



The challenges of horticultural labour

Labour – it’s a topic that is always on our minds, no matter the season.

According to reports by the Canadian Agriculture Human Resources Council, worker shortages cost the greenhouse, nursery and floriculture sector around \$103 million in 2017/2018. Compared to other segments of agriculture, this one “employs 15% of the agricultural workforce, making it the largest employer in Canada’s agriculture sector.” Forecasting to 2029, they expect as many as 29,900 unfilled jobs mainly due to a lack in domestic labour.

During this same period in 2017/2018, the field vegetable sector had trouble filling 1,500 jobs, costing \$403 million to the industry and expecting 14,500 unfilled positions by 2029. The tree fruit and vine sector was no better, with 900 unfilled jobs and \$94 million lost in sales, along with forecasts of 15,400 unfilled jobs by 2029.

Horticulture in general, whether indoor or outdoor seems to have a problem in attracting domestic talent.

This is why, back in September, we teamed up with sibling magazine, Fruit & Vegetable to hold a roundtable on horticultural labour. We invited six

Innovation Centre, Ont.

What came out of the roundtable was truly extraordinary. Panelists shared their perspectives as growers, educators and sector partners and some of the challenges they face when it comes to hiring, training and retaining staff. We asked panelists to discuss qualities that make up the ideal candidate and how education plays a part, and finally, discussed ways in which the sector can promote the opportunities that a career in horticulture can bring.

Altogether, the discussion was two hours long but every minute of it was gold. We edited it down to four parts, approximately 20 minutes each, but for those looking for the full experience – it’s available online.

I won’t divulge too much at this time, but suffice to say, horticultural education programs are more popular than ever, and it’s being driven by a love of food, plants and an interest in farm life. One of the problems is in rural life – how can we retain workers who want access to creature comforts or critical services nearby, such as good coffee and child care? Can the wages sustain a family?

In addition to the roundtable, there is a

How can the sector collaborate with those beyond horticulture?

members of the horticulture sector – two growers, two educators and two sector partners – in an effort to find out where the hurdles are and how we can potentially eliminate them, or at least lower the barriers.

Meet our panelists:

- Stephanie Slaman, John Slaman Greenhouses, Ont.
- Dusty Zamecnik, EZ Grow Farms, Ont.
- Kim Wickwire, Olds College, Alta.
- Laura Bryce, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, B.C.
- Niki Bennett, Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers, Ont.
- Tania Humphrey, Vineland Research and

special In the Spotlight video with sponsor and industry supplier, A.M.A. Horticulture. Anyone who’s met Connie Bradt and Elise Johnson will understand their enthusiasm for fostering the next generation of horticultural talent, and they bring some fantastic insight to the table. For instance, how can the sector collaborate with those beyond horticulture, such as Business Improvement Associations to rebrand and promote the opportunities available?

Interested in hearing more? Head over to greenhousecanada.com/tag/growing-horticulture/ to watch the roundtable video in four parts, as well as the In the Spotlight video with sponsor AMA Horticulture.

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