



Study of Labour Supply and Demand Within the PEI Agriculture Sector

October 2007

HIGHLIGHTS

About the Study

The PEI Agriculture Sector Council Board of Directors identified the recruitment and retention of agriculture workers as a major issue facing the PEI Agriculture Industry that required further research. The purpose of this labour supply and demand study was to assist industry stakeholders to be aware of, and better understand, the dynamics of the agriculture labour force and issues related to recruitment and retention of workers. The study was also intended to assist in the development of more effective human resource planning and practices across the industry.

The study included a literature review and analysis of existing data (primarily from Statistics Canada) as well as the results of 167 employer surveys, 116 farm worker surveys, and 7 focus groups with employers and workers conducted specifically for this study.

Key findings

- According to Statistics Canada data, the number of PEI farms was down by 7.9% from 1,845 farms in 2001 to 1,700 farms in 2006.
- While the total workforce (including farm operators) has declined in the past two decades the workforce has stabilized recently with estimates of between 4200 and 4900 workers each year from 2001 to 2006.
- Among farms with payroll, wage and salary expenditures increased 24% since 2001.
- More employers surveyed thought their farm operation would increase in size (27%) than decrease (14%) over the next five years while the remainder predicted no change or were not sure. Thus the demand for workers is likely to be about the same over the next five years.
- Farm operators interviewed indicated that labour is the biggest investment for most farmers and recruitment and retention of workers is a constant preoccupation for many farmers.
- The employer survey revealed that employers expected 11% of their existing workers to retire in the next five years. The farm worker survey revealed that 8% of workers expected to retire in the next five years.
- The estimates of overall loss of workers from the agriculture field due to retirement, loss to other industries, etc. based on the worker survey was between 10% and 15% per year.
- In total, 76% of employers surveyed indicated difficulties recruiting at least one type of worker.

- In total, 43% of employers indicated difficulties retaining at least one type of worker.
- While most farm operators continue to rely on word of mouth, family and friends, and local job advertising to address their recruitment needs, more farm operators are beginning to look at other alternatives such as migrant and/or immigrant farm workers.
- Employers surveyed rated the largest recruitment issues as competition with other PEI industries, competition with other provinces, and the image of the industry.
- Farm workers surveyed indicated the top rated factors that would support them to remain in agriculture were farm being located close to where you live, how you are treated by your employer or supervisor, and being able to work outside.
- Farm worker survey respondents noted the top rated factors that may potentially cause them to leave agriculture were the wage level you get, the number of regulations in the agriculture industry, benefits, and being able to get work in Alberta or other provinces.

Issues and Strategies

The study highlighted six key issues and presented strategies to address each of these issues:

- Declining labour force
- Competition from other industry and jurisdictions
- Disengaged younger generation
- Training and development
- Public perception of the industry
- Employment insurance and other social programs

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For more information:

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For more information on this study, please contact:
Wendy Weatherbie, Executive Director
PEI Agriculture Sector Council
Telephone: (902) 892-1091
E-mail: wweatherbie@peiagsc.ca