

COVID-19 Disruptions and Agriculture: Temporary Foreign Workers

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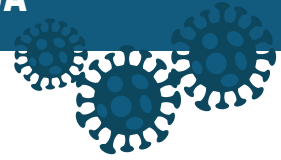
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Key insights

- Canada's agriculture sector is a significant source and contributor to the food supply chain in Canada.
- The agriculture sector is highly dependent on temporary foreign workers (TFW's). TFW's account for 20% of total employment in this sector, with a particularly high dependency in the horticulture industry (e.g. fruits, vegetables, greenhouse and nursery operations).
- Border restrictions due to COVID-19 could have an impact on the availability of temporary foreign workers during the 2020 growing season, with this decrease in labour potentially impacting Canada's domestic food production.



Agriculture and Temporary Foreign Workers

Canada's agriculture industry is a significant source and contributor to our nation's food supply. Farm cash receipts from the primary agriculture sector amounted to \$62.4 billion in 2018, of which \$8.4 billion was realized in the horticulture industry - which includes fruits and vegetables and greenhouse operations.

As significant as the agriculture sector is to Canada's food supply, it is inherently vulnerable due to the seasonality of production, especially in crop production and horticulture; as well as the perishable nature of many products. Seasonal labour is required for production, at very specific times of year, especially during planting in the spring, and harvesting in the summer and fall.

This sector is particularly dependent on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program. In the context of COVID-19, border restrictions are heightening vulnerabilities related to accessing this workforce and could put Canada's domestic food production, especially horticulture crops, at risk.

Temporary Foreign Workers are critical to the agriculture sector and have been steadily increasing in Canada over the past twenty years. In 2018, there were nearly 55,000 jobs filled by temporary foreign workers in Canada's agriculture industry and these accounted for 20 per cent of total employment in the primary agriculture sector. Although, temporary foreign workers in 2018 came from nearly 100 countries, the majority came from Mexico (51%); Guatemala (20%) and Jamaica (18%).

Although various aspects of the sector depend on TFW, 84.9% of the jobs filled by TFWs were on 2,393 horticulture farms and 68.4% of these jobs were on large farms with gross receipts of \$2 million or more. Horticulture farms include Vegetable and melon, Fruit and tree nut and Greenhouse, nursery and floriculture. Tables 1 and 2 below indicate the degree of vulnerability to labour shortages in the agriculture sector by farm type and by province, respectively.

Table 1
Jobs filled by TFWs in the agriculture sector, and farms with at least one TFW, by farm type, 2018

	Farms with at least one TFW	Jobs filled by TFW	Share of jobs filled by TFW among jobs of all employees ¹
	number		percent
All farm types	3,846	54,734	19.5
Cattle ranching and farming, including dairy	501	1,548	3.2
Hog and pig farming	134	496	5.3
Poultry and egg production	83	446	3.6
Other/mixed animal production	133	784	5.5
Oilseed and grain farming	220	1,089	2.1
Vegetable and melon farming	693	13,210	39.8
Fruit and tree nut farming	1,021	14,848	36.9
Greenhouse, nursery and floriculture production	679	18,389	35.0
Other/mixed crop farming	382	3,924	20.7

1. Proportion of temporary foreign workers in 2018 were compared to the total number of agriculture employees from the 2016 Census of Agriculture. The 2018 estimate for the total number of agriculture employees will be released soon.

Source: Statistics Canada (2020). Temporary Foreign Workers File, 2018. Excludes Territories.

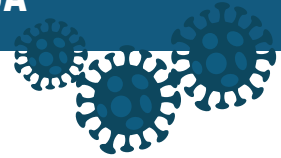


Table 2
Jobs filled by TFWs in the agriculture sector, and farms with at least one temporary foreign worker, by province, 2018

	Farms with at least one TFWs	Jobs filled by TFWs	Share of jobs filled by TFWs among jobs of all employees ¹
	number		percent
Canada	3,846	54,734	19.5
Newfoundland and Labrador	7	34	2.8
Prince Edward Island	35	285	6.7
Nova Scotia	73	1,566	19.7
New Brunswick	15	145	2.3
Quebec	1,259	14,653	26.2
Ontario	1,328	25,611	31.2
Manitoba	67	579	3.1
Saskatchewan	103	447	1.7
Alberta	252	1,900	5.7
British Columbia	707	9,514	21.4

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Source: Statistics Canada (2020). Temporary Foreign Workers File, 2018. Excludes Territories.

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[Farm cash receipts, January to September 2019](#)

[Farm income, 2018 \(revised data\)](#)

[Agricultural sector workers from the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, 2016, 2017 and 2018](#)

[Agricultural sector workers from the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, 2015](#)