

BACKGROUND ON MUSHROOMS CANADA AND OUR USAGE OF THE TFWP

Canada has a strong, adaptable, and a high-tech mushroom sector that contributes over a \$1 billion to the Canadian economy. Canada grows over 150,000 tonnes of mushrooms annually 24/7/365. Mushroom farms are a big job creator in Canada, creating over 6,400 jobs with competitive wages. Our Temporary Foreign Workers are paid competitive wages that are regulated; they are paid the same as local residents. Mushrooms are the largest sector employer of Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) Agricultural Stream workers, employing over 2,400 workers when Canadians do not apply. The Canadian Mushroom Growers' Association members have been working together on a **Mushroom Fair Labour & Ethical Recruitment Program** for the last several years with includes training for employers and workers supporting program compliance and best practices.



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The mushroom sector feels that having a job and excellent quality housing should be recognized as benefit and a primary worker protection. Allowing farm workers who are gainfully employed to immigrate and integrate into the community is another worker protection not commonly understood. There is no risk in letting workers who are employed through the TFWP Agricultural Stream to integrate into the communities and stay in Canada. That is why we are proud to have partnered with Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to support the development of the federal Agri-Food Immigration Pilot. We have over 200 of our TFWP Ag Stream workers who have applied to the Agri-Food Immigration Pilot, and with the recent IRCC changes almost all our workers will now be able to qualify for the 2,750 immigration spots. **Visit our Mushroom Jobs Portal www.mushrooms.ca/jobs or our Labour Market Info Fact Sheet in the Addendum 1 to learn more about competitive wages and quality jobs offered on a mushroom farm.**

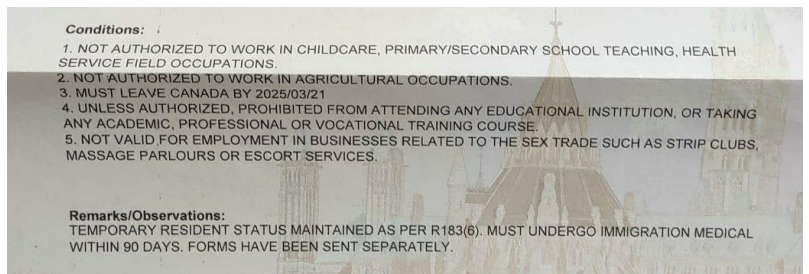
One of the key issues we are finding is that the two departments IRCC and Employment Social Development Canada (ESDC) TFWP do not work together to support the farm workers pathway to permanent residency, not recognizing the dual intent of farm workers working in permanent full-time occupations. We would like to see the TFWP Agricultural Stream program catch up to IRCC and better support our workers and employers with transition programming and department guideline changes to help with the transition, and that this would become a priority within the TFWP and the IRCC departments.

WHY OPEN WORK PERMITS UPON ARRIVAL DO NOT WORK FOR AGRICULTURE:

We have concerns about open work permits upon arrival because there are many issues for the agriculture sector that are not commonly understood.

1. OPEN WORK PERMITS UPON ARRIVAL DISCRIMINATE AGAINST AGRICULTURE: Open work permits do not allow agriculture

workers to begin work when they arrive. Open Work Permits are stamped so that potential workers need to complete a medical test first. Our farms' actual recent experiences with the open work permits are that while the potential recruits wait for up to 6 weeks for the medical test results, they go to work in sectors that do not have this requirement such as food manufacturing and restaurants. We have not received any answer why the work permits have this requirement for agriculture but not for restaurants and other sectors handling food. We requested IRCC to change this for incoming Ukrainians so agriculture is treated the same as restaurants, but nothing was changed to support agriculture.



Screen capture of an open work permit. Number 2 states the incoming recipient of the open work permit cannot work in agriculture, below it shows they need a medical. When this happens the incoming potential farm workers go work in other sectors like restaurants immediately and the farm does not get any recruits This is well documented by our farms.

2. IRCC 10 DAY WORK PERMIT TRANSFER PROCESS FOR CLOSED WP WHEN WORKERS CHANGE EMPLOYERS: The need for the open work permit upon arrival or sectoral work permits for TFWP Ag Stream is redundant because IRCC already provides a 10-day work permit process to "extend or change the conditions on your work permit". This allows a worker to change employers and the work permit is completed by IRCC within 10 days when the website instructions are followed. This is the one thing related to

TFWP Ag Stream Work Permits that is working extremely well, although it is not well publicized to workers or employers. We suggest this work permit transfer process which was first offered during COVID be continued and that IRCC offer a webinar for the agriculture sector through the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada roundtable. We have requested this many times, but it has not been offered yet; a webinar publicizing this process would be extremely beneficial to the entire agriculture sector.

3. **EMPLOYER COSTS OF THE TFWP:** Farm employers pay over \$8,000 per TFWP Agricultural Stream worker for costs associated with the TFWP that include flights to and from the worker's home country, heavily subsidized employer paid housing (workers only pay \$30 per week), and transportation to and from work. If the worker has an open work permit, and the worker leaves, is the Government of Canada going to drop these heavy costs of the TFWP or reimburse the farmer for the TFWP costs when the workers go to other sectors within the urban centres?
4. **BENEFITS OF TFWP TO THE FOREIGN WORKER NOT UNDERSTOOD:** Although the TFWP has challenges, it is a safe and legal program that covers many costs for the workers offering benefits other "open" immigration programs do not have. Over 2,100 TFWP inspections were conducted by the TFWP last year and 94% of all Canadian employers, including agriculture, were found to be compliant with the TFWP and employment regulations and standards (see mushroom news release in Addendum 2). The benefits of the "closed" work permit are understood by the workers related to housing, flights to and from their home country and transportation to and from work, but not clearly understood by the media, academics and politicians. The facts of the TFWP benefits are shown in stark contrast when looked at objectively compared to incoming ["open" IRCC programs where news media reports show new immigrants and refugees without jobs living in tents in Toronto.](#)

Further, the benefits of the TFWP 2-year Agricultural Stream contract to the worker is not understood in how it allows for the **incoming TFWs with dual intent** to build ties within the farm and local rural community, allowing for integration opportunities in depopulated areas of Canada, before they begin the immigration process. This allows the time for the worker to do things like complete training for the official level 4 language test to prepare for immigration through the Agri-Food Immigration Pilot.

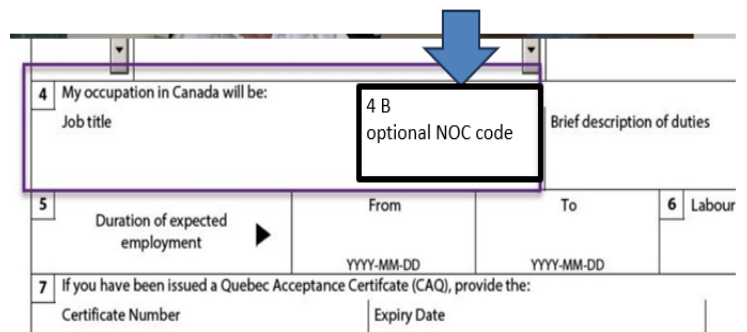
5. **BENEFITS OF THE TFWP TO THE LABOUR MARKET:** The TFWP Labour Market Impact Assessment in a "closed" work permit strengthens the labour market by placing incoming workers where there is labour shortage and jobs available. The labour shortage in agriculture is large and growing, the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council recent research shows that ["workforce vacancies in agriculture came at cost of \\$3.5 billion in 2022."](#) For agriculture, the labour market shows the reasons for the ongoing and chronic labour shortage in the agriculture sectors is related to rural location outside of the urban highly populated areas, which is necessary due to the farm land location and issues related to things like smell. The kind of work, picking and harvesting, that is required to produce food is essential but not always desirable for Canadians. Technology is maximized at all farms, but on mushroom farms hand picking to not bruise the mushrooms is still required.

PRIORITY ISSUES AGRICULTURE SECTOR NEEDS ADDRESSED FOR TFWP AND AGRI-FOOD IMMIGRATION PILOT

We ask for your support as we continue to ask for an agriculture industry joint meeting with IRCC and ESDC/TFWP to resolve these serious issues affecting TFWP Agricultural Stream which are getting worse.

1) TAKE AGRICULTURE OUT OF THE TFWP:

Industry has been requesting that we have a program that takes Agriculture and Agri-Food out of the TFWP and recognizing the sector that makes up the vast majority of the TFWP. For food production and primary processing, the program needs to be recognized as a priority. In 2021 the mandate letters for the Ministers of ESDC and AAFC promised a new Agri-Food and Seafood program to be developed. This work, however, has not proceeded and no consultation for it has begun.



4 My occupation in Canada will be:			
Job title	4 B optional NOC code		Brief description of duties
5 Duration of expected employment	From	To	6 Labour
	YYYY-MM-DD	YYYY-MM-DD	
7 If you have been issued a Quebec Acceptance Certificate (CAQ), provide the:			
Certificate Number	Expiry Date		

IRCC is ONLY prioritizing the primary agriculture put the NOC in "Job Title" with NO text. We recommend IRCC add a space for 4 B NOC Code in the work permit application form BESIDE the Job Title space. So ALL primary agriculture work permit applications are prioritized not just the ones that put the NOC code in the "Job Title" space.

SOLUTION (see graphic of work permit app →)
Add searchable work permit application field for NOCs is a simple interim solution providing maximum support for TFWP Agricultural Stream Work Permits. So, ALL primary ag

work permit applications are prioritized not just the ones that put the NOC code in the “Job Title” space when no instruction to just use the NOC is available and not all farm workers can comply with ONLY using the NOC as the work permit needs to match the LMIA. Due to the form not having a searchable field primary agriculture *actual* prioritized applications are likely very low.

- 2) **PATHWAY TO PERMANENT RESIDENCE REMAINS A VERY BUMPY ROAD FOR WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS:** One of the biggest over-arching issues currently is that the two departments, ESDC/ TFWP and IRCC, do not recognize that TFWP Ag Stream farm workers **dual intent** as potential new immigrants. Both departments are STILL stuck in an archaic attitude that sees farm workers as “temporary” and for this reason are not putting any priority on developing the supports that the other dual intent immigration programs and streams have, nor looking to make changes to the TFWP or IRCC guidelines that are needed to support TFWP Ag Stream workers who want to stay and live in Canada permanently. If dual intent is recognized for TFWP Agricultural Stream then the departments could include our workers for things like language training at the settlement agencies or pilot funding to farms to hire language training teachers to teach workers to prepare for the level 4 language test.

ISSUES & SOLUTIONS RELATED TO THE NON-RECOGNITION OF FARM WORKERS DUAL INTENT INCLUDE:

- **TFWP Housing Issues for Workers and Employers:** The TFWP is no longer accepting TFWP Ag Stream Workers housing waivers for workers who choose to live on their own: this means workers live on their own and farmers need to keep empty housing just in case they want to move back which is taking up housing in the community during a housing shortage (**see Ontario Farmer article in addendum 3**).
- **Mass refusals of Work Permits:** Farms are seeing mass refusals for workers incoming from countries like Vietnam and also for workers renewing work permits for things like, “I am not satisfied that you will leave Canada at the end of your stay” and “The purpose of your visit to Canada is not consistent with a temporary stay given the details you have provided in your application” and “family ties” in Canada. These reasons for refusal indicate that -Food Immigration Pilot allowing farm workers to stay and immigrate is not part of the assessment process for the Canadian embassy in Vietnam and other countries where our workers are coming from (**see National Post article in Addendum 4**).
- **TFWP Housing Issues Related to AFIP:** The Agri-Food Immigration Pilot does not include a voluntary box to disclose PR status, but this is desperately needed for farm employers due to the TFWP ag employer paid housing requirements, to support housing transition, and to support TFWP compliance within the integrity inspection program.
- **Work Permit Renewals/Extensions at Edmonton Processing Centre:** Work permit renewals for in-Canada workers who are seeking to immigrate are not prioritized (taking well over 4 months) and the and the processing team in Edmonton makes the same ongoing work permit mistakes again and again.

SOLUTIONS:

- a. We recommend that better Work Permit processing be tied to the new TFWP Recognized Employer Pilot (REP) as a benefit tying the programs together and providing a recognizable benefit to the new TFWP REP Program.
 - b. In the meantime, we recommend an interim **“Tiger Team” approach for primary agriculture in the Edmonton work permit processing centre, so there is a processing team for agriculture** to save time and money for IRCC and save undue hardship for agriculture employers and workers so work permits are completed in timely way so issues like pregnant workers do not have their work permits and health cards expire.
- 3) **NEW! Biometrics and Work Permit Urgent Issue:** A new urgent issue for in-Canada TFWs who have biometrics expiring has been developing because **there is no process for biometrics renewal** within the Edmonton processing centre that does the processing for the work permit renewals/ extensions. Some workers who need to renew/ extend their TFWP Agricultural Stream work permits also have biometrics now expiring. These workers have submitted their work permit paperwork and included payment for the biometrics renewal at the same time. Instead of having a new process for the biometrics renewals to support in Canada workers, the processing team is shortening the time of the work permit extensions considerably (within a few months), to match the biometrics expiry date rather than generating a letter for the workers to go renew the biometrics and renewing the work permits for 2 years. This will mean workers’ work permits will be expiring shortly, without a process for biometrics renewal, meaning the workers could lose status, not allowing them to continue working in Canada.
- **SOLUTION:** Edmonton work permit processing centre for in Canada TFWs immediately develop biometric renewal process that works in tandem with the work permit renewal/ extension process.



Mushroom Fair Labour & Ethical Recruitment Program

ADDENDUM 1

FACT SHEET:

Labour Market Information 2021



WORKFORCE TOOLBOX



EMPLOYER TRAINING HUB

CANADIAN MUSHROOM AGRIWORKFORCE

Lots of Job Opportunities on Mushroom Farms.

6,470 Total Jobs:

Mushroom Farms are BIG Job Creators!

2,425 TFWP Agricultural Stream Workers

mushroom farms are the largest sector employer of TFWP Ag Stream workers

194 Mushroom farms in Canada

MUSHROOM FARMS COMPETITIVE WAGES & OPPORTUNITY TO GROW:

Canadians and TFWs paid the same.

Visit www.mushrooms.ca/jobs

- **Harvester** Min. to \$20/hr
- **Supervisor** \$18 to \$25.50/hr
- **Packaging** Min. to \$19/hr
- **General Farm Worker** Min. to \$17.50/hr
- **Health & Safety** \$37,400 to \$81,000/yr
- **Human Resources** \$37,400 to \$78,000/yr
- **Grower** \$39,500 to \$83,000/yr
- **Farm Manager** \$53,000 to \$190,000/yr

100% FARMS PROVIDE TRAINING:

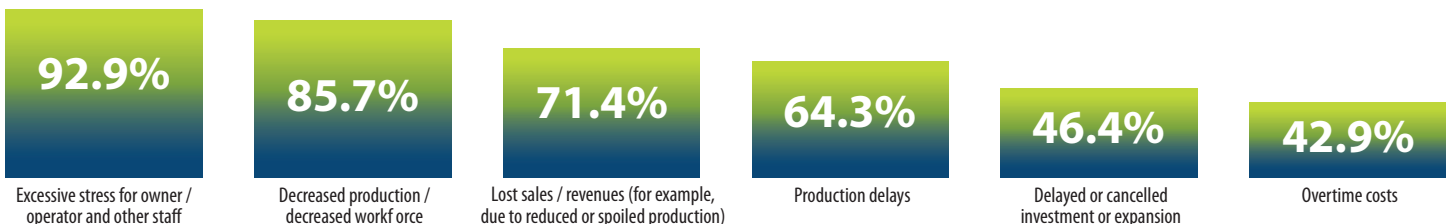
Orientation training, Occupation Health & Safety Training, Harvester Training

QUALITY BENEFIT PACKAGES CAN INCLUDE:

Medical & health insurance, extended health & dental, vision, drug coverage, life insurance, vision, pension, and RRSPs.

12.3% National Job Vacancy Rate with over one third farms over the national average, some approaching 40% vacancies. Job vacancy numbers have more than doubled in 4 years and absenteeism has doubled on some farms.

IMPACT OF LABOUR SHORTAGE EXACERBATED BY COVID-19 PANDEMIC



MUSHROOM FARMS CARE ABOUT OUR WORKFORCE

All of our workers are essential and we're proud of them

What does it take to grow 150,000 Tons of fresh Canadian mushrooms every year?

Passion, Dedication, Hard Work

HIGH GROWTH/ HIGH DEMAND

Strong, adaptable and high-tech mushroom sector contributes close to **\$1 Billion** to Canada economy

EXPORTS: Canada is the number 2 value exporter of fresh mushrooms in the world

WELCOME TO RURAL CANADA

The majority of TFWP Ag Stream workers stay working on the farm 6 to 10 years or longer.

MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE

- Proud to welcome & support workers who chose to immigrate.
- 2021 Over 2,425 Ag Stream TFWs on Mushroom Farms across Canada.

MUSHROOM FARMS SUPPORT OUR WORKERS:

We recommend that the federal & provincial immigration programs accept 2 years Canadian experience and better support early family re-unification for our hard working TFWs

ADDENDUM 2



Fresh. Simple. Good. *and* Local!

NEWS RELEASE

Mushrooms Canada – RELEASE
October 4, 2023

POSITIVE TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKER COMPLIANCE DATA RELEASED SHOWS 94% COMPLIANCE FOR ALL SECTORS

Harriston, ON, 4 October 2023 (Mushrooms Canada) – [The Temporary Foreign Worker Program \(TFWP\) released inspection compliance data recently](#) for the period between April 2022 to March 2023 where it was found that after 2,100 inspections, 94% of all Canadian employers, including agriculture, were compliant with the TFWP and employment regulations and standards. This was released following new Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) regulations introduced last year, improving the TFWP's ability to conduct TFWP inspections.

“Mushrooms Canada is happy to see ESDC transparency in releasing these findings; making them public,” says Ryan Koeslag Executive Vice President, Mushrooms Canada. “Mushroom farmers grow mushrooms, but we are really a people business creating over 6,400 jobs across Canada, employing 70% Canadians.



To Learn More, Watch Our [VIDEO](#)

With 2,400 TFWP Ag Stream workers, mushroom farms are the biggest sector employer of TFWP Agricultural Stream workers. “We are proud of our members’ track record with the TFWP compliance,” says Koeslag. “Mushroom farms support their farm workers with many voluntary best practices, and we have constantly advocated for their workers to be able to access new immigration options.” ESDC statistics consistently show that the agriculture sector in Canada has above-average employer compliance rates compared to other industries and sectors that use the TFWP.

“Our mushroom members work hard to do the right thing by following the very strict TFWP rules,” says Koeslag. “Our farmers want to support their workers every way possible.”

Canadian mushroom farms that employ Temporary Foreign Workers have the same obligations and pay the same competitive wages as they do for Canadian employees. The TFWP regulations include set wage rates; housing subsidized at a very high rate; transportation to and from their country of origin; transportation to and from their housing location to the farm; access to health care cards, workplace insurance such as provincial WSIB in Ontario; occupational health and safety legislation. Farms share with the workers the federal government’s publication outlining the workers’ legal rights and protections. Some farms even voluntarily support their workers with language training and provide community events on a regular basis.



Fresh. Simple. Good. *and* Local!

“We need more people working in agriculture in rural Canada,” explains Koeslag. “The labour shortage for Canadian agriculture is massive and continues to grow. Mushroom farms have a huge job vacancy rate. To grow food in rural Canada, we need to fill this Labour gap.”



“We feel that allowing farm workers who are gainfully employed to immigrate and integrate into the community is one of the most important parts of worker protections,” says Koeslag.

“This is why we have been pleased to partner with the Government of Canada to support the Agri-Food Immigration Pilot (AFIP) and continue to work with the

TFWP and AFIP so the programs are accessible to our workers and make sense for our workers and our farms.

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BACKGROUND

Canada has a strong, adaptable, and a high-tech mushroom sector that contributes over a \$1 billion to the Canadian economy. Mushrooms double in size every day. Canada grows over 150,000 tonnes of mushrooms annually 24/7/365. Mushroom farms are a big job creator in Canada, creating over 6,400 jobs with competitive wages, Canadians make up 70% of our workers.

According to the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC), there were 16,500 job vacancies on Canadian farms in 2018, which is causing \$2.9 billion in lost sales to the Canadian economy. The sector’s labour gap is forecast to nearly double, reaching a potential shortage of 123,000 people by 2029.

All of our workers are essential and we are proud of them. Mushrooms are the largest sector employer of Temporary Foreign Worker Program Agricultural Stream workers, employing over 2,400 workers when Canadians do not apply. We have 150 workers who have applied to the Agri-Food Immigration Pilot with the current criteria. We have been working together on a ***Mushroom Fair Labour & Ethical Recruitment Program***.

Migrant workers employed by the mushroom industry now have an opportunity for permanent residency but Canada's approach to its temporary agricultural workforce is plagued with other issues.

Federal bumbling impacts agricultural workforce. 'It's bizarre, the policy that's happening'

By Jeffrey Carter, Ontario Farmer

Oct. 24, 2023



The Agricultural Stream of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) is facing serious issues, including in the area of mushroom production, a billion industry in Canada.

According to Ryan Koeslag, executive vice-president of Mushrooms Canada, the massive labour shortage in Canadian agriculture is growing, including among mushroom producers.

“We feel that allowing farm workers who are gainfully employed to immigrate and integrate into the community is one of

the most important parts of worker protection,” Koeslag said. “This is why we have been pleased to partner with the Government of Canada to support the Agri-Food Immigration Pilot (AFIP).”

Rolling out the AFIP, unfortunately, has been challenging.

That relates to the COVID-19 pandemic but there has also been a lack of communication between the Economic and Social Development Canada (EDSC) and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) which jointly administer the TFWP, according to Janet Krayden, labour specialist with Mushrooms Canada. This has led to challenges for employers and employees and there are broader implications.

The cost of food production at the farm level is being negatively impacted, leading to increased prices at the retail level. There has even been an impact on the cost of housing, she said.

“There is a real disconnect between the departments. Ag Stream housing guidelines are driving up the price of rent in rural communities; absolutely, the TFWP's archaic rules which fail farmers and workers staying in Canada permanently is doing that.”

According to Mushrooms Canada, Service Canada (part of EDSC) previously allowed Ag Stream workers to move out of employer housing for such reasons as wanting more independence or to live with their spouse or other family members by granting a ‘housing waiver.’ That changed a few months ago.

“The TFWP bureaucracy arbitrarily changed their interpretation with no notification. Instead of accepting the fact workers are no longer living in employer-paid housing – a voluntary step workers can make – farmers are being required to keep empty beds and empty housing to pass the Labour Market Impact Assessment housing inspection, in case the workers decide to move back.”



Making the housing problem even worse is yet another government department, Revenue Canada Agency, Krayden said. Farmers who are mandated to maintain empty off-farm accommodations for their workers are not exempt from the Underutilized Housing Tax.

The housing issue extends beyond Canada's mushroom industry which employs about 2,400 TFWP workers across Canada, about 30 per cent of the workforce in that sector. Ag Stream workers are also employed in other occupations involving year-round employment including greenhouse and livestock production. They are engaged in a wide range of roles in those industries including skilled and supervisory positions.

"Our farmers want their farm workers to stay and have a chance to immigrate, so Mushrooms Canada has strongly advocated for the Agri-Food Immigration Pilot," Krayden said. "But we never expected the TFWP would not keep up to the changes the immigration department has already made. We didn't think the TFWP would go backwards and punish farmers for their workers choosing to integrate into the community."

Changes to the pilot program were announced in May, with the changes rolling out over the summer and more coming. Spouses and other family members of Ag Stream temporary foreign workers accepted under the immigration program are now eligible to apply for open worker permits to come to Canada.

"This could cause a new looming housing crisis for farmers if the TFWP housing guidelines do not quickly adapt to the new immigration reality for TFWP Ag Stream Workers, accepting and not punishing farmers when workers choose to move out and get their own housing for their families," the Mushrooms Canada release states.

Krayden said 150 Ag Stream workers employed in the mushroom industry have been accepted into the pilot program but roadblocks remain. While up to 2,750 TFWP Ag Stream workers are eligible annually the pilot had a slow start, much of that related to COVID. "With the new changes, we think almost all our farm workers will now be able to access the program, so this is a huge change for the TFWP and an opportunity for farm workers that they have never had before. Our employers are working on transition and incentive plans to retain as many of the new farm worker immigrants as possible."

A positive change to the AFIP was the removal of the requirement that workers show a high-school diploma from their home countries, Krayden said. Acquiring a certificate was challenging due to bureaucratic issues and since certificates earned by mature students are sometimes lost or destroyed.

The pilot did not include any changes to the language requirement – a Level 4 in reading, writing, speaking and listening under the Canadian Language Benchmark system. Meeting that high level is challenging for most workers, especially those new to English.

"What we would like to see is that TFWP Ag Stream workers be allowed by the federal government to take language training at the immigration settlement agencies with other new immigrants, or that some funding be provided to the farms to support bringing language teachers to the farm to provide immigration level language training," Krayden said. "We need to see the TFWP keep up with the immigration department and become more supportive of the farm employers supporting farm workers who are trying to transition and settle in Canadian society."



Other challenges include bureaucratic delays with the TFWP work permit processing by IRCC for extensions. Employers are also not being informed when workers enter the AFIP or when they achieve permanent residency.

“This is the other biggest issue for the housing that the departments need to figure out quickly,” Krayden said. “To follow the rules, the farm employer needs to know when the Ag Stream worker is out of the TFWP, due to the housing rules and to remain compliant for the many integrity inspections. We still do not have an answer or a clear pathway for the farm workers and the farm employers even though we keep asking for this.”

Krayden said TFWP Agriculture Stream is fundamentally different from the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). Under the SAWP, government-to-government contracts are involved and workers can only stay in Canada for up to eight months in any given year while the Ag Stream allows for year-round employment over multiple years. In addition, there is a specific set of countries involved with the SAWP, several Caribbean nations and Mexico.

The Ag Stream, in contrast, sources workers from around the world including the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Ukraine, Mexico and Guatemala and allows for year-round employment, with two-year contracts over multiple years.

“We think almost all our temporary workers will now qualify under the Agri Food Immigration Pilot,” Krayden said.

Krayden said another difference between the SAWP and TFWP is the levels of communications, not just among departments, but between the farming community and government. With the SAWP, there are yearly meetings with representations from the farm community, the Canadian government, and the participating governments supplying workers. With the TFWP, programming changes are made at the federal government level with little if any consultation.

“It is bizarre, the policy that’s happening,” Krayden said.

There are also differences between the Ag Stream and Low-Wage Stream of the TFWP. Under the Ag Stream, for instance, employers are required to provide housing, either on or off the farm with workers providing a weekly remittance of up to \$30 to help cover housing costs, an amount that hasn’t changed at the same time worker wages have increased by 43 per cent.

In contrast, under the Low-wage stream used by meat processors, employers must ensure their workers pay no more than 30 per cent of their before-tax income on housing, whether they own the housing or not.

“Even though we are primary agriculture, the up to 30 per cent housing rules makes a lot more sense for full-time permanent farm workers, who often live in towns in apartments or single residential housing, because the workers are paid competitive or even the median wage, the same as local residents,” Krayden said.

“In the Low-Wage Stream, this allows the workers to integrate into the community – they can live with family in friends in normal way. This is why we are seeking this more flexible option for farm workers, especially those who are bringing families now at the beginning of their immigration process.”

ADDENDUM 4

NATIONAL POST

More Canadian agricultural producers denounce 'mass' foreign worker application rejections

IRCC officers are rejecting foreign worker applicants over "family ties" within Canada, despite none of them actually having relatives in the country

Author of the article: [Bryan Passifiume](#)

Published Aug 23, 2023 • Last updated Aug 23, 2023 • 4 minute read

National Post

"This is not just cattle — this is all of ag right now." Agricultural operators say the problem over permits for temporary foreign workers being rejected is getting worse.

Struggling to find workers, agricultural operators are sounding the alarm over problems with Canada's immigration bureaucracy.

This week, the Canadian Mushroom Growers' Association echoed concerns expressed last week by KT Ranches in National Post, claiming chronic and often inexplicable rejections of temporary foreign worker applications by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) are creating grief for farmers.

"We're starting to see these mass refusals," said Mushrooms Canada's Janet Krayden in an interview with National Post. She said their members started getting hit with a flurry of unexplained rejections late last fall. "This is not just cattle — this is all of ag right now."

Last week, KT Ranches co-owner Tracey Carson spoke of their battles with IRCC's seemingly arbitrary and often confusing rationale in approving workers.

In one case, IRCC rejected a work permit for a Kenyan-trained veterinarian hired as a herdsman at the Okanagan-based cattle ranch. He was rejected both because IRCC officers were concerned he didn't have the ability to perform the job, and they weren't convinced he'd leave the country after his permit expired because of "family ties" within Canada — despite him not having any family in the country.

Krayden said Canada's mushroom farmers are experiencing the same thing, specifically concerning Vietnamese applicants inexplicably rejected for family ties within Canada, despite none of them actually having relatives in this country.

"I have two farms that are struggling right now with those kind of mass refusals from Vietnam," she said. "But I've been told by immigration consultants that this is happening (with applicants) beyond Vietnam." What's even more astounding, she said, is that nearly all of the rejections found themselves inexplicably reversed upon appeal.

"We've never seen this before, that they would be refused because they have family in Canada," Krayden said. "There might be some archaic regulation that's on the books, but it doesn't make sense — it's a new systemic issue that's causing mass refusals for agriculture right now."

Questions to IRCC by National Post weren't returned by deadline.

Despite current immigration policy listing agriculture as an "essential" occupation, Krayden said current trends suggest the exact opposite.

Data released by Mushrooms Canada earlier this year list a 12.3 per cent job vacancy rate within the industry, while some farms report vacancies far exceeding that number.

Across the entire sector, the national job vacancy rate for Canadian agricultural producers reached 5.4 per cent, according to [data published online by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council](#).

Three provinces — Prince Edward Island, Ontario and British Columbia — reported vacancy rates higher than the national average, reporting 5.71, 6.09 and 7.95 per cent respectively.

That same data suggests 47 per cent of Canada's 192,408 farms are unable to find enough workers, and 34 per cent of farms report zero Canadians applying for posted jobs.

Thirty-five per cent of Canadian farms employ temporary foreign workers, and a little under half anticipate the need to hire more workers over the next five years.

Unlike many other agricultural operations, mushroom farming is a year-round enterprise, and therefore doesn't rely on seasonal workers.

Of the 6,500 workers growing mushrooms in Canada, around 2,500 are temporary foreign workers, typically granted two-year work permits.

Labour shortages on Canadian mushroom farms are leading to a loss of crops and productivity, Krayden said. Canada's temporary foreign worker program, she said, is out-of-date — particularly since the [introduction of Canada's Agri-Food immigration pilot](#) that provides a pathway to permanent residence for qualified, non-seasonal agriculture workers.

Krayden said the organization met with IRCC officials over the summer to air their concerns.

"We're still asking them to resolve it, but they keep saying, 'We can't see any reason that's provoking this.' But they're not helping," she said.

Errors by IRCC officers are also sparking concern.

Last week, Carson, of KT Ranches, told National Post of mistakes made by IRCC officers preventing the family of one of her herd managers from applying for a visa.

Krayden said such errors are becoming more frequent — particularly when processing extensions for workers already in Canada.

"They make the same mistakes again and again and again," she said, reporting applications being held up because of errors like incorrect dates or work permits being issued with wrong job classifications.

"They're causing all of these work processing issues for themselves, and it's bogging the entire system down," she said.

"The seasonal ag worker program brings in like 60,000 workers on an annual basis in Canada, but our farms aren't like that — we don't have this seasonal push."

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