



Ontario Agri-Careers Support Initiative

8 Innovative HR Solutions from the Ontario Agri-Careers Support Initiative

A Project Summary Report



[The Ontario Agri-Careers Support Initiative](#) (OACSI) was designed to grow the labour market for food and beverage processing businesses by either enticing people to become employed in the sector or to remain employed.

Given the significant challenges faced by Ontario's 4,000+ food and beverage processors in recruiting and retaining top talent, the timing of OACSI was important. By 2025, it is estimated that the Ontario industry will experience up to 25,000 job vacancies representing approximately 20% of the current workforce. The looming gap is a result of an ageing workforce demographic but also the lacklustre attraction of younger generations to the huge variety of jobs and career opportunities in the industry.

As with any complex issue, the labour challenges in this sector demand a comprehensive strategy that includes both industry-driven and facility-level solutions. The OACSI program provided support to eight innovative companies to develop unique pilot solutions that offered value to not just the applicant, but the entire Ontario food and beverage processing industry.

The following project summaries offer insights, best practices, and practical resources that can be shared across the industry.

Innovative Training Methods for Employee Skills Development at Highbury Canco Corp.

This project provided support to [Highbury Canco](#) for specific digital and hands-on skills training for designated personnel —maintenance, packer operators, first aid for supervisors and leaders, aerial work platform for specific departments, and radiation safety training for health and safety specialists. A survey of worker participants indicated that the training is in use daily and is facilitating improved confidence and problem-solving skills.

Highbury Canco is investing in its workforce and giving them the tools to assist them in their growth within the company. In the near future, the company intends to take the training provided by the industry experts and add small sessions to their Alchemy Learning Management System, including a playbook, to encourage a continuous learning environment.

To learn more about Highbury Canco and the project, check out the article *3 Ways Food and Beverage Processors are Developing Skills Training & Mentorship*.

Hiring Outside the Box: Onboarding with Agility and Retaining with Passion at Maple Leaf Foods

This project focused on career fairs for [Maple Leaf Foods'](#) many facilities. Career fairs organized in partnership with communities, external providers such as Indeed, or organized locally/onsite all proved successful. As a result of the career fairs, the company experienced an almost 50% increase in hiring over the timeframe of the project.

Maple Leaf Foods also found that the use of shuttles to access jobseekers in remote areas was successful but unfortunately cost prohibitive. The company will explore alternatives such as an employee-driven ride-share program, carpooling initiative, and variations on an Uber strategy.

To learn more about Maple Leaf Foods and the project, check out the article *3 Practical Industry Solutions to the Employment Challenge in Food and Beverage Processing*.

Custom HR Automation Supporting Onboarding, Training & Development at Village Juicery

This project assisted [Village Juicery](#) in a complete transition to an automated HR system from paper. The company had realized that many out-of-the-box software systems were not suited to its multi-channel model and need for integration of HR, payroll, and performance management functions — all priorities tied to employee recruitment and retention.

With the new custom system, Village Juicery reduced administration hours for staff by centralizing onboarding, training, and resources at the click of a button. The new system also freed up time for the managers and supervisors to focus on team building and improved production.

To learn more about Village Juicery and the project, check out the article *3 Ways Food and Beverage Processors are Developing Skills Training & Mentorship*.

Eliminating Barriers to Attraction and Retention of Workers at Farm Fresh Poultry

This project led to a ride-sharing service for Farm Fresh Poultry that significantly reduced the cost of transportation for individuals without personal vehicles. The company also explored options for reduced housing and subsidized accommodations to assist workers in finding a home.

Farm Fresh Poultry also learned that collaboration with Minto area businesses and the community could provide support to the company and its employees with other issues such as daycare and elder care.

To learn more about Farm Fresh Poultry and the project, check out the article *Community-Based Solutions for Rural Processors' Unique Labour Challenges*.

Eliminating Barriers to Attraction and Retention of Employees at Burnac Produce

This project created and launched an initiative called [Jobs That Feed](#) with a website, targeted marketing campaign on social media, video, and radio. The website offers available jobs, job descriptions, and functionality for jobseekers to apply for jobs. A unique behavioural assessment tool to assist jobseekers with “job fit” is also provided to applicants. The assessments assisted with the quality and fit of the applicant for the employer.

The Jobs that Feed initiative achieved its objective in increasing the quality of candidate applications, increasing the social media following across all platforms, and increasing awareness of the opportunities available in the food and beverage processing industry.

To learn more about Burnac Produce and Jobs That Feed, check out the article *3 Practical Industry Solutions to the Employment Challenge in Food and Beverage Processing*.

Driving Engagement Through Sustainable Attraction and Retention at Centennial Food Group

This project was designed to support better attraction and retention of employees in a large multicultural urban centre with support for multilingual employees, an improved onboarding process, an employee referral program, and a mentorship program. The latter proved the most successful for the company with a forum established to support women, especially those that identified as a visible minority.

To learn more about [Centennial Food Group](#) and this project, check out the article *3 Ways Food and Beverage Processors are Developing Skills Training & Mentorship*.

Temporary Foreign Worker Feasibility and Resource Study with Bimbo Canada

This project conducted an assessment and prepared a guide for the company and other processors to better understand how the Temporary Foreign Worker Program works and how it can be utilized by food and beverage processors.

The project identified that temporary foreign workers could solve both short-term and long-term labour gaps for processors and that the program itself is accessible for businesses and has proven to be very successful in its delivery.

To learn more about [Bimbo Canada](#) and this project, check out the article *3 Practical Industry Solutions to the Employment Challenge in Food and Beverage Processing*.

The Impact of Transportation, Daycare and Developmental Support on Recruitment and Retention at VG Meats

This project took a holistic approach to attract and retain employees with a comprehensive professional and personal approach to HR. VG Meats established skills and development plans with staff and explored ways to offer childcare and transportation options.

To learn more about VG Meats and the project, check out the article, *Community-Based Solutions for Rural Processors' Unique Labour Challenges*.

About the Agricultural Adaptation Council

The Agricultural Adaptation Council (AAC) is an industry-led organization that stimulates growth and opportunity for Ontario's agriculture and food industry through the delivery of funding programs, facilitating connections, and developing partnerships.

The Ontario Agri-Careers Support Initiative program was funded in part through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (the Partnership), a five-year, federal-provincial-territorial initiative. This program is being delivered by the Agricultural Adaptation Council on behalf of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.