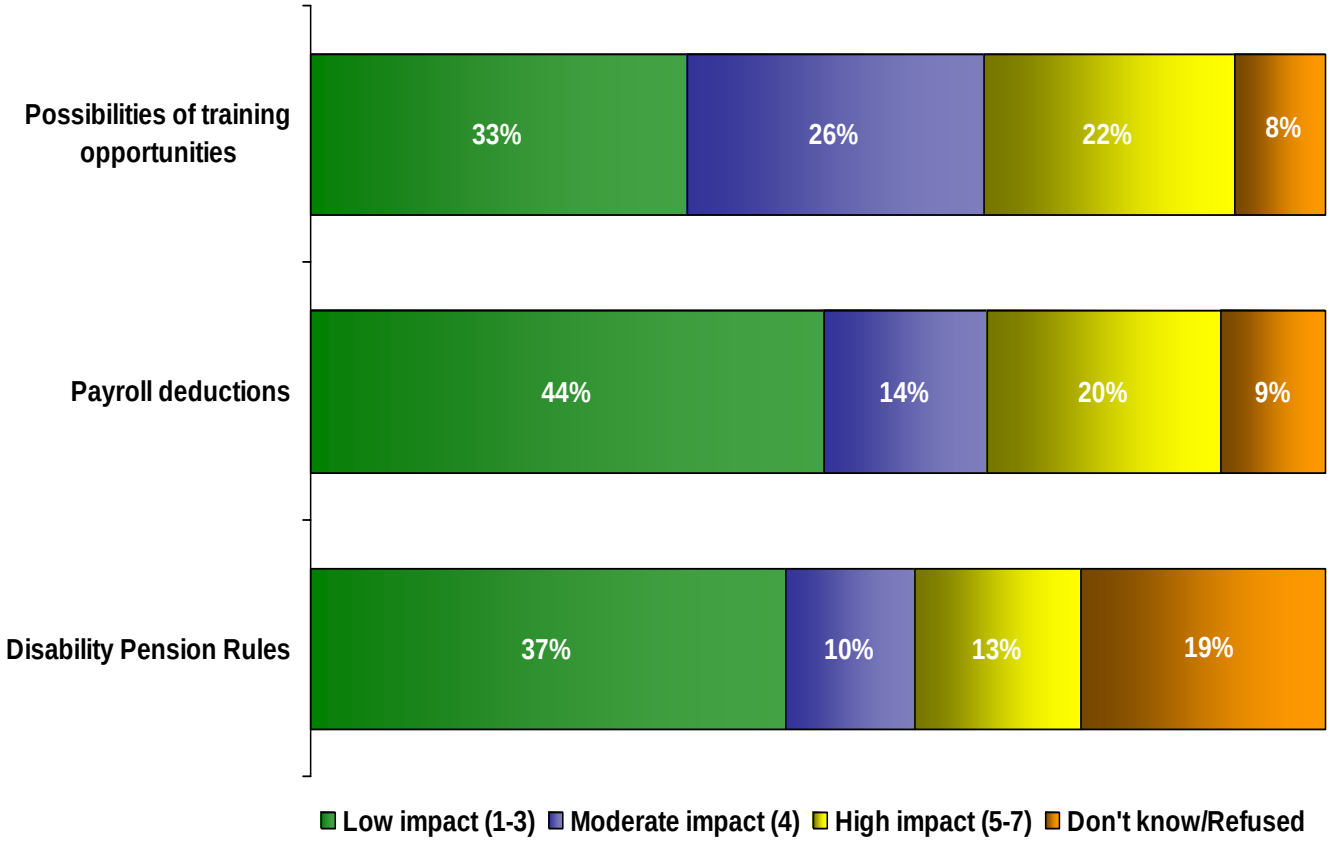
Impact of Factors on Finding Employees (3)

Rate the impact each of the following factors has on your ability to find suitable employees for your farm. Please use a 7-point scale.

- The **possibilities of training opportunities has relatively low impact** (33%) on finding suitable employees for farming operations with only 22% stating it has high impact.
- **Payroll deduction (**44%) and **disability pension rules (**37%) have the **least impact** of all of the factors tested on employers' ability to find suitable employees for their farm.



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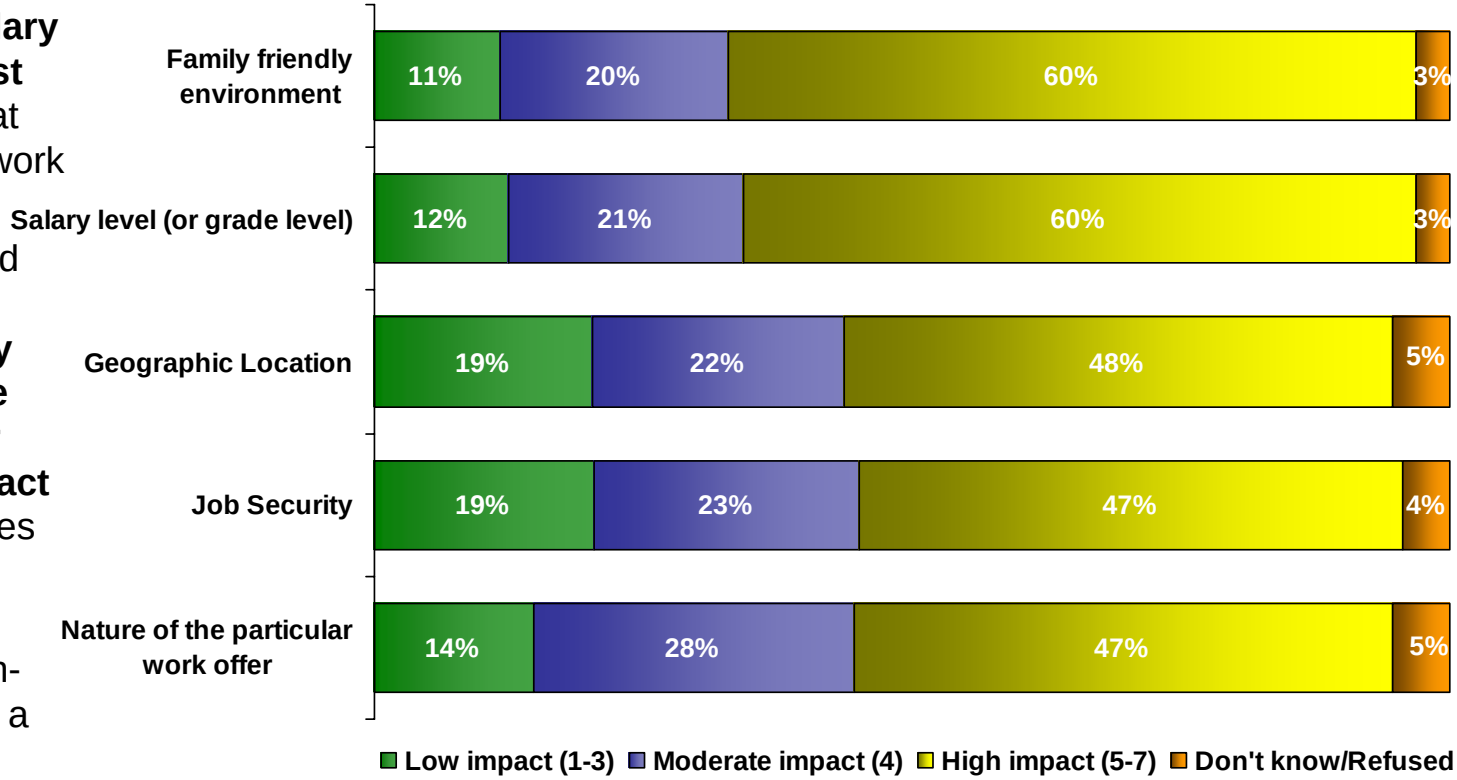
*Note: does not add to 100% because "not applicable" is omitted

Impact of Factors on Attracting Employees (1)

Please rate how important each of the following factors is in attracting employees to work in agriculture? Please use a 7-point scale.

- **Family/friendly environment and salary level** are the **two most important factors** that attract employees to work in agriculture.
- Respondents indicated that **geographic location, job security and the nature of the particular work offer** also have a **high impact** on attracting employees to work in agriculture.
- About 20% of respondents were non-committal (rating 4 on a scale of 1-7) on these factors.



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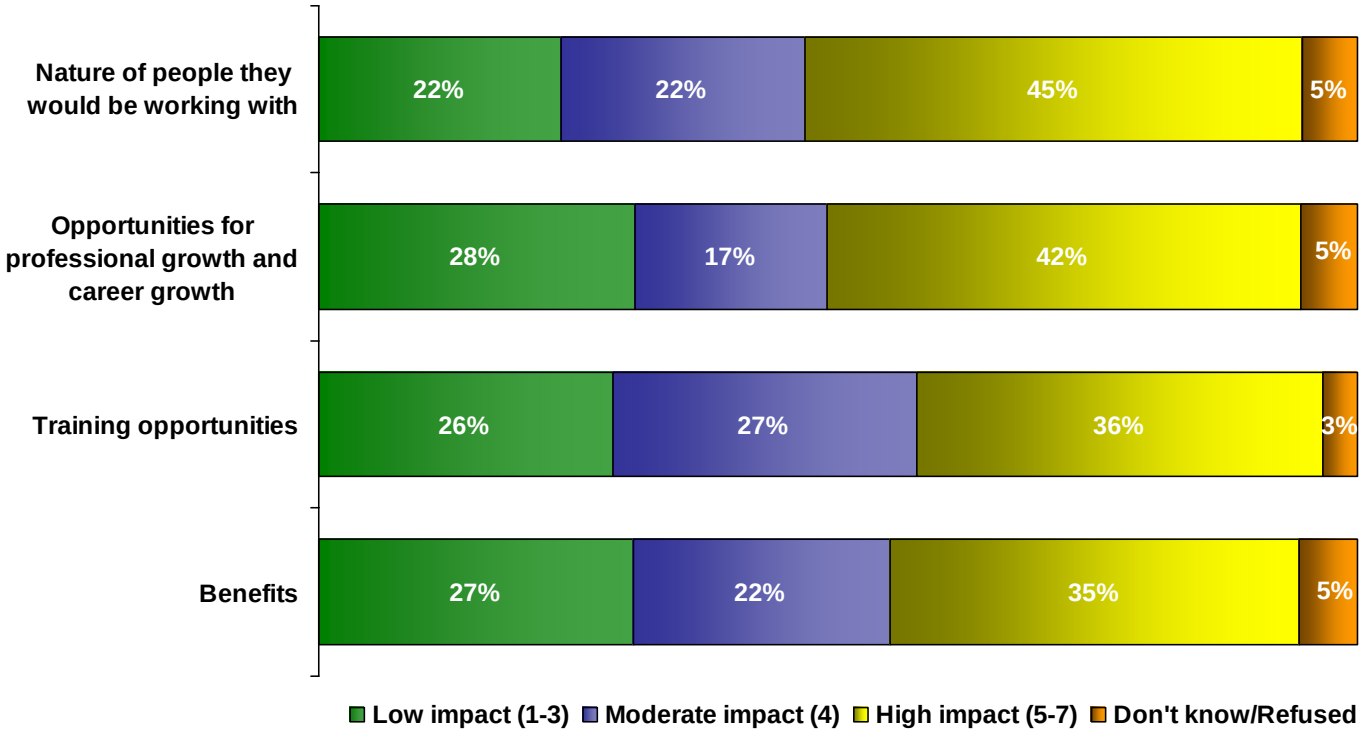
*Note: does not add to 100% because "not applicable" is omitted

Impact of Factors on Attracting Employees (2)

Please rate how important each of the following factors is in attracting employees to work in agriculture? Please use a 7-point scale.

- Respondents found all of these factors important, but to a lesser extent than those on the previous page
- What is interesting to note is that employers **rate training opportunities and benefits** as the **least important** factors in attracting employees to work in agriculture.



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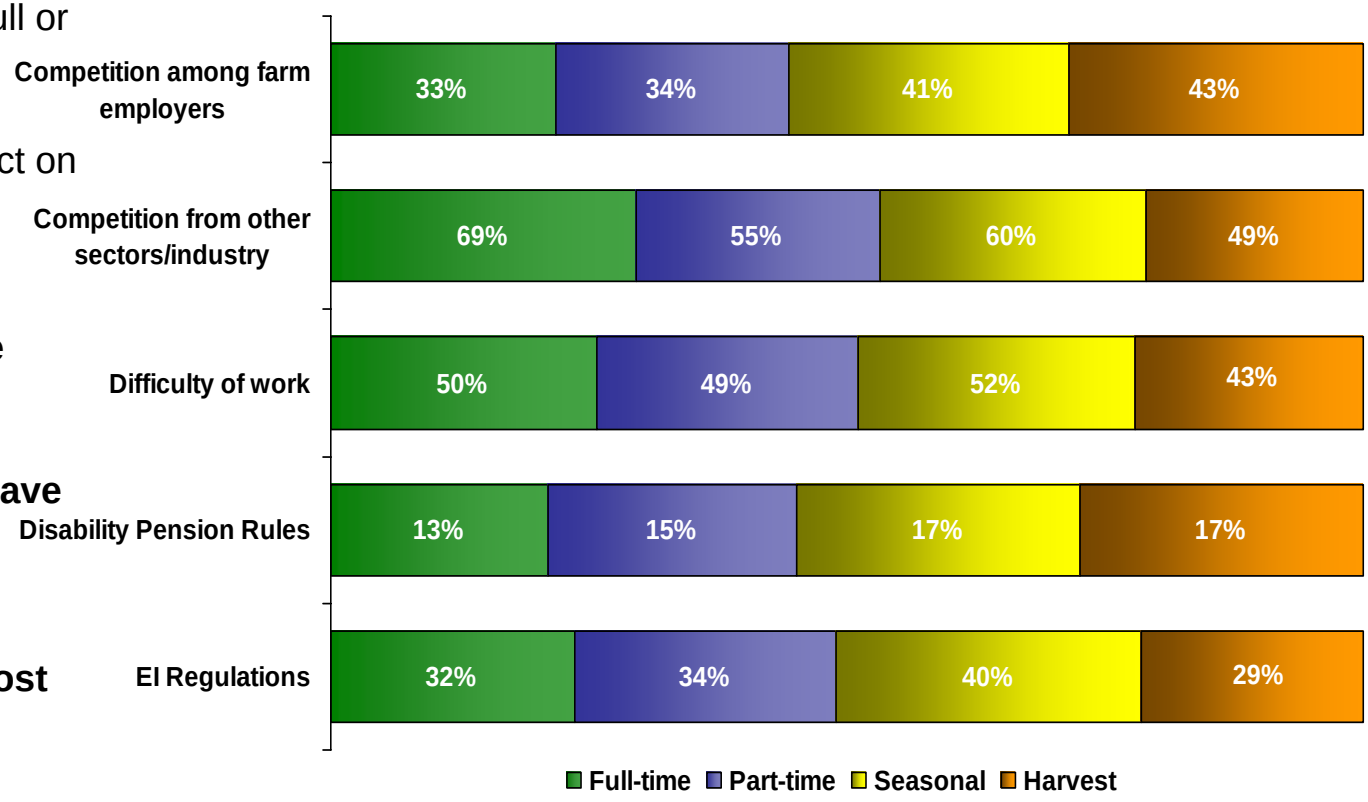
*Note: does not add to 100% because "not applicable" is omitted

Factors Influencing Types of Employees (1)

***Please rate how important each of the following factors is in attracting full-time/part-time/seasonal/harvest employees to work in agriculture and horticulture? Please use a 7-point scale. % saying "Important"* (5, 6, 7)**

- **Competition among farm employees** is more of a factor in attracting **seasonal and harvest employees** than full or part-time employees.
- **Competition from other sectors** has the most impact on attracting **full-time and seasonal employees.**
- The **difficulty of the work** impacts attracting **all of the types** of employees almost equally.
- **Disability pension rules have little impact** on attracting employees to work in agriculture and horticulture.
- **EI regulations** have the **most impact** on **seasonal employees** and the least impact on harvest employees.



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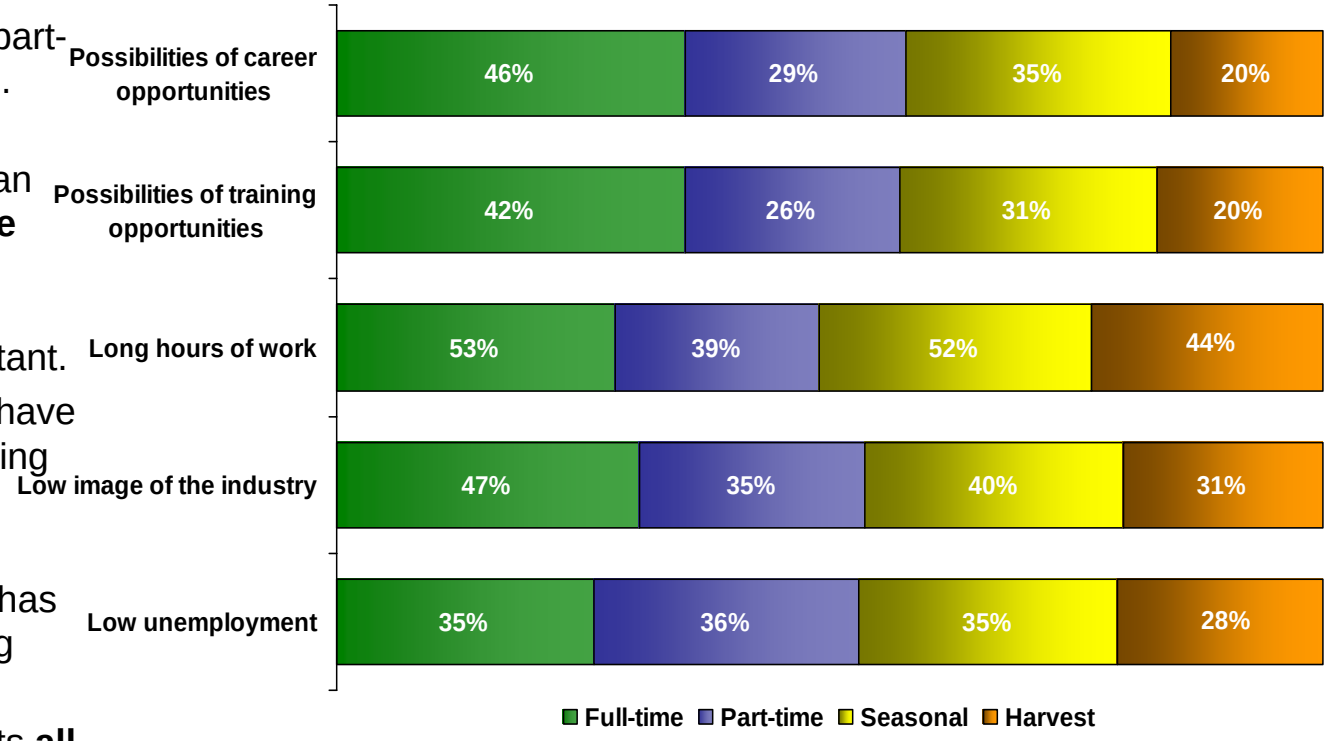
Factors Influencing Types of Employees (2)

***Please rate how important each of the following factors is in attracting full-time/part-time/seasonal/harvest employees to work in agriculture and horticulture? Please use a 7-point scale. % saying "Important"* (5, 6, 7)**

- The possibilities of has more of an impact **career opportunities** on attracting **full-time and seasonal employees** than part-time and harvest employees.
- Possibilities of **training opportunities** has more of an impact on attracting **full-time and seasonal employees**, although only 36% of respondents consider important.
- **Long hours of work** again have more of an impact on attracting **full-time and seasonal workers**.
- The **image of the industry** has the most impact on attracting **full-time employees**.
- **Low unemployment** impacts **all categories** almost equally.



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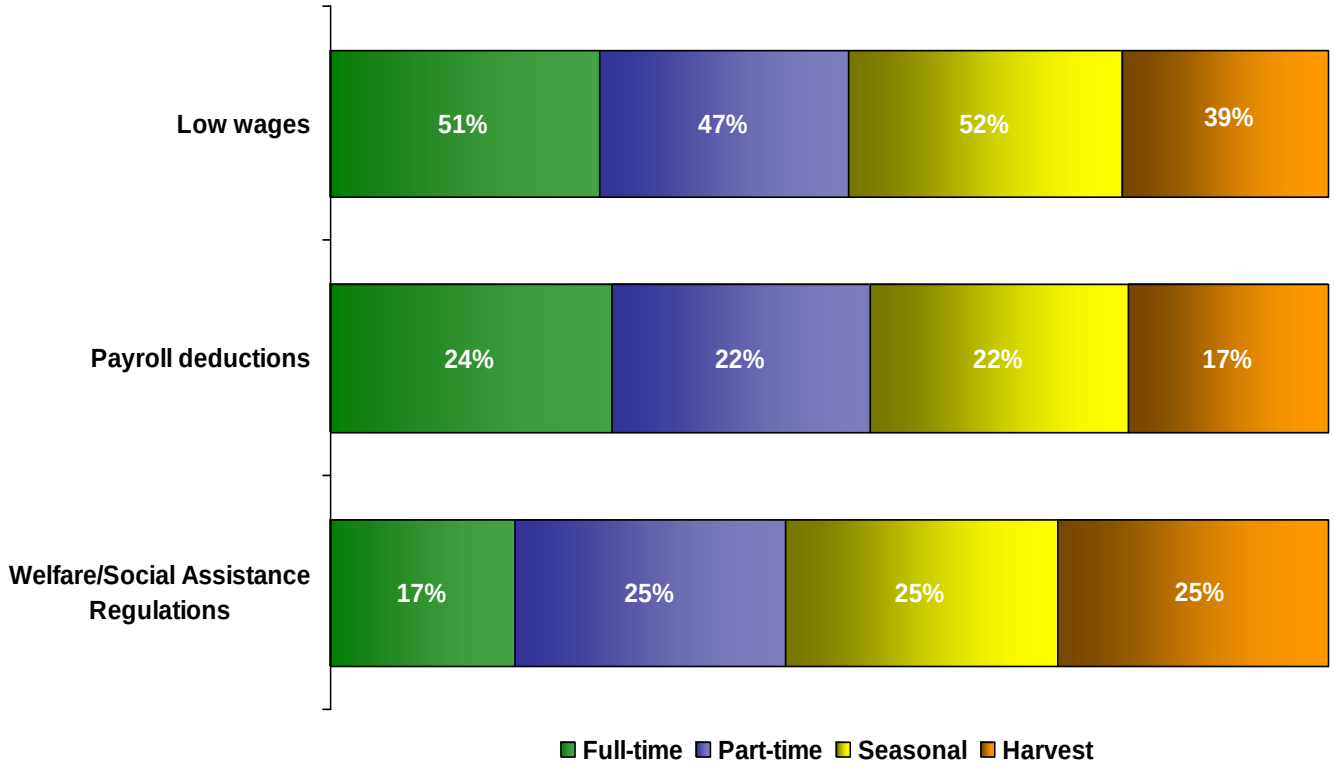
Factors Influencing Types of Employees (3)

***Please rate how important each of the following factors is in attracting full-time/part-time/seasonal/harvest employees to work in agriculture and horticulture? Please use a 7-point scale. % saying "Important"* (5, 6, 7)**

- Again, respondents noted that **low wages** have **more** of an **impact** on attracting **full-time and seasonal employees** and the least impact on attracting harvest employees.
- **Payroll deductions** have virtually the same impact on **all categories**, but respondents rate it relatively low in importance.
- **Welfare/social assistance regulations** have the **least impact** on **attracting full-time employees** and respondents rate this factor as relatively low in importance.



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Section 3:

Education and Training

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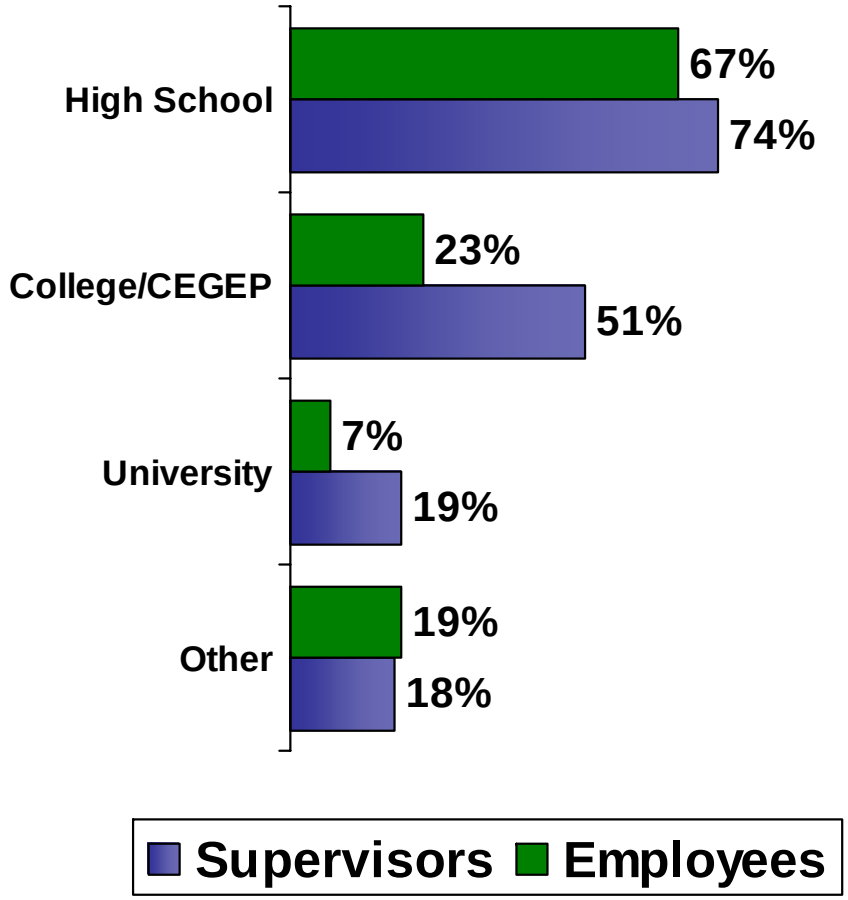
Importance of Levels of Education and Training

Please rate how important it is for your employees and supervisors to have completed each level of education listed below. Please use a 7 point scale.

% saying "Important" (5, 6, 7)

- The most dramatic statistic here is the emphasis respondents place on the importance of have college/CEGEP education for supervisors. 51% of respondents noted that this was important for those at the supervisory level.
- High school education was almost equally important for supervisors (74%) and employees (67%).
- Although only 19% of respondents cited university education as important for supervisors, they rated this almost three times more important for supervisors than for employees.



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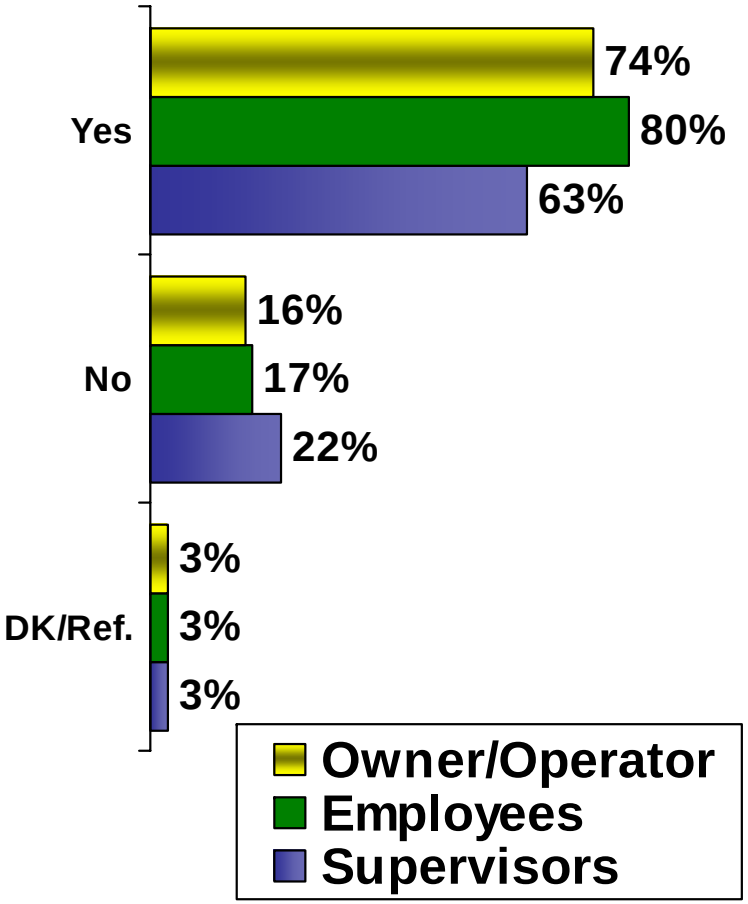
Importance of Levels of Education and Training

Do you provide training opportunities for each of the following?

- Respondents noted that more training opportunities are provided for employees (80%) than for owner/operators (74%) or for supervisors (63%).
- 22% of respondents said they did not provide training opportunities for supervisors, while 17% said they did not for employees and 16% said they did not provide training opportunities for owners/operators.



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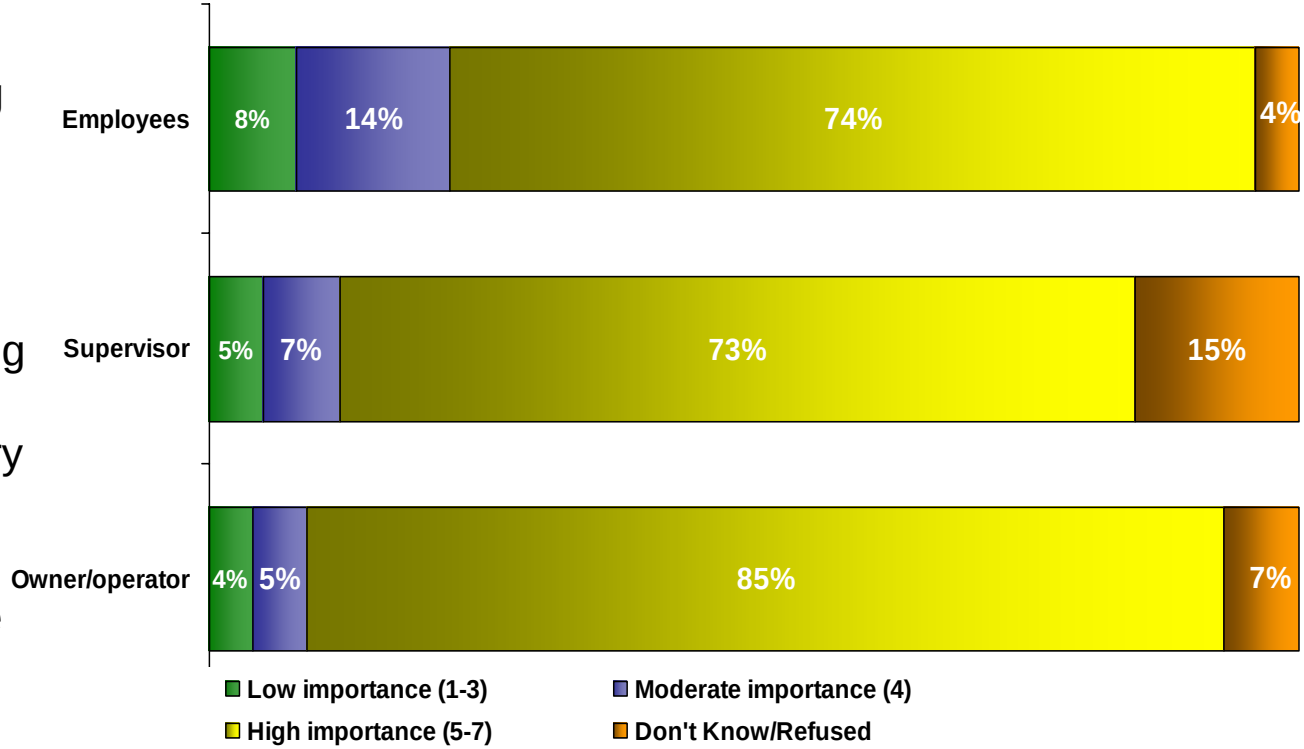
Categories: Importance of and Training

Please rate the importance of training and education for each of the following categories. Please use a 7-point scale.

- Although only 36% of employers consider training to be an important factor in attracting employees to working in agriculture and horticulture, a significantly high percentage rate training for employees, supervisors and owner/operators as very important.
- Respondents rated training for owners/operators as the most important of the three categories (85%).



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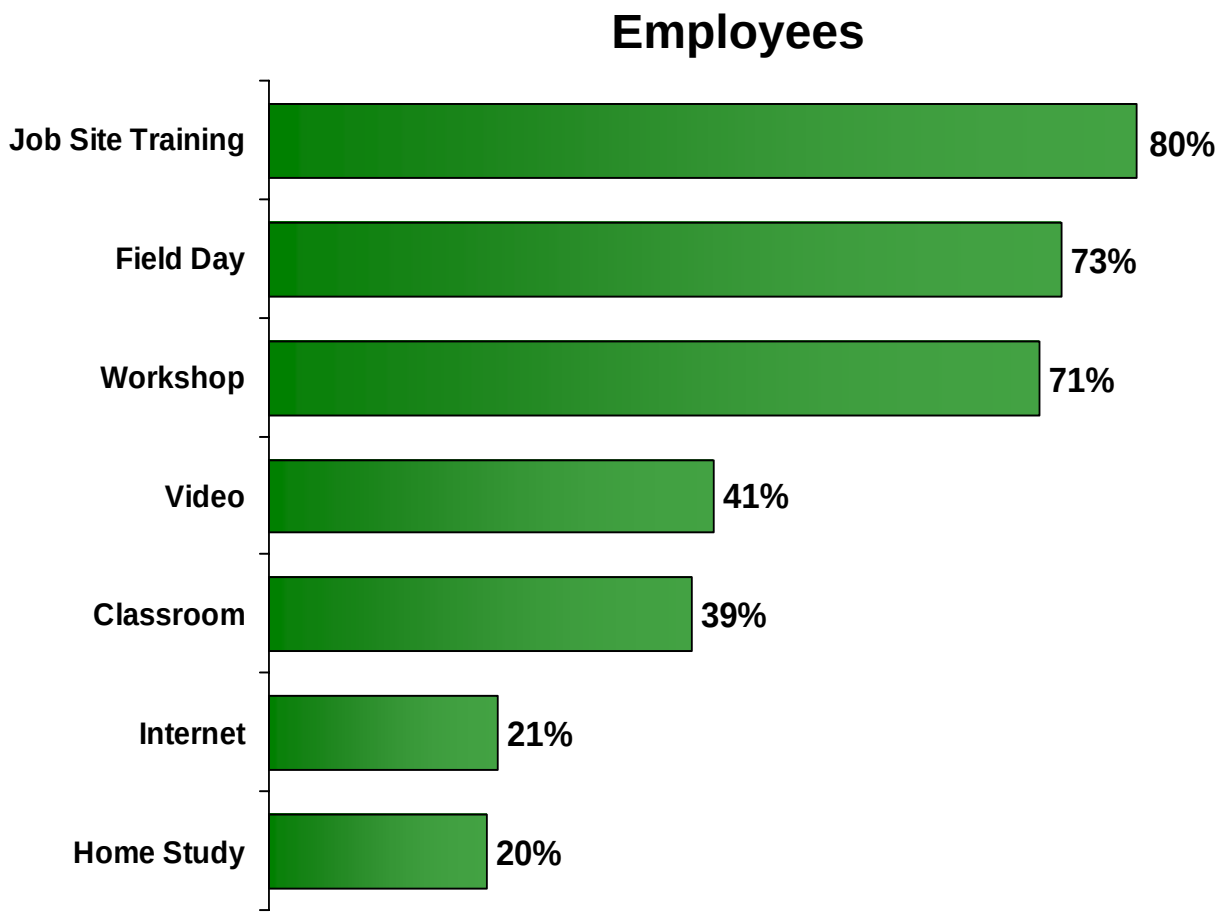
Effectiveness of Training Methods: Employees

How effective are the following training methods to your employees. Please use a 7-point scale.

- Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that **job site training is the preferred method** for employees (80%).
- This is followed by field day (74%) and workshop (71%).
- To a lesser extent, participants rated videos (41%), classroom training (39%) as important training methods.
- Internet and home study training methods were only rated as effective by 20% of those surveyed, indicating they are the least preferred training methods for employees.



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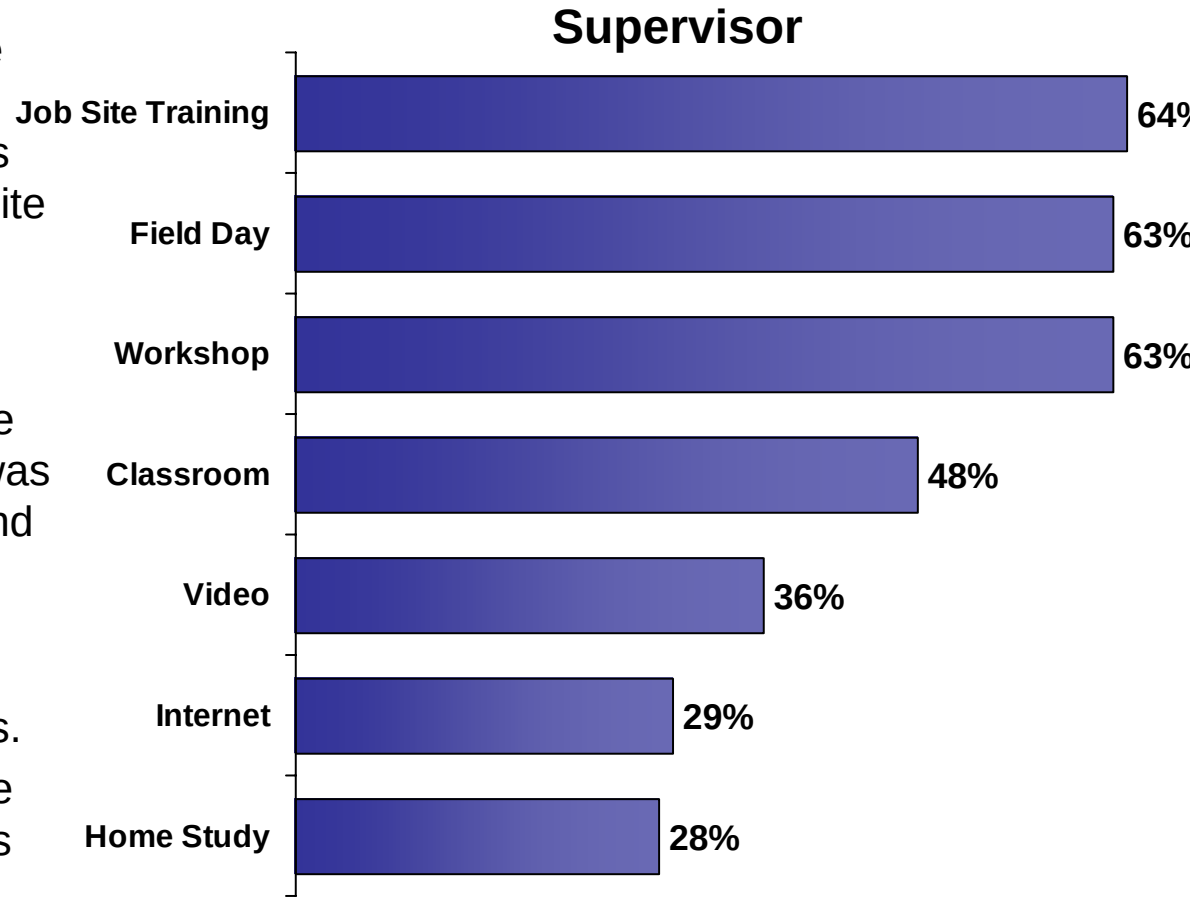
Effectiveness of Training Methods: Supervisor

How effective are the following training methods to you or your employees. Please use a 7-point scale.

- Respondents rated the same three categories as the most effective training methods for supervisors as they rated for employees (i.e. job site training, field day and workshop). Relatively no distinction was noted among these training methods.
- The only change in the rating of the next four methods between what was rated as effective for employees and what was rated as effective for supervisors is that classroom is viewed as a more effective training method for supervisors than videos.
- Internet and home study rate more highly as effective training methods for supervisors than for employees.



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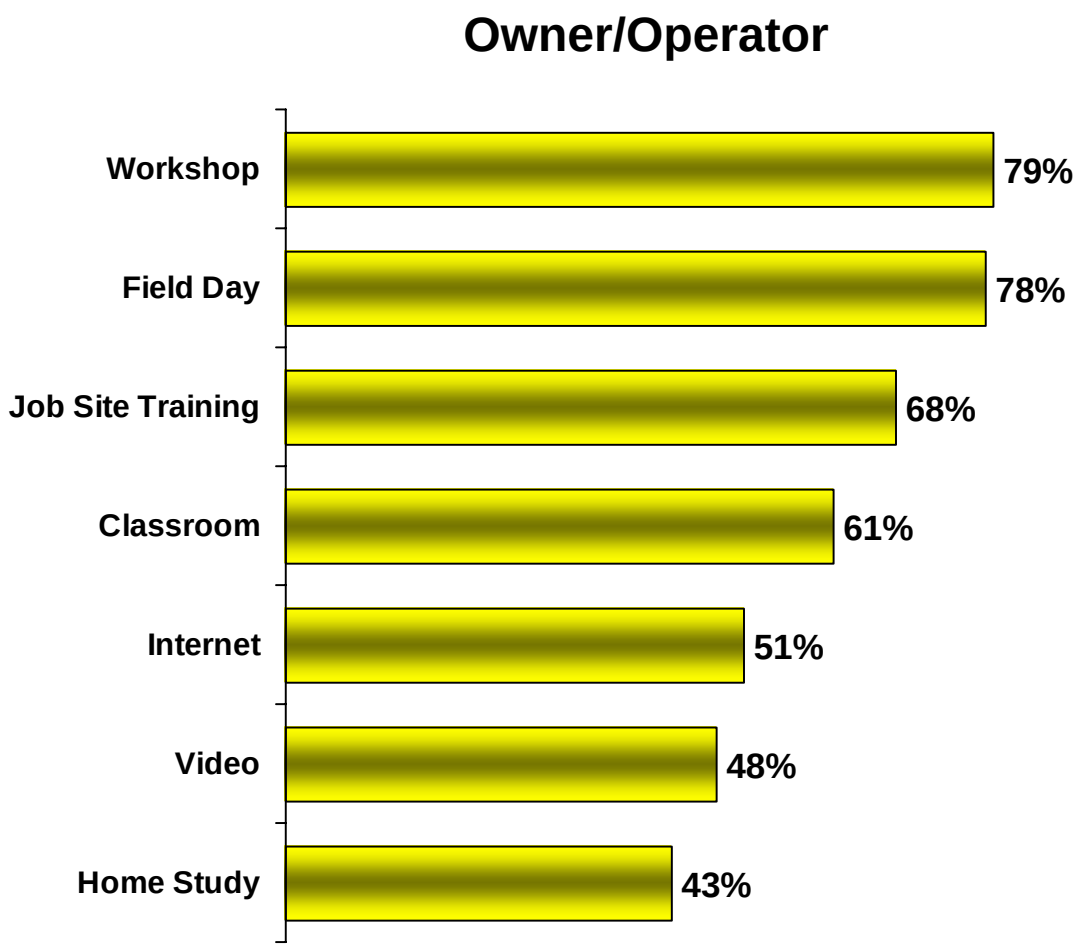
Effectiveness of Training Methods: Owner/Operator

How effective are the following training methods to you or your employees. Please use a 7-point scale.

- In contrast to what they indicated was effective training methods for employees and supervisors, respondents rated workshops as the most effective training method for owners/operators.
- This is followed by field day and job site training.
- Interestingly, Internet training is given much higher prominence for owners/operators than they rated for employees and supervisors, with more than half of the respondents indicating it is an effective training method.
- Video and home study are the two least effective methods for training owners/operators.



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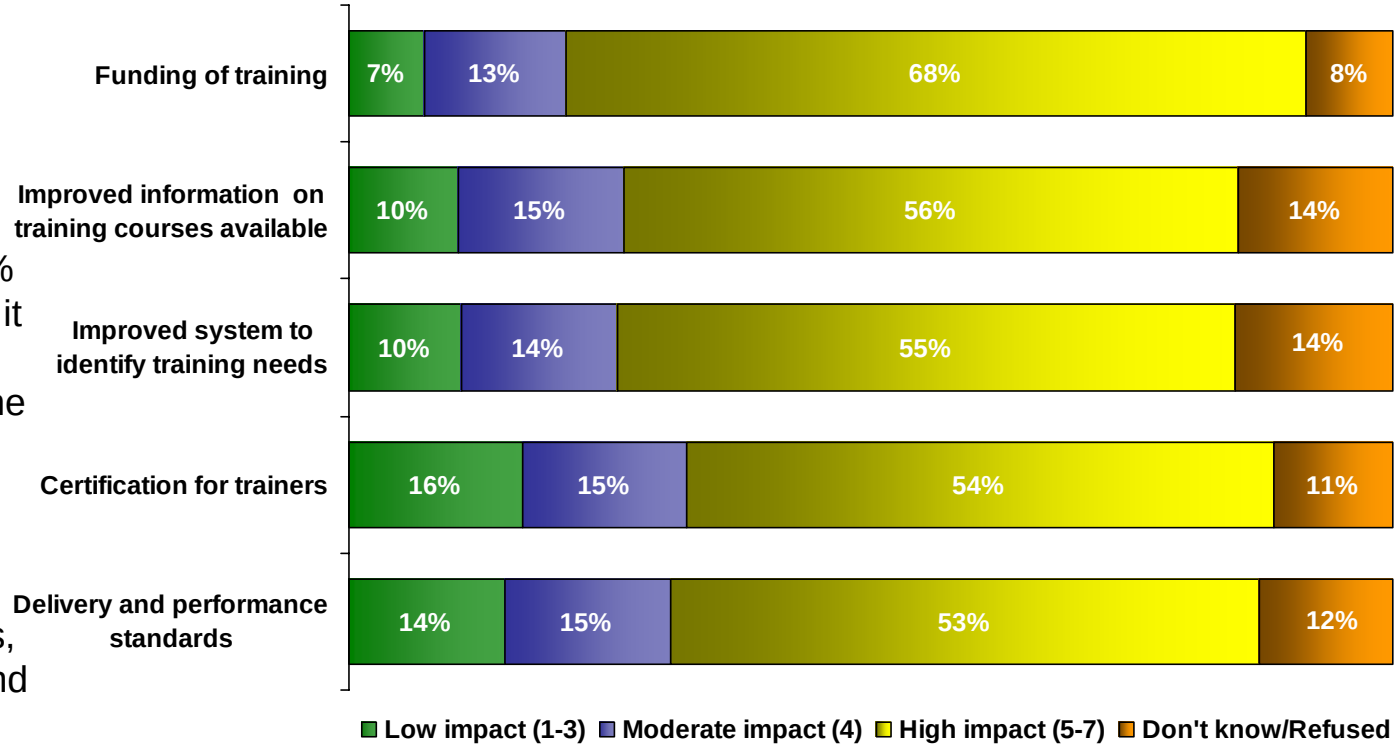
Impact of Training and Development on Attracting Employees in Agriculture (1)

How much impact does each of the following Training and Development issues have on attracting employees in agriculture? Please use a 7-point .

- Results indicate that although training is an important feature in developing employees in the sector, funding this training is the most important issue facing employers today with 68% of respondents indicating it has a high impact on attracting employees to the sector.
- This is followed quite closely by lack of information on available courses, training methods, certification for trainers and delivery and performance standards.



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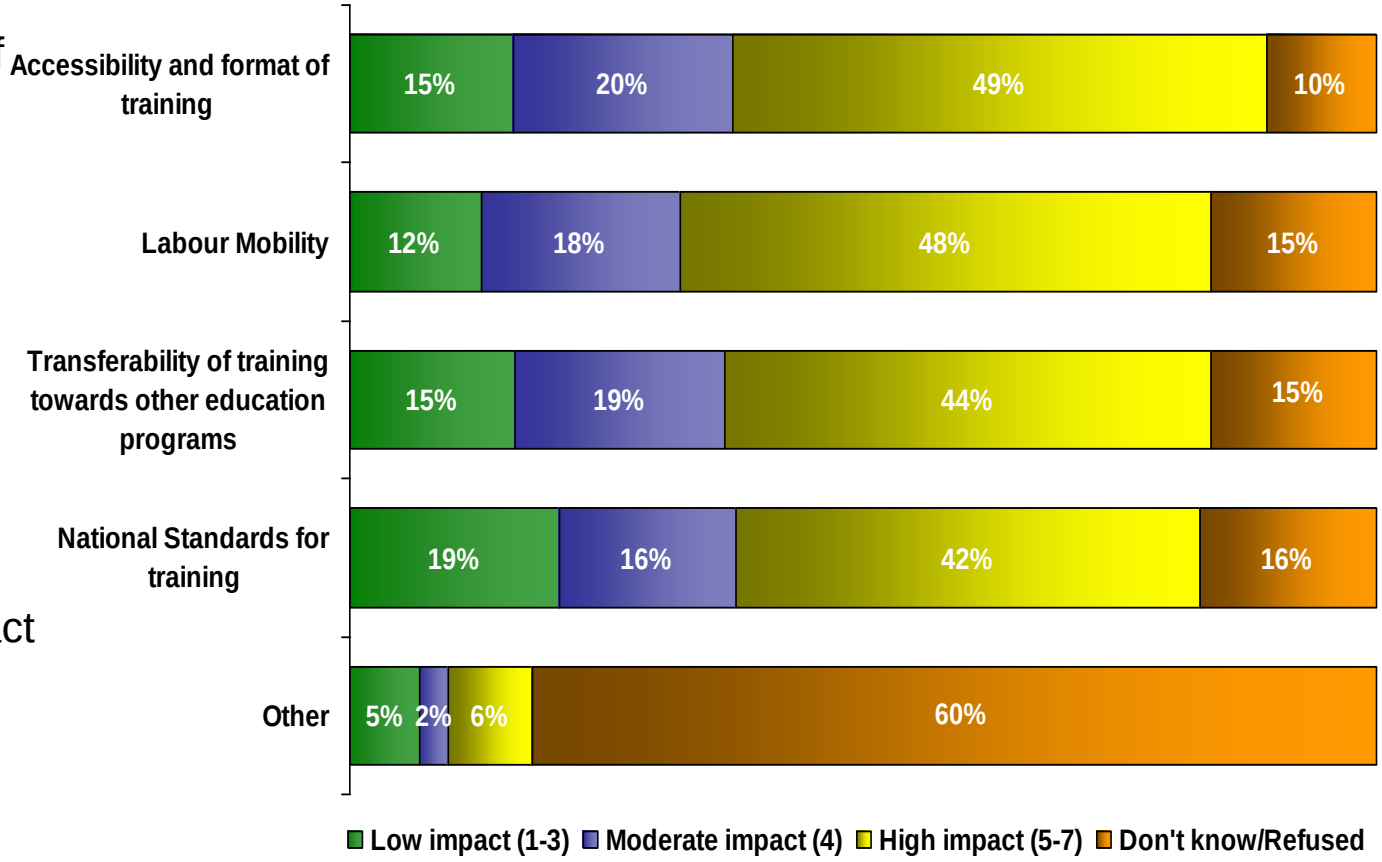
*Note: does not add to 100% because "not applicable" is omitted

Impact of Training and Development on Attracting Employees in Agriculture (2)

Agriculture Human Resources Sector Council

How much impact does each of the following Training and Development issues have on attracting employees in agriculture? Please use a 7-point .

- To a lesser extent, availability and format of training, labour mobility, transferability of training and international standards for training have an impact on attracting employees in agriculture.
- That being said, almost half of the respondents indicated that these issues have a high impact on attracting employees in agriculture.



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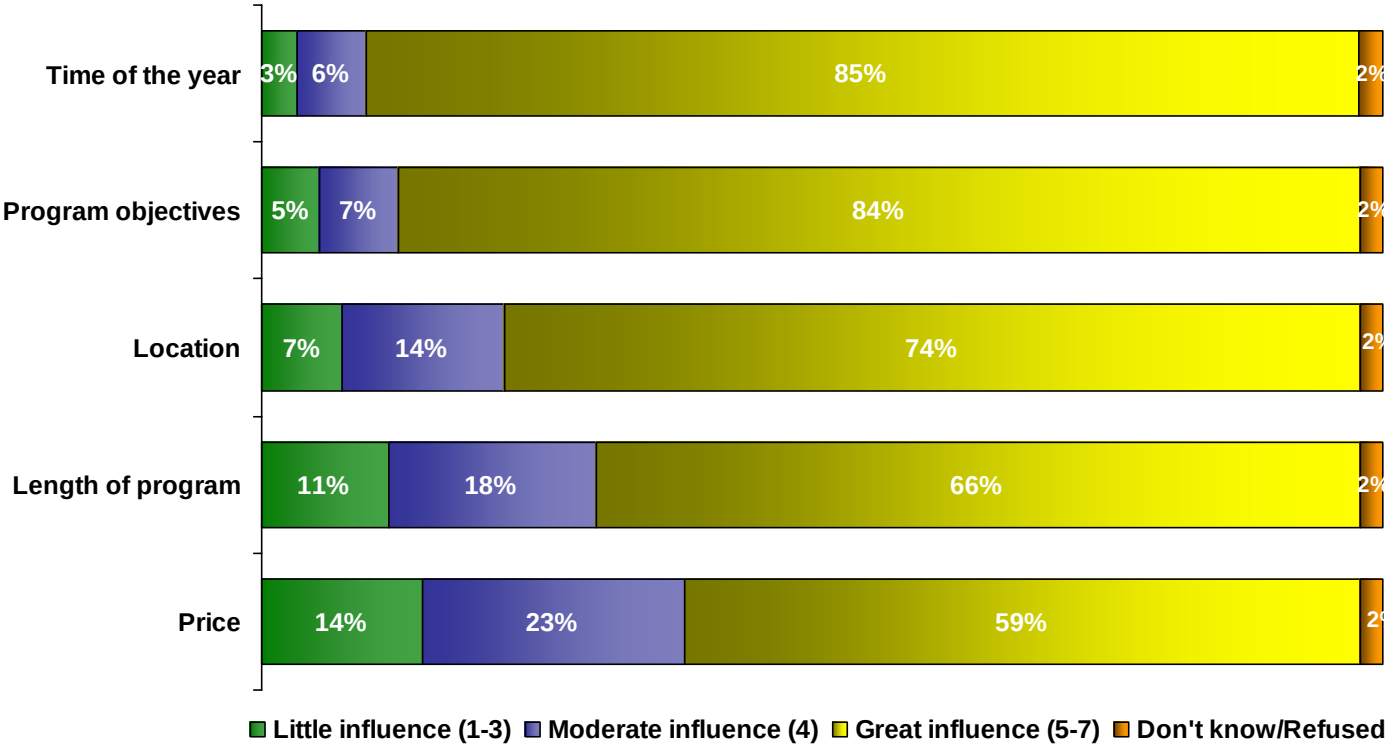
GPC Public Affairs
Strategic Communications, Government Relations and Opinion Research

*Note: does not add to 100% because "not applicable" is omitted

Factors Influencing Registration in a Training Program: Employers-Producers (1)

How much do the following factors influence you to register for a training program for yourself? Please use a 7-point scale .

- Timing is everything! 85% of respondents indicted that the time of year when a training program is offered has the most influence on whether or not they will register.
- This is followed very closely (84%) by program objectives.
- Location, length of the program and the price also have a great deal of influence regarding respondents' ability to register for a training program, with more than 60% rating these factors as a 5, 6 or 7 on a 7 point scale.



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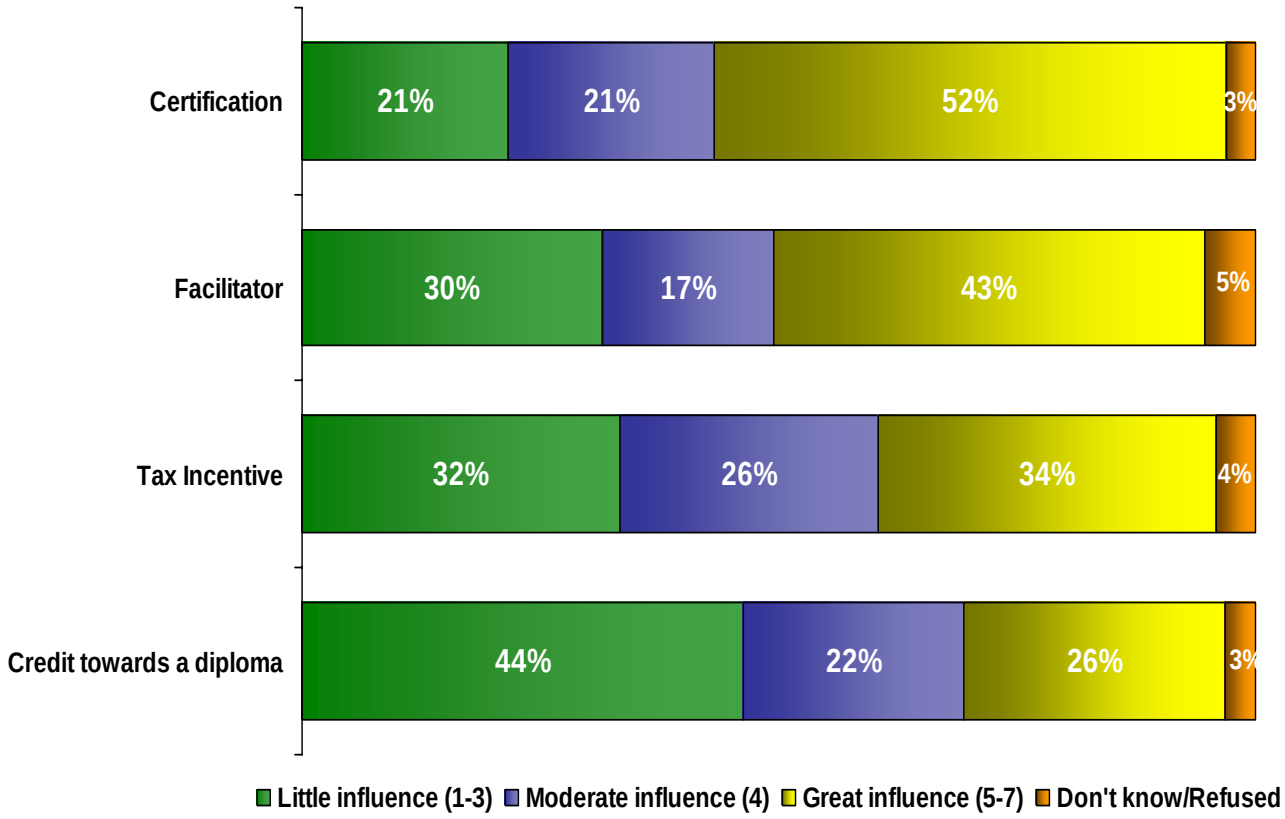
Factors Influencing Registration in a Training Program: Employers-Producers (2)

How much do the following factors influence you to register for a training program for yourself? Please use a 7-point scale .

- To a lesser extent, but still important factors influencing employers/producers willingness to register for a training program is the certification offered at the end of the program and the facilitator teaching the program.
- Tax incentive is almost evenly split between those respondent indicating it has little influence and those who said it has a great deal of influence. Almost 1/3 of respondents sat in the middle on this factor.
- Credit towards a diploma has the least influence on employers/producers willingness to register for a training program.



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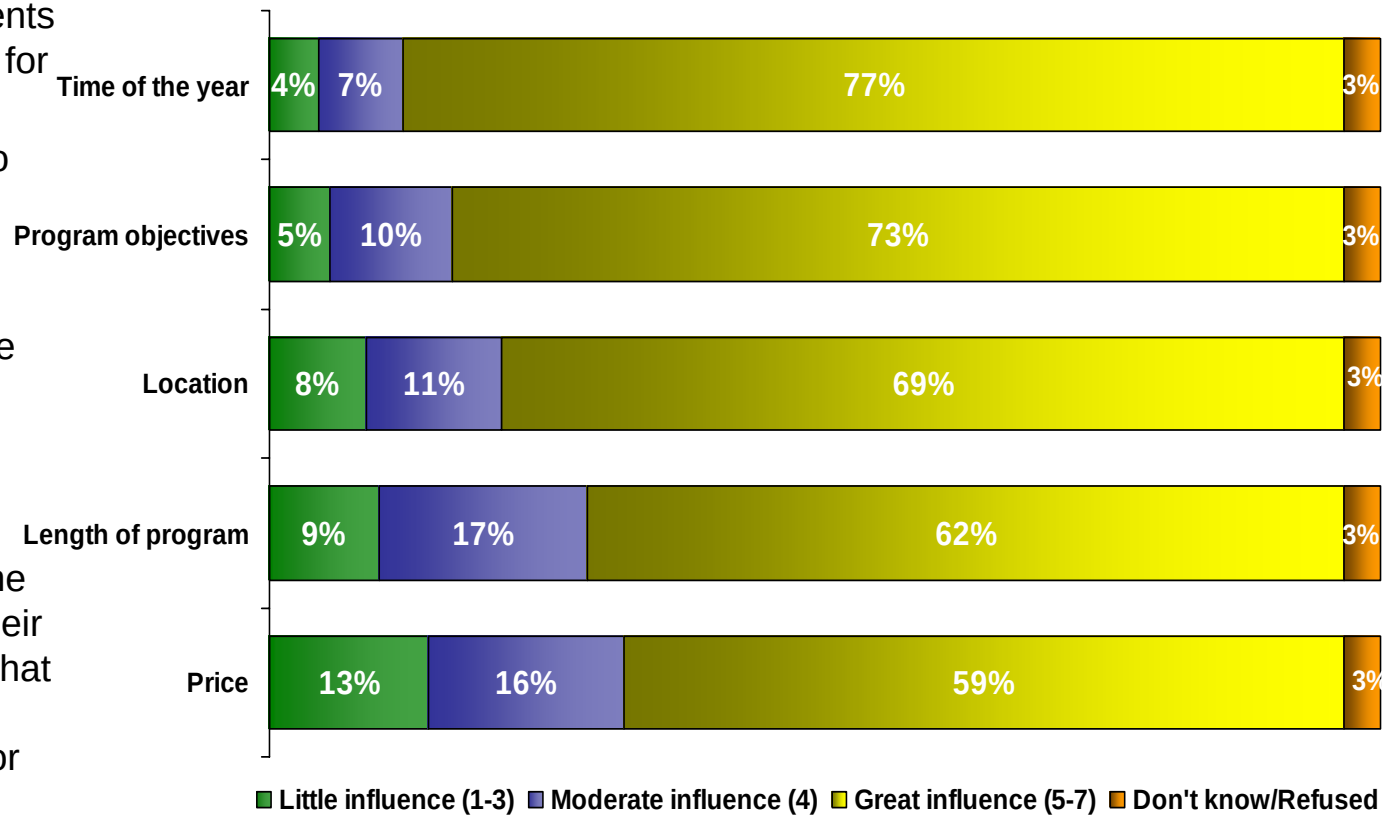
Factors Influencing Registration in a Training Program: Employees (1)

How much do the following factors influence you to register for a training program for your employees? Please use a 7-point scale .

- The time of the year has the most influence on respondents registering their employees for a training program.
- Program objectives are also the second most important factor, followed closely by location.
- Length of program and price are the fifth and sixth most influential factors.
- It is interesting to note that although respondents rated the same factors in the same order for themselves and their employees, they indicated that all of these factors, except price, had more influence for them than their employees.



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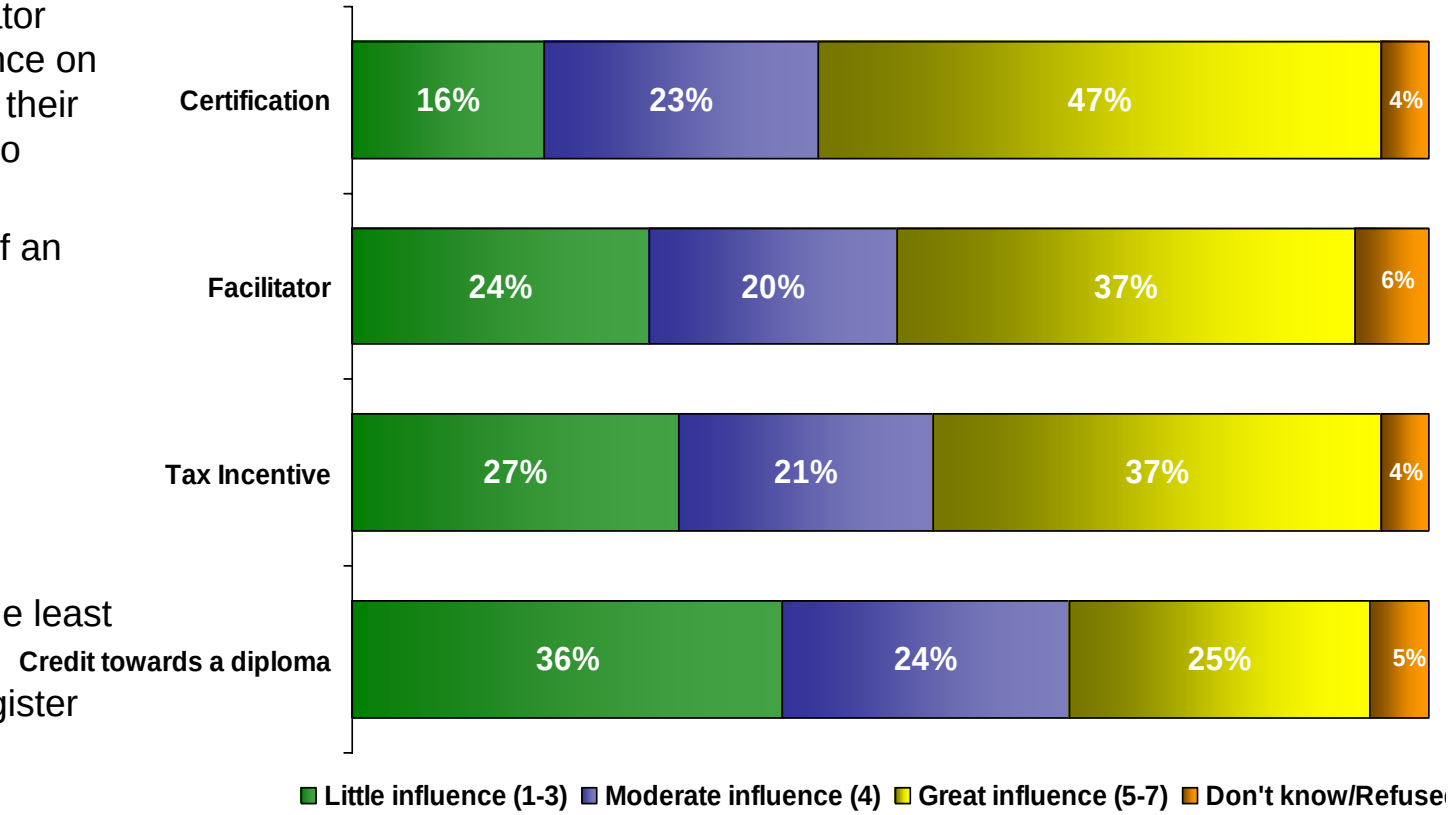
Factors Influencing Registration in a Training Program: Employees (2)

How much do the following factors influence you to register for a training program for your employees? Please use a 7-point scale .

- Certification and facilitator have more of an influence on owners/producers than their employees, according to respondents.
- Tax incentive is more of an issue for respondents regarding employees registering in training programs than for the owners/producers themselves.
- Again, credit towards a diploma is viewed as the least influence regarding employees ability to register for a training program.



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- Hiring Issues:
  - The areas respondents noted as having as much difficulty hiring appropriate employees as those who did not are supervisors/ technicians, harvest labour, graders, packager/packer and mechanics.
  - Welders were the most difficult to hire.
  - This indicates that skilled and unskilled labour are areas requiring recruitment and retention work. It also underlines the fact that some very specific skill areas are required such as graders.
- Hiring Methods:
  - By far, word of mouth and referrals from family and friends are the ways in which producers/owners recruit new employees. The efficacy of some government employment programs/centres for agricultural hires should potentially be examined to ensure they are recruiting the right types of people for the skill areas required.

- Branding Issues:
  - Owners/producers indicated that the main barrier to finding suitable employees for their farm was competition form other sector or industries. The also noted that the agricultural industry has a low image making it difficult for them to hire the employees they need. This low image encompassed long hours of work, low wages and the difficulty of the work associated with the agricultural sector.
  - The four top factors that are barriers to hiring employees in the agricultural sector are competition from other sectors or industries, followed by the long hours and the difficulty of the work . These three barriers have the most impact on hiring full-time and seasonal workers and to a lesser extent part-time and harvest workers.
  - An area that has repeated been described by producers as one requiring attention is changing the image of the agricultural sector so as to attract “new blood”. This sentiment is born out by respondents answers to this question.

- Marketing Messages:
  - This survey also provides some insight into what messages the sector might want to highlight when looking at attracting employees to work in agriculture.
  - By far, producers/owners indicated that the family friendly environment and salary or grade level were the two most important factors in attracting employees to work in agriculture. The sector should develop appropriate messages around these two themes and use these messages in marketing materials aimed at attracting employees to work in agriculture.

Conclusion

- Education and Training:
  - Owners/producers indicated that employees and supervisors must have high school education, with more than half of them indicating that college or CEGEP is required for those who work at the supervisory level. Almost 20% indicated that university education is required at the supervisory level.
  - Owners/producers said they provided more training for employees and themselves than at the supervisory level and rated the importance of training and education highly for all three levels.
  - Owners/producers prefer job site training as the most effective method for training their employees and their supervisors. If training is to be offered via the Internet, only 20% of owners/producers feel it is an effective method for their employees and 29% for their supervisors. That being said, since owners/producers indicated that supervisors require a higher level of education, the Internet may be a way of providing them with some higher level training that they may not be able to access any other way due to their busy work schedules and heavy work load.
  - Owners/operators prefer workshops and field days as methods to take training. Any courses developed for owners and operators should be delivered as a workshop or a field day.

- Barriers to Education and Training:
  - Owners/producers indicated that funding of training was the largest barrier to attracting employees to working in agriculture.
  - Improving information on training courses available and a system to identify training needs would also be welcome by more than half of the owners/producers surveyed.
  - Also, the training courses must be offered by excellent instructors who meet delivery and performance standards at a time that is convenient to those working in the agricultural sector. These courses must be tailored to meet the students' needs, at a location that is convenient and of a length that is sufficiently long to cover the material but not so long that it takes the students away from the farming operation for an extended period of time.

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