

NEWCOMERS AND AGRICULTURE:

Using Immigration as a Solution to the Agriculture Labour Shortage In Ontario



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The views expressed in this publication are the views of the Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province of Ontario.

The Government of Ontario and its agencies are in no way bound by the recommendations contained in this document.

Mission

SLWDB is a diverse and dedicated organization, committed to identifying needs and facilitating solutions to attract, train and retain a viable workforce through community partnerships.

Vision

Growing Sarnia Lambton's workforce for tomorrow's economy.

FEEDBACK:

We invite community feedback on all SLWDB publications:

[PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON THIS REPORT.](#)

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

OVERVIEW

This research seeks to address the question of what attracts newcomers to employment in agriculture. As a recent Western Ontario Warden's Caucus report makes clear, in southwestern Ontario alone, by 2030 agriculture will require an additional 10,000 workers (Western Ontario Warden's Caucus, Western Ontario Workforce Strategy: Findings and Issues Report, 2021, p. 105). This labour gap is the result of growth in the industry as well as the large number of impending retirements.

Newcomers are a group who can help fill this identified gap. However, there are barriers to newcomer participation in agriculture. This research project has worked to identify these barriers by surveying newcomers to better understand what would attract them to work in agriculture and what would attract them to live in a rural community.

This project encompassed four phases: policy review, review of innovative existing programs, data collection, and final report and presentation. The policy review phase worked to identify all existing policies relating to newcomers in Ontario and work in agriculture. The review of innovative existing programs worked to identify innovative attraction and retention programs in Canada and around the globe that can be reasonably adapted for workers in agriculture in Ontario. The data collection phase included a survey of newcomers to Ontario and asked what would support a newcomer in accessing employment in agriculture. This report represents the fourth phase of the project.

This report includes an overview of the survey results. It also includes a list of recommendations that can be reasonably implemented to support the growth of the agricultural workforce in Ontario. We hope that they inspire future action.

While the primary purpose of this research was to answer the question of motivations to work in agriculture, employers across all industries will benefit from understanding the motivations to live in a rural community as they work to recruit newcomers from the bigger cities.

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

THE SURVEY

The data collection phase of this project included an online survey of newcomers to Ontario. The survey was launched in July 2022 with a goal of 150 responses.

SLWDB staff connected with many organizations that support newcomers across Ontario in order to solicit their help. Partnership played a very important role in the success of the data collection. It was important to collect responses from newcomers in both small and large communities in order to understand their motivations. In the end, connections were made with organizations in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Ottawa, Hamilton, London and Kitchener/Waterloo. Responses were also collected from smaller communities, including Sarnia and Chatham-Kent.

The survey closed on October 31 with a total of 243 responses.

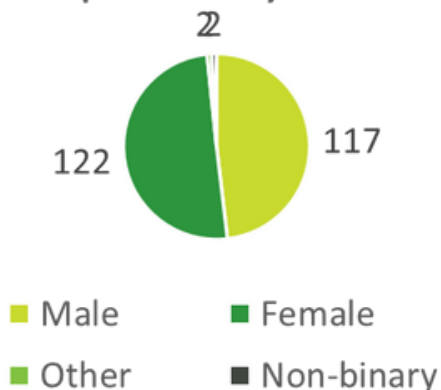
SURVEY RESULTS

243 RESPONSES COLLECTED

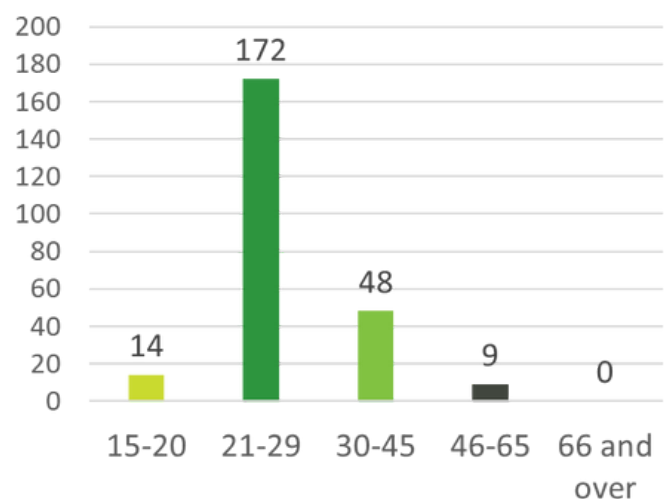
DEMOGRAPHICS

Nearly half of respondents were male and half were female. The vast majority of respondents were in the core working age. No one over 65 years of age completed the survey.

Respondents by Gender



Respondents by Age



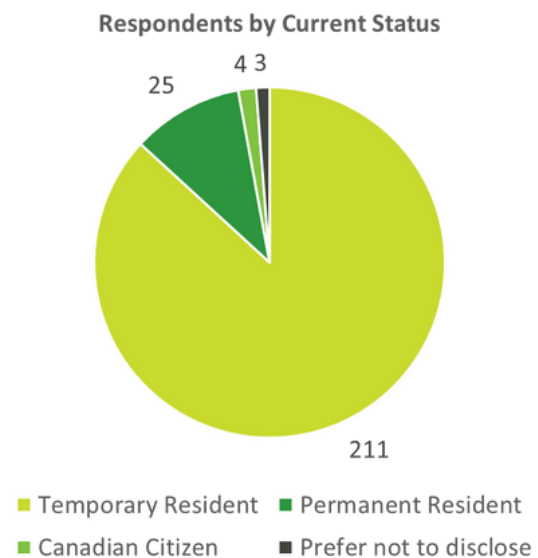
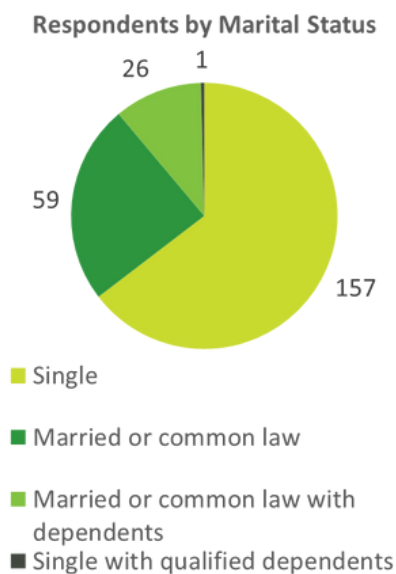
SURVEY RESULTS

243 RESPONSES COLLECTED

ADDITIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS

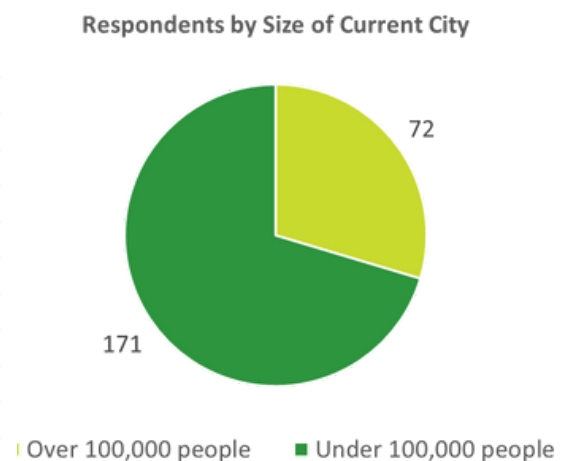
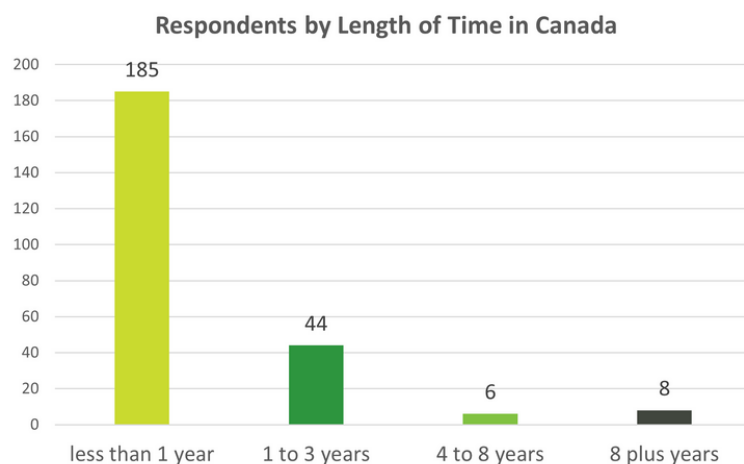
Given the age breakdown of the respondents, it was not surprising that the majority (65%) were single. An additional 35% of respondents were married/common law with or without children.

The majority of respondents (87%) were temporary residents at the time of the survey.



The majority of survey respondents (76%) had been in Canada for less than a year.

The majority of respondents (70%) were living in a rural community.



SURVEY RESULTS

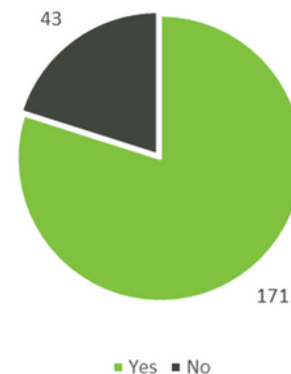
243 RESPONSES COLLECTED

IN-DEMAND JOBS IN AGRICULTURE

The majority of survey respondents (80%) had identified a goal of permanent residency.

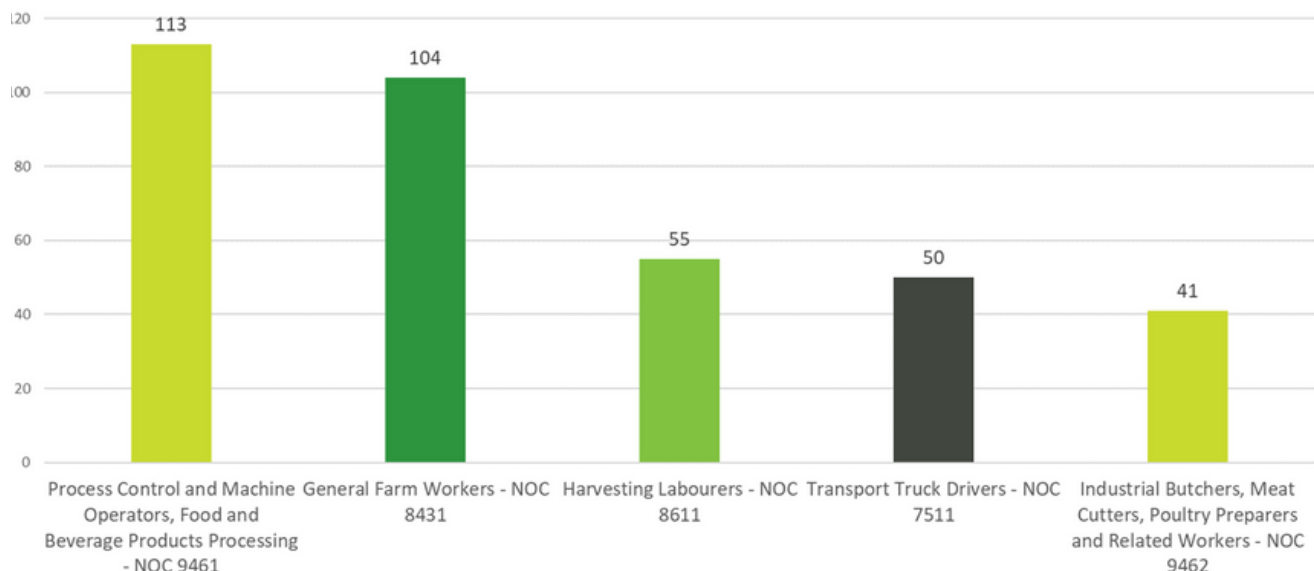
Looking back at the previous question about the respondents' current status, 10% are Permanent Residents, 2% are Canadian Citizens, and 1% chose not the answer, for a total of 13%. Therefore, a total of 7% of survey respondents, or approximately 17 people, were not interested in permanent residency.

Respondents by Goal of Permanent Residency



The Ontario Government currently offers a program that allows newcomers working in identified in-demand jobs in agriculture to apply for permanent residency. The survey included a question on five of these in-demand occupations. Newcomers were most interested in the Process Control Operator and General Farm Worker positions.

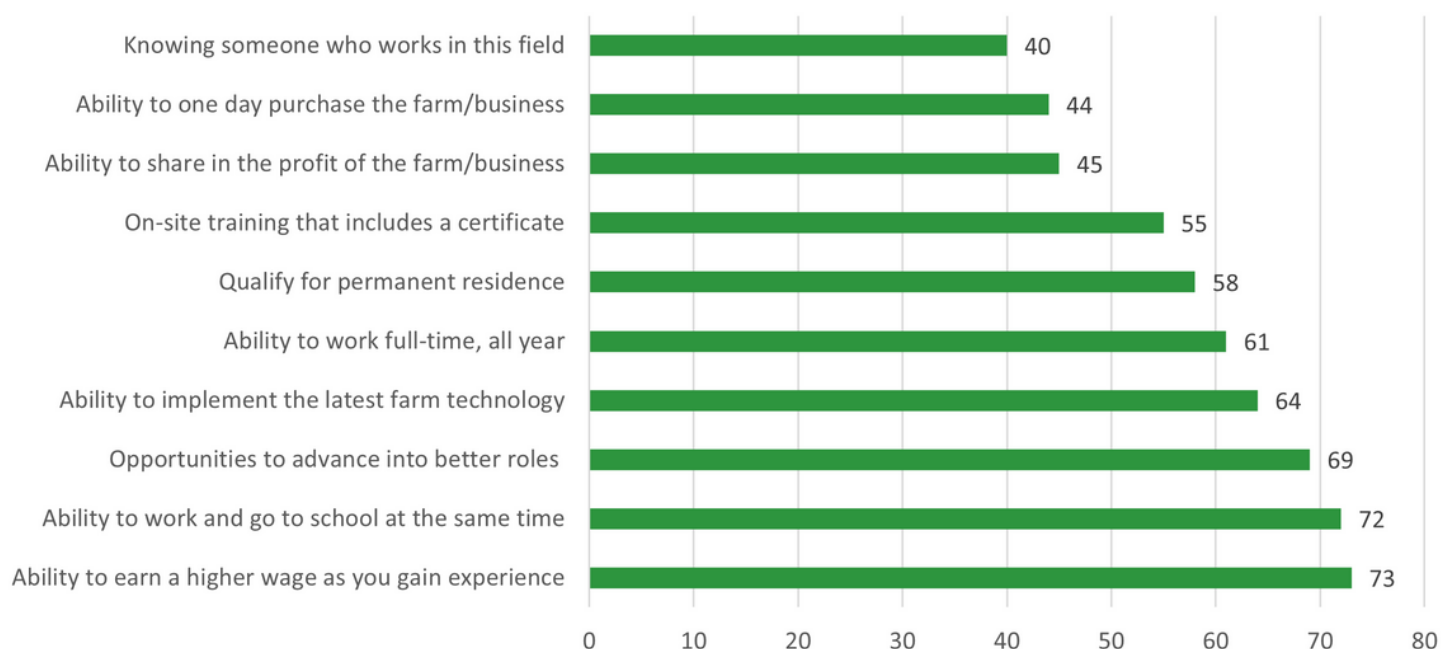
Respondent Interest in In-Demand Jobs



MOTIVATION TO WORK IN AGRICULTURE

243 RESPONSES COLLECTED

Respondents by Motivation to Work in Agriculture

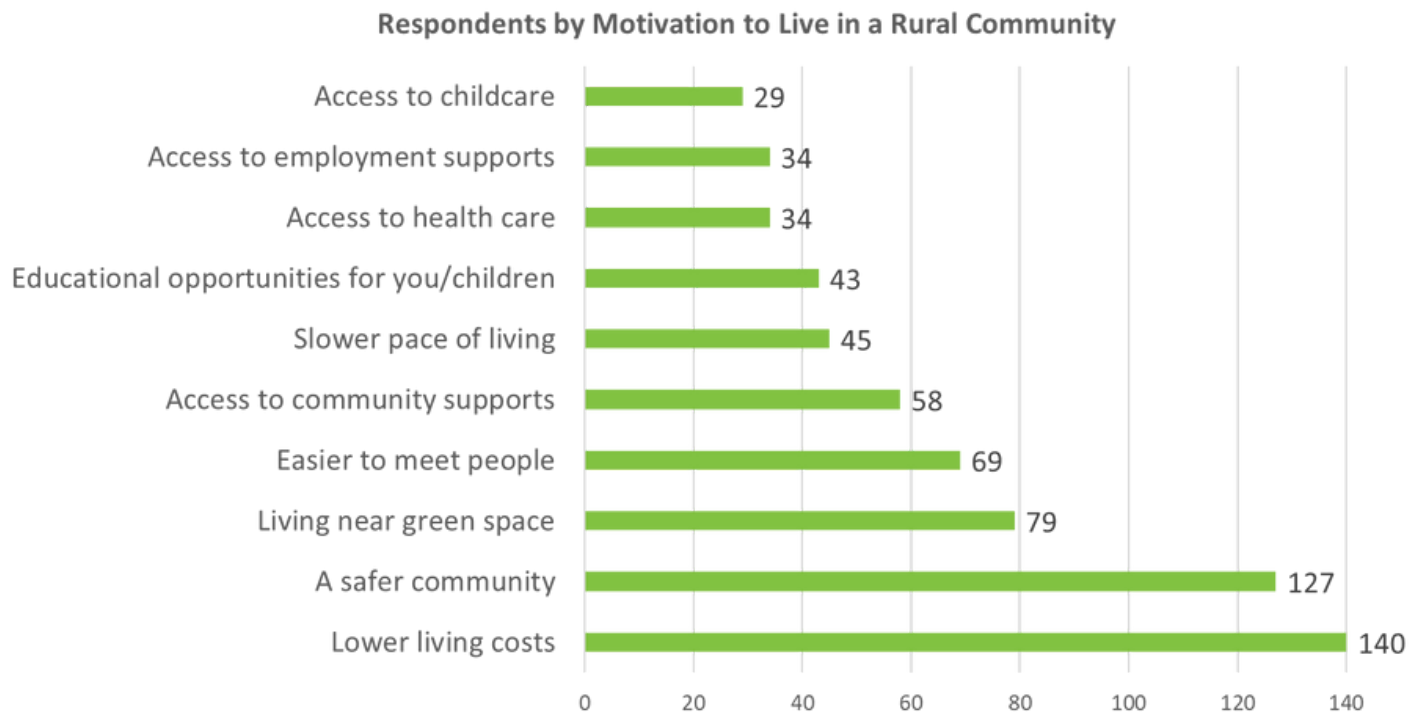


When asked what would motivate them to choose a career in agriculture, respondents were allowed to choose up to five responses. The top choice among survey respondents (30%) was the the ability to earn higher wages as you gain experience. This was followed closely by the ability to work and go to school at the same time (30%). Additional top choices included opportunities to advance into better roles (28%) and the ability to implement the latest farm technology (26%).

These responses closely align with additional research that SLWDB has conducted on retention best practices for employers. Most employees across all industries, ages and genders, whether a newcomer or not, want a competitive salary, a healthy work-life balance and the ability to advance in their careers. Additionally, newcomers are interested in being able to qualify for permanent residency.

MOTIVATION TO LIVE IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

243 RESPONSES COLLECTED



An important component of the survey was the motivation for a newcomer to live in a rural community. Even though employment is one of the most important factors in where someone lives, it is not the only factor.

When asked what would motivate someone to live in a rural community, respondents were allowed to choose up to five responses. The top choice among survey respondents was the lower cost of living (58%), followed closely by living in a safer community (52%). Additional top choices included living near green space (33%), finding it easier to meet people (28%), and accessing community supports (24%).

This data is particularly relevant to the work of economic development groups across Ontario as they work to attract newcomers. The results will provide valuable insights for future attraction campaigns.

Conclusion

As the survey results show, newcomers are keenly interested in some aspects of working in agriculture. The top barriers can be broadly categorized as transportation, skills development, entrepreneurship and creating a welcoming environment for newcomers. It will require the work of many different partners to overcome some of the identified barriers.

Transportation is one of the largest barriers for newcomers to work in agriculture. Very few newcomers have the ability to purchase vehicles when they first arrive, which is one of the reasons why they settle in urban areas with public transportation options. It is also important to note that having a driver's license and the ability to drive a vehicle is an important skill for anyone working in agriculture to develop, and newcomers will require supports to accomplish this.

While housing did not feature prominently in the survey results, transportation and housing are connected issues. Transportation solutions will vary depending on how far a newcomer will have to travel for work. For newcomers to access employment in rural areas, all levels of government and private industry will have to come together to create a plan that addresses the transportation barrier. Public transit beyond urban boundaries will be a key component.

Newcomers have indicated that they have a strong interest in utilizing the skills that they have developed before coming to Canada. They are particularly interested in implementing the latest farm technology. All levels of government and private industry must come together to promote this opportunity to newcomers, when it is available. Agricultural employers are encouraged to include this opportunity in their job postings.

Many newcomers believe that the only jobs available in agriculture are seasonal and that there are only limited opportunities for advancement. Agricultural employers are encouraged to highlight these opportunities in their job postings, as well.

Conclusion

There are only limited supports available to connect newcomers and agricultural employers. Employment Service Providers should have the means of assisting newcomers, including by offering training incentives. Newcomers are interested in training opportunities that include certificates, but nothing currently exists to prepare them for a career in agriculture. A pre-apprenticeship program in agriculture with hands-on experience would help fill this gap.

Newcomers have expressed interest in profit sharing of the business and one day being able to purchase the business. This is difficult in agriculture because land and equipment are expensive. Allowing for smaller farms and n Farm Diversified Use will help to lower this barrier.

And finally, a welcoming community will have better success at attracting and retaining newcomers to the area. There is much work left to be done on equity, diversity and inclusion in rural communities. All levels of government, private industry and members of the community will have to come together to create and implement a local plan that addresses this issue. The first step will be to identify leader groups and provide the supports needed to begin the planning process.



Recommendations

TRANSPORTATION:

- Provide supports for attaining a driver's license – driving is an important skill for both getting to work on a farm and for using the farm equipment
- Support employers in creating shared transportation networks to get workers to rural job sites

TECHNOLOGY:

- Encourage employers to implement technology in their operations – droning, automation, greenhouse growing, sustainability initiatives – this is something that would motivate newcomers to work in agriculture

CAREERS:

- Work to combat the stigmatism around working in agriculture – most newcomers are not interested in working in agriculture, but they are also not aware of the opportunities
- Work to highlight the career opportunities and career progressions in agriculture
- Fund Employment Ontario service providers to support newcomers in job search and placements to assist with training
- Work with government officials to bring candidates with Agriculture skills and desire to work in the Agri Food Industry

ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

- Provide increased supports around farm ownership for newcomers – grants and loans
- Provide tax breaks for employers who engage in profit sharing
- Allow farmers to segment their farms in order to encourage micro-farming opportunities

Recommendations

LANGUAGE:

- Offer supports to employers who offer language training – make the connection to adult education and local literacy programming
- Encourage employers to highlight the languages spoken by existing staff in job postings – older workers indicated that they wanted to work with people who speak the same language

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:

- Create training opportunities for farm specific skills – newcomers want certifications for the skills they are building – something akin to a pre-apprenticeship program for agriculture

PROMOTE LIVING IN A RURAL COMMUNITY:

- People who come from a rural community are more likely to want to settle in a rural community
- Highlight the aspects of living in a rural community that newcomers have identified are important to them
- Work with rural communities to find a solution to get high speed internet into smaller rural areas to entice demographic looking for slower pace but can still be connected.
- Develop a community plan around Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, implement it and market it