

December 16, 2019

The Honourable Carla Qualtrough, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion
Employment and Social Development Canada
140 Promenade du Portage
Phase IV, 14th Floor
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0J9

The Honourable Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
365 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1L1

Dear Ministers,

We are writing to congratulate you on your recent appointments.

FBC-ABC is a national association representing more than 1,500 food and beverage manufacturers from across Canada. FBC-ABC strives to support a strong business environment for our members and a robust food system for Canadians.

Today, food and beverage is the largest manufacturing employer in Canada, collectively employing over 260,000 people – more than the automotive and aerospace industries combined. Total sector shipments, at over \$112.4 billion, are the second largest of any manufacturing sector in the country.

Labour is the number one issue facing Canada's food and beverage manufacturing sector today. The problem is expected to increase in the coming years, with industry projecting a shortfall of 65,000 full time employees by 2025. In addition, the primary agriculture sector is projecting a shortfall of 123,000 workers by 2029. Canada's agri-food sector is facing a looming crisis.

Labour is a complex issue: the problem and the solutions are multi-faceted; labour shortages and issues are often local; and policy and programs fall within federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions. Even at the federal level, multiple cabinet ministers, including yourselves, and government departments have responsibility for various elements of the problem and hold the authority to contribute to various elements of the solution.

At the June 2019 Food Processing Value Chain Roundtable, FBC-ABC presented a framework – People, Careers & Workforce Planning – that demonstrates the complexity of industry’s labour problems. Present at that meeting were senior officials from Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC), Employment and Social Development Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. We have attached that framework for your reference.

Progress on labour issues requires leadership and coordination from both industry and government. FBC-ABC is working with industry associations, producer groups and other stakeholders to coordinate our work on the labour file. We also need your leadership to champion and coordinate work on this issue at the federal level and across all orders of government.

We recognize the need for one department to take the lead on this file and, so, have recommended to Minister Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food, that under her leadership AAFC establish an internal division headed by a senior department official to lead and coordinate cross-government work on the agri-food industry’s labour crisis. Industry recognizes its own obligations and commits to take responsibility for coordinating and increasing collaboration among interested industry groups and stakeholders.

We have also recommended to Minister Bibeau that AAFC establish a small but focused Working Committee of the Value Chain Roundtables to include representatives from the agri-food industry and key government departments to develop a joint plan of permanent solutions to help meet the agri-food sector’s long-term labour needs.

Finally, we have recommended that labour be a central issue on the agenda for the July 2020 Federal-Provincial-Territorial Agriculture Ministers meeting, where the work of the Working Committee would be presented by industry and where coordination across provinces and territories could be encouraged.

We believe that industry and government have a shared goal – to ensure Canada has thriving agriculture and food and beverage manufacturing sectors. This will not occur unless the industry’s labour issues are addressed.

We thank you for taking the time to review these priorities and hope for an opportunity to discuss how to move this issue forward.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Sullivan
CEO

c.c. Daniel Vielfaure, Co-Chair, FBC-ABC and Deputy CEO, Bonduelle Group
Michael Burrows, Co-Chair, FBC-ABC and CEO, Maple Lodge Farms
Graham Flack, Deputy Minister, Employment and Social Development
Catrina Tapley, Deputy Minister, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Chris Forbes, Deputy Minister, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada



People, Careers & Workforce Planning

A Labour Strategy for the Food and Beverage Manufacturing Sector

In 2018, the federal Agri-food Economic Strategy Table released a report calling on the agriculture and food sectors to increase domestic sales to \$140 billion and export sales to \$85 billion by 2025 — a roughly 30% increase over 2017 levels.

Achieving the Economic Strategy Table's goals is a challenge the food and beverage manufacturing sector willingly accepts. However, chronic labour concerns must first be resolved for success to follow.

To better understand the situation and the structural issues impacting business and workforce development, Food and Beverage Canada – Aliments et boissons Canada has launched People, Careers & Workforce Planning. This strategy will guide businesses, governments and industry stakeholders in solving labour challenges and achieving Canadian growth targets.



TALENT ATTRACTION

Expanding the available talent pool by expanding knowledge among job seekers about the opportunities and benefits of working in the sector and by strengthening the sector's reputation as an inclusive and progressive "employer of choice".



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Ensuring the sector has adequate numbers of employees with the right skills to meet its growth and productivity goals.