



## BRIEF

### PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Labour Market Impact Assessment under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program

Submitted by

**ALIMENTS ASTA INC.**

May 3, 2021

## Table of Contents

ALIMENTS ASTA: A DRIVER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT .....	4
CONSTANT AND INNOVATIVE RECRUITMENT EFFORTS.....	4
COMPETITIVE COMPENSATION.....	6
CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY .....	7
MAJOR LABOUR NEEDS .....	7
IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR SECTOR .....	7
TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER PROGRAM .....	7
PERMANENT SELECTION OF TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS.....	8
RENEWAL OF WORK PERMITS FOR TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS.....	9
FAMILY REUNIFICATION .....	9
PROCESSING TIME AND LMIA DURATION .....	10

---

Aliments Asta Inc. thanks the Committee for the opportunity to speak about the current labour shortage and the study on Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP).

---

## A DRIVER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Aliments Asta Inc. is a family business founded in 1982 that operates a pork slaughtering and processing plant in St-Alexandre-de-Kamouraska in the Lower St. Lawrence. We employ about 500 people and indirectly create a few hundred jobs in our region. In order to transport our product, we founded Transport St-Alexandre with a fleet of 10 trucks and 20 trailers. In addition, we are shareholders in Isoporc, one of the largest pork producers in Quebec, and shareholders in Meunerie St-Hugues. We also own about 10 piglet nurseries.

Aliments Asta Inc. is a major employer in the region. We pay more than \$26,000,000 in salaries and benefits to our employees annually. We are invested in our region and participate in its development in many ways.

## CONSTANT AND INNOVATIVE RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

Aliments Asta Inc. is constantly recruiting to meet its significant labour needs. Through its recruitment strategies, the company recognizes just how important human resources are to the success of its operations. For many years, Aliments Asta has been committed to providing its employees with good working conditions, a relationship based on mutual respect and a management philosophy that encourages development. By constantly improving the work environment, making major investments, focusing on employee safety and training, and satisfying customers, Aliments Asta has demonstrated its commitment to continuous improvement and growth.

By continually looking for new ways to recruit and retain its employees, Aliments Asta has demonstrated a great deal of creativity and openness.

It works closely with the Quebec and Canadian governments and several industry organizations to recruit Quebecers and Canadians first and foremost. However, all these efforts have not been able to fill all the available positions directly related to the production line. Aliments Asta also meets all the requirements of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program in terms of recruiting workers from under-represented groups, such as Indigenous people, vulnerable youth, newcomers and people with disabilities.

### **QUICK FACTS:**

#### **Corporate website**

Aliments Asta actively uses its website for recruitment. The address is listed in all its job postings, providing easy access to all the information regarding the company and the job, with photos and text.

### **HR marketing campaign**

The company has a significant HR marketing campaign budget. Material design, traditional, digital and social media placements—nothing is overlooked.

### **Recruitment sites**

Aliments Asta uses several platforms that connect job seekers with employers. Among others, **Emplois en région** and **Place aux jeunes en région** attract young people who would like to settle in the regions.

### **Professional recruitment agencies**

In the last few years, Aliments Asta has been using staffing agencies to help fill its labour needs. These agencies recruit from all target groups, but mainly young people and landed immigrants in major cities.

### **Job fairs and recruitment tours**

Every year, Aliments Asta participates in job fairs, either in person or virtually. The company also organizes recruitment drives for which it travels to the regions of Quebec and New Brunswick.

### **Referral program**

Aliments Asta employees can contribute to staff recruitment through a generous referral program.

### **Partnerships with various Employment Assistance Services**

Aliments Asta is constantly in contact with various Employment Assistance Services and Emploi-Québec. It participates in a number of ad hoc activities so that it can connect with the largest possible number of job seekers in the area. These organizations provide services to job seekers from various categories, such as the vulnerable young people, people with disabilities and offenders.

### **Plant work opportunities for people with minor physical or intellectual disabilities**

Aliments Asta also recruits from this under-represented group, not only because of a labour shortage but also in the interests of social inclusion. The project is underway.

### **Collaboration with Montreal-area immigrant aid and settlement organizations**

Aliments Asta has developed a recruitment project with organizations that have an “immigration regionalization” component. The project consists of holding in-person or virtual meetings with immigrants residing in the Montreal area who wish to settle in the regions.

### **Collaboration with schools - Employeur conciliant**

Aliments Asta has a strong presence in schools owing to its “Employeur conciliant” certification, where young people are encouraged to work while going to school. This program even grants leave

to student athletes so they can train and compete at events without worrying about being denied leave. Studies and sports are encouraged.

**Negotiation of a letter of agreement with the Union to hire experienced labour (65 years of age or older) to work part-time**

Aliments Asta has an agreement with the Union to hire workers 65 years of age or older to work two days a week.

**Indigenous reserve**

Aliments Asta sends its job postings to the local Indigenous reserve.

In short, all of the strategies in place are aimed at giving recruitment priority to Canadians and permanent residents who wish to work in the food processing sector and settle in the regions. These strategies are also inclusive in that they generally or specifically target under-represented groups.

**Aliments Asta has also implemented various recruitment and retention strategies targeting Canadians across the country, including:**

- In-house training department dedicated to one-on-one training for new employees;
- Skills development program;
- Stable schedule, with day shifts only, Monday to Friday;
- Paid telemedicine for all employees;
- Scholarship program;
- Coordination of a carpooling service;
- Full cafeteria service;
- Partnership for a company day care centre;
- Organized social and family activities;
- Recognition program, etc.

**COMPETITIVE COMPENSATION**

Aliments Asta has an **annual payroll of \$26,000,000**, including employee benefits.

**Average annual salary of production employees:**

**\$50,000** (including employee benefits)

**Average annual salary of other employees**

(Managers, administration, maintenance, quality control, etc.):

**\$75,000** (including employee benefits)

## CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY

Aliments Asta is a committed corporate citizen.

Every year, Aliments Asta gives more than \$100,000 in various sponsorships to the Greater KRTB community (Kamouraska, Rivière-du-Loup, Témiscouata, Les Basques). Whether it is for a sustainable infrastructure or an ad hoc event, Aliments Asta is involved in community, educational, cultural and sport initiatives.

## MAJOR LABOUR NEEDS

Aliments Asta currently has **more than 100 JOBS TO FILL**.

These 100 jobs will not only compensate for regular employee turnover and retirements, but also fill the labour need related to expansion projects and the development of new products that are in demand.

The labour shortage is a huge obstacle to maintaining our daily operations and to development projects.

## IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR INDUSTRY

- We are affected by the small population in the regions and by the labour shortage.
- Our facilities are in a rural area.
- We have automated some of our operations, but output is not enough to significantly replace the need for labour.
- Training is provided entirely upon hiring by our training staff.

## TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER PROGRAM

Aliments Asta feels that the TFWP does not adequately meet its current labour needs in the regions. In fact, **it does not enable us to meet our short-term staffing needs even though it is essentially our last resort.**

### TOO LOW A CAP ON HIRING TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS

The cap on hiring temporary foreign workers (TFWs), which is set at 10% under the TFWP, is a major issue. That cap does not enable us to meet our increased and immediate labour needs.

In the current circumstances, the 10% hiring cap is clearly too low and significantly jeopardizes Aliments Asta's projected development.

Aliments Asta believes that the following solution would be better suited to our industry:

### Main recommendation

Include in the “exemptions to the cap on primary agricultural positions” the National Occupational Classification (NOC) codes for labourers in food processing (9617) and industrial butchers (9462), **because slaughter operations are a logical continuation of primary agriculture.**

### Secondary recommendation

In the event that this solution is rejected, we recommend that the current cap under the TFWP be increased to 20% or even 30%.

## PERMANENT SELECTION OF TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS

Aliments Asta has permanent labour needs. The TFWP is only a means to meet our short-term needs and is essentially the gateway for numerous unskilled workers looking to immigrate to Canada. The prospect of permanent resident status is a mechanism that attracts newcomers to outlying regions. It is a draw for people who wish to settle in Canada.

We help our TFWs obtain permanent residence. We estimate that 80% of them will apply for permanent residence when they have the opportunity. It creates stability for both us and our employees.

However, almost all of our TFWs are currently excluded from these two programs because of the Canada-Quebec Accord. Quebec recently implemented a pilot program for the food processing sector to enable TFWs working in our sector to obtain a Quebec selection certificate (CSQ), but the requirements of this new pilot program, such as 24 months of experience instead of 12 months, and other criteria, put us at a disadvantage compared with other Canadian provinces. These new criteria of the Quebec program will

- Decrease the number of TFWs who can be recruited abroad, compared with companies located in other provinces and compared with recent years, because those who have obtained permanent residence are not included in the cap calculation; and
- Encourage TFWs working in Quebec to seek employment in another province (e.g., New Brunswick), where they can obtain permanent residence faster, enabling them to reunite with their families.

### First recommendation



That the federal government continue to recognize our sector as an essential service by continuing its initiatives to grant access to permanent residence for low-skilled positions in our industry, and that it continue discussions with the Quebec government so that the latter implements programs equivalent to those announced by the federal government in recent years.

## RENEWAL OF WORK PERMITS FOR TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS

Our TFWs acquire enough work experience to apply for a CSQ at the same time as their work permits expire. In order to keep our TFWs employed, we are forced to reapply for an LMIA, a Quebec temporary selection certificate and a work permit renewal for each TFW.

Under the current regulations, after 18 months of work, we have to proceed with the renewal process, as the process must be started six months before the work permit expires.

Therefore, creating a new LMIA exemption or amending an existing exemption that would allow TFWs with a certain amount of Canadian work experience in our sector to obtain a closed work permit with a job offer (on the employer portal) instead of having to restart the LMIA process would be invaluable to our company.

### Second recommendation

That the federal government create a new LMIA exemption or amend an existing exemption to allow TFWs in our sector to obtain a closed work permit with a job offer (on the employer portal) after 18 months of work.

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION

In our sector, TFWs are mainly labourers in food processing (NOC 9617) or industrial butchers (NOC 9462). Under the NOC, these positions have a respective skill level of D and C. Under the current LMIA exemptions, unlike the spouses of workers in jobs with a skill level of O, A or B, the spouses of our TFWs are not eligible for an open work permit as accompanying spouses, and it is difficult for their children to obtain a visa or study permit.

Allowing their spouse and children to accompany TFWs during temporary residence would be of great help in our recruitment and retention of TFWs. It would also alleviate some of the constraints Quebec has imposed on obtaining the CSQ and, by extension, permanent residence for workers in Quebec.

### Third recommendation

That the federal government allow spouses of TFWs who have obtained a work permit linked to an LMIA and a CAQ and who are working in certain NOCs, including NOC 9617 and NOC 9462, to obtain an open work permit and allow the children of these TFWs to obtain a visa or study permit, as the case may be, thus facilitating temporary family reunification.

## PROCESSING TIME AND LMIA DURATION

Given that the labour shortage is greater than ever and that our labour needs are urgent, the following are our recommendations for processing time and LMIA duration.

### **Processing time**

#### **Fourth recommendation**

That the government continue to give priority to processing LMIA's for key occupations in the agriculture and agri-food sectors, and to granting work permits.

### **LMIA duration**

#### **Fifth recommendation**

That the government, following its three-year pilot project, maintain the duration of work permits at a minimum of two years for low-wage workers.