

# Labour



The Canadian Horticultural Council and its members recognize the value to the Canadian economy of the horticultural sector's continuing contribution to growth and employment. The Canadian government also recognizes this and further recognizes the chronic shortages of seasonal labour for primary agriculture, particularly in horticulture, where labour has always been the highest ranking input contributing to production and prosperity.

The sector continues to face intense scrutiny with respect to its involvement in, and use of foreign worker programs. In fact, many beyond those who actually employ the workers, or depend on the output of the farms who employ the workers, continue to maintain that the need is not actual.

While the CHC fully endorses the "Canada First" concept for labour, seasonal or not, reality has demonstrated that horticulture must access resources from foreign jurisdictions to ensure a sufficient and consistent supply of labour to meet its planting, growing and harvesting needs.

The Agricultural Stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) has allowed exemptions for agriculture from its broader industry guidelines that make the program less expensive for farmers to participate. The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) stream of the TFWP is given respect by government largely due to its history of nearly 50 years of administration and the participation of all parties in the annual review process to update the program and ensure ongoing compliance.

The reason these program streams work well is because of the industry-government relationships that have been developed and the business-like approach taken by industry in addressing the issues. It is imperative to continue to be diligent in dealing honestly with government officials and, in so doing, continue to have credibility with all levels of government. The relationships that have and will develop are critical to success.

When the TFWP has not worked well in recent years, it was mainly for one of two reasons: the federal government implemented changes without consultation with industry, or when consultations were conducted the input we provided was ignored in the implementation or that the other being that federal policies did not fit with provincial policies and problems and delays occurred as a result.

In February 2016 the federal government announced intent for yet another review of foreign worker programs. While this is concerning, and a somewhat complex undertaking due to multi-jurisdictional (i.e.: department) roles and responsibilities, there is a need, and an opportunity to take advantage of the review to reach out and advocate to inform and ensure clear understanding of the facts.

The CHC recently developed a consensus briefing document on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (Ag Stream). Consensus and moving forward on the issues based on collaboration and in the development of policy is also key to success.