

BUILDING AGRICULTURE WORKFORCE CAPACITY



FEBRUARY - 2024

COMPLETED FOR:

VERGE
Economic Development



**CYPRESS
COUNTY
FCSS**

PREPARED BY:



Elan Buan
Consultant



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PROJECT CONTACTS

Elan Buan: Project Consultant, Schollie Research & Consulting

Theresa Hardiker: Executive Director, VERGE Economic Development

Corrina Roth-Beacome: Executive Director, Forty Mile FCSS

Kim Dalton: Director of Municipal Services & Director of Emergency Management Cypress County



FUNDING LABOUR MARKET DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT

The Province of Alberta in Partnership with the Government of Canada to provide employment support programs and services.

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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

VERGE Economic Development, a partnership of the County of Forty Mile, Town of Bow Island, and Cypress County, is located in rural Southeast Alberta where agriculture is the dominant industry. The organization requested a **Labour Market Needs Assessment** to identify barriers to growth, training needs, as well as employment opportunities within the agriculture industry focusing primarily on crops and animals with food processing as part of their Building Agricultural Workforce Capacity (BAWC) project.



THE BUILDING AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE CAPACITY (BAWC) PROJECT IS FOCUSED ON THE FOLLOWING PIECES:

- a. attracting labour to the agricultural sector
- b. helping agriculture employers connect with workers
- c. identifying labour shortages as a barrier to growth.

METHODOLOGY

Both a workforce survey and an employer survey were conducted to gain feedback from the region. Additionally, a number of targeted interviews were completed with employers and other organizations in the region. Data from Statistics Canada's 2021 Census of Population and 2021 Census of Agriculture were compiled to better understand the region. Other publications and reports were reviewed to better understand labour market trends. In particular, data compiled by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council (CAHRC) were utilized.

BARRIERS TO GROWTH

The main barriers to growth identified include:

- A shrinking pool of applicants due to a large portion of the workforce retiring and leaving the workforce (baby boomers), which was sped up by the COVID-19 pandemic. The population is not growing. The population in the VERGE Economic Development region declined by 1.7% between 2016 and 2021.
- A shortage of workforce housing in rural communities. There are a number of factors contributing to this issue, but it has been exacerbated by the high number of retirees who have left the workforce, but not necessarily moved out of their workforce housing. It is hard to attract and retain people to rural communities when there is nowhere for them to live.
- Access to childcare. Childcare availability is important for freeing up young families (mostly moms) for employment.
- A seasonal workforce in the agricultural industry as well as for both the counties and St. Mary River Irrigation District (SMRID).

Employers in the region are fortunate in that they can draw workers from larger centres like Medicine Hat, Taber, and Lethbridge, but this often results in increased costs for employers who either need to provide vehicles for workers to commute, and/or fuel subsidies.

TRAINING NEEDS

- Anecdotally, it was acknowledged that the region has lower levels of literacy. Twenty percent of the population aged 25 to 64 years old has not completed a high school diploma or equivalency in the VERGE Economic Development region, compared to 10% provincially.
- Class 1 drivers licenses were most frequently mentioned as being in-demand in the region, especially for agricultural workers. The current mandatory entry level training (MELT) framework presents a substantial cost to agriculture producers both in training costs and insurance.
- Medicine Hat College has developed some non-credit training programs in conjunction with the needs of agricultural producers. They are going to pilot these programs in the new year.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Most primary agriculture operations are looking for general farm workers or farm hands. There is also a need for agriculture managers as many operators are approaching retirement.

Wholesale agricultural dealerships in rural communities are struggling to find qualified service technicians (especially journeyman). There is not a sufficient volume of candidates for rural communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS



- a. **Help increase awareness for employers and producers regarding programs and grants for Class 1 drivers licenses.** Mandatory entry level training (MELT) training is relatively expensive. There are a number of programs and grants to help subsidize the cost. Some employers may have a difficult time figuring out how to apply online, or find the process onerous or frustrating. Consequently, it is recommended that VERGE Economic Development partner with other organizations like Safety Buzz Campus, agricultural associations, and Chambers of Commerce or business associations to share and disseminate this information. Additionally, there may be opportunities to connect employers and producers with someone who would help walk them through the intake process similar to a passport clinic.



- b. **Help share and disseminate access to other information with agriculture producers.** There are numerous organizations and programs that are trying to help fill some of the gaps that exist in the agriculture industry (and other industries such as trades). However, given that agriculture (and most businesses in rural areas) is primarily made up of several small and medium enterprises, employers are not always well connected to the variety of programs and services available. VERGE Economic Development can collaborate with their County partners via their Agricultural Service Boards and agricultural fieldman, other agricultural associations, and Chambers of Commerce or business associations to share and disseminate information about these programs.



- c. **Help employers to explore non-traditional sources of labour.** As the pool of applicants shrinks, employers are increasingly looking toward non-traditional sources of labour like people with disabilities, individuals with criminal backgrounds, immigrants and international students, and economically disadvantaged individuals. Employers also face some barriers in terms of fear of the unknown, and false perceptions based on their own lack of information.



d. **Help employers seek creative solutions for seasonal workers.** There may be some opportunities that employers could explore to help offset this seasonal workforce challenge. There may be some pools of labour well suited to seasonal work. There may be training opportunities that could be completed in the off-season. As more and more employers are seeking creative solutions to address workforce challenges, bringing a group of employers into the same room to talk about their labour needs may bring about some creative solutions. Perhaps a manufacturer, construction company, or courier company would ramp up production during winter months with temporary seasonal workers whose skills transfer over.



e. **Share opportunities regarding agriculture with youth.** As fewer youth come from rural and from farming backgrounds, there is a growing disconnect between consumers and where food comes from based on a lack of access and understanding of modern agriculture. There are already a number of organizations doing good work in this area and the Irvine Agricultural Discovery Center is really paving the way for engagement with junior high aged youth. More can be done to advocate to youth the great opportunities that exist in the agriculture industry along with the career development opportunities available in rural communities.



f. **Continue to help communities address shortages in workforce housing and childcare.** A shortage of workforce housing confounds labour force shortages in rural areas. If there is nowhere for people to live, it is hard to attract them to a community. Addressing this gap via a housing strategy and plan can help to alleviate this issue.



g. **Change the narrative.** For generations, the narrative has been that young people need to leave rural areas to find better job opportunities. However, this narrative is no longer accurate. Migration patterns and slowing birth rates have left fewer people to fill a growing number of job vacancies. People will migrate to rural communities for 1) a simpler life, 2) safety and security, 3) affordable housing, 4) outdoor recreation and 5) quality schools.¹ With the exception of the housing piece, which has been addressed above, rural communities in the VERGE Economic Development Region can offer these things.



¹<https://extension.umn.edu/economic-development/rural-brain-gain-migration>

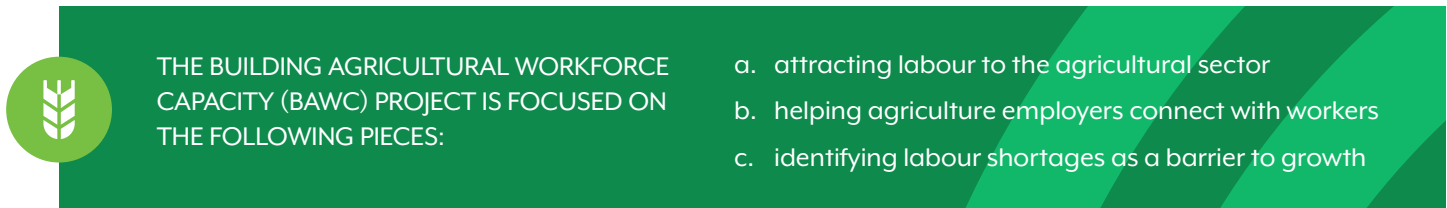
B. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

B.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2019, the Business Retention and Expansion Workforce Development (BREWD) report was completed in Southeastern Alberta. The project which encompassed the VERGE Economic Development region, emphasized a shortage of labour within the agriculture section in rural Southeast Alberta. Recommendations from the project included the following themes:

- Keeping youth and young families in rural Alberta and how to expand their experience
- Expanding soft skills training programs that would address skills gaps within the agriculture sector
- Addressing retention and training programs
- Succession planning opportunities to fill the labour shortage within rural Alberta.

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B.2 METHODOLOGY

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Two online surveys were hosted at VERGE Economic Development's website to gain some stakeholder feedback. One survey was targeted at the regional workforce and the other was targeted at regional employers.

Seventy-two (72) responses were submitted on the workforce experience survey and 27 responses were received on the employer survey.

Additionally, targeted interviews were conducted with regional employers and other regional service providers and organizations to gain further insight into regional trends and challenges.

Interviews were conducted in-person (the first week of October 2023) or via telephone / video-conference throughout the fall.

Detailed survey results were provided in a separate document.

Approximately 20 interviews were completed with regional employers. Additional interviews were completed with service providers and training providers such as the Medicine Hat Chamber of Commerce, the Medicine Hat Local Immigration Partnership, FCSS, REDIWorks, Safety Buzz Campus, Medicine Hat College, the local school division, the Irvine Agricultural Discovery Center, CAREERS – the Next Generation, and the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC).

A regional demographic profile utilizing Statistics Canada data was developed to better understand actual population, labour force, education, employment, industry and occupation of the region. The 2021 Census of Agriculture was also reviewed to get a better understanding of the agriculture industry in Census Division No. 1 which includes both Cypress County and the County of Forty Mile.

Some analysis was conducted using Vicinity Jobs to look at real time labour market information. Vicinity Jobs collects data from a variety of websites and job boards (for example, Indeed and Job Bank). Given the small population of the municipalities within the study area, and the fact that not all jobs are posted using websites and online job boards, only a portion of this data was captured.

Other publications and reports were reviewed to better understand labour market trends. In particular, data compiled by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council – Conseil Canadien pour les Ressources Humaines en Agriculture (CAHRC-CCRHA) hereby referenced using its English acronym, CAHRC – was utilized.

C. AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE

C.1 INDUSTRY TRENDS

Agriculture has some unique workforce challenges including:

- **Rural:** Employment opportunities are mostly located in rural areas making it difficult for employers to access and attract workers.
- **Seasonality:** There will always be a seasonal component to agriculture making it unable to provide full-time permanent jobs.

New labour market data from the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) reveals that on-farm agriculture businesses lost an estimated \$3.5 billion in sales in 2022 because they didn't have the workers they needed. The research, conducted by the Conference Board of Canada on behalf of CAHRC, found the sector has an above-average vacancy rate of 7.4%, with two in five employers saying they couldn't find the workers they needed.²

Agriculture in Canada, including farm businesses, support services, and agricultural wholesalers, had a workforce of 420,000 in 2022, of which 17% were foreign workers (including workers from the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program). This is an increase of more than 30% since 2017.

RBC Thought Leadership released a report in 2019 titled "Farmer 4.0 - How the coming skills revolution can transform agriculture." In it, they noted the following:³

- Canada faces a skills and labour crisis in agriculture, with a projected domestic shortage of 123,000 workers within a decade.
- One-quarter of Canada's farmers will be 65 or older by 2025. and over the next decade 37% of the agricultural workforce will be set to retire. Moreover, Canadian youth are not looking to replace them, with 600 fewer young people entering the sector every year. Just look at any population map to see the challenge. Canada's cities have grown by more than 50% over the last three decades, to 25 million; our rural population has stayed flat at 6 million. That's the quantity challenge. We'll need a shift in quality, too.
- Canada could gain \$11 billion in annual GDP by 2030 by closing the agriculture labour gap and accelerating investment in technology.

² <https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/cahrc/news-releases/cahrc-release-research-showing-workforce-vacancies-agriculturecame-cost-35>

³ RBC Thought Leadership. "Farmer 4.0-How the coming skills revolution can transform agriculture."

While the report raises concerns, it also identifies some positive findings. For example,

- The number of students in agriculture programs has jumped 29% in the past decade — a faster pace than the 21% growth across all programs.
- Six Canadian universities rank in the top 100 agriculture and forestry programs globally.
- Post-secondary institutions across Canada are implementing innovative programs to address the emerging needs in agriculture.

The report also notes there is room for improvement:

- Despite higher-than-average growth in post-secondary agriculture programs, 600 fewer young people are starting careers in agriculture each year
- Women account for only 28% of farm operators
- Immigrants represent 1 in 14 of the agricultural population, compared with 1 in 5 of all Canadians
- Only 1.9% of farm operators are Indigenous, despite nearly 9 million acres of territorial land

Furthermore, technology promises to open agriculture opportunities to non-traditional sources of talent. Automation will also help to make these jobs more accessible by reducing physical demands and creating a more “normal” work arrangement. However, a tech-heavy farm sector will still have to compete with other sectors for this talent. RBC Thought Leadership notes that a fourth agricultural revolution is underway. This revolution of agricultural technology is “all about data.” Consequently, Canada needs to adopt a new mix of farm skills that is more data-focused, innovation-minded and diverse.

The McKinsey Center for Advanced Connectivity and Agriculture Practice also recognizes that demand for food is growing at the same time as the supply side faces constraints in land and farming inputs. Agriculture must embrace a digital transformation enabled by connectivity to address these forces.⁴ Digital tools are also being incorporated in order to increase productivity.

New technologies can upgrade decision making, allowing better risk and variability management to optimize yields and improve economics. They may also enhance the well-being of livestock, addressing the growing concerns over animal welfare. Enhanced connectivity in agriculture could add more than \$500 billion to global gross domestic product, a critical productivity improvement of 7 to 9 percent for the industry.

⁴ Goedde, Lutz, Joshua Katz, Alexandre Menard, and Julien Revellat. “Agriculture’s connected future: How technology can yield new growth.” McKinsey & Company. McKinsey Center for Advanced Connectivity and Agriculture Practice. October 2020.

C.2 PROVINCIAL TRENDS

According to the CAHRC's forecast on "How Labour Challenges Will Shape the Future of Agriculture in Alberta: Agriculture Forecast to 2029," Alberta's agriculture sector faced a costly labour gap in 2018, and that gap is expected to widen over the next decade.



BASED ON THE CAHRC'S 2018 SURVEY OF THE PROVINCE'S AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS:

48%

could not find enough workers

56%

of employers who experienced labour shortages lost sales as a result

23%

reported zero Canadian job applicants for job postings

PROVINCIAL OVERVIEW

- Alberta is home to the third-largest agriculture sector in Canada, employing 16% of Canada's agricultural workforce (54,500 people in 2017).
- The province employs 34% of the nation's beef workers, 20% of Canada's grain and oilseed workers and 17% of its swine workers.
- The beef industry employs 28% of the province's agricultural workers, followed by grain and oilseed at 14% and greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture at 9%.
- Alberta's agriculture sector has a low reliance on foreign workers. Only 4.3% of the province's workforce is foreign workers. Of those more than half work in the greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture industry which is typically quite seasonal and labour intensive.
- In 2017, the province was unable to find enough workers; 2,800 jobs went unfilled as a result of labour shortages. Those shortages resulted in production losses and delays, as well as \$281 million in lost sales.
- By 2029, the province will have 19,600 more jobs than the domestic labour force can fill.
- Alberta's key agriculture industries are all predicted to have strong productivity and a growing demand for labour.
- The province's domestic labour supply is predicted to shrink during that time, which will more than quadruple the labour gap (increase from 4,400 to 19,600). It is anticipated to widen by 13.4% per year.
- The industry will have the most trouble filling managers in agriculture positions - which includes both owner-operators and hired managers - and general farm worker positions.
- By 2029, there will be 8,000 general farm worker jobs and 5,500 managers in agriculture jobs in excess of the available domestic labour pool.

C.3 CENSUS DIVISION NO. 1

Agriculture in the VERGE Economic Region is relatively diverse in that it contains a number of subsectors including:

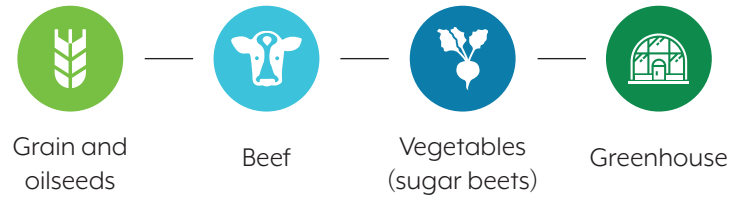


TABLE 1: NUMBER OF FARMS BY NAICS FOR CENSUS DIVISION NO. 1

North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)	Number of Farms Reporting
Total number of farms	1,332
Oilseed and grain farming	518
Cattle ranching and farming (99% Beef)	533
Other crop farming (e.g. Hay, miscellaneous)	151
Greenhouse, nursery and floriculture production	29
Vegetable and melon farming	13

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Agriculture.

Additionally, there are some hog and pig operations, and other animal production in the region. Agriculture production in the region is supported by the St. Mary River Irrigation District (SMRID). Appendix A shows some of the top field crops and hay by acres and greenhouse square footage in Census Division No. 1.

According to the 2021 Census of Agriculture, there are 1,332 farms in the division. Farm operators in the Census Division No. 1 are a little bit younger than the province as a whole.

TABLE 2: FARMS ACCORDING TO THE NUMBER OF OPERATORS REPORTED

Farms according to the number of operators reported	Census Division No. 1	Alberta
Total number of farms	1,332	n/a
Total number of farm operators	1,840	n/a
Male	70%	68%
Female	30%	48%
Age - under 35 years	9%	9%
Age - 35 to 54 years	32%	29%
Age - 55 years and over	59%	62%
Age - average	55.3	56.5
Age - median	57	58

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Agriculture.

The 2021 Census of Agriculture reports that there were 1,421 full-time workers year-round, 239 part-time workers year-round, and 421 seasonal or temporary workers in Census Division No. 1.

TABLE 3: PAID AGRICULTURAL WORKERS FOR CENSUS DIVISION NO. 1

Paid agricultural workers	Unit of measure	Census Division No.1
Full-time workers (year-round)	Number of farms reporting	238
	Number	1421
Part-time workers (year-round)	Number of farms reporting	76
	Number	239
Seasonal or temporary workers	Number of farms reporting	92
	Number	421
Agricultural workers, total	Number of farms reporting	285
	Number	2081
Agricultural workers, family members	Number of farms reporting	210
	Number	638

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Agriculture.



A larger proportion of farms in Census Division No. 1 are larger acre farms compared to the provincial average.

TABLE 4: TOTAL FARM AREA DISTRIBUTION

	Census Division No. 1	Alberta
Total number of farms	1,332	41,505
Under 10.00 acres	4%	3%
10.00 to 69.99 acres	6%	9%
70.00 to 129.99 acres	5%	8%
130.00 to 179.99 acres	9%	15%
180.00 to 239.99 acres	3%	3%
240.00 to 399.99 acres	9%	12%
400.00 to 559.99 acres	7%	8%
560.00 to 759.99 acres	6%	7%
760.00 to 1,119.99 acres	6%	8%
1,120.00 to 1,599.99 acres	8%	7%
1,600.00 to 2,239.99 acres	6%	6%
2,240.00 to 2,879.99 acres	6%	4%
2,880.00 to 3,519.99 acres	5%	2%
3,520.00 acres and over	19%	7%

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Agriculture.

The CAHRC produced a series of publications under the “Agriculture Forecast to 2029: How Labour Challenges Will Shape the Future of” various provinces and subsectors of agriculture. The key points from these publications are highlighted in tables in Appendices B to E for the following subsectors:



GRAIN AND OILSEEDS



FIELD FRUIT AND VEGETABLE



BEEF



GREENHOUSE, NURSERY AND FLORICULTURE



Workforce Development is going to play a critical role in growing local economies across Southeast Alberta in the next decade, having a clear understanding of the challenges is the first step. Creating local solutions through a collaboration of Industry, Academia, Government and service providers is vital to creating a vibrant workforce, this report will be foundational as the region moves forward.

Sean Blewett, General Manager, Community Futures Entre-Corp



D. REGIONAL POPULATION

The communities that make up VERGE Economic Development region have a population of 15,320. This population increases to 82,513 when the City of Medicine Hat and Town of Redcliff are included (Census Division No. 1).

TABLE 5: POPULATION 2016 TO 2021 FOR COMMUNITIES IN VERGE ECONOMIC REGION

Community	Population 2021	Population 2016	Population percentage change, 2016 to 2021
Bow Island	2,036	1,983	2.7
Burdett	331	401	-17.5
County of Forty Mile	3,471	3,581	-3.1
Cypress County	7,524	7,662	-1.8
Dunmore	1,088	1,100	-1.1
Foremost	630	541	16.5
Suffield	190	255	-25.5
Walsh	50	60	-16.7
Total	15,320	15,583	-1.7
Census Division No. 1	82,513	82,629	-0.1

Statistics Canada. 2022. Census Profile. 2021 Census.

Overall, the population has been relatively stagnant over the past five years (2016 to 2021). The population for the VERGE Economic Development region declined by 1.7% in this timeframe, and Census Division No. 1 declined by 0.1%. This compares to a growth rate of 4.8% for the province and 5.2% for the country.

Census Division No. 1 has a median age of 41.6. This compares to the provincial median age of 37.6 and the Canadian median age of 41.6. Communities in the County of Forty Mile are younger compared to the rest of Census Division No. 1.

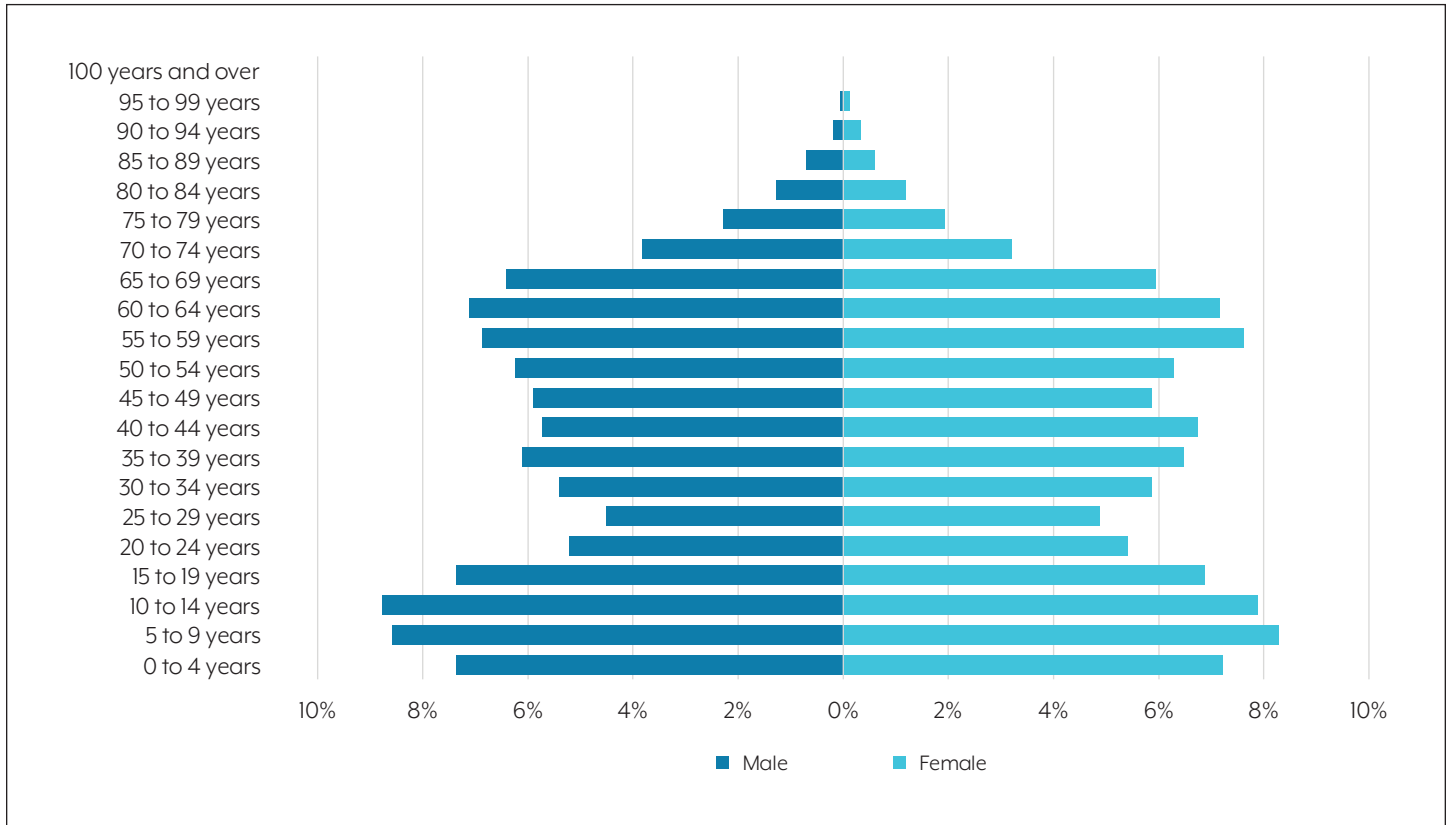
TABLE 6: MEDIAN AGE OF COMMUNITIES IN VERGE ECONOMIC REGION

Community	Median Age
County of Forty Mile	34.5
Bow Island (town)	34.9
Burdett (hamlet)	32.5
Foremost (village)	36.8
Cypress County	40.8
Dunmore	42.4
Redcliff (town)	40.4
Suffield (hamlet)	49.6
Walsh (hamlet)	46.8
Medicine Hat (city)	42.4

Statistics Canada. 2022. Census Profile. 2021 Census.

As demonstrated in the population pyramid below, the Verge Economic Region has a strong proportion of its population under 20.

FIGURE 1: POPULATION PYRAMID FOR VERGE ECONOMIC REGION



The working age population is defined as those aged 15 to 64. The VERGE Economic Region has a smaller proportion of the working age population compared to the province of Alberta (Alberta has one of the smallest dependency ratios across the country), but has a higher proportion of young people, between the ages of 0 and 14.

TABLE 7: WORKING AND DEPENDENCY PROPORTIONS OF POPULATION

Age Profile Snapshot			
Age Group	VERGE Economic Region	Census Division No. 1	Alberta
0-14	24%	18%	19%
15-64	62%	62%	66%
65+	14%	20%	15%

Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

Immigrants

Immigrants make up 13% of the population in the study area according to the 2021 Census of population. Provincially, it is 23%. Twenty-two percent (22%) of these immigrants have been admitted as economic immigrants, and 73% as family-sponsored.

Of those immigrants who have come via the economic admission category, 27% have applied as principal applicants and 73% as secondary applicants. A principal applicant is the lead or primary person in a family who initiates the immigration application. Secondary applicants are immigrants who identified as the married spouse, the common-law or conjugal partner or the dependent of the principal applicant on their application for permanent residence.

TABLE 8: IMMIGRANT ADMISSION CATEGORY AND APPLICANT TYPE

Admission category and applicant type	VERGE Economic Region	Census Division No. 1	Alberta
Economic Immigrants	22%	72%	56%
Principal applicants	27%	39%	41%
Secondary applicants	73%	61%	59%
Immigrants sponsored by family	73%	67%	29%
Refugees	3%	32%	15%
Other	3%	2%	1%

Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

The largest portion of the immigrant population were born in Mexico. This is especially true for the recent immigration⁵ population.

Indigenous

Only 3.5% of the population in the VERGE Economic Development region identify as Indigenous (approximately 490 people). This increases to 4.8% for Census Division No.1 and compares to 6.8% provincially. The majority (78%) of Indigenous identifying people in the VERGE Economic Development region identify as Métis, followed by First Nations (20%).

Visible Minority

The VERGE Economic Development has a relatively small population that are visible minorities.⁶ The largest group of visible minorities are South Asian (approximately 75 persons).

⁵ 'Recent immigrant' refers to an immigrant who first obtained his or her landed immigrant or permanent resident status between January 1, 2016 and May 11, 2021.

⁶ Visible minority refers to whether a person belongs to a visible minority group as defined by the Employment Equity Act and, if so, the visible minority group to which the person belongs. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour". <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?Function=DECI&Id=62026>

E. ANALYSIS OF THE REGIONAL LABOUR SUPPLY

According to Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population, the study area has a population of 9,465 between the ages of 15 and 64 years of which 7,225 are in the labour force. The 15 to 64 year old population increases to 51,395 for Census Division No. 1, which includes the City of Medicine Hat and Town of Redcliff, and 41,035 people are in the labour force.

E.1 EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

A quarter of the workforce in the VERGE Economic region works in the agriculture industry. It is followed by health care and social assistance at 11%, and construction at 10%.

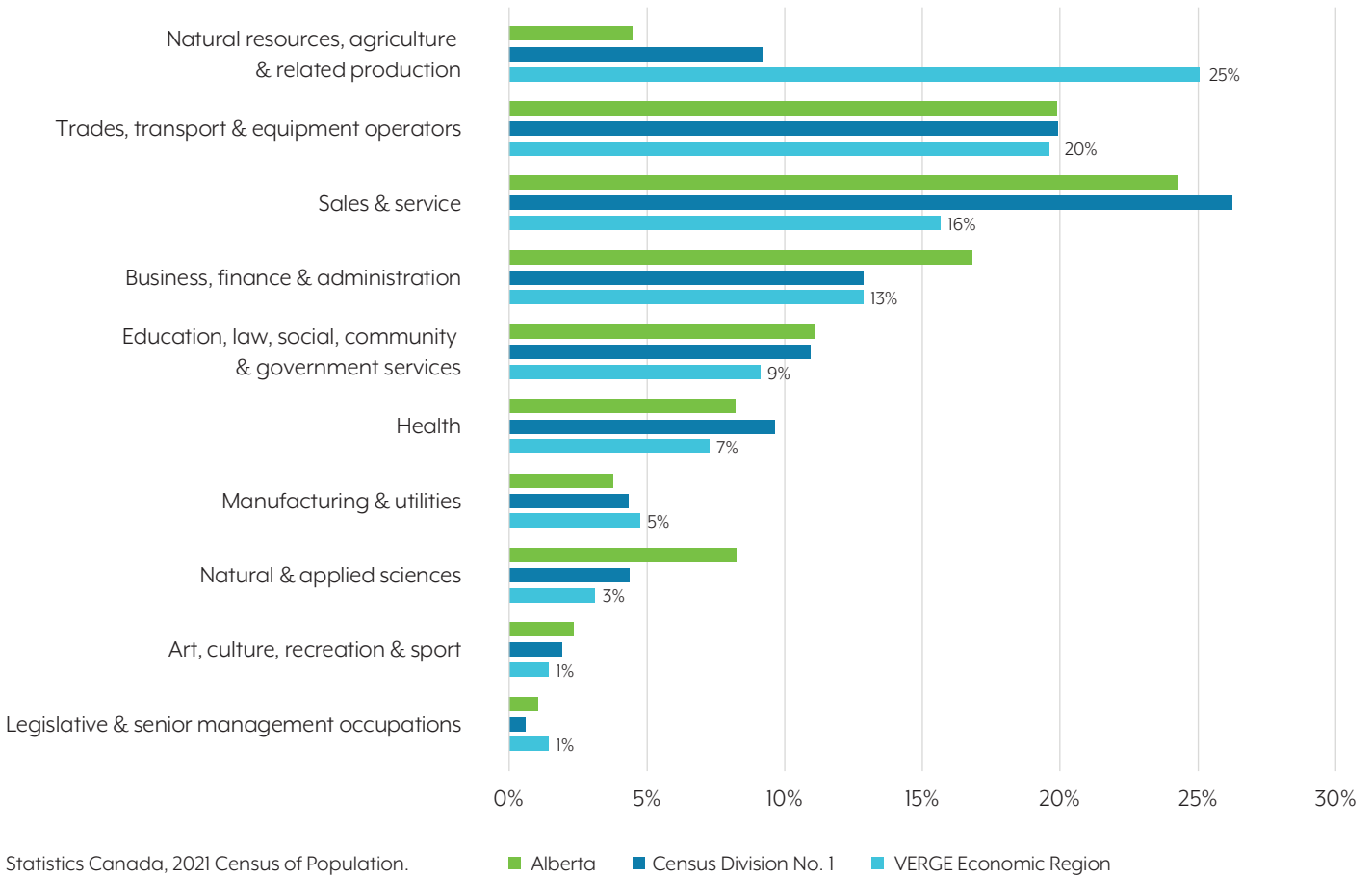
TABLE 9: EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

Industry (2021)	VERGE Economic Region	Census Division No. 1	Province of Alberta	LQ ⁷ Relative to Province
11 Agriculture	24%	6%	3%	8.18
21 Mining, Quarrying, Oil & Gas Extraction	5%	5%	5%	1.05
22 Utilities	0%	1%	1%	0.49
23 Construction	10%	9%	9%	1.02
31-33 Manufacturing	4%	4%	5%	0.77
41 Wholesale Trade	2%	2%	3%	0.73
44-45 Retail Trade	9%	14%	11%	0.78
48-49 Transportation & Warehousing	5%	5%	6%	0.90
51 Information & Cultural Industries	0%	1%	1%	0.11
52 Finance and Insurance	2%	2%	3%	0.51
53 Real Estate	1%	1%	2%	0.48
54 Professional; Scientific, Technical Services	3%	4%	8%	0.32
55 Management of companies and enterprises	0%	0%	0%	0.00
56 Administrative & support; Waste Management & Remediation Services	3%	3%	4%	0.64
61 Education	7%	7%	7%	0.99
62 Health care and social assistance	11%	15%	13%	0.86
71 Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	2%	2%	2%	0.89
72 Accommodation & Food Services	3%	7%	6%	0.45
81 Other Services	5%	5%	5%	1.05
91 Public Administration	6%	7%	5%	1.07

Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

⁷ Location quotients (LQ) identify how local industries stack up with a larger comparison area, in this case, the Province of Alberta. When interpreting the location quotient (LQ), a LQ greater than 1.0 indicates that an area has proportionately more workers than the larger comparison area employed in a specific industry sector. This typically implies that an area is self-sufficient and is producing more of a product or service than is consumed by area residents. The excess is available for export outside the area. As a rule of thumb, a location quotient greater than 1.25 almost certainly identifies exporting industries. On the other hand, a LQ that is significantly less than 1.0 may indicate that the community tends to import the good or service and may present an opportunity to develop businesses in the local area to meet area demand. The applicable rule of thumb is that a location quotient less than 0.75 indicates an importing industry. Those LQs between 0.75 and 1.25 indicate normal distribution of industry within the region.

FIGURE 2: LABOUR FORCE AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER BY INDUSTRY - SECTORS - NORTH AMERICAN INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM (NAICS) 2017 - 25% SAMPLE DATA



E.2 NATIONAL OCCUPATION CLASSIFICATIONS

The largest four-digit National Occupational Classification (NOC) occupations in Census Division No. 1 are outlined in the table below.

Census Division No. 1			
NOC	Occupation Minor group National Occupational Classification (NOC)2021	All classes of workers ⁸	TEER Category
1311	Office administrative assistants -general, legal and medical	855	4
3130	Nursing and allied health professionals	980	2
3310	Assisting occupations in support of health services	1,245	4
4122	Secondary, elementary and kindergarten school teachers	870	2
6002	Retail and wholesale trade managers	1,015	1
6410	Retail salespersons and non-technical wholesale trade sales and account representatives	1,800	5
6510	Cashiers and other sales support occupations	1,555	6
6520	Food support occupations	1,400	6
6531	Cleaners	1,025	3
7330	Transport truck and transit drivers	1,190	4
8002	Managers in agriculture, horticulture and aquaculture	1,315	1

Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0591-01 Class of worker including job permanency by occupation minor group, labour force status, age and gender: Canada, provinces and territories and census division.



In 2021 NOC were redesigned to move away from the previous version of NOC with four “Skill Level” categories (A, B, C, and D) to an innovative six-grouping “TEER” categorization. This new categorization represents the degree of Training, Education, Experience and Responsibilities (TEER) required for an occupation. Appendix F contains a chart that describes the level of Training, Education, Experience and Responsibility with the associated NOC.

Other critical 4 digit NOCs under Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations for Census Division No. 1 include:

- 8202 Contractors and supervisors, mining, oil and gas = 390
- 8412 Workers in agriculture and fishing occupations = 355
- 8510 Agriculture, horticulture and harvesting labourers and related occupations = 455

⁸ Includes persons aged 15 years and over who have worked at some point in time between January 2020 and May 2021.

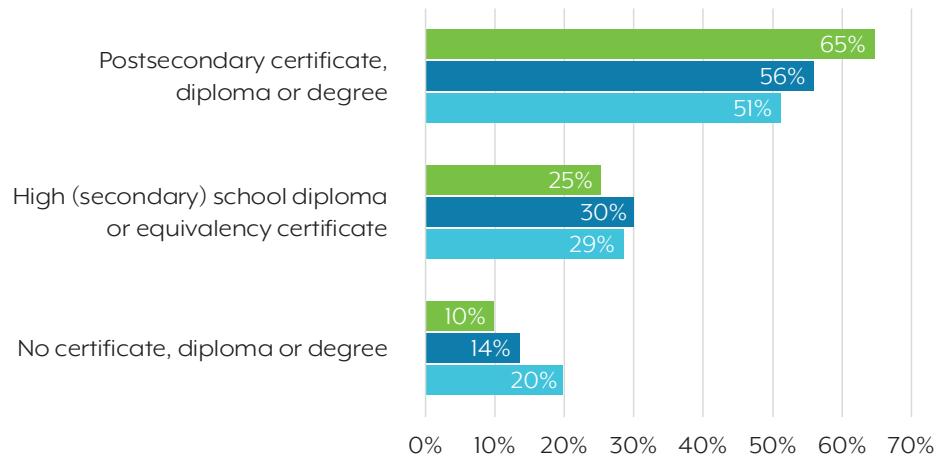
E.3 EDUCATION AND SKILLS SUMMARY

Like many rural areas, a smaller proportion of the population has completed a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree compared to the province as a whole (46% vs. 56%).

Twenty-percent of the population aged 25 to 64 years old have not completed a high school diploma or equivalency, which is higher than Census Division No. 1 and the province. Regional interviews reiterated that lack of literacy was a challenge in the region.

FIGURE 3: HIGHEST CERTIFICATE, DIPLOMA OR DEGREE FOR THE POPULATION AGED 25 TO 64 YEARS IN PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS - 25% SAMPLE DATA

- Alberta
- Census Division No. 1
- VERGE Economic Region

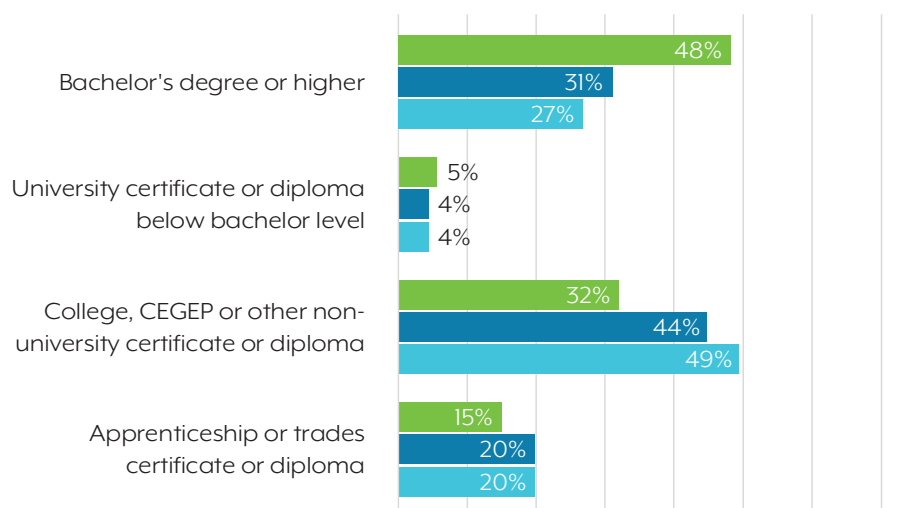


Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

Of those individuals who have completed post-secondary education, 49% have received a college or other non-university certificate or diploma, and 20% have completed an apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma.

FIGURE 4: POSTSECONDARY CERTIFICATE, DIPLOMA OR DEGREE

- Alberta
- Census Division No. 1
- VERGE Economic Region

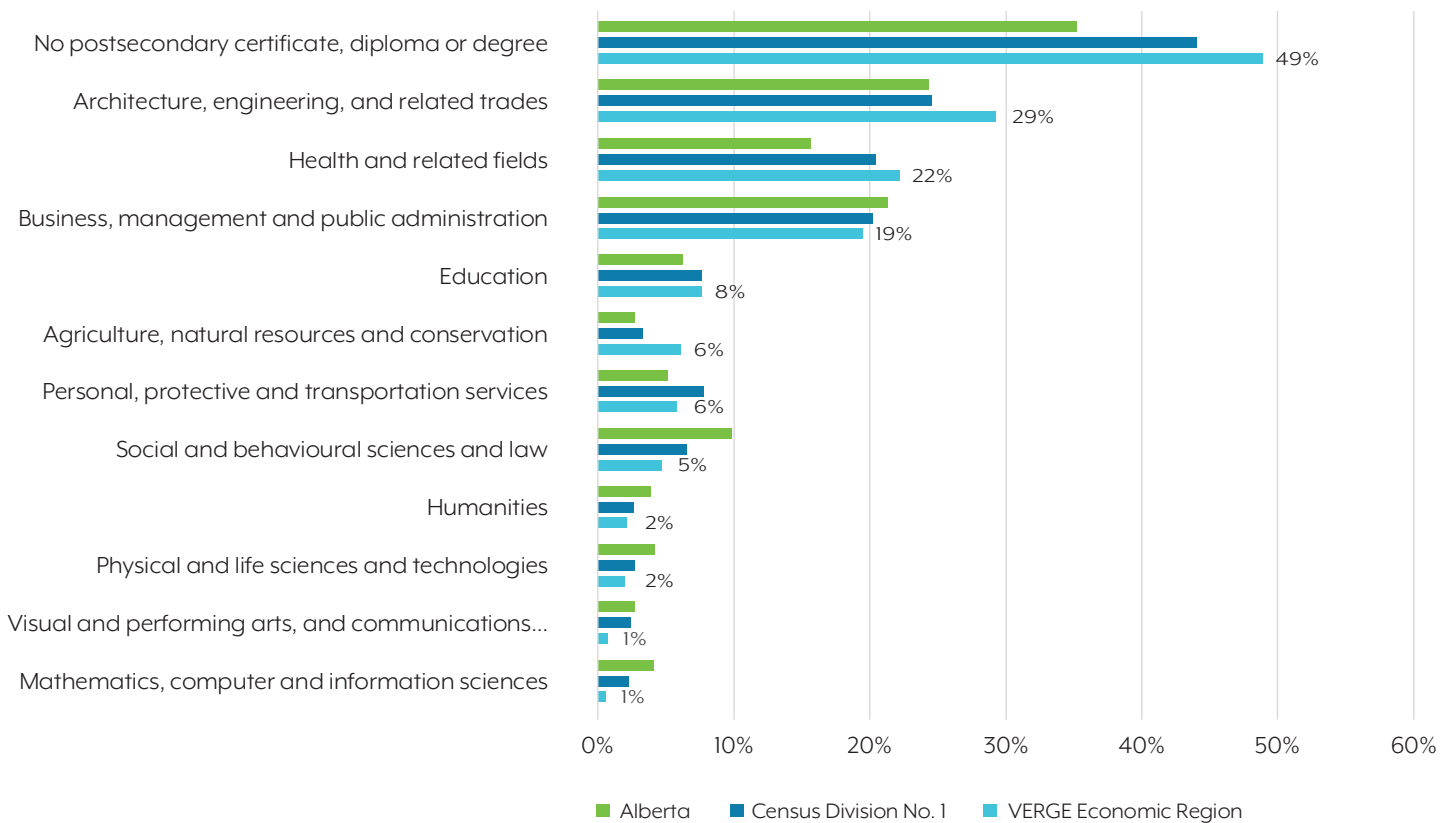


Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

One metric to help assess which skills exist in the region is Statistics Canada's major field of study. The areas of study most commonly reported in the VERGE Economic Region include:



FIGURE 5: TOTAL - MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY - CLASSIFICATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS (CIP) 2021 FOR THE POPULATION AGED 25 TO 64 YEARS IN PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS - 25% SAMPLE DATA



Proportionally, the study area has a higher proportion of its population with post-secondary education in architecture, engineering and related trades (29%) compared to the province (24%), health and related fields (20%) compared to the province (16%), and agriculture, natural resources and conservation (6%) compared to the province (3%).



Farmers might need to find work projects to keep their workers busy during the downtime.



F. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

F.1 REGIONAL ASSETS

It is important to acknowledge the good activities happening in the region. For example, it was acknowledged that:

- The Medicine Hat & District Chamber of Commerce has been holding agricultural round tables to better understand agricultural challenges and bring awareness to these issues at a provincial level.
- Many agricultural producers are investing in safety training programs for their staff.
- Community Futures Entre-Corp helps entrepreneurs and small business owners throughout the Southeast Alberta region, including communities in the VERGE Economic Development region. Community Futures are funded by Prairies Economic Development Canada (Prairies Can). Community Futures Entre-Corp has several free employment resources, including HR toolkits and templates, for small business owners and entrepreneurs at their website: <https://entre-corp.albertacf.com/resources/employment-hr>.
- The Irvine Agricultural Discovery Center, located on the Irvine School grounds, is an on-site agriculture demonstration project that connects both rural and urban students to deepen their shared understanding of the Canadian Food System. The program teaches sustainable agriculture practices focusing on feeding 9 billion people by 2050 in an environmentally sound, socially responsible and financially viable way now and in the future. The program is meant to build capacity in rural youth. It targets junior high school students. Some great partnerships have been established, or are being fostered with agriculture related businesses in the region through the Agricultural Discovery Centre. Most recently, an Ag Pro Certificate project was completed in partnership with Western Tractor.
- In the Prairie Rose School Division a number of unique programs and projects, referred to as “Prairie Rose Possibilities”, have been chosen by various schools and designed based on community, staff and student passions and interest. Some fantastic partnerships, and career exposure opportunities have been developed as a result. In addition to the Irvine Agricultural Discovery Center, some, but not all, other projects are listed in Table 10.



When career paths are highlighted for students within their rural region and they are allowed to be involved in meaningful work participation, then they are more likely to either stay or return to their rural region.⁹

⁹Asche, Kelly. “The Journey to meaningful workforce participation among graduates in Southwest Minnesota.” Center for Rural Policy & Development. November 2023.

TABLE 10: SNAPSHOT OF SOME “PRAIRIE ROSE POSSIBILITIES”

Program	Description
Senator Gershaw Farms Program	The Senator Gershaw Farms Program at Senator Gershaw School in Bow Island has a fully functioning greenhouse. It has become a student-run business.
Foremost Agricultural Resource Model (F.A.R.M)	The Foremost Agricultural Resource Model (F.A.R.M) is a schoolwide garden project where the focus is on creating a student run garden at Foremost School.
Dave Rozdeba South Alberta Flight Academy	Eagle Butte High School in Dunmore has the Dave Rozdeba South Alberta Flight Academy, a high school program that allows students to earn their private pilot’s license along with their high school diploma. Students can earn credits through applicable courses in: aeronautics, aviation-flight, fabrication, leadership, mechanics, and robotics (including flight simulation and drone operation). It is a partnership between Prairie Rose Public Schools, Eagle Butte High School and Super T Aviation.
Foremost Rodeo Academy	Foremost School has a Rodeo Academy that attracts billets from around the world.
South Alberta Fire Rescue Academy (SAFR)	<p>South Alberta Fire Rescue is a two-year program operating out of Senator Gershaw School (Bow Island) and Eagle Butte High School (Dunmore). It has a focus on firefighting and rescue training. The program provides three days per week of in-class instruction and two days off site for hands-on firefighter training.</p> <p>At the end of the two year program students will earn their Firefighter 1 and Firefighter 2 certifications and can enter directly into the industry. The project is done in partnership with certified firefighter instructors from the Town of Bow Island and Cypress County.</p>
Drone / RPAS Advanced Pilot Training Course	<p>Students completing the Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) course will earn a Medicine Hat College Micro-credential in unmanned aerial vehicle operation and will earn a basic pilot certificate from Transport Canada.</p> <p>The advance pilot certificate is optional to the micro-credential program.</p> <p>Volatus Aerospace is conducting an Agriculture Drone / RPAS Research Program -Science Experiential Aerial Research (SEAR) and will accept 15 students from the 4 high schools in Prairie Rose School Division.</p>
Health Care Aide Program	This Dual Credit program is completed in conjunction with the Medicine Hat College. It is available to students in grades 11 and 12.

SOUTH ALBERTA SCHOOL OF TRADES



A collaborative partnership between Medicine Hat College and Prairie Rose Public Schools was announced in January of 2024. Starting in the fall of 2024, Prairie Rose Public Schools and Medicine Hat College will launch the South Alberta School of Trades. This initiative will expose students to seven trades disciplines in Grade 10, then narrow their focus on two trades the following year. The final year of high school would involve pre-employment or first year apprenticeship programming.

F.2 CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

F.2.A A COMMUTING WORKFORCE

While the region is fortunate, in that it can draw workers from larger centres like Medicine Hat, Taber, and Lethbridge this often results in increased costs for employers who need to provide either vehicles for workers to commute, and/or fuel subsidies. One larger employer indicated that they have a transit van that operates daily from Lethbridge. Another employer noted they had a small fleet of service vehicles commuting workers daily from Medicine Hat. An additional larger employer indicated that they were looking into implementing a vehicle allowance.

F.2.B LACK OF WORKFORCE HOUSING

By no means unique to the VERGE Economic Region, a limited supply of housing exacerbates the ability to attract workers into more rural areas / communities – both in terms of rental units and properties for sale. Some employers, particularly in agriculture, may try to provide a housing unit for their staff. The challenge appears to be more prevalent in smaller communities like Bow Island and Foremost. In Dunmore, homes that are available are typically on the higher end.

In addition to the comments heard during the interviews, access to obtainable housing was the second lowest ranked factor among workforce respondents (mean of 2.86). A lack of housing / rental near work location was considered a major barrier in acquiring and retaining a quality workforce by 32% of employers who responded to the survey.

F.2.C CHILDCARE

Limited access to childcare was also cited as a barrier in the VERGE Economic Region. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of respondents to the employer survey indicated that this was a major barrier to acquiring and retaining a quality workforce. Access to childcare was the lowest ranked factor on the workforce survey (mean of 2.14).

F.2.D OTHER SERVICES

Some employers indicated that it was just hard to attract people to rural communities where there are fewer shopping options e.g., Foremost does not have a grocery store, there are fewer convenient amenities, and there are fewer options for family activities.

F.2.E
CLASS 1
LICENSE

Most agricultural producers require that their employees have a Class 1 driver's license. Cypress County also has a pre-requisite for a Class 1 license for lots of their public works positions.

Obtaining a Class 1 license is expensive – it usually costs \$10,000. It involves a total of 113 hours of training. Individuals have to complete the government exam without an interpreter which can be problematic for individuals with low levels of literacy and/or whose first language is not English or French. Additionally, a number of employers have cited insurance concerns because insurance companies are reluctant to insure drivers with less than three years of experience. The insurance costs for smaller companies and producers is often prohibitive.

The Chamber of Commerce is advocating on a number of agricultural-related issues – one of which is a recognition that long haul trucking is different than hauling grain to a terminal, yet they both require the same level of training.¹⁰

Agriculture associations have also advocated for examinations to accommodate the needs of the local immigrant labour force, who are not as literate in English as the general population. For example, they have requested for the examination to be administered orally with the help of an interpreter if needed, similar to the service offered for a Class 3 or 5 license.

F.2.F
SEASONAL
WORKFORCE

Having a seasonal workforce can be a major challenge in the agricultural industry as well as for both the counties and SMRID. Many agriculture producers employ members of the Low German-Speaking or Kanadier Mennonite¹¹ community. Seasonal employment can work well for some of these folks, who may travel to the north in the winter and conduct logging work.

F.2.G
OTHER
CHALLENGES

While they were less prominent, a few other topics were mentioned that created challenges.

Large geography

The two counties – Cypress County and County of Forty Mile – along with SMRID cover a relatively large area so there can be a lot of geography to cover in a day. SMRID also acknowledged that as an irrigation district, they are a very unique industry and therefore cannot always find workers who have “industry” experience. Similar to farm hands, they often need a “jack of all trades” – someone who can move from operating equipment to maintenance, mechanical and construction.

Holiday coverage

There are some positions in rural communities that are really difficult to fill when people want to take time off or holidays. For example, the Village of Foremost struggles to give their public works water operator time off because they cannot find a temporary replacement. Additionally, pharmacists in rural communities have to plan their time-off months in advance in order to attract replacement coverage from somewhere else in the province. Not being able to give employees time-off or holidays increases the challenges associated with attracting new people to these positions.

Increasingly, the younger generations are seeking a work-life balance. Therefore it will become even more difficult to attract new people to these roles.

¹⁰ <https://chatnewstoday.ca/2023/06/30/transport-companies-struggle-to-hire-new-drivers-due-to-rising-insurance-costs/>

¹¹ Colloquially referred to as “Mexican Mennonites.”

G. RECOMMENDATIONS

G.1 HELP INCREASE AWARENESS FOR EMPLOYERS AND PRODUCERS REGARDING PROGRAMS AND GRANTS FOR CLASS 1 DRIVERS LICENSES.

As previously noted, Class 1 licenses are in strong demand in the region – particularly for general farm workers. Mandatory entry level training (MELT) is relatively expensive.

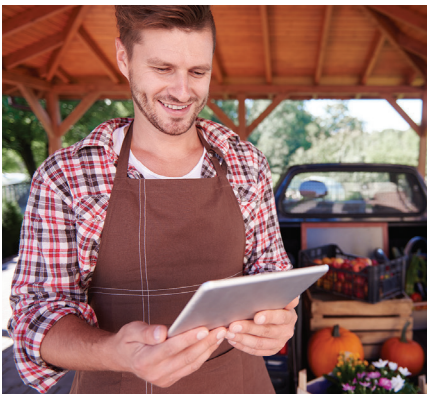
There are a number of programs and grants to help subsidize the cost. Some of these grants and programs are highlighted in Appendix G. These programs are shared by training providers like Safety Buzz Campus and agricultural associations, but there is still an onus on employers to complete and submit the applications and fulfil their end of obligations.

Some employers may have a difficult time figuring out how to apply online, or find the process onerous or frustrating. Consequently, it is recommended that VERGE Economic Development partner with other organizations like Safety Buzz Campus, agricultural associations, and Chambers of Commerce or business associations to share and disseminate this information.

Additionally, there may be opportunities to connect employers and producers with someone who would help walk them through the intake process. Similar to a passport clinic, there could be intake days or clinics to help complete the grant applications.

G.2 HELP SHARE AND DISSEMINATE ACCESS TO OTHER INFORMATION WITH AGRICULTURE PRODUCERS.

There are lots of organizations and programs that are trying to help fill some of the gaps that exist in the agriculture industry (and other industries such as trades). However, given that agriculture (and other businesses in rural communities) is primarily made up of several small and medium enterprises, producers are not always well connected to the variety of programs and services available. VERGE Economic Development can collaborate with their County partners via their Agricultural Service Boards and agricultural fieldman, other agricultural associations, and Chambers of Commerce or business associations to share and disseminate information about these programs.



CAHRC

The mission of the CAHRC is to research, develop and communicate solutions to human resource issues identified by Canadian primary agriculture. Consequently, their organization is there to help primary agriculture producers.

In addition to providing some human resource consulting, they have:

- Two wage subsidy programs which can also provide wrap around supports
- Human resource toolkits (<https://hrtoolkit.cahrc-ccrha.ca/>)
- Labour market information
- Webinars and other information

FIGURE 6: CAHRC AGRIWORKPLACE SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM POSTER AND WEBINAR MENU



CAREERS Next Generation and Other Youth Programs

CAREERS Next Generation is an industry-led public/private not-for-profit foundation that brings together industry, schools, government, and communities to guide youth into successful career paths. CAREERS offers employers an opportunity to showcase their industry and attract potential future employees by connecting to motivated high school interns. CAREERS does the work of matching students to employers (at no cost to employers) ensuring needs are met.

They have a Youth Internship Incentive Program (YIIP), which is designed to increase the number of employers supporting work-integrated learning internships in trades, technologies, and in-demand occupations. This financial incentive for employers is meant to expand an employer's ability to achieve their goals, as well as to enhance opportunities for youth that align with Alberta's skilled worker needs.

Appendix H contains a list of provincial and federal agriculture initiatives to attract youth into the sector program.

Medicine Hat College

Locally, Medicine Hat College has been working closely with the agriculture community to identify industry needs. The College is piloting a series of programs. For example, they have built an agriculture certificate targeted at general farm workers which focuses on some mechanical and quick fix welding components, a basic electrical course which includes some automation for pivot technology, and a certificate in agriculture business targeted at the gap in farm management. This last program would cover some topics like finance, technology, automation, and management.

Despite these programs addressing some gaps identified by a farm advisory committee, the programs will need participants in order to be successful and for continuity. Therefore producers need to know about them, and be encouraged to enroll candidates in them. It will also be helpful for all parties involved to understand that the programs are in a pilot stage; consequently, feedback is required to make improvements to them.



G.3 HELP EMPLOYERS TO EXPLORE NON-TRADITIONAL SOURCES OF LABOUR.

As the pool of applicants shrinks, employers are increasingly looking toward nontraditional sources of labour like people with disabilities, individuals with criminal backgrounds, immigrants and international students, and economically disadvantaged individuals. These segments of the population typically have high barriers to employment like access to reliable transportation, housing, and childcare.¹²

Barriers also come from the business side, which fall under a couple of themes:

- Fear of the unknown
- Perceptions held by employers about people dealing with high barriers.

Employers sometimes form false perceptions based on their own lack of information. Consequently, there is a place to help employers understand the value that might exist with nontraditional sources of labour.

For example, people with disabilities might require employment supports (or coaching), which can be provided at no cost to the employer through organizations like REDIWorks. REDIWorks helps individuals with intellectual disabilities including neurodiverse¹³ individuals, persons with developmental disabilities, and acquired brain injuries find meaningful employment opportunities. REDIWorks serves candidates who have grown up in these rural areas and who are accustomed to a rural lifestyle. While their clientele have barriers to employment, they would have a number of clients who are ideally suited to temporary, part-time or seasonal work or to conducting task-focused, repetitive work. Furthermore, there are a number of provincial and federal grants to help train individuals with disabilities.



Other potential sources include:

- Medicine Hat College attracts international students, some of whom would be interested in part-time or seasonal employment.
- The young Indigenous population still has a higher rate of unemployment compared to the non-indigenous population. There may be opportunities to tap into this workforce. Prior to the early 1990s, there was a strong seasonal Indigenous workforce in Southern Alberta's sugar beet industry.

¹² Asche, Kelly. "Finding work or finding workers? Part 3: Engaging populations with high barriers to employment – Greater Minnesota feeling left out." Center for Rural Policy & Development. April 2019.

¹³ Neurodiversity" is a term that's used to describe differences in the way people's brains work. It typically includes autism, ADHD, and learning disorders like dyslexia. It may also include Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder.

G.4 HELP EMPLOYERS SEEK CREATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR SEASONAL WORKERS.

It was noted that there are challenges associated with attracting a seasonal workforce. Seasonal work is typically less attractive to those seeking year-round employment and job security. However, there may be some opportunities that employers could explore to help offset this challenge.



For example, it has already been noted that some pools of labour may be well suited to seasonal work:

- People with barriers to employment.
- Students.
- Young Indigenous people.
- Recently retired staff, summer interns and top temporary talent from past seasons. They can hit the ground running and save on onboarding expenses. If employers have treated seasonal workers and contractors well in the past, then they may be blessed with a permanent temporary talent pipeline.



There may be opportunities for employers to plan training and upgrading in the off-season for their seasonal staff. The courses being piloted at Medicine Hat College could be completed in the winter. One employer noted that some of their seasonal staff used their lay-off time to obtain their Class 1 license. These individuals are eligible for Alberta's Driving Back to Work program which supports unemployed and under-employed Albertans in obtaining a Class 1 driver's license by covering more than 90% of training and testing costs.

The CAHRC proposes that there may be creative ways to offset seasonal fluctuations, such as banking hours or partnering with employers whose seasonal peaks occur at different times of the year. Bringing a group of employers into the same room to talk about labour challenges may bring about some creative solutions. Perhaps a manufacturer, construction company, or courier company would ramp up production during winter months with temporary seasonal workers whose skills transfer over.

G.5 SHARE OPPORTUNITIES REGARDING AGRICULTURE WITH YOUTH.

While lots of great work is being conducted through organizations like Agriculture for Life¹⁴ and its Classroom Agriculture Program (CAP)¹⁵ and Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC)¹⁶ program, plus Inside Education¹⁷, CAREERS Next Generation, and the Irvine Agricultural Discovery Center, there is still a lack of awareness regarding the variety of opportunities that exist in agriculture and the perception around agriculture.

¹⁴ Agriculture for Life (Ag for Life) is a charitable organization dedicated to building a greater understanding and appreciation of agriculture and its fundamental connection to life. Agriculture Education programs are designed to give students a real awareness of agriculture and food production (www.agricultureforlife.ca).

¹⁵ <https://www.classroomagricultureprogram.ca/>

¹⁶ <https://aitc-canada.ca/en-ca/>

¹⁷ Inside Education is a non-profit education organization that supports multiple perspective environmental and natural resources education in Alberta. Agriculture Education programs supports teachers and inspires students to explore how agriculture connects land, water, food, and people to form the basis for endless learning. (www.insideeducation.ca)

There has been a push to try to get more agriculture into the existing core curriculum and various organizations have been working with both Alberta Agriculture and Alberta Education to make this happen.¹⁸ The Alberta Chambers of Commerce has made a series of recommendations to this effect to the Government of Alberta.¹⁹ The province does provide a small series of classroom activities, lesson plans and other resources for Kindergarten to Grade 12 teachers and students.²⁰

As fewer youth come from rural and farming backgrounds, there is a growing disconnect between consumers and where food comes from based on a lack of access and understanding of modern agriculture.

Along with that, there is a vital need to provide services to rural communities where much agriculture production occurs, and to keep rural communities vibrant.



G.6 CONTINUE TO HELP COMMUNITIES ADDRESS SHORTAGES IN WORKFORCE HOUSING AND CHILDCARE.

A couple of the largest challenges faced by rural communities with regards to labour attraction and retention has to do with a lack of housing options. A shortage of workforce housing confounds labour force shortages in rural areas. If there is nowhere for people to live, it is hard to attract them to a community.

Addressing this gap via a housing strategy and plan can help to alleviate this issue.

A strategy should look at streamlining red tape/bureaucracy, clarifying zoning, reducing risk faced by developers, and incentives. Already, the Town of Bow Island is exploring how they might pursue different housing options and Cypress County is exploring allowing farmers to put additional housing on their property.

¹⁸ Eleven agricultural-related associations addressed a letter to the Honourable Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Education in July of 2021 regarding the inclusion of agriculture in K to 12 curriculum and programs of study. The letter included a table of how and where topics could be included. The letter may be viewed at: <https://www.teamalbertacrops.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Ag-Education-in-New-Curriculum-Letter-forMinister-LaGrange-July-26-2021.pdf>

¹⁹ Alberta Chambers of Commerce “Highlighting the Importance of Agriculture Education.” <https://www.abchamber.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Highlighting-the-Importance-of-Ag-Education.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.alberta.ca/agricultural-education>



Community-based solutions can also be investigated. For example, Cooperatives First is a great resource that can share different models, help community organizations walk through the process and understand how to get started.


Childcare is another issue that economic developers and administrators in rural communities are often dealing with in recent years. Again, Cooperatives First has a model to help rural communities with daycares.


G.7 CHANGE THE NARRATIVE.


For generations, the narrative has been that young people need to leave rural areas to find better job opportunities. However, this narrative is no longer accurate. Migration patterns and slowing birth rates have left fewer people to fill a growing number of job vacancies.


It was acknowledged in several of the interviews, and in both the employer and workforce surveys, that rural communities in the VERGE Economic Region are safe. This is a narrative that can be leveraged.


People will migrate to rural communities for²¹

- 

A SIMPLER LIFE
- 

OUTDOOR RECREATION
- 

SAFETY AND SECURITY
- 

QUALITY SCHOOLS
- 

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

With the exception of the housing piece, which has been addressed above, rural communities in the VERGE Economic Development Region can offer these things.

²¹ <https://extension.umn.edu/economic-development/rural-brain-gain-migration>



I would go back to that agricultural lifestyle in a heartbeat.
How do we work together to make it sustainable?



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APPENDIX A: FIELD CROPS AND HAY CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE (2021)

Field crops and hay	Census Division No. 1
Total area of field crops and hay – Total number of farms reporting	1,015
Total area of field crops and hay – acres	1,486,049
Wheat – acres	583,715
Canola – acres	166,674
Lentils – acres	157,494
Barley – acres	150,690
Dry field peas – acres	128,204
Alfalfa and alfalfa mixtures – acres	99,873
Chickpeas – acres	25,777
Other dry beans – acres	21,900
Mustard – acres	21,566
Triticale – acres	12,803
Oats – acres	12,447
Rye – acres	10,121
Potatoes – acres	8,441
Sugar beets – acres	5,808
Greenhouse products	
Total greenhouse area in use – Total number of farms reporting	26
Total greenhouse area in use – square feet	6,399,768
Greenhouse fruits and vegetables – square feet	6,238,088

Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Agriculture.



724 NUMBER OF FARMS REPORTING CATTLE. 217,765 NUMBER OF CATTLE.

APPENDIX B: AGRICULTURE FORECAST TO 2029: HOW LABOUR FORCE CHALLENGES WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE ‘GRAIN AND OILSEED’ INDUSTRY

‘Grain and Oilseed’ Industry	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounts for 11% of the total agricultural workforce. • Workforce is generally comprised of domestic workers. Foreign workers make up 0.4% of total labour pool. • Over 80% of the industry labour force is concentrated in the Prairies, with 20% in Alberta. • Grain and oilseed industry has a strong growth outlook, which will require a bigger workforce to meet output targets. • The domestic labour force is expected to shrink, with retirement being one of the key factors affecting labour supply. • Between now and 2029, Alberta will see an additional 2,000 jobs at-risk. • The industry will have the most trouble filling managers in agriculture positions -which include owner-operators and hired managers -and general farm worker positions. Managerial roles will account for 61% of the labour gap and general farm workers will account for 18%. • Over the next decade, the labour gap will increase more than five times, with 25% grain and oilseed jobs potentially going unfilled due to a lack of available workers. 	
<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grain and oilseed operations tend to be far from urban centres. Rural depopulation is thinning the available workforce further and requiring employers to provide housing for their workers. • With no access to the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Agricultural Stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), this industry is unable to supplement its domestic workforce with foreign workers through these mechanisms. • Production is concentrated in the Prairies where competition for workers in natural resource sectors is intense. • The workforce is significantly older than the agricultural average and will be heavily impacted by retirements. 	<p>To meet these labour challenges, the industry could leverage the following strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work is less physical than average for jobs in agriculture. • Grain and oilseed producers enjoy below-average voluntary turnover rates. • Insufficient compensation compared with other sectors is less likely to impede recruitment and retention efforts within the industry.

Highlights from Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council – Conseil Canadien pour les Ressources Humaines en Agriculture (CAHRD-CCRHA)

APPENDIX C: AGRICULTURE FORECAST TO 2029: HOW LABOUR FORCE CHALLENGES WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE ‘BEEF’ INDUSTRY

‘Beef’ Industry	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The second largest agricultural employer in Canada with 13% of the agricultural workforce. • The industry relies on domestic labour; only 0.7% of the workforce is made up of foreign workers (compared to total agricultural average of 17%). • Two-thirds of the workforce are in the Prairies. Alberta alone accounts for 34% of all beef workers. • Although Canada’s beef production has been in decline over the past decade, the next ten years are predicted to grow. • Productivity will increase by 1.2% over the next decade. • The demand for workers is expected to grow by 0.8% per year. Alberta is predicted to have 5,550 more jobs available than employees available to work. • The industry will have the most trouble filling general farm worker positions (44% of all unfilled positions). 	
<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The beef sector is concentrated in the Prairies where competition for workers in natural resource sectors (e.g., oil and gas, and mining) is most intense. • The industry has an older-than-average workforce, which means it will lose workers to retirement at a much more rapid rate. • Over one-third of beef producers surveyed identified finding workers with the necessary qualifications and experience as a challenge. • Labour shortages for this industry are more likely to affect expansion plans, an issue of concern for an industry facing high growth. 	<p>To meet these labour challenges, the industry could leverage the following strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Below-average seasonality and variability in hours create a more stable, attractive workplace. • The work is less physical than average for jobs in agriculture. • Staff training could help the industry improve worker qualifications.

Highlights from Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council – Conseil Canadien pour les Ressources Humaines en Agriculture (CAHRD-CCRHA)

APPENDIX D: AGRICULTURE FORECAST TO 2029: HOW LABOUR FORCE CHALLENGES WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE ‘FIELD FRUIT AND VEGETABLE’ INDUSTRY

‘Field Fruit and Vegetable’ Industry	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employs about 7% of the total agricultural workforce. The industry relies heavily on foreign workers to stay productive. Over the next decade, labour challenges will intensify as a shrinking pool of domestic workers and an increased reliance on foreign workers will make the industry even more vulnerable to labour policy changes and lost sales due to labour shortages. Historically, the field fruit and vegetable sector has outpaced other horticulture commodities in terms of the average output per worker. Market demand and industry output growth is expected to slow over the next decade. General farm worker jobs and harvesting labourer jobs will be the hardest for the field fruit and vegetable industry to fill over the next decade. Demand for labour is expected to increase by an average of 0.6% per year. 	
<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seasonal fluctuations in labour demand and hard physical labour required on the job can make it harder to attract and retain workers. The industry has above-average turnover rates, which creates considerable cost and strain for employers. 	<p>To meet these labour challenges, the industry could leverage the following strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tapping into pools of workers who many be interested in working part of the year (e.g., retired workers) may help address the sector’s need for large numbers of workers for limited periods of time. It could explore innovative recruitment and retention practices. It could find ways to offset seasonal fluctuations, such as banking hours or partnering with employers whose seasonal peaks occur at different times of the year.

Highlights from Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council – Conseil Canadien pour les Ressources Humaines en Agriculture (CAHRD-CCRHA)

APPENDIX E: AGRICULTURE FORECAST TO 2029: HOW LABOUR FORCE CHALLENGES WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE ‘GREENHOUSE, NURSERY, AND FLORICULTURE’ INDUSTRY

‘Greenhouse, Nursery, and Floriculture’ Industry	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The largest agricultural employer with 15% of the agricultural workforce. It is the third most reliant on foreign workers, with foreign workers accounting for 40% of the industry’s workforce. Jobs tend to be highly seasonal and labour intensive, with many products requiring hand picking and packaging. Strong growth in foreign markets for greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture products will support strong production growth over the next decade. The industry will have the most trouble filling general farm worker, and nursery and greenhouse worker positions. 	
<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industry employers were more likely to cite perceptions of low wages in the industry as a barrier to recruitment. Seasonal fluctuations in labour demand and the hard physical labour required on the job can make it harder to attract and retain workers. The industry has high voluntary turnover rates, which creates considerable cost and strain for employers. 	<p>To meet these labour challenges, the industry could leverage the following strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It could provide the right tools and training to support workers in labour-intensive roles. It could find ways to offset seasonal fluctuations, such as banking hours or partnering with employers whose seasonal peaks occur at different times of the year. Tapping into pools of workers who many be interested in working part of the year (e.g., retired workers) may help address the sector’s need for large numbers of workers for limited periods of time.

Highlights from Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council – Conseil Canadien pour les Ressources Humaines en Agriculture (CAHRD-CCRHA)

APPENDIX F: NOC 2021 VERSION 1.0 TEER CATEGORIES

The “TEER” categorization defines the requirements of the occupation by considering the type of training, education and experience required for entry, as well as the complexities and responsibilities typical of an occupation. In general, the greater the range and complexity of occupational tasks, the greater the amount of formal education and training, previous experience, on-the-job training, and in some instances, responsibility, required to competently perform the set of tasks for that occupation.²²

The NOC 2021 V1.0 Training, Education, Experience and Responsibility (TEER)	when the second digit is...
Management – TEER	0
Completion of a university degree (bachelor's, master's or doctorate);	1
Completion of a post-secondary education program of two to three years at community college, institute of technology or CÉGEP; or Completion of an apprenticeship training program of two to five years; or Occupations with supervisory or significant safety (e.g. police officers and firefighters) responsibilities; or Several years of experience in a related occupation from TEER 3 (when applicable).	2
Completion of a post-secondary education program of less than two years at community college, institute of technology or CÉGEP; or Completion of an apprenticeship training program of less than two years; or More than six months of on-the-job training, training courses or specific work experience with some secondary school education; or Several years of experience in a related occupation from TEER 4 (when applicable).	3
Completion of secondary school; or Several weeks of on-the-job training with some secondary school education; or Experience in a related occupation from TEER 5 (when applicable).	4
Short work demonstration and no formal educational requirements.	5

²² <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=323293&CVD=323294&CLV=0&MLV=4&D=1>

APPENDIX G: SUBSIDIES AND GRANTS FOR CLASS 1 LICENSES

Funding Programs	Overview
Canada-Alberta Job Grant (CAJG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAJG is an Alberta government funding program that offers training grants to employers. • Through the program, companies may receive non-repayable funding from the government to purchase third-party business training programs, including training for in-demand skillsets. • Training is expected to improve the employability and value employees can provide; new hires in these training sessions can also maximize funding potential.
Driving Back to Work program (DBTW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBTW supports unemployed and under-employed Albertans in obtaining a Class 1 driver's licence by covering more than 90% of training and testing costs. • Albertans who are working fewer than 29 hours a week on average per year are eligible for this program.
Class 1 Experience and Equivalency (E&E) Mandatory Entry Level Training (MELT) Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Class 1 E&E program provides experienced Class 3 license holders seeking to obtain a Class 1 driver's licence with basic Class 1 driving theory and procedures; promote positive driving attitudes and to guide the instructor on how to effectively deliver the training. • While elements of the Experience and Equivalency Class 1 MELT program relate to a variety of work environments, additional on-the-job training and supervision by an experienced commercial truck driver will assist drivers in developing advanced Class 1 driving skills after successful completion of this course.
Federal Driver Training Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Federal Driver Training Grant offered through Trucking HR Canada covers up to \$10,000 for driver training, and wage incentive of up to \$10,000 to cover any onboarding or finishing/mentorship training. • The employer's responsibilities include ensuring eligibility criteria are met.

APPENDIX H: PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL AGRICULTURE INITIATIVES TO ATTRACT YOUTH INTO THE SECTOR PROGRAM

Provincial and Federal Agriculture Initiatives to Attract Youth into the Sector Program	Geography	Description
Youth Employment and Skills Program (YESP)	National	Helps agricultural employers attract youth.
Science Horizon Youth Internship Program	National	Assists with wage subsidies for youth employment in the environmental sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics sectors.
Protein Industries Canada Program	National	Introduces students from kindergarten to grade 12 to the career opportunities available to them in plant-protein, agri-food and digital agriculture sectors.
CAHRC AgriTalent Program	National	Partners agri-employers with post-secondary institutions. Includes Work Integrated Learning, webinars, networking sessions, and business case competitions for students.
Farm Credit Canada (FCC) Ag Knowledge Exchange	National	Provides capital support and knowledge transfer activities for young people and women.
Youth Agriculture Education Program	Alberta	Supports the development, expansion, or adaptation of agriculture education programs for kindergarten to grade 12 students.