

Report to the 2021 BCFGA Convention

From the

Labour Committee

We as farmers understand the entire life cycle of seasonal farming. However, for Canadians COVID-19 has raised two important questions; who produces our food? And how does it get to our plate?

From the winter weather conditions of January and February our season starts with pruning and getting our trees ready to produce the healthy and quality fruit that makes it to the kitchen tables around the country. Our industry has a high requirement for labour to carry out detailed management of the trees from pruning, training, thinning and harvesting. The labour requirement varies significantly for different crops depending on picking frequency, pruning and training requirements. As we all know it is essential to have enough labour available to carry out key operations at critical production times. Once fruit leaves our fields, the majority of fruit enters a complicated web of moving parts of transportation, storage, grading, packing, marketing, purchasing and consuming. A modern marvel that connects our urban and rural communities, gives consumers that “just in time” product which shows up at food markets across the country.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the complicated and complex distribution system and the things that can go wrong.

Most systems, whether it be transportation, healthcare, tourism, production were impacted by the crisis. COVID-19 showed the ripple effects and gaps in the system but also called into view issues surrounding food security. We were reminded by farmers, harvesters, that labour is important for this essential industry.

BCFGA along with member organizations quickly responded after the federal government began taking stringent actions to curb the spread of coronavirus in mid-March. On top of mind for every farmer was would they get the workers they were expecting from Mexico, the Caribbean and other countries.

BCFGA worked actively to ensure that flights, processing of visa applications, Covid 19 health protocols were addressed so that farm workers would not be adversely affected. The federal, provincial government in partnership with agriculture associations suggested changes needed to facilitate labour needs, while also protecting public health.

BCFGA participated in highlighting the increased cost of labour related covid 19 measures. This collective awareness from Canada's agriculture community resulted in a \$50 million announcement to help farmers, agriculture employers with temporary foreign workers (TFWs) costs. Costs associated with the measures necessary to follow the mandatory 14-day isolation period required of all workers arriving from abroad. Up to \$1,500 per TFW was provided to employers or those working with them to ensure isolation protocols were met.

Government of Canada is conducting consultations on employer-provided accommodations for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program across Canada. BCFGA and members provided feedback on proposed minimum requirements and worked along with

[BC Agriculture Council](#) / [WALI](#) / CFA / and Canadian Horticultural Council to ensure that industry-wide concerns are heard.

In 2018, British Columbia enacted the [Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act](#) which aims to improve the protection of Temporary Foreign Workers by creating a registry of employers and foreign worker recruiters active in the [Temporary Foreign Worker Program](#). Two separate registries have been established – one for foreign worker recruiters and one for employers that hire foreign workers in BC. As of Dec. 15, registration will be mandatory to receive an approved LMIA by Service Canada. Your associations played an active role highlighting regulatory burden and obstacles and sought to have thoughtful changes.

BCFGA would also like to thank the BC government for providing the 14-day quarantine period in government-arranged accommodations during the 2020 growing season. This approach has helped avoid the agricultural sector outbreaks and seen as a model concept during the pandemic. The 2021 season quarantine will follow the same setup.

The Labour file is very active and BCFGGA continues to monitor and address key concerns which might impact worker arrivals into BC. BCFGGA continues communication and discussion in relation to online LMIA application, housing inspection and Covid 19 health/Safety issues as they arise. BCFGGA Labour specialist Bunvir Nijjer is a Registered Canadian Immigration Consultant and has been active in assisting growers with LMIA questions,

Sadly, the [restrictions](#) implemented due to Covid-19 left most backpacking youth from Quebec and Ontario unable to travel which impacted the overall youth that came to help in the tree fruit sector. Backpacking is a timeless concept dating back to the 1950s and 60s, when backpacking as we know it truly began. The question remains, that when movement begins and everything reopen will this rite of passage for many travelers continues or has Covid ended it forever. It is estimated less than 1000 workers made the trek for the 2020 season.

For those that came BCFGGA continued its Farm Labour Project and Ron Forrest provided

- training/information sessions throughout the valley in French, English and Spanish.
- coordinated job postings between farm labour agencies and farmers. The Labour matchmaker
- provided awareness and resources to seasonal workers to help prevent the spread of coronavirus and encouraged them to take lead in protecting themselves and the community.
- provided general orientation and farm safety training sessions for new and returning workers.

We have had a positive response to this service from our growers, consulates and thank all those that helped make this successful and effective.

PILOT PROJECT SAWP LABOUR

BCFGA understands The economic, social, and labour disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating. With this in mind, BCFGA realizes that labour planning and management is critical to staying in the business of farming if similar events occur in the future. In a BC labour market forecast done by Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council also known as CAHRC...it is predicted that By 2025, the number of jobs going unfilled will reach 11,200, a number that's equivalent to one in four jobs. In light of these changing labour markets, BCFGA will be exploring a concept of SAWP labour movement within a group of farmers. Concepts such as Shared contracts, or Association Liaison Contracts. Some models exist in other countries and BCFGA will explore this idea and its value to our industry.

SAWP EMPLOYER INFORMATION SESSION

Every year information sessions for SAWP employers are held to cover critical elements of the SAWP program and to refresh employer responsibilities under provincial/federal legislation. These sessions have been held with participation from Service Canada, Integrity Service Branch, WorkSafeBC, Fire Department, Housing Inspectors, BCAC / WALI, Consulate and liaison offices and others. These sessions contribute to strengthening labour relations and has been appreciated by the employers as a valuable resource of information. This year BCFGA also held a Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) webinar. An Introduction to the SAWP program with focus on providing information to those considering the guest worker program for the first time. It was well attended and the webinar is online for those who want to view it.

Points to Keep in Mind

Labour and Temporary Worker Related WEBSITES

- ❖ GOV'T of CANADA-
www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/foreign_workers/agriculture/seasonal/index.shtml
- ❖
www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employment-standards-advice/employment-standards/hiring/hire-temporary-foreign-workers/register-as-employer
- ❖ BC Center for Disease control -
<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19>
- ❖ Employment Standards Branch - www.labour.gov.bc.ca/esb/
- ❖ COVID 19 Info- cphrbc.ca/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-canadian-employers/
- ❖ Western Agriculture Labour Initiative (WALI) - wali.bcac.bc.ca/index
- ❖ WorkSafeBC - www.worksafebc.com/
- ❖ British Columbia Agriculture Council *BCAC* - www.bcac.bc.ca/
- ❖ MiTerra Holidays - miterraholidays.com/
- ❖ Mexico Ministry of Labour – BC Employer Survey of SAWP worker -
<https://simolint.stps.gob.mx/>
- ❖ Ministry of Agriculture - Province of British Columbia - gov.bc.ca/agri
- ❖ Farm Practices Protection (RighttoFarm) Act - <http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/lc>
- ❖ AGSAFE– <http://www.agsafebc.ca/>
- ❖ Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC)- <http://www.hortcouncil.ca/>

Please also take the opportunity to review the BCFGAs website for any changes and upcoming current information of industry related news. Please contact BCFGAs office events. Furthermore, FRIDAY FILES are available on the BCFGAs website and for any questions.

I hope we all have a safe and successful 2021 Season.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pinder S. Dhaliwal – BCFGAs Labour Committee