

# NEWCOMERS IN AGRI-FOOD



**workforce**  
WindsorEssex

## ABOUT

Workforce WindsorEssex is a workforce and community development board whose mission is to lead regional employment and community planning for the development of a strong and sustainable workforce.

Workforce WindsorEssex is an experienced leader in the development of regional labour market tools, research, guides, and events that create positive change in the local labour market while saving others time and effort. These resources, created in close coordination with employment, education, and industry partners, are designed to help jobseekers, employers, students, and educators, as well as the community, make more informed labour market decisions using locally-responsive, data-rich, and unbiased resources.

To learn more about Workforce WindsorEssex and view our tools and resources, visit [www.workforcewindsor.essex.com](http://www.workforcewindsor.essex.com).

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### **MIKAL FAKHREDDIN** **RESEARCH ASSOCIATE**

Mikal (Kal) Fakhreddin is a Local Board Research Associate. She has a BA[H] in International Relations and Development Studies with minors in French and Sociology from the University of Windsor, where she is currently completing her Masters in Political Science. Kal's studies have sparked an ardent interest in diversity and migration in the region, and she is excited to learn from and contribute to the research team at Workforce WindsorEssex.

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## INTRODUCTION

The agri-food industry in Canada has experienced chronic labour shortages over the past decade. In 2017, the labour gap in farm agriculture was 63,000, and it is expected to reach 123,000 by 2027, while Food and Beverage Manufacturing is expected to have a shortage of 65,000 workers by 2025. A rapidly aging population and the fact that 90% of the Canadian population live in urban areas have contributed to the challenges that the industry has faced over the years, making it the sector with the highest job vacancy rate in Canada. In Windsor-Essex, the Leamington Census Area (CA), which includes Leamington and Kingsville, is widely known for its large concentration of greenhouse operations. The area has been rapidly growing in recent years and contains over 60% of Ontario's greenhouses, the largest concentration of greenhouses in both Canada and the U.S., but they continue to struggle due to persistent labour gaps. The purpose of this report is to explore the value of filling these gaps with a large and underutilized group within the workforce: newcomers. Newcomers, immigrants that have relocated in the past five years, migrate to Canada with experience, a willingness to learn, and an eagerness to work. However, newcomers face many barriers when it comes to entering the agri-food industry, and employers sometimes lack the necessary supports to facilitate their entry. This report explores the state of the agri-food industry, identifies barriers for newcomers and employers within the sector, and recommends the best practices and policy changes that employers, newcomers, and government agencies can adopt going forward.





# STATE OF AGRICULTURE & DEMAND NEEDS

In 2021, the agriculture and agri-food sector in Canada employed 2.1 million people and generated over \$134 billion of Canada’s gross domestic product.<sup>1</sup> As of June 2022, there are 297 employers within the agri-food industry in Windsor-Essex, making up 2.5% of all employers in the region, and the Leamington CA area is home to over 4,500 acres of greenhouse operations, making it the largest vegetable greenhouse cluster in North America and second-largest in the world. The food and beverage processing sector alone generates over \$3 billion in annual GDP. Due to Windsor-Essex’s strategic location, the agri-food industry thrives; surrounded by the Great Lakes, farmers always have reliable access to a water source, and directly across from Detroit, Michigan, international trade is facilitated as 70% of our product is exported to the U.S. Undoubtedly, the agri-food industry is a vital part of the region’s economy. Despite these advantages present within the sector, it still faces a critical and ongoing issue: acute labour shortages.

	# OF EMPLOYERS WITH EMPLOYEES as of June 2022 in Windsor-Essex	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYERS (all industries) in Windsor-Essex	# OF EMPLOYERS with employees as of June 2022 in Ontario	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYERS (all industries) in Ontario
<b>111 - CROP PRODUCTION</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>3,997</b>	<b>0.8%</b>
<b>115 - SUPPORT ACTIVITIES FOR AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>761</b>	<b>0.2%</b>

1: "Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada," Government of Canada, July 18, 2022.

The industry faces chronic labour gaps because there are many barriers to accessing the agri-food sector, especially for newcomers. One distinguishable challenge for any jobseeker looking to enter the industry is location. Since most agriculture businesses are located in rural communities, there are many limitations to accessing and advertising to workers. Scarce populations and a lack of expansive and affordable transportation make the search for employees extremely difficult for the agri-food sector. As of 2021, the Leamington CA area (Leamington and Kingsville) is only home to 12% of the total population in Windsor-Essex.<sup>2</sup>

Another barrier that is unique to the sector is the misconception that seasonality, having peak and off seasons, means the industry is unable to offer full-time employment year-round, which deters applicants who require a steady income. However, the industry in Windsor-Essex has a fruitful and productive growing season that lasts 212 days on average, and the majority of jobs offered in the industry are full-time and permanent positions. Potential employees believe that they may be unemployed for 40% of the year,<sup>3</sup> which is a strong deterrent for local jobseekers and newcomers alike, but that is rarely the case.

According to research conducted by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council (CAHRC), employers within the industry will often turn to the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program and the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) to fill the gaps left by a lack of domestic workers. Hiring through these programs can correct the shortages that arise due to the seasonality of the industry. However, this still leads to challenges when it comes to retention. Finding employees through these programs is efficient, but retaining employees becomes the issue. When it comes to hiring Canadian workers, nearly all of the employers in the CAHRC surveys expressed major difficulties, citing “critical labour shortages.” The focus groups they conducted also revealed that employers prefer to take on domestic labourers, however, they are often unimpressed with their work ethic, as the job requires extremely long hours of labour-intensive work, and they have found local workers to be unreliable and inefficient. Considering the perception local workers and TFW programs are not satisfying Canadian employers, newcomers are presented with a great opportunity to fill the needs of the agri-food industry.



2. "2021 Census: County of Essex Continues to Grow," County of Essex, April 27, 2022.  
3. "Agriculture and Agri-Tech," Invest WindsorEssex, 2022.  
4. "Options and Opportunities for Attracting Non-Traditional Workers to the Agriculture Industry," Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council, March 31, 2015

Despite the widening labour gap in agriculture and agri-food, there are numerous barriers that make it difficult for newcomers to enter the industry. To begin, there is a lack of knowledge of the agriculture sector in employment service agencies.<sup>5</sup> In Windsor, specifically, many agencies have programs that outline how to enter other industries, such as skilled trades, but none have specific programs that highlight or offer initiatives to enter the agri-food sector. Transportation is also a significant issue. Migrant workers are often housed on the premises, but local workers (newcomers) will have to find transportation to and from their place of work. For newcomers with a small income/no income, they may not have access to a private vehicle, and oftentimes public transportation has limited routes/schedules. Employment far from city centres, as most agricultural companies tend to be, are usually not included in public transportation routes, and if the employees have to work long hours, the buses are likely not operational once their shifts are over. Moreover, due to the seclusion of the industry, newcomers and their families will be reluctant to spend a significant amount of their income on transportation or even relocation for an entry-level job.

Due to the focus on work ethic within the industry, newcomers face another barrier when they are mislabeled as lazy, inefficient, or unreliable.<sup>6</sup> Cultural barriers can lead to negative biases against newcomers, which can hinder their chances during the hiring process. On the positive side, employers within the agriculture sector do not prioritize language skills, so the language barrier that most immigrants find themselves trapped behind is less of an issue in this industry. Many employers within the sector have experience working with migrant workers with minimal English language skills, and they don't believe it is an impediment in any way to their overall performance.<sup>7</sup> This presents newcomers, those who may not feel very confident about their language skills, with a good opportunity to secure employment that does not rely too heavily on their ability to communicate effectively. However, training newcomers is most effective in their native tongue, but employers cannot always afford to translate all of their training modules in multiple languages to accommodate newcomers from different regions. Moreover, minimal English language skills is usually an impediment to growth within the industry since more specialized jobs or supervisor/managerial positions would require a higher level of language.



5. "Options and Opportunities for Attracting Non-Traditional Workers to the Agriculture Industry." Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council, March 31, 2015  
6. "Reduce Unconscious Employer Best Practices for Hiring Skilled Newcomers." Allies: A Maytree Idea, 2015  
7. "Options and Opportunities for Attracting Non-Traditional Workers to the Agriculture Industry." Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council, March 31, 2015

## CAREERS IN AGRI-FOOD

The following is a list of examples and descriptions of careers in agri-food available in Windsor-Essex. As of December 2022, there are 69 active job postings for careers in the agri-food sector, and the majority have been active for over two months, denoting the need for employees and the struggle to find them.



### FOOD PRODUCT/PRODUCE INSPECTOR

Associated NOC Code(s): 2222 – Agricultural and fish products inspectors

Agricultural and fish products inspectors inspect agricultural and fish products for conformity to prescribed production, storage, and transportation standards. They ensure the food/produce meets a standardized quality.

#### Skills

- Product quality assurance
- Management
- Communications
- Horticulture

#### Working Conditions



Working indoors



Working outdoors





### PACKER

Associated NOC Code(s):

- 1521 – Shippers and receivers,
- 8431 – General farm workers,
- 8432 – Nursery and greenhouse workers,
- or 8611 – Harvesting labourers

Harvesting labourers assist other farm workers to harvest, sort, and pack crops. They may also assist occupations such as truck drivers in the loading and unloading of products.

### Skills

- Horticulture
- Fine motor skills
- Farming
- Warehousing
- Sorting
- Management

### Working Conditions



Working indoors



Working outdoors



**GENERAL FARM WORKER**

Associated NOC Code(s):  
8431 – General farm workers

General farm workers plant, cultivate and harvest crops, raise livestock and poultry, and maintain and repair farm equipment and buildings. This group includes operators of farm machinery

**Skills**

- Interpersonal skills
- Horticulture
- Fine motor skills
- Farming
- Landscaping
- English language
- Troubleshooting
- Mechanical skills

**Working Conditions**

Working indoors



Working outdoors



Possible exposure  
to chemicals





### GREENHOUSE WORKER

Associated NOC Code(s): 8432 – Nursery and greenhouse workers

Greenhouse workers plant, cultivate, and harvest trees, shrubs, flowers and plants, and serve nursery and greenhouse customers. They are responsible for day-to-day plant and crop care, ensuring that plants receive correct levels of nutrients and are planted and maintained following best practices.

#### Skills

- Horticulture
- Pruning
- Fungicides
- Pesticides
- Insecticides
- Interpersonal skills

#### Working Conditions



Working indoors



Working outdoors





### **HORTICULTURIST**

Associated NOC Code(s):  
2225 – Landscape and horticulture technicians and specialists

Horticulturists deal with issues related to horticulture such as irrigation; breeding, cultivation, and studying of plants; and treat injured and diseased trees and plants.

### **Skills**

- Horticulture
- Irrigation
- Management
- Problem solving
- Pruning
- Trimming

### **Working Conditions**



Working indoors



Working outdoors



## CURRENT STATE OF EMPLOYER PRACTICES CHALLENGES & INITIATIVES

According to an employer survey and consultations conducted by Workforce WindsorEssex, the main methods of connecting with employers is through word of mouth, job posting websites, and job/community agencies, specifically the South Essex Community Council (SECC). Most employers stated that they will usually seek out newcomers for hourly positions, but not salary positions. During their peak seasons, they hire newcomers for temporary work, but claim that they can't keep them on because the paperwork and other tasks moving forward require a higher level of English language proficiency than most newcomers currently possess. Some employers stated that newcomers are specifically part of their recruitment strategy, while others stated that they simply review a newcomer's application just like any other. One employer noted that they attend presentations at a local multicultural centre in an effort to recruit new employees. According to employers, the biggest barriers when it comes to hiring newcomers is language, transportation, and a lack of Canadian work experience/education. Other barriers that were mentioned were a lack of childcare, meaning newcomers were unable to work the hours required because of a lack of accessible and affordable childcare. The majority of employers didn't have an issue when it came to skills training, as many newcomers had experience from their countries of origin.



“

According to employers, the biggest barriers when it comes to hiring newcomers is:

- language,
- transportation, and
- a lack of Canadian work experience/education.

”



When asked if there were any government programs that support employment in the sector, one employer cited a program that helped with training costs for young employees (under 29), but the rest were unsure if any programs existed, exposing the need for more programs and an increase in marketing of existing programs. There are a few government programs that apply to the agri-food sector (which will be reviewed below), but without properly promoting these initiatives, they are widely underutilized, which seems to be the case with local employers.

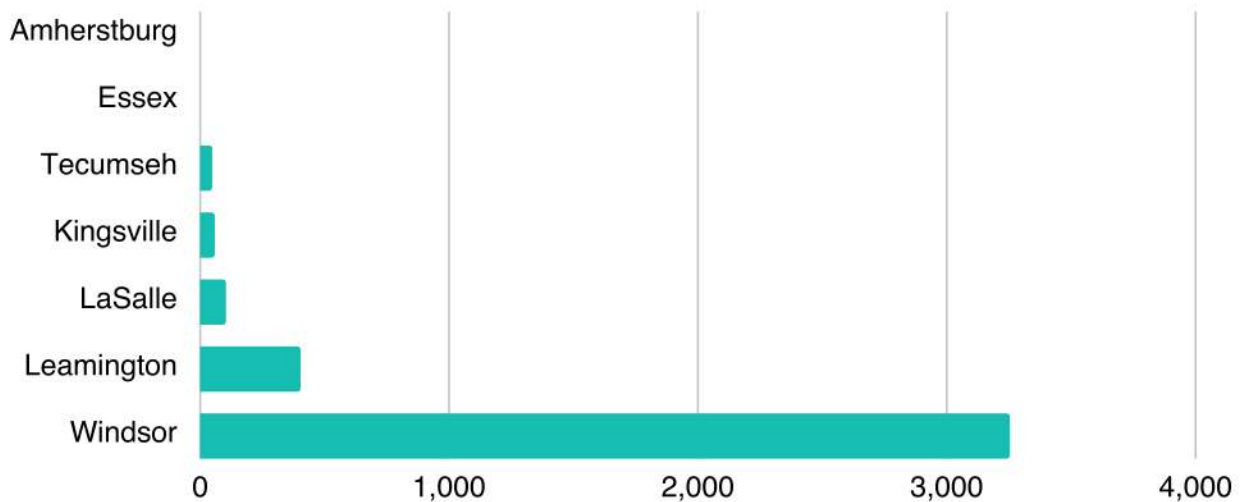
Employers were also asked what kind of programs could be introduced to encourage hiring newcomers, and the majority stated that funding for language courses would be the most beneficial program for newcomers. In addition to language courses, employers expressed that government-funded translation and interpretation services would greatly facilitate the training process and mitigate training costs. One employer noted that they have subtitles for their video training programs, but they can't have more than one language displayed at the same time, meaning they have to divide their training sessions into smaller groups across different times, which lengthens the process significantly. Another employer noted that some of their practices could not be properly translated, so a certain level of English comprehension becomes an essential part of the job.

Finally, employers were asked what changes would need to be made for their company to hire more newcomers. Some employers stated that they were more than willing to hire newcomers, but ESL training would have to be made more accessible and affordable since language is by far the biggest barrier to hiring newcomers. Employers have adapted well to training TFWs by developing training modules in Spanish, since the vast majority of TFWs come from Spanish-speaking countries, but they require more funding to apply these practices to multiple newcomer languages. One employer also noted that the immense amount of paperwork that has to be completed in order to hire an employee full-time is another challenge. Cutting down on the onboarding process could ease the hiring process for both employers and new hires.

## NEWCOMER LANDSCAPE & BARRIERS

The number of permanent resident arrivals is facing a resurgence after a consistent decline in previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, 3,745 immigrants resettled in Windsor-Essex alone. Of that number, only 365 newcomers resettled in Leamington, where the majority of Windsor-Essex's agri-food industry resides. The accessibility of rural communities becomes one of the most prominent challenges when it comes to filling labour shortages within the sector. The smaller populations and the lack of adequate transportation systems make it much more difficult for jobseekers to enter industries that are primarily located in rural communities. As a result, labour shortages are chronic within the agriculture industry. Considering only 10% of newcomer arrivals resettle in Leamington, entering the agri-food industry becomes a near impossibility for the majority of newcomers who, oftentimes, do not have access to a method of transportation.

### PERMANENT RESIDENT ARRIVALS





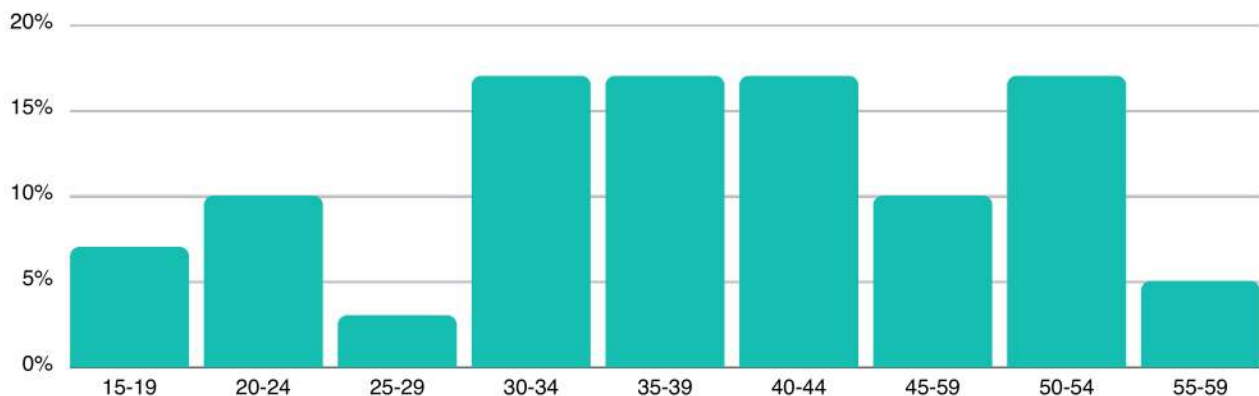
**According to a newcomer survey conducted by Workforce WindsorEssex, the top ways that newcomers connect with employers is through:**

1. friends and family,
2. job fairs,
3. job placement agencies, and
4. simply walking into a business and applying for a job.

When asked if they had any support when it came to seeking employment, half of the respondents answered no, and the other half stated that they were supported by friends or job agencies. For many newcomers, the supports exist, but they are under advertised or inaccessible. The biggest barriers to seeking employment, identified by newcomers, were the language barrier, the lack of Canadian work experience, and the lack of connections to employers.

When respondents were asked if they would consider a job in the agri-food industry, over 60% answered no. Some were simply uninterested, others claimed that it was not close enough to where they lived, and some said that the agri-food industry did not align with their previous work experience and education. On the other hand, those interested said yes because they needed a job and an income, denoting the fact that many newcomers will seek employment in any industry with the right incentives. To that point, when asked what changes would encourage them to enter the agri-food industry, many cited a higher salary as the primary motivator. Others said that proximity to the workplace, access to English classes through their employer, and opportunities for growth and support within the industry would incentivize them to enter the industry.

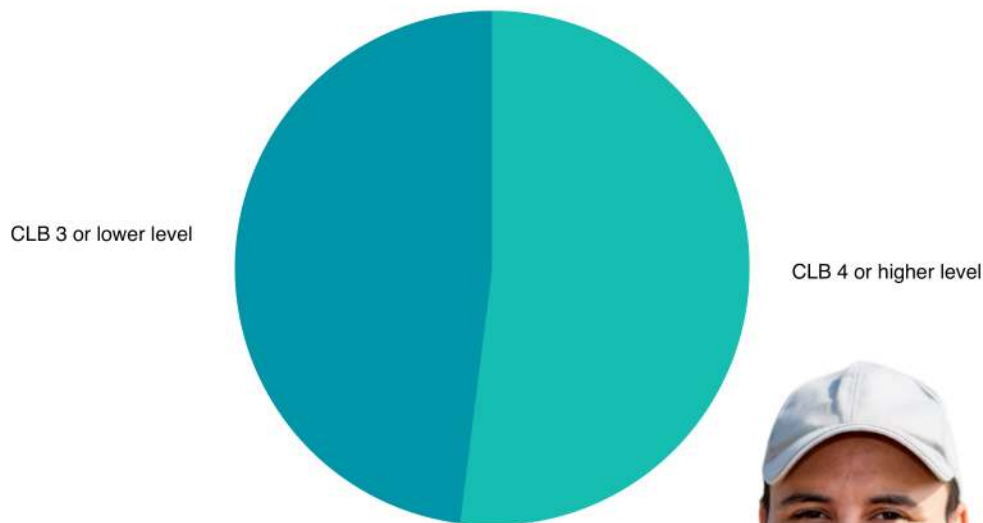
### NEWCOMERS WITH AGRIFOOD EXPERIENCE BY AGE





During consultations with service providers, it was revealed that the majority of newcomers that begin working within the agri-food industry are overqualified for the entry-level positions that are usually offered; however, their language skills restrict them from applying for better roles. According to newcomer data provided by the YMCA of Southwestern Ontario using their K2: Pathways to Settlement program, 81% of newcomers with agri-food experience are within the prime working-age. Despite the low wages, their overqualification, and the distance, many newcomers travel from Windsor proper to the county to work within the industry, demonstrating how motivated newcomers are to work and support their families.


## ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF NEWCOMERS WITH AGRI-FOOD EXPERIENCE



The above chart demonstrates the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), or language proficiency, of newcomers with agri-food experience. CLB describes 12 levels of ability in each of four different language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) and are categorized into 3 stages (Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced). According to the data available, most newcomers with agri-food experience in Windsor-Essex have CLB level 3 or 4, meaning they have basic levels of English language proficiency. This is also reflected in the research and consultations conducted with employers in agri-food, who point to this basic language proficiency as a barrier to promote newcomers within their businesses.



## BEST PRACTICES LOCALLY AND BEYOND



The best practices for hiring newcomers include reducing unconscious and cultural biases within the workplace. Unconscious and cultural biases can negatively impact the hiring process for newcomers. Some misconceptions regarding newcomers are that they are unreliable or inefficient workers and many believe the majority of newcomers migrate to Canada to leech off of government support indefinitely.<sup>8</sup> These myths devalue the work ethic of newcomers, when research demonstrates a clear pattern of efficiency when it comes to hiring a diverse staff. According to studies conducted by Statistics Canada, there is a positive correlation between hiring immigrants and the productivity of firms.<sup>9</sup>

Proposed practices for reducing unconscious biases are introducing diversity training to employees and hiring managers, blacking out the names and places of education so hiring is based solely on qualifications, training on how to conduct culturally-appropriate interviews, setting a target number of newcomer hires, and encouraging cultural exchange in the workplace. Some beneficial practices to employ during the interview process is using plain language, giving newcomers ample time to answer questions, and providing interviewees with feedback once the interview is over so they can learn from mistakes they might have made. These practices have the potential of reducing biases during the hiring process, and cultural barriers in the workplace.

8. "Reduce Unconscious Employer Best Practices for Hiring Skilled Newcomers." Allies: A Maytree Idea, 2015

9. Gu, Wulong, Feng Hou, and Garnett Picot. "Immigration and Firm Productivity: Evidence from the Canadian Employer-Employee Dynamics Database." Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, September 14, 2020

Other methods that improve the work experience/hiring process for newcomers is a certain level of accommodation. Employers willing to offer transportation services to their employees would vastly improve the experience and ability to work for newcomers who cannot secure private transportation. Shuttle buses to and from public transportation routes would greatly aid in resolving transportation issues that newcomers often have. Another tactic is offering language training within the workplace. In-house language training is beneficial for employees who want to improve their language skills, but may not be able to find the time outside of work hours. It also has the added benefit for employers, who can improve their employees' language skills while tailoring the lesson plans so they include sector-specific terminology that will improve communication for all parties.<sup>10</sup>

Mentorships, apprenticeships, and bridging programs offer sector-specific training for those hoping to enter a certain industry, and they connect potential employees with potential employers. These programs are extremely helpful for newcomers who find the path to employment unclear. The highly structured program sets newcomers down a clear path toward their career goals and links them with the tools and connections needed to find employment once they have completed their training/experience.<sup>11</sup> On top of this, employment agencies must develop reliable pathways for newcomers to enter these industries. Based on this research, informational programs for this sector are extremely lacking, and the confusion that newcomers face when they resettle in Canada is exacerbated by a lack of clear resources. Advertising programs and organizing informational sessions regarding the agri-food sector would greatly improve a newcomer's ability to pursue a career in the sector.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>10</sup>. "Reduce Unconscious Employer Best Practices for Hiring Skilled Newcomers." Allies: A Maytree Idea, 2015.

<sup>11</sup>. "Employer Guide to Hiring Newcomers." Hire Immigrants, June 2016.

<sup>12</sup>. "Options and Opportunities for Attracting Non-Traditional Workers to the Agriculture Industry." Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council, March 31, 2015.



## CURRENT POLICY AND ANALYSIS

### CAREER BRIDGE

The Career Bridge program is a paid apprenticeship offered to “new immigrants” with a Bachelor’s degree, at least three years of international work experience, and fluency in English. The apprenticeships offered are four, six, eight, and 12 months in length. The government of Ontario provides the infrastructure funding, and the host organization determines the apprentice’s salary. It is primarily used to link agri-food businesses with skilled newcomers, helping them access an underutilized group through an online database, allowing them to save on HR and recruitment costs and find skilled workers. Employers in the agri-food sector who are interested in the program can apply to gain access to the pool of candidates and Career Edge will handle administration and pay the newcomer’s salary. The host organization will be billed afterwards. All agri-food businesses are eligible to apply.<sup>13</sup>

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) has other policies that support agri-food businesses and allow them to generate new jobs, such as the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund,<sup>14</sup> but none of them, besides Career Bridge, are geared toward newcomers specifically. Evidently, there is a large policy gap when it comes to the recruitment of newcomers. The Career Bridge program is a good start, but the prerequisites for newcomers to be eligible for the program, such as fluency in English, limits the pool significantly. It offers little support for newcomers with lesser language skills or little education.

Entry level jobs in agri-food, such as general labourers, do not often require highly skilled workers, which means a program that is tailored toward lesser skilled newcomers could fill many labour gaps within the agri-food industry. Since the biggest barrier to employment for newcomers is language, other programs that help newcomers develop their language skills while on the job could also be beneficial for newcomers and employers. A funding program for employers could be considered: newcomers coming in with relevant international experience could be given the tools on site to perform well, such as training in their native language.

13. “Career Bridge,” Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, 2022.

14. “Southwestern Ontario Development Fund,” Government of Ontario, 2022.

### **SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT FUND**

The Southwestern Ontario Development Fund supports businesses and non-profits located in southwestern Ontario with projects that create jobs and spur economic growth and private investment. The funding can be up to 15% of the project cost for businesses or up to 50% for community development projects. Businesses have to commit to creating at least five new jobs.<sup>14</sup> This fund could be used to create jobs and programs for newcomers; however, the program itself does not include incentives for employers or community programs to be geared toward newcomers specifically. Nevertheless, it holds a lot of potential for employers who are interested in tapping into the newcomer pool but lack some of the funding to do so. It could also cover half the costs of a municipal or local organization's program in a town where there is an expansive agri-food sector and a large newcomer population, such as Leamington, ON.

### **CANADA-ONTARIO JOB GRANT**

The Canada-Ontario Job Grant offers financial assistance to small, medium, and large businesses who wish to purchase training for their employees. They cover up to \$10,000 per person for training costs. Employers with over 100 employees must cover half of the training costs, and employers with less than 100 employees must cover one-sixth of the training costs. This grant is a good opportunity for employers in the agri-food service to receive government assistance to purchase training geared toward newcomers. For example, a training program that is conducted in multiple languages could be purchased with the Canada-Ontario Job Grant, allowing them to invest in the newcomer workforce without the added training costs.<sup>16</sup>



### **ONTARIO IMMIGRANT NOMINEE PROGRAM: IN-DEMAND SKILLS STREAM**

This program allows employers to apply for the approval of permanent, full-time positions to be filled by foreign nationals and to recruit foreign nationals to fill those positions. The In-Demand Skills stream is sector-specific and geared toward foreign workers who have a job offer in agriculture, trucking, construction, or personal support work. The job offer must be a permanent and full-time position in order for the immigrant to be considered for permanent residence.<sup>17</sup>

15. "Southwestern Ontario Development Fund." Government of Ontario, 2022.  
16. "Canada-Ontario Job Grant." Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Government of Ontario, 2022.  
17. "OINP Employer Job Offer, In-Demand Skills Stream." Government of Ontario, 2022.

These four positions within the agri-food industry are eligible for the program:



**NOC 8431  
GENERAL FARM WORKERS**



**NOC 8432  
NURSERY  
AND GREENHOUSE WORKERS**

**NOC 8611  
HARVESTING LABOURERS**



**NOC 9462  
INDUSTRIAL BUTCHERS AND MEAT  
CUTTERS, POULTRY PREPARERS  
AND RELATED WORKERS**



Applicants must have a cumulative nine months of full-time experience within the same NOC that they're applying for, a valid license or other authorization, language skills at CLB level 4 or higher, and a Canadian high school diploma or its equivalent in another country. Among the significant barriers for newcomers are language difficulties and a lack of Canadian work experience. Considering this OINP stream requires both, the program will be very limiting for newcomers, and it is likely that only a few will be able to meet the requirements and fill the shortages in the agriculture sector.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

## LANGUAGE

While language courses are offered by service providers and local school boards, terminology particular to the agri-food sector is not typically taught. Consider translating training programs in major languages (Arabic, Hindi, Spanish) or offering language courses that include occupation-specific terminology. Hiring an employee or interpreter that is fluent in one or some of these major languages would also help to ease the language barrier between employers and newcomers and facilitate the training process.

## WORKPLACE CULTURE

Integrating diversity training into your workplace is a rewarding initiative for talent development. Cultural biases can hinder the hiring process for newcomers and establish a negative work environment for diverse groups. Reviewing applications based on merit alone, offering assistance during the onboarding process, and organizing social events to make newcomer staff feel engaged and supported in the workplace will nurture a stronger workplace culture.

## BROADENING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Broaden the scope of your connections by reaching out to local employment service providers and ESL programs to meet with qualified candidates. Try to seek out newcomers by attending or organizing events in newcomer communities, and advertise the opportunities that the agri-food industry has to offer. Make your skill needs known to service providers and in job postings so jobseekers are made aware of what skills they need to develop to enter the industry.

## TRANSPORTATION

Consider developing transportation services if your business is located further from city centers. Since newcomers often lack a method of transportation, adding a shuttle service or a company vehicle drop-in/drop-off area where public transportation ends would make jobs in the sector much more accessible for jobseekers without a private vehicle or those worried about transportation costs.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JOBSEEKERS

## DEVELOP YOUR SKILLS

Identify transferable skills that can relate to a role in the agri-food sector. Try to improve existing skills and develop new skills to appeal to employers. Attend programs that aim to advance your soft skills, a good first step to improving your interview skills. By developing a strong understanding of the skills you already possess, you will be more able to emphasize these when observing which positions interest you, as well as modifying your applications to these positions.

## RESEARCH THE LABOUR MARKET

Look into local labour market information and find employers in the sector to reach out to. Tracking historical hiring periods to find trends of demand and identifying the best place and time to apply for a job in the sector will give you a stronger idea of where your future opportunities may come in the agri-food sector.

## KEEP IMPROVING ESL ABILITIES

Continue to improve your English language skills and ask for ESL support to learn occupation-specific terminology that could ease the training process and ease the language barrier between you and potential employers.

## BUILD CONNECTIONS WITH EMPLOYERS

Attend in-person job fairs and information sessions to meet and speak with hiring employers. This not only allows you to have more opportunities for gaining employment, but also at honing soft skills and building connections that may assist in future employment and training opportunities.





# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS



## **CLIENT-EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS**

Provide meaningful opportunities for clients to meet with employers. This can be achieved by hosting job fairs, information sessions, and training workshops. Advertising these events to newcomers will not only be of benefit with respect to increasing turnout, but also in finding participants that are skilled, motivated, and engaged.

## **CONNECTIONS**

Expand your contacts within the industry. During the COVID-19 pandemic, staffing changes were made, and many contacts were lost as individuals shifted positions or simply became preoccupied with other work. Develop a reliable network of contacts, ensure that you have a second point of contact, and maintain communication with your contacts to maintain a spectrum of connection.

## **LANGUAGE**

Partner with local employers to develop and offer agri-food-specific language training in the workplace. Integrate industry-specific terminology into ESL language courses, and offer to provide pre-employment language training to facilitate training for newcomers and employers.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS

## TARGETED AND FLEXIBLE PROGRAMS

Develop programs that specifically support the employment or training of newcomers. There are many programs that support the agri-food industry, but none are tailored to promoting and supporting newcomers in the sector. Create programs that will incentivize employers to reach out to newcomers to enter the industry by covering training costs or a portion of newcomer wages. Ensure that eligibility requirements are flexible to support candidates with low English levels or lack of experience. The OINP stream is a strong start to offering industry-specific support to newcomers; however, they severely limit the number of eligible candidates with rigid and unrealistic requirements for newcomers who often lack English skills and Canadian work experience.

## LANGUAGE

Support the need for occupation-specific language training for the agri-food sector in major languages (Arabic, Hindi, Spanish). Developing training programs in the most-spoken newcomer languages or funding employers to develop their own training in these languages will ease the language barrier between employers and newcomers.

## CONNECTIONS

Encourage partnership and collaboration between employers and newcomer-supporting organizations to develop meaningful connections. Promote opportunities within the agri-food industry to newcomers, and encourage employers to look toward newcomers to fill persistent labour gaps.



## CONCLUSION

The agri-food industry is in need of capable workers to fill the critical labour shortages that they've been experiencing for the past decade. Newcomers are motivated and eager jobseekers that have the potential to fill these gaps, but language and transportation barriers make it difficult for newcomers to enter the industry, and a lack of government support is an impediment for employers. There are numerous government policies that aim to support employers in the agri-food industry; however, very few are geared toward newcomers. Local employers stated that they are more than willing to hire newcomers, but they need financial support to improve translated training programs and mitigate training costs. Improved government programs can incentivize newcomers and employers alike and begin to fill the labour gaps within the industry.



# TeaMWork Project

In recognition of their need to support some of the nation's most vulnerable and isolated workers, the Government of Canada announced the Migrant Worker Support Program (MWSP) as part of Budget 2021. Informed by the lessons learned from the Migrant Worker Support Network Pilot, the MWSP aims to support community-based organizations in the provision of migrant worker-centric programs and services.

Funded by Employment and Social Development Canada, TeaMWork is a project under the Migrant Worker Support Program. The purpose of the program is to provide migrant workers with accurate information and access to available services and supports, and to assist them in learning about and exercising their rights while in Canada.

The funding will serve the best interests of Migrant Workers in Essex, Kent, and Lambton counties.

More specifically, the MWSP and TeaMWork objectives aim to:

- Increase migrant workers' awareness and understanding of their rights and responsibilities through educational activities and/or educational material;
- Empower migrant workers to exercise their rights by providing or assisting in accessing services available to them;
- Foster inclusion and welcoming of migrant workers through social, cultural, and/or recreational events;
- Support migrant workers during emergency situations;
- Foster new partnerships or leverage existing partnerships/networks to support migrant workers;
- Develop and implement coordinated approaches among community organizations, and/or build their capacity and knowledge to provide resources and services to migrant workers.



 **CANADIAN  
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