

**Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration Canada – Study on the use of the Labour Market
Impact Assessment under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program**

Addendum to Oral testimony from the Canadian Horticultural Council

April 7, 2021

General Overview

Canada's agriculture industry has withstood immense pressure over the previous year, and has overcome significant challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As our country begins to look towards post-pandemic recovery, agriculture is expected to be in the centre of these conversations. This is aligned with the findings of the Advisory Council on Economic Growth in 2017 and reinforced in the 2018 report from the Agri-food Economic Strategy Table. Both of these reports identified Canadian agriculture as a growing sector, and set ambitious targets of production.

In order to maintain this growth trajectory, Canadian producers rely on access to a stable labour supply. This process has always begun with hiring Canadians first through ongoing and vigorous domestic recruitment. However, because agricultural jobs are generally located in rural communities and are seasonal in nature, it is extremely challenging to hire Canadians who generally prefer year-round work and who are concentrated in urban centres. When producers are unable to find enough Canadian workers, they access the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), or the other Agricultural stream programs of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) to satisfy their labour needs.

Over the years, the Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) has worked collaboratively with the federal government to address the vital need for labour in the produce sector to ensure that all growers are able to maintain production without interruption. This has been none more evident than during the COVID-19 pandemic, which greatly threatened the ability of fruit and vegetable growers to access temporary foreign workers. CHC and its members are grateful to the federal government for its swift actions in exempting international farm workers from travel restrictions and for providing some financial support to employers of foreign workers to help cover the costs associated with workers quarantining upon arrival.

It is our hope that the accomplishments of the previous year will continue through greater coordination among various government departments and industry to deliver further enhancements to the LMIA process for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program moving forward.

Shortage in Domestic Labour Market

Canadian farmers spend significant time and effort trying to recruit and retain Canadian workers. However, seasonal farm work does not provide permanent year-round jobs, and as the positions are usually located in rural areas, they are incredibly difficult to fill.

Research conducted by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) shows a critical gap between the demand for workers and the supply of available Canadian workers. This gap has doubled in the past 10 years to approximately 60,000 workers. By 2025, the labour gap is expected to grow to 114,000 workers. The job vacancy rate for the industry is higher than any other industry in Canada, at 7%.

The jobs are also critical and time-sensitive, as they revolve around seasonal crop cycles, fluctuating weather conditions, and the handling of live plants. All these considerations mean that growers need seasonal employees during peak periods to avoid devastating losses. International farm workers help to fill this critical labour need.

This labour shortage, as well as the economic impact it has on the sector, has been greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a report recently issued by CAHRC, it was found that the labour shortages attributed to the pandemic resulted in lost sales of \$2.9 billion. Moreover, two in five employers surveyed were not able to find a sufficient number of workers to meet the needs of their operation. The need to find long-term solutions has never been so imperative to address these challenges moving forward.

Adaptability during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted incoming TFWs, and CHC would like to recognize the federal government's willingness to make changes to specific LMIA processing measures to ensure efficient processing. The most notable of these policy changes include:

- Prioritization of processing LMIA for primary agriculture and agri-food employers
- Removing minimum recruitment requirements
- Extension of the period of validity of a LMIA from the current 6 months to provide employers with more time to identify candidates and arrange for their travel to Canada
- Increase the duration of work permits for low wage stream employees from 1 year to 2 years
- Added flexibility regarding the requirement to provide a recent Housing Inspection Report (HIR)

While many of these policy changes occurred as the direct result of unprecedented circumstances, it cannot be dismissed that they greatly enhanced the LMIA process, and thus should be considered on a permanent basis moving forward.

Trusted Employer Program

In order to help streamline and standardize the Labour Market Impact Assessment application process, CHC continues to advocate for the Government of Canada to implement a Trusted Employer Program. Under such a program, employers carrying a designation of being trustworthy in their use of the TFW Program would have access to an accelerated labour market test. This recommendation is consistent with a proposal made by the Canadian Employee Relocation Council, and is also currently being used in other countries, including the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia.

Online Applications

Industry has indicated a preference for the online application process, which has streamlined their ability to gather and submit the necessary information. In order for this process to continue operating efficiently, it would be helpful for third party labour groups to have access to applications in order to vet

and ensure their completeness before being submitted to Service Canada. This will save a considerable amount of time, and prevent incomplete applications from inundating the overall processing time.

It is also recommended that organizational information, including job descriptions and crop lists, submitted in previous years' LMIA's be populated automatically in new applications. This would allow employers to go in and only make necessary updates, without having to compile the same information year-over-year. Especially for longstanding employers who access the program, this can become quite burdensome. As a result, embracing a more digital process presents an opportunity to further streamline the work required, and allows applications to be completed more efficiently. This would greatly benefit employers, involved third parties, and relevant government agencies.

Eligibility Criteria of Permanent Residency

As the majority of fruit and vegetable farm jobs are seasonal in nature, most workers aren't eligible for immigration. However, some permanent, year-round jobs are available in supervisory roles for workers with the right skills and experience. Greenhouses also provide other year-round job opportunities. CHC believes that the federal government should recognize the labour shortage, prioritize international farm workers, and allow an immigration option if someone has a permanent, year-round job offer on a farm.

Conclusion

Investment in fresh produce production, the research needed to develop the industry such that it can compete in a global market environment, and continuing to provide valuable domestic jobs are all dependent on supplementary labour supplies. Providing a healthy work environment for employees continues to be a priority on our farms.

CHC and its members are committed to ensuring that Canadian farms will continue to provide safe, secure, and healthy food sources for families in Canada and around the world. In order to accomplish this, we need the continued support of government to deliver an effective and efficient TFW Program that recognizes the fact that domestic labour has been in constant undersupply.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the committee's ongoing study. If you have any questions about our submission, please contact Jordan Boswell, Acting Manager, Policy Research and Development at jboswell@hortcouncil.ca or 613-226-4880 x209.

About the Canadian Horticultural Council

The Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) is an Ottawa-based voluntary, not-for-profit, national association that represents fruit and vegetable growers across Canada. These growers are involved in the production of over 120 different types of crops, with farm cash receipts of \$5.4 billion in 2019. Since 1922, in collaboration with members and the government, CHC has advocated on important issues to ensure a viable future for Canada's fruit and vegetable sector.