

**BC Fruit Growers' Association
Friday File**

June 19, 2015



Social Insurance Number - Critical Issue for the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program

Mexican and Caribbean workers are permitted to work in Canada under the SAWP program. All Canadian employment requirements must be met for these workers, including the requirement of a Social Insurance Number for the worker. Up until now, the worker was provided the SIN number 'automatically' when entering the country. The Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) facilitated this process.

Now, in a unilateral decision made without consultation or warning, CBSA has withdrawn its support and facilitation of providing a SIN to workers upon entry to Canada. Instead, Canadian growers (with the exception of Ontario) are being asked to take workers to the nearest Service Canada centre to obtain their SIN number. Such centres are located in Penticton and Kelowna. Clearly, this is disruptive to grower's business when done without notice or consultation, and it is doubtful that the Service Canada centres are prepared for a large influx of foreign workers.

Contact your MP to express your concern about this withdrawal of service by CBSA:

Dan Albas, MP Okanagan-Coquihalla: dan.albas@parl.gc.ca

Ron Cannan, MP Kelowna-Lake Country: cannan.r@parl.gc.ca

Rules of the SAWP Program

Growers are reminded that more stringent enforcement and penalties are in place for the SAWP program, so it is critical that growers be aware of and follow rules. Here are some examples that will lead to growers being banned from the program for 2-3 years:

- moving workers from inspected housing to non-inspected housing.
- contracting out or encouraging workers to go to other, non-approved employment.
- improper pay. Piece work rates are only in place for fruit harvest. Piece work rates must not be paid for pruning or thinning. A permitted practice is to pay minimum wage and an additional bonus based on piecework.

If you have questions on labour standards, please see the labour standards fact sheet on farm work: http://www.labour.gov.bc.ca/esb/facshts/pdfs/farm_workers_2015.pdf

SAWP Transfers

Many growers apply for SAWP workers as a transfer from another farm. This helps to extend the workers stay and earnings and it allows the grower to split the cost with the first employer.

However, caution is needed if you apply for a transfer worker without having another employer identified who will provide the transfer worker. If it turns out that no transfer workers are available, then you will probably need to switch to a worker that comes directly from Mexico - but a new application is needed for the direct hire from Mexico. This requires additional advertising and time for approval, so use caution if applying for transfer workers without having identified another employer who will provide that worker.

Replant

The 2015 Replant Program is different from the previous program in some important ways. Most important, the province introduced the concept of 'quality projects'. As a result, a Replant Plan was required, in addition to the usual application form. Another change is that funding is provided one time, so that a fixed amount of funding is provided in any one year.

When completed application are received, the project is first determined to meet the eligibility requirements.

Then the eligible projects are rated by a committee of horticulturists, using the Replant Plan and Project Application. Since the program is oversubscribed for 2015, not all applications will receive funding. Unlike previous years, when the projects approved were on a 'first come, first serve' basis, the new Replant Program will provide funding to the highest scoring applications.

A first round of project approvals has been delivered to about 30 applicants. In the next week, we are anticipating the second round of project applications to be delivered. The BCFGAs has requested the provision of additional government funding so that further projects may be funded, as this is the first year of a new program. We expect a decision in the new few weeks.

New BCFGAs Office Location

The new location of the BCFGAs office is
880 Vaughan Avenue, Kelowna, BC V1Y 7E4.

The main telephone number remains the same: 250-762-5226, or toll free 1-800-619-9022.