



**ONTARIO AGRICULTURE
AND FOOD PROCESSING SKILLS
AND OCCUPATION GAPS**



CAHRC-CCRHA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A shortage of labour is one of the primary concerns facing many employers in agriculture and food processing. The purpose of this report was to uncover some of the occupation gaps and skill gaps across the horticulture, field crops, supply-managed sectors, red meat, food processing and agriculture sales and service industries. Through 20 interviews, 6 focus groups, and a survey of 66 employers, industry stakeholders were asked to identify which skills and occupations are critical now and in the future.

Common trends were revealed across all agriculture and food processing. Some occupations, such as general labourer¹ and transport truck drivers, are in high demand across all the sectors. Other in demand occupations, such as growers and industrial butchers, are more sector-specific. Similarly, some skill gaps (e.g., thinking skills, intrapersonal skills²) were identified as gaps across all sectors, while other skill gaps (e.g., business skills, animal handling) applied to a specific sector.

This report highlights the key trends, barriers, and proposed actions that sectors can take to prepare the workforce of the future.

Common barriers to skill development were also revealed across agriculture and food processing. Two common barriers included people not seeing jobs in these industries as viable career options and a lack of training that provides applied learning opportunities (e.g., hands-on learning). In most sectors, it was identified that collaborating with educational stakeholders to develop more applied and hands-on programming would be a good strategy for providing people with the applied learning opportunities they need. In addition, most sectors identified a marketing strategy or re-branding initiative as a proposed action needed to highlight the viable career opportunities in the industry. Many sectors, particularly in the agriculture industry, also identified the development of a mentorship program as a useful action to develop people's skills.

The results summarized in this report highlight the key trends, barriers, and proposed actions that sectors can take to prepare the workforce of the future. The research findings can be used as a starting point for developing sector action plans. For example, the barriers and proposed actions identified through this research can be confirmed with a broader sample of relevant stakeholders. Then, an action plan can be developed to identify the specific steps, partners, and objectives for implementing the proposed actions. Ultimately, these sector action plans can help the industry to secure a highly skilled workforce and grow the industry for years to come.

¹ Please see the Appendix for a definition of general labourer.

² Example skills for each of the different skill groupings (e.g., thinking skills, intrapersonal skills) are provided in the Appendix.



1.0

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The agriculture sector is the economic engine of Ontario, supporting 97,800 jobs in primary agriculture, including 28,800 temporary foreign workers, and over 101,000 jobs in food and beverage processing in 2018. In past months, the COVID-19 crisis has accentuated labour shortages in the sector. Many agriculture and food processing employers consider labour shortages as their top issue as they deal with the fallout from the current crisis.

The goal of the two-year project is to assist Ontario's agriculture and food processing industry in addressing increasing labour shortages, while preparing Ontarians with the future skills needed to work in industry. Information about labour markets is described in many ways and can be confusing to job seekers and employers. The project has developed a common framework for describing the agricultural and food processing labour market so that job seekers and

employers can understand where the jobs are in the industry. The project has also developed and piloted templates for industry associations to use to develop their own sector action plans. With these sector action plans: Ontario's agriculture and food processing industries will be able to assist employers to find and keep workers and help their workforce to adapt to emerging skills that will be needed in the coming decade. Ultimately, these sector action plans will help the agriculture and food processing industries secure a highly skilled workforce in future years.

Ontario's bright production outlook for agriculture and food processing is dependent on ensuring there are enough workers to fulfill the sector's growth potential. This project will assist the agriculture and food processing industries in assessing current needs and developing programs and training opportunities to prepare the workforce of the future.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

This report summarizes the results of industry consultation across the food processing industry, agriculture sales and service industry, and four sectors within the agriculture industry. Industry stakeholders were asked to identify which skills and occupations are critical in each of the sectors, now and in the future. Industry and sector-specific skill development challenges, trends, issues, and proposed actions for how to address these challenges were also discussed.



1.3 APPROACH

A total of 20 stakeholders across the food processing³ and agriculture sales and service industries,⁴ and across four sectors (horticulture,⁵ field crops,⁶ supply-managed sectors,⁷ red meat⁸) within the agriculture industry were interviewed.

After interviews were completed, the Canadian Agricultural HR Council (CAHRC) conducted a series of focus groups to hear from employers about occupational and skill shortages. Five focus groups were held in December 2020 with employers. The Council reviewed recent research reports about skills and occupational shortages in the food processing sector published by Food Processing Skills Canada (FPSC), Food and Beverage Canada (FBC-ABC), and Food and Beverage Ontario (FBO). Because the research was comprehensive, it was determined that a focus group with food processing employers would provide similar results and was not necessary.

Stakeholders in the agriculture sales and service industry were included in consultation efforts as this industry supports agriculture producers by providing products and services to farm businesses. Stakeholders in this industry indicated that there are severe labour and skills shortages that affect the success of agriculture producers. The workforce for this industry is estimated to be approximately 90,000 and has not been included in other labour market information research.

Finally, 66 employers completed an online survey.⁹

³ Food processing includes animal food manufacturing, grain and oil seed milling, sugar and confectionary product manufacturing, fruit and vegetable preserving and speciality food manufacturing, dairy product manufacturing, meat product manufacturing, seafood product preparation and packaging, bakeries and tortilla manufacturing, beverage manufacturing, other food manufacturing, and cannabis (edibles and infused beverages).

⁴ Agriculture sales and service sector include crop input suppliers and services (seed, plant nutrients, crop protection), animal feed suppliers, grain elevator services, farm equipment manufacturing, sales and services, and barn equipment sales and services.

⁵ Horticulture includes field fruit and vegetables, tree fruit and vines, greenhouse vegetables, nursery, floriculture, and ornamentals.

⁶ Field crops includes hay, seed, cereals, pulses, grains and oilseed, forages, and fibre.

⁷ Supply-managed sectors include dairy, and poultry and/or eggs.

⁸ Red meat includes beef including feedlots, swine, sheep, goat, or lamb.

⁹ Please note that the survey response rate is low. Survey response rates may have been lower than expected because of personal and professional challenges related to COVID-19 including survey fatigue.



2.0 HORTICULTURE

Six participants took part in the interviews, and 5 participants took part in the focus group. A total of 22 employers completed the survey and indicated that the primary commodity they produce for sale is in the horticulture sector (including field fruit and vegetables, tree fruit or vine, greenhouse vegetables, nursery and floriculture, and mushrooms). Ten survey respondents had operations in Southern Ontario, 5 in Western Ontario, 4 in Central Ontario, 2 in Eastern Ontario, and 1 in Northern Ontario.¹⁰ Most respondents (18 of 22) reported that less than 25,000 people live in the town, community, or city where their main or largest operation/business was located. Total gross revenue ranged from less than \$99,999 to up to \$249,999,999.

2.1 PRIORITY WORKFORCE ISSUES

Interview and focus group respondents indicated that a reliance on foreign workers, the supply of domestic workers, technology and innovation, and regulatory changes will have the greatest impact on the workforce (e.g., supply and demand of workers, skills and occupations needed now and, in the future) and should be treated as priorities. Employers completing the survey also rated these four workforce issues as key challenges that will impact the growth of the sector. Specifically, reliance on foreign workers was identified as a key trend by 16 of 22 respondents, supply of domestic workers by 12 of 22 respondents, technology, and innovation by 12 of 22 respondents, and regulatory changes by 9 of 22 respondents. In addition to these four trends, some employers also felt that challenges related to COVID-19 and a lack of skills and educational programs should be treated as priorities.

2.2 CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED OCCUPATIONAL AND SKILL NEEDS

2.2.1 Current and Future Occupational Needs

Focus group and interview respondents indicated that it can be difficult to hire general labourers, equipment operators, growers/managers/horticulturists, team leaders/supervisors, and maintenance workers. Survey results revealed that hiring for the general labourer position is the most difficult, with 20 of 22 respondents reporting difficulty hiring for this position. Most employers surveyed also reported that they find it difficult to hire equipment operators, growers/managers/horticulturists, team leaders/supervisors, and maintenance workers. The challenges associated with hiring for some of these positions, such as general labourer, may be exaggerated by the seasonal nature of the work.

¹⁰ Southern Ontario includes Hamilton, Niagara, Haldimand-Norfolk, Brant, Oxford, Elgin, Chatham-Kent, Essex, Lambton, and Middlesex. Western Ontario includes Peel, Dufferin, Wellington, Halton, Waterloo, Perth, Huron, Bruce, Grey and Simcoe. Central Ontario includes Hastings, Prince Edward, Northumberland, Peterborough, Kawartha Lakes, Durham, York, and Toronto. Eastern Ontario includes Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry, Prescott and Russell, Ottawa, Leeds and Grenville, Lanark, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington, and Renfrew. Northern Ontario includes Nipissing, Manitoulin, Sudbury, Greater Sudbury, Timiskaming, Cochrane, Algoma, Thunder Bay, Rainy River, and Kenora.

When asked to consider what occupations will be needed most by 2030, focus group, interview, and survey respondents reported much of the same. That is, they felt it would continue to be challenging to hire general labourers, equipment operators, growers/managers/horticulturists/ team leaders/ supervisors, and maintenance workers. Some employers also mentioned that it will be challenging to hire for off-farm roles, such as transport truck drivers because of the licensing requirements and regulations. They also reported that hiring for the skilled trades will become increasingly challenging over the next 10 years.

2.2.2 Current and Future Skill Needs

Employers reported finding it hard to currently hire and keep people with thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, planning), skills related to operating and maintaining equipment, and supervisory skills (e.g., managing, and leading people, conflict management). In addition, specialized skills such as integrated pest management and technical skills related to growing plants (e.g., plant propagation, nutrient management) were identified as in demand right now. Focus group participants also reported intrapersonal or personal skills (e.g., work ethic, integrity, adaptability) as critical right now, particularly for the general labourer position.

Employers in the interviews, focus group, and survey rated the following skills as being needed the most by 2030: technical skills related to growing plants (e.g., plant propagation, nutrient management), thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, planning), maintaining equipment and machinery, and intrapersonal or personal skills (e.g., work ethic, integrity, adaptability). Employers expect that their business will experience reduced productivity or production delays, reduced sales and revenue, and heightened levels of stress for self and employees because of being unable to find and keep employees with the right skills.

Focus group respondents explained that it can be challenging for farm owners to prioritize spending the budget on training their people.

2.3 BARRIERS TO SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Core Barriers and Priorities to be Addressed

A key barrier to developing people's skills in the sector was that new entrants do not see jobs in the sector as viable careers. Focus group respondents explained that people have a perception that the agriculture industry in general is not a great place to work. They also noted that when they send people for training, these people often leave the industry because they are not paid more for their new skill set. Workers often leave for other industries, such as the automotive industry. Further, smaller operations with under 10 employees struggle to offer career opportunities because there are no higher-level positions to transition into. As such, many workers see jobs in the sector as a stop-gap job rather than a career.

Another barrier to developing people's skills in the sector is the cost for the operation/business. Focus group respondents explained that it can be challenging for farm owners to prioritize spending on training their people. Often, farm owners prioritize investing in the technical side of their operation, but do not recognize the value of investing in the people side. Influencing farm owners to shift their thinking is challenging, but one focus group respondent suggested that it could be done if someone internal to the operation/business (e.g., in an HR, safety, or finance role) had the tools to make a strong business case for investing in people.

In addition, employers felt that a lack of awareness of programs, lack of interest in programs, and employees not having enough time to participate in programs were all barriers to skill development. To address these issues and challenges, employers reported that they provide their employees with in-house training and development, offer higher wages, and recruit employees from other countries.

2.4 PROPOSED SECTOR ACTIONS

Identify Actions to Address Barriers and Priorities

The main action that respondents felt should be taken to address these barriers is to incorporate agriculture topics into school curricula to give students a basic understanding of agriculture. Focus group participants expanded on this and mentioned that students need a better understanding of the role that agriculture plays in the economy, food security, and food sustainability. Further, they indicated that this should be applied to all levels of schooling and include funding to get students out onto farms.

Respondents also identified a need to partner with educators (e.g., colleges and universities) to share industry ideas about a better alignment between what the sector needs and what educators train for. Employers should be consulted to ensure their expectations and desired outcomes are considered when creating programs. Further, the programs should include metrics on knowledge transfer, so that there is evidence that the program is having its desired impact.

Another action identified by employers was to develop more programs that have a hands-on or applied learning component (e.g., co-ops, internships). These types of applied programs would help young people to try out different agriculture occupations. For example, Olds College in Alberta has an applied program, where students receive hands-on work experience.

A mentorship program could help to encourage young people to enter the industry and reduce some of the barriers they face.

Lastly, a few respondents indicated that a mentorship program could be developed. A mentorship program could help to encourage young people to enter the industry and reduce some of the barriers they face. This type of program could be run by an association at the sector level. They also suggested that association membership be opened-up to include non-owner staff. Associations typically limit membership to farm owners/operators. Allowing, and encouraging, other farm employees to join associations could help to get more people involved and, ultimately, grow the industry.

Survey Responses by Geography:

Responses did not appear to differ by geographic region.¹¹



¹¹ The limited sample size prevented a detailed analysis by geography. Additional research is needed to explore how workforce issues, trends, occupational, and skill gap, barriers to skill development, and proposed actions vary by region.

3.0

FIELD CROPS: GRAINS AND OILSEEDS



Two participants took part in the interviews, and 6 participants took part in the focus group. A total of 11 employers completed the survey and indicated that the primary commodity that they produce for sale is field crops (including hay, seed, cereals, pulses, grains and oilseed, forages, and fibre). Three survey respondents had operations in Western Ontario, 5 had operations in Eastern Ontario, 2 had operations in Southern Ontario, and one survey respondent had operations in Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western Ontario. One-half of respondents reported that between 1,000 to 10,000 people live in the town, community, or city where their main or largest operation/business was located. Total gross revenue ranged from \$250,000 to up to \$49,999,999.

3.1 PRIORITY WORKFORCE ISSUES

Interview and focus group respondents noted that an aging workforce and higher rates of retirement as well as fewer younger workers entering the sector will have the greatest impact on the workforce (e.g., supply and demand of workers, skills and occupations needed now and, in the future) and should be treated as priorities. Employers completing the survey also rated these two workforce issues as key challenges that are likely to affect the growth of the sector (7 of 11 and 8 of 11, respectively). The high level of seasonality in the sector as well as the ability to provide a competitive wage were identified as workforce issues. Survey respondents noted that workforce issues, such as a lack of skills and educational programs related to agriculture (6 of 11), the availability and supply of domestic workers (3 of 11), and the consolidation of farms (3 of 11) should be treated as priorities.

3.2 CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED OCCUPATIONAL AND SKILL NEEDS

3.2.1 Current and Future Occupational Needs

Focus group and interview respondents indicated that it can be difficult to hire general labourers, supervisors, and managers. Other occupations external to the farm, identified as in demand, included transport truck drivers. Most employers surveyed, reported that they, too, find it difficult to hire supervisors, managers, and transport truck drivers. They also reported that jobs associated with the agriculture sales and service sector can be difficult to hire for (e.g., parts department personnel, service technicians¹²). The challenges associated with hiring for some of these positions, such as general labourer, may be exaggerated by the seasonal nature of the work.

¹² Please see the Appendix for a definition of service technician.

When asked to consider what occupations will be needed most by 2030, focus group and interview participants reported that they felt that it would continue to be challenging to hire for on-farm positions such as general labourers and off-farm positions such as transport truck drivers. They also reported that equipment operators (on-farm) and service technicians (off-farm) would be in demand positions by 2030 given the expected advances in technology. Consistent with these findings, many of the employers surveyed, anticipate finding it hard to hire general labourers, managers, supervisors, equipment operators, service technicians, and transport truck drivers in the next 10 years.

3.2.2 Current and Future Skill Needs

Employers reported finding it hard to currently hire and keep people with skills related to chemical handling, crop production, operating and maintaining equipment and machinery, and trades skills (e.g., plumbing, electrician). Focus group participants also noted that it can be particularly hard to hire general labourers and supervisors with intrapersonal or personal skills (e.g., adaptability, continuous learning) and skills related to operating equipment and machinery. In addition, they indicated that it is hard to find and hire managers with the needed thinking skills (e.g., decision making, planning).

Employers rated the following skills as being needed the most by 2030: operating and maintaining equipment and machinery, trades (e.g., plumbing, electrician), precision agriculture, business skills (e.g., business acumen, sales, marketing, finance, HR), data analysis, and digital technology and computer skills. Focus group and interview respondents indicated that intrapersonal or personal skills (e.g., adaptability, continuous learning), skills related to operating equipment and machinery, and thinking skills (e.g., decision making, strategic thinking) will be needed the most by 2030.

Employers expect that their business will experience reduced sales, reduced productivity, or production delays, and that they, and their employees will experience heightened levels of stress because of being unable to find and keep employees with the right skills.

3.3 BARRIERS TO SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Core Barriers and Priorities to be Addressed

A lack of educational programs focused on agricultural skills was identified as a key barrier to developing people's skills in the sector. Respondents noted that, although there are programs that provide training on how to operate heavy equipment, there are no programs on how to operate agriculture-specific equipment. The existing education system does not provide enough information on farming and does not offer hands-on or applied experience (e.g., apprenticeship programs). Another barrier to developing people's skills in the sector is that young people and new entrants do not view agriculture as a viable career option. Potential employees also hold negative perceptions of the sector.

In addition, employers felt that the government and industry do not provide the needed incentives for them to be able to offer programming. As one focus group participant mentioned, it can be very challenging to receive funding to upskill people and funding for many programs is ad-hoc. The cost of skill development for both the operation/business and the individual employee, as well as the time it takes for employees to participate in training, we identified identified as other barriers to skill development.

To address skill issues and challenges, employers reported that they provide their employees with in-house training and development, offer higher wages, and have increased the other benefits and compensation that they offer.



3.4 PROPOSED SECTOR ACTIONS

Identify Actions to Address Barriers and Priorities

Respondents felt that developing agricultural apprenticeship programs within Ontario would help new entrants to develop the skills needed to succeed in the sector and at the same time provide practical hands-on experience. Programs could be modelled after Conestoga College’s recently launched program for agricultural equipment operators. Building on this idea, respondents felt that programs could be developed within the province that recognize agricultural designations as skilled trades (e.g., like Red Seal). This would help to make careers in the sector more appealing to young people.

Respondents suggested that creating an agriculture student grant program (e.g., like the student grant program but agricultural-specific) would be useful in terms of helping to build a skilled workforce. This type of program would help to entice people to enter the sector and help employers to fund skill development.

Identifying strategies that highlight why agriculture is a rewarding career was identified as another priority action for building a skilled workforce. The proposed agricultural-specific job grants as well as greater partnerships with educational partners may help to increase awareness of the various careers available.

Lastly, respondents felt that a mentorship program could help to build a skilled workforce. The program could include a peer network for employers, mentors, and mentees to share information. This program would leverage existing materials and resources like those developed for the Ag’s Women’s Network and the Cattlemen’s Young Leaders (CYL) Mentorship Program.

Programs could be modelled after Conestoga College’s recently launched program for agricultural equipment operators.

ONTARIO EXAMPLE: THE ECOLOGICAL FARMERS ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO (EFAO)

The EFAO is a membership organization that supports farmers to build ecological farms through farmer-led education, research, and community building. The EFAO currently has over 720 members with a variety of experiences, farm sizes, and production types.

The EFAO offers some programs that are intended to support new and aspiring farmers. For example, the Ignatius New Farmer Training Program provides learners with the information needed to start a farm. The program covers a range of topics and includes a mix of webinars, virtual field days, and participant meet ups. Participants can sign up for a whole term or sign up for single sessions. The EFAO also offers an online farm planning course and runs shorter online training events and webinars on a regular basis.

More information about the programs offered by the EFAO can be found on their website here: <https://efao.ca/programs/>

Survey Responses by Geography:

Responses did not appear to differ by geographic region.¹³



¹³ The limited sample size prevented a detailed analysis by geography. Additional research is needed to explore how workforce issues, trends, occupational, and skill gap, barriers to skill development, and proposed actions vary by region.



4.0 SUPPLY-MANAGED SECTORS

Three participants took part in the interviews, and 6 participants took part in the focus group. A total of 7 employers completed the survey and indicated that the primary commodity that they produce for sale is in the supply-managed sector (dairy, or poultry and/or eggs). Three survey respondents had operations in Western Ontario, 3 had operations in Southern Ontario, and 1 had an operation in Central Ontario. Four of the 7 respondents reported that less than 25,000 people live in the town, community, or city where their main operation/business was located. Total gross revenue ranged from \$500,000 to up to \$49,999,999.

4.1 PRIORITY WORKFORCE ISSUES

Interview and focus group respondents noted that the supply of domestic workers, an aging workforce and higher rates of retirement will have the greatest impact on the workforce and should be treated as priorities. Employers completing the survey also rated these workforce issues as key challenges that are likely to impact the growth of the sector (4 of 7 and 3 of 7, respectively). A lack of skills and educational programs related to agriculture was also identified as a priority workforce issue by interview and focus group respondents, and 2 of 7 survey respondents. Three of 7 survey respondents also noted that fewer younger workers entering agriculture should be treated as a priority workforce issue.

4.2 CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED OCCUPATIONAL AND SKILL NEEDS

4.2.1 Current and Future Occupational Needs

Focus group and interview respondents indicated that it can be difficult to hire general labourers, feeder positions, herdspersons, supervisors, and managers. Other occupations external to the farm, identified as in demand, included transport truck drivers. Most employers surveyed, reported that they, too, find it difficult to hire general labourers and managers. They also reported some difficulty hiring for feeder positions, herdspersons, and supervisors.

When asked to consider what occupations will be needed most by 2030, focus group and interview participants reported that they felt it would continue to be challenging to hire for on-farm positions such as general labourers and herdspersons, and off-farm positions such as transport truck drivers. They also mentioned that service technicians and mechanics would be more in demand by 2030 given the advances in technology, computer systems, and robotics. The employers surveyed indicated that by 2030 it will be most challenging to hire people for general labourer, manager, herdsman, and skilled trades positions.

4.2.2 Current and Future Skill Needs

Employers reported finding it hard to currently hire and keep people with skills related to maintaining equipment and machinery, animal health and welfare, animal production/husbandry, intrapersonal or personal skills (e.g., work ethic, initiative), and thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, planning). Focus group participants noted that intrapersonal or personal skills, such as work ethic, reliability, and initiative, are particularly important for general labourers and workers.

Employers rated the following skills as being needed the most by 2030: animal production/husbandry, animal health and welfare, intrapersonal or personal skills (e.g., work ethic, initiative), essential skills (e.g., literacy, numeracy), operating equipment and machinery, and thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, planning). Focus group and interview participants indicated that human resources skills, trades skills (e.g., electrical, plumbing), and technology skills (e.g., computer literacy) will also be needed most by 2030.

Employers expect that there will be more stress for themselves and their employees, reduced productivity, reduced sales, and increased costs if they are unable to find and keep employees with the right skills.

4.3 BARRIERS TO SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Core Barriers and Priorities to be Addressed

One of the main barriers identified by respondents was that jobs in the sector are not seen as viable careers. Focus group participants mentioned that there is often little room for upward mobility at most operations. Another barrier to developing people's skills in the sector is that the training available does not provide applied learning opportunities (e.g., hands-on learning). Focus group participants also mentioned that some of the training available is outdated, and therefore people are not learning the skills that they need. Other barriers include too little interest in skill development from employees, the cost of training for the business/operation, and that training is often offered at locations that are too far away for people to attend.

To address skill issues and challenges, employers reported that they provide their employees with in-house training and development (i.e., on-the-job training), offer higher wages, and have increased the other benefits and compensations that they offer.

4.4 PROPOSED SECTOR ACTIONS

Identify Actions to Address Barriers and Priorities

Respondents recommended that there be a re-branding of agriculture in Canada to provide Canadians with a realistic and positive image of farming in Canada. This re-branding should remove the stigma around farming and highlight the rewarding careers that are possible in the field. This type of re-branding campaign would help to address the barrier of people not seeing jobs in the sector as a viable career. Additionally, branding efforts could focus on highlighting the different lifestyle opportunities (e.g., application of science) that the sector can provide (e.g., Godairy New Zealand).

Focus group participants mentioned that there is often little room for upward mobility at most operations.

To address the barrier of a lack of applied learning, respondents indicated that part of the education and training (including colleges and universities) needs to include a hands-on component. Because much of the work in agriculture is outside, working with animals, and working with tools, even people with a degree in agriculture do not always have the requisite skillset to complete the tasks required. Adding hands-on experience, through a co-op placement or internship, would provide people with the hands-on experience required. Focus group participants mentioned that Lakeland College in Alberta has an agriculture program that includes a good hands-on component. In addition, many respondents interviewed were not aware of the agricultural training being offered by the various levels of government. A centralized website describing such programs, including links to other agricultural boards and organizations would be helpful.

Focus group respondents mentioned that a mentorship program could help to build a skilled workforce. The program could include informal or formal avenues for mentors and mentees to connect. The mentee could be provided with guidance, included in operations or tasks they may not be familiar with, and exposed to different areas of the business. An example of an already existing mentorship program is the Cattlemen's Young Leaders (CYL) Mentorship Program.

Adding hands-on experience, through a co-op placement or internship, would provide people with the experience required.

Lastly, respondents felt that working with government agencies to explore how to improve immigration and temporary foreign worker (TFW) programs is critical to ensuring a stable and skilled workforce. Focus group respondents indicated that TFWs are essential to keep farms operating, while the larger industry-wide labour shortage is addressed. Respondents mentioned that TFW programs need to be modified to either provide longer working Visas or fast-tracked permanent resident status to allow foreign workers to balance family life back home with their work life in Canada. It was also suggested that a centralized provincial website that lists all possible sources of labour would be beneficial.

Survey Responses by Geography:

Responses did not appear to differ by geographic region.¹⁴



¹⁴ The limited sample size prevented a detailed analysis by geography. Additional research is needed to explore how workforce issues, trends, occupational, and skill gap, barriers to skill development, and proposed actions vary by region.



5.0 RED MEAT

Three participants representing red meat (beef including feedlots, swine, sheep, goats, or lamb) took part in the interviews, and 7 participants took part in the focus group. A total of 3 employers (swine) completed the survey.¹⁵ One survey respondent had operations in Southern Ontario, 1 had operations in both Southern and Western Ontario, and 1 had operations in both Southern and Central Ontario. Two respondents reported that between 1,000 to 10,000 people live in the town, community, or city where their main or largest operation/business was located, while the other respondent reported that their main operation was in an area with a population of between 100,000 and 500,000. Total gross revenue ranged from \$2,000,000 to up to \$250,000,000.

5.1 PRIORITY WORKFORCE ISSUES

Interview and focus group respondents noted that a lack of skills and educational programs related to the sector, regulatory agreements, and trade agreements and/or disruptions will have the greatest impact on the workforce and should be treated as priorities. They also reported that a shortage of livestock truck drivers and limited food processing capability negatively impacted the supply chain and value chain. Others indicated that greater rates of retirement, the availability of domestic workers, and increasing technological advances and innovation are impacting the labour supply and demand in the sector. Employers completing the survey indicated that workforce issues, such as a reliance on foreign workers and issues with immigration should be treated as priorities.

5.2 CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED OCCUPATIONAL AND SKILL NEEDS

5.2.1 Current and Future Occupational Needs

Interview and focus group respondents reported that there is a shortage of people in positions external to the farm including industrial butchers and related roles, meat inspectors and livestock truck drivers. They reported that it can be challenging to hire for on-farm positions such as general labourers, farm supervisors and managers, sanitation workers and maintenance people. Employers completing the survey reported it hard to find and hire general labourers and farm supervisors.¹⁵

¹⁵ Please note that due to the small survey sample size, the discussion will mainly focus on the results from the interviews and focus group.

Responses by Geography:¹⁶

Interview and focus group respondents noted that in Northern Ontario there is a shortage of feed providers and veterinarians.

When thinking about the various trends that are likely to impact the sector (e.g., technology), interview and focus group respondents noted that those occupations currently in demand would continue to be the occupations most needed by 2030. Employers anticipate that it will be especially challenging to find and hire general labourers and farm supervisors/managers in 2030.

5.2.2 Current and Future Skill Needs

Employers stated that it can be difficult to find and hire people with skills related to animal handling, animal health and welfare, and animal production/husbandry. They also reported that it can be hard to hire people with the needed interpersonal skills (e.g., teamwork, communication), thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, planning), and supervisory or managerial skills (e.g., diversity and inclusion, developing others). Interview and focus group respondents noted that it can be hard for mixed production farms to find and hire general labourers/workers with skills related to crop production. They also find it hard to hire general labourers with the needed essential skills (e.g., reading, numeracy, etc.), intrapersonal or personal skills (e.g., work ethic, willingness to learn), and skills related to operating and maintaining equipment and tools. They noted that there is a shortage of skills related to performing a trade (e.g., plumbing, brick layer, electrician) and meat processing skills.

Respondents noted that the skills currently in demand will likely be the most needed and difficult to hire for 10 years from now. In 2030, general labourers/workers will need to have strong intrapersonal or personal skills (e.g., adaptability, work ethic, ability to learn) and be able to operate and maintain equipment and tools for farms to succeed. Farm managers will need to be innovative and be strong strategic thinkers to navigate the various trends affecting the future of the sector.

Employers expect that their business will experience reduced sales, reduced productivity, or production delays, increased costs, and that they, and their employees, will experience heightened levels of stress because of being unable to find and keep employees with the right skills.

5.3 BARRIERS TO SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Core Barriers and Priorities to be Addressed

Barriers to developing people's skills in the sector included a lack of available training, a lack of training that provides applied learning opportunities (e.g., hands-on), and training that is provided in locations that are too far away for the learner. Jobs are also not seen as viable career options. Focus group respondents reported that government and industry do not provide incentives for offering programming. Training can also be expensive for the learner (e.g., cost of livestock truck driver's license). Lastly, upskilling opportunities do not always take the learner's level of essential skills (e.g., reading, writing, etc.) and language needs into consideration.

To address skill issues and challenges, employers reported that they have recruited employees from other countries and/or provinces, have tried to offer higher wages, increased other types of benefits and compensation (e.g., housing, health benefits, discounted or free meat) that they offer, and have provided in-house training and development. Employers have also tried to provide mentoring opportunities and have offered job rotations and job shadowing.



¹⁶ The limited sample size prevented a detailed analysis by geography. Additional research is needed to explore how occupational and skill gaps, barriers to skill development, and proposed actions vary by geographic region.

5.4 PROPOSED SECTOR ACTIONS

Identify Actions to Address Barriers and Priorities

Respondents indicated that it is important to explore strategies for promoting careers in the sector and making careers appealing to young people. This would include identifying marketing messages and what channels to use (e.g., social media). New entrants are often not aware of the different career options and hold negative perceptions of the sector (e.g., wages, work environment, animal welfare). Sector-specific programming could be offered across all levels of the Ontario school system. This type of programming could build on the offerings currently provided by AgScape, an organization that provides agriculture and food literacy learning content to educators and students in Ontario.

Respondents also felt that there is a need for more government sponsored education programs (i.e., student subsidies or scholarships) that offer applied learning (e.g., co-op placement, apprenticeship). Sector-specific, applied programs, like the Agricultural Equipment Operator program offered by Conestoga College would help to encourage people to obtain the skills needed to be successful and develop an interest in the sector. Agricultural designations could also be recognized as skilled trades (e.g., farm mechanics, meat processors) as this would help to encourage entry into the sector and make careers more attractive to new entrants.

Creating online and modular training that focuses on those skills most in demand was identified as another priority action for building a skilled workforce.

Creating online and modular training that focusses on those skills most in demand was identified as another priority action for building a skilled workforce. This training could be made interactive by using technology, such as virtual reality. Additionally, there is a need to create online training focussed on management and supervisory skills (e.g., developing others, coaching, diversity and inclusion, conflict resolution, and other leadership skills). Respondents noted that some associations, such as Ontario Sheep Farmers and Ontario Pork Industry Council, already offer online training modules. For example, the Ontario Pork Industry Council offers some excellent online training focussed on a variety of topics, including leadership. These existing training modules could serve as a template for the development of additional training.





6.0

FOOD PROCESSING

As mentioned previously, CAHRC reviewed recent research reports about skill and occupational shortages in the food processing industry published by FPSC, FBC-ABC, and FBO. Because this research was comprehensive, it was determined that further consultation with food processing employers would provide similar results and a focus group was not necessary. The information collected from existing research and during the interview phase was used to populate the survey. The survey provided additional confirmation concerning support for sector priorities. The findings of existing research as well as the results of the interviews and employer survey will be discussed in the sections below.

Three participants representing meat product manufacturing took part in the interviews. Two employers, one representing meat product manufacturing, and one representing beverage manufacturing completed the survey.

6.1 PRIORITY WORKFORCE ISSUES

FPSC conducted a survey of 740 food processing companies across Canada, including 211 respondents from Ontario.¹⁷ Ontario respondents noted that the top challenge impacting their business was the availability of labour (61%). It was estimated that Canada will need 56,000 new workers by 2025 to meet the federal government's Agri-Food Economic Strategy Table's target of \$85 billion in exports, for which Ontario's share would be 20,000 new workers.¹⁸ Ontario respondents also reported that regulatory requirements (e.g., labelling, certification, quality

assurance; 45%) and waste reduction and other environment requirements (39%) were having the greatest impact on their business. Other business challenges rounding out the top 5, included implementing new technologies (39%) and changing consumer trends (36%). Another reported challenge making it more difficult for industry to find and retain the needed workforce was that the general public is not aware of the industry and the available opportunities.¹⁹

¹⁷ Food Processing Skills Canada (2020). *2020 Labour market information survey: Canadian food & beverage manufacturing industry report*.

¹⁸ Food Processing Skills Canada (2021). *At the crossroads to greatness: Key insights & labour market research about Canada's food and beverage processing industry*.

¹⁹ Food Processing Skills Canada (2020). *Your next worker: Everything you need to know. Perceptions of the people you are trying to reach*.

These findings are consistent with the results of FBO's Labour Market Information report²⁰ and FBC-ABC's People, Careers & Workforce Planning model.²¹ This model identified six interconnected elements that impact the development and retention of the food processing workforce. These elements are linked to well-documented workforce challenges. Elements include initiatives designed to increase awareness of the industry and career options, tools and programs that promote progressive HR and a positive employee culture, and initiatives that support skills training. Other elements focus on mechanisms and supports for ensuring qualified foreign workers, supporting underrepresented groups (e.g., new Canadians, Indigenous people, and youth) and supporting the adoption of automation and technology. FBO has developed a strategy of priority initiatives related to these six elements.²²

Interview findings and survey results from the current research were consistent with those described above.

6.2 CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED OCCUPATIONAL AND SKILL NEEDS

6.2.1 Current and Future Occupational Needs

Currently, there are a high number of job vacancies for labourers, industrial butchers, maintenance, and construction trades (e.g., millwrights, industrial electricians), shippers and receivers, material handlers and transport truck drivers.²³ There is a shortage of workers in skilled trades (e.g., maintenance electricians, automation technicians, millwrights) across Ontario and the country.²⁴ These job vacancies are likely to continue to be problematic 10 years from now. Turnover rates (e.g., workers that resign, retire, or are terminated) are highest among production workers.²⁵ The cost of these vacancies amounts to over \$1 Billion a year for Ontario.²⁶ It is also important to note that many employers reported experiencing seasonal challenges related to recruiting and retaining workers with the needed skills.²⁷

Similarly, interview and survey respondents noted that employers currently find it hard to hire industrial butchers, and related roles. Respondents representing the red meat sector (primary agriculture) also reported that a shortage of workers in these roles was affecting their sector.

6.2.2 Current and Future Skill Needs

Respondents reported that there is currently a shortage of technical skills related to their sector (e.g., skilled butcher) and a shortage of skills related to performing a skilled trade (e.g., maintain equipment and machinery, maintain electrical systems, automation). Employers completing the survey also reported that it can be hard to find and keep people with skills related to operating equipment, supervisory or managerial skills (e.g., developing others, managing performance), and thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, planning, strategic).

The skill requirements for some production positions will change as technology changes such that there will be a need for more technology related skills (e.g., experience in robotics, computer-controlled equipment and manufacturing software).²⁸ A *Future Skills Roundtable* conducted by FPSC sought to identify skills needed in the future for several core occupations.²⁹ They found that in order to be successful in the next 10 years, production workers will need mechanical and digital skills, critical thinking, and communication skills, while production supervisors will need an inclusive and adaptable approach to work. Both sales and marketing professionals and food safety professionals will need to be able to learn continuously and stay up to date on their area of focus.

Respondents expect that their business will experience reduced productivity, or production delays, increased costs, less innovation and that they, and their employees will experience heightened levels of stress because of being unable to find and keep employees with the right skills.

20 Food and Beverage Ontario (2019). *Labour market information for Ontario's food and beverage processing industry*.

21 Food and Beverage Canada (2020). *A report on: Food and Beverage Canada- Labour Planning Session*.

22 Food and Beverage Ontario (2020). *A strategy for jobs and recovery in Ontario's food and beverage manufacturing sector*.

23 Food and Beverage Ontario (2019). *Labour market information for Ontario's food and beverage processing industry*.

24 Food and Beverage Canada (2021). *Food and beverage manufacturing national workforce and recovery action plan*.

25 Food Processing Skills Canada (2020). *2020 Labour market information survey: Canadian food & beverage manufacturing industry report*.

26 Food Processing Skills Canada (2021). *At the crossroads to greatness: Key insights & labour market research about Canada's food and beverage processing industry*.

27 Food Processing Skills Canada (2020). *2020 Labour market information survey: Canadian food & beverage manufacturing industry report*.

28 Food and Beverage Ontario (2019). *Labour market information for Ontario's food and beverage processing industry*.

29 Food Processing Skills Canada (2018). *Future Skills in Food Processing. Round table report: Identifying the skills of tomorrow*.

6.3 BARRIERS TO SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Core Barriers and Priorities to be Addressed

A lack of educational programs focused on sector-specific skills and the cost of upskilling for the operation/business were identified as key barriers to developing people's skills in the industry. The educational programs designed to produce graduates with the needed skills are rated as inadequate or non-existent.³⁰ Another barrier to developing people's skills in the sector is that young people and new entrants do not have a positive perception of the sector and are not aware of available jobs/careers.³¹

Employers reported using a variety of training tools, including on-the-job training, in-house team members who provide training, manuals, handouts or quizzes, and group talks to help build skills within the workplace. They also offered a variety of benefits (e.g., extended health or drug plan, paid leave, RRSP matching, tuition reimbursement) to attract employees and encourage them to stay.³²

6.4 PROPOSED INDUSTRY ACTIONS

Identify Actions to Address Barriers and Priorities

FBO has developed a *Strategy for Jobs and Recovery in Ontario's Food and Beverage Manufacturing Sector*.³³ This strategy includes several priority initiatives that will address workforce challenges facing the sector. Example initiatives include the creation of a workforce hub to support recruitment and retention efforts, innovative approaches to skills trade training to address shortages, supports for front line workers in communities with job opportunities, and programs designed to facilitate innovation and automation. Consistent with these recommendations, FBO has launched the CareersNOW initiative that provides resources, training, and information on careers in the food processing industry.

FPSC has outlined several features of a multi-faceted labour strategy.³⁴ This strategy includes 5 themes centred on increasing awareness of the industry and

careers, finding novel ways to recruit, retain and train people, investing in technology and innovation, modernizing, and adapting immigration programs, and developing and implementing programs that support industry as it continues to adapt to the realities of COVID-19.

More recently, FBC-ABC released the *National Workforce and Recovery Action Plan*.³⁵ This Action Plan focuses on two key areas preventing the food processing sector from reaching its growth potential: labour and innovation. The Action Plan outlines several recommendations for addressing the shortage of skilled trade workers, including assessing current availability and demand for skilled trades workers, identifying career development pathways, exploring regional differences in educational requirements, and investigating the role of underrepresented groups.

ONTARIO EXAMPLE: SUB-SECTOR STRATEGY IN ACTION

Meat & Poultry Ontario has put together an *Industry Workforce Advisory Table (IWAT)*, comprised of 11 companies and 12 members representing the meat processing industry in Ontario. The goal of the project is to develop a provincial strategy and action plan that addresses skill development pathways and identifies attraction and retention strategies for new entrants as well as the current workforce. IWAT identified the following initial list of solutions:

- Develop clearer communication and promotion of the industry and careers to the public and young people.
- Research what workers seek in their careers and identify criteria for achieving job satisfaction.
- Create an online, central food sector hub and job posting board by region/city.
- Focus on attracting immigrants.
- Increase awareness of existing training available to employers and develop in-house leadership training for smaller employers.
- Develop a benchmarking system between employers and provide a tailored to industry HR toolkit for employers.

30 Food Processing Skills Canada (2020). *2020 Labour market information survey: Canadian food & beverage manufacturing industry report*.

31 Food Processing Skills Canada (2020). *Your next worker: Everything you need to know. Perceptions of the people you are trying to reach*.

32 Food Processing Skills Canada (2020). *2020 Labour market information survey: Canadian food & beverage manufacturing industry report*.

33 Food and Beverage Ontario (2020). *A strategy for jobs and recovery in Ontario's food and beverage manufacturing sector*.

34 Food Processing Skills Canada (2021). *At the crossroads to greatness: Key insights & labour market research about Canada's food and beverage processing industry*.

35 Food and Beverage Canada (2021). *Food and beverage manufacturing national workforce and recovery action plan*.

7.0

AGRICULTURE SALES AND SERVICE



Three participants took part in the interview, and 7 participants took part in the focus group. A total of 21 employers completed the survey and indicated that their primary operation/business is in the agriculture sales and service sector (crop input, animal feed, farm equipment sales and services, crop consultant). Eight survey respondents had operations in Western Ontario, 5 had operations in Central Ontario, 4 had operations in Southern Ontario, 3 had operations in Eastern Ontario, and 1 had an operation in Northern Ontario. Ten respondents reported that fewer than 10,000 live in the town, community, or city where their operation was located (6 reported between 10,000 – 100,000; and 5 reported between 100,000 – 500,000). Total gross revenue ranged from \$250,000 to over \$250,000,000.

7.1 PRIORITY WORKFORCE ISSUES

Interview and focus group respondents noted that an aging workforce and higher rates of retirement, and technology and innovation will have the greatest impact on the workforce and should be treated as priorities. Employers completing the survey also rated these two workforce issues as key challenges that are likely to affect the growth of the industry (15 of 21 and 13 of 21, respectively). Survey respondents also mentioned that workforce issues, such as fewer younger workers (12 of 21), and a lack of skills and educational programs related to agriculture (11 of 21) should be treated as priorities.

7.1.1 Current and Future Occupational Needs

Focus group and interview respondents indicated that it can be difficult to hire service technicians, salespeople, and transport truck drivers. Most employers surveyed felt that these three occupations are the most challenging.

Survey respondents also reported that customer service roles are challenging to hire.

When asked to consider which occupations will be needed most by 2030, focus group and interview participants reported that they felt it would continue to be challenging to hire service technicians. With anticipated advances in technology, they also mentioned that there would be a greater need for information technology (IT) type roles, including IT support and software development roles. Survey respondents echoed the notion that it will continue to be challenging to hire service technicians. They also reported that it will be challenging to hire salespeople, customer service roles, and middle managers over the next 10 years.

7.1.2 Current and Future Skills Needs

Employers reported finding it hard to currently hire and keep people with thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, planning), supervisory or managerial skills (e.g., leading people, coaching), intrapersonal or

personal skills (e.g., adaptability, initiative), and skills related to maintaining equipment and machinery. Focus group participants also noted that interpersonal skills, such as teamwork and customer focus, can be challenging to hire for in entry-level roles.

Employers rated the following skills as being needed the most by 2030: thinking skills (e.g., problem solving, planning), heavy machinery skills, essential skills (e.g., literacy, numeracy), intrapersonal or personal skills (e.g., adaptability, initiative), business skills (e.g., sales), and technology skills. Focus group and interview respondents also felt that customer service skills would be needed the most by 2030.

Employers expect that their business will experience reduced productivity or production delays, reduced sales and revenue, and heightened levels of stress because of being unable to find and keep employees with the right skills.

7.2 BARRIERS TO SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Core Barriers and Priorities to be Addressed

The cost of training for the operation or for the employee was identified as a key barrier to developing people's skills in the industry. Respondents indicated that the cost of training for some programs (e.g., crop dryer course) is too high. Another barrier to developing people's skills in the industry is that sometimes employees have little interest in attending training or do not have the time needed to participate in training. A limitation of existing training is that it does not include an applied component. Training needs to have a hands-on component (e.g., apprenticeships, co-ops) to be more effective.

In addition, employers felt that jobs in the industry are not seen as viable careers. Focus group participants mentioned that there needs to be more awareness of the possible opportunities in the industry, and to also highlight the types of technology being used. Current strategies include going into schools, doing job fairs, and shop tours, but respondents indicated that more should be done to highlight the opportunities within the industry.

To address skill issues and challenges, employers reported that they provide their employees with in-house training and development, offer higher wages, and have increased the other benefits and compensations that they offer.

7.3 PROPOSED INDUSTRY ACTIONS

Identify Actions to Address Barriers and Priorities

Respondents felt that greater collaboration between industry and academia is needed to develop programs that meet the needs of the industry and to build a skilled workforce. Focus group participants mentioned that the industry could collaborate with trade schools and universities to develop programs that align with the needs of manufacturing. For example, Saskatchewan Polytechnic and the Discovery Farm Langham are in the early stages of developing a collaborative program aligned to industry requirements, with a focus on service technicians and the range of systems and techniques they need to be familiar with.

Respondents identified several other actions related to training and skills development, including developing a training policy to teach employers how to build an organizational culture that attracts employees and results in lower turnover; developing online skills training with an applied learning component; developing train-the-trainer programs and accreditation to facilitate in-house training activities.

In addition to the recommendations around training, respondents felt that identifying marketing strategies to convince people that there are great job opportunities in the industry would be a useful action for building a skilled workforce. Focus group participants mentioned the idea of developing something like the "field to fork" commercials to increase awareness of the opportunities available within the industry. Other ideas included visiting classrooms more often to teach students about the technology used in the industry and developing a video game for people to play that exposes them to career opportunities within the industry and can help them to develop the needed skills.

Survey Responses by Geography:

Responses did not appear to differ by geographic region.³⁶

³⁶ The limited sample size prevented a detailed analysis by geography. Additional research is needed to explore how workforce issues, trends, occupational, and skill gap, barriers to skill development, and proposed actions vary by region.



8.0

UPTAKE OF EXISTING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

During the interviews, stakeholders were asked about their awareness and use of several existing workforce development programs (i.e., SkillsAdvance Ontario Pilot Program, Ontario Labour Market Partnerships Program, Canada-Ontario Job Grant, Feeding Your Future Program).

SAO EXAMPLE PROGRAM: FARM ASSISTANCE TRAINING IN PRESCOTT-RUSSELL³⁷

The United Counties of Prescott and Russell, the Prescott-Russell Employment Services Centre, and Groupe Convex Prescott-Russell partnered to offer skills development training for local agriculture workers. They received \$271,734 in funding through SAO.

Features of the training program:

- Training sessions will be free to participants.
- Training will target anyone interested in agriculture and agri-food.
- Training content will focus on essential technical skills required to support farm work.

The SkillsAdvance Ontario (SAO) pilot project is intended to support workforce development in key growth sectors. SAO funds partnerships that help connect employers with the employment and training services required to recruit and advance workers with the right skills. More information about the SAO pilot project can be found here: <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/programs/sao.html>

The Ontario Labour Market Partnerships (OLMP) program provides funding to communities, sector groups, employers, or employer associations to develop and implement strategies for addressing workforce challenges (e.g., skills shortage). More information about the OLMP program can be found here: <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/programs/lmp.html>

³⁷ The Review (2021). *Partners plan to train agriculture workers in Prescott-Russell.*

OLMP EXAMPLE PROGRAM: NATIONAL FARMERS UNION – ONTARIO FARM LABOUR PROJECT³⁸

The National Farmers Union – Ontario (NFU-O) received OLMP funding to support their farm labour project. The aim of the project is to identify the causes and potential solutions to farm labour issues in the province.

The project will include:

- An online survey for farm operators.
- Interviews with key stakeholders.
- Focus groups with key stakeholders.



The Canada-Ontario Job Grant (COJG) provides opportunities for employers or employer associations to invest in their workforce with financial support from the government. The COJG provides direct financial support for employers to purchase training for their employees. The COJG is available to small, medium, and large businesses planning to deliver short-term training to existing or new employees. Employers can receive up to \$10,000 per person for training costs, if the training is delivered by an eligible third-party trainer. Employers with more than 100 employees need to contribute one-half of the training costs, and employers with less than 100 employees need to contribute one-sixth of the training costs.

More information about the COJG can be found here: <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/cojg/>

Feeding Your Future is an Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) project that aims to promote agri-food jobs and training opportunities across Ontario. The project includes free job matching concierge services, virtual career fairs, webinars, and other training opportunities. The job matching concierge was developed through a partnership between OFA, AgCareers.com, and CareersInFood.com to help match employers with job seekers. Funding for this project (up to \$396,000) was obtained through the Canadian Agriculture Partnership, which is a \$3 billion five-year federal-provincial-territorial investment initiative.³⁹ More information about Feeding Your Future can be found here: <https://feedingyourfuture.ca/>

Two-thirds of the stakeholders interviewed, reported that they were not aware of these programs. One barrier to using the SkillsAdvance program was that participants felt that the program did not fit their needs. Respondents reported that they had decided not to use the Ontario Labour Market Partnership Program because they did not feel that they would qualify for funding, they found it hard to find information on the program, the application process was not user friendly, or they were unsure of how the funding could be applied.

³⁸ National Farmers Union – Ontario (2020). *NFU-O Farm Labour Project*.

³⁹ Ontario Federation of Agriculture (2020). OFA will receive Canadian Agriculture Partnership funding to address agri-food labour supply and training challenges.



9.0

NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges and Barriers

The results summarized in this report highlight the key trends, barriers, and proposed actions that sectors can take to prepare the workforce of the future. Some occupations, such as general labourer and transport truck drivers, are in high demand across sectors. Other in-demand occupations, such as growers and industrial butchers, are sector-specific. Similarly, some skill gaps (e.g., thinking skills, intrapersonal skills) were identified as gaps across sectors, while other skill gaps (e.g., business skills, animal handling) applied to a specific sector.

Common barriers to skill development seen across industry include people not seeing jobs as viable career options and a lack of training that provides applied learning opportunities (e.g., hands-on).

In most sectors, it was identified that collaborating with educational stakeholders to develop more applied and hands-on programming would be a good

strategy for providing people with the applied learning opportunities they need. In addition, most sectors felt that a marketing strategy or re-branding initiative would help to highlight the viable career opportunities available in industry. Many sectors, particularly in the agriculture industry, also identified the development of a mentorship program as a useful action to develop people's skills.

The findings presented in this report can be used as a starting point for developing sector action plans. For example, the identified barriers and proposed actions can be confirmed with a broader sample of relevant stakeholders. Then, an action plan can be developed to identify the specific steps, partners, and objectives for implementing the proposed actions. Ultimately, these sector action plans can help the industry to secure a highly skilled workforce and grow the industry for years to come. The *Grow the Future Guide*⁴⁰ is a resource that can be used for developing these sector action plans.

⁴⁰ Canadian Agriculture Human Resource Council (2021). *Grow the Future: A Practical Guide for Developing Sector Action Plans for Attraction and Retention*.

10.0

APPENDIX



10.1 SKILL DEFINITIONS

Example skills for some of the common skill groupings used throughout this report are provided below.

SKILL GROUPINGS	EXAMPLE SKILLS
Business skills	Business acumen, sales, marketing, finance, human resources
Data analysis skills	Analyzing and interpreting data, big data, data visualization
Essential skills	Reading, writing, document use, numeracy
Intrapersonal or personal skills	Adaptability, work ethic, continuous learning, self-awareness, stress management, initiative
Interpersonal skills	Teamwork/ working with others, customer service, communication, networking
Supervisory or managerial skills	Developing/coaching others, conflict management, diversity, and inclusion
Thinking skills	Attention to detail, decision-making, problem solving/trouble shooting, strategic thinking, planning

10.2 OCCUPATION DEFINITIONS

OCCUPATION	DEFINITION
General labourer	Refers to both Farm labourers and Farm workers as defined in CAHRC's National Agricultural Occupational Framework. Farm labourers assist with activities, may operate equipment, require supervision, and are often entry-level positions that do not require prior experience. Farm workers perform activities with minimal to no supervision, operate equipment and typically require some experience. Sample NOC codes: 8611, 8612, 8613, 8431, 8432
Service technician	Maintain and repair agricultural implements and equipment.