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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid





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• (1600)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 28 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The Board of Internal Economy requires that the committee adhere to the following health protocols: maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from others; wear a non-medical mask unless seated, and preferably wear a mask at all times, including when seated; and maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer provided in the committee room and by regularly washing your hands well with soap. As the chair, I will enforce these measures, and I really want to thank you for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You may speak in the official language of your choice. At the bottom of your screen, you may choose to hear floor audio, English or French. With the latest Zoom version, you do not need to select a corresponding language channel before speaking. The “raise hand” feature is on the main toolbar if you wish to speak.

I will remind you that all comments should be addressed to the chair. When you are not speaking, please keep your microphones muted. The committee clerk and I will maintain a speaking list for all the members.

Today, we resume our study of the labour market impact assessment under the temporary foreign worker program. We will be hearing from three witnesses in this panel.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all our witnesses for appearing before the committee and giving us their time. We look forward to hearing your important testimonies.

Today, we will be hearing from the National Cattle Feeders' Association, represented by Casey Vander Ploeg, vice-president; and Jolayne Farn, human resources manager, Van Raay Paskal Farms Ltd. We will also hear from the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, represented by Sheri Somerville, chief executive officer; and Brandon Ellis, senior manager, policy. We will also hear from Toundra Greenhouses, represented by Eric Dubé, chief executive officer.

All the witnesses will be given five minutes for their opening remarks, and then we will proceed to the rounds of questioning.

Before I open the floor for the opening remarks from the witnesses, I just want to get the consent of the committee.

Because our witness Eric Dubé does not have a headset, it will not be possible to have interpretation. I want to seek the consent of the committee to allow him to give his testimony without having interpretation.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.):** Madam Clerk, I wouldn't say that's fair.

**The Chair:** If that's the case and interpretation cannot happen, then we will not hear from Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Clerk, can you clarify why interpretation would not be available for Mr. Dubé's opening remarks?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Leif-Erik Aune):** During the sound check, the witness's integrated microphone on his device produced an audio quality that was not strong enough to allow for safe interpretation. I'm advised that the interpretation service is not possible with the quality of Mr. Dubé's audio. We could attempt it, but the interpretation service predicts that unless his audio quality were to change—and there's no technical reason to expect that it would—interpretation service won't be possible. They express their regrets.

**The Chair:** If we do not have unanimous consent from the committee, then I would request that Mr. Dubé send in a written submission.

Mr. Regan.

[Translation]

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Madam Chair, there is no doubt that it is very important to have simultaneous interpretation so that committee members, and even the witnesses, can understand the comments from witnesses. It's essential for our meetings.

I wonder if we could try again for a few minutes and ask Mr. Dubé to come a little closer to his computer. That might help.

It's just a suggestion.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Regan.

Mr. Clerk, can we try that?

[Translation]

**The Clerk:** Yes, we can try that.

Mr. Dubé, can I ask you to speak to us for 10 or 15 seconds.

[English]

**The Chair:** I see Madam Normandin's hand raised.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Yes, I would like to make a very quick comment in support of those made by Mr. Regan.

It is important for us to have interpretation as one of our parliamentary privileges. However, if Mr. Dubé wants to stay with us, we could ask him questions, at least in the context of the discussions we will be having, and he can reply in writing.

Can the analysts compile the questions we ask and send them to Mr. Dubé, if the sound checks still don't work?

• (1605)

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Clerk, can you do the check for Mr. Dubé?

[Translation]

**The Clerk:** Mr. Dubé, could you bring your computer's microphone very close to your mouth and speak to us for 10 or 15 seconds?

**Mr. Eric Dubé (Chief Executive Officer, Tundra Greenhouses):** Good afternoon. My apologies for the problem with the microphone. I received the invitation less than 48 hours ago and we weren't able to obtain a microphone that would help with the interpretation and accommodate everyone. I am not sure whether people can hear me, whether the service is working properly. You will have to tell me.

**The Clerk:** Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

[English]

We're advised that, for reasons of health and safety, the interpretation service is not able to interpret the testimony.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

I think it would be best if you can send us a written submission because this is the last meeting with witnesses. It will not be possible for us to reschedule a meeting with you.

[Translation]

**Mr. Eric Dubé:** Okay, thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You can stay with us and hear the questions. I will work with the clerk to see how we can get some of the questions answered from your end, through a written testimony.

Yes, Mr. Dhaliwal.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, even though Mr. Dubé is not making his statement right now, if there are questions for him, certainly those can be

posed by the members of Parliament. Then they can be answered in written form.

**The Chair:** Yes, that's what I have suggested to Mr. Dubé, that he can stay and hear the discussion. If there are some questions to which the members need answers, we can send them in writing to Mr. Dubé, and he can send us a written response.

With that, we will start hearing from our witnesses.

First, we will hear from the National Cattle Feeders' Association.

Casey Vander Ploeg, vice-president, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg (Vice-President, National Cattle Feeders' Association):** Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Casey Vander Ploeg. I am the vice-president of the National Cattle Feeders' Association. I'm joined today by Ms. Jolayne Farn, who is the HR manager at one of Canada's largest cattle feeding operations, Van Raay Paskal Farms in southern Alberta.

I'll say just a few words first about who we are and what we do.

Every spring, there are millions of calves born on some 75,000 farms and ranches across Canada. After a season on pasture eating grass, these calves are sold to cattle feeders and placed in a feedlot operation, where they're fed a high-energy grain ration that takes them from 500 or 600 pounds to a market weight of 1,500 pounds. Canada's feedlots range widely in terms of size, from 1,000- and 5,000-head operations to over 100,000 head. These larger operations employ hundreds of people. Every year, cattle feeders in this country finish over three million head of cattle and generate \$9 billion in farm income.

Without question, a chronic shortage of labour is the single largest challenge facing Canadian agriculture. It results in lost sales of over \$400 million annually for our beef industry, and over \$3 billion when you consider all of agriculture. Despite Herculean efforts, agriculture simply cannot attract enough domestic labour to fill these rural jobs, and because there is no stream within the immigration system to secure agriculture workers, we rely on the temporary foreign worker program. It's the only gateway for our sector to secure foreign labour, which we then work to transition to permanent residency.

Before I turn to Jolayne to detail some of the concerns we have with LMIA's and the TFW program, I want to stress a critically important point: Cattle feeders are not interested in low-skilled foreign temporary workers. We need permanent full-time skilled workers. The temporary foreign worker program is designed for temporary workers and is not a natural fit for our sector, but it's the only option we have.

I give the floor over to you, Jolayne.

• (1610)

**Ms. Jolayne Farn (Human Resources Manager, Van Raay Paskal Farm Ltd., National Cattle Feeders' Association):** Thank you, Casey.

I speak from 15 years of HR experience and seven frustrating years of working with the temporary foreign worker program. The LMIA process is costly, inefficient and does not meet the needs of the beef industry. The program is complicated, and we need to hire immigration consultants to help us manage it.

Also, changes to the program occur without notice. For example, we submitted LMIA's, and while they were being processed, the approved wage rate was changed. Our application was denied and we had to start all over—at the employer's expense.

The housing must be secured, inspected and paid for prior to an LMIA being submitted and the workers' arrival. The process takes at least four months, so we have to pay for housing that sits empty. We've paid \$5,000 in rent for one house and as much as \$21,000 for houses that sat empty while we waited for approvals.

Service Canada officers lack knowledge about agriculture. Our job descriptions are not understood, and neither are rural locations and addresses. The resulting delays and denied applications are, again, at the employer's expense.

Before submitting an LMIA, we need to post job advertisements for 14 days and provide a detailed report on our attempt to hire Canadians. We once submitted all this required information and the LMIA was denied. We found that the officer did not review all the information provided.

Processing times are far too long. Job advertisements take two weeks. Service Canada takes four to eight weeks to review the application and another two to four weeks to secure a work permit. The process takes four to six months before a worker arrives, and this assumes a smooth process, which rarely occurs. COVID-19 has made the process even longer and more expensive with travel logistics and the need to pay wages for workers in quarantine.

It is important to understand that overcoming these frustrations and getting foreign agriculture workers into Canada is just the first step. Once workers arrive, we focus on transitioning them to permanent residency, and that can take years.

We were pleased when the government announced plans to allow permanent residency for some 90,000 foreign workers now in Canada, but this too has issues. No third party is allowed to support the workers in submitting applications. Medical tests, translations, employment letters, forms and passports have to be submitted as one package. The cost to apply is over \$1,000 per worker, and there is no reimbursement if the application is denied—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Farn, but your time is up.

We will now proceed to the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Somerville, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. You can share your time with your colleague.

**Ms. Sheri Somerville (Chief Executive Officer, Atlantic Chamber of Commerce):** Mr. Ellis will be taking our time. He'll lead the charge on this one.

**Mr. Brandon Ellis (Senior Manager, Policy, Atlantic Chamber of Commerce):** Thank you very much, Sheri.

Thank you very much to the committee members for having us here today, and to you as well, Madam Chair.

My name is Brandon Ellis. I am the senior manager of policy for the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce. As was mentioned, we're also joined by our chief executive officer today, Sheri Somerville.

The Atlantic Chamber of Commerce represents 94 chambers of commerce and boards of trade, and the interests of 16,000 businesses across four Atlantic provinces.

Throughout the pandemic, and in the time predating it, we have seen immigration play a vital role in the economic stability of our region. Immigration programs have allowed Atlantic Canadian communities to grow their population and have seen businesses diversify their skill sets and their workforces as well.

The Atlantic chamber is pleased to see the recent commitment by government to increase immigration targets by over 400,000 per year for the next three years. We're also pleased to see former leaders making positive contributions to the discussion on immigration, such as the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney with his recent commentary suggesting that Canada needs to triple its population by the end of the century.

In order to grow and have a robust workforce, we must begin taking down the barriers for employers and newcomers. Labour market impact assessment processing times have generally decreased throughout the pandemic, yet many employers, particularly in agriculture, as our fellow witnesses have just relayed, have said that more communication from government is needed as travel restrictions continue to evolve.

It has also become more costly for employers to recruit immigrant workers due to the rising cost of flights, the implementation of quarantine hotels, the provision of food to workers while they're quarantining, and in Atlantic Canada, the mandatory two-week quarantine restrictions across the four provinces. All of these costs are, in most cases, at the expense of the employer.

Furthermore, LMIA's and slow permit processing times have contributed to an increasingly burdensome process for recruiting entry-level workers. While express entry programs can see immigrants come to Canada in a relatively short time frame, there are examples of employer attempts to recruit entry-level workers—who do not qualify for the express entry category—taking between 12 to 18 months within our region.

It is not only permit processing that adds to the administrative length and burden. Additional factors include needing to establish an account with the Government of Canada's job bank, getting vacancies posted, the required one-month advertising period, and then the LMIA processing, as well.

Government should establish collaborations with businesses and communities to assist immigrants and international students as they attempt to connect with the workplace. There must be an increase in resources to help immigrants settle in their new communities. Immigrants will be put in a position to succeed when they are welcomed as members of the community. To facilitate that, there must be adequate resources that are allocated to ensure long-term success.

The Atlantic chamber believes that immigration will be instrumental in the economic recovery of Canada. Government must focus on programs to increase experiential learning, accelerate immigration, recognize foreign credentials, simplify seasonal work programs and enhance settlement services and retention strategies.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure that we will have a robust labour market with access to qualified workers. This will ensure that we not only recover but also grow.

We would like to thank the Government of Canada and the citizenship and immigration committee for the important work that you are doing. Immigration is vital to the future of Canada, and we must all work collaboratively to ensure that immigrants are in a position to succeed upon arrival. We must also actively work to reduce the regulatory burden and wait times for immigrants and employers.

We welcome any questions that the committee may have.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ellis, for your remarks.

We will now proceed to our round of questioning. We will start our round of questioning with Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you will have six minutes. You can please proceed.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses today.

I'd like to hear a little bit more about the processing delays. Over and over again, we hear from a lot of people that there are already so many delays when it comes to processing applications. With more announcements now being piled on by immigration, people are concerned that those processing times are going to be pushed even further back.

To the NCFA and anyone from the chamber, can you please talk a little bit more about what your concerns are with those delays, and what kind of red tape you're seeing?

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** I'll be brief. Yes, the processing times, delays, rejected applications and having to resubmit are all part of this frustrating administrivia that employers have to deal with.

We've suggested two things that might be changed to help this out. The first is to incorporate a trusted employer status within the temporary foreign worker program, so that those employers who have a good record with foreign workers could get their applications expedited. We could hold back on delays and increased turnaround times.

The second idea is to draw a distinction between those coming into the temporary foreign worker program who are truly temporary and seasonal, and those who are applying for full-time permanent work in the agriculture stream, who will transition out of the temporary foreign worker program and into permanent residency. We think that those are two options to improve the program and help correct this situation.

• (1620)

**Mr. Brandon Ellis:** Thank you for the question. I will answer on behalf of the chamber.

We would also support a trusted employer designation. We have a similar program under the Atlantic immigration pilot program, and we think that it would be good in other parts of the country as well.

The delays I've been hearing a lot about around the region are primarily in the entry-level workforce. For example, there's a Tim Hortons in Happy Valley-Goose Bay in Newfoundland and Labrador that has to begin their application a year in advance prior to any worker going there. They do not have access to workers under express entry due to the skill level of the work. It is creating exceptional delays for them. They take between 12 and 18 months to get a worker there. I've also heard the same for some long-term care homes within the region.

Some of the delays we're experiencing are primarily due to the skill level and to government not necessarily recognizing that employers need access to a labour market at all skill levels.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you so much for that. I've been hearing the same thing from all the groups that I've been talking to. Usually it's the employer who's left scrambling after all these big announcements are made because there's no real plan or there's no real help for them.

For example, I got a call today from an employer who said his entire workforce might have to take the entire day off tomorrow because they're going to have to apply for the newly announced express entry program. That's a huge concern. Right when the announcements were made, there was this big panic of having English classes filling up because people had to take them just to catch up to that portion of getting accepted.

I'll open it up to both of you again. Are you hearing concerns from employers about this new program that's being released tomorrow and the burden or the panic that it has caused for employers?

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** Jolayne, do you have any thoughts on that?

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** Yes. There are quite a few employers concerned about this, as there are going to be many who want to get into this program but there's so much red tape when you try to get into it. For us, we have many who are trying to get into English classes too, to be able to be accepted in this program.

**Mr. Brandon Ellis:** At this time we have not heard any feedback on the new express entry streams.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you very much for that.

With what we currently have, we're also seeing delays with the new quarantine measures, where some people are waiting for more than 20 days for a test to come back. Can you talk a little bit about how much of a negative impact this has on employers?

They're already spending so much money to bring people here. Can you talk about the burden and what we can do to get rid of some of this red tape?

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** I can speak on behalf of the National Cattle Feeders. We have had long delays in getting tests back for our employees. We've had to pay 30 hours per week while they're in quarantine. That is a cost that we've had to incur because of the long waits in testing. That's what I can speak about on our behalf. I'm not sure about the chamber.

**Mr. Brandon Ellis:** It's not so much in the form of testing, but the extraordinary costs to get an employee into the workforce here in Atlantic Canada now are quite substantial.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Ellis, but your time is up.

We will now proceed with Mr. Schiefke for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Let me start by thanking all our witnesses for joining us today, including Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Dubé, it is a shame that we cannot hear you, but we will gladly read your document.

[*English*]

My line of questioning today will start with Ms. Somerville from the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce.

Both of you talked about challenges relating to the costs associated with bringing in temporary foreign workers during COVID-19. I'm wondering if you could speak to the subsidies that were put forward by the federal government, and whether that had a positive impact on you and your members.

• (1625)

**Ms. Sheri Somerville:** I can speak to that, certainly. I think what we're seeing is that, overall, any amount of time that people have to spend in quarantine and quarantine hotels certainly ups the costs. Any subsidy the government provides at this time, especially considering all the added costs and the losses that businesses are currently incurring as a result of 18 months of shutdowns and then being back in business, is always very helpful. Nonetheless, they still have to quarantine. They still have to spend time in the hotels.

Right now I don't have any hard and fast numbers on where those costs lie. I can anecdotally say that the subsidies would probably be very welcome, but it certainly doesn't negate the costs they're already incurring.

**Mr. Peter Schiefke:** I understand.

Several witnesses testified in previous committee meetings about having to incur these costs on an annual basis, the thousands of dollars required to put forward these applications. Many put forward the idea of having one application that would be good for multiple years because many of the workers keep coming back every year.

Is this something that you think would be beneficial to the members of the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce?

**Ms. Sheri Somerville:** Brandon, you can jump in if you'd like, but we have the designated employer program, which works very well in Atlantic Canada. If you think about it, anything that you don't have to do twice increases your efficiencies, and that's what you want: increased efficiency, increased efficacy, a reduction in the time intensity that employers and employees have to put in. Every lost day counts. You want to reduce that, so I would say, absolutely, let's try to get a program in place.

I know our colleagues at the Canadian chamber have talked about implementing the temporary program across Canada. We have had a very good experience with that in Atlantic Canada—I don't believe I'm overstating it—and it's a model that could be replicated. I believe our colleagues at the Canadian chamber had mentioned a NEXUS-like program. We have models we can replicate and take best practices from to help expedite processes and make it less time-intensive and reduce your red tape.

**Mr. Peter Schiefke:** The Atlantic Chamber of Commerce put out a tweet with regards to the program we put forward for temporary residency to permanent residency, speaking to the fact that you're happy to see that 90,000 people in Canada will be granted permanent residency, including farm workers. Your tweet was "The demand is strong for Canada's 6 new immigration programs with nearly 1.5 million workers and students in Canada. Some 90,000 new permanent residence spots will be available beginning May 6."

Is this a program you would like to see expanded upon, and would it be beneficial to the members of the chamber?

**Ms. Sheri Somerville:** I believe so. Quite frankly, we need more bodies in Atlantic Canada. We have an aging and shrinking population, and inclusive growth is part and parcel of our economic growth and the region's sustainability. Absolutely, I would say yes to that.

**Mr. Peter Schiefke:** Thank you.

For my last question, I'm going to turn my attention to the National Cattle Feeders' Association.

Ms. Farn, you mentioned something very interesting. You said that the workers who are processing the files are not as well versed as they should be with regard to farming. Could you be more specific and elaborate on what you mean by that, so that we can improve on the system and perhaps better educate and better inform those who are processing these important files?

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** Sure.

When we submit the LMIA's, a job description is attached. That job description is very clear that when we bring calves in, we have to process cattle. They do not understand what that is. Processing cattle is putting an implant in their ear—a tag—vaccinating, ensuring their health and making sure that they're placed with food and water.

They don't understand low-stress cattle handling either. We have to explain and go through the whole process of what low-stress cattle handling is. Some have told me that they understand, but there's been such inconsistency from one officer to another, we spend a lot of time explaining. The outcome will affect the employer, because of that lack of knowledge.

• (1630)

**Mr. Peter Schiefke:** Thank you very much, Ms. Farn.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have left?

**The Chair:** You have about 25 seconds.

**Mr. Peter Schiefke:** Okay.

Ms. Farn, I'll ask a quick question of you once again, or perhaps you, Mr. Vander Ploeg.

You put out a tweet that you're happy to see the 90,000 people in Canada temporarily now being granted permanent residency. Are you also in favour of an expansion of that program that was just put forward?

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** With some changes....

Go ahead, Casey.

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** Jolayne mentioned some of the issues we have with the current 90,000, but the concept, the idea, of better improved pathways to permanent residency addresses a critical need that we've been raising on this file for years.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up.

**Mr. Peter Schiefke:** Thank you all.

**The Chair:** We will now proceed to Madam Normandin.

Madam Normandin, you can please start. You will have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My thanks to all the witnesses for their presentations.

My questions go to anyone who would like to answer. The first also goes to Mr. Dubé.

I would like you to tell me about a myth we often hear, that foreign workers are often cheap labour. You might say that it's something we hear even more often in connection with agriculture.

Mr. Dubé, I have spoken to my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean, who has helped with the arrival of some very qualified foreign workers, from the Netherlands, if I recall correctly. I know that there's a lot of very qualified labour. So I would like your comments on the quality of the labour.

Mr. Vander Ploeg, you also said that you are not looking for underqualified workers, but qualified workers. Can you comment on that?

[*English*]

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** I'll elaborate very quickly for you. Thank you for that question.

Across the country, governments have been raising minimum wages. I remember receiving a call from a reporter about the situation in Alberta and whether we were concerned about that. My answer was that we were not concerned about that at all, because cattle feeders pay way above and beyond minimum wage. It is a true living wage, and there are opportunities to be promoted and move up within an operation.

Jolayne is very familiar with Cristo, who came in as a foreign worker from Mexico and is now in a supervisory managerial role in one of the largest cattle-feeding operations in the country. It's a tremendous success story.

Jolayne, do you have anything that you would add on the wage side?

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** Every one of our temporary foreign workers who has come in has excelled and is surpassing...and has very much increased wages. I would not say that they are cheap labour in regard to that.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

You also said that it is sometimes difficult to make your needs clearly understood, with Service Canada specifically. You often have to turn to members of Parliament to obtain information.

Would a dedicated phone line, specifically to answer your questions, be of any use to you?

[*English*]

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** That service would be incredibly helpful—very helpful



[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Along the same lines, would it be more useful to have the support of agents with access to your workers' files, rather than office staff giving out general information?

[English]

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** Yes. That would be very helpful. They would know and would understand how the entire process works.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Does anyone from the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce want to comment on that?

[English]

**Mr. Brandon Ellis:** We would agree.

If there's one area of government that we would recommend expanding, we would recommend expanding the resources in Citizenship and Immigration. I think that would be a fantastic idea.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**Ms. Sheri Somerville:** If I may add to that, with concierge services like a dedicated phone line, if you look at what Nova Scotia did in their office of regulatory efficiency, ORASE, they developed that one-stop shop where businesses can go to one person and then government deals behind the scenes with everything it needs to do to get the right response for people.

That is incredibly helpful to businesses. The time that you have to call around or find information is time well spent to get you where you want to go, but it's time that's needed.

• (1635)

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

This is for the National Cattle Feeders' Association. You were talking about financial support during the crisis. We know that the amount being provided is up to \$1,500 and it will go to \$750, starting on June 15.

Is that amount sufficient in the current crisis?

[English]

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** I'd ask Jolayne about that.

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** I would say no. It's not enough support.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

I would like to hear what you have to say about an issue parallel to the one involving temporary workers: animal welfare.

Does predictability in terms of the temporary workers, meaning always having a good complement of employees, help with animal welfare?

[English]

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** Absolutely, yes, because animal welfare is huge. You want to give them the best life that you can while they're

here, and you need the people to do that. It's a 24-7 business. They need to ensure that they are fed and watered, and especially that they're treated. If they have lameness or a disease, they have to be treated. We want to keep them alive.

Yes, we need these people to ensure that the animal welfare is there.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

As I do not have much time left, I would like to ask a question that I may go back to. It is about the duration and predictability of work permits and labour market impact assessments.

I would like to know whether the same workers always come back to the same employers. This would be a justification for extending work permits and labour market impact assessments, given that, year after year, the positions to be filled are the same.

I don't think I will have the time to hear the answer, Madam Chair, but I will come back to it on my next round.

[English]

**The Chair:** Your time is up. You can go again in the second round.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. You can please proceed.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses.

I was particularly intrigued by the comment that what the IRCC needs to do is to really have a stream for, perhaps, lower skills or different skills for permanent residents, immigrants coming to Canada. Then also it needs to particularly target those who are seasonal so that we can actually have a wider range of PR application processes and better management of the needs today.

Canada used to have an immigration stream that targeted the full range of labour skills—high, medium and low—but right now our system is primarily targeting the highly skilled level. Would you support Canada's bringing back an immigration stream that targets the full range? I suspect there are a lot of people who actually want to work in different fields as well and would want to get permanent resident status here in Canada.

I wonder if any of the witnesses want to comment on that.

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** I think that is a very important question and a very important comment.

We think—and we've long thought about this too—that we need a long-term, enduring solution for this issue. This is just the first nip of the ringer. Baby-boomer retirements are happening. We think that there is going to be increased pressure to grow the Canadian labour force.

One of our recommendations to government is to secure a long-term solution by establishing an economic immigrant stream within the immigration system that meets Canada's diverse and multi-faceted labour needs—whatever those jobs are—and by, as a way to move forward with that, resurrecting the concept of employer sponsorship of immigrants.

That's how my parents came to this country. My dad was an electrician, but he came in as a farm worker because Canada needed farm workers and my father needed Canada. It was an awesome match.

We think that there are certainly some lessons to be learned from how we managed this in the past.

• (1640)

**Mr. Brandon Ellis:** We would just simply say that there are areas for all skills in Atlantic Canada and in Canada as a whole. There's room for everyone.

As I mentioned earlier, in the Tim Hortons in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, 37 of the 40 workers they are employing there are immigrants. They are newcomers to our country. The Labradorian population is now 1.2% Filipino. They are doing wonderful things up in Labrador for international recruitment and immigration. We need skills across the board to come to our country and to build it.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much indeed for that. I would agree. Actually, I think it would benefit Canada in every sense of the word to have the full range of skill sets by way of an immigration stream to come to Canada.

I want to turn to the new announcement that the government made on the 90,000 TFW PR stream. The details of that program are going to be announced tomorrow, and already we know that there are going to be problems with it.

It's going to be first-come, first-served, as I understand it, and people have to have language testing. There's a backlog of people trying to get that language requirement met, amongst other things. In the face of this, I'm quite worried about how this is going to unfold down the road.

What do you think the government should do to address this current announcement to make the program better?

The other issue that I know some workers have already indicated is that they don't have access to the technology to make that application, because they are out on a farm or in a place where they don't have good broadband. If it's first-come, first-served, they may actually miss out.

Are you hearing any of those kinds of concerns from your workers or from an employer's perspective?

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** Go ahead, Jolayne.

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** Yes. From our workers, we are hearing concerns about first-come, first served. Also, they can't have support

from an immigration consultant. They have to do all of it themselves and pay these fees with no reimbursement if something goes wrong. If every "i" isn't dotted and every "t" isn't crossed, they are out this money, and it is substantial to them. It's not only the English requirements, but everything that needs to be sent in.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Is there anyone else?

**Ms. Sheri Somerville:** I don't think I'll speak up, Brandon. I don't think we're too aware of that right now and what the effect would be in Atlantic Canada.

As Jolayne alluded to, for anything that adds an extra step—an extra "i" that needs to be dotted or a "t" that needs to be crossed or delays—at this time, it's burdensome to employers. I don't know what the answer is to fix that, unless you get the processing time in terms of advance notice of language or what have you.... There's really no easy fix to it, I would say. If the program is being announced tomorrow—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Somerville. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to our second round of questioning.

We will start our second round with Mr. Allison.

Mr. Allison, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

To our witnesses, thank you as well.

Casey, my in-laws came to Canada from eastern Europe many years ago to work on a farm, and I think you've just hit the nail on the head: What a great way to get started. They did not know the language, not at all. If they'd had to pass a language test, they would have been cut out and wouldn't have had that opportunity.

Brandon, you talked about Tim Hortons employees. I can assure you, because I have been a Tim Hortons franchisee, that if we could get people locally, we would never want to go through the temporary foreign worker program, because it's costly. You mentioned that.

The reality is that people think, for some strange reason, that.... I realize that potentially there are people thinking that it adds to the system, but I'm going to say that, by and large, people treat these temporary foreign workers very well. At the end of the day, they do what they need to do. It's housing and it's all the things that go into that.

My question is for you, Jolayne. You talked about the LMIA's. It's interesting that we go through the same process every year, hoping that maybe something has changed and that we need to post online again because maybe magically we're going to get some employees to show up this year.

Talk to me about what we need to do to streamline that process or program so that we can make it easier. Is it a cheaper fee? Is that part of it? Is it a reduced waiting period? If you're obviously advertising one year.... Talk to me about what you think would make that program easier to manage.

● (1645)

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** What would make it easier, first of all, is the advertising. When you're in agriculture, you're advertising all the time to get a Canadian to come and work for you. Why, two weeks prior to an LMIA, do you have to prove that you have been advertising to try to hire a Canadian? It doesn't make sense. We're trying to do it all the time.

Right now, with the four agriculture streams, there are four different rules to going into these LMIAs. Going forward, it would be nice to have more of a streamlined process. You have to fill out all the substantial information in all of these LMIAs—employer's letters, the proof of advertising—which then goes back to the Service Canada officer who is probably confused as to what questions they should be asking these people.

I think the LMIA process just needs to be more streamlined and have the right officers asking the question. If we could get Canadians to work, we would not be spending the money we spend on temporary foreign workers, but we cannot.

**Mr. Dean Allison:** Absolutely.

Sheri and Brandon, you guys mentioned it before. The east coast is an amazing place. Obviously, when it comes to some type of economic stream for a path to residency, I would guess that you would support that in a big way because it is tough to get employees. At the end of the day, when you get people in your communities that can be a part of it, this would be something that I think would be beneficial in the long term for, not just the east coast but certainly all across Canada.

Talk to us about your specific experience in the east coast.

**Mr. Brandon Ellis:** I'll take this one.

We need a wide range of skill sets across Atlantic Canada. We're highly rural, which means we have employers that require a significant amount of skill from newcomers coming in, but also some that only require entry-level skill sets coming in. I know several employers here, even just in the St. John's area, that cannot get workers to work at their workplace. We need to look more internationally, beyond what we have here in Atlantic Canada.

We also have an older population. We will greatly need immigration as we go forward in the next couple of years as we see folks leaving the workplace and needing to be replaced.

Above all else, our members need access to qualified workers, no matter their skill.

**Mr. Dean Allison:** Thank you.

Sheri, is there anything else you want to add?

**Ms. Sheri Somerville:** As one of those who is in the aging population, absolutely; that's what we hear all the time.

We have a company that has said it's going to need 10,000 workers of all skill levels over the next five years. We have agriculture. We have aquaculture. Students are a great first line of defence, so we need to make sure we get international students coming to our universities and entrench them in our communities.

I just second what Brandon has said. Yes, we need more people in all of Canada, but in Atlantic Canada, I think the situation is just a little bit more acute. We have a great, beautiful place to live and we're trying to sell the heck out of it to everybody.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Somerville. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Regan.

Mr. Regan, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Somerville, I would say that Dean and I are definitely part of that aging population. I think you're a ways behind us and I think he'd agree with that. I see he's nodding.

I like what he said about the east coast being amazing. I'm glad he recognizes that. The Niagara region is pretty nice too. They have some nice wineries and great fruit, etc. My in-laws are in Ontario, so I have to say nice things about Ontario, besides.

Mr. Ellis, you talked about the aftermath of the pandemic. Can you tell us when that's going to start? I'm only kidding, but you did talk about an increase in experiential learning. I'll ask you or Ms. Somerville: How would you envisage that, please?

**Mr. Brandon Ellis:** We simply need more government programs to increase experiential learning to give newcomers and also local, domestic Canadians opportunities to be in the workforce or to increase their skill levels.

● (1650)

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** I represent the riding of Halifax West. I've seen reports years ago that suggested that this riding is the most diverse riding east of Montreal. I could say it's immigration central for Atlantic Canada, but it's good to see more immigrants coming to other parts of Atlantic Canada and throughout the area.

I would dispute your argument a little bit that the region is highly rural. It is more rural in terms of population than the rest of the country, and that's an important point, but over the past couple of decades, it has become considerably more urban. I think you'd agree.

Nevertheless, I want to ask you about the labour market challenges we face here in Atlantic Canada. To what degree do you find, from your members, that labour retention is an issue? How does it compare to attracting new talent? How does that dynamic work?

How do you think the Atlantic region, as a whole, is doing with its objectives of attracting and retaining newcomers? What role is the Atlantic immigration pilot playing?

**Mr. Brandon Ellis:** The Atlantic immigration pilot is a significant driver in the immigration efforts of our region. We greatly applaud the government for continuing to extend it and for implementing that program.

I will agree with you. I will not dispute your dispute that you're seeing a lot of folks within our region move to the more urban centres, but there is a lot of rural population across the region too, so it's important to find balance.

In terms of labour retention, with the immigration process as we're seeing it right now, as I mentioned, some of these wait times are between 12 and 18 months for some employers seeking entry-level workers. A lot of times, those newcomers who are coming to Canada are often also applying for their permanent residency.

It's become very hard to convince entry-level workers who go to a rural part of Canada to stay there after they are 12 months into their PR process and are no longer tied to the employer. If they have obtained permanent residency, they may be taking off to Toronto or to a larger urban centre, as you can imagine. It is greatly hurting some of our rural employers, for sure. There are issues around retention.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Let me ask Mr. Vander Ploeg about your experience with some of the pilot programs that the government has had, like the agri-food immigration pilot.

Do you see that this is a route the government should expand on, or are there elements of that which you think have been positive?

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** Certainly, that has been very important for the processing side of the industry. Cattle feeders are just as concerned with the labour shortages in our processing and agri-food facilities as we are on farm, because problems at that end of the supply chain trickle down to the farm level, and basically, result in lower farm income. We know that they are severely pressed on the labour front, so we work hand in glove with the processors to get that pilot program up and running.

The thing about the pilot is that it's an attempt to put a policy lens on the issue in order to come up with policy and programming that will work at the end of the day. One of the issues with the 90,000 that was announced was that it came out of the blue. It surprised everybody, and now there's a mad scramble to take advantage of it.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Vander Ploeg, but time is up for Mr. Regan.

We will now proceed to Ms. Normandin.

Ms. Normandin, you have two and a half minutes for your questioning. You can please proceed.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

My question goes to all the witnesses. I have kind of shown my colours already.

We know that the labour shortage is chronic at the moment. It has been that way for a number of years. It is not a new phenomenon or one that is different from one year to the next. The employers are always the same, the employees are often the same and they do the same job for one year, five years, 10 years and sometimes even more.

In that context, I would like to hear what you have to say about the case for increasing the duration of work permits and the validity of labour market impact assessments, specifically in order to provide more predictability.

• (1655)

[*English*]

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** Thanks for that question, and I'll be brief.

What we're talking about here is building some more permanency into the system. It's realizing that these are not one-off issues that get resolved every time you put an LMIA in or get a worker and a valid work visa.

We need to take a more programmatic policy-oriented approach to it. I think that's the direction we ought to be going in, quite frankly, all with an eye to reducing the regulatory burden and the administration costs of it, and realizing that we're going to be in this game for a considerable period of time to ensure we get the workers we need into this country.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Does anyone from the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce have a comment? If not, I have other questions.

Go ahead, Ms. Somerville.

[*English*]

**Ms. Sheri Somerville:** Just quickly, I would agree with that. Again, it's going back to the less work we make for employees to do redundant activities.... If we can extend it and build flexibility into the program so that year after year they're not returning to do that, I would agree with Mr. Vander Ploeg for sure.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Great, thank you.

In terms of labour market impact assessments, should they be more flexible, that is, valid for a longer time, in regions where the unemployment rate is low, since we know that those regions will have a shortage of labour?

[English]

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** The unemployment rate is only one metric. Alberta has very high rates of unemployment, for obvious reasons, but that doesn't mean that, in specific parts of the province, there isn't a huge need for labour. Our jobs are rural. They're outdoors. They're agriculture. They're different. We need to keep that in mind. There are metrics other than the unemployment rate.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, but your time is up.

We will now end our panel with Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have two and a half minutes for your round of questioning. The floor is yours.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

One of the issues that was brought up is about resettlement support, which is especially important for rural communities as opposed to an urban centre, where I come from. In your regions, in your areas, what kinds of resettlement supports do you think would be useful and helpful to support the workers and to attract people to come to your community and stay in your community?

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** Jolayne, do you have any thoughts on that?

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** In rural areas, there are always housing issues, and there are transportation issues for different reasons. Their wife's work might be urban, and we want them to become rural. There are transportation issues, and there are housing issues.

Is there anything else, Casey, that you can think of?

**Mr. Casey Vander Ploeg:** I think one of the interesting things to keep in mind here is that, when you get a group of immigrants together in a community, they start helping each other. Certainly that was my experience as a child growing up in this country. We want to facilitate that, but a lot of it is also organic. We should be facilitating that sense of community being created.

**Mr. Brandon Ellis:** I would agree as well. It is integral that you have that sense of community. I know several employers who are trying to specifically recruit the family and friends of immigrants who are coming over and have settled into the community. That has been what they're finding is helping with retention. We need any-

thing that can help support immigrants, whether it be housing or whether it be a frequently-asked-questions document.

Some of the immigrants land here and wonder where you can get a SIM card or where you can find things around the community. Anything that can help an immigrant integrate into a community and settle here is important.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm wondering if language capacity is an issue. Part of the requirement for the new program is language testing. If people are working here already, they are able to communicate with you. Do we really need additional language testing?

**The Chair:** Ms. Kwan, your time is up.

• (1700)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Could I just get a quick answer from any of the witnesses?

**The Chair:** You can get a quick, 10-second answer.

**Ms. Jolayne Farn:** It is an issue, and there should be more support with that, yes.

**The Chair:** With that, this panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all the members of this committee, I would really like to take the opportunity to thank all our witnesses for appearing before the committee and providing important testimony toward this study.

If you have any other things you want to highlight for the committee, and you were not able to talk because of the lack of time, you can always send us your submissions in writing. We can take them into consideration when we go through the consideration of the report.

I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes. Members should log off from this public Zoom and log on to the in camera Zoom meeting. It takes a few minutes for the IT to initialize the in camera Zoom. Everyone can log off from here and log on to the in camera Zoom for the rest of the meeting.

Thank you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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