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NEWS RELEASE

Mushrooms Canada – RELEASE
September 1, 2021

LABOUR CRISIS – LET OUR AGRICULTURE FOREIGN WORKERS STAY

Harriston, ON, Mushrooms Canada -- “We need more people working in agriculture in rural Canada,” says Ryan Koeslag, Executive Vice President, Mushrooms Canada. “The labour shortage for Canadian agriculture is massive and continues to grow. Mushroom farms have a 20 per cent job vacancy rate. To grow food in rural Canada, we need to fill this labour gap.”

In the 2019 election, Mushrooms Canada asked the Government of Canada, Immigration Department and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) to give our workers a chance to stay and immigrate. In spite of some gains for our workers, we have found not enough has been done by the Government to help farm workers to stay on our farms.

According to the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC), there were 16,500 job vacancies on Canadian farms in 2018, which is causing \$2.9 billion in lost sales to the Canadian economy. The sector’s labour gap is forecast to nearly double, reaching a potential shortage of 123,000 people by 2029. For mushrooms, the same labour survey, showed a job vacancy rate approaching 20 per cent. Surveys also show that the labour shortage has been exacerbated and increased by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, Mushrooms Canada is releasing an election package entitled, ***Mushrooms Canada Election 2021 Recommendations: Let Our Agriculture Foreign Workers Stay***. The [video](#) and [report](#) are being distributed to all political parties and we are asking them to create a labour strategy and immigration policy that makes sense so we can begin to fill the labour gap with a **made in Canada approach** to farm worker immigration that works for our workers and farms.

“No matter who is elected, food made in Canada needs to be prioritized, and the farm labour crisis will need to be addressed,” says Koeslag. “We believe work in rural Canada has value. Hard work on the farm has value. We want that recognized and the issues our farms and our workers are having need to be addressed. 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 through the TFWP, to have a chance to stay and immigrate.”

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.



To Learn More watch our [VIDEO](#) & read our Election 2021 [REPORT](#)



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“We believe international farm workers have value and are part of our Canadian agriculture workforce,” says Janet Krayden, Mushrooms Canada Workforce Expert. “When Canadians do not apply, we need to allow them to stay through an immigration program, such as the Agri-Food Immigration Pilot. However, the pilot needs to be different than the other immigration programs or it is more of the same for the workers without access to immigration. The workers report to us that there is a fundamental misalignment and misunderstanding of their skills, experience, and they are called “lower-skilled”. We strongly disagree with how they are being treated by the Federal Government within these programs. Removing immigration obstacles would allow the farms to recruit people interested in agriculture to stay so these farm workers who are employed in good jobs with competitive wages can build new lives in Canada.”

Currently, there are over 900 international workers employed on mushroom farms, according to surveys, and approximately 300 across Canada who would like the chance to stay.

Koeslag says, “Much research has been conducted. It is time to move forward with action. The farms want to support the workers to build their dreams in Canada. There is no risk in letting these farm workers stay and immigrate. It is time to move forward with an agriculture labour strategy that will give farm and food workers a chance so our local food made in Canada has a chance.”

Mushrooms Canada Recommendations: Recognize the growing of food as a priority by creating an agriculture labour strategy to include the following:

1. Prioritize agriculture and the agri-food industry by taking it out of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and creating an **Agri-Food Workforce Program** for Agricultural stream. The primary mandate needs to focus on and work to decrease Canada’s agricultural labour shortage.

2. Create a clear Pathway to PR for agriculture TFWs to immigrate. Make the Agri-Food Immigration Pilot a permanent program for farm and food workers to stay in Canada to include:

- a) Change regulations so that TFWP agriculture workers, including so-called “lower-skilled TFWs,” are treated the same as all other immigration classes, and allow them to reunite with their families within the AFIP.
- b) Change the regulations to create a Stream B to recognize Canadian farm and food experience so that workers with 2 years-experience on a Canadian farm, who have a full-time permanent job, would be allowed to apply for permanent residency without the overly bureaucratic education assessment obstacle. These workers have a valuable and needed skill set that needs recognition.

3. Create a Trusted Employer Program to support efficient prioritized paperwork including processing of LMIAS and work permits for farm and food workers:

- a) Create a fair and balanced approach for farm employers and workers for Integrity Audits and eliminate the overlap of jurisdictional oversight. (One to two years for an audit that does not allow farmers to fill job vacancies is not acceptable).
- b) The Department to work with employers to create and provide a reliable communications channel and training materials to ensure employers are kept up to date on changes to TFWP rules and wage rates.

Please read our Report for more details on these issues and recommendations.

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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. Mushrooms are struggling with close to 20% job vacancy rate. Mushrooms Canada has released many reports highlighting that agriculture and rural Canada need more people. Review our recent video showcasing progress on our **Mushroom Fair Labour and Ethical Recruitment Pilot** Learn more:

<https://www.facebook.com/MushroomsGrowers>

Competitive wages offered on mushroom farms and extensive recruitment efforts was documented by CAHRC in research.

- Entry to Experienced 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

MUSHROOMS 2019

19.3% Vacancy Rate

Impacts **23%** throwing out of crops and losing **\$40M** annually

AGRI-LMI
LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION

CANADIAN MUSHROOM AGRIWORKFORCE
Mushroom farms hire Canadians first

WORKFORCE
70% CANADIANS
194 mushroom farms in Canada in 2016
4,000 mushroom sector jobs in Canada

PERMANENT, YEAR-ROUND WORK
24/7/365 days per year

DYK: A mushroom expands in size 4% every hr or doubles in size/day.

HIGH GROWTH/ HIGH DEMAND

Canadian production of fresh mushrooms is growing & demand for new varieties soars

ADDS \$900 MILLION total contribution to the Canadian economy

133,000 TONS of mushrooms produced in Canada

Top Export Markets are US and Japan
Exports increased over \$50M in 2018-2019

Welcome to rural Canada
Immigrants and international workers **stay working** on mushroom farms on **average 11 years.**

Making Dreams Come True 2019
Over 920 Ag Stream TFWs across Canada.
Farms **Proud** to **welcome** & provide settlement support to workers who chose to immigrate.

RURAL QUALITY LIVING WAGE

Harvester Wage:
from **minimum wage** to **\$29.88/hr**
(Performance bonus allows Harvesters to earn up to \$29.88/hr)

Supervisors
\$35,000-\$80,600/yr

Managers
\$42,500-\$171,000/yr

FARMS OFFER QUALITY BENEFIT PACKAGES

Canada Funded by the Government of Canada's Sectoral Initiatives Program