



Agriculture 2025: *How the Sector's Labour Challenges Will Shape Its Future*



CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL
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Executive Summary

An important part in Canada's economy since the country's founding, agricultural production has continued to expand over the years. Canada is now a major producer of many agricultural products, and its exports relative to production are among the highest in the world. Over the next decade, this vital sector is poised for growth, as the global market for Canadian agricultural products rapidly expands.

However, Canada's agriculture sector faces many unique labour challenges that could jeopardize its growth potential and its contribution to the national economy. In 2014, 26,400 jobs went unfilled in Canada's agriculture sector, which cost the sector \$1.5 billion in lost revenues, or 2.7% of product sales. Labour shortages don't just impact the sector today, they also limit its future growth by preventing or delaying expansion plans.

Chronic labour shortages have led agricultural employers to rely increasingly on foreign workers; this labour source now accounts for 12% of the sector's workforce. While foreign labour has helped to lessen the impact of chronic labour shortages, it's only a partial solution, and one that could easily disappear due to policy changes or global events.

A Widening Labour Gap

While agricultural labour issues are significant today, they will intensify in the future.

The sector's labour requirements are expected to grow considerably over the next 10 years. By 2025, the agriculture sector will need significantly more workers in order to reach production targets. At the same time, the size of the domestic agricultural workforce will shrink, placing additional pressure on a sector already challenged to find enough workers.

As a result, the sector's labour gap will nearly double over the next 10 years, reaching 113,800 people by 2025. This is equivalent to 27% of the labour demand

for that year, or more than one in every four jobs in the sector. Ontario and Alberta will account for the majority of Canada's agricultural labour gap in 2025, but Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Quebec will also have sizeable labour gaps. Among commodities, horticulture-based commodities will continue to experience significant labour gaps. However, 'grain and oilseed'* and 'beef' producers will experience the largest increases in their labour gaps, and account for much of the increase in the labour gap for the sector as a whole.

The growth in the sector's demand for labour is driven primarily by production and productivity trends for different commodities in the sector. In particular, a strong demand for food products in emerging markets will drive above-average production for the export market. At the same time, the sector's productivity, which is the amount each worker can produce, will slow modestly compared to what occurred in the previous decade. As a result of a stronger demand for Canada's agricultural products and a slower growth in productivity, the agriculture sector is expected to need an additional 21,000 workers over the next decade.



* The Labour Market Information data classifies Canada's agriculture sector into 11 commodity areas: 1) 'apiculture'; 2) 'aquaculture'; 3) 'beef'; 4) 'dairy'; 5) 'field fruit and vegetable'; 6) 'grain and oilseed'; 7) 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture'; 8) 'poultry and egg'; 9) 'sheep and goat'; 10) 'swine'; and 11) 'tree fruit and vine'.



While the sector's labour demand is set to increase, the domestic agricultural labour pool is expected to shrink. By 2025, we expect that 34,000 fewer Canadian residents will be available to work in the sector. One key factor driving this decline in labour supply is that the sector has an older-than-average workforce, which will lead to an above-average retirement rate. At the same time, a declining number of young people entering the agricultural workforce and the fact that the sector attracts a below-average share of immigrants mean that the number of new entrants into the sector's workforce will shrink.

When the weak outlook for supply and the strong outlook for demand are combined, the sector's labour gap will widen considerably.

Unique Labour Challenges

In addition to a growing labour gap, agricultural employers face a unique combination of hiring challenges. First, agriculture has the largest seasonal fluctuations in employment of any major sector, and one of the longest work weeks, particularly during seasonal peaks. Second, many agricultural operations are located in rural areas where populations have shrunk. Third, many potential workers have negative perceptions about the sector, particularly around the physically demanding nature of the work. Finally, in a competitive commodity market, employers are largely unable to raise wages to attract workers and pass the higher costs on to their customers.

While many other sectors face one or two of these labour challenges, no other sector faces all of them at once, and their cumulative effect on Canada's agriculture sector has added to the difficulties agricultural employers face.

Different Commodities, Different Challenges

Although many of the key labour issues are shared by producers across the sector, each commodity group also faces its own unique set of challenges.

For example, supply-managed commodities such as 'dairy' and 'poultry and egg' face a skill shortage rather than a labour shortage. They are generally able to find sufficient people, but not necessarily with the right skill sets. For producers of horticultural products, maintaining access to foreign workers is critical, given that they now account for more than one-quarter of the segment's workforce.

Producers of red meat will shift to being growth leaders in the coming years to meet the rising foreign demand for their product. This will pose a challenge, given that over the past decade, a sizeable decline in the workforce for these producers has eroded the availability of the skilled workforce they need to help them reach their growth potential in the years to come.

Finally, 'grain and oilseed' producers and 'aquaculture' producers are both poised to benefit from growing global demand. However, these industries will be challenged to find the workers they need because of the rural location of their operations and their limited access to agriculture-specific employment programs that provide access to foreign workers.



Creative Solutions

Many producers have found innovative solutions to the challenges that they face in attracting and retaining workers.

For example, some producers coordinate with other offsetting seasonal employers, either within or outside of Canada, to address seasonality in demand and provide more attractive, stable terms of employment. Other producers bank hours, which means that they pay their workers based on a standard 40-hour week and disburse wages for overtime hours during slack periods. This gives workers with highly variable hours greater wage stability. Still other producers target employees who are only interested in working part of the year, such as those who are semi-retired.

Other innovative solutions include increased flexibility regarding hours and work conditions. Emphasizing nonmonetary benefits such as free meals, working with machinery or animals, and working outdoors can also attract people to work in agriculture. Some producers even go so far as to offer ownership stakes in their business as an incentive for their best employees.

Recruiting from nontraditional pools of labour, expanding job recruitment and advertising strategies

into nontraditional areas, and increasing the awareness of employment opportunities in the sector have also been suggested or used by some producers.

The Way Forward

While Canada's agricultural employers are actively trying new and creative ways to find and keep more of the workers they need to stay productive, these activities alone can't adequately address the sector's problems. At present, the sector is on an unsustainable path, with an ever-growing labour gap, a rising dependence on foreign workers to fill that gap, and a growing number of jobs going unfilled. To address the myriad challenges facing the agriculture and agri-food sector, government ministries, educational institutions, sector councils, and other stakeholders will need to work together on several key areas.

The issues identified by the Labour Market Information initiative through an analysis of sector data reinforce the findings of the Agricultural and Agri-Food Labour Task Force (LTF), which was established by the Agriculture and Agri-Food (AAFC) Value Chain Roundtables in 2012 to examine the sector's labour-management issues and labour shortages.





After conducting an extensive consultation over a 12-month period with industry stakeholders, including commodity value-chain roundtables, industry associations, educational institutions, and agriculture and agri-food businesses, the LTF published the Workforce Action Plan, a forward-looking road map for addressing the sector's critical labour shortages.

The solutions outlined in the Workforce Action Plan closely align with those identified by the Labour Market Information initiative:

- **Improve access to foreign workers.** Foreign workers are a vital source of labour for the sector, accounting for as much as three-quarters of the labour force in some agricultural industries during peak seasons. Continued and expanded access to foreign workers will help to supplement the dwindling domestic workforce and enable employers to meet the labour needs of highly seasonal operations.
- **Attract more domestic workers.** Develop an integrated and collective approach for the agriculture and agri-food sectors to promote the vast number and types of jobs available across Canada, clarify the job requirements and career pathways available, and give job seekers, students, teachers, guidance counselors, and employees an organized entry point to this information.

- **Increase awareness of agriculture careers.** Many misconceptions about jobs in the sector exist, and there is a general lack of awareness around the career possibilities. Developing a collective career-promotion tool for job seekers, teachers, guidance counselors, and employees can help to increase interest in the sector, enrolment in relevant training programs, and recruitment and retention efforts.
- **Enhance worker knowledge and skills.** Agricultural employers are challenged to find workers near their operations who have the right knowledge and skills and learning options for their workers that are easily accessed. Improving the availability and accessibility of learning options is also needed.
- **Align training resources with workplace needs.** The agriculture sector is evolving rapidly; to ensure today's students can meet tomorrow's needs, there needs to be closer alignment between training and educational program offerings and the current and future requirements of various agricultural industries to support on-the-job training requirements.
- **Improve human-resource management.** Making best-practice HR management tools and techniques available to agricultural employers, managers, and supervisors will give them the support, knowledge, and training they need to enhance their recruitment, employment, and retention efforts.

The implications are clear. There is broad agreement from every quarter that finding ways to increase both the domestic and foreign supply of labour, improve worker recruitment and retention, and build the skilled and knowledgeable workforce the sector needs will require a dedicated, coordinated effort.

However, if the sector is empowered to learn from the best practices of its own members and supported in collaborating with policy makers to implement solutions, it can strengthen its labour force, reach its growth potential, and continue to meet the rising need for food in Canada and the rest of the world.



Introduction

The agriculture and agri-food sector employs over two million Canadians and accounts for one in eight jobs in the Canadian economy, or 12% of total Canadian employment. The sector is diverse, encompassing primary agriculture, 'aquaculture,' food and beverage processing, input and service suppliers, food distribution, retail, wholesale, and foodservice industries. In every region, this sector is an important source of economic activity and contributes over \$108 billion, or 6.6%, of Canada's annual GDP.

However, Canada's agriculture sector faces significant labour challenges that put its viability and growth potential at risk.

Agriculture has played an important part in Canada's economy since the country's founding, and primary agriculture production continues to expand to this day. In 2015, Canada's agriculture sector achieved its second-highest level of production on record, exceeded only by the bumper crop of 2013. Today, Canada's agriculture sector plays a significant role in feeding both Canadians and the world; it is a major global producer of many agricultural products, and its exports relative to production are among the highest in the world.¹

Every province in the country makes a unique contribution to the success of the country's agriculture sector. Horticultural products are most prominent in British Columbia, Southern Ontario, and Atlantic Canada, while red meat and grains dominate production in the Prairies and 'dairy' is the largest agricultural product in Quebec. Together, these regional characteristics are a critical ingredient in supporting the diversity and long-term growth of the sector.

During the sector's long history, it has undergone major changes, including significant operational consolidation over the past decade, resulting in far fewer but much larger farms. The product mix for the agriculture sector has also changed significantly

as farm operators respond to changing market conditions and leverage technology to maximize the value of Canada's arable land. Finally, the sector has experienced a rapid increase in productivity in recent years, with farm operators producing far more today with fewer workers and less land.

The people who work in agriculture are both critical to its success and part of the transformation that the sector is undergoing. For example, consolidation has increased the need for management skills among operators who must transition from being farmers to employers, and strong productivity gains have reduced the need for some types of workers while changing the required skills for many of the jobs that remain.

Against this backdrop of rapid change, Canada's agriculture sector faces a growing labour crisis. The sector's job-vacancy rate is the highest of any major sector in the Canadian economy, and is typically two to three times as high as the average for all sectors.²

Already, labour shortages have led the sector to steadily increase its reliance on foreign workers, who now account for more than one in ten people in the sector's workforce. While this still leaves domestic workers as the vast majority of the agricultural workforce (88%), it makes the sector increasingly vulnerable to policy changes or other unpredictable factors that could significantly reduce access to foreign labour.



¹ Kristelle Audet, *Liberalization's Last Frontier: Canada's Food Trade* (Ottawa 2013).

² See CANSIM table 285-0002.





Despite increased reliance on foreign labour sources, Canada's agriculture sector was unable to fill 26,400 jobs, a shortfall that cost it \$1.5 billion in lost sales.

In the coming years, the gap between the sector's labour requirements and the available pool of domestic labour is expected to widen considerably, a trend that would place more agricultural businesses at risk and seriously impede the sector's growth potential.

The research presented in this report is intended to identify the unique labour challenges affecting the agriculture sector today and in the future. It is based on a three-year research project conducted



by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, which examined the labour market situation in Canada's agriculture sector. The study was undertaken in response to the considerable evidence of labour shortages in the sector. The objectives of the research included assessing the current labour market, producing projections of labour supply and demand for the agriculture sector, and making recommendations for potential solutions to labour shortages.

To capture an accurate picture of the sector today and as it is likely to look in the future, we constructed an economic model that forecasts agricultural labour demand and supply by industry, by province, and by occupation. We also surveyed and interviewed employers, workers, and stakeholders in the sector. The results of this research were validated through a series of focus groups and webinars held in different regions across the country, covering different commodities within agriculture. In total, more than 1,400 sector stakeholders participated in the research activities that support these findings.

In addition to this national report, there are 21 others that present the findings for individual commodities and provinces. All of these reports are available from the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council at www.AgrilMI.ca.

It is important to note that the results of this research focus on the primary agriculture sector only. As defined by Statistics Canada's industry definitions, we include all crop and animal producers (including 'aquaculture' and 'apiculture') and support services for agriculture.³ These industries include some nonfood commodities, such as sod and ornamentals among crops and horses and fur producers among animal producers. Although this study does not include food processing, there is a strong link between food processors and the primary agriculture sector. As such, agriculture's labour challenges have implications for the entire agriculture and agri-food supply chain.

³ As defined, the sector includes North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) codes 111 (crop production), 112 (animal production), 1151 (support activities for crop production), and 1152 (support activities for animal production).



Factors Driving Labour Shortages

Labour shortages are a significant and long-standing problem in agriculture. For example, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council found in previous research that the sector's vacancy rate was 9% in 2009⁴ and 10% in 2011.⁵ In the most recent survey, conducted as part of this project, we found that there were an estimated 26,400 unfilled vacancies in Canada's agriculture sector in 2014. This was equivalent to 7% of the sector's workforce at its seasonal peak that year, meaning that 7% of all positions were unfilled at the time of year when the highest number of people worked on farms.

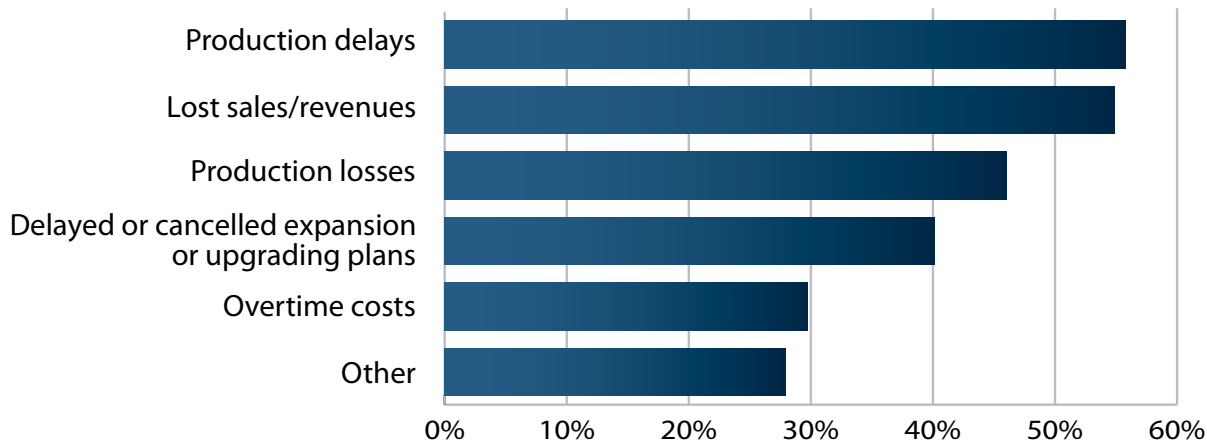


These vacancies have real consequences for the sector. Based on our survey results, the three key results of unfilled vacancies are production delays, lost production and/or sales, and delays or cancellations of expansion plans (see Chart 1). Thus, labour shortages have financial implications for the industry, and they will continue to do so in the future. We estimate that the sector's revenues were reduced by \$1.5 billion, or 2.7%, in 2014 as a result of labour shortages.

Moreover, unfilled vacancies tell only part of the story when it comes to the sector's labour gap, which is defined as the difference between how many workers employers would like to hire (labour demand), and how many domestic workers are available to work (labour supply). We estimate that in 2014, the labour gap in Canada's agriculture

Chart 1: Unfilled Vacancies Cost the Industry Now and in the Future

Share of respondents who indicated a labour shortage



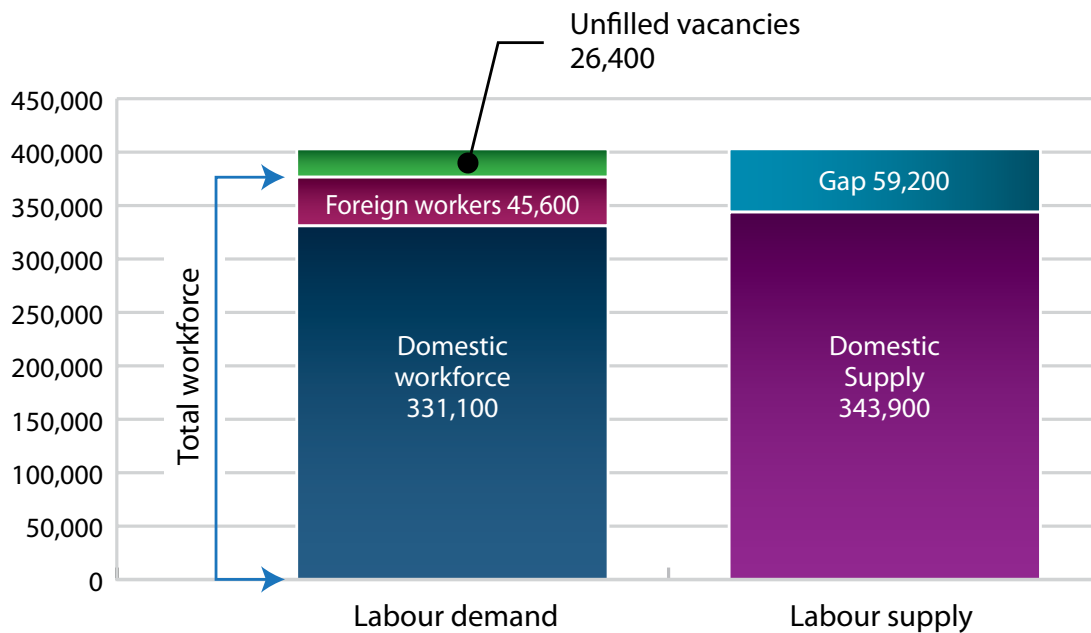
Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

⁴ Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, Labour Market Information on Recruitment and Retention in Primary Agriculture (Ottawa 2009).

⁵ Labour Market Information: Focus on Small Farms in Canada 2011 (Ottawa 2011).

Chart 2: Breakdown of Canada's Agricultural Workforce

Agricultural workforce by category



Sources: Statistics Canada; Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

sector was 59,200 workers, equivalent to 14.7% of the labour demand (see Chart 2). Although agricultural employers prefer to hire Canadians first and have a stable Canadian workforce, foreign workers have helped to fill a portion of this gap in a number of agricultural industries. However, not every job is suitable for foreign workers, and some agricultural industries have very limited access to this labour source. A reliance on foreign labour can also leave the sector vulnerable to policy changes and other factors beyond its control.

We estimated the labour gap by first determining labour demand. Labour demand includes the domestic workforce (including owner/operators, paid workers, and unpaid workers) at its seasonal peak, foreign workers, and unfilled vacancies. In 2014, this stood at 403,100 people. We then subtracted domestic supply, which includes all Canadian

residents willing to work in agriculture, from the total labour demand in order to determine the labour gap. Since the labour supply was 343,900 people in 2014, the labour gap was 59,200 people.

The labour gap in agriculture is unusually large because it is driven by a variety of challenging factors. These include seasonality, the rural locations of many operations, competition with other sectors, and the physicality of the work. Many other economic sectors may face one or even two of these challenges, but no other sector faces all of them combined.

The rest of this chapter discusses these challenges in more detail.



Seasonality

The survey conducted as part of this research asked a number of questions about the factors that affect worker recruitment and retention in the agriculture sector. In the surveys, the number one factor that employers identified as being a retention challenge is variability of hours (see Chart 3). In particular, employers have two concerns when it comes to variability in hours. The first is related to seasonality, which 42% of employers identified as being a key challenge, and the second is related to the issue of excessive working hours at peak times, identified by 24% of employers.

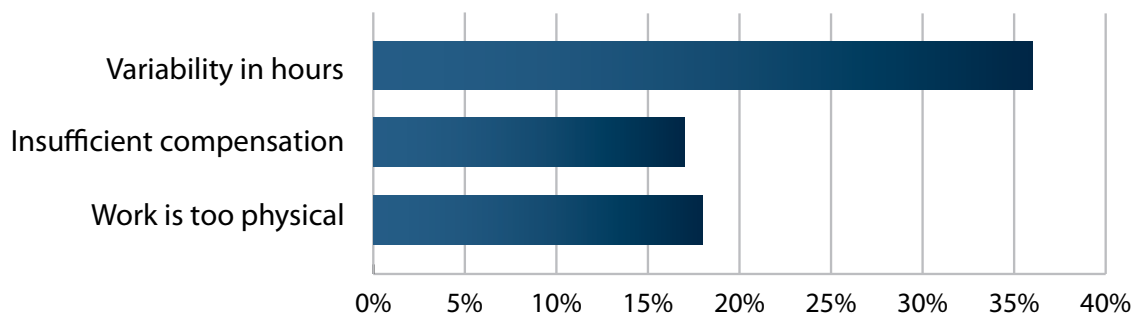
The severity of these challenges is apparent when we examine the sector's labour data. For example, if we add seasonal foreign workers to the reported employment data for agriculture, we find that the sector's employment at its seasonal peak is over 30% higher than the seasonal low. In comparison, the difference between the seasonal peaks and lows in employment across all sectors is only 4%.⁶ Education, with its summer breaks, and construction are the only two economic sectors that come close to agriculture in terms of the seasonal fluctuations in employment.

Agriculture also stands out from other sectors in terms of the number of hours worked. On average, people who were employed in the sector worked 44.8 hours per week in 2015⁷. This was well above the average of 35.9 hours for all sectors, and was the highest among all of the major sectors in the economy. Moreover, the number of hours worked per week is highest in the spring planting and late summer harvesting seasons, and it is much lower during the winter months. This emphasizes that the challenges of long hours and seasonal variations in workloads are interrelated.

However, it is important to note that not all commodities face these challenges in equal measure. For example, seasonality is most acute in the horticulture commodities, where seasonal peak employment can be more than three times as high as that of seasonal lows. Seasonality is less of an issue for employers raising animals. For example, 'dairy' producers experience very limited seasonality, but they are more likely than any other type of farm operator to report that long hours are a challenge. This is driven by the fact that caring for and milking the animals generally requires a presence on the farm 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and particularly in smaller operations, providing this level of care can be a challenge.

Chart 3: Key Challenges to Retaining Workers

Share of responses



Based on a survey of 728 respondents

Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey.

⁶ See CANSIM table 282-0088

⁷ See CANSIM table 282-0019

Rural Locations

While variability in hours and wages are two key factors affecting retention in the sector, there are also a number of key issues that impact the ability of the sector to recruit workers.

According to our employer survey, the top three recruitment challenges include finding workers with sufficient skills and experience, the rural location of the sector's operations, and negative perceptions about the sector (see Chart 4). Although finding the right workers is the top challenge for recruiting at agricultural operations, this is not necessarily unique to the sector (see Chapter 5). Rural locations and negative perceptions, on the other hand, are more specific to agriculture.

Since 1991, Canada's population has risen by more than 8 million people. However, all of that growth has occurred in urban areas. Over the same period, the population of rural Canada has been essentially unchanged, at about 6.3 million.⁸ One reason for the lack of population growth in rural areas is that immigrants have been a major source of population growth in Canada for many years, and

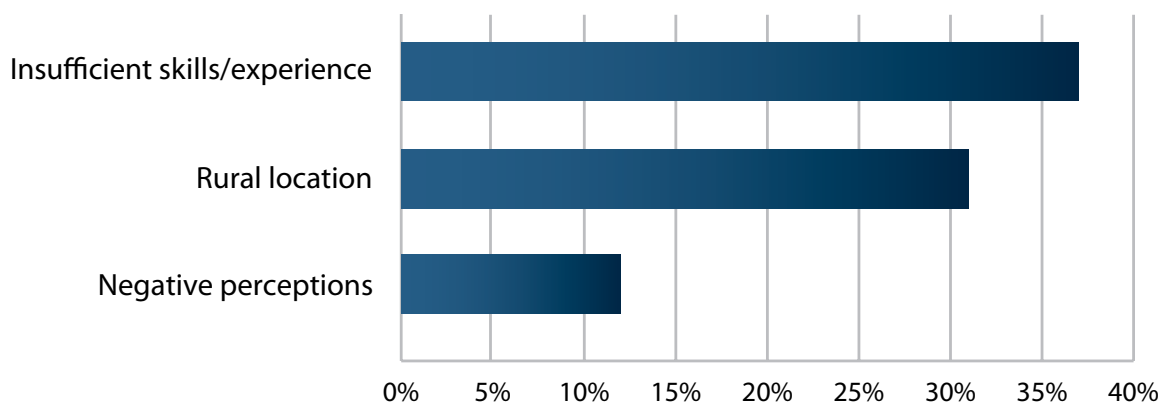
few immigrants settle in rural areas. Another is that young adults tend to move to urban areas for school and work opportunities, and many do not return.

The result of these trends is apparent in the detailed survey results, where the rural location of many agricultural operations poses three key challenges when it comes to recruiting. First, people who live in urban areas are often not willing or able to travel to the rural locations of agricultural operations. Second, people in urban areas are less familiar with agriculture and therefore don't consider a career in the sector. And third, respondents suggested that young people who have left rural areas lead to a shrinking number of workers available to work in agriculture. All three of these factors were identified as recruitment challenges by about one-quarter of respondents.

However, the rural nature of agriculture is less of a concern in some regions and commodities than in others. In particular, it was much more likely to be cited as a concern in the Prairies and in Atlantic Canada, while it was less of a concern in British Columbia, Ontario, or Quebec.

Chart 4: Key Challenges of Recruiting Workers

Share of responses



Based on a survey of 771 respondents

Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey.

⁸ Statistics Canada, Population, Urban and Rural, Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo62a-eng.htm>.



Another potential factor is the commodity mix in the different provinces. Some commodities, such as grain, are land intensive and are thus less able to operate close to cities. Conversely, many types of horticulture products are less land intensive and thus can be more easily located near areas with larger populations. As a result, regions that are grain intensive, such as the Prairies, are more likely to report challenges with recruiting that are related to the rural nature of agriculture.

Competition for Workers

Beyond variability in hours, competition for workers with other industries was another key retention challenge that employers identified in our survey. This competition has led to a wage gap that exists between agriculture and sectors such as oil and gas, and this makes it difficult for agricultural employers to retain their employees. It is true that the agriculture sector's wages are well below the Canadian average, with weekly earnings in agriculture averaging \$684 in 2015, versus \$923 for all sectors.⁹ However, the average wage in agriculture ranges widely, from minimum wage to well over \$20 an hour for an entry-level worker.

There are a few things to keep in mind when discussing wages in agriculture. First, the gap between agricultural wages and those in other sectors has gradually narrowed over time. In 2000, average weekly earnings in agriculture were only two-thirds of the average for all sectors. By 2015, that ratio had risen to nearly three-quarters (74%) of the average. Thus, agricultural wages have been experiencing above-average growth over this period and have become more attractive relative to many other sectors. This increase in the relative wage for the sector is true in most provinces, with Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador, which have the strongest links to oil production, being the major exceptions.



Second, the median wage is increasing faster than the average wage, which suggests that the labour market is becoming more balanced between high-paying and low-paying jobs in agriculture. In other words, the growth in wages is more pronounced for lower-end farm jobs than for the higher end.

In addition, there are career paths within the sector that can lead to above-average rates of pay. For example, among occupations that are predominately found in agriculture, several, including agricultural specialists and managers in horticulture and 'aquaculture,' earn above-average wages (see Chart 5). The industry also employs a significant number of people in other occupations with above-average pay, such as truck drivers and heavy-machinery mechanics. Other examples of higher wages include harvesting, landscaping, and natural-resource labourer occupations, which are paid between \$17.30 and \$25.20 an hour, depending on the province in which the job is located.

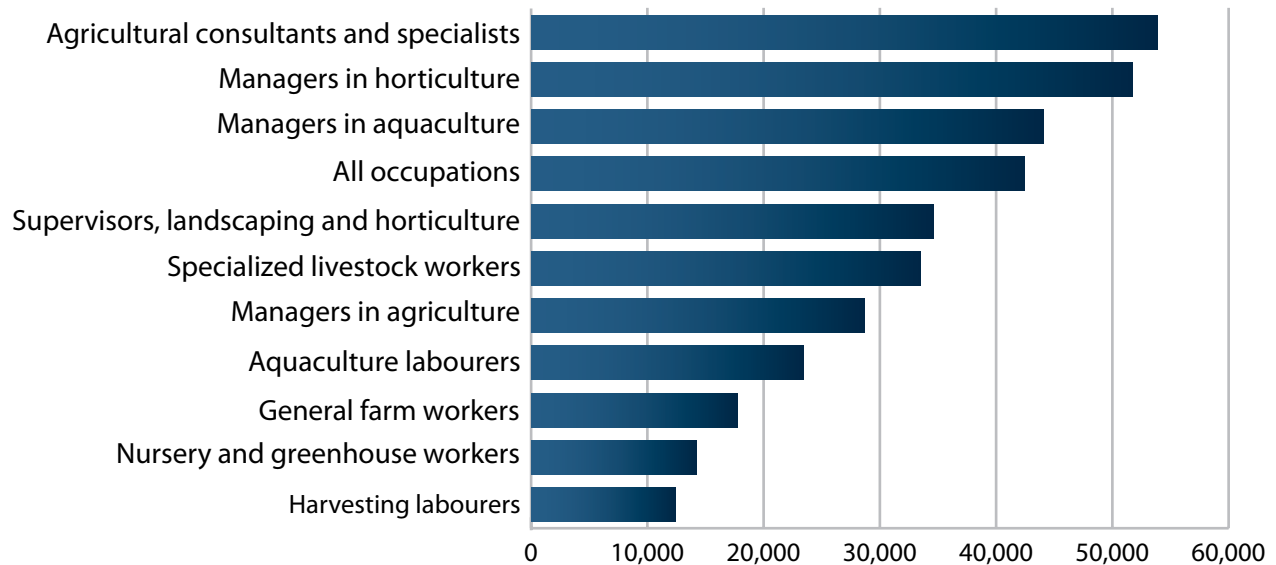
Finally, the inability of farm operators to pass higher costs on to their customers limits the ability of the sector to raise wages. Many of the products grown by the sector are commodities, meaning that producers have only a limited ability to distinguish their products from others. As a result, prices for

⁹ See CANSIM table 282-0072.



Chart 5: Not All Jobs in Agriculture Pay Below-Average Wages

Average annual wages and salaries for select occupations, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada.

their products are generally set in regional or global markets. Moreover, producers are generally too small to exert much influence on market prices. As such, raising wages or expenses in an environment where prices cannot rise commensurately will erode operator profits, and may even put them out of business.

Work Environment

The perception that the work is too physical in nature is the other major challenge identified by employers, with about 30% of respondents suggesting that it was a barrier to recruitment. For job-seekers, 41% of respondents suggested that the work being too physical is a major retention challenge.

In addition, when employers were asked if they would recommend working in the sector, 8.5% said they would do so to little or no extent. If employers are unwilling to recommend working in the sector, it does not bode well for their ability to recruit new workers.

It is also important to note that perceptions about the sector do vary, depending on a variety of factors. For example, among commodities, horticulture and 'swine' were much more likely to report negative perceptions as a barrier, while grain, 'aquaculture,' and 'beef' producers were much less likely to do so. This may be tied to perceptions about the type of work or the work environment in the different types of operations. For example, in the focus groups associated with this project, employers reported that job candidates were often interested in working with animals or machinery, but could be discouraged by what they might consider menial work, such as picking, or a work environment with undesirable characteristics, such as bad odours.

In addition, employers whose operations were in rural areas were less likely to report negative perceptions of the sector versus those located close to urban areas. This highlights the fact that urban areas present something of a conundrum for the sector. Urban centres clearly represent a large pool of workers from which agricultural employers



can potentially hire. This is apparent in the fact that farms close to urban areas were less likely to report labour shortages and were better able to find employees with the right skills. However, urban dwellers are less likely to be knowledgeable about the work opportunities in agriculture and more likely to view the sector negatively. If producers are able to network effectively in urban areas to overcome these barriers, urban areas could become an important source of labour.

One other interesting result from the employee survey shed light on worker perceptions about the sector. Workers generally reported being happy to work in the sector, and 91% expected to work for two or more years in the sector. In addition, 75% of workers would recommend working in the sector to some or a great extent.

For comparison purposes, we can contrast this finding with the results from standard employee engagement surveys. For example, Aon Hewitt reported that only 66% of employees were engaged, or committed to their jobs, in North America in 2014.¹⁰ This suggests that workers in agriculture are highly engaged and enjoy their work. Indeed, when asked why they work in the sector, 71% reported that they enjoy it, with other reasons including enjoying working with family, working outdoors, or feeding people.

Yet the sector experiences a high turnover rate. For example, we estimate that the voluntary turnover rate¹¹ was 18.3% and the involuntary rate was 7% for the sector in 2014, based on the employer survey results. Even among year-round workers, the voluntary turnover rate was 14.3%. In comparison, the average voluntary turnover rate for all sectors in Canada was 7.3%.¹² Only the retail sector had a higher voluntary turnover rate than agriculture.

These results suggest that the agriculture sector has essentially two types of workers. The first is a core of engaged workers who enjoy what they do and



tend to stay in the sector. The second comprises new workers who try working in agriculture but leave after a short period. Indeed, in our focus groups and interviews, farm operators mentioned many anecdotes about people lasting less than a week in some positions. It is the second group that drives the sector's high turnover rates. The key challenge for employers in this environment is to identify, hire, and develop workers who will stay in the first group.

¹⁰ Aon Hewitt, 2015 Trends in Global Employee Engagement (Chicago 2015).

¹¹ Voluntary turnover is due to an employee-initiated departure, while involuntary turnover is initiated by the employer.

¹² Nicole Stewart and Elyse Lamontagne, Compensation Planning Outlook 2014 (Ottawa 2013).



Agriculture's Widening Labour Gap

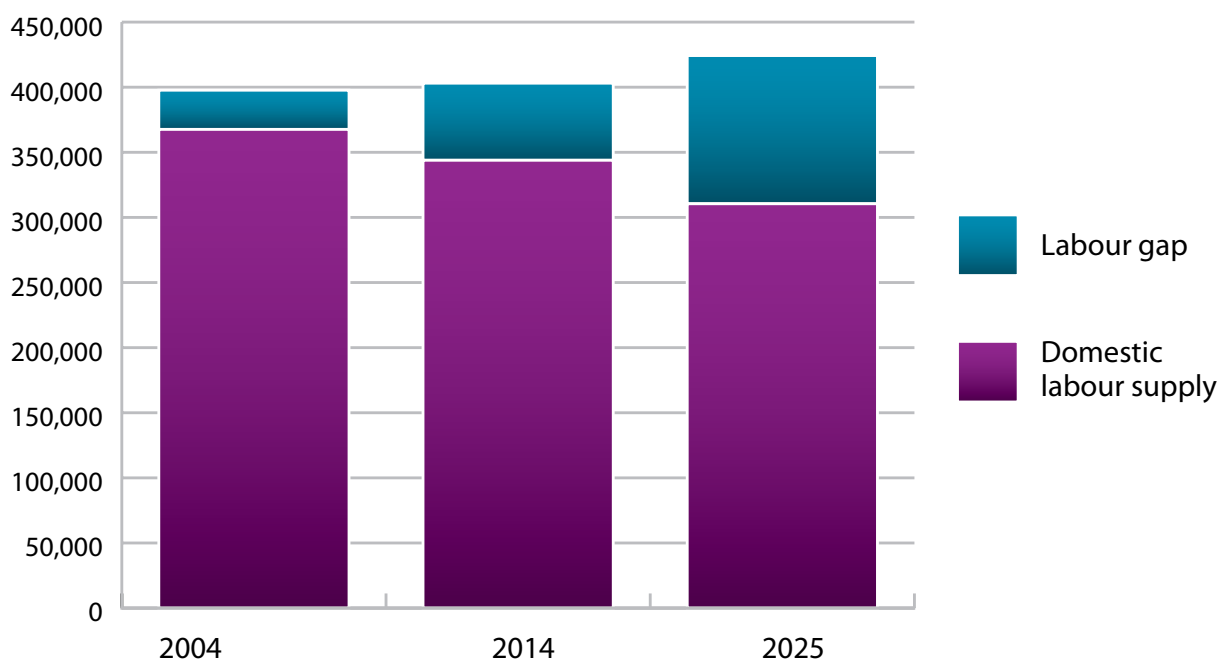
The previous chapter discussed the size of the current labour gap in the agriculture sector and some of the key factors that contribute to it. Another key issue is how the size of that gap has changed over time. Historically, the sector's labour gap has been steadily rising. In fact, between 2004 and 2014, we estimate that the labour gap has essentially doubled in size, rising from 30,100 to 59,200 people.

That trend is expected to continue in the years to come. By 2025, the sector's labour gap is expected to nearly double again, reaching 113,800 people (see Chart 6). This will be equivalent to 27% of the labour demand, or more than one in every four jobs in the sector that year. To date, the sector has been able to fill about three-quarters of its labour gap with foreign workers, but it is unclear whether employers can double or even triple the number of foreign workers

coming into the sector in the years to come. As such, if the labour gap is left unfilled, it will hamper the sector's ability to continue growing.

The sector's labour gap is not evenly distributed across provinces or commodities today, and that will continue to be the case in the years to come. Ontario and Alberta will account for the majority of Canada's agricultural labour gap in 2025, with Ontario alone accounting for just under half of the total (see Chart 7). Other provinces with sizeable labour gaps will include Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Quebec. However, relative to the size of the labour demand, the labour gap will be significant in all of the provinces, with the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Chart 6: The Sector's Labour Gap Is Expected to Double over the Forecast Period
Number of workers

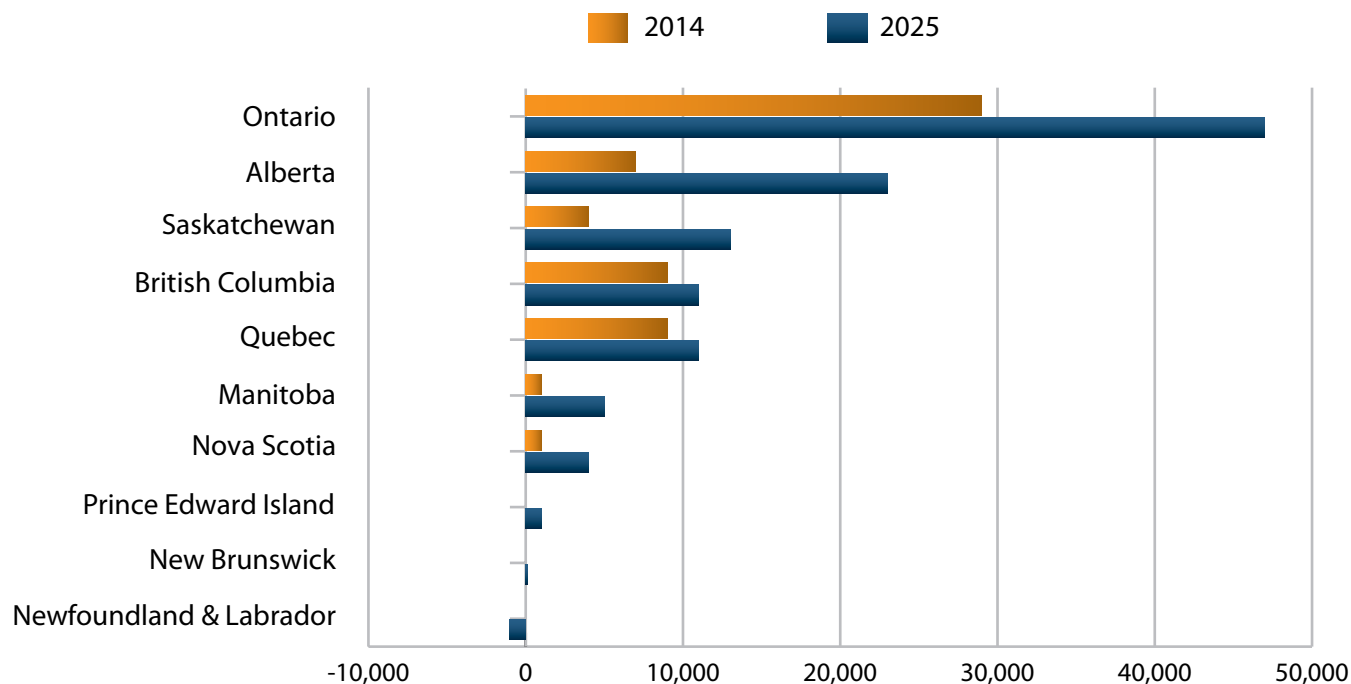


Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.



Chart 7: Ontario and Alberta Will Account for the Majority of Canada's Agricultural Labour Gap

Labour gap by province



Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

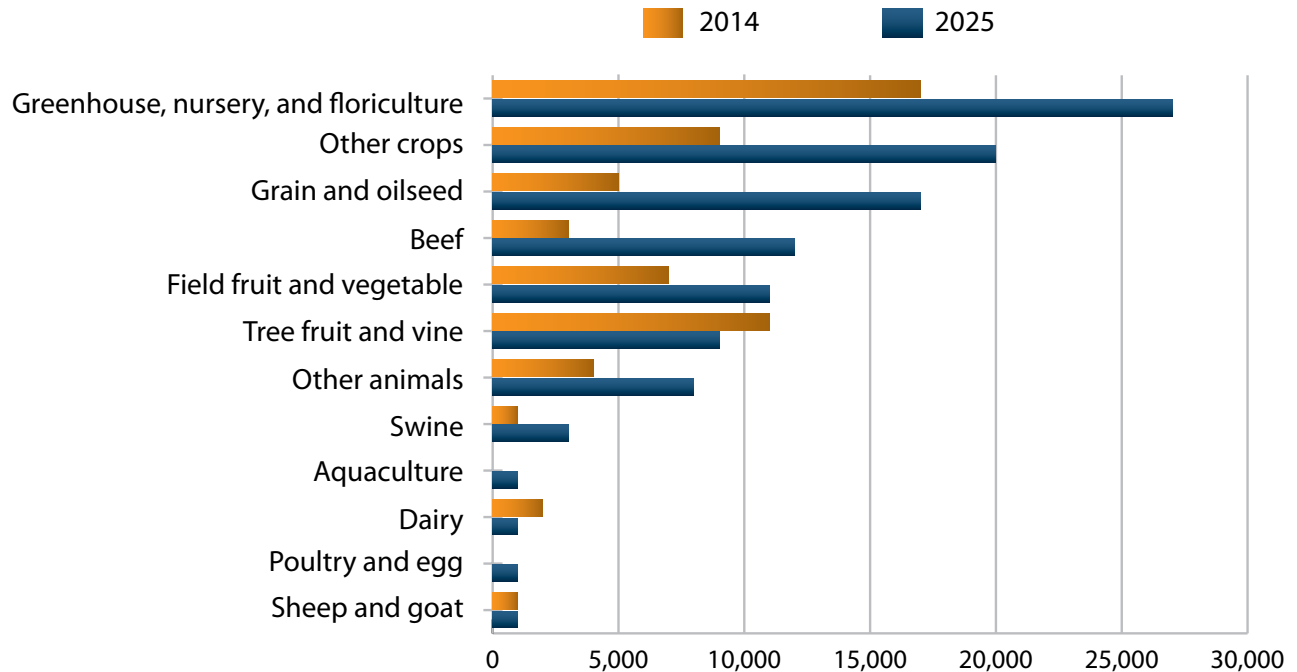
Among commodities, the 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture' industry will continue to have the largest labour gap. With an expected gap of 27,000 workers in 2025, this commodity group will account for nearly one-quarter of the sector's labour gap (see Chart 8). Other horticultural commodities, which include many mixed farms in the 'other crops' group, will also continue to experience significant labour gaps. However, 'grain and oilseed' producers and 'beef' producers will experience the largest increases in their labour gaps and account for much of the increase in the labour gap for the sector as a whole. The other commodity groups will generally experience much smaller labour gaps, although these gaps are still sizeable relative to labour demand. The 'poultry and egg' industry and the 'dairy' industry will have the most balanced labour markets over the forecast period.

There are two key factors that will drive the size of the sector's labour gap in the coming years. The first is the growth in labour demand, which is driven primarily by the production and productivity growth for different commodities in the sector. The second is the supply of Canadian workers willing to work in the agriculture sector. The rest of this chapter discusses the key trends driving the changes in labour demand and supply.



Chart 8: The 'Greenhouse, Nursery, and Floriculture' Industry Will Continue to Have the Largest Labour Gap

Labour gap by commodity



Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

Trends Impacting Labour Demand

Labour demand in the agriculture sector has changed little over the past 10 years, but we expect a moderate increase in demand in the next decade. The rising demand for workers is driven by the potential of the sector to increase production in response to rising market demand for its products. Notably, rising global demand for food, especially for animal protein, will be a key driver in the forecast. In addition, the sector's productivity, which has enjoyed strong growth historically, is expected to see more moderate growth in the future (see Chart 9). Overall, the demand for workers within Canada's agriculture sector is expected to grow by an average of 0.5% per year, from 403,000 in 2014 to 424,000 in 2025.

Export-Oriented Commodities Will See Strong Growth

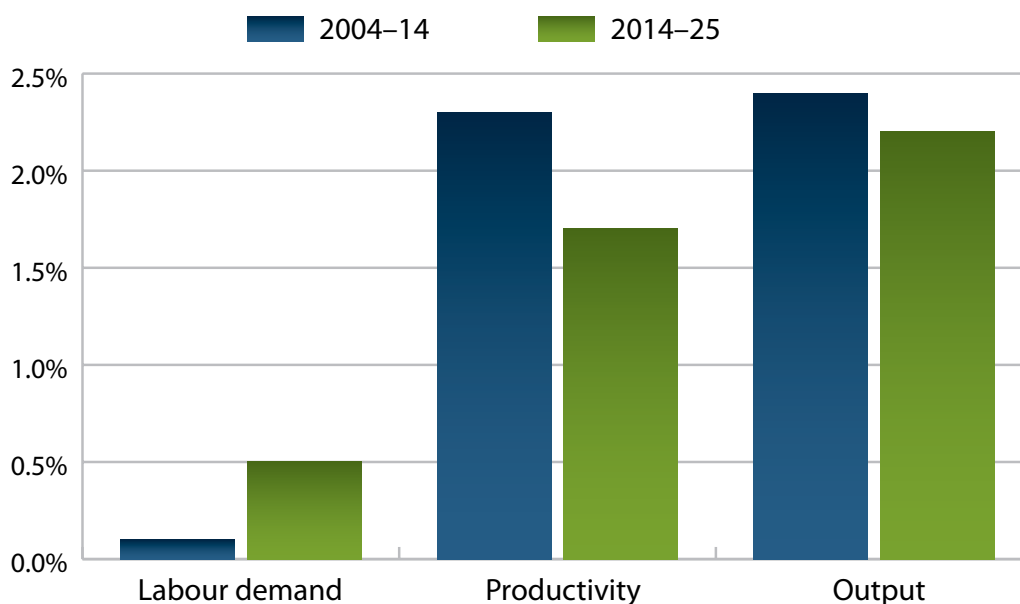
The demand outlook for agricultural products is an important factor in determining the sector's future production levels. Within North America, markets are already mature and well served. As a result, consumption growth is largely limited to population increases, which are very modest. The other major factor that influences the pace of growth in domestic consumption is changes in consumer tastes. For example, Canadians have been eating less red meat, but consuming more fish and chicken in recent years.

In contrast, developing economies generally have stronger population growth as well as populations that are becoming richer and better able to purchase



Chart 9: Positive Production Outlook and Slowing Productivity Growth Will Drive Gains in Labour Demand

Average annual growth



Source: The Conference Board of Canada; Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

food in greater quantities and varieties. Accordingly, industries that export a significant share of their production are expected to experience above-average production growth. Agri-food products with significant exports from Canada include 'grain and oilseed', 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture', red meat, and seafood products. As a result, these commodities are expected to experience the strongest production growth over the forecast period (see Chart 10). In contrast, the growth potential for industries that are heavily dependent on the domestic market, such as the 'dairy' industry, will be closely tied to population growth.

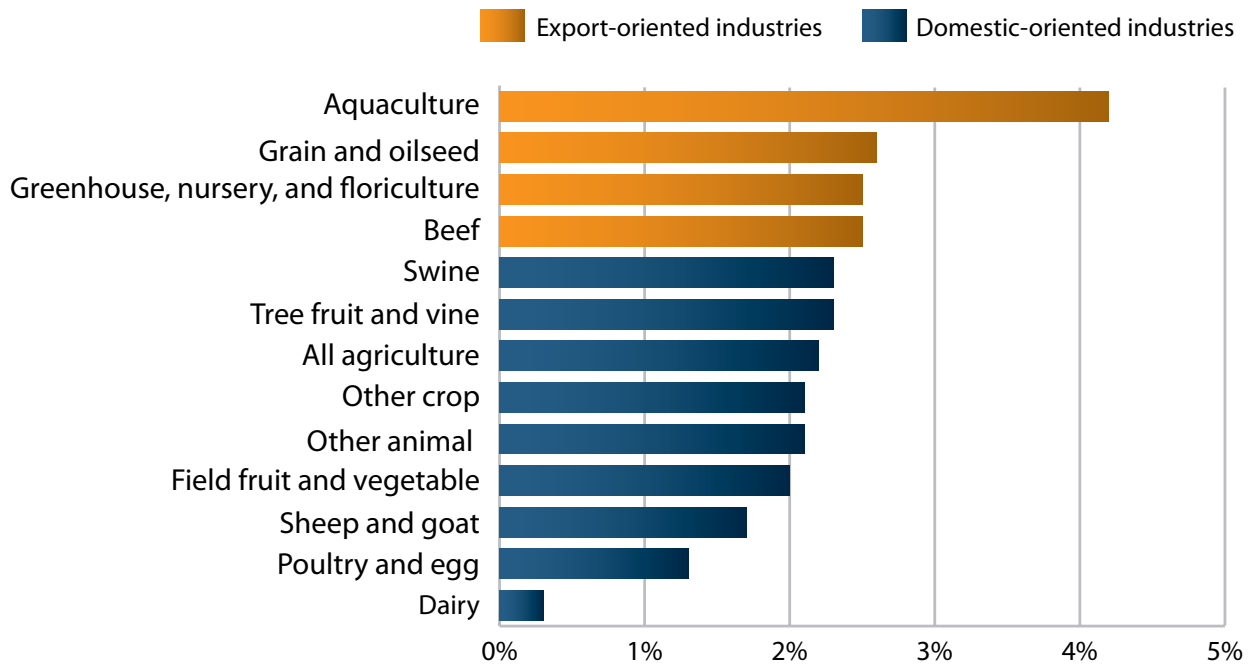
Two key factors will support Canadian exports of food products in the years to come. The first is a weaker Canadian dollar. The new normal for many commodity prices, including the key mineral and energy products that Canada exports, is at a level much lower than it was a few years ago. After

spending a prolonged period near parity with the U.S. dollar, the Canadian dollar will be consistently weaker over the forecast period, averaging USD \$0.83 in the medium-to-long term. The lower Canadian exchange rate makes Canadian exporters more cost-competitive, which should support exports and limit imports. In addition, a weaker Canadian dollar leads to higher effective prices for many products whose benchmarks are set in U.S. dollars, supporting revenues and profitability for Canadian producers.

The other major factor supporting exports is the recent signing of several free trade agreements, which should increase market access for Canadian agri-food operations in foreign markets. For example, under the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which is on track to be implemented in 2017, over 94% of the EU agricultural tariff lines will be duty free. While



Chart 10: Export-Oriented Industries Will Experience the Strongest Production Growth
Average annual growth in price-adjusted production, 2014–2025



Source: The Conference Board of Canada; Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

Canada’s agricultural trade with the European Union is currently limited, this free trade agreement will support a competitive advantage over producers from other countries that do not have a free trade agreement with the EU. The Trans-Pacific Partnership is another recently signed free trade agreement that should support access to markets, particularly those of Japan, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

Productivity Growth Will Slow in the Future

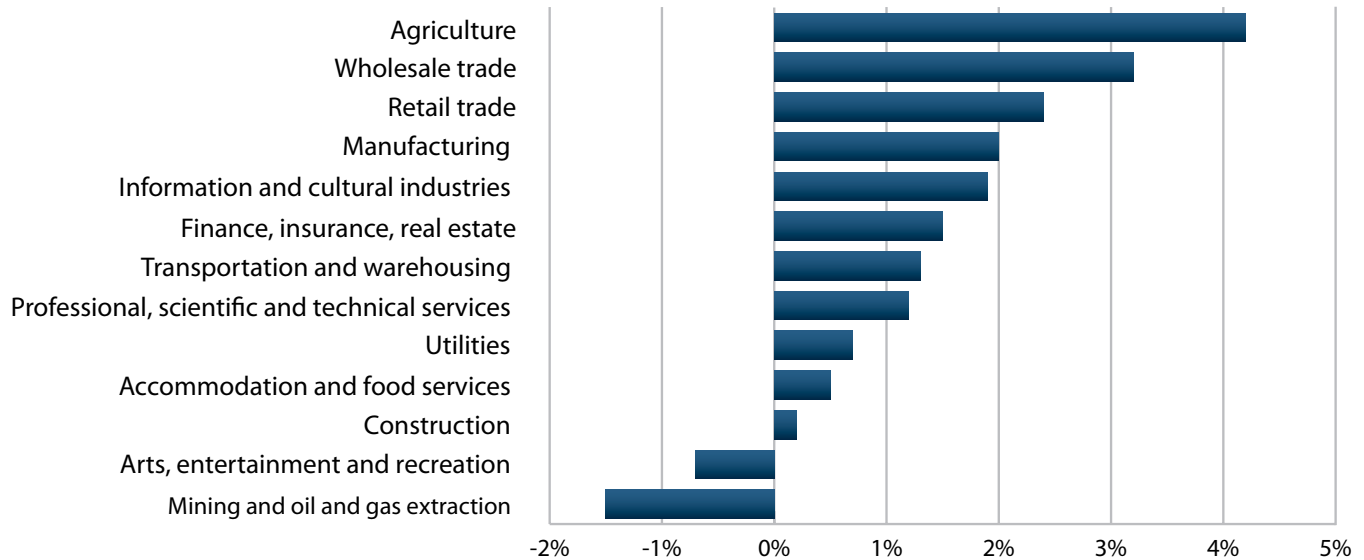
Strong productivity gains (measured by how much output each worker is able to produce) have been a key part of Canadian agriculture for many years. Thanks to mechanization, better seeds, improved fertilizers, and new farming techniques, farms have been able to produce more products with fewer workers. For example, in 1990, there were about

500,000 agriculture workers in Canada. In 2014, the workforce had shrunk to about 375,000 people, including foreign workers, which is a 25% decline. Over the same period, agricultural production grew by close to 60%. In fact, agriculture had the strongest productivity gains among all the major sectors in Canada over the past two decades (see Chart 11).

While we continue to expect strong improvements in agricultural productivity over the forecast period, the rate of production mechanization will decrease compared to previous years. This is because today’s farms are already much more capital intensive than they were 20 years ago. As a result, the potential gains from increasing mechanization have become increasingly more marginal.



Chart 11: Agriculture Enjoyed Exceptional Productivity Gains over the Last 20 Years
Average annual change in output per hour worked, 1994–2014



Sources: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

Consolidation Has Changed the Labour Mix

Over the last two decades, the agriculture sector has been consolidating rapidly, as a large number of small farms have merged into larger entities. Consolidation of farms has been an important factor driving productivity gains and limiting the growth of demand for agricultural workers over the last 20 years, as larger farms tend to produce more products per worker. In addition, consolidation has influenced the type of work done in the sector: for example, it has resulted in a shift toward fewer owner/operators and more paid workers.

With farm consolidation expected to continue over the forecast period, albeit at a more modest pace, owner/operators will account for a steadily

shrinking share of employment in the sector. This is apparent when we examine the share of the sector’s employment that is in the ‘manager in agriculture’ occupation, which includes owner/operators. The share of labour demand represented by ‘managers in agriculture’ declined by 20% over the past two decades from nearly half of the total labour demand (47%) in 1995 to just 37% of the total labour demand in 2015. That share is expected to decline a further 3% between now and 2025. In addition, we expect that the contribution of unpaid workers (typically family members) will become less significant and that a larger share of the workforce will be paid workers.



Trends Affecting the Labour Supply

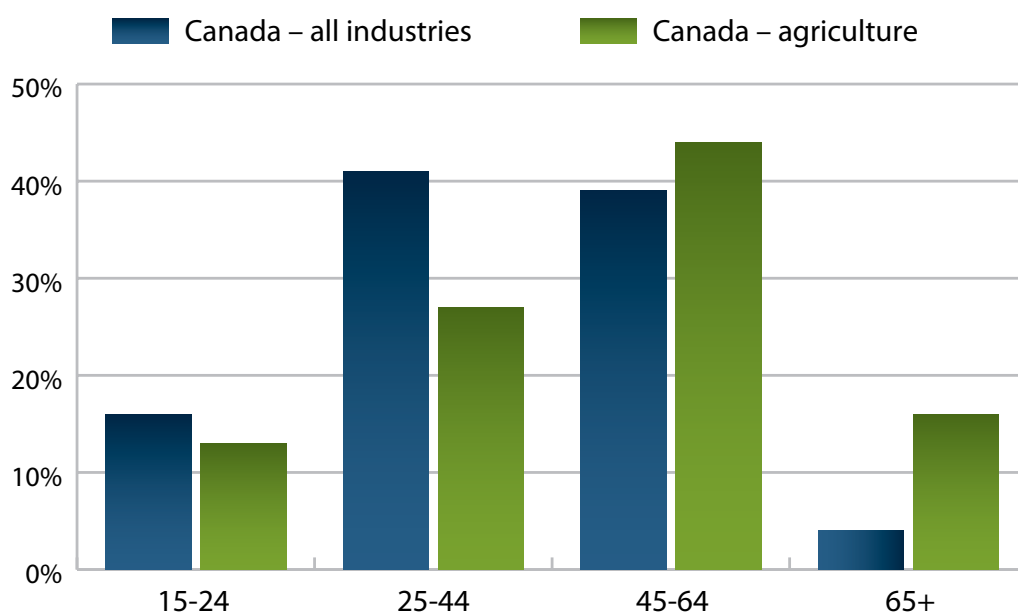
The supply of domestic workers available to the agriculture sector is determined by estimating how many people will exit and enter the sector's workforce each year. Demographic factors, including retirement, rates of interprovincial and international migration, and the number of young people entering the workforce from school are all key determinants. In addition, some people choose to enter or leave the agricultural workforce each year from or to other sectors of the economy. Personal preferences for work, relative wages, and broader economic conditions can all influence these movements. Overall, the domestic labour supply available to work in agriculture is expected to shrink over the forecast period, falling from 344,000 workers in 2014 to 310,000 in 2025. Furthermore, all provinces are expected to see declines in the available agricultural labour force.

Retirements Will Shrink the Labour Supply

A rising number of retirements will be a key factor driving the decline in the sector's labour supply in the years to come. All sectors will be impacted by the aging workforce, but agriculture is unique in that the average age of its labour force is considerably older than the average age in all sectors. In fact, over 16% of agriculture workers are over the age of 65, versus 4% for the overall labour force (see Chart 12). Unsurprisingly, more than two-fifths of our survey respondents suggested that the need to replace retiring workers was a key concern. After accounting for the fact that workers in the agriculture sector tend to retire later than in other industries, the sector is still expected to see 93,000 workers retire between 2014 and 2025. This is equivalent to 27% of the current agricultural workforce, or more than one in four workers.

Chart 12: Older-than-Average Workforce Will Result in a Large Number of Retirements

Share of agricultural workers by age group, 2011



Sources: Statistics Canada; Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.



Retirement Trends By Occupation

Because the age structure varies for each occupational group, retirement rates will also vary considerably (see Chart 13). For example, 24% of managers in agriculture in 2011 were 65 years of age or older and 51% were between 45 and 64 years of age. As a result, about 48% of the managers in agriculture in 2014 will likely retire by 2025. Since the manager occupation accounts for the second-largest share of total demand, this change in the supply of managers will have large implications for the sector.

Other senior managers, managers in horticulture, product inspectors, and truck drivers are also occupations filled by older workers and are expected to see a larger-than-average share of retirements between 2015 and 2025.

In comparison, general farm worker occupations are filled by younger people. Most notably, 56% of general farm workers were younger than 45 years of age in 2011, and only 11% were above the age of 65. This is the occupational group expected to replace many of the managers in agriculture.

In some cases, the average age of workers varied by commodity. For example, 'aquaculture' workers were younger, on average, than workers in other commodities. This is partially because this industry is relatively new compared to some of Canada's more established commodity areas.

Chart 13: Retirements Will Affect Some Occupations More Than Others

Share of 2014 labour supply expected to retire between 2015 and 2025 for select occupations



Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Statistics Canada.

Shrinking Number of Young Workers

A shrinking number of young workers leaving school will be another key factor limiting the sector’s labour supply in the years to come. The number of Canadians aged between 15 and 24 years is expected to decline in the years to come, falling from a high of 4.6 million people in 2013 to about 4.4 million in 2025. Moreover, this trend will be widespread, with nearly all provinces expected to record a decline in population in that cohort over this period. Alberta and Saskatchewan will be the only exceptions. The end result will be fewer people leaving school and looking for work than we have become accustomed to.

This is a demographic fact that will impact all sectors of the economy. However, agriculture faces an additional challenge in that the share of young people entering the sector’s workforce has been steadily declining independently of any reduction in

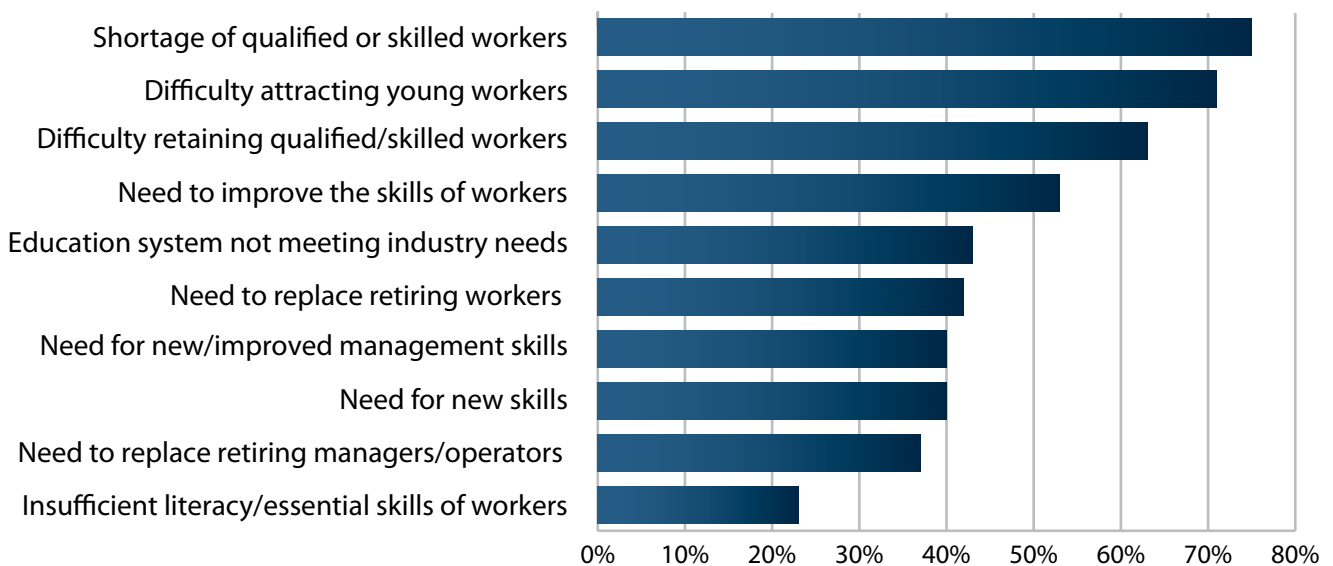
the size of this cohort. According to our employer survey, difficulties attracting young workers affected 71% of agricultural operations, making it the second most-cited issue affecting Canadian farmers, following a shortage of qualified or skilled workers (see Chart 14). Overall, we expect roughly 45,000 young workers to join the agricultural workforce between 2014 and 2025. That is approximately 300 fewer young workers per year than the sector saw between 2004 and 2014.

Young Worker Trends by Occupation

Young workers are the most important source of new workers for every sector. However, for various reasons, including changes in preferences regarding seasonal or physical work, a desire for better salaries, a preference for work in urban centres, and other factors, young workers are proving less likely to choose agriculture as a career.

Chart 14: Agricultural Operations across Canada Are Challenged with Attracting Young Workers

Issues affecting agricultural operations: share of respondents indicating ‘to some extent’ or ‘to a great extent’



Based on a survey of 729 respondents

Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey.



Using the current generation of workers aged between 25 and 34 years as a benchmark, we measured their employment preferences to project how many of them will choose to enter each of the selected occupations. In other words, the workers in this age group are considered to be representative of the preferences that the following generation of workers will have regarding their choice of occupations.

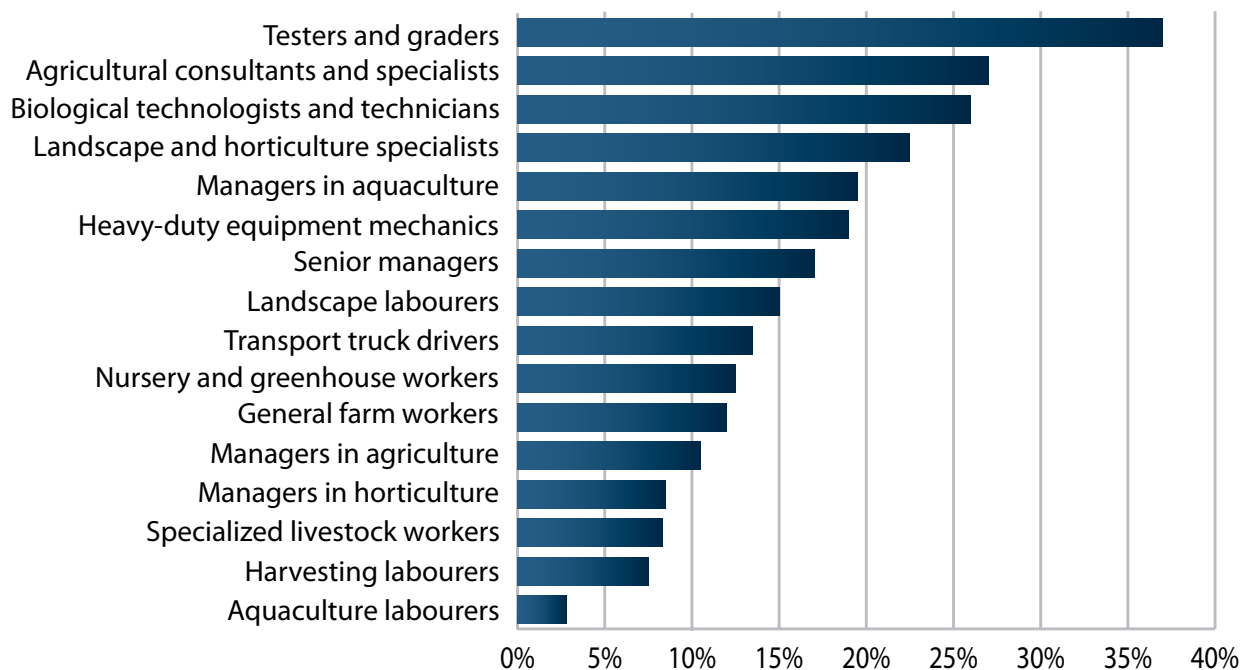
Based on this input, we identified how many young people are likely to choose certain agricultural occupations in the next ten years and expressed the number as a percentage of the existing workforce (see Chart 15). Using this formula, we can see that the number of young people likely to choose a career in testing and grading was quite high, being equivalent to 36% of the labour supply for this occupation as of 2014. For other occupations, such as “aquaculture labourer,” we can see that

the interest was much lower; the number of young people likely to choose this career was equivalent to just 3% of the labour supply for this occupation.

The overall trend suggests that occupations that attract a larger number of young workers tend to require higher levels of education and are often not agriculture-specific occupations. For example, just 8% of biological technologists and technicians work in agriculture. Among the five occupations of most interest to young people, agricultural consultants and specialists is the occupation where the highest share of workers is found in the agriculture sector, but that share is still only 20% of all workers in that occupation.

At the other end of the spectrum are occupations that will struggle to attract new workers. Most of the occupations found at the bottom of the list are very physical and don't require higher levels of education.

Chart 15: Young Workers Are Less Attracted to Many Agriculture-Specific Occupations
Cumulative new, young workers between 2015 and 2025 relative to 2014 labour supply



Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Statistics Canada.

Harvesting and 'aquaculture' labourers, specialized livestock workers, managers in horticulture, and managers in agriculture are five occupations in which the number of young workers expected to join the workforce in the coming years is the lowest. These occupations are also the most agriculture-specific, with over 60% of the workers in these occupations found in the agriculture sector.

These results suggest that younger generations are moving away from occupations that are agriculture-specific, and those occupations account for most of the agricultural labour demand in the coming years. In fact, the top five occupations of most interest to young workers account for only 1% of the labour demand in the sector.

Immigrants Will Add to the Agricultural Workforce

With immigration expected to be a large source of growth for the Canadian population, immigrants represent a potential pool of workers available for work in the agriculture sector. Annual immigration to Canada has averaged just above 250,000 for the last decade, and assuming future changes to immigration policy are enacted, this number is expected to rise over the forecast period to 350,000 immigrants per year in 2025. Current federal policies block immigrants with skills considered to be 'low,' making

it difficult for immigrants who plan to work in the sector to obtain permanent residency. No federal pathway to permanent residency currently exists for 'general farm workers' or entry-level workers, since they are classified as 'low-skilled.' Although some Provincial Nominee Programs, which are immigration programs that each province controls, offer some hope with limited access for agricultural workers, for the most part, these provincial programs have a 'high-skill' focus that includes prioritizing immigrants with university education. It is also important to note that, in recent years, immigrants arriving in Canada have been less likely to choose a career in agriculture than in other sectors. It is projected that immigrants will account for only 17,000 new entrants into the sector's workforce over the next decade.

Immigration trends are expected to be of more benefit to some provinces than to others. For example, British Columbia and Ontario are expected to experience the largest net inflow of migrants (both international and interprovincial) into their respective agriculture sectors between 2014 and 2015 (see Chart 16). This will support a below-average decline in the labour supply available within each province's agriculture sector over the forecast period.

Immigration Trends by Occupation

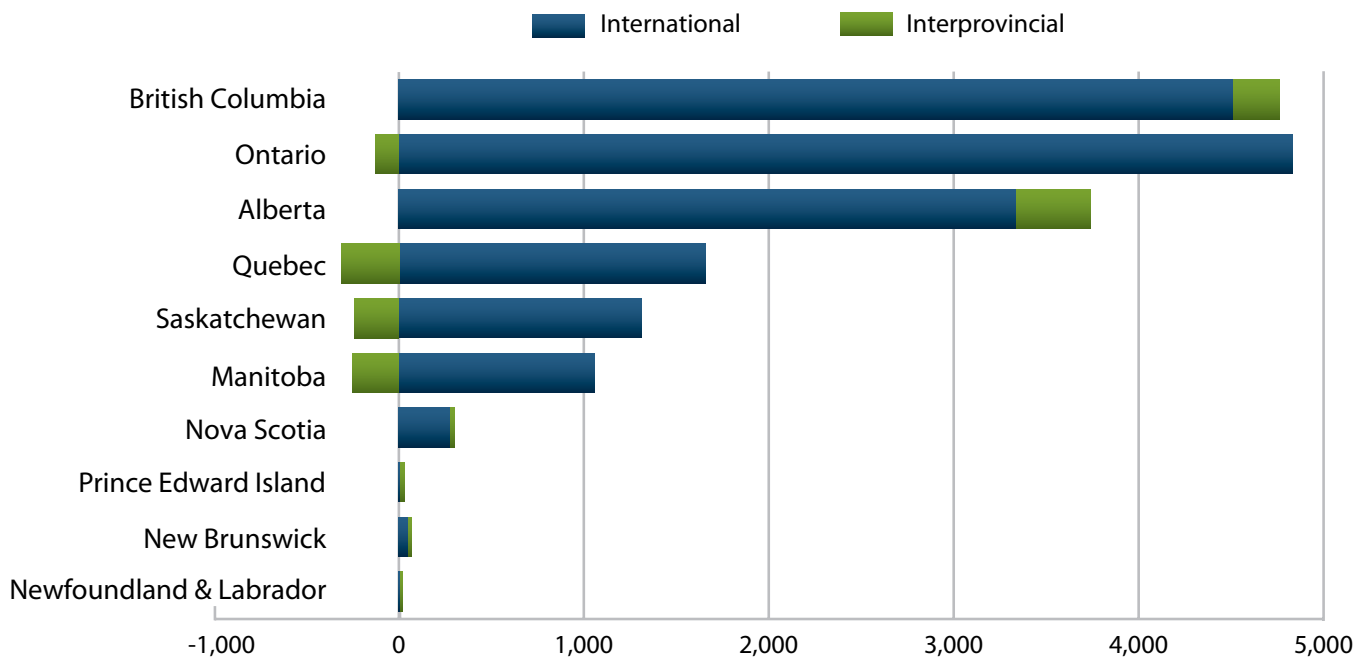
Immigration is expected to be a large source of growth for the Canadian population going forward, and as a result, they could represent a potential pool of workers for the agriculture sector. However, the integration of immigrants into the agricultural workforce has been limited.

At one end, many immigrants have taken positions as harvesting labourers in recent years, and this is expected to continue going forward. In fact, cumulative net migrants between 2015 and 2025 are expected to be equivalent to 15% of the 2014 supply of harvesting labourers employed during the same time period. At the other end, there are other occupations in which the presence of migrants is minimal and their contribution to the workforce will remain modest. Many of these occupations



Chart 16: Migration Trends Will Benefit Some Provinces More Than Others

Cumulative net new entrants into the agricultural workforce from migrants, 2014–25



Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Statistics Canada.

are in managerial positions or in positions that require specific skills, such as heavy-duty equipment mechanics. Immigrants who come to Canada may have these skills in their country but may find it difficult to adapt or to get their skills recognized in Canada, reducing their presence in these occupations.

Using the current percentage of immigrants represented in each occupation, we can use the total number of new immigrants entering the workforce between 2015 and 2025 to project the share of the labour supply that the new influx of immigrants would have accounted for in 2014 (see Chart 17). Based on these projections, we can assume that even with the growth in the immigrant population, immigrants will make up a small fraction of the labour supply for many agricultural occupations, including managers in agriculture, where they could represent less than 2% of the workforce.

Occupation-Specific Trends

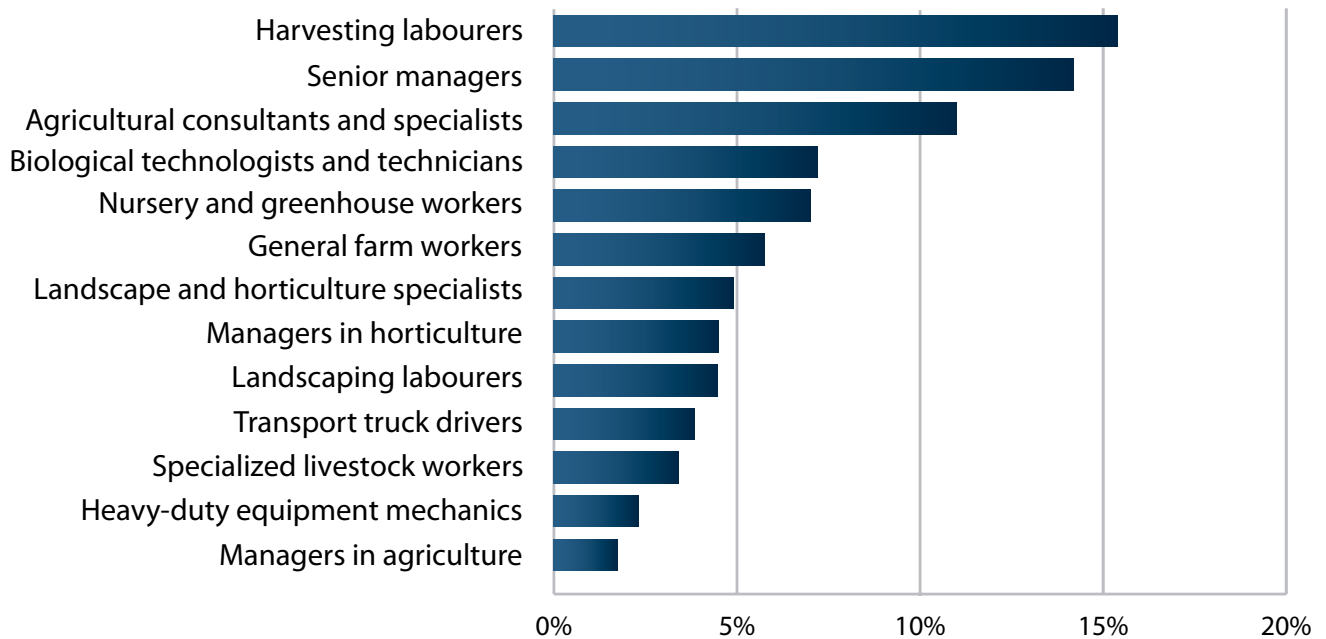
While agriculture's widening labour gap will affect a wide range of occupations, some will be more heavily impacted than others.

For example, because of the trend towards consolidation of smaller farms into fewer large farms, the share of managers required in the workforce is expected to shrink over the forecast period. In essence, fewer farms translates into a reduced need for managers. In 2025, managers in agriculture are expected to account for 34% of labour demand in the agriculture sector, down from 37% in 2015.

In contrast, all other occupational groups will see their share of labour demand in the sector increase. General farm workers, service contractors, greenhouse workers, and business, finance and



Chart 17: Some Occupations Are Likely to Attract and Integrate More Immigrants
 Cumulative migration between 2015 and 2025 as a share of the 2014 labour supply



Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Statistics Canada.

administration occupations will all see their share of the workforce increase significantly. This trend is also related to consolidation, reflecting the sector’s ongoing shift away from traditional, small family farms towards larger business-oriented farms with professional managers and employees.

Not all occupations will be under the same pressure in terms of labour shortages going forward. While some occupations are at risk of facing more retirements, others seem able to attract more young workers. The gap is the final result of the changes in demand for each occupation (driven by the market conditions and changes in technologies) and the supply changes (driven by the various demographic factors). By evaluating each occupation independently and generating gap measurements that take into account both labour demand and supply growth, we can determine which occupations will be most affected by labour shortages (see Chart 18).

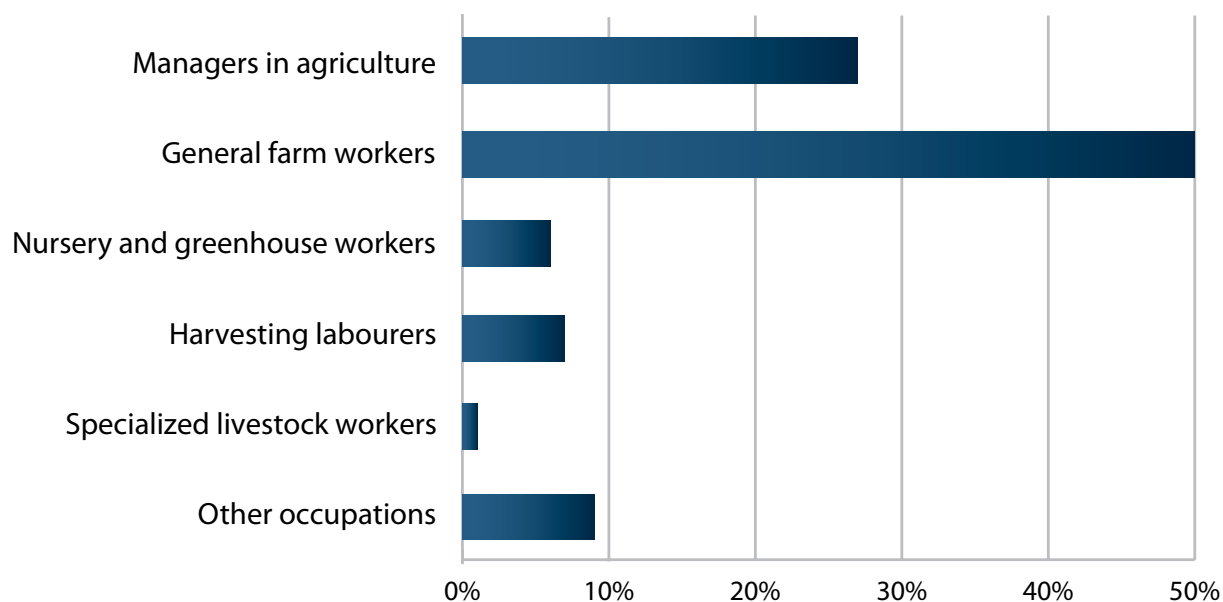
Between 2015 and 2025, the gap in the agricultural workforce is expected to widen from 59,000 workers to 114,000 workers. Most of the gap will be felt in the general farm workers and managers in agriculture occupational groups. In fact, those two occupations will account for more than three-quarters of the gap in 2025. This is no surprise, as they also account for over 60% of the workforce.

Another way to analyze the pressure from labour shortages in each occupation is by looking at the gap relative to labour demand, as well as how it is changing over time. This ratio highlights where the gap represents a large proportion of the demand, regardless of the size of the workforce for a particular occupation. For example, although the agriculture sector employs fewer than 3,000 landscaping labourers, the labour gap-to-demand ratio for this occupation is highest over the forecast period, rising from 49% in 2014 to 55% in 2025. In other words, more than half of the jobs in this occupation are at risk of going unfilled due to a lack of available domestic workers.



Chart 18: Two Occupations Account for the Majority of the Labour Gap

Total share of the labour gap for select occupations in 2025



Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Statistics Canada.

In general, most agriculture-specific occupations already have significant labour gaps relative to demand, and their size is expected to grow in the coming years (see Chart 19). For example, 'managers in agriculture' is the single largest occupational group, and its labour gap-to-demand ratio is expected to rise from 10% to 27%. This represents one of the largest increases over the next decade. General farm workers, who already have a high gap-to-demand ratio, will see it climb further, from 30% to 42%. In summary, the current labour shortages that the sector is experiencing are only expected to get worse in the coming years.

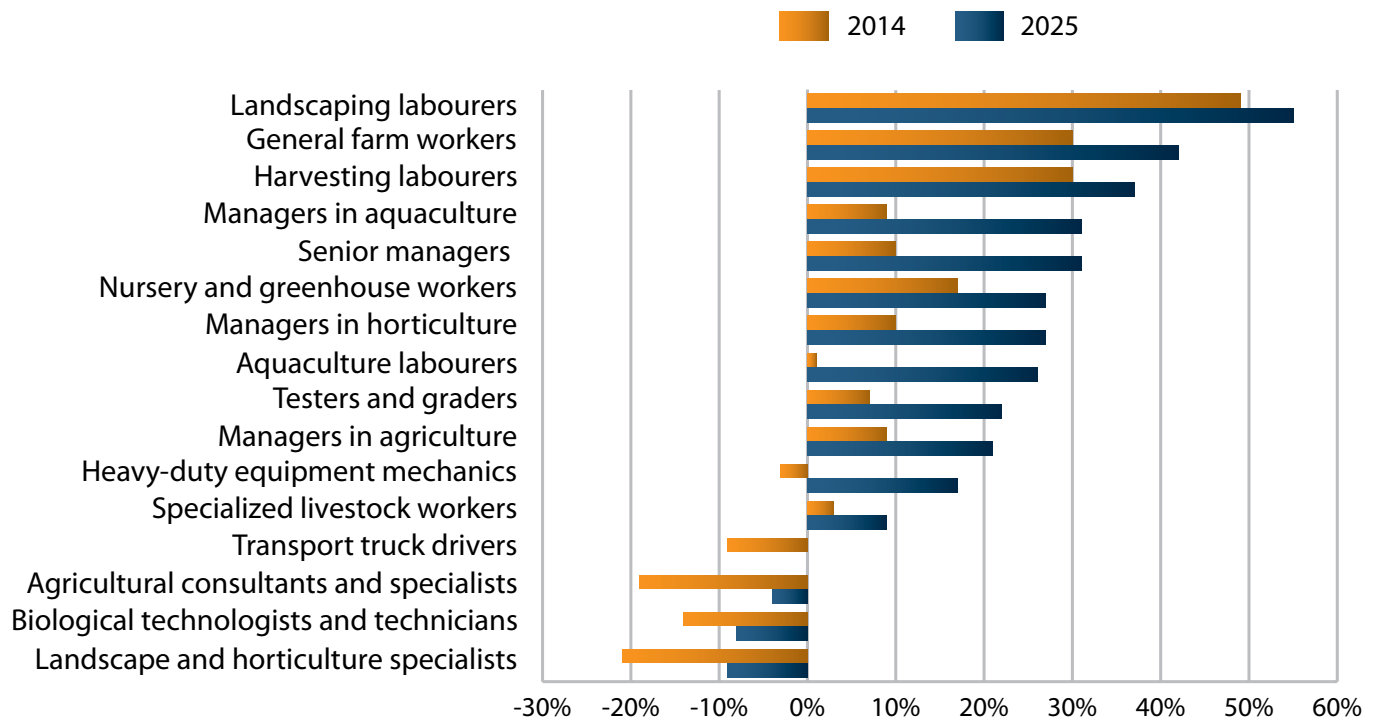
It is also worth noting that several occupations are expected to have labour surpluses over the forecast period, although the surpluses are expected to get gradually smaller. Occupations that fall into this category include landscape and horticulture specialists, biological technologists and technicians, and agricultural consultants and specialists. It is important to note that although a surplus may exist

nationally for these occupations, it is still possible that local shortages may exist in some regions. In other words, the people with the right skills may not be located where they are needed.



Chart 19: Labour Shortage Pressures Vary by Occupations

Labour gap as a share of demand for select occupations



Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Statistics Canada.



Unique Commodity Challenges

We have seen that Canada's agriculture sector has a significant labour gap caused by an unprecedented convergence of different factors, including seasonal patterns in production and the rural location of many farms. Many farms have addressed at least some of these challenges by hiring foreign workers to sustain operations.

The sector's labour gap is expected to nearly double over the next 10 years due to a combination of healthy growth prospects for the sector and a shrinking domestic supply of people available to work in the sector. Although many of these concerns are common across the sector, producers of each of the various agricultural commodities face a unique combination of challenges. This chapter examines the unique challenges within agriculture's different commodity groups.

Supply-Managed Commodities

Two commodity groups within the agriculture sector are covered by Canada's supply-management systems. These systems control production so that industry output aligns with the expected market demand. This type of controlled system reduces costly shortages and surpluses.

The first and larger of Canada's two supply-managed commodities is the 'dairy' industry, which includes farm operations that primarily engage in milking dairy cattle. The other is the 'poultry and egg' industry, which includes farm operations that primarily engage in breeding, hatching, and raising poultry for meat or egg production. Animals grown include chickens and turkeys, which are supply managed and account for the vast majority of production, but they also include all other types of game birds, such as ducks, geese, pheasants, partridges, and pigeons.

'Dairy' Producers and 'Poultry and Egg' Producers Face Fewer Recruitment Challenges

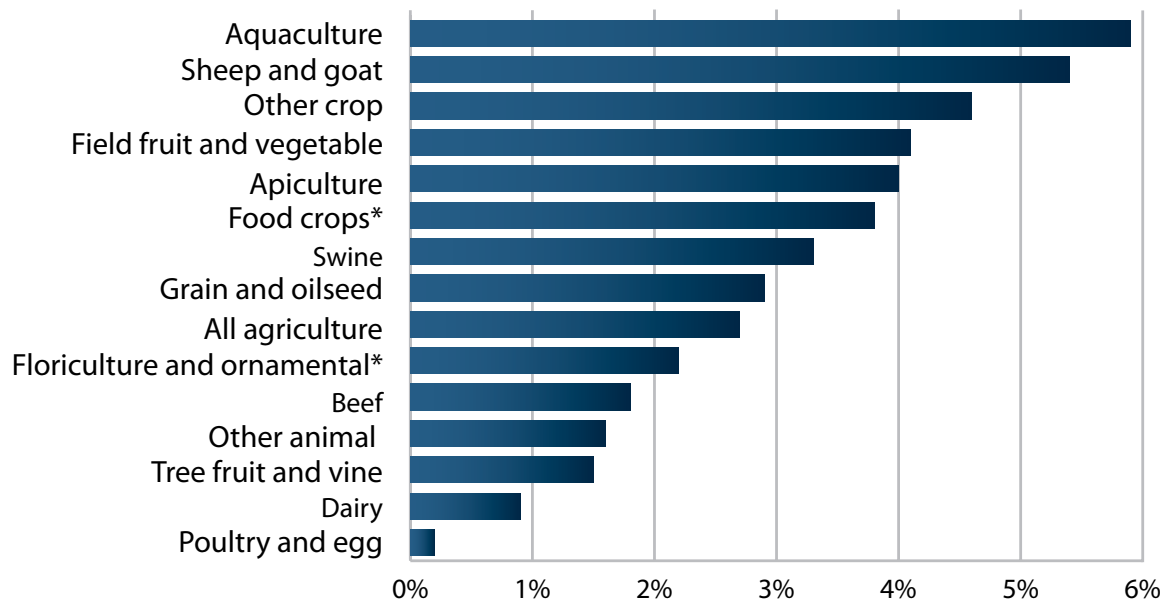
Labour shortages have a smaller impact on supply-managed industries, compared to most other commodities. For example, lost sales due to labour shortages in 2014 for both industries were the smallest within the agriculture sector (see Chart 20). A key reason behind this is that farm operations in supply-managed industries face fewer difficulties in recruiting workers. According to our employer survey, 41% of farm operators were unable to find all the workers they needed in 2014. In contrast, only 36% of 'dairy' producers and 17% of 'poultry and egg' producers were unable to find all their needed workers. Moreover, 'poultry and egg' producers were six times more likely than the average Canadian farmer to report not facing any barriers to recruitment, at 12% versus 2% of respondents for all of agriculture.

A number of factors mitigate the buildup of labour shortages in supply-managed commodities. To begin with, they have low levels of seasonality in their business operations. In fact, the 'dairy' industry has the lowest level of seasonal workforce fluctuations in the entire agriculture sector. As a result, these industries generally offer stable, year-round employment that is more attractive to potential workers. In addition, both industries have



Chart 20: Labour Shortages Are Less Costly for Supply-Managed Products

Estimated share of sales lost due to labour shortages by commodity, 2014



Sources: Statistics Canada; Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey.

* segment within the 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture' industry

below-average voluntary turnover rates. In other words, fewer employees leave their jobs, meaning that employers have fewer jobs to fill. A lower turnover rate will also allow an operation to be more productive by limiting the time and resources spent filling positions and training new employees.

Labour Quality over Quantity Is the Key Issue

While employers in supply-managed industries may be better able to find a sufficient number of workers, they face more difficulties in hiring people who are well suited to their operations. In other words, 'poultry and egg' farms and 'dairy' farms are challenged with skills shortages more frequently than labour shortages. For instance, according to our employer survey, 'poultry and egg' operators and 'dairy' operators were the most likely to cite an applicant's lack of essential skills as a key barrier to recruitment. High levels of involuntary turnover

rates, particularly in the 'poultry and egg' industry, may be a further indication that there is a mismatch between the skills a given position demands and the skill set an employee brings.

Various solutions can help supply-managed industries tackle the skills shortcomings of new and existing workers. For example, supply-managed operations could increase their willingness to provide formal training to ensure that their workers have essential skills, such as reading, problem solving, and numeracy. In addition, finding ways to retain qualified workers will be key. For the 'dairy' industry, this could involve improving work conditions and finding ways to reduce the number of hours worked, which are the industry's two largest retention challenges. For 'poultry and egg' farmers, finding career paths for workers that will generate more opportunities for advancement will be important in encouraging workers to stay.



Stable Production Outlooks Will Keep Labour Markets Balanced

Going forward, stable production outlooks and modest productivity growth are expected to soften labour demand growth in supply-managed commodities. Indeed, one outcome of the supply management system is that 'dairy' producers and 'poultry and egg' producers are largely confined to the domestic market. The outlook for production growth in the 'poultry and egg' industry is somewhat stronger than in the 'dairy' industry, since the per capita consumption of poultry meat is rising in Canada while the per capita demand for 'dairy' products is falling. However, without access to faster-growing foreign markets, the 'dairy' industry and the 'poultry and egg' industry will see the most stable production outlooks within the agriculture sector.

With productivity growth expected to match production gains in both industries, labour demand will not rise over the forecast period. This coincides with the findings of our employer survey, in which only 36% of 'dairy' farmers and less than one-quarter

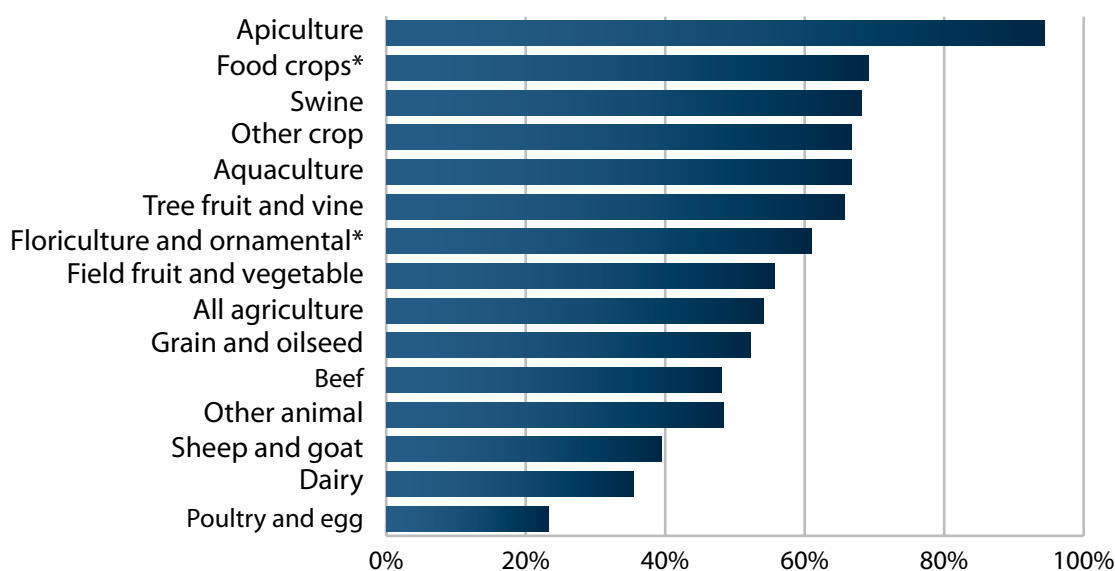
of 'poultry and egg' farmers expected employment at their farms to increase over the next five years, compared to 54% for all of agriculture (see Chart 21). Furthermore, 'poultry and egg' farmers were more than twice as likely to expect declines in their employment over the next five years, relative to all of agriculture. Flat labour demand will be a key factor limiting the size of the labour gap in supply-managed industries over the forecast period, and this will keep labour markets generally balanced for these industries.

Horticulture

Horticulture growers include three commodity groups within agriculture: 'tree fruit and vine'; 'field fruit and vegetable'; and 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture'. All three commodity groups share common characteristics, including the fact that their production is highly seasonal, very labour intensive, and highly dependent on foreign workers. All three of these factors are interrelated. Because they need a high volume of workers, often for shorter periods

Chart 21: Supply-Managed Commodities Have a Stable Employment Outlook

Share of respondents who expect their employment to rise over the next five years



Based on a survey of 813 respondents

Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey.

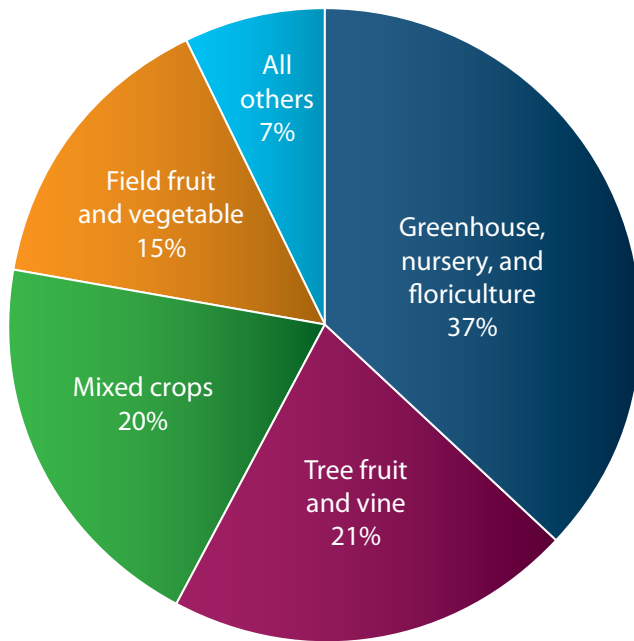
* Segment within the 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture industry'





Chart 22: Horticulture Accounts for Most of the Foreign Workers Employed in Agriculture

Share of foreign workers in agriculture by commodity, 2014



Sources: Statistics Canada; The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

at peak times, it is difficult to recruit Canadians to work in these jobs. Employers often turn to foreign workers to fill their labour needs when Canadians are not available.

Continued Access to TFW Programs Is Critical

No other commodities within agriculture depend more heavily on foreign workers to fill labour shortages than those involved in horticulture. In fact, these three industries account for nearly three-quarters of foreign workers in the agriculture sector (see Chart 22). Additionally, many of the remaining one-quarter of foreign workers are found at ‘mixed crop’ farms, which often produce fruits and vegetables in addition to other products. Producers of these commodities are so dependent on foreign workers that they account for more than a quarter of each commodity’s workforce at their seasonal peak, compared with less than 5% for the rest of agriculture.

Their reliance on foreign workers to fill labour gaps stems largely from their high seasonal fluctuations in labour demand. Indeed, the most pronounced seasonal pattern within agriculture is found among



the horticulture industries. For example, the workforce of the 'tree fruit and vine' industry at its seasonal peak is 3.5 times the size of the workforce at the seasonal low. With many products within these industries needing to be hand-picked and/or packaged, and when Canadians are not available to do this work, these industries rely heavily on foreign workers to perform these labour-intensive activities during their seasonal peaks. Because of their high reliance on foreign workers, which are counted as part of the labour gap along with unfilled jobs, producers in these commodity groups tend to face the largest labour gaps in the agriculture sector.

While horticultural producers have been successful in filling much of their labour gap with foreign workers, this solution does open them to policy risk. Changes in temporary foreign worker policies can result in an unstable supply of foreign workers and uncertainty for business owners.

Negative Perceptions Impede Recruitment and Challenge Retention

Horticultural producers are more likely to report that they have a lower sense of satisfaction with their own businesses and that potential workers have a poor perception of their industry. For example, in the employer survey, the 'greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture' industry and the 'tree fruit and vine' industry were the commodity groups most likely to cite negative perceptions of their industry as a key recruitment barrier. A likely cause for the negative perceptions of horticulture is the physical nature of the industry's work, in which repeated and laborious physical activities remain common. This is also likely to contribute to the fact that horticultural producers face higher turnover rates than the rest of agriculture, particularly for seasonal workers.

Going forward, it will be important for employers to address the negative image associated with working in horticulture. In addition, employers will need to continue providing the appropriate tools and training to help workers handle the physicality of the work



within such industries. Addressing these challenges could prove to be beneficial to these industries, which are already affected by some of the most severe labour shortages within the sector.

Red Meat

Red-meat producers include 'beef' producers, operations that raise and finish cattle, and 'swine' producers. Feedlots and producers that raise cattle for 'dairy' herd replacement are also included in the 'beef' industry. The 'beef' and 'swine' industries share common characteristics. Both commodity groups experienced a significant decline in production and labour in recent years, and both are expected to experience above-average growth between now and 2025.

From Laggards to Growth Leaders

Both commodity groups have experienced a significant decline in production and labour demand in recent years, as low prices led to a substantial decline in the number of 'beef' farms and 'swine' farms. Many of these farms switched to producing 'grain and oilseed' products. However, the performance among red-meat producers is expected to improve significantly in the years to come. Indeed, strong pricing and increased herd sizes in 2015 suggest that a turnaround has already begun.



Looking ahead, production at both 'beef' and 'swine' farms is expected to experience above-average growth. Growth in the domestic demand for red meat is expected to remain weak; per capita demand has been gradually trending down for years as consumers switch to poultry, fish, and meat alternatives. However, foreign demand will drive the expansion in production. Growing personal disposable income in emerging countries is expected to support strong growth in the global demand for animal protein. As a result, both industries are expected to see an increase in labour demand over the forecast period.

This healthy production outlook is supported by the results from the employer survey. Just under half of 'beef' farm operators and more than two-thirds of 'swine' operators expect employment at their operations to increase over the next five years. Nonetheless, while a rising labour demand will be a contributor to a widening labour gap within red meat industries, a declining labour supply will be its main driver.

Impact of an Aging Workforce Is Particularly Acute

Over the forecast period, red-meat industries (particularly the 'beef' industry) are expected to experience above-average declines in domestic labour supply when compared to the rest of agriculture. A high rate of retirement will be the key factor driving this. For example, close to three-fifths of 'beef' farmers believed that the average age of workers at their farms had become somewhat or much older over the past five years compared to just under half of all farms. The stabilizing of the labour demand in recent years contributed to this trend because it limited hiring activity and resulted in fewer younger people being hired into the industry.

As the 'beef' workforce continues to age, the industry will experience a rising number of retirements. By 2025, just under one-third of the segment's current domestic workforce is expected to retire, which is well above the average for all of agriculture. In combination with weak inflows of new workers, this

will result in 'beef' producers experiencing the largest decline in their labour supply within agriculture over the forecast period, with supply in 2025 expected to be 17% below where it stood in 2014 (see Chart 23). While the 'swine' industry will see a smaller share of its workforce retire compared with the 'beef' industry, it too will experience significant declines in its labour supply over the next decade.

Significant declines in the labour supply are expected to drive a significant increase in each industry's respective labour gap. In fact, the labour gap for 'beef' and 'swine' producers will experience the largest and third-largest increases, respectively, over the next 10 years, with 'grain and oilseed' producers ranked second. Widening labour gaps will severely hamper the ability of 'beef' and 'swine' producers to take advantage of growing foreign demand and expand production. Moreover, confronting sizeable future labour shortages will be even more challenging for the red meat industries because large declines in the labour demand over the past decade have limited the pool of experienced candidates from which these industries can draw.

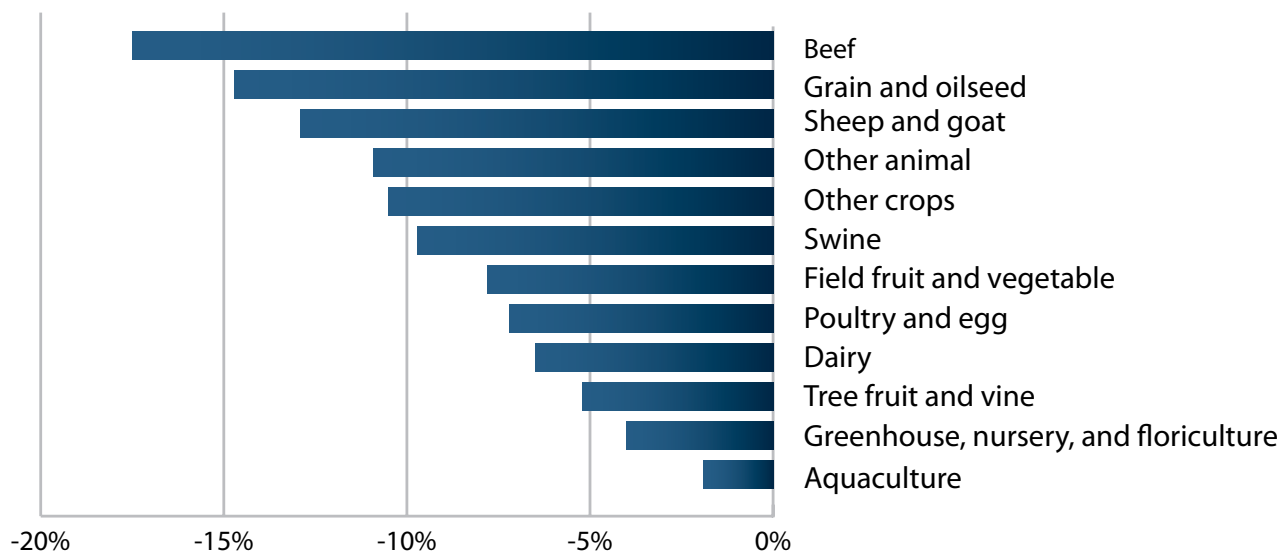
Finding Qualified Workers Remains a Challenge

Beyond a rising labour gap, red-meat operations also face significant difficulties with skills shortages. In our survey, red-meat producers were much more likely to report a current shortage of qualified/skilled workers. Four in five 'beef' producers and all 'swine' producers cited this as a concern, compared with three-quarters of respondents for all of agriculture. While 'beef' producers were much more likely to report that applicants lack the required experience, 'swine' producers were more likely to cite the limited number of qualified candidates in their area. In addition, red-meat producers were more likely to encounter difficulties in retaining skilled workers, despite having turnover rates that were well below the average for all of agriculture. Surprisingly, only half of 'beef' producers reported that they provided training for their workers. Training is a potential way to address experience and skill shortages, although this is a solution that will take time to implement.



Chart 23: 'Beef' Producers Will Experience the Largest Decline in Labour Supply in the Coming Years

Change in labour supply, 2025 versus 2014



Source: The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

Grain and Oilseed

The 'grain and oilseed' industry produces a wide variety of field crops, with key products such as wheat, canola, soybeans, and feed corn. The industry also includes pulses (e.g., lentils, dry peas), barley, oats, and forage crops. Producers of 'grain and oilseed' products are the second-largest employers within agriculture: their workforce totaled 55,800 people in 2014. In addition, this commodity group has experienced the strongest growth within agriculture over the past decade in terms of production, productivity (output per worker), and the size of its workforce. As such, much of the success in Canada's agriculture sector in recent years can be tied to 'grain and oilseed' production.

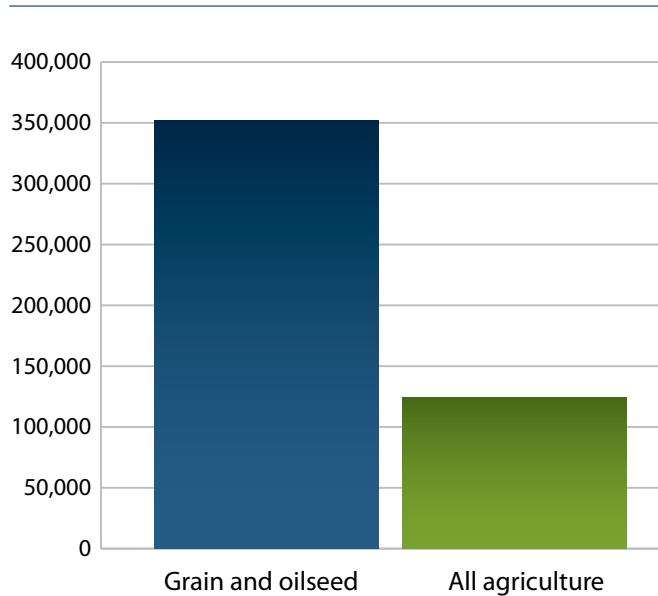
High Sales per Employee Make Labour Shortages More Costly

Labour shortages are very costly for 'grain and oilseed' producers. In fact, labour shortages are estimated to have cost these producers \$569 million, or 3% of sales, in 2014. In dollar terms, this was the largest loss of sales as a result of labour shortages within the agriculture sector. The high relative cost of labour shortages can be attributed to two factors. First, 'grain and oilseed' producers face greater labour shortages relative to other industries. According to our employer survey, 44% of 'grain and oilseed' operations reported a shortage of workers in 2014, which resulted in a high share of unfilled vacancies relative to demand. Second, the amount of sales per worker among 'grain and oilseed' producers is more than twice the average for all of agriculture (see Chart 24). This, in part, reflects the industry's strong productivity over the past decade. With 'grain and oilseed' operators producing more per worker, each unfilled vacancy is likely to have a larger impact on operator revenues.



Chart 24: 'Grain and Oilseed' Sales per Worker Are Well Above Average

Dollar amount of sales per employee, 2014



Sources: Statistics Canada; Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

Above-Average Seasonality Creates Labour Challenges

The vast majority of labour demand for 'grain and oilseed' producers is met by domestic workers. In fact, foreign workers amounted to only 0.3% of the industry's workforce in 2014, the lowest reliance on foreign workers among major agricultural commodity groups. This is partly the result of 'grain and oilseed' commodities not being on the National Commodities List. As a result, the industry does not have access to the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Agricultural Stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), limiting its ability to make use of foreign workers compared with other agriculture industries.

The inability to access the two main agriculture streams of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program will pose challenges to 'grain and oilseed' producers for a number of reasons. To begin with, this industry's employment experiences an above-



average degree of seasonality (although not as high as we see among horticultural producers), and employing foreign workers is a common way for producers to manage seasonal fluctuations in labour demand.

In addition, the 'grain and oilseed' industry is expected to experience one of the largest increases in its labour gap over the forecast period. While a strong production outlook is expected to support above-average growth in the demand for labour, the industry will also have one of the highest retirement rates within agriculture, which will lead to a significant decline in its labour supply. Limited access to the various streams of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program will impede the ability of 'grain and oilseed' producers to fill the labour gap and hamper the industry's ability to grow.

Rural Location of Operations Impedes Recruitment Efforts

The rural location of 'grain and oilseed' operations is a major hindrance to hiring workers. In fact, 'grain and oilseed' producers were much more likely to list rural locations as a key barrier to recruitment, with declining populations in rural areas being their largest concern. The challenge of rural locations in the industry is reflected in the fact that 'grain and oilseed' producers in our employer survey were



much less likely to be close to a larger population centre than other producers. Only one in five 'grain and oilseed' producers reported being close to a population centre of more than 10,000 people, compared to 35% for all of agriculture. Since 'grain and oilseed' operations require more land, they are less able to locate close to urban centres. The rural nature of many 'grain and oilseed' farms presents accessibility issues and lessens the appeal of this type of work for many potential workers in urban areas. This will continue to challenge 'grain and oilseed' producers in finding sufficient workers in the future.



Aquaculture

The 'aquaculture' industry is defined using Statistics Canada's definition (NAICS code 1125), which includes operations primarily engaged in farm-raising finfish, shellfish, or other aquatic animals. It is important to note that this definition excludes any processing activity that is undertaken by 'aquaculture' producers, which would instead be listed under the seafood processing industry (NAICS 3117). It is expected that significant production growth in the sector will lead to an increasing need for workers.



Shifting Into High Gear

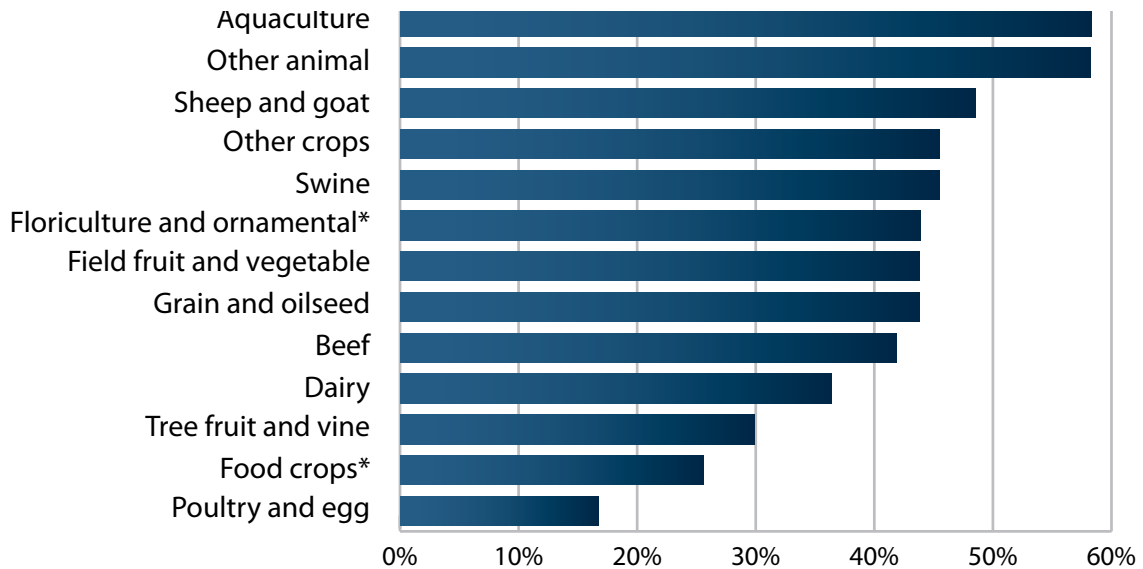
The 'aquaculture' industry is expected to see significant growth in the labour demand over the forecast period, supported by a healthy outlook for production. Indeed, the industry is expected to see the strongest production growth within agriculture in the coming years. Strong global market conditions for fish protein will be a key driver behind the acceleration in production growth and will benefit the 'aquaculture' industry, which relies on exports for a significant share of its sales. With the increase in production expected to be sufficiently strong, labour demand in the industry will expand at an above-average pace, despite healthy productivity growth. According to our employer survey, two-thirds of 'aquaculture' farmers expect employment at their farm to rise over the next five years, while none expect to see declines.

Strong growth in labour demand has various implications for the 'aquaculture' industry, which already faces challenges in finding workers. To begin with, strong growth in labour demand will widen the industry's labour gap. Labour shortages are already a problem for 'aquaculture', given that 58% of 'aquaculture' operators reported not finding all the workers they needed in 2014, which is the highest share of any agriculture industry (see Chart 25). The high number of unfilled vacancies resulted in the industry losing 6% of its sales in 2014, the highest



Chart 25: 'Aquaculture' More Likely to Report Labour Shortages Than Any Other Commodity

Share of respondents who were unable to find a sufficient number of workers



Based on a survey of 813 respondents

Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey.

* segment within the greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture industry

rate of loss in the agriculture sector. One bright spot for the industry is that it has a younger-than-average workforce. This is expected to result in the lowest retirement rate in the agriculture sector over the forecast period, which will keep the labour supply flat and reduce the size of the labour gap.

Accessing Work Sites Is a Challenge

The rural nature of 'aquaculture' poses significant challenges to worker recruitment and retention. To begin with, more than a quarter of the industry's workforce is located in the Atlantic provinces, where the population tends to be more spread out. The greater remoteness of operations means that 'aquaculture' farmers have difficulty sourcing labour, a concern made more pressing by declining populations in rural areas, which is the industry's top recruitment concern. In addition, 'aquaculture' farmers are challenged by the limited ability of

workers to get transportation to worksites and by the need for workers to move from their original location to one that is closer to work. Worker mobility will be a key challenge for 'aquaculture' farmers going forward.



The Road Ahead: Finding Solutions

The major changes that have occurred in agriculture over the past decade are expected to persist over the forecast period. For example, the shift to fewer and larger farms is expected to continue. This in turn will drive further increases in mechanization and productivity growth within the sector. This is part of a general shift in the sector away from the traditional business model of family farms toward more of an agri-business approach, although the majority of agri-businesses are still family owned and operated.

All of these trends are apparent when we look at the profile for younger farm operators, who represent the future of the sector. In our survey results, younger operators were much more likely to have larger farms, on average, than older operators. Nearly half (45%) of farm operators under the age 55 had sales in excess of \$1 million per year, while only 31% of those aged 55 and above reported sales at that level.

In addition to having larger farms, younger farm operators are less likely to make use of family workers. According to our employer survey, family accounted for only 8.5% of workers at farms where the owner/operator was under the age of 55. In comparison, this share was 14% for farms where the owner/operator was over the age of 55. This means that younger farm operators are more likely to be competing with other employers for hired labour, which may be why they are more likely to cite an inability to pay higher wages as a key retention barrier than employers in other sectors, such as oil and gas. A survey of 695 respondents indicated that approximately 45% of operators under 35 years of age reported that wages are a barrier to retention, compared to just 35% of operators aged 65 or older.

Another thing that stands out among young farm operators is their optimism about the outlook for the agriculture sector. Among farm operators under the age of 55, 61% reported that they expect their employment to rise over the next five years,

versus 48% for those over aged 55 and over. If this optimism is to be realized, the sector will need to find ways to address the labour challenges we have identified in this report. As discussed in Chapter 4, different types of producers face different types of challenges. Thus, a solution for one type of operation may not be universally applicable or even advisable across all organizations. However, the rest of this chapter discusses how some of the labour challenges identified in this report can potentially be addressed.

Addressing Seasonality

The influence of significant seasonal fluctuations on the sector's labour demand will not change any time soon. Canada's climate precludes year-round production for many types of agricultural products. Mechanization can reduce seasonal fluctuations in employment, but many jobs still require personal judgment or fine motor skills that cannot, or at least cannot yet, be replicated by a machine. As such, the sector must continue to find creative solutions to address its need for large numbers of workers for limited periods of time.

Input from operators who participated in the Labour Market Information project and the Workforce Action Plan highlighted some of the creative ways in which the sector has addressed seasonality. For example, some operators have tapped into a pool of workers who may only be interested in working part of the year. In the interviews conducted as part of this project, many producers indicated that recently retired farmers, or retirees with farm backgrounds, constituted an increasing share of the available labour pool. These individuals typically work for a short period of one to four months during the summer and rely on pensions and savings rather than the pay they receive from agricultural work to support their cost of living. Producers felt that this demographic is motivated more by lifestyle considerations than compensation and driven by a desire to keep active, be closer to food production,



enjoy workplace camaraderie, and use heavy machinery. Some producers indicated that this had become one of their principal sources for new recruits, although this situation was rare.

Internationally, work may be coordinated with regions that have different growing seasons. In some cases, this is already occurring in an informal way. For example, some producers who employ foreign workers report that those workers have their own farm operations in their home country that they tend to when they're not in Canada. More broadly, an organized effort to coordinate seasonal labour moving from Canada to Southern Hemisphere countries, such as Australia or New Zealand, could help seasonal farm workers find year-round employment.

Another technique identified by both this research initiative and the Workforce Action Plan was that of banking hours for seasonal workers. This involves an employer paying their workers based on a standard

40-hour week and then 'banking,' or saving, any additional hours for subsequent payout at a later date. Since seasonal work often involves working overtime hours, this practice allows an employee's wages to be paid out over a longer period and stabilizes the income of seasonal workers. This practice is more prevalent when employees are not entitled to overtime pay, which is the case in British Columbia, for example.

Finally, many farm operators suggest that the current Employment Insurance (EI) program in Canada dissuades potential workers from taking job opportunities in the agriculture sector. Although EI can supplement the income of seasonal agriculture workers, many producers thought that the program dissuaded others from working in the sector, particularly in Atlantic Canada. For example, in our employer survey, 27% of respondents thought that altering EI eligibility was one of the top two factors that would help address the labour challenges that the sector faces (see Chart 26).

Chart 26: Employment Insurance Is Viewed as an Impediment to Work in the Sector
The top two activities that would help address agriculture labour challenges, share of respondents



Based on a survey of 732 respondents
Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey.

Attracting Workers to Rural Locations

The necessity of many farms being located in rural areas will not change in the years to come; the land required for many types of farm operations cannot be moved. At the same time, the demographic trends that show a growing share of the population living in urban areas and an older-than-average population in rural areas are irrefutable and difficult to surmount. That said, producers in rural areas did have some suggestions about ways to manage the issues that come with their location.

For example, producers report that a perceived lack of amenities (e.g., entertainment, consumer goods, public services) is the key barrier when seeking to entice people to a rural location. There are several potential ways to address this. For example, encouraging local governments to promote the employment opportunities, schools, and recreational programs they have to offer will help to alleviate concerns for those who are considering moving to rural areas for agricultural employment. Also, arranging transportation can allow people to enjoy the amenities offered in an urban environment when they work in a rural environment. This can be an effective increase in real wages since workers can forgo the monetary and time cost of commuting by personal vehicle.



However, transportation may not always be possible, particularly for more remote locations. In this circumstance, many producers promote quality of life and other nonmonetary benefits (such as health and dental coverage) as a way to attract and retain workers. Providing meals to workers was especially appreciated and thus valuable for retention purposes. Other fringe benefits include the complimentary use of a personal vehicle, on-site housing, free or discounted produce, and training courses at local post-secondary institutions.

Effective training programs can also solve another problem that is more acute for rural operations: many occupations servicing the agricultural sector are spread increasingly thin. Specialists such as mechanics, veterinarians, pesticide applicators, and agricultural financial service professionals are becoming more difficult to find and are located further away from farms. Training new or existing employees in these skills can serve to improve retention and address the challenge of shrinking access to many specialty skills. However, many interviewees noted that the key impediment to implementing this solution is that there are few courses tailored to agriculture and to related occupations.

Finding and Keeping the Right People

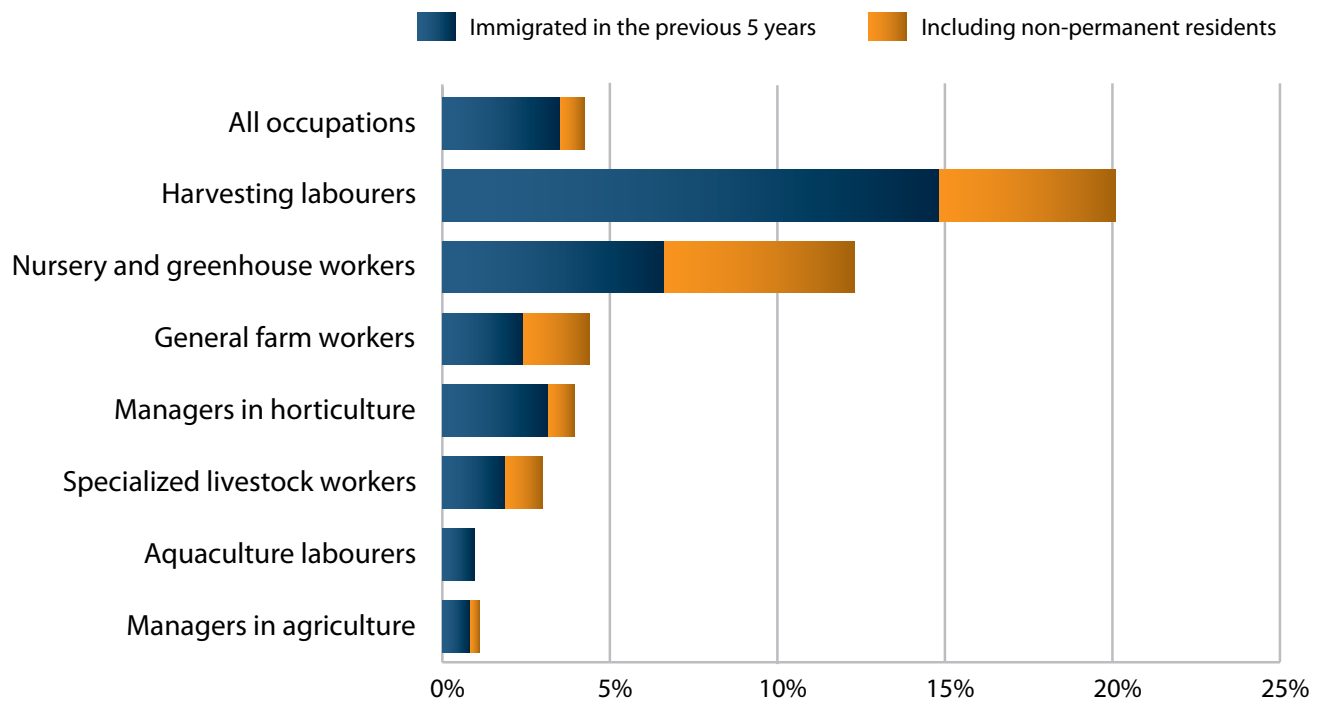
Given the size of the current labour gap in agriculture and its expected growth in the years to come, a key part of any future action will involve increasing the supply of labour available to the sector. These efforts fall into two broad categories: finding more new entrants and keeping more of the people who already work in the sector.

Immigrants

Immigrants are an important source of workforce growth in Canada. With more than 250,000 people moving to Canada each year, immigrants account for the majority of the country's population growth. Foreign workers are a very important part of the



Chart 27: Immigrants Are Underrepresented in Most Agricultural Occupations
Share of the workforce for select occupations, 2011



Sources: Statistics Canada; Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

agriculture sector, accounting for 12% of the sector’s workforce in 2014. However, they are in Canada on a temporary basis rather than a permanent basis. As such, foreign workers are not classified as immigrants. In fact, for many of the major occupations within agriculture, recent immigrants account for a below-average share of employment (see Chart 27).

Agricultural employers suggested that there is a need to encourage recent immigrants to locate to rural communities. This could involve promoting employment, education, social, and recreational opportunities, not only for potential workers, but also for spouses and children. As such, it will be important to develop strong relationships with immigrant settlement agencies so that their staff understands the employment opportunities and services that are available in rural communities.

Temporary Foreign Workers

In both the Labour Market Information initiative and the Workforce Action Plan, farm operators indicated that they place a high value on their existing access to foreign workers, including through the Seasonal Agriculture Worker Program (SAWP) and the Agricultural Stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). In both the focus groups and the interviews, many producers mentioned that, although hiring Canadians is the sector’s first priority, foreign workers are essential. The SAWP program was highly valued, with the main concern being that the commodities to which the program is applicable are too limited. Indeed, several interviewees believed that there would be no horticulture production in Canada without the SAWP.



In addition, in both our employer and stakeholder surveys, employing more foreign workers was ranked second behind finding more young Canadian workers as the best way to address labour shortages in the sector.

However, while other industries, such as manufacturing, have been able to relocate operations to international regions where appropriate sources of labour are available, this option is not available to agriculture industries. The land and water required for production are in Canada, not elsewhere. As a result, farm operators have found it necessary to bring in workers from other regions in order to improve their production potential. In short, the growing reliance on foreign workers in agriculture may be the result of how the sector is adapting to globalization.

Despite the success of SAWP and other foreign worker programs, there is also a strong sentiment that existing permanent immigration programs, with their focus on university graduates, are not well suited to the needs of agriculture. A few producers reported success in recruiting workers among recent refugees to Canada. Many others were keen to assist interested foreign workers who come to the sector through SAWP or other temporary foreign worker programs to become permanent residents

or Canadian citizens. However, this option is not always readily accessible, as the ability to sponsor foreign workers for permanent residency varies widely by province. Many interviewees felt that the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) of Manitoba was particularly well designed toward this end.

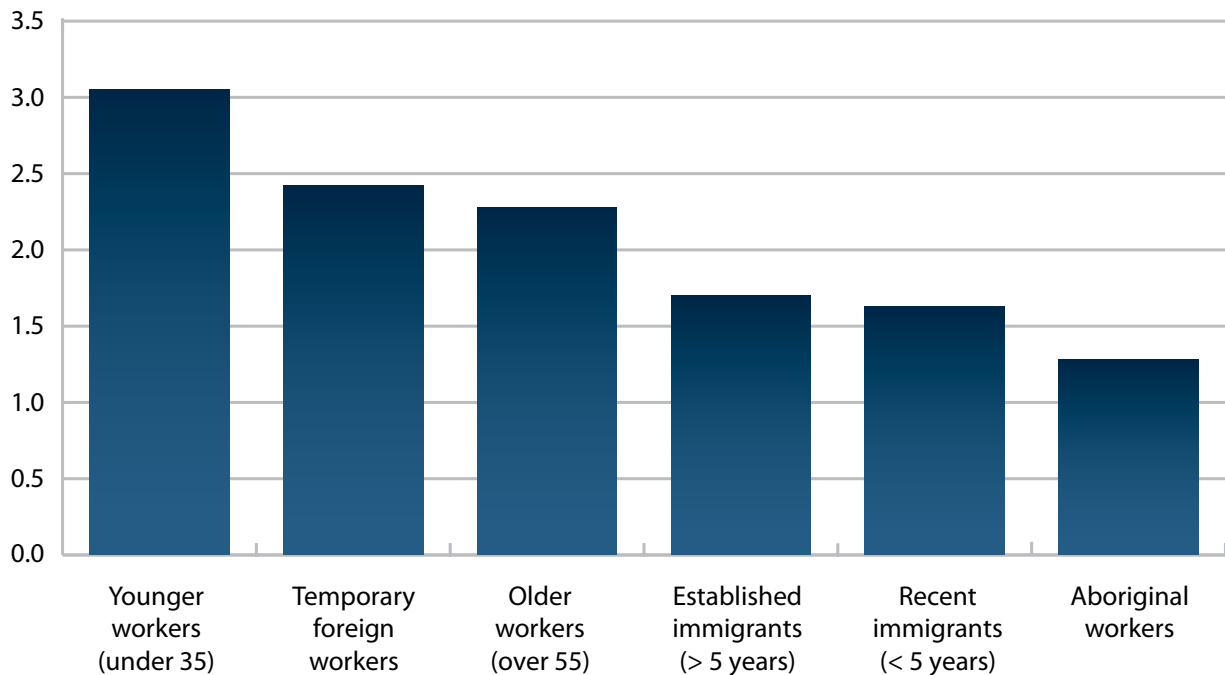
Underrepresented Groups

In addition to immigrants, a variety of other underrepresented groups in the Canadian workforce could potentially be a source of labour. The two groups that stand out the most in this regard are disabled workers and Aboriginal workers. For example, in our employer survey, only 14.6% of respondents reported that they employed disabled workers, and this share was only 10.6% for the employment of Aboriginal people.

At the same time, few employers thought that these groups would prove to be a solution for their labour challenges. For example, in the employer survey, producers were asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 5 the best way to fill labour shortages in the sector. Hiring Aboriginal people received an average score of only 1.3 (see Chart 28). Employers who have successfully employed Aboriginal people noted that several things were required, including good communication to overcome cultural differences regarding attitudes



Chart 28: Employers' Perceptions of the Best Groups to Fill Labour Shortages
 Rank (on a scale of 1 to 5)



Based on a survey of 812 respondents
 Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer survey.

about work and flexibility in work schedules to accommodate cultural requirements.

In a series of interviews and web focus groups, employment agencies that work specifically with Aboriginal people cited the lack of transportation and communication within the community as the most common barriers for their clients in obtaining work in agriculture. In addition, developing an advocate within the local Aboriginal community was seen to be essential for mediating any miscommunication.

When it comes to people with disabilities, many employers felt that the physical nature of agricultural work would prevent them from working in the sector. However, this opinion was based on a misunderstanding of how disability was defined. Interviewees often associated disability with total blindness or severe mobility impairments. However,

many forms of disability do not preclude agricultural employment. Once disabilities was properly defined, many employers realized that they already employ workers with some form of disability. As such, a better understanding of the physical or mental limitations of certain types of disabilities among employers may lead to better outcomes.

Employment agencies that work with people with disabilities provided a variety of suggestions that would assist in securing employment for them in agriculture. These included providing employment-services agencies with information about the industry and the available jobs and careers, posting job ads that provide detailed descriptions of the skills required for the job, and selecting employees based on skills rather than educational attainment. Employers were also encouraged to attend job fairs



or information sessions held at the agencies so that clients can hear firsthand information about the industry and they can offer site visits to show clients what working on a farm is like. Other tactics include sharing success stories with other employers to help change negative perceptions, providing opportunities for direct dialogue with agencies and clients, and providing job-shadowing opportunities.

People with disabilities were found performing a diverse range of farm tasks. One producer estimated that over 25% of their staff had one form of disability or another. By accommodating these disabilities, that producer effectively eliminated their labour shortages.

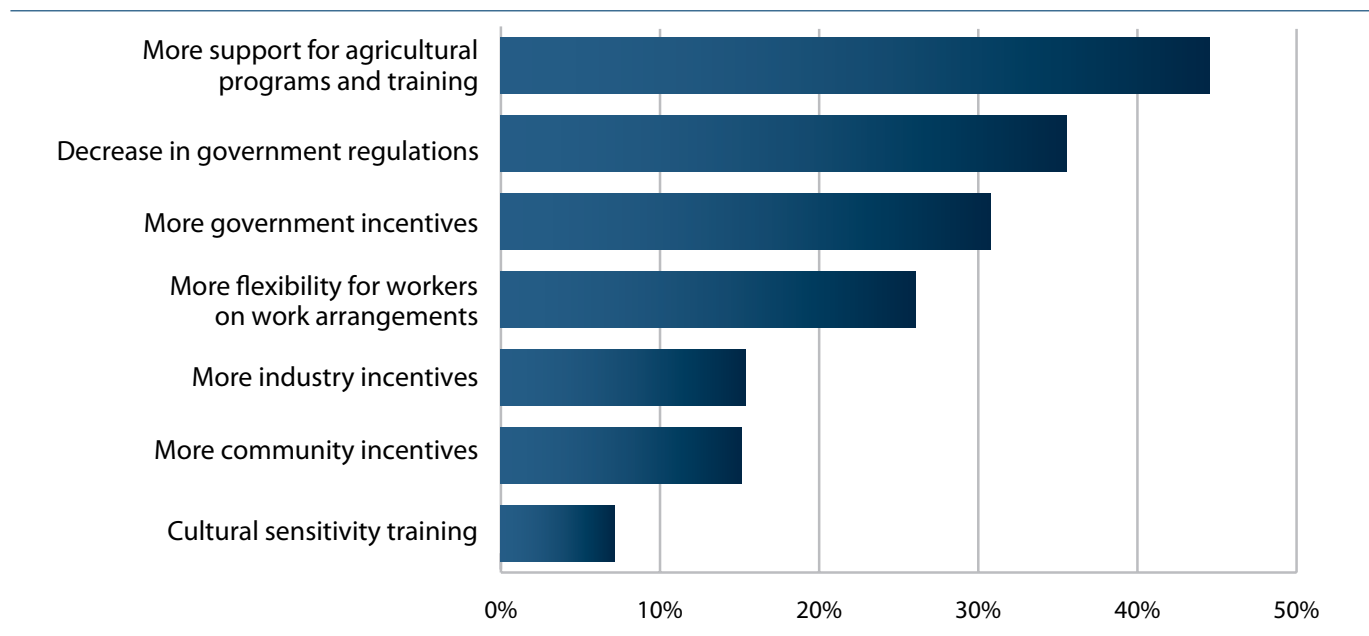
When employers were asked what would be required to increase their use of underrepresented groups, the number-one response was 'more support for agriculture programs and training' (see Chart 29). This aligns with the findings of the Workforce Action

Plan, in which developing educational resources, improving worker knowledge and skills, and aligning training with industry needs were top priorities. Fewer government regulations, more government incentives, and increased flexibility from employers on work arrangements were other major factors.

Marketing Agriculture to Potential Employees

Another top issue among agricultural producers was the very limited knowledge of the sector that potential hires often displayed. Better marketing of the sector was the number-one solution to addressing human resource challenges in agriculture identified in the stakeholder survey, listed by 27% of respondents. Among employers, it was the number-two proposed solution, identified by 24% of respondents. Only changes to the EI program scored higher among employers. This input aligns strongly with that provided by operators and other

Chart 29: What Would Encourage Involvement among Underrepresented Groups?
Share of respondents



* Based on a survey of 813 respondents
Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Employer Survey.

stakeholders in the Workforce Action Plan, in which developing career promotion tools was identified as a priority.

Respondents noted that knowledge and skills among potential workers are particularly weak among those who come from urban areas. But even in rural areas, knowledge about agriculture is on the wane, as fewer people grow up with exposure to working on farms. One interviewee noted that their next-door neighbour was surprised to learn that potatoes do not grow on trees. This lack of knowledge of the sector makes it a less plausible career choice for younger generations and further increases the separation between producers and potential employees.

Outreach programs that seek to educate school-aged children about where their food comes from are common tools that different groups use in an effort to combat this problem. Another objective of these programs is to inform children and adults about the variety of career opportunities, show them that many of these jobs require higher levels of skill, and dispel the misconception that jobs in agriculture are limited to manual labour. These outreach programs take a variety of forms and are organized by different groups. Better coordination and the identification and adoption of best practices from successful programs could make them more effective. Employers can also potentially leverage their employees' high level of satisfaction to assist them with recruiting.

Improving Recruitment Practices

Many producers report that they rely on a variety of recruitment methods. The most common method, and the most successful from both the employers' and the employees' perspectives, is word of mouth. Half of employers and 65% of workers report that they see the most success through word-of-mouth recruiting. By comparison, fewer than 25% of employers report seeing the most success through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), and just over 10% report the most success through Internet recruiting.



Word-of-mouth recruitment is common among small businesses (a description that applies to much of the agriculture sector), but restricting a business's recruiting to word of mouth carries advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages associated with word-of-mouth recruitment include the following:

- The employer may already be familiar with the job candidate, or someone they know can vouch for the candidate, which helps the employer to make a more informed decision.
- It takes less effort than most other recruiting tools.
- It reduces both time and financial cost for employers.

Disadvantages associated with word-of-mouth recruitment include the following:

- It limits the number of potential applicants.
- It discriminates against those who are not aware of the vacancy.
- An employer's potential labour pool is limited by the extent of their personal and professional networks.



Employers who do rely on word-of-mouth advertising need to ensure that they work hard to expand their networks to reach the widest possible pool of candidates.

Producers also use other recruitment techniques, including advertising in traditional and online newspapers, social media platforms, and job boards to recruit workers. However, even these expanded efforts often do not result in the recruitment of enough domestic workers to meet the producers' needs, and they will need to develop more innovative recruitment strategies if they wish to attract more Canadians to the sector.

For example, employers could increase the size of the potential pool of candidates by using web-enabled job-search tools such as AgriJobmatch.ca or the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council's online job board, which are dedicated to the agriculture sector. The development of these types of job-resource centres were identified as a clear priority in the Workforce Action Plan. Another possible recruitment strategy would be to encourage more apprenticeships and other forms of experiential learning. Such strategies seem underrepresented in the agriculture sector when compared to other sectors. Other suggestions include combining classroom education and farm experience, and developing short-term (2- to 4-week) basic farm orientation programs for those interested in a career in agriculture.

In summary, while the agriculture sector has begun to improve and expand its practices for recruiting and selecting domestic labour, a coordinated effort among educators, employers, sector councils, and government is required to support the ongoing efforts of agricultural employers and address their unique hiring challenges.



Education and Training

Another potential way for sector employers to find the skilled workers they need is to train them, rather than relying on others to provide that training. It is interesting to note that employers cite a lack of sufficient experience and training as their number one recruitment barrier, but only 48% of them had offered training to their workers in the previous 12 months. The concern over insufficient experience and training among applicants, combined with a limited commitment to training workers, is common across all commodity groups and provinces.

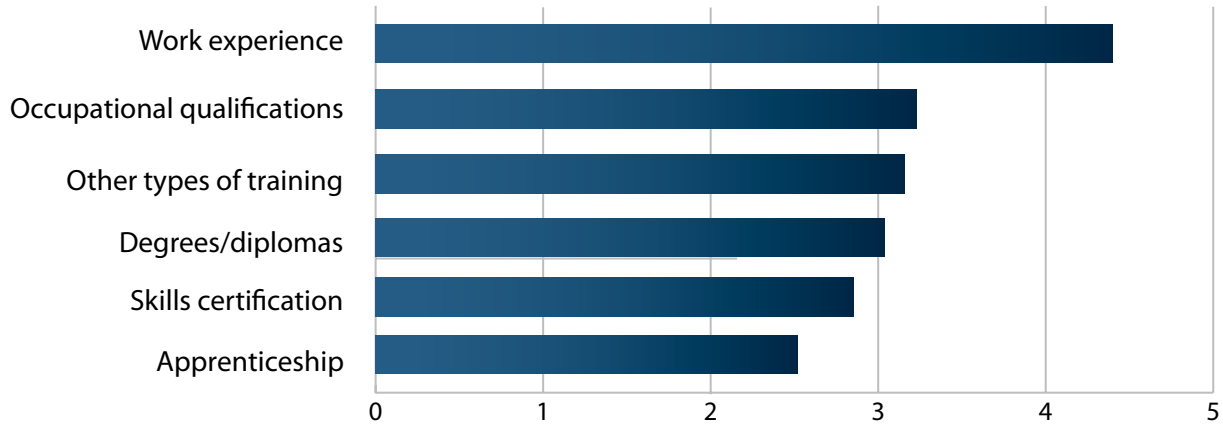
Workers confirm the focus on their experience when going through the hiring process. In the worker survey, we asked workers to rank on a scale of 1 to 5 whether employers recognized different types of qualifications. On average, experience was given a score of 4.4, well above any other consideration (see Chart 30).

In the interviews, producers expressed a considerable degree of hesitation around having untrained or inexperienced workers. Sometimes this was related to safety concerns, such as people being unfamiliar with potentially dangerous equipment



Chart 30: Which qualifications does your employer recognize?

Rank (on a scale of 1 to 5)



Based on a survey of 31 respondents

Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council Worker Survey.

or people who are not accustomed to working with large animals. Sometimes these concerns were related to having untrained people working with very expensive equipment. While these concerns are certainly valid, everyone needs to gain their experience and training somewhere. Employers who are willing and able to provide this training are likely to find it easier to hire and keep their workers.

The Workforce Action Plan noted the lack of appropriate training options as a key area for improvement, with the development of a learning-resource centre and the alignment of training options with industry needs being identified as top priorities.

Improving Retention

A key aspect of improving retention in any job is to determine what motivates your employees and work to satisfy those motivations. The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council promotes a 'best practice approach' to human resource management, including training for farm managers and supervisors on topics such as motivation and communication to assist in worker retention.



Addressing Wage Disparity

The last major challenge that agricultural employers face is wages. It is worth noting that in the worker survey, 28% of those who have recently changed employers stated that they did so to take advantage of better wages and benefits elsewhere. In fact, this is the number one reason that workers change employers within the agriculture sector. Wages are not just an issue when competing with other sectors; they can also be a factor when workers are considering where to work within the sector.

As noted in Chapter 2, the ability of farm operations to increase the pay that they offer is limited. As a result, employers need to find nonmonetary means to motivate workers to choose to work in agriculture and to stay in the sector once they are there. Many possible techniques have been previously discussed

in this chapter, including options such as providing benefits (such as meals and transportation) and emphasizing the quality of life that working in the sector offers. Being more flexible with work arrangements can also improve an employer's relative attractiveness.

Some producers also found that retention improved dramatically if workers were presented with an opportunity to develop an ownership stake in the farm. While many producers hope to be succeeded by family members, this may not always be an option, as many in the next generation opt instead to pursue a career outside of agriculture. Offering employees the option to 'buy in' gives producers an avenue for retirement and succession while simultaneously providing workers with much-desired career advancement prospects.



Conclusion

Canada's agriculture sector faces unique labour market challenges. Most critically, the sector has a labour gap of 59,200 workers, which is equivalent to about one in seven available positions within the sector. Moreover, the size of this labour gap has doubled over the past decade and is expected to nearly double again by 2025, putting 113,800 jobs at risk. This is equivalent to 27% of the total labour demand, or more than one in every four jobs in the sector that year.

In addition to a shrinking domestic workforce and a growing need for labour, the sector faces an unprecedented combination of hiring and retention challenges, including a high degree of seasonal fluctuation in employment, rural depopulation, limited access to foreign labour, and low rates of pay dictated by commodity pricing in some agricultural industries.

The labour gap has implications for the sector today and in the future. The current costs include lost sales of \$1.5 billion per year, as well as higher overtime costs and increased turnover, as the long hours and

hard work put in by an overburdened workforce creates burnout. Unfilled vacancies also reduce the sector's growth potential, as producers have to delay or cancel expansion plans due to a lack of labour.

Input collected from producers during this three-year research project and from the Workforce Action Plan over a one-year period shows that today's producers are finding creative solutions to the challenges. For example, some are addressing seasonality in labour demand by coordinating with other complementary seasonal employers or with agricultural employers with different seasonal patterns outside of Canada. Others bank hours or target employees who are only interested in working part of the year, such as those who are semi-retired. Some producers are also offering increased flexibility regarding working hours or conditions and emphasizing nonmonetary benefits such as free meals, working with machinery or animals, working outdoors, feeding people, or offering ownership stakes in their business as incentives for their best employees. Still others have seen success by recruiting from nontraditional pools of labour.



Foreign workers have also played a role in addressing the sector's labour needs. To date, the sector has been able to fill about three-quarters of its labour gap with foreign workers, with much of the work done by these workers filling the need for seasonal work on farms. However, given the expected rise in the sector's labour gap, it is unclear whether producers will be able to rely on foreign workers to the same extent in the years to come. Doing so would require the sector to triple the number of foreign workers it employs over the next 10 years. Even if this were possible, much of the increase in the labour gap will occur in the 'grain and oilseed' and the 'beef' commodity groups, which are not currently on the National Commodities List. Foreign workers will likely continue to be a major source of labour for the sector, but improvements to the sector's access to foreign workers must be made if the sector is to realize its growth potential in the years to come.

Ultimately, foreign workers are only one element in a multi-faceted solution that must come together to address the sector's considerable labour challenges robustly and sustainably.

In addition to improved access to foreign workers, the industry recognizes the need to make further

improvements in attracting more domestic workers by creating learning resources that promote agricultural careers, outline potential career pathways, and dispel misconceptions. We also need to enhance worker knowledge and skills through improved access to job training, find ways to align learning resources more closely with evolving workplace needs, and support best practices in human-resource management for all employers and managers across the sector.

Based on extensive sector research and consultation, the implications are clear: the solutions to these challenges involve finding and keeping more of the right people. At present, the sector is on an unsustainable path, with a steadily growing labour gap and an increasing dependence on foreign workers to fill that gap. By combining the insight and resources of government ministries, educational institutions, sector councils, and stakeholders, and by supporting the sector in learning from the best practices of its own members, we can ensure that Canada's agriculture sector will have a greater chance of achieving its potential and continuing to meet the rising need for food domestically and around the world.



Appendix: Definitions and Classifications

Methodology

- An economic model for forecasting labour demand and supply in the agriculture sector was developed to quantify and forecast the labour shortage issue. The forecast was produced for each province, for 10 different commodity groups, and for 25 occupational groups.
- A number of industry consultation activities were performed in order to validate results and assumptions in the labour supply and demand model:
 - A large-scale **survey of employers, workers, and other stakeholders** was conducted with 1,034 respondents across Canada, including 813 employers, 132 workers, and 89 stakeholders.
 - Over-the-phone **interviews** with 80 industry stakeholders were conducted.
 - **Six focus groups** were held across the country with a hundred participants overall. Participants included employers, owner-operators, representatives of the national and provincial industry associations, provincial government officials, and other stakeholders.
 - **Seven webinars** focused on specific commodity groups gathered over 100 participants overall.
- The analysis focused on primary production only. Food processing and other aspects of the value chain were not included in the numbers.

Definitions

- **Workforce:** Every person who contributes to the operation of a farm, including owner-operators, paid workers, unpaid workers, and foreign workers.
- **Potential demand:** This refers to the number of workers the industry needs in order to reach its full production potential. The demand for workers is driven by market conditions, the demand for agricultural products, and productivity growth. Historically, it is the sum of the workforce and unfilled vacancies.
- **Domestic supply:** This refers to the number of domestic workers available, including Canadians and permanent residents. Supply includes owner-operators, paid workers, and unpaid workers. It is driven by demographic factors such as retirement, young workers joining the labour force, immigration, migrants from other provinces, and workers shifting to and from other sectors.
- **Gap:** This refers to potential demand less domestic supply.
 - There is a gap when domestic supply is not sufficient to meet the demand. As such, the gap can be interpreted as a measure of labour shortages faced by employers.
 - Foreign workers, including seasonal agricultural workers and unfilled vacancies, are used to estimate the gap. Both indicate a level of demand by employers that domestic supply was not able to fill.
- **Voluntary turnover:** The voluntary turnover rate is calculated as the number of people who departed from a job voluntarily (such as leaving for another job) divided by the total number of workers.
- **Involuntary turnover:** The involuntary turnover rate is calculated as the number of people who departed from a job involuntarily (such as being dismissed) divided by the total number of workers.



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About This Report

This report features data collected during a three-year research project to examine Canada's labour market situation for primary-production agricultural businesses. The project was led by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council (CAHRC) and was launched in response to the unique workforce challenges faced by the agriculture sector.

The purpose was to assess the current labour market, project supply and demand for agricultural workers from 2015 until 2025, and recommend potential solutions to labour issues.

The Conference Board of Canada, commissioned by CAHRC, constructed an economic model that forecasts agricultural labour demand and supply for each province, for 11 different commodity groups, and for 25 occupational groups.

The economic model was validated through a number of industry consultation activities conducted Canada-wide, including:

- **A large-scale survey** of 813 employers, 132 workers, and 89 industry stakeholders
- **Phone interviews** with 80 industry stakeholders
- **Six focus groups** with 100 participants in total, including employers, workers, and other stakeholders
- **Seven webinars** focused on specific commodity groups, with 100 participants in total

This data was used to produce the following reports:

Commodity-specific reports and fact sheets

Apiculture ■ Aquaculture ■ Beef ■ Dairy ■ Field Fruit and Vegetable ■ Grain and Oilseed ■ Greenhouse, Nursery, and Floriculture ■ Poultry and Egg ■ Sheep and Goat ■ Swine ■ Tree Fruit and Vine

Regional reports and fact sheets

National ■ British Columbia ■ Alberta ■ Saskatchewan ■ Manitoba ■ Ontario ■ Quebec ■ New Brunswick ■ Prince Edward Island ■ Nova Scotia ■ Newfoundland and Labrador

For more information on the research, and to access additional commodity-specific, national, and provincial reports, please visit the CAHRC website at www.AgriLMI.ca.

About CAHRC

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council (CAHRC) is a national, nonprofit organization focused on addressing human resource issues faced by agricultural businesses across Canada. CAHRC conducts industry research and develops products and services designed to help agricultural employers attract, retain, and develop the workforce they need to succeed.

For more information about the Council and its products and services for Canada's agriculture sector, please visit www.cahrc-ccrha.ca.



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