

OFA – Policy Advisory Council (PAC) Orientation Meeting

March 8, 2022

Virtual via Zoom

Welcome

Peggy Brekveld, President welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced co-host Julie Danen from the PAC Steering Committee.

OFA Update

Peggy Brekveld provided updates on the topics below:

Pre-Budget Priorities

OFA Executive and Directors have been meeting with political staff on OFA provincial pre-budget priorities at several ministries, including OMAFRA, Environment, Energy, Consumer & Government Services, and most recently Treasury Board. Topics discussed include:

1. Investment needs in infrastructure and social infrastructure in rural Ontario (roads, bridges, drainage, natural gas, affordable energy, schools, healthcare)
2. Promote & protect Ontario food supply (promote local food procurement)
3. Key role for farmers/agriculture in climate change (recognize efforts Environmental Goods and Services & incentivize Best Management Practices)
4. Pandemic & supply chain interruption (Risk Management Program/Enhanced Workplace Protection)

Ontario Food Summit

Last week several OFA Directors were in Ottawa and participated in the Ontario Food Summit hosted by Premier Ford.

Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) Annual General Meeting

Several OFA Directors attended CFA's in-person Annual General Meeting last week. Peggy commented that it was a great opportunity to network with provincial and national farm groups from across the country, share ideas, concerns, messages, connect with politicians and raise key issues and priorities for Ontario agriculture. Directors had the opportunity to speak with Senator

Rob Black, MP David Epp and MP Francis Drouin. Also, engaged staff for Environment Minister Guilbeault regarding carbon tax and regulations advocating the following:

1. Critical importance to ensure Ontario and Canadian farmers remain competitive on world stage
- 2) Advocate for investment in research for clean technologies and innovation to advance the agriculture sector
- 3) Encourage support to accelerate implementation of new technologies with a balance on environment and profitability

Responding to Grassroot Concerns:

1. Facilitated a webinar with record participation (close to 300 attendees) to share information and best practices for OFA members around insurance renewal, what to look for, how to protect your assets, brought forward by Leeds as a resolution.
2. Investigating opportunities to partner with others around slow-moving vehicle awareness and road safety – a resolution brought forward by the Northern Caucus
3. Co-hosting webinars with Workplace Safety Prevention Services – around farm safety – an issue raised this month by Lambton County by way of a resolution

OFA Provincial Election Campaign Material

Peggy commented that behind the scenes the OFA team is working hard to put together messaging for the June 2 provincial election. A one pager will be sent out to counties shortly to assist with messaging when speaking to local candidates.

Ag Careers & Feeding Your Future

Kathryn Doan, Director, AgCareers.com

Kathryn gave an overview of recruitment trends in the agriculture industry stating that Ag careers.com's focus is on talent on a global look but local approach. Statistics show that traditionally 75% of applicants to agriculture jobs had an agriculture background. Kathryn stresses that more people with a wide range of education and skills are required to feed our future. Need to recruit more non agriculture people to the sector.

Careers in agriculture have changed, jobs are highly technical and modern, yet the industry still portrays itself to the public as the image of an old farm/barn image. This does not make agriculture careers appear attractive.

Kathryn addressed how is the agriculture industry competing for talent. In a survey with job seekers, it was surprising to find that salary was number 4 on the list. Most important was safety in the workplace, better benefits and job growth potential.

Agriculture has a stigma of 80–90-hour, seven days a week work. To make the jobs more attractive ideas include, make the job shared amongst 3 people, offer a compressed work week, be flexible so employees can take time off to attend to family needs or appointments.

AgCareers.com benchmarks salaries of 1000's of positions every year, looking at job skills and benefits. Recognizing that agriculture competes directly with the auto sector. Is the agriculture industry competitive? Salary trends will change and continue, competition for talent will continue,

AgCareers.com now offers a concierge service. Kathryn explained that they developed this to help farmers with writing job descriptions, generally not a skill of farmers. Kathryn showed examples of what a poorly written and professionally written job description look like. She stressed how important quality messaging is to the industry to attract candidates with good skills.

Michelle deNijs, Communications Specialist, Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Michelle shared an overview of the Feeding Your Future labor initiative launched in May 2020. The main objective of the program is to address ongoing labour shortage in agriculture. The program offers resources such as job matching, virtual career fairs, webinars and training opportunities.

Feeding your Future has hosted 23 virtual career fairs and 23 webinars attracting 1000's of job seekers and hundreds of employers. March 29 is the next scheduled virtual career fair and March 24 is the next employer focused webinar. For more information:

www.feedingyourfuture.ca/career-fair
www.feedingyourfuture.ca/webinars

Michelle commented that some webinar recordings are directed to employers to improve employee training. <https://feedingyourfuture.ca/webinars/past-webinars/>

Michelle explained the Ontario Ag Worker Training Certificate that is offered through Feeding Your Future. The certificate is for individuals in Ontario that are new to the agriculture industry or need a refresher course. The program updated content and added two new modules for a total of nine. Added to the certificate are modules on mental wellness and introduction to small hand tools. All modules must be completed to obtain the certificate.

Question: Is there an age limit to complete the Certificate?
No, there is no age limit. In fact, high school aged is ideal to complete the certificate to encourage agriculture as a career choice

Breakout Session #1

Attendees were divided into eight breakout rooms and asked to consider the following questions:

1. Who is managing to find, keep and retain labour within farms/businesses and organizations?
2. Based on what we know from AgCareers and Feeding Your Future's work, what additional training, outreach, support is needed for farm employers and employees?
3. What role does technology play? In changing labour-intensive jobs? In how we promote our sectors job opportunities? In the training required for work in the farm sector?
4. What is the 'ideal' worker for these job vacancies, and why aren't they applying?
5. What types of jobs are going unfilled? What do they have in common?

Responses are recorded in a separate document.

How Labour Challenges Shape the Future of Agriculture in Ontario

Debra Hauer Manager Agri LMI, Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC)

Debra showed statistics highlighting that the labour gap increased to 30% in 2018 from 17% in 2008. It was estimated that in 2018 there were 4400 jobs in agriculture unfilled despite more foreign workers. This is increasingly worrying given labour shortages will limit the sectors future growth and expansion plans.

Debra shared results of a 2021 survey looking at the impacts of Covid on farm operations. The survey revealed the top three impacts as excessive stress, production delays and lost sales/revenues. 85% of farm operations saw an increase in operating costs due to Covid of approximately 9.3%.

PAC shared in the chat similar Covid experiences including stress, profitability, short staffed, burn out, delayed/cancelled expansion, finding the right people when folks not wanting to work out of the home or commute, housing shortage and no applicants for job postings.

CAHRC in partnership with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and Food & Beverage Canada have produced a draft National Workforce Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Food & Beverage Manufacturers. Debra stressed that labour shortages are reaching a crisis and urgent action is needed. Doing things, the same will only result in similar results. The plan addresses immediate and systemic labour issues. Debra overviewed the five pillars – Automation & Technology, Immigrations & Foreign Workers, People & Workplace Culture, Perception & Awareness and Skill Development.

Questions:

1. Regarding our labour shortage and increasing dependence on foreign workers. Is this similar with other countries that are like Canada (US, New Zealand), and what strategies are they employing?

Yes, happening in all western countries. Canada better than others as we tend to talk with one voice as an industry. Australia has recognized agriculture in their Immigration. National Workforce Strategy for Agriculture. Bringing people in from other countries. United Kingdom hurting from Brexit. Labour shortages to harvest fruit crops all over Europe an issue

2. Since some agricultural work is seasonal has any work been done for partnering with other industries to offer year-round work with a package of different employers to produce one full time job?

That has been discussed, tricky to find an industry where work is abundant in the winter. Tourism and forestry get going in summer but not winter. It has happened on an individual or community basis but not large scale.

3. What kinds of things do Entrepreneurial individuals looking for labour not understand about managing employees?

Focused on building their business, entrepreneurs struggle to understand that people do not have the same mindset. 110% into your business. Owners need to think about employees to have a work life balance. Opportunity to give a weekend off or early off on Friday. If you want an employee to move to your community, considerations for school, employment for spouse, and internet access are all important.

4. Are there resources for 'employer readiness' when you are a smaller-scale farmer with less than ten employees?

*CAHRC has an online resource toolkit – available for a yearly subscription.
<https://hrtoolkit.cahrc-ccrha.ca>*

Breakout Session #2

Attendees were divided into eight breakout rooms and asked to consider the following questions:

1. When did this lack of labor start to become an issue, and wherein Ontario is it more pronounced?

2. Based on the information from CAHRC, what gaps could be filled, what additional information, promotion, tools would support farmer & farm businesses?
3. What incentives may attract Canadian labor? Ownership options? Benefits? Career opportunities? Lifestyle?
4. What policy changes do we need to see to address the shortage of labor in Ontario agriculture? Housing? Immigration? Transportation?
5. What other employers or organizations are attracting and keeping employees? How? What can Ag learn from this?
6. What is the 'ideal' worker for these job vacancies, and why aren't they applying?
7. What types of jobs are going unfilled? What do they have in common?
8. When did this lack of labor start to become an issue, and where in Ontario is it more pronounced?

Responses are recorded in a separate document.

Closing Remarks

Peggy thanked staff, PAC Steering Committee, and co-host Julie Danen for pulling the meeting together.

Reminder that the Board of Directors has committed to doing a review of PAC in 2022. March 10 and 18 the Board of Directors is hosting roundtable discussions. PAC were encouraged to attend one of the meetings.

Adjournment