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NEWS RELEASE

Canadian Mushroom Growers' Association – RELEASE October 10, 2019

MUSHROOM FARMS FACE LABOUR CRISIS – LET FOREIGN WORKERS STAY

Give Rural Canada A Chance: Solutions for Canadian Agriculture's Labour Shortage

Guelph, ON, Canadian Mushroom Growers' Association Canada (CMGA) -- “We need more people working in agriculture in rural Canada,” says Ryan Koeslag, Executive Vice President, Canadian Mushroom Growers' Association. “The labour shortage for Canadian agriculture is massive and growing. Mushroom farms have a 20 per cent job vacancy rate. To grow food in rural Canada, we need to fill this labour gap, so we would like to see agriculture recognized as a priority in Canada's immigration and Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP).”

According to the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC), there are 16,500 job vacancies on Canadian farms which is causing \$2.9 billion in lost sales to the Canadian economy. The sector's labour gap will nearly double over the next 10 years, reaching 123,000 people by 2029. For mushrooms, the same labour survey released in June 2019, showed a job vacancy rate approaching 20 per cent.



To Learn More watch our [VIDEO](#) & read our Election 2019 [REPORT](#)

Today, the CMGA is releasing an election package entitled, [Give Rural Canada a Chance: Solutions for Canadian Agriculture's Labour Shortage](#). The [video](#) and [report](#) are being distributed to all political parties and we are asking them to “Give Rural Canada a Chance” by making economic immigration and access to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program a priority for farmers in rural Canada. No matter who is elected, food **made in Canada** needs to be prioritized, and the farm labour crisis will need to be addressed. The report asks, “is Canada's economic immigration policy contributing to the agri-food labour crisis?” The video includes interviews with Temporary Foreign Workers, supervisors, managers and farmers.

The Canadian agriculture supply chain is contributing \$111 billion per year to our economy, over six per cent of Canada's GDP. That's \$304 million per day, creating 2.3 million jobs. The mushroom sector contributes close to \$1 billion a year to the economy. Growth and export potential for mushrooms is phenomenal, increasing by \$50 million last year alone.

“Work in rural Canada has value. Hard work on the farm has value,” says Koeslag. “The workers employed through the TFWP have the same rights and wages as Canadians. We believe international farm workers have value and are part of our Canadian agriculture workforce. When Canadians don't apply for these year-round farm jobs, we want these workers who are interested in agriculture, who have a job from day one of arrival, to have a chance to stay and immigrate. We want them to be allowed to build their dreams in Canada.”



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There are many issues creating obstacles affecting a clear pathway to permanent residency (PR) in rural Canada for these international farm workers. Currently, there are over 900 international workers employed on mushroom farms, according to a recent survey, and approximately 300 across Canada who would be able to qualify with new immigration criteria. There is a fundamental misalignment and misunderstanding of the skills, experience, and human capital required on the farm and in rural Canada.

Removing immigration obstacles would mean that farms that are under-staffed would be able to normalize hours of work; keep up with current orders; and allow farmers to grow more food for Canada and the world. It would allow the farms to recruit people interested in agriculture, helping farms keep trained staff, filling rural Canada with people employed in good jobs with competitive wages, actively working and contributing to the community.

These 5 recommendations being proposed would *allow* for a clear pathway to Canadian citizenship for international farm workers. "Following the Federal Election in 2019, the CMGA recommends that the Government of Canada move forward quickly to adopt and immediately implement the following five simple recommendations that would allow a clear pathway to PR for farm workers," says Koeslag.

"Much research has been conducted. It is time to move forward with action. There is no risk in letting these mushroom farm workers stay and immigrate. Give these workers a chance so local made in Canada food has a chance."

Recommendations: *Create a clear pathway to PR for farm and food workers.*

1. Prioritize agriculture and agri-food by taking it out of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and creating an **Agri-Food Workforce Program** for Agricultural stream and primary processing, with the mandate to decrease Canada's agricultural labour shortage.
2. Support agriculture career outreach in Canada and abroad, and support training strategies for all skill levels from farmers, managers, supervisors, and entry level to experienced workers.
3. Government of Canada to partner with farm and food businesses on new labour mobility and immigration programs that work in rural Canada, recognizing the employer's important role in supporting settlement in rural Canada.
4. Government to work collaboratively with active workers in the program and farm employers using the program to develop new measures that improve worker protections within the TFWP.
5. Create a **clear pathway to permanent residency (PR)** by making farm workers' access to immigration programs a priority.

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Give Rural Canada a Chance



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ABOUT MUSHROOMS CANADA

Mushrooms Canada was founded in 1955 as a voluntary, non-profit organization whose members are dedicated to the production and marketing of fresh mushrooms in Canada. Membership includes mushroom growers, processors, spawn makers, suppliers, scientists and other allied industries.

BACKGROUND

The Canadian mushroom sector contributes over \$900 million to the Canadian economy each year with tremendous opportunity for growth. Canadian mushroom exports increased \$50 million between 2018 to 2019.

Competitive wages offered on mushroom farms and extensive recruitment efforts are documented in many research reports. Please review our [REPORT Election 2019 Give Rural Canada a Chance](#) that includes this information:

- Entry to Experience Harvester: \$Min to \$29/hr →extensive training offered at entry level phase
- Supervisor: \$35,000/yr to \$80,000 /yr
- Managers: \$42,500-\$171,000/yr

+ Mushroom farms offer benefit packages