

JOBS AND GROWTH THROUGH THE CANADIAN AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD WORKFORCE ACTION PLAN

A Contribution to
2016 Pre-Budget Consultations

Presented to
House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

January 14, 2016



Presented by
**Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food
Labour Task Force**

Prepared by the
Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council
1410 Blair Place, Suite 404
Ottawa, ON, K1J 9B9

Sustainability and Growth of Canada's Agricultural Industry is at Risk

Introduction

The agriculture industry is full of high quality job opportunities and career options with competitive wages and benefits. The industry also offers many life style benefits and flexibility not available in other industries. Agricultural employers expend extensive efforts to recruit and retain Canadian workers, however the industry continues to identify pervasive and critical labour shortages as its biggest business risk. Federal action is required to sustain and grow a strong and stable Canadian agricultural industry. Securing a stable AgriWorkforce will allow the industry to remain globally competitive, take advantage of export opportunities provided by the Federal Government's free trade agenda, and ensure the security, safety and sustainability of food for all Canadians.

Canadian Workforce Action Plan for Agriculture & Agri-Food

Industry stakeholders have expressed significant concern about the immediate labour challenges facing Canadian agriculture and agri-food businesses and the risks to their viability and growth into the future. As a \$100 billion dollar industry that contributes over 6% to Canada's gross domestic product and employs 2.3 million Canadians, this issue is urgent, cross cutting and merits focused attention.

As a result, the Chairs of Agriculture and Argri-Food Canada's twelve Value Chain Roundtables that are representative of the industry launched a Labour Task Force mandated to research and prepare plans to mitigate risks to the agriculture and agri-food sector as a whole. The Labour Task Force conducted extensive consultations over the last three years with industry stakeholders resulting in the ***Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan***, (WAP) a roadmap designed to address the sector's critical and pervasive labour shortages.

The WAP initiative is led by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council and supported by over 60 partner organizations, industry stakeholders that are working collaboratively to secure a sustainable future workforce. The agriculture and agri-food industry is committed to this initiative for numerous reasons: current production targets are not being met, businesses are running inefficiently without full staff complements, exporting and expansion opportunities are not being met, businesses are experiencing significant loses in revenue, and the viability of numerous businesses are at risk.

The Labour Task Force recommends that industry and government partner to deliver on the **Workforce Action Plan**, collaborating to champion the effort and provide the requisite political and financial support for this important initiative that serves to secure the future stability and success of Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry.

Specifically, the plan includes the following main activities:

1. **Increase the Supply of Labour** - to meet immediate and future requirements for skilled and unskilled workers; and
2. **Improve the Knowledge and Skills of Workers** - to meet immediate and future labour requirements of the industry.

The following critical research, development activities and recommendations are defined in the **Workforce Action Plan**:

1. Increase the Supply of Labour to Meet Immediate and Future Requirements for Skilled and Unskilled Workers

The **Workforce Action Plan** recommends immediate action to improve access to domestic and foreign labour and to address longer term workforce supply requirements by increasing the size of the labour pool for the agriculture and agri-food industry.

1.1 Improve Access to International Agriculture Workers: Temporary and Seasonal Labour

The **Workforce Action Plan** specifies access improvements to temporary and seasonal workers for industry stakeholders to ensure labour needs are met in a standardized, efficient manner. This is important as international agriculture workers are a job multiplier, helping to secure existing Canadian jobs and keep businesses viable.

- *"For every worker employed in the beef sector another 4.2 workers are employed in Canada (counting direct and indirect impacts) and almost 7 workers are employed if all impacts are included.(Canadian Cattlemen, Ag Workforce Economic Impact)*
- *"It's estimated that at least two jobs for Canadians are created in the agrifood industry for every seasonal agricultural worker employed through SAWP at Ontario farms." (Morning Exchange, May 2015)*

1.2 Improve Access to Domestic Labour

The **Workforce Action Plan** specifies access improvements to Canadian workers to facilitate the employment of more Canadians to fill requirements for agriculture and agri-food positions now and into the future through the following:

a. Develop A Jobs Resource Centre for Industry

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes the development of a centralized mechanism to support career promotion for the agriculture and agri-food

industry as a whole. This includes the development of a searchable and robust **On-line Jobs Resource** which clarifies the vast number and types of jobs, job requirements and career pathway options within the agriculture and agri-food industry for job seekers, students, teachers, guidance counselors, and employees to improve awareness, interest, enrolment, recruitment, employment and retention (leveraging existing tools)

b. Develop Career Promotion Initiative and Tools for Industry

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes the development of a collective and integrated career promotion initiative including a centralized repository for ease of use and access to all materials to increase the future labour pool. This includes the development of industry wide career promotion tools directed toward job seekers, teachers, guidance counselors, and employees, for use by all stakeholders within the industry including employers, associations and educational institutions to improve awareness, interest, enrolment, recruitment, employment and retention for the industry (leveraging existing tools and marketing efforts of all within the sector)

2. Improve the Knowledge and Skills of Workers to Meet Immediate and Future Labour Requirements

The **Workforce Action Plan** recommends improvements to the knowledge and skills of Canadian agriculture workers to facilitate their retention and future employability as technological and innovation enhancements change job requirements for agriculture and agri-food positions through the following:

2.1 Develop A Learning Resource Centre

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes the development of a centralized mechanism to support skills and knowledge education/training for the agriculture and agri-food industry as a whole. This includes the development of a searchable **On-line Learning Resource** to improve access to agriculture and agri-food learning options in all their forms across Canada for students, job seekers, employees, employers and education administrators (leveraging existing tools).

2.2 Align Training with Industry Needs

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes improved alignment of training and education program offerings with industry needs through partnership and structured curriculum review to ensure Canadians gain the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in modern agriculture and agri-food workplaces and to enhance the enrolment in these programs and ultimately increase the pool of highly trained graduates.

2.3 Increase Investment in HR Mgmt and Training

The **Workforce Action Plan** includes improved Human Resource Management knowledge for industry employers, managers and supervisors with increased use of best practice management techniques and increased investment in training and skills

development to enhance recruitment, employment and retention of agriculture and agri-food workers in Canadian operations.

Continued & Enhanced Labour Market Intelligence

The identification of labour requirements and gaps through rigorous labour market intelligence research is essential to clarifying and addressing workforce shortages for the agriculture and agri-food industry. It is critical that ongoing, collaborative efforts by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC), the Labour Task Force, industry associations, provincial governments, educators and employers be supported and continue. Industry labour market intelligence is used to inform federal and provincial policy makers, support educators, assist employers, and clarify opportunities for job seekers. This work ensures jobs are accurately defined and communicated, knowledge and skill requirements are clarified and aligned with provided training, positions are filled with qualified resources, workforce supply is quantified and fully accessed, workforce demand is understood and fully supported, and future workforce requirements are clarified, planned for and accommodated to safeguard the viability and growth of the industry. Without detailed national, regional, and sector specific information on workforce requirements in terms of current and future supply, and demand, industry and government face significant constraints in their ability to make targeted responses to chronic labour shortages. Continued and enhanced Labour Market Intelligence activities would ensure industry and governments make informed and effective policy decisions for the agriculture and agri-food industry.

Pathway to Implementation

The Labour Task Force has defined the appropriate approach, collaborators, leaders and timeline to ensure the success of the **Workforce Action Plan**. Careful consideration of the immediacy of the requirements and the involved complexities have informed these recommendations regarding the pathway to implementation to ensure industry expertise, research, best practices and tools are fully leveraged. The pathway to implementation includes the following:

The Labour Task Force recommends that this initiative be conducted as a collaborative effort, with an approach that facilitates the full and continued participation of industry stakeholders across the agriculture and agri-food sector including associations, businesses, sector councils, education institutions and government ministries. Stakeholder participation and contributions to the work are mandatory to ensure the initiative remains focused on priority industry needs. This initiative will leverage existing research, materials, tools, expertise, and efforts of partnered stakeholders from all commodities within the agriculture and agri-food industry and all regions of Canada to reduce duplication of efforts and ensure collaborative messaging that promotes interest, loyalty and secures a qualified workforce for the success of the industry's future.

The Labour Task Force recognizes the scope and breadth of the plan and the need for dedicated resources to oversee all elements. It is recommended that this initiative be led by an organization with the mandate, experience and capacity to undertake this work. The role of the lead organization will be to manage the contributions of industry stakeholders and partners, conduct all research elements, oversee all development activities, gather the input and perspectives across the industry to support full validation of materials, support the finalization of all outputs to be meaningful and meet industry needs, disseminate results and ensure the overall success of the initiative.

The Labour Task Force recommends the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council function as the lead organization to deliver the plan leveraging their extensive experience in addressing these issues for the industry.

The Labour Task Force stresses that it is urgent and essential that this initiative begin immediately as the issues of labour shortage are pervasive, affecting current operational success and damaging to the future health of the industry and the economy.

Through committed partnerships and investments between industry and government in this collaborative approach, the agriculture and agri-food system can be supported with the requisite supply of workers that have the knowledge and skills to successfully meet employer needs today and into the future.

Conclusion

The Labour Task Force recommends that industry and government partner to deliver on the ***Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Workforce Action Plan***, collaborating to champion the effort and provide the requisite political and financial support for this important initiative that serves to secure the future stability and success of Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry.

The ***Workforce Action Plan*** has been developed based on extensive industry research and consultation which clarified the pervasive challenges of the labour shortage and highlighted the need to address two priority objectives:

- **Increase the supply of labour** - to meet immediate and future requirements for skilled and unskilled workers; and
- **Improve the knowledge and skills of workers** - to meet immediate and future labour requirements of the industry.

The activities of the plan address these two objectives, and through its implementation, improvements to recruitment, employment and retention for the industry can be realized in the short and longer term.

It is urgent that due focus and attention be given to these activities now in order for the industry to remain viable, competitive and a significant contributor to the economic health of the country.

Through committed partnerships and investments between industry and government in this collaborative approach, the agriculture and agri-food system can be supported with the requisite supply of workers that have the knowledge and skills to successfully meet employer needs today and allow for continued prosperity, competitive advantage and growth of the industry into the future.