

2018

Final Report



*Labour Market Research &
Innovation Project*

Denise Ghanam, GCI Consulting Inc.

South Essex Community Council

Workforce WindsorEssex

Labour Market Research and Innovation Project

SUBMITTED TO: Michelle Suchiu, Executive Director WFWE
Local Employment Planning Council
Windsor, ON
Email: msuchiu@workforcewindsoressex.com

PREPARED BY: Denise Ghanam
President, Ghanam Consulting Inc
Phone: (519) 551-5432
Email: denise@gcistrategy.com

Carolyn Warkentin,
South Essex Community Council

CONTRIBUTIONS: Mary Jane Nohra, Elena Peralta, and Jeanine Lassaline-Berglund

SUBMITTED BY: Carolyn Warkentin
Executive Director,
South Essex Community Council
215 Talbot Street East
Leamington, ON
Phone: (519) 326 –
Email: cwarkentin@secc.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to a request for proposals by the Local Employment Planning Council (LEPC) of Workforce WindsorEssex (WFWE), a collaborative partnership involving the South Essex Community Council (SECC), Ghanam Consulting Inc. (GCI), Stepstone Consulting, Highline Mushrooms, Pure Flavour Hothouse Ltd, and Mucci Farms was created. The partnership's goal was to develop and deliver a pilot soft skills and agri-business orientation training initiative to potential new entrants to the labour force for that sector, with an impact research component embedded in the process. The program offered a series of soft skills development sessions over a four-week period, combined with three onsite employer visits and job sampling, where applicable. The essential and soft skills training focused on health & safety issues specific to the agri-business sector and work readiness. The intended target groups for the pilot project included unemployed, under-employed, and hard to place members of the local labour market.

The research methodology involved a pre and post-test self-assessment tool measuring trainees' self-efficacy for job search skills. Additionally, the soft skills program had a pre-test and post-test component to assess participants' success with the material. Finally, employers of the participants who made actual hires provided feedback also. Qualitative and quantitative results indicate that the pre-hire training had value in improving participants' perceptions of their skill level, as well as in the employers' views of their suitability for work in the agri-business sector. The training also resulted in a few of the participants self-selecting out of the hiring process, which provides value in saved recruitment time and effort for the employers. Participants also saw a strong quantitative improvement in their self-perception of skills and work readiness, and provided qualitative support to the value of training received.

The approach utilized was innovative for this area and responded directly to well-identified community workforce development needs. Based upon the positive impact of the training on participants, the following recommendations were made:

1. More lead-time is required to properly promote the GROW Program and provide adequate information to potential participants and referral partners.
2. Better engagement with partners, including face-to-face meetings to explain the goals of the GROW Program, provide promotional materials and explain the language/literacy requirements of the program.
3. Conduct information sessions to provide further details of the program to interested participants.
4. Engage with Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG) to assist with promoting the benefits of the program to their members.
5. Small group delivery is essential to discussion and participants receiving support and attention that is required.
6. Extend the program from 24 hours to 30 hours
7. Ensure that Food Safety Certification is included in future programming.
8. Deliver the program over 2 weeks, 3 or 4 days each week.
9. Consider other times of year to offer the training so that it could be accessible to youth.
10. Secure financial investments from OGVG and the agri-business sector to continue the GROW Program.

11. Continue to advocate career potential in the agri-business sector.
12. Combine technical growing expertise with soft skills training.

BACKGROUND AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Municipality of Leamington is home to the largest concentration of greenhouses in North America and boasts the longest growing season in Canada. A large number of food processing plants are located in and around Leamington, along with second and third tier industries catering to the agribusiness sector. A recent research study funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities developed an in-depth picture of the labour market challenges in the Leamington area, specifically the current workforce skills gap in the agri-business sector and the general tightening of the supply of labour. The study indicated an increasing demand for labour over the next five years, with limited increases expected to the size of the existing labour pool. This, combined with the skills gap, will create significant challenges for local employers, especially in the agri-business sector, which has experienced steady growth, and continues to expand.

A subsequent feasibility study was undertaken to assess the viability of creating a skills training and education centre for the agri-business sector in the Leamington area. This study included a detailed employer survey on the skills gap, as well as perspectives on the challenges of recruiting and hiring workers with the needed skills. Interviews with employers, educators and community partners, as well as focus groups, were held to share and validate the findings and develop suggestions for pilot programs and how such training might be structured.

The employer survey identified a significant challenge for all agri-business employers related to both recruiting and successfully hiring new entrants for frontline positions in growing operations, greenhouses, and food processing facilities. Additionally, recent research conducted by Workforce Windsor-Essex (WFWE) on the top career positions available in the Windsor-Essex area also included this important entry-level role.

As an Employment Ontario Service Provider, South Essex Community Council also recognized the challenges with respect to recruitment, training and retention in the agribusiness sector based on its work with local employers and the clients who access employment services.

Given the previous research and the ongoing concerns with employers who accessed Employment Ontario services, an opportunity presented itself to pilot the GROW Project, a pre-employment program targeted at unemployed new Canadians or recent refugees, and hard to place youth. Both these groups represent new recruitment sources for many local employers in this sector, as well as an opportunity to provide some public education on the employment opportunities that the agribusiness sector can offer.

The goals of the GROW Project were to:

- Develop and facilitate relevant, industry specific training to participants;
- Educate participants about the myriad of employment opportunities available in the agribusiness sector; and
- Determine if soft skills training would make a difference with respect to hiring and retention of participants into the agribusiness sector.

The pilot training and internship program consisted of the following:

- in class training including foundational skills, soft skills and customized sector specific skills;
- work placement or job trial for 4 hours per week with local employers;
- follow-up with employers and trainees regarding possible job placements; and
- one-month follow-up with participants who secured employment as a result of the GROW project.

Partners in the GROW Project included:

- South Essex Community Council
- Ghanam Consulting Inc.
- Highline Mushrooms
- Mucci Pac
- Pure Flavour
- Stepstone Consulting
- The Leamington and District Chamber of Commerce
- Workforce Windsor Essex

SECC acted as the project manager for the GROW Project and coordinated the efforts of the various partners. As well, SECC looked after outreach to attract the project participants.

METHODOLOGY

The GROW program targeted **unemployed workers** in the local area, to enhance their employability and their self-efficacy for employment in the agri-business sector, by providing both soft skills and essential skills, and a realistic job preview to enhance retention if hired. SECC and other community partners identified participants.

Training was provided for six hours per week for four weeks, to teach some specific health & safety job skills necessary for work in the agri-business sector, as well as deliver the soft skills training curriculum. All training was led by an instructor, but utilized a group- facilitated model for training delivery. Delivery of the workshops was conducted by SECC staff and by GCI, with both instructors highly qualified, with many years of adult learning facilitation, and some formal teaching education/certification.

The other component of the program was the **research** agenda, which used a pre and post-test self-assessment tool, a validated Likert scale used to gauge the participants' perceptions of relevant job skill areas (See Appendix 1). The post-test re-assessed their perceptions of skills and self-efficacy at the end of the training, after one month, providing an indication of the impact of the program on development of the the new skills to be utilized in the workplace.

Finally, the research also captured the input of some of the employers whose staff was involved in the hiring of the graduates of the program. A debrief session was held with the employers. As well, feedback was

obtained from employers after their new hires had been on the job for approximately one month, following being trained in our pilot program. This allowed the team to assess the impact from the employer perspective and validate if the training had helped to close the skill gap.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT & OUTREACH

1. Outreach Methods & Partners

The following outlines the outreach methods utilized by the GROW program to recruit participants:

a) Social Media

This included sites such as Kijiji, Face Book, Instagram and Twitter. A local ad was posted to the Kijiji site and a paid boost was used on Face Book. Participating employers were tagged in Twitter posts. Ads were also posted on 4 local Buy and Sell Groups. A total of 2 referrals came from social media.

b) Community Partners

Community partners included Ontario Works, The Bridge, Service Canada and Workforce Windsor Essex. Community partners were contacted as soon as the program flyer was ready. They were asked to share the flyer with their clients and to post it in visible locations in their respective sites. SECC staff involved in the GROW project also made follow up calls to check on recruitment efforts and answer any questions. Workforce Windsor Essex included the GROW Project information in their WEJobs email alert. A total of 5 referrals came from Ontario Works and Service Canada.

c) Employment Ontario Service Providers

EO service providers in South Essex included the Employment Assessment Centre and the New Canadian Centre of Excellence. These partners were contacted as soon as the program flyer was ready and were asked to share it with their clients. SECC staff involved in the GROW project also made follow up calls to check on recruitment efforts and answer any questions. There were no referrals from EO funded services.

d) South Essex Community Council

Information was provided to various programs within SECC including Literacy and Basic Skills, Language Services and Settlement Services. In addition, SECC staff was asked to share the GROW Project flyer with their clients and contacts. A total of 13 referrals came from SECC programs.

It should be noted that 1 referral came via word of mouth through a friend.

2. Timing issues

There were some issues associated with the timing of the pilot project, along with other scheduling conflicts, that affected recruitment. These included the following:

- Language students at SECC were unable to participate in the pilot project due to the fact that the in class portion of the GROW training and the work placements conflicted with class times.
- High school and college students were not recruited because those in high school were still in classes when the pilot was conducted. Additionally, college/university students were likely already working at the time of the pilot project.

- Program details finalized later than originally anticipated due to the delay in approval of the pilot project. As a result, the flyer/advertisement for the pilot project was developed later than expected thus delaying outreach to potential referral sources for the GROW project.

3. Challenges

There were a few challenges associated with access barriers to the GROW Project. These included:

- A lack of available subsidized childcare spaces in Leamington. This meant that some interested participants were not able to secure stable childcare in order to attend the sessions.
- Some of the participants referred to the GROW project were not able to participate due to their language levels.
- Some participants were not necessarily interested in the type of work offered in the Agriculture Sector but were attracted by the incentive provided by the pilot program.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRAM DELIVERY

1. Assessment of “A” Game Content

The existing content of “A” Game program worked well for the purposes of the pilot project. Many of the activities brought about good discussion. Participants shared experiences, positive and negative, and received constructive feedback from their peers. The curriculum was delivered over a 4-week period and the facilitator reviewed and constructed lesson plans according to the Curriculum Guide.

Seven foundation workplace behaviors were introduced. These included:

- *Attitude*
- *Attendance*
- *Appearance*
- *Ambition*
- *Accountability*
- *Appreciation*

Activities in each chapter are designed to help participants apply the experiences they have had in life and apply them in a work environment.

2. Adaptation and customization of the program to fit the sector and the participants

Some activities were altered based on suitability. The level of literacy required for the “A” Game Curriculum was challenging. The program does require a minimum Level 2, and at times, Level 3 literacy proficiency based on the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework. The facilitator altered some written exercises to oral format to ensure group understanding. An assessment of literacy skills at the start of program was beneficial in identifying potential literacy skills deficits in participants.

Some participants had experience working in the agricultural industry. Most of them were willing to try it out to see if it would be a fit. Others wanted to upgrade and refresh their employment skills. Scenarios of working in the agricultural sector were utilized during learning activities when possible.

Participants reported enjoying the group discussion, writing in workbook, and the three employer field trips. All participants said they would recommend the GROW Project to a friend. Participants learned a lot about themselves. One participant shared, “I have trouble with authority” and “I have difficulty when I feel disrespected, and I get angry.” The group reacted positively and offered alternative ways of handling those feelings and experiences in the future.

The facilitator also encouraged participants to take a different approach when talking about retention. She suggested that participants must stay in a job long enough to evaluate it fully. The program material and approach required both participants and the facilitator to be reflective and to challenge their own thinking. One downside of the “A” Game curriculum was that the activities and questions included in the training seemed to assume that participants were **not** already successful and made assumptions about their skill levels and motivation, as it related to the seven soft skill areas.

After completion of the program material focusing on the seven soft skill areas, the exam for the Certificate of Work Ethic Proficiency is available to participants. Upon earning the required 90 percent score on the final exam (32/35 correct multiple-choice questions), participants earn the certification.

3. Timing and Participation

The program did allow for flexibility in terms of the timing. Each of the seven modules had several delivery formats allowing for flexibility with respect to how much information was reviewed and how many exercises were facilitated. The GROW Project allowed SECC staff to deliver about 90% of the full program in the 24 hours allocated to in class training. Upon completion, the team identified a few activities that could be removed based on feedback from the participants and the experience of the facilitator. In future, including the H&S training, the program would need approximately 30 hours for delivery, with some additional material being developed to supplement the topics of communication and conflict resolution.

Participants’ attendance throughout the program was admirable. They were committed to the program and invested time out of their lives to attend and fully participate in the in-class portion, as well as the on-the-job training opportunities. A couple of them arranged childcare and organized transportation in order to attend the job sites. Participants were motivated and asked questions regarding employment opportunities, resume assistance, and general labour market information. The facilitator offered resources and information throughout the program. Participants were invested, both emotionally and professionally, in the project. Some participants had not been in the workforce for quite a while. They used this training program as a way to evaluate and reintroduce themselves to the workforce.

4. Challenges

One challenge with respect to program delivery and facilitation related to the last minute changes from the employers with respect to the work sampling. These included:

- Better coordination of the work sampling options. Last minute changes pertaining to the work sampling options made it difficult for the participants to adequately prepare (make transportation or childcare arrangements). The short notice and limited prep time caused a few participants to miss the job sampling sessions.
- A lack of common understanding amongst the participating employers regarding the expectations and goals of the work sampling created some confusion and last minute adjustments by the participating employers.
- Employers had different expectations and internal policies regarding things such as health and safety that complicated the work sampling opportunities. For example, some employers required personal protective equipment to be worn by the GROW Project participants in order to participate in the work sampling. Since permanent employment was not a guarantee and because the GROW Project did not have the funds to purchase PPE for the participants, alternative arrangements had to be made. In one case, the work sampling was switched out for a tour, and question and answer period with Human Resources.

EMPLOYER OUTREACH EFFORTS

More than ten employers were contacted in an effort to set up work sampling opportunities for the GROW Project participants. The goal was to have 4 work sampling opportunities; in the end, there were three.

The following challenges were identified:

- There were concerns regarding the work sampling and what it would entail at a few potential employers who workforces are unionized.
- Several employers who were contacted indicated that they did not have sufficient time to participate, either because they could not devote enough time to planning and participation or because the turn-around time was insufficient.

Overall, response to the GROW Project was positive and many employers expressed an interest in it, even if they declined to act as a host employer.

RESULTS

Of the initial 18 participants who registered for the GROW program, only 13 attended the first session. One additional person joined the program in the second session, so that 14 participants completed the job search self-efficacy survey in the pre-test phase. Surveys were completed anonymously, with only the instructor knowing which participant was assigned which number. The researcher had only the assigned number to consider and compare the pre-test results with the post-training surveys, which were completed at the end of the four-week program.

Since only fourteen participants completed the survey, that number became our data pool. Given the small sample size, caution must be taken when applying the findings from this research. During week 2 of the program, three of those fourteen participants had to leave the program: one due to health issues (unable to sit

in classroom for the required period); one self-selected out of the program, as her interest was more entrepreneurial rather than employment related; and one left due to illness of a family member and resulting challenges with housing related to her death.

The remaining 11 participants attended all the training sessions and most of the job sampling visits. Those 11 participants completed the post-training self-efficacy assessment. In order to provide consistency and comparability of results, all results of both pre-test and post-test were compared using an uneven one-tailed T-test. Results reveal that eight of the eleven individual question results in the survey showed statistically significant improvement in scores. These results are valid to +/- .05 at 95% confidence (19 times out of 20). Additionally, the improvement in overall mean scores for each participant was also considered significant.

The survey tool can be found in Appendix 1. The survey measures the confidence of the participants to successfully complete certain tasks related to effective job search on a Likert scale from 1 (no confidence at all) to 5 (complete confidence). This assessment of self-efficacy for job search has been previously utilized in two federal government research projects (including one by this author¹) and has been included in a published study². Further, the instrument has been validated using factor analysis, with all questions found to be effective measures of self-efficacy for job search. The questions ask about tasks such as using social networks to obtain job leads, preparing a resume, interviewing well, using various resources to find jobs, and organizing a weekly job search schedule.

The 11 participants who completed both the pre-test self-assessment and the same survey in the post-test phase after the training, showed an improvement in overall mean survey scores after one month of training of 17.97%. The question with the largest improvement in score after the training was Q11, which asked the participants to rate the likelihood that they would become employed in a job that they would find in the next six months. The percentage increase in response was 37.22%, with a T-test value of .008. Essentially, this value indicates that the probability is just over 99% that the improvement in the mean scores on this question from before the training to afterwards is the result of the training intervention itself.

Three of the eleven survey questions did not show statistically significant improvements. The two questions with the lowest percentage score increase after the training were Q6 and Q7, which asked the participants to rate the likelihood that they could prepare a sales pitch to attract the interest of employers and how confident they were to plan and organize a weekly job search schedule. The percentage increase in response for both these questions was 8.33%, with a T-test value of .345 for Q6 and .192 for Q7. This indicates that these changes, while still positive, are not statistically significant. Additionally, Q4 asked about the participants' confidence in making cold calls to obtain a job interview. The increase of 13.62% had a T-test value of .243. This is not surprising, as the training focused more on soft skills to be used in the workplace, rather than specific job search skills. There was some discussion on resumes and interviews, and the job sampling was meant for exposure and

¹ Ghanam, D. et al. *The Impact of Labour Market Information Delivery Modes on Worker Self-Efficacy in Employment Related Outcomes in Southwestern Ontario*. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. 2012, Ottawa, Ontario

² Reavley, M. and Ghanam, D. *Impact of the Provision of Labour Market Information Training on Trainees' Perceptions of Job Related Self-Efficacy: A Comparison of the Influence of Two Delivery Methods on Expressions of Competence and Confidence*. Canadian Journal of Career Development (2013) Volume 12, issue 2, (pp 20-34).

to assist with establishing their interest in a career in the agriculture sector. Additionally, the focus on soft skills such as communication may have led to higher improvements in scores related to interviewing or talking to contacts to find job leads. For comparison of the pre-test and post-test results for all questions, see the Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1 – Mean score comparisons on the survey questions before and after training intervention

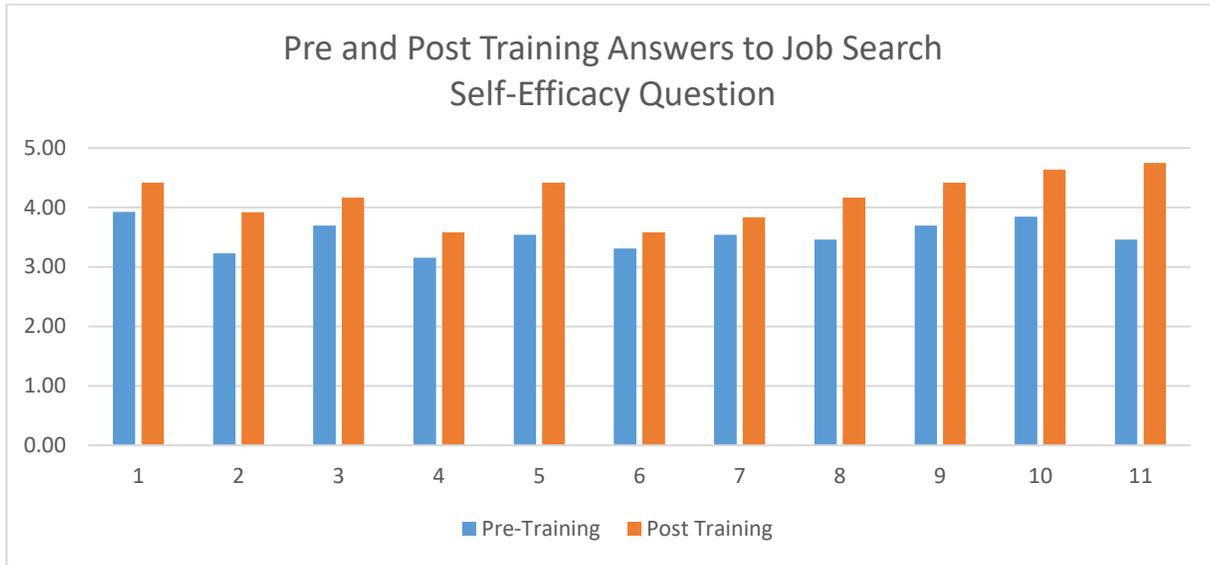


Figure 2 – Individual survey question improvement as a percentage before and after the training intervention (with statistical significance measured by a T-test score)

Question #	Question Content	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score	Individual % Change	One Tailed Uneven T-test
1	Use social networks to obtain job leads	3.9	4.4	13	.04
2	Prepare resume to get interview	3.2	3.9	21	.02
3	Impress employers during interview	3.7	4.2	13	.10
4	Make “cold calls” to get interviews	3.2	3.6	14	.24
5	Conduct info interview with	3.5	4.4	25	.00

	counsellors or people in field				
6	Prepare sales pitch to employers	3.3	3.6	8	.34
7	Plan weekly job search schedule	3.5	3.9	8	.19
8	Find where job openings exist	3.5	4.2	20	.04
9	Use variety of sources to find jobs	3.7	4.4	20	.04
10	Find good job opportunities	3.9	4.6	21	.02
11	Become employed in next months	3.5	4.8	37	.00
AVERAGE		3.53	4.17	17.97	.08

A survey of training satisfaction was administered at the end of the four-week program (see Appendix 2). Participants rated the program with an overall mean score of 4.73 on a scale from 1-5 in terms of recommending the training to others. In all, there were strongly positive responses to the soft skills and health & safety training, as well as for the job sampling, and the certification components. Participants were asked what they liked best about the program including discussions, writing in the workbook, field trips to the employers, or all of the above. 73% indicated “all of the above”, with the remaining 27% indicating the classroom discussions.

73% also agreed that the pace of learning “made it easy to make progress”, with only one student indicating that the pace was too fast, and two indicating that “they it would be nice to cover more material faster”. In terms of the value of the learning activities, there was a strongly positive mean score of 4.64 out of a possible 5. Finally, when asked how the GROW program has helped them progress towards their goals, the mean score was 3.55 on a four-point scale that ranged from “struggling to make progress” to “I will definitely reach my goal soon”.

Additionally, several participants provided qualitative comments indicating that they had “learned a lot about myself” and the “program was great”. Constructive suggestions for change were to include more work on communication and conflict resolutions techniques. A number of trainees had positive comments for the SECC instructor, Mary Jane Nohra, for her excellent delivery of the material and her positive attitude which contributed to a successful program. The exchange and connection among the participants was an important component as well. One participant shared, “I have trouble with authority” and “I have difficulty when I feel disrespected, and I get angry.” The group reacted positively and offered alternative ways of handling those

feelings and experiences in the future. This positive group dynamic helped to ensure that all participants gained value through both the curriculum and by learning from each other’s experiences. For a summary of participant results, please see Figure 3 below.

Figure 3- Training evaluation summary by participants

Q1 What did you like best in program?	Q2- Pace of Program OK?	Q3 Learning activities were useful? (Scale 1-5)	Q4 Progress on personal goals? (Scale 1-4)	Q5 Workshop hours OK? (Scale 1-5)	Q6 Recommend GROW? (Scale 1-5)
8 - “all of above” 3 - “discussion”	8 of 11 agreed pace was good	4.64/5	3.55/4	4.55/5	4.73/5

What follows are a few examples of additional qualitative feedback from the participants:

- One participant, who reported working at a garbage management company and planned on returning to the job, chose to start working at Highline Mushrooms. I believe that the tour of the facility and information about the incentives and employee benefits had an impact on the participant’s decision. He recruited a family member, who also started working there as well.
- Another participant was hired as a general labourer at one of the 3 participating growing operations. He is learning a lot about the industry and hopes to move up in the company.
- A participant reported that she accepted a job in the healthcare field but requested to start her new role after the completion of the program. She felt that it was valuable experience and that the information that she was learning could be beneficial at her new job.

The final form of evaluation for this pilot program is the results experienced with the employers in terms of potential candidates for hire. The employability outcomes are reflected in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4 – Program attrition, completion, and employment outcomes

Start Program	Early Attrition	Attend Full Program	Complete Full Program	Achieve at least 90% on “A” Game test	Self-Select out of Work in Sector	Find Work in Sector with Pilot Employers	Find Other Work	Still in Job Search
14	3	11	11	7/11	2	4/9	2/9	3/9
	21.4%	78.6%	100%	63.6%		44.4%	22.2%	33.4%

Seven out of eleven participants who completed the full program achieved the required 90 percent score on the final test. Certificates were mailed to all successful participants. The test consisted of 35 multiple choice questions. Re-writes were scheduled for two participants. One was successful and is included in the seven that achieved 90%. The other has yet to come in for the re-test. Each participant is able to attempt the test three times if needed. Two of those who did not achieve the required 90% score still did quite well. Both are non-native English speakers, who had some challenges with the literacy level of the “A” Game program. The average score for all 11 participants was 86.7 %, indicating a strong result, and clear benefits from undertaking the training.

The 11 participants who completed the program provided a ranking form where they indicated their level of interest in working in the agri-business sector and indicated their preference for employment with each of the three pilot employers. Two participants self-selected out of consideration for employment in the sector. Given the issues that the sector has experienced with retention, we consider this a positive outcome from the pilot program, as one of the goals is to ascertain the participant’s suitability for employment in the agriculture industry.

Based on the ranking information of the remaining nine participants, four names were sent to Employer One. Results were one person hired; one person interviewed but accepted a job offer in a non-agri-business industry; one person interviewed but declined offer; and one deferred interview until September. Employer Two received three names. Results were one person hired; one declined to be interviewed; and one accepted a job offer in a non-agri-business industry. Employer Three received two names. Both were interviewed and hired. Qualitative feedback on the employer ranking form indicated concerns over employment in the sector for a single mother because of the potential long hours and fluctuating end time for day shifts. Other comments included positive feedback about being exposed to the packaging process and finding it more interesting than expected. As well, one participant was impressed with the opportunity to move up within each organization, with potential career tracks outlined by the employers.

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The GROW Project was evaluated in a variety of ways as outlined in the section above. Evaluation also included employer feedback and two evaluation meetings by the project team.

Employer Feedback on Program

The following feedback was received from the participating employers through a post work sampling meeting and through employer feedback forms:

- The issue regarding Personal Protective Equipment must be better clarified prior to work sampling. Of particular note was the issue around participants having proper safety boots. It was suggested that toe caps might be provided to the participants in future.
- More lead-time was needed to liaise with employers. There were a number of issues with changes to the schedule (start and stop times were not consistent among all employers. More clarification was required regarding the goals of the program and the role of the employer.
- Create a better employer package that outlines the goals of the GROW Project, expectations of employer participants and how to facilitate the onsite visit.

- Three hours was determined to be sufficient for work sampling or a workplace tour. The employers all agreed that first impressions are critical. The work sampling gives the employer a chance to “sell” their company to prospective employees.
- A facility tour was noted as an alternative option to work sampling. It could include having a few current employees come in to talk to the GROW participants about their experience working in the agri-business sector.

Overall, the feedback from the employers was positive. They could see the benefits of the GROW program for the agri-business sector, particularly around recruitment. They found the participants to be highly engaged in the work sampling and provided good feedback for making improvements.

Project Staff

What follows are some observations of the project staff and partners with respect to outreach and recruitment, workshop materials and work sampling:

- More time for outreach was needed, and the partners needed to make more use of their connections with local high schools and colleges. A lot of time was spent developing the marketing materials for the program, which took time that the project did not necessarily have. Information sessions may have been helpful in recruiting participants and pre-screening them for the GROW program.
- Reach out to agri-business partners such as Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers Association, to help promote the GROW program to the agri-business sector.
- More time was needed to deliver the “A” Game curriculum.
- It might be worth considering shortening the length of time for subsequent iterations of the GROW program. Perhaps providing more intensive training (30 hours) over 2 weeks as opposed to 4 weeks might give participants more time to job search. It was also suggested that additional material be developed to supplement the topics of communication and conflict resolution.
- There were some issues around scheduling for the workshop room. Moving from one room to another was inconvenient. The scheduling conflicts arose due to the short lead-time, which made booking workshop rooms difficult.
- Transportation to employers was challenging due to last minute changes in venue and timing. Again, more lead-time and more liaising with the employers might have mitigated this.
- The language level in the *Bring Your “A” Game* curriculum was too high for some participants. One consideration may be that in the future, the program could be translated and offered in different languages. Another consideration for the future would be to better assess the language level of the curriculum to ensure newcomers and immigrants who might participate have an adequate CLB (Canadian Language Benchmark) level to complete the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made as a result of the GROW Pilot Project:

OUTREACH & RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

- 1. More lead-time is required to properly promote the GROW Program and provide adequate information to potential participants and referral partners.** 6-8 weeks should be sufficient to properly market the program and engage community partners to assist with referrals.
- 2. Better engagement with partners,** including face-to-face meetings to explain the goals of the GROW Program, provide promotional materials and explain the language/literacy requirements of the program.
- 3. Conduct information sessions** to provide further details of the program to interested participants. 2 information sessions per cycle could be provided to potential participants and would outline the goals of the GROW Project, along with expectations for participation, the program activities and information about the participating employers.
- 4. Engage with Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG)** to assist with promoting the benefits of the program to their members.

PROGRAM CURRICULUM AND DELIVERY

- 5. Small group delivery** is essential to discussion and participants receiving support and attention that is required.
- 6. Extend the program from 24 hours to 30 hours.** Additional time was required to cover health and safety more sufficiently, as well as some of the soft skills curriculum.
- 7. Ensure that Food Safety Certification is included in future programming.** This was cited as a requirement by the employers and would add extra value for participants if it was included in the GROW training.
- 8. Deliver the program over 2 weeks, 3 or 4 days each week.**
- 9. Consider other times of year to offer the training so that it could be accessible to youth,** particularly those who are going directly from school to work (late June to end of August). The program could be made available to co-op students as well.

SUSTAINABILITY

- 10. Secure financial investments from OGVG and the agri-business sector to continue the GROW Program** and make it a pre-requisite for entry-level employees in the sector. This could include the provision of Personal Protective Equipment.
- 11. Continue to advocate career potential in the agri-business sector.** Show the clear progression paths for new entrants.
- 12. Combine technical growing expertise with soft skills training.** Use OGVG as the delivery mechanism for new hire ORIENTATION to the sector, supported by SECC and other vetted agri-business source (Ridgetown or St. Clair College)

CONCLUSION

Although there is room for adjustment and improvement, the GROW Pilot Project proved to be a positive experience for the participants and the employers. There is value in providing some foundation training for those who are interested in entering the agri-business sector, not only to improve soft skills and basic entry-level certifications, but to help participants better understand the industry and dispel the myths that are associated with the agri-business sector. There is also value in engaging with sector employers and other bodies such as OGVG, to create more support for GROW training and how it can benefit the sector as a whole. There is work to be done to secure financial resources to ensure on-going sustainability of the GROW Program, but the initial feedback from the employers was good and all indicated that they would be open to supporting further GROW Program iterations in the future. The GROW Pilot Project has provided some good insights with respect to training a labour force that is suitable for entry into the agri-business sector which continues to face challenges in recruitment and retention of its Canadian labour force. The results of the GROW Pilot Project can also help the Municipality of Leamington and other community partners to build and support a robust and highly qualified work force for the agri-business sector in the years to come.

APPENDIX 1

DATE _____

PARTICIPANT # _____

THIS SURVEY IS ABOUT SEARCHING FOR A NEW JOB

Please read each of the following statements and **CIRCLE THE NUMBER** which best represents how confident you are that you could successfully do each of the following activities..

1 indicates no confidence at all; **2** indicates very little confidence; **3** indicates moderate confidence;
4 indicates much confidence; and **5** indicates complete confidence.

How much confidence do you have that you could:

	No confidence		Moderate		Complete confidence
1. Use social networks to obtain job leads	1	2	3	4	5
2. Prepare a resume that will get you interviews	1	2	3	4	5
3. Impress employers during employment interviews	1	2	3	4	5
4. Make “cold calls” that will get you a job interview	1	2	3	4	5
5. Conduct information interviews with career counselors or people working in the field to ask out about careers and jobs that you are interested in pursuing	1	2	3	4	5
6. Prepare a sales pitch that will attract the interest of employers	1	2	3	4	5
7. Plan and organize a weekly job search schedule	1	2	3	4	5
8. Find out where job openings exist	1	2	3	4	5
9. Use a variety of sources to find job opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
10. Search for and find good job opportunities for you	1	2	3	4	5
11. Become employed in a job you find in the next six months	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX 2

GROW PROJECT SURVEY

Name: _____ Date: _____



Anonymous

<p>1. What was your favorite part of the GROW Project?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Participating in discussion<input type="checkbox"/> Writing in workbook<input type="checkbox"/> Field trips to greenhouses<input type="checkbox"/> All of the above	<p>2. How would you rate the speed of learning in the workshops?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> The pace is too fast for me.<input type="checkbox"/> We learn at a pace that makes it easy to make progress.<input type="checkbox"/> It would be nice if we could cover some more material faster.
<p>3. I found the learning activities to be useful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree<input type="checkbox"/> Agree<input type="checkbox"/> Maybe<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<p>4. Has attending the GROW Project helped you to progress towards meeting your goal?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Definitely! I will reach my goal soon.<input type="checkbox"/> I am happy with my progress, but still have more work to do.<input type="checkbox"/> Progress feels slow for me; but I feel that I will be able to reach my goal in a few months.<input type="checkbox"/> I feel that I am struggling to make good progress towards my goal.
<p>5. The hours of the GROW Project workshop were convenient for me.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree<input type="checkbox"/> Agree<input type="checkbox"/> Maybe<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree	<p>6. I would recommend the GROW Project to a friend.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree<input type="checkbox"/> Agree<input type="checkbox"/> Maybe<input type="checkbox"/> Disagree<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree

COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS:
