



PRESS RELEASE

Canadian Produce Marketing Association and Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada Affirm Commitment to Worker Protections in Response to UN Report

August 14, 2024 (Ottawa, ON) —The Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) and the Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC) are responding to the recent report by the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery by reaffirming their commitment to the fair and respectful treatment of Canada’s seasonal and temporary farm workers. Both organizations are highlighting the significant strides made in enhancing worker protections and rights within the agricultural sector.

Canadian agriculture and agri-food generated \$150 billion of Canada's gross domestic product in 2023, accounting for approximately 7% of the national GDP. This sector is crucial to the well-being of Canadians in both rural and urban areas. However, agriculture faces a chronic and increasing labour and skills shortage, particularly in the fresh fruit and vegetable sector.

The most recent statistics from the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) identified over 28,200 jobs that went unfilled in Canada’s agriculture sector, resulting in \$3.5 billion in lost revenues. Despite the sector's efforts, these unfilled positions persisted even as Canada brought in over 66,000 temporary foreign workers to fill vacancies across a wide range of agricultural occupations. The fruit and vegetable sector remains highly dependent on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), with these programs accounting for a significant portion of the workforce.

While the UN report raises important considerations, CPMA and FVGC emphasize the positive progress made in recent years to strengthen worker protections and improve conditions. These programs have seen significant reforms designed to enhance the rights and well-being of workers, reflecting the sector's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement.

One of the most impactful reforms is the introduction of open work permits for vulnerable workers, a policy that has been in place since 2019. This change allows workers to move freely between government-approved employers within the program, providing them with greater opportunities and reducing the need for reapplication. This policy works alongside existing provisions that permit workers to apply for new permits while still in Canada and, for SAWP workers, to request transfers through their home country’s liaison offices.

“Over the years, these programs have evolved significantly, incorporating feedback and addressing concerns raised by various stakeholders,” says Marcus Janzen, President of FVGC. “Our priority is to ensure that all workers are treated with fairness and respect. The role of these workers in securing Canada's food supply cannot be overstated.”



In addition to the enhanced mobility, new federal regulations introduced in 2022 have strengthened protections against reprisals for workers who report unsatisfactory conditions. A 24-hour multilingual government hotline, established in 2021, offers direct support to workers, ensuring they have access to the assistance they need.

“The well-being and safety of seasonal and temporary foreign workers remain our top priority,” adds Ron Lemaire, CPMA President. “The entire supply chain is committed to our ongoing efforts with government and allied partners to ensure these programs meet the highest standards. The sustainability of Canada’s fresh produce sector, and by extension, our food security, depends on it.”

CPMA and FVGC recognize the importance of ongoing dialogue and continuous improvement. The UN report highlights areas for attention, and while challenges remain, the agricultural sector has made substantial efforts to ensure fair treatment and safe working conditions. These efforts reflect a deep commitment to both the workers and the communities they serve.

CPMA and FVGC will continue to advocate for practical solutions that balance the rights of workers with the operational needs of the sector. These efforts are essential not only for the well-being of the agricultural workforce but also for the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of Canada’s fresh produce sector and the overall security of our food supply.

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About the Canadian Produce Marketing Association

Based in Ottawa, Ontario, CPMA is a not-for-profit organization that has been supporting a diverse membership made up of every segment of the fresh produce supply chain for 100 years. CPMA represents nearly 900 member companies responsible for 90% of the fresh fruits and vegetable sales in Canada and an industry that contributes nearly \$15 billion to Canada’s GDP annually, supports over



185,000 jobs, and improves the health and productivity of Canadians.

About the Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada

The Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC) represents growers across the country involved in the production of over 120 different types of crops on over 14,000 farms, with a farm gate value of \$6.8 billion in 2022. FVGC is an Ottawa-based voluntary, not-for-profit, national association, and, since 1922, has advocated on important issues that impact Canada’s fresh produce sector, promoting healthy, safe, and sustainable food, ensuring the continued success and growth of the industry.