

Farmers want to help

Farmers support the government as it does its best to navigate these unprecedented times. We recognize the need to take every reasonable precaution to address the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and protect the health of Canadians. We want to help.

Food security at stake without foreign workers

Foreign agricultural workers play a critical role in the production of fruit and vegetables in Canada. They represent the majority of the horticulture sector's field workers. Without them, farmers will not be able to get the work done during planting (and pruning, etc) season which is upon us. **Once planting season is missed, it is too late and the entire 2020 crop will be at risk.** The consequences would become apparent once grocery shelves are empty during harvest time. We won't be able to rely on other countries like the U.S. or Europe to fill our shelves during these extraordinary times. It would be prudent for the government to act now to ensure robust domestic food production rather than reduce or eliminate it.

Time sensitivity for action

Many fruit and vegetable growers are expecting temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in the near future. Over the next four weeks, 4,600 workers were scheduled to arrive, with another 8,800 scheduled to arrive in the two months after that. Without these workers, there will be a great number of acres that won't even be planted and many of the perennial crops and orchards won't be able to be prepared for the crop year and/or harvested. For those who transplant seedlings, they should be starting their first seedlings around now if they haven't already. Without labour to transplant and harvest, many operations will shutter. **This will impact not only the fresh market, but also the frozen, processed and canned supplies for the coming year.** The possibility of similar shortages in the U.S. will severely limit Canada's ability to deal with this issue in a few weeks or months, e.g. with imports. We must act now.

Self-isolation on farms

The temporary foreign worker programs for agriculture are uniquely suited to achieve the government's goal of social distancing and self-isolation, in particular the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP). The vast majority of workers in the program are housed at the home farm where they work, with no "neighbours" other than perhaps the farm employers themselves. With workers self-contained in this manner, the industry is in a good position to establish protocols that would lower the risk to the Canadian public to virtually nothing, or at least so far that the risk is far outweighed by the benefit of food security for Canadians.

Finding a solution

Canadian fruit and vegetable growers are ready to work with the government to ensure that disruptions to Canada's food supply are minimal while addressing the threat of COVID-19. We urge the government to work with the agriculture sector to develop a solution for an **orderly resumption of the Temporary**

Foreign Worker Program for Primary Agriculture (SAWP and TFWP Agriculture Stream). As part of the solution, industry will work to establish an isolation protocol to ensure that the health of our workers, the local communities and public health is top of mind. And we will work with the international liaison officers of the workers' countries of origin to ensure the safe transfer of workers to Canada.

The fresh produce industry has an exemplary record of risk management as can be seen in the success of CanadaGAP, risk-based protocol to safe guard the food supply of Canadians. We look forward to building on this record during these extraordinary times. We need government's leadership and partnership.