

**HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES AND  
NEEDS IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR  
FOCUS GROUPS  
*Final Report***

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Highlighted below are the key findings of the *Human Resources Issues and Needs in the Agriculture Sector Focus Groups*, conducted across Canada in 2005. Current and future human resources issues and trends in the Canadian agricultural industry were explored and the feasibility of establishing a national sector council for the industry was examined.

***The inability to pay wages high enough to attract and retain skilled and unskilled agricultural workers was commonly cited as a major difficulty for producers participating in the focus groups.***

- Competition with industries able to pay higher wages was frequently and repeatedly brought up in most groups.
- Most participants felt low commodity prices hinder their ability to pay competitive wages, making recruitment and retention very difficult.

***The hours of work available and expected in the agricultural sector were commonly cited as barriers to recruitment and retention.***

- Some producers felt strongly that their inability to provide full-time year-round employment was a major obstacle for recruitment and retention.
- Others felt that the long hours, early start times, irregular work schedules and physically demanding work presented greater barriers.

***A shortage of skilled workers was frequently cited as a major human resources challenge.***

- There exists a shortage of workers with the qualifications to operate technologically sophisticated machinery and many of those who want to work do not have adequate training.
- Food safety legislation now demands a higher level of expertise.
- The time spent and costs associated with training workers, and the frustration of losing them to higher-paying industries once they are trained was a major concern for producers.
- Some participants wanted human resource training to help them manage their staff effectively and within government labour regulations.

***Government legislation could be used more effectively to assist producers in their efforts to attract and retain workers.***

- Employment Insurance (EI) was thought to contribute to the human resources challenges faced by producers by:
  - Reducing benefits or terminating claims of those who take temporary or seasonal work in the agricultural sector, and
  - Requiring that those temporarily laid off from agricultural work take training that would enhance their employability in other sectors.

- Many producers felt that facilitating the immigration of farm workers would address some of the labour shortages the sector is facing today.
- Legislation restricting the use of foreign workers was a concern for many producers.

***Focus group participants agreed that the image of their sector needs to be improved.***

- Most participants felt that poor public perception of the industry contributed to difficulties recruiting and retaining workers.
- Many participants felt that there was little they could individually do to have any real effect on attracting Canadian workers, in particular.
- Some participants suggested that the positive aspects of the industry could be promoted (e.g., entrepreneurial aspects of a career in agriculture, the personal sense of freedom and the variability of the work).
- Producers wanted to see stronger partnerships between the agriculture industry and educational institutions to attract young people to the sector; the pressure on young people to go to university when many might be well suited to a career in agriculture was viewed as a barrier for the sector.

***Many participants expected population aging to have a significant impact on the sector by increasing the already existing labour shortages.***

- With large numbers of producers expected to retire over the next few years and increasingly low numbers of young people entering the sector, many participants felt that without immigration there would simply not be enough people to work in the sector.

***Participants, in general, were not strongly in favour of or against the idea of a sector council but did have many opinions on the potential role such a council might play.***

Participants were predominantly interested in seeing a sector council help set and achieve goals for the future. Among these goals might be:

- Improving the image of the industry;
- Raising awareness of agricultural careers and career paths;
- Identifying strategies to overcome challenges with recruitment and retention;
- Collaborating with the educational sector to build skills training;
- Supporting work-based training (e.g. training wages, apprenticeship programs);
- Keeping abreast of skill requirements due to diversification and/or technological change;
- Focusing on current and anticipated employment trends due to supply and demand;
- Setting occupational standards; and
- Developing accessible human resource training for producers.

***Some participants felt that a sector council would add yet another layer of bureaucracy that was not necessary as commodity associations are currently addressing these issues.***

- Participants wanted to ensure that a sector council would recognize the need for specific regional and commodity representation.
- Other participants suggested that a sector council could act as a mediator between government and the commodity groups to explain the needs and demands of each to the other.
- Generally, participants felt that a major benefit stemming from the creation of a national sector council could be the establishment of a large-scale information network.

***Overall, most participants were willing to support a sector council if visible results could be attained in the near future.***

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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### 1.1 Background

The agriculture and agri-food sector is a major employer in Canada, providing jobs to one in seven Canadians and contributing 8% to the country's GDP.<sup>1</sup> The agriculture component of the sector encompasses primary agriculture (e.g., workers on farms) and agricultural services (e.g., veterinarians, livestock breeding, soil preparation, crop dusting, agricultural consulting, etc.). The agri-food component includes food processing, agriculture and food products, wholesale and retail trade (including farm input products such as fertilizer), and food and beverage services.<sup>2</sup>

The agriculture and agri-food sector has undergone significant internal change over the past 20 years, while remaining stable in terms of the percentage of the Canadian population it employs. Although farm employment and the number of census farms is declining, employment in agri-food (beyond the farm gate) has grown faster than the overall economy, resulting in stable employment numbers for the entire sector. Furthermore, the size of farms is increasing. There were over 485,000 employees in agriculture in 1996, while there were over 1,600,000 workers in agri-food, representing over three-quarters of the employment in the sector overall.<sup>3</sup>

Agriculture and agri-food is a large employer in all provinces. However, Ontario and Quebec are major centres for agriculture and agri-food jobs with a large number of persons employed in these industries in those provinces. Proportionally, Saskatchewan is the greatest employer in the sector among the provinces.

For the most part, agriculture and agri-food industries are located in predominantly rural regions, which may present a human resource challenge to agriculture and agri-food industries in the near future due to high levels of youth out-migration. Recent research completed by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. on rural youth out-migration has found that more than one-half (55%) of rural youth intend to migrate to urban centres for better access to employment, education and social opportunities. As the population ages and workers in the sector retire, shortages can be expected in this sector as youth out-migration continues.

Stakeholders representing the Canadian agricultural industry were brought together in November 2003 for an Agriculture Forum on Sector Council Feasibility. At the close of the conference, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) was appointed to coordinate the investigation into the feasibility of an Agriculture Sector Council to address human resource issues within the industry.

As part of its feasibility research, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., a national, independent research firm was contracted to hold stakeholder focus groups across Canada to gather perspectives on human resource issues and trends in the agriculture industry, and to identify possible future ideas for the sector council team.

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<sup>1</sup> Agri-Food Trade Service Overview of the Sector, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin, Vol. 4 No. 8, 2003

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

Traditionally, many of the skills needed to operate a farm were passed from generation to generation. This method, complemented by some ongoing learning, worked reasonably well in the past but farm operations have become larger and more complex and today's farmers need skills and knowledge that cannot always be obtained in this fashion. Farmers today are expending more effort to manage human resources and to make strategic decisions about both long-term direction and immediate issues. To deal with rising market demands around environmental and food safety, they may also need to upgrade and combine their technical and management skills. The quickening pace of change means many farm business must be re-tooled, which involves major decisions about accessing capital and using it wisely.

A national sector council could address a variety of Human Resources (HR) concerns in the agri-food industry. And would consist of an overarching national council with sub-councils to look at commodity-specific issues. This sector council would work with government to help determine the types of skills necessary for the agriculture sector. Most other sectors of the Canadian economy already have joint industry/government mechanisms to determine the types of skills necessary for that sector and develop national approaches for skills development but the agriculture sector does not.

Sector councils bring together representatives from business, labour, education, and other professional groups in a neutral forum in order to comprehensively and cooperatively analyze and address sector-wide human resource issues. Some of their activities include, apprenticeships, career awareness; international programs; job banks; occupational certification; occupational standards; training projects; and youth initiatives.

## **1.2 Evaluation Overview**

As highlighted in the previous section, *Human Resources Issues and Needs in the Agriculture Sector Focus Groups* is designed to provide an overview of the human resource issues, challenges and opportunities for the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry, and will serve to determine the feasibility of an Agriculture Sector Council.

## **SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY**

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### **2.1 Research Questions**

The research questions were addressed in a series of focus groups conducted across Canada. The objective was to identify current and future human resources issues and trends in agriculture industry in Canada, and examine the feasibility of establishing a national sector council for the industry.

### **2.2 Focus Group Objectives**

The moderator's guide was designed by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., in consultation with the CFA, by senior staff with extensive experience in the design of focus group guides. This task included a review of the research issues to ensure that the various research/evaluation issues associated with the research were adequately addressed. Such a review was essential to the proper design and development of the moderator's guide. A well-developed guide ensured that the qualitative information generated through all focus groups could be analyzed through content analysis, summarized, and systematically sorted by thematic content.

The moderator's guide was designed to facilitate discussion with respect to the following issues:

- human resources issues and needs in the agriculture sector;
- knowledge/relevance of education and training options, including gaps and overlaps;
- trends in the agriculture sector which impact on future recruitment/training or employee workloads (e.g., technological advancement);
- satisfaction with skilled labour pool; and
- stakeholder perceptions of recruitment and attraction issues.

For the Quebec focus groups, a modified version of the moderator's guide used in the other focus groups across Canada was used. The core questions from the moderator's guide, included in the Quebec groups, were:

- What are the key human resource issues you are currently facing?
- What are some possible solutions to improving the labour force?
- What are the advantages and opportunities/disadvantages and risks, the creation of a National Agriculture Sector Council would hold for agricultural producers in Quebec?

A different approach to exploring human resource issues and possible solutions was followed. Focus group participants in Quebec were provided with Comité sectoriel de main-d'oeuvre de la production agricole's (CSMOPA's) Strategic Plan for 2003-2008 prior to the meetings. The document outlined human resource issues facing the sector and possible

solutions. The moderator then used the focus groups to seek feedback on this document (Appendix C).

According to CSMOPA's focus group report, the methodology proposed by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., while very appropriate for provinces in which "few concerted sectoral actions on human resources development had taken place" was deemed to be inadequate for the Quebec context "where twenty years of continuous activity has resulted in a solid collaboration between all of the stakeholders."

## **2.3 Focus Group Site Summary**

### **2.3.1 Focus Group Locations**

Thirteen focus groups were held, eleven of them in English and two in French. The dates, locations and number of participants are given in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Location and Attendees of Focus Groups**

<b>Location &amp; Date</b>	<b># Recruited</b>	<b># Attending</b>
Nisku, AB January 5, 2005	19	20
Saskatoon, SK January 14, 2005	9	8
St. John's, NF January 24, 2005	13	5
Kentville, NS January 26, 2005	19	13
Winnipeg, MB January 26, 2005	8	14
Fredericton, NB January 26, 2005	17	13
Quebec City, QC February 7, 2005	12	11
Charlottetown, PEI February 14, 2005	13	16
Longueuil, QC February 14, 2005	12	10
Guelph, ON February 15, 2005	7	5
London, ON February 16, 2005	13	10
Abbotsford, BC February 21, 2005	7	4
Kelowna, BC February 22, 2005	13	16
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>145</b>

### **2.3.2 Focus Group Recruitment**

Various methods of recruitment were used for each location. Some local agriculture organizations contacted members and invited them to contact the Consultant's office to register to participate. In other cases, the Consultant was provided with member lists and the Consultant made phone calls to recruit participants followed by emails and faxes with additional information.

Recruitment efforts were intended to target grassroots producers who owned or operated farming operations. Farm employees were not actively recruited. In addition to operating farms, some of those recruited had involvement with agricultural organizations across the

country. Recruiting efforts in Quebec differed somewhat in that agricultural employers who sit on a partnership authority “having a mission and an expertise in the development of agricultural human resources in Quebec” were actively recruited. Two farm employees were also invited to each focus group as well as other stakeholders.

### **2.3.3 Participant Demographics**

Each of the thirteen focus groups was attended by between 4 and 20 participants. Focus groups were comprised of producers from each Canadian province with two taking place in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. Most participants were male (n=115) and almost all were producers and owner/operators. There were some female participants (n=25) and a few employees and retired producers. Participants were involved in a wide variety of commodities, and usually more than one. These included cattle, sheep, turkeys, hogs, greenhouse, horticulture, dairy, landscaping, berries, fruits (often apples), vegetables, potatoes, herbs, grain, soybeans, eggs and honey. On average, participants had been in the industry for approximately 26 years. Most participants had at least one employee and employed at least one family member. Participants reported employing between 1 and 100 people with a higher number of reported employees during peak season. A wide range of age groups was represented in the focus groups with the youngest participant being 22 years and the oldest 79 years. The average age of participants was approximately 51 years.

While the Quebec focus group facilitators/organizers did not collect demographic information about those who participated in the two Quebec focus groups, it was possible to ascertain the sex of participants based on a list of participant names that was provided by CSMOPA to R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. The list of participant names also included information about the commodity group(s) of participants. As a result, information about sex and commodity has been incorporated in the demographic summary above, however, information about length of time in industry, number of employees, whether family is involved in farming operations, and ages are not available for those who participated in the Quebec groups.

## **2.4 Analysis and Reporting of Findings**

Focus group interviewing is a qualitative methodology that generates a wide range of anecdotal information through discussion based on participants’ knowledge, experience and opinions. Focus group research is qualitative research and, therefore, does not seek to quantify the results of the research. Focus group research results do not project statistically to the attitudes and opinions of the population as a whole. As such, qualitative analysis is the appropriate tool applied to summarize the results. Reporting of qualitative results typically does not involve quantitative measures such as proportions/percentages, and this is reflected in the language used to report the findings. For example, when most of the interview participants agree on a topic, the results are reported as “the majority of participants”. Alternatively, if a number of people (i.e., more than one or two, but not necessarily the majority) mentioned similar points, then the results would be reported as “some of the participants”.

In general, when reporting key themes and/or perceptions, the following descriptions have been used:

**No/None:** refers to instances where no individual identifies the particular issue or topic.

**Few/Very Few:** refers to instances where only one or two individuals may have expressed a particular opinion.

**Some:** refers to instances where between one-quarter and one-half of the individuals interviewed expressed a particular opinion.

**Several/Many/Most:** refers to instances where the majority of, but not all, participants were of the same opinion and/or held similar perceptions regarding a selected issue or topic.

**All:** reflects consensus across all participants. All participants questioned on the topic expressed the same view or held the same/similar opinion.

In addition, words that appear in quotations are the exact words used by individuals during the focus groups

## SECTION 3: OVERVIEW OF HUMAN RESOURCE ISSUES

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The main findings of the eleven focus groups and general conclusions are presented in the remainder of the report. Findings are presented according to key issues identified for the evaluation. Focus group participants identified a number of key human resources issues agricultural producers are facing today and expect to face in the future.

### 3.1 Challenges of Recruitment and Retention

#### 3.1.1 Wages and Hours

The inability to pay wages high enough to attract and retain skilled and unskilled agricultural workers was commonly cited as a major difficulty for producers participating in the focus groups. In every province, other than Quebec where participants did not engage in discussions around wages, most participants in the focus groups expressed frustration with the low value the market places on their commodities. Low commodity prices hinder the ability of producers to pay competitive wages, making recruitment and retention very difficult for many producers. Many participants in the greenhouse industry and, to a lesser extent, those in organic farming, reported being better off in terms of the value of their product and consequently the wages they can afford to pay. Difficulty competing with industries able to pay higher wages was frequently and repeatedly brought up in most groups. This concern was particularly acute for some producers hiring mainly unskilled labour but those hiring skilled workers also expressed this concern. Producers in all provinces but Quebec cited wages as a barrier to recruitment and retention and one of their chief human resource challenges.

Some participants did feel that unskilled agricultural workers are paid a fair wage believing that the kind of work producers can offer is a greater barrier. Most, however, expressed wanting to pay higher wages but said they simply cannot if their operation is to survive. The sentiment of one producer who stated, "If we were paid properly for our product we could pay people properly" was shared by many.

The hours of work available and expected in the agricultural sector were also commonly cited as barriers to recruitment and retention although views about the nature of the challenges varied within focus groups and across regions and commodity groups. Some producers felt strongly that their inability to provide full-time year-round employment was at the root of their challenges. Workers, they felt, want stable employment throughout the year. Other industries can offer more steady work at higher wages and are, therefore, more desirable to workers. On the other hand, some producers felt that the long hours, early start times and physically demanding work, when work is available, presented larger barriers. These producers felt that many potential workers are not willing to work under these conditions and that this, coupled with low wages, made recruitment and retention extremely difficult. Further impacts were felt to be the result of younger employees having a poor work ethic and older workers becoming unable to manage the physically demanding work. These problems were expected to intensify as the workforce continues to age.

### 3.1.2 Skills

Focus group participants in all provinces other than Quebec felt strongly that the inability of many farming operations to pay high wages and/or offer full-time work affects their ability to attract and retain unskilled labour. However, the lack of skills of those they *are* able to hire was also a concern for producers in all regions. A shortage of skilled workers was commonly cited as a major human resources challenge and as the sector's need for skilled workers continues to increase, producers expect their difficulty in this area to also increase. Farms are increasing in size, farm machinery has become more complex, and food safety legislation is increasingly stringent. At the same time, there is a shortage of those with the qualifications to operate much of this machinery, food safety legislation now demands a higher level of expertise, and many of those who want to work do not have adequate safety training. In the past, many of the skills required to do agricultural work were acquired through work on the farm. In many cases, farming families passed this expertise on, generation after generation so those working on the farm had been exposed to the farming lifestyle and skills required throughout their lives. The challenges producers are facing with regards to skills today are two-fold. On the one hand, the level of expertise and technical knowledge required is growing and many of the skills required must still be developed "on the job" as the theoretical training available through colleges tends not to be sufficient. Much of what must be learned is best taught "hands on". On the other hand, many producer's children are not interested in a career in agriculture and many of those seeking agricultural work did not grow up around a farming operation and, therefore, do not come with the required skills.

The need to train workers requiring complex, or even basic skills was expressed as a burden by many producers. Providing training is time consuming and, therefore, very costly for producers who already have difficulty keeping their operations going because of low commodity prices. Costs aside, many producers are too busy to take much time to provide extensive on-the-job training. Many producers also highlighted the frustrations associated with training workers only to lose them to higher-paying industries once they are trained. As one producer put it, "If they are good they will leave you and go get a job that pays more." This sentiment was shared by participants in several groups who again highlighted the challenges associated with the low wages they are able to pay and expressed distress, and in some cases anger, about incurring all the costs for training workers only to lose them when "something better comes along". Many producers did not direct their anger at the workers themselves, however, but rather, at government and consumers for what they regard as a lack of respect for agriculture producers and their products. Several producers felt that HRSDC should help pay for on-the-job training. Others felt that society should contribute by paying more for the product produced as this is who is currently benefiting from the end products. In some groups, the idea of developing apprenticeship programs for agricultural occupations was raised. A participant in one group suggested the examination of the apprenticeship model used by many European countries (e.g., Germany and Sweden).

While producers need skilled workers and frequently expressed challenges associated with finding them and training them, some participants also voiced the desire or need for human resource training for themselves. In some groups, it was participants themselves who raised this as a concern but in many groups concerns were raised only after participants were prompted to start thinking about their own training needs. Many participants across all groups reported feeling that as farm sizes increase, their need for management training becomes greater. This was particularly true of participants in Quebec.

The Quebec focus group participants indicated that agricultural employers need training on how to manage human resources on farms. They noted that the new generation of workers, including those from rural areas, do not have the same values as their predecessors. Employers need to adjust their methods to meet these new expectations.

On the other hand, there were also participants who did not show much interest in training for themselves. However, some of these participants did express legitimate concern about their ability to keep abreast of all the changing regulations in the sector and about their ability to treat their employees well and relate to them effectively.

### **3.1.3 Attitude Toward Agriculture**

When discussing the challenges associated with recruitment and retention, participants frequently returned to the issue of wages. However, a wide range of feelings about the perception of the agricultural sector and people's attitudes toward working in it were also expressed. The feelings of many participants were summed up well by one participant who said, "We don't provide the kinds of jobs that Canadians aspire to." While some participants attributed this to a poor work ethic among Canadians, young Canadians in particular, many others acknowledged that they were not surprised that many young people are not interested in pursuing a career in the sector. Some participants suggested that if they had it to do over, they would have pursued a different career path and some had discouraged their own children from pursuing a career in agriculture. Others espoused the benefits of working in the sector including the personal sense of freedom, variability of work, and their love of nurturing plants and animals.

Most participants felt that the irregular work patterns, long hours, seasonal work, and "dirty-work" associated with agricultural employment contributed to their difficulty recruiting and retaining workers. Many producers residing in provinces with foreign worker programs for agriculture reported much greater success with foreign workers than with Canadian workers. "It's very intense and hard work for months of the year. I prefer to hire Canadians when I can, but there just aren't any to hire." For many participants, foreign workers seemed to be a very important source of labour. Many of those who had hired foreign workers or immigrant workers reported their greater commitment to work and willingness to work long hours in poor conditions.

Many participants felt that as a whole Canadian society has a negative view of their sector. Some participants felt that Canadians have a low opinion of agricultural workers and that those who work closest to our food resources are "not valued in Canada". Consumer ignorance about "where food comes from" was thought to contribute to these attitudes. The image of the sector was a concern for some participants in all groups although participants in Quebec pointed out that other industries with image problems still succeed in recruiting workers. Participants expressed frustration with consumers who "demand better animal welfare, want pesticide-free food and fruit and vegetables with no blemishes but they don't want to pay". One producer highlighted a sentiment expressed in some of the groups by saying, "Urban Canada is ignorant about their dependence on rural Canada whereas rural Canada knows it is dependent on urban Canada." Other participants reported feeling that farming tends to be viewed as something that "anyone can do" and felt that most people are not aware of the knowledge and skills required (e.g., producers must have knowledge of animal nutrition and soil science). As one producer put it, "It is difficult when you have an education and you are still looked down upon because you work in agriculture."

Many participants seemed to feel that the education system does not support them and would like to see better cooperation between the agriculture sector and educational institutions. At the high school level, agriculture often has no place in the curriculum so a career in agriculture does not even enter the consciousness of most young people. At the college level, agricultural programs are deemed to be inadequate by many producers. Students often graduate without knowing anything about the “hands-on” work that must be done. Several participants felt that better partnerships are needed between the sector and colleges in order to improve training.

### **3.1.4 Government Legislation**

Focus group participants in all provinces felt that government legislation interferes with their efforts to recruit and retain employees. In particular, Employment Insurance (EI) legislation was touted as being unresponsive to the needs of the sector and was thought to contribute to the human resources challenges faced by producers. These sentiments were expressed most strongly on the East Coast but seemed to be a concern for producers in all regions. Several producers suggested that EI discriminates against seasonal workers and felt that seasonal work should be valued and supported as it is critical to sustainability of the agricultural sector. Although not widely cited, some felt that the shorter time period needed to qualify for EI had resulted in more workers taking farm work only long enough to acquire enough hours to qualify for benefits. The view that some would rather collect EI than work for low wages was shared by many participants, most commonly those on the East Coast. However, many producers who shared this sentiment did not blame the workers themselves; there is little incentive to work when costs for transportation and childcare, low wages and few or no benefits are considered. Across the country, many focus group participants felt that the allowable earnings while on EI should be increased as current rules create a disincentive to work by penalizing EI recipients for working. Currently, the weekly allowable earnings are so low that it creates a barrier to working part-time.

Legislation restricting the use of foreign workers was also highlighted as a concern by many producers although these concerns varied by province. East Coast producers, for example, do not have a foreign worker program available to them while producers in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia do. Some East Coast participants expressed interest in having a foreign worker program available to them. Many participants felt that given low commodity prices and the resultant low wages producers can pay, their ability to attract Canadians to the sector is not going to improve. Consequently, many regarded foreign labour as the only solution and felt that without it, their operations would have to be shut down. This was particularly true of producers that are currently drawing heavily on foreign labour. This was also shared by the Quebec groups where participants generally felt that producers have become too dependent on foreign labour, a dependence they feel may have resulted in too little energy and resources being directed towards finding alternate solutions.

Other participants felt that government attempts to help producers attract and retain labour though well-intentioned programs have not been particularly successful. Some producers argued that government tried to help in the past but no longer does, as many of the labour pools once organized by government are gone. Accessing the help that does exist was also thought to be a problem. One producer expressed frustration at trying to access government services saying, “I call the Ministry and end up in voicemail jail.” According to participants in Quebec groups, new measures pertaining to human resources should be supported by accurate and current knowledge of the workplace. Experience has shown that

governments were more receptive to projects presented by sectoral representatives when these projects were founded on research-based data.

### **3.2 Recruitment Strategies**

Focus group participants across the country reported a variety of methods they use to recruit both unskilled and skilled workers. Recruitment strategies cited were very similar across the country although some regions rely heavily on foreign workers while other regions do not use foreign labour at all. Strategies most often employed by participants include newspaper advertisements, word of mouth, family and friends, and contract labour. In provinces where it is possible, using offshore labour is common. Other strategies frequently used, albeit less commonly, are labour pools, borrowing workers from neighbouring farms, advertising at horticulture colleges and advertising in trade magazines. Overall, producers in the greenhouse industry and in organic farming report having less difficulty recruiting than do other producers. In fact, many owner/operators in the greenhouse industry and in organic farming reported that for them, recruitment strategies are generally not necessary. This was particularly true of producers in Ontario. The higher wages and in some cases, benefits, these operations can offer make them desirable to potential workers. Recruitment was not a topic explored in the Quebec focus groups although there was discussion around making the industry more appealing to young retirees and women with regard to part-time and seasonal work. Participants in the Quebec groups suggested that if working conditions for women were made more flexible, in particular for part-time work on dairy and swine farms, more women might be attracted to the sector, allowing producers to tap into another source of labour. Similar feelings were expressed in focus groups throughout the country.

### **3.3 Suggestions for Improving the Workforce**

When discussing ways to improve the workforce, it was difficult at times to steer participants away from discussion of low commodity prices and low wages. Many argued that paying higher wages is the best means to improving the workforce, but various other ideas were put forward as well. Participants in some of the focus groups had discussions around immigration policy and several participants felt that immigration policy could be used as a tool to address some of the labour shortages the sector is facing today. Some focus group participants were supportive of Canada accepting immigrants in large numbers as many producers have had success employing recent immigrants. One group discussed the potential for an immigration program specifically designed to sponsor farming families. Participants in another group, many of whom felt that it is currently being applied in a manner that does not “make sense”, discussed the ‘Putting Canada First Policy’. These participants felt that the policy fails to recognize the lack of a labour supply for the Canadian agricultural sector. According to these participants, there is a major need for low-skilled labour in Canada and ‘Putting Canada First’ does little to address this problem.

Some participants felt that increasing the amount of skilled labour “imported” from other countries would solve the sector’s labour force recruitment and retention issues while others felt that the sector should not simply give up on the idea of attracting Canadians to farm work. There was considerable discussion around this issue in several groups with participants divided between those who see value in continuing to try to attract Canadians to the sector and those who feel that the better workers tend to be immigrants or foreign

workers here on work permits. These participants felt strongly in many cases that immigrant labour would be the future source of labour for this sector. This was particularly true when unskilled labour was discussed. A participant in Alberta suggested establishing training programs in foreign countries that are a source of labour for the agricultural sector. The program would train workers in their own language prior to their entry into Canada. Other participants in the group thought this was an interesting idea and felt the federal and provincial governments should facilitate this process in partnership with sector and post-secondary institutions. In addition to encouraging immigrants to pursue careers in agriculture, participants in another group felt that as new immigrants already represent a significant part of the agriculture workforce, there should be government training available to them in life skills, language, and Canadian culture.

Further discussion in this group revealed feelings that agricultural workers, in general, require life skills training. Aside from technical skills, some participants felt that workers need to learn basic things such as “that one does not stay up until 2:00 am watching movies when one has to get up at 6:30 am to go to work”. This echoed a concern voiced in many of the groups about the work ethic of many employees, particularly young workers. In more than one focus group discussion about how to improve the work ethic of youth, the McDonald’s training program was identified as an exemplary program for youth.

Employment Insurance was raised in two groups during discussions about improving the workforce. Some participants expressed frustration with the way EI is managed, stating that the government puts pressure on people to go into other fields. When an agricultural employee is laid off, he or she is in most cases given a recall date for the following spring. Despite this, EI requires that these employees undergo training during the time they are collecting EI. This training is never in agriculture, but rather, in some other field. These participants believed that workers then find employment in other fields and are lost to the agricultural sector. Participants agreed that it would be better to provide them with training in the agricultural sector during their time on EI so they would not be lost to the sector and would return in the spring with improved skills. These participants generally agreed that if the government is going to force them to take training, it should be training in the agricultural sector. Some participants in other groups had similar ideas and also suggested that training opportunities could be made available to those on social assistance.

Many participants suggested improved training, or improved approaches to training, feeling that training must become more relevant. Many also felt that more onsite training should be coordinated with post-secondary institutions. Some participants believed that the federal government should help offset the costs associated with onsite training. The majority of participants expressed concerns about training in agriculture, but few were in agreement about just how to address these concerns and many were unable to clearly articulate their suggestions for improvement. Overall, however, participants seemed to want more support and cooperation from the provincial and federal governments and better coordination with post-secondary institutions.

Many participants felt strongly that improving the perception of the sector is key to improving the workforce. Some felt that the image of farm work as “dirty” unskilled work would be difficult to change while others said they did not have the time to concern themselves with the image of the sector. For the most part, however, participants saw value in working to change the inaccurate image that many hold of the sector. A participant in one focus group brought up a recent documentary entitled *Killing Fields* and many in this group expressed distress with the documentary’s content. Participants felt that the documentary was one-

sided and profiled the sector as one that “treats workers as slaves”. Public perception is that farm owners exploit their workers. Participants in several groups felt that improving the image of the sector would help attract more young people to agriculture as a career.

Some participants wanted to see the positive aspects of agriculture highlighted in high school curriculum and many wanted to see agricultural careers promoted in both high schools and post-secondary institutions. If more young people were able to see a future in the agricultural sector, participants believed that recruitment would be easier and retention more likely.

Assisting farm operators to recognize the value of having a “year round hire” was thought to be important as well. Many participants felt that the image of agriculture as a sector that provides seasonal employment only is detrimental to their efforts to attract and retain labour. The message that it is wrong not to go to university was also thought to be a barrier and participants felt that the educators could play a role here. There was thought to be a lot of pressure on young people to go to university while many might be well suited to a career in agriculture.

### **3.4 Strategies for Promoting the Agricultural Jobs to Workers**

Across the country, many focus group participants agreed that they must work to improve the image of their sector in order to promote agriculture to workers. Some groups seemed more discouraged about the future of the sector and their potential to attract and retain workers than others but many did put forth positive attributes of a career in agriculture, which if marketed appropriately, could help to attract workers. Some participants suggested that the entrepreneurial potential of a career in agriculture could be appealing to some. Many suggested that the health benefits of working outdoors doing physical activity could be highlighted. Other participants struggled to identify anything positive about the sector.

Overall, participants in focus groups across all provinces were fairly negative about the sector and its future. Some groups had great difficulty finding anything positive to say even when prompted several times. One participant expressed a sentiment that seemed to be shared by many. “Find someone who knows nothing about it and you might be able to attract them.” Many participants, while sharing ideas, seemed to feel that there was little they could do to have any real affect on attracting Canadian workers in particular. Many suggested that they did not even want their own children to get involved in agriculture. Others, however, felt that greater effort should be directed towards recruiting Canadians. This sentiment was echoed in the Québec groups where participants argued that is preferable to access several labour pools in order to fill agricultural demands. Participants in provinces with foreign labour policies seemed to focus on developing the foreign labour pools to fill positions. Many echoed a sentiment shared by one focus group participant. “You should have seen that field after the rain. Thank goodness I had Mexicans working for me. A Canadian would have quit on the spot and I would never have gotten the asparagus harvested.”

### **3.5 Future Labour Market Supply and Demand**

Discussion of future labour market supply and demand revealed diverse opinions and varying levels of optimism about the future of the agricultural sector in Canada. Many

participants expected population aging to have a significant impact on the sector by increasing the already existing labour shortages. With large numbers of farmers expected to retire over the next few years and increasingly low numbers of young people entering the sector, many participants felt that without immigration there would simply not be enough people to work in the sector. Again, many producers cited foreign labour sources as the best option in this situation although the foreign worker issue was contentious in some groups.

Technology is expected to change the agriculture sector significantly. Many focus group participants felt that new farming techniques and technologies would continue to increase the educational and skill requirements of workers. Others expected to see a continuing decline of the work ethic amongst Canadian youth. The pressure to produce 'cheaper' products was also expected to continue, thereby pushing wages down further. Several participants felt strongly that small farms would not be able to compete resulting in larger farms continuing to take over. As more farmland disappears, Canadians will have to rely more heavily on imports from other countries. Some participants felt that current government policy favours urban living and participants expected this trend to continue. Participants expect they will have to start recruiting from urban areas as the potential labour supply shifts from one that was predominantly rural based to one that will be predominantly urban based. Participants observed that rural youth are showing less and less interest in staying on the farm and the rural population will continue to decline as a result.

Some Québec participants pointed out that a large number of students registered in agricultural programs are preparing to take over the family farm while very few destine themselves to become farm workers. There was further concern about the observed decrease in the number of registrations and the significant drop-out rates from agricultural vocational programs.

### **3.6 Regional Variation**

Participants across the country shared similar concerns with regards to competing with industries able to pay higher wages. There was variation, however, in the type of industry that successfully competed for workers in the labour pool. East Coast participants viewed employment provided by the federal and provincial governments most detrimental as government pays higher wages to unskilled workers (e.g., on road construction crews) than most farming operations can. Those employed by government in seasonal jobs tend not to be interested in agricultural work with lower wages. A producer in Prince Edward Island summed it up by saying, "Once people start working for government they are often lost forever. You can't blame them."

British Columbia producers faced the same challenges recruiting and retaining workers although many felt that competition for labour came from their own sector. Large operations are generally in a position to pay slightly higher wages and provide more hours of work than smaller operations, making attracting and retaining labour more challenging for the smaller producers. Larger operations were also thought to have the ability to offer more benefits and amenities and, therefore, workers are attracted to larger operations. Alberta producers faced competition for labour with the oil, gas industry and forestry operations.

## **SECTION 4: FEASIBILITY OF AN AGRICULTURE SECTOR COUNCIL**

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### **4.1 Reactions to a Sector Council**

Focus group participants were asked to discuss the role they would visualize for an industry council or sector association. Participants, in general, were not strongly in favour of or against the idea of a sector council but did have many opinions on the potential role such a council might play. Many did not want to miss an opportunity to get assistance from the government to address key human resource issues. Although some groups were comprised of participants with stronger views on the topic than others, most groups shared similar views. Participants were predominantly interested in seeing a sector council help set and achieve goals for the future. Many participants agreed that by incorporating long term planning with training for succession and with identification and implementation of potential labour sharing opportunities, this could be achieved. The situation of Québec producers is unique in that the agricultural sector in Québec already has an established provincial sector council, which is working to address human resource issues. As such, discussions around the possible establishment of a sector council in Québec were in this context.

### **4.2 Potential Role of a Sector Council**

Facilitators provided information to participants about the wide range of issues that other sector councils have addressed. These included:

- Public image of the industry
- Public awareness of agricultural careers and career paths
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Institutional skills and training
- Work-based training
- Changes in skill requirements due to diversification and/or technological change
- Current and anticipated employment trends due to supply and demand
- Occupational standards

In some groups, many participants felt that all of these issues needed to be the focus of an agriculture sector council. In contrast, some participants felt that a sector council would add yet another layer of bureaucracy that was not necessary as commodity associations are currently addressing these issues. The Québec groups saw the role of a national sector council as being complementary to what is already being done in the province. The Winnipeg focus group, on the whole, questioned whether “public image of the sector” and “public awareness of agricultural careers and career paths” should even be classified as human resource issues. Overall, most participants were willing to support a sector council if visible results could be attained in the near future. Further discussion identified areas of particular interest to participants.

### Lobby Government and/or Mediate

A popular contribution made by group members was that the council could act as a mechanism to lobby the government for changes to address the human resource issues in the agriculture sector. Participants were advised that this is not a role a sector council could play but this did not dissuade some participants from asserting their desire to see a sector council lobby government. Other participants suggested that a sector council could act as a mediator between government and the commodity groups to explain the needs and demands of each to the other. It was made clear that if the sector council could inform the government about the needs of the sector, a sector council should also be able to lobby government to provide them with the tools to act in accordance with those needs. Additionally, many participants suggested that in order for the council to be productive, it must be proactive (i.e. lobby the government).

### Public Perception

Participants in most groups felt that a sector council could help change the public perception of the sector. While group members recognized that promoting and enhancing the image of a low-return career in agriculture would be a challenging long-term goal, many thought it was a worthwhile endeavor. Generally, advertising and the education system were thought to be the mediums for changing public perception.

### Recruit and Retain Sector Workers

Many of the participants thought that a sector council could aid in recruiting and retaining employees in the agricultural sector in a number of different ways. Participants in several groups made suggestions such as creating apprenticeship programs for secondary school students, certification programs for agriculture-specific occupational skills or educational exchange programs for youth. Additionally, it was suggested that programs be developed for foreign workers in various languages and that ESL programs be made available to these workers. Participants in another group suggested that a sector council could help employers in the agriculture sector find/retain workers by sponsoring a database that provides information on available labour, possibly doing matching job-hunters skills with employer requirements. Alternatively, rather than organize a database, one group suggested that a farm labour office or dispatcher could coordinate or redirect workers to other producers when their employer ran out of work. Many also shared the belief that it would be important for a sector council to be available to provide sector information, especially to people at the grassroots level.

Participants in a few groups expressed their desire to see a sector council work to change EI legislation so that it no longer presents disincentives to recipients to work, thus discouraging many potential employees from working part-time in the agricultural sector. Some participants felt that it would be preferable if they could access government assistance by way of training wages, in particular for those workers who were not collecting EI.

### Training

Participants in several groups emphasized that the potential role a sector council could play in identifying and providing training for basic agricultural jobs, operating machinery, and management training for owner/operators. Some participants thought the sector council could organize training in specific areas such as welding, mechanics, truck driving and

hydraulics but felt strongly that the training should take place on the farm, not in a classroom. The Charlottetown focus group suggested that farmer's need to be trained about how to "act" not "react". This way, producers would have the ability to be more proactive in anticipating markets for their commodity and anticipating labour market trends. Leadership training and networking opportunities were also areas some participants felt were important for agriculture owners and producers. One group suggested that the sector council could hire specialists to provide training, however, some participants clarified that they would not want the government dictating what farms or farmers should produce. Some participants also hoped a sector council could help them market their commodities. Participants from the Kelowna group also pointed out that in British Columbia, the sector council could also work towards educating employers who work specifically with foreign workers. Members from the London focus group were particularly concerned with developing a program for foreign workers and Saskatoon group members were interested in identifying/ recruiting labour from foreign sources, as foreign workers are seen as vital to the survival of the sector.

#### Occupational Standards and Regulations

Although at first hesitant, the majority of participants in a few focus groups were ultimately in favour of having a sector council take on the role of determining occupational standards and regulations for the sector. Participants indicated that even though regulations were of a controversial nature, they would rather see the views of producers and rural people taken into account rather than have undeveloped standards imposed upon them by an "ignorant" government department. A couple of groups felt that the sector council could cover health and safety issues for farm owners and workers. For example, some participants felt that the council might be able to assist producers in providing sanitary facilities (e.g., toilets, showers, etc.).

#### Other Areas

Participants in one group suggested that a sector council would be useful in that it could document the best practices from all jurisdictions. Some also suggested that the sector council would be able to research and adopt suitable parts of other existing models while coordinating their agricultural human resource issues with other existing initiatives. On the other hand, there were a few participants who were in favour of the sector council being involved in broader, non-commodity specific issues such as ensuring the availability of community structures including schools, churches, etc. in rural areas. The Québec focus groups suggested that a national sector council could intervene on issues that are under Federal jurisdiction such as women in agriculture (maternity leaves, daycare), EI, seasonal workers, job/internship exchanges across Canada, and the transportation program for workers from which the Federal Government withdrew some time ago.

### **4.3 Regional Variation**

A predominant concern about instituting a sector council consistently discussed across focus groups was that there would probably be a lack of specific regional or commodity representation. The Abbotsford focus group was particularly disturbed by this idea. They believed that by creating a sector council, western issues would just be lumped in with eastern issues without regard for the abundance of distinct issues different regions face. Group members from Kelowna voiced a similar belief. They believed that even if efforts were made to have some kind of regional and/or commodity representation within the

council, that this would be impossible due to the quantity and diversity of these domains. Many participants who voiced this opinion seemed to be in favour of a strengthened government relationship similar to the current one wherein provincial and federal representatives engage in a labour partnership.

Although Québec participants raised some of the same issues raised in the other provinces, the unique situation of Québec resulted in the discussion around the establishment of a national sector council differing substantially from discussions in other provinces. Québec is in a distinct position in that the agricultural sector in the province already has a sector council.

On the whole, Québec focus group participants agreed with the idea of a national sector council, but only under certain stipulations. The group outlined that the council must operate at a conceptual rather than operational level, that all activities taking place in Québec be coordinated by the provincial sector council, that agricultural workers should be present and compensated for discussion groups and consultations on important decisions in the agricultural sector and that the council have a simple structure to maximize efficiency. Another concern raised involved the unique arrangement Québec has with the federal government in the area of education and training. Participants in Québec wanted to ensure that their participation in a national sector council would not lead to a loss in the exclusive jurisdiction Québec has over education and training in the province.

#### **4.4 General Comments and Concerns**

Despite concerns about the difficulty the sector council would have gaining large-scale support from producers and although many group members thought the sector council might not do any harm, they also questioned whether the sector council would do anything significantly helpful. As a participant from the Fredericton focus group ascertained, “a sector council can’t raise the profits of farming.” Furthermore, there was a shared sentiment among participants from many of the focus groups about the sector council becoming just another level of bureaucracy where more funding and resources become tied up with insignificant issues. Some group members from Abbotsford believed such an initiative would be a waste of money because there is already money available in the federal – provincial partnership, farm-specific programs have already been developed, and again, because the council would behave as yet another political inconvenience.

Generally, participants felt that a major benefit stemming from the creation of a national sector council would be their increased ability to access additional financial resources. They also saw benefit in the establishment of a large-scale information network. Participants felt that their presence at the national level would allow them to intervene on national issues that are of importance to them.

**APPENDIX A  
INVITATION LETTERS**

R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. Letterhead

[Date]

Dear Producer:

Stakeholders representing the Canadian agricultural sector were brought together in November 2003 for an Agriculture Forum on Sector Council Feasibility. At the close of the conference, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) was appointed to coordinate the investigation into the feasibility of an Agriculture Sector Council to address human resource issues within the Canadian agriculture sector.

As part of its feasibility research, an independent consultant, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., has been commissioned to conduct focus groups across Canada with grassroots stakeholders representing the Canadian agriculture sector. The purpose of the focus groups is to gather perspectives on human resource issues and trends within the sector and discuss the feasibility of an Agriculture Sector Council.

Your name has been provided as someone who could provide valuable input. We would like to invite you to attend a focus group. The focus group will last approximately 2 1/2 hours and will be held:

[date]

[time]

[city], [province]

If you would like to make arrangements to participate in this focus group, please contact the Consultant to register:

[Name]

R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.

Email:

Telephone: 1-800-665-5848

Hours: Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time

We value your opinions and hope you will take this opportunity to voice them at the focus group. If you would like additional information about the research, please direct your questions to Tanya van der Gaag of R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. at 1-800-665-5848 or via email at [t.vandergaag@malatest.com](mailto:t.vandergaag@malatest.com) or if you have questions for someone from the Steering Committee call Bob Zidichouski of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture at (819) 457-4332 or via email at [bobz@cfafca.ca](mailto:bobz@cfafca.ca). Please note that incremental travel costs will be covered.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joanne Barry  
Research Manager

le 26 janvier 2005

Madame, Monsieur

C'est avec plaisir que nous vous invitons à participer au groupe de discussion sur la mise en place éventuelle d'un Conseil sectoriel canadien en agriculture.

Cette activité s'insère dans une démarche de consultation pancanadienne organisée par la Fédération canadienne de l'agriculture (FCA). Le Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre de la production agricole coordonne la consultation au Québec.

Plus précisément, nous souhaitons discuter avec vous des besoins du secteur en matière de ressources humaines dans un contexte où le ministère canadien des ressources humaines et des compétences (RHDC) est prêt à investir dans la création d'un tel organisme.

Vous trouverez, ci-joints, l'horaire de la rencontre ainsi que le plan de développement du Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre de la production agricole pour la période 2003-2008. Nous vous prions de prendre connaissance de ce dernier document avant la rencontre, afin de vous familiariser avec les principaux enjeux qui touchent les ressources humaines en agriculture au Québec tel qu'identifiés par le Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre de la production agricole.

La rencontre aura lieu à la date et à l'endroit suivant :

**Date :**

**Lieu :**

**Salle :**

**Heure :**

Vous recevrez une allocation de 50.00 \$ pour votre participation et vos frais de déplacement seront remboursés.

Votre expérience et votre opinion sont indispensables pour cette consultation.

Comptant sur votre présence, je vous prie de croire, Madame, Monsieur, à l'assurance de mes sentiments les meilleurs.

Hélène Varvaressos  
Directrice

p. j. Horaire et plan de développement

c. c. Bob Zidichouski, Fédération canadienne de l'agriculture  
Martine Mercier, 2<sup>e</sup> vice-présidente générale, UPA

**APPENDIX B**  
**FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR'S GUIDE**

## ***Human Resources Issues and Needs in the Agriculture Sector*** **Moderator's Guide**

Good morning/afternoon! First of all I would like to thank all of you for coming today. The focus group should take about two and one-half hours. We will take a break about half-way through for 10 minutes or so.

My name is <<Moderator's Name>>, and I am a researcher with <<R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.>>. We have been contracted to conduct research on human resource issues and needs for the agriculture sector.

In November 2003, stakeholders representing the Canadian agricultural sector were brought together for an Agriculture Forum on Sector Council Feasibility. As a result, a Steering Committee was formed to identify key human resources issues within the Canadian agriculture sector and to assess the feasibility of establishing a National Agriculture Sector Council.

As part of the research, an independent research consultant, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., was commissioned to conduct focus groups in each province across Canada. As a grassroots member of the Canadian agriculture sector, you were selected to provide your perspectives on human resource issues and needs.

I'd like to remind you that your participation in this focus group is strictly voluntary. Does everyone want to continue?

The session will be **audio taped**. The recording equipment is [equipment location – tape-recorder]. We tape focus groups so that we don't have to remember everything that is said and to make sure the results we present are accurate. Anything you say will remain confidential—that is, your name will not be associated with anything you say.

I'd like to point out that there are **no right or wrong answers** and that I am not looking for group consensus or agreement on each item. In fact I need to hear your views especially if they are different from most of the other people in the group. I'd like everyone to have a **chance to talk** and make any comments that you think are relevant to the discussion at hand. I'd just like to ask that you talk one at a time—try not to interrupt another person when they are talking (this makes it easier to listen to the tape, too!) My main role is to make sure the discussion stays on track and that everyone has a fair chance to contribute.

**Are there any questions before we start?**

## INTRODUCTION

First, I'd like everyone to introduce himself or herself to the group and provide some information about yourself and your business that you are comfortable sharing. For example, the type of work you do, the size of your operation, whether you have employees and if so, how many. How you would describe yourself in terms of how long you have been involved in the sector (e.g., old-timer, entrepreneur, green). I'll begin by telling you something about myself.

**Moderator:** *Provide a brief introduction.*

## HR ISSUES

Now, I would like to get your perspectives on the human resource issues in the agriculture industry.

1. a) What are the key human resource issues you are currently facing?
  - Probes: Aging workforce? Youth out-migration? Availability of workers? Availability of workers with adequate training?
- b) Do these issues affect the various parts of your work force in different ways?
  - Probes: Full-time, part-time, seasonal workers?
2. What are some possible solutions to improving the labour force?
  - Probes: Training/courses for employers and employees? Development of recruitment strategies/assistance? Availability of workers (through immigration, inter-provincial migration, migration from urban to rural)?
3. What are your recruitment strategies? What do you think would help attract workers?
  - Probes: Are there particular groups you typically think of when you need to hire workers? E.g., individuals with experience in the agriculture sector; individuals with generic management skills, youth, European immigrants, Asian immigrants, women, Aboriginal people. Improving the image of careers in the agriculture industry?

#### 4. Activity

Now, I would like to break you into smaller groups (three groups of eight) to have a discussion. Each group will get a sheet of paper from the flip chart and a marker. Choose one person from your group to write down key points that are raised. Try to give everyone in your group a chance to share their input. One person will also have to report back to the larger group when you're finished so it's a good idea to choose that person now.

What aspects of the agriculture sector do you think are attractive that could be promoted to potential new workers? Suggested features could include: compensation, job security, work hours, benefits, flexible work arrangements, maternity and educational leaves, general work environment, entrepreneurship opportunities

Moderator: Have each group report back to the larger group. Ensure key points are recorded on the flip chart and that the groups explain each item.

#### 5. What factors, if any, do you think will or could affect labour market supply and demand over the next few years?

- *Probes:* Lack of skilled workers/skill gaps; out-migration, aging population/retirement; immigration policies, the regulatory environment, etc.

## LEADERSHIP IN HR

Leadership in human resources in some industry sectors have been provided by existing associations, specific committees or sector councils. You are all aware of existing associations (e.g., CFA) and committees, but some of you may not be familiar with sector councils. A sector council may bring together representatives from business, labour, education, and other professional groups in a neutral forum in order to comprehensively and cooperatively analyze and address sector-wide human resource issues. Some of their activities may include: apprenticeships, career awareness; international programs; job banks; occupational certification; occupational standards; training projects; and youth initiatives.

A national sector council could address a variety of human resources (HR) concerns in the agri-food industry and would consist of an overarching national council with sub-councils to look at sub-sector specific issues. This council's mandate would be to help ensure that the agriculture sector has enough people with the right skills to effectively support the industry now and into the future. Many other sectors of the Canadian economy already have a national sector council to determine the types of skills necessary for that sector and develop national approaches for skills development but the agriculture sector does not. Examples include wood manufacturing, fish harvesters, plastics, construction, and mining. There are approximately 30 sector councils across Canada today.

6. Activity:

Now, I'd like to break you into smaller groups again (form new groups). As before, please write down the key points that are raised and choose someone who will report back to the group.

- What role would you like to see an industry council or sector association play? In particular, provide their potential role with respect to current and future human resource requirements for this sector? Also list what role you would not want them to be involved with?

For your reference, I have provided a wide range of issues that other sector councils have addressed:

- Public image of the industry
- Public awareness of agricultural careers and career paths
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Institutional skills and training
- Work-based training
- Changes in skill requirements due to diversification and/or technological change
- Current and anticipated employment trends due to supply and demand
- Occupational standards

**Moderator:** Have each group report back to the larger group. Record key points on the flip chart and ensure that an explanation is provided for each point.

7. Do you know of any other associations or committees that are currently working to address human resource issues in the agriculture industry?
8. What might influence your decision to support a sector council? (Other than the areas that were identified in the previous activity where sector council involvement would not be necessary.)

## WRAP-UP

**Moderator:** Provide an overview of the information provided during the session.

Tell participants that results will be made available on request in a few months through:

Mr Bob Zidichouski  
Project Coordinator, Agriculture Sector Council Project  
Canadian Federation of Agriculture  
(819) 457-4332 or [bobz@cfafca.ca](mailto:bobz@cfafca.ca)  
[www.cfa-fca.ca](http://www.cfa-fca.ca)

Have participants sign for receiving money for (\$50) travel expenses.  
Ensure forms are distributed for participants to submit a claim for additional expenses directly to the project.

Thank participants for taking part in the focus group!

**APPENDIX C**  
**QUÉBEC FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR'S GUIDE**

## Cahier de l'animateur

No	Heure	Dur.	SUJETS	MÉTHODE
			Accueil des participants	Café, formalités
1	13h30	20	Introduction et mise en situation	Résumé des démarches en cours concernant la création d'un conseil sectoriel. Par : H. V. But de la rencontre. : utiliser ODJour, appuyer sur le fait qu'il s'agit d'une cueillette d'opinions Participation volontaire, pas "représentative", toutes les opinions sont bonnes, se sentir libre. Il n'est pas du tout prévu de débattre de propositions, de chercher ou de faire des consensus Enregistreuse, (exactitude du rapport, confidentialité,), ne pas interrompre (enregistreuse) tour de parole, vous nommer au début des interventions, Questions ??
2	13h50	15	Présentation des participants	Tour de table : chaque participant donne son nom, le nom de l'entreprise représentée, ses activités, puis son rôle dans l'entreprise. Commencer par l'animateur
	14h05	5	Démarche de la rencontre	Mêmes questions dans tous les focus groups provinciaux pour compilation de données. Besoin de partir de notre situation au Québec pour répondre aux questions = expliquer la démarche proposée