



April 6, 2020

Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
1341 Baseline Road Tower 7, Floor 9, Room 149
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C5
Canada

Minister Carla Qualtrough
Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion
140 Promenade du Portage
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0J9
Canada

Dear Minister Bibeau and Minister Qualtrough;

We appreciate the efforts that the Government of Canada has undertaken to allow Temporary Foreign Workers and Seasonal Agricultural Workers into Canada to work on Canadian farms. These nearly 60,000 workers provide Canadian farmers with the labour required to complete their planting and harvest seasons and for the processing of agricultural products. However, we are concerned as to whether the expected number of workers will arrive in Canada due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If they don't, it could lead to a labour shortage, which could in turn negatively impact Canada's food security. Therefore, the Government of Canada should work with the agricultural sector to encourage Canadians to consider working in the agricultural field to address these labour deficiencies. We recommend that the Government of Canada consider the following steps to incentivize and retain domestic workers:

1. Allow Canadians and permanent residents who are employed in agricultural positions commonly filled under the Temporary Foreign Worker or Seasonal Agricultural Workers programs to:
 - a. Receive the Canada Emergency Response Benefit while keeping on-farm earnings; or
 - b. Receive Employment Insurance benefits without having their on-farm earnings clawed back; or

- c. If a worker is ineligible for either program, receive a grant equivalent to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit;
 - i. Including students.
 2. Explore with Provinces and industry measures to provide job protection to workers eligible for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit whereby workers would be allowed to claim the CERB, retain their connection with their current employer so that they have a job to return to post-crisis, and work in agriculture in the interim.
 3. Protect workers by paying for accommodations at nearby hotels or motels for those who would usually reside in on-farm communal living arrangements, thereby ensuring that accommodations comply with provincial health and emergency measures.
 4. Waive the Guaranteed Income Supplement claw-back for on-farm income.

Although we hope that allowing Temporary Foreign Workers and Seasonal Agricultural Workers to come to Canada will help mitigate impacts on the Canadian food supply, we believe that the government must also incentivize Canadians to work in agriculture to forestall a food shortage in Canada.

Employment and Social Development Canada should also consider similar provisions for domestic seafood processing workers.

Sincerely,

Senator Diane Griffin (Prince Edward Island)
Senator Robert Black (Ontario)
Senator Colin Deacon (Nova Scotia)
Senator Stan Kutcher (Nova Scotia)
Senator Pamela Wallin (Saskatchewan)
Senator Peter Boehm (Ontario)
Senator Patricia Bovey (Manitoba)
Senator David Richards (New Brunswick)
Senator Doug Black (Alberta)
Senator Frances Lankin (Ontario)
Senator Chantal Petitclerc (Quebec)
Senator Tony Loffreda (Quebec)
Senator Mohamed Ravalia (Newfoundland and Labrador)
Senator Marilou McPhedran (Manitoba)
Senator Josée Forest-Niesing (Ontario)
Senator Brian Francis (Prince Edward Island)
Senator Howard Wetston (Ontario)
Senator Mary Coyle (Nova Scotia)
Senator Rosa Galvez (Quebec)
Senator Elaine McCoy (Alberta)
Senator Michael Duffy (Prince Edward Island)
Senator Nancy Hartling (New Brunswick)