

BC Fruit Growers' Association

Friday File



April 9, 2020

Protocols Finalized

Growers can now make decisions and plan

The federal government announced [the protocols for Temporary Foreign Workers](#), dated March 27. The BC Government announced [recommendations for all farms to meet the orders, notices, and guidance issued by British Columbia's Provincial Health Officer and additional mandatory requirements for farms employing Temporary Foreign Workers \(TFWs\) and domestic workers](#), on April 7. Finalization of these documents allows SAWP workers to travel from Mexico and the Caribbean to BC. These federal and provincial requirements may be eased with time or additional requirements may be added at any time.

One important item was amended in an April 1, 2020 in a [letter from the Ministers of Labour and Health, Hon. Carla Qualtrough and Patty Hajdu](#).

The BC government yesterday afternoon released the protocols for [Protecting Farmers and Farm Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

Another item that is changing is the plan that will be required for people repatriating or entering BC by airplane. Instead of being voluntarily-developed isolation/quarantine plans, written plans are being required. More in the next newsletter.

AgSafeBC

Information source on COVID-19

AgSafeBC has compiled information on [COVID-19 Protocols and Procedures, Best Practices, and Signage](#) (in multiple languages).

Workers Available

Labour Orientation and Safety Service is operational

For non-SAWP workforce, BCFGGA is undertaking extra measures to encourage capable local workers to work on farms.

Ron Forrest is the BCFGGA staff for backpacker and local labour. We are starting Ron early to help find BCFGGA members the workers they need. [Ron currently has workers available for BCFGGA members](#). To contact **Ron**, call **778-363-3620**.

Labour - foreign and domestic

Where are we going?

There are labour challenges this year:

- Quarantine Cost is about \$900 per worker in wages. In addition to SAWP workers not being permitted to work during the 2 week quarantine period after their arrival, employers are required to pay workers a minimum of 30 hours per week for this quarantine period. The quarantine payment requirement for SAWP was imposed on April 1 by the federal government.
- International Travel restrictions. There are no scheduled international airline flights in April and possibly beyond, and the choices for regularly scheduled international flights will be reduced when airlines get international flights back on line.

Charter flights are being arranged by MiTierra - the first flights from Mexico will start April 15 and continue regularly. The first flights from Jamaica are currently scheduled for May 8 and 11 to start the season. MiTierra will contact growers directly about flights. SAWP workers will be supplied in order of their originally expected arrival date and the workers must be transported directly to the farm. Airfares for Mexico are expected to be in the range of \$1,100, with an additional \$100 bus transport to the farm from Vancouver airport.

Airfares for the Caribbean on regularly scheduled Westjet flights are expected to be in the range of \$700 to Vancouver or Kelowna.

The processing of new applications in Mexico SAWP (those with LMIA's submitted after the travel ban) are delayed due to problems with SIMOL, the closure of biometrics processing (impacts 50% of growers) and restrictions on the processing and handling of Work Visas. The Visa Application Centre has been closed in Jamaica and the Embassy and Ministry are operating on restricted schedules.

The situation has been changing daily. Any new travel restrictions (e.g. the entry restrictions announced yesterday by Premier Horgan) may cause minimal or may cause a lot of disruption. For example, travel into and out of Barbados and Eastern Caribbean countries is currently banned.

- Employer preparation. Employers will need to have plans in place as part of the health protocols. An important part of planning will be the ability to individually isolate workers who become ill after arrival. Separate housing will be required for affected individuals. As an example, in the recent Bylands Nursery COVID-19 outbreak, the employer was able to house infected workers separately. We are looking to the province for guidance and assistance with isolation requirements.
- There will likely be a shortage of international backpackers that normally come to Canada on visitor visas. We are monitoring the availability of Quebecois backpackers and also local unemployed workers.

Stronger Together

Helping us help you

What are growers who rely on SAWP workers to do?

1. Continue applying, but take into account the 2 week delay after arrival for workers to begin working (e.g. one alternative is to apply for arrival 2 weeks earlier than normal).
2. Be prepared for fewer SAWP workers to arrive and for greater costs (cleaning sanitation, slower field operations due to spacing restrictions). Solutions are to look to local workers - BCFGa will be working on this, but shortages of workers from Quebec and other international backpackers is likely to leave the industry with an overall shortage of workers. Planning for lower production may be prudent - which varieties and blocks are your least profitable? On the other hand, it is expected that with reduced supply, produce prices will be increasing.
3. Support BCFGa and industry positions by contacting your MP, MLA and Ministers. We have developed the following resources to help you:

Here is the [contact list for all MLAs](#) (provincial representatives) in BC. You can search by your community for your MLA and find all of their contact information.

Here is a [contact list for all MPs](#) (federal representatives) in BC. You can search by postal code for your MP.

When you send your letter, please ensure you also send the letter to the provincial and federal ministers of agriculture:

[Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau](#), Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

[Hon. Lana Popham](#), BC Minister of Agriculture

If you email, please copy the Ministers of Agriculture and the BCFGa.

It is important that the message be unique to you and be written from your perspective, but [here is a letter template](#) developed by the Canadian Horticultural Council that you can use as a starting point to customize from.

COVID-19 Province-Wide Burning Ban

For smoke sensitive areas (areas with moderate to high residential density)

COVID-19 impacts lung health, so the province has instituted a province-wide ban on open burning, effective last Thursday. Growers have been in contact with the BCTFC field service and the BCFGa regarding a reversal of this ban for orchards. Reversing the just-announced ban is highly unlikely at this time of heightened focus on health care and COVID-19.

[Here is information on chipping programs and private contractors](#), compiled by Christina Forbes, Regional Agrologist at the BC Ministry of Agriculture - thanks Christina.

BCFGA Strategy and Action on COVID-19 impacts and financial assistance

Taking it to the next level

The BCFGAs Board has approved the engagement of [Earnscliffe government relations consultants](#) to assist in preparing a strategy for both SAWP and financial assistance programs and to help with our lobby effort - watch for more information in this newsletter.

Apple Clearwing Moth Survey

Keeping research moving

The Summerland Research & Development Centre (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada) needs your help in filling out a survey on apple decline symptoms in the Okanagan, Similkameen, and Creston Valley orchards. The results of the survey will help to better understand the extent of the issue in our apple growing regions so that we can direct the research in the Apple Decline Project to better help our apple growers. It will take about 5 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Your participation in this survey is on a voluntary and anonymous basis, and [the survey can be found here](#).

Details: AAFC Human Research Ethics Committee Approval # 2019-F-002 MacDonald; for more information, contact Jesse MacDonald at jesse.macdonald@canada.ca

COVID-19 Information

Of many sources, here are some basic, relevant sites and webpages

[HealthLinkBC](#)- Information available in [English](#), [Spanish](#) and [Punjabi](#)
[Public Health Canada - COVID-19](#)
[Ag SafeBC Covid-19 Best Practices Advice](#)
[AgSafeBC Covid-19 documents, signs, and procedures](#))
[WorksafeBC](#)

These websites provide information on how to monitor, what actions to take if detected, and getting an action plan in place in advance of a COVID-19 infection.

HubConnect

A Labour App for you, your family and your workers

WALI has developed the HubConnect app for growers, their families and workers - the app includes links to COVID-19 information, as well as other useful information.

Download for [Apple](#) or [Android](#).

- Regional specific resources
- Available in English and Spanish*
- Downloadable information
- Able to be used offline

TIP: Be sure to select the appropriate region. This can be changed in settings.

**Dependent on your phone language selection. By default all the information that is not available in Spanish will be in English and vice-versa.*

BCFGA Office

Covid-19 restrictions

We are temporarily closing access to the BCFGGA office during the Covid-19 emergency. Most of our staff are working from home. Please call (250-762-5226, or toll-free 1-800-619-9022) or [email](#) us if you need to communicate with us. We encourage members to contact BCFGGA staff and directors by telephone or email.

BCFGA 2020 Board of Directors

Name		Cell/Text
Pinder Dhaliwal - President	Oliver	250-490-7198
Peter Simonsen - VP	Naramata	250-488-0363
Ravinder Bains	Keremeos	250-499-0512
Sukhdeep (Deep) Brar	Summerland	250-462-5687
Avi Gill	Kelowna	778-990-9737
Sukhdev Goraya	Kelowna	250- 859-1229
Talwinder Bassi	Oliver	250-485-7272
David Dobernigg	Vernon	250-550-8999

Meetings and Events - check the [BCFGA Calendar](#) on our website for more information

Date	Meeting	Details
April 8	CrestonTree Fruit Production Guide - annual review	<i>By Zoom Video Call - more information to follow.</i>