



Ontario Agri-Careers Support Initiative

Community-Based Solutions for Rural Processors' Unique Labour Challenges



Food and Beverage Ontario's recent report, [Understanding Ontario's Food and Beverage Processing Industry](#), tells us the province has 4,675 food and beverage manufacturing establishments. For 75% of the facilities located in urban areas, the labour challenges are serious enough. But for the remaining 25% in rural areas, factors such as child and elder care, housing, and transportation can be debilitating for employers in attracting and retaining people.

According to the [Rural Ontario Institute](#), from 2006 to 2016, the manufacturing sector demonstrated the largest decline in employment within non-metropolitan areas — a decline of 30%. A recent Food and Beverage Ontario study also found that housing affordability is a dominating factor in an individual's choice of employment as well as an organization's ability to attract skilled workers. Housing affordability and accommodating childcare solutions can make or break a jobseeker's decision to work for an organization.

Rural processors finding community-based solutions for transportation and housing

Farm Fresh Poultry, a leading chicken processor located in Harriston, Ontario, has experienced several of its own challenges with affordable housing and transportation for employees. In this region, there is no public transit, but there are local rideshare programs and a network of community partners interested in supporting a strategy for the region. That said, without a personal vehicle, individuals may find it too cumbersome and time consuming to take a job that is outside of a rural town.

"There are 1,800 people living in Harriston which is a small pool to recruit workers from," said Ryan Lemire, Chief Operating Officer, Farm Fresh Poultry. "We knew implementing transportation solutions and identifying housing options would be key to resolving our labour challenges."

The company found a rideshare service that significantly reduced the cost of transportation to the plant. Previously, an employee who was unable to get transportation would likely commute via taxi at a variable cost that could be as high as \$50.00 one way. With a local ride sharing company called [Ride Well](#) it was possible to reduce transportation costs to roughly \$8.00 one way.

Farm Fresh Poultry also found housing initiatives local to Harriston with new housing available at reduced prices. This list is shared with employees and affordable housing programs – [Rent Geared to Income](#) and Below Market Rent — are highlighted for them.

[VG Meats](#) is another rural processor with similar challenges. A family-owned company located in Simcoe, Ontario, VG Meats has proudly been serving Ontario families high quality meat since the 1970s.

"We partnered with local interests to implement a rideshare program and assessed the potential of offering our own daycare options for families," said Kevin VanGronigen, Owner, VG Meats. "My advice for any rural processor is to connect with the community supports already in place and work together in finding solutions."

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