



National Farmers Union – Ontario NEWSLETTER

*Strong Communities.
Sound Policies.
Sustainable Farms.*

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Training and retaining agricultural labour

Bringing healthy food from farm to table requires almost 80,000 skilled primary agricultural workers across Ontario.

Even before the havoc caused in our food chains by the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario farmers faced ongoing difficulties in attracting and retaining labour. According to the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC), 4,400 farm jobs in the province were left unfilled in 2017. The CAHRC estimates a deficit of as many as 47,300 farm workers in Ontario by 2029.

The National Farmers Union – Ontario (NFU-O) is investigating the causes of and solutions to farm labour conditions across the province, including challenges to training and retaining agricultural workers and new farmers. This project was approved through the Ontario Labour Market Partnership (OLMP) and funded through the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

This NFU-O study offers a different perspective to the farm labour debate. To date, research on farm labour shortages has been tailored to large corporate agribusiness. There is little understanding among policy-makers or among Ontario consumers of the often-unique labour issues on small and medium-sized family farms. Similarly, among the solutions to agricultural labour shortages, little has been proposed to meet staffing demands while ensuring commitments to sustainable agriculture and fair labour practices.

The voices of Ontario's family farmers deserve to be heard. Whether addressing the problems of maintaining a healthy and skilled workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic or advocating policy changes to increase the viability and attractiveness of agricultural careers, NFU-O farmers have far more than just food to bring to the table.

By centering the experiences and knowledge of its membership and other valued stakeholders, the NFU-O plans to shed light on the labour crisis on family farms and develop, through community input and engagement, progressive proposals and practical next steps for action by farmers, farm organizations, government agencies, and policy-makers.

As COVID-19 complicates the agricultural labour situation, this NFU-O study will illuminate these upheavals and work closely with the NFU-O membership to address these new challenges – from enhanced health and safety protocols and adjustments in farm product sales and

distribution, to recruiting, training, and retaining qualified staff while physical distancing measures are in place.

This project will include a mix of consultation, research, and stakeholder engagement. In April, the NFU-O released an on-line survey for all farm operators, no matter which farm organization they belong to. Interviews with members and key stakeholders are underway and on-line focus groups are in the planning stages. Ongoing analysis will be published on a rolling basis and a final report with recommendations for high-priority actions and policy changes will be released by early 2021.

If you have any questions, or would like to know more about how you can contribute to this study, please contact Dave Thompson at david@nfontario.ca.

The views expressed in this study are those of the NFU-O and do not necessarily reflect those of the province.

Coming Events

PLEASE NOTE: All in-person meetings have been cancelled including Local 316's Annual Spring Fling. See the NFU-O's weekly e-news for updates on local conference calls and on-line meetings.

2020 NFU-O Farm Labour Survey

Have farm labour shortages affected your ability to bring food to Ontario tables?

How is COVID-19 impacting your staffing needs in 2020?

Let's work together to find sustainable solutions to farm labour issues in Ontario.

NFU-O farm owners and operators, we want to hear from you!



Follow the link below to complete a short survey.
Fill it out for a chance to win a surprise prize!

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/farmlabour>

If you have questions about the survey, please contact Dave Thompson at david@nfontario.ca



A subscription to The Rural Voice is one of the benefits of being an NFU-O member