



MP Robert Morrissey, Chair
Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

February 13, 2026

Dear MP Morrissey and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) and Canada's fresh fruit and vegetable industry, I am pleased to share our comments regarding the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities study on the Impacts of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program on the Labour Market.

Based in Ottawa, CPMA is in a unique position as an organization representing companies from the farm gate to the dinner plate, spanning the entire produce industry. The Association's members include major growers, shippers, packers and marketers; importers and exporters; transportation and logistics firms; brokers, distributors and wholesalers; retailers and foodservice distributors; and fresh cut operators and processors. In fact, CPMA's more than 900 domestic and international members are responsible for 90% of fresh fruit and vegetable sales in Canada, including more than 200 Canadian-based grower/shipper organizations.

In Canada, the fresh produce supply chain generates \$18.6 billion in GDP and supports more than 187,000 jobs in rural and urban communities across Canada¹, and plays a critical role in ensuring a stable, affordable supply of fresh produce for Canadians. This people-powered sector depends on timely, predictable access to a reliable workforce; however, chronic and widespread labour shortages continue to pose a significant barrier to economic success.

A 2023 Royal Bank of Canada report found that, by 2033, 40% of Canadian farm operators will retire, leaving a shortfall of 24,000 general farm, nursery and greenhouse workers². Labour shortages are reported in both urban and rural areas of Canada, with impacts to businesses' productivity, sales, profitability, access to products and new business development. In fact, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) has found that labour shortages have cost the fruit and vegetable industry hundreds of millions of dollars³.

For Canada's fresh produce sector, labour availability is directly linked to food security and supply chain stability. Rising costs, increasing administrative burdens, and even brief delays in government decisions or permit processing can cascade from farms and greenhouses through pack houses, wholesalers, and retailers, resulting in missed harvests, cancelled orders, and empty shelves. Given the perishable nature of fresh produce, these impacts are often immediate and irreversible. In addition to our domestic workforce,

¹ Conference Board of Canada, 2025.

² Farmers Wanted: The labour renewal Canada needs to build the Next Green Revolution, Royal Bank of Canada, 2023

³ AGRI LMI, Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC), 2019

the fresh fruit and vegetable industry relies upon thousands of workers coming into Canada as part of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) to plant, cultivate, process, harvest and pack our products.

In 2023, the Canadian agriculture sector as a whole employed 79,734 temporary foreign workers, an increase of 23.3% from 2022, and representing a significant portion of the labour force in the sector. In addition, nearly 1 in 4 agriculture employees (23.2%) in Canada in 2022 were temporary foreign workers, underscoring their essential role in the workforce⁴. CAHRC analysts project that the domestic labour gap in agriculture will grow by about 15% between 2023 and 2030, from approximately 87,700 to 101,100 workers during peak season.⁵ By 2030, horticulture is expected to have roughly 11,300 unfilled on-farm jobs at peak season. Most of these will be farm labourer and farm machinery operator roles⁶. These shortages persist despite sustained efforts by employers to recruit Canadians and permanent residents.

Bridging this labour gap is critical to ensuring the short- and long-term success of the Canadian fresh produce industry. Canadian horticulture relies more heavily on international workers than do other segments of agricultural production, with 43% of horticultural workers coming from outside Canada, (compared to 17% for the rest of agriculture), and 61% of horticultural farmers hiring foreign workers, (compared to 35% of the rest of agriculture). Our sector can therefore be acutely impacted by changes to the requirements of the TFW Program.

It is also important to recognize that our sector's chronic labour shortages extend both on-farm and post-farm gate. To effectively strengthen Canada's food security, the government must apply a total supply chain lens to ensure that all aspects of the agriculture and agri-food sector are considered and supported. CPMA was disappointed to see the government announce the end of some measures under the previous Temporary Foreign Worker Program Workforce Solutions Road Map, including the reduction in the proportion of an employer's workforce able to come through the TFW low-wage stream, from 30% to 20%.

While the government's proposed New Foreign Labour Program for Agriculture and Fish Processing deems all commodities within primary agriculture eligible, with no cap on limit of temporary foreign workers employed, gaps remain in addressing labour shortages in important post-farm gate roles in the fresh produce supply chain. For example, packing and grading were not explicitly mentioned in the occupational scope outlined in the government's proposal. Under the current system, packing fruits and vegetables is eligible if at least 50% of the produce packed comes from the packinghouse's own farms. Operations that pack for other farms or grow less than 50% of the produce they pack are not considered primary agriculture and must apply through the TFWP Agricultural Low-Wage Stream. This is a major gap that the previous temporary measures under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program Workforce Solutions Road Map had sought to address, as packing operations without an on-farm presence play a critical role in fresh produce supply chains across the country.

Canada's food supply chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Labour disruptions at any stage, whether during planting, harvesting, packing, transportation, or distribution, can create roadblocks that affect the

⁴ [Number of employees in the agricultural sector, Statistics Canada, 2023](#)

⁵ [Sowing seeds of change: Agricultural labour market information forecast to 2030, Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council, 2023](#)

⁶ [Agriculture Labour Market Forecast 2023-2030, Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council, 2025](#)

entire system. A policy approach that does not consider impacts across the full supply chain risks weakening overall food system resilience and increasing volatility for producers and consumers alike.

It is also important to recognize that worker protections under the TFWP have strengthened significantly in recent years. Notable reforms include the introduction of open work permits for vulnerable workers in 2019 and new federal regulations introduced in 2022 that enhance protections against reprisals. These measures, combined with increased inspections and enforcement, represent meaningful progress in addressing concerns raised by stakeholders.

Employers in the fresh produce sector are also investing heavily to operate in compliance with program requirements and to support worker well-being. Many farmers have proactively upgraded worker housing at their own expense, often exceeding existing regional standards and proposed changes. These investments demonstrate a genuine commitment to compliance and continuous improvement. Collaborative efforts among employers, governments, and workers' home countries have also contributed to addressing legitimate concerns and improving outcomes. Policy discussions should reflect the current regulatory environment and acknowledge these substantial improvements.

CPMA urges the government to recognize the essential role of the TFWP in sustaining Canada's fresh produce sector and food security. Any changes to the program should be carefully considered to avoid unintended consequences that could disrupt Canada's food system. We also strongly urge the government to maintain the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program as a separate, fit-for-purpose stream. SAWP remains one of Canada's most long-standing and successful international partnerships. Maintaining its integrity and responsiveness protects not only our domestic food supply but also Canada's reputation as a fair, reliable trading partner and a destination that values worker welfare.

Agriculture and food production must be a national priority in the government's broader Build Canada economic strategy. Applying a food security lens to create an effective workforce strategy for the entire fresh produce chain, from the farm gate to the dinner plate, can stabilize access to workers where and when they are needed, keeping food on the shelves for Canadians.

With many Canadians continuing to struggle with the cost of food – and many producers concerned about the impact of trade volatility with the United States, it is essential that the Government of Canada not unnecessarily add to the costs of food production. CPMA reiterates that the fresh produce sector requires a specialized, timely workforce to manage perishable products. Delays or shortages directly impact food quality and availability, highlighting the need for targeted labour solutions specific to this sector.

We thank the Committee for its consideration of this important matter and would be pleased to answer any questions Committee members may have.

Sincerely,



Ron Lemaire
President
Canadian Produce Marketing Association