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**BC AGRICULTURE LABOUR MARKET AND  
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**

*AN INITIATIVE UNDER THE AGRI-FOOD FUTURES FUND*

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**Three Year Strategic Plan  
2004 - 2006**

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# AGRICULTURE LABOUR MARKET AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE STRATEGIC PLAN

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## ***Purpose***

This document is the BC Agriculture Labour Market and Skills Development Initiative (ALMSDI) Strategic Plan (2004 to 2006). It has been prepared for consideration under the auspices of the Agri-Food Futures Fund (AFFF). The AFFF is a cost-sharing trust fund whose goals are the development and sustainability of the agri-food industry in British Columbia. As all agriculture industries depend to varying degrees on labour, this initiative and the issues it addresses are truly cross-sectoral and are fundamental to sustainability of BC's agri-food industry. This Strategic Plan outlines a proactive, responsive approach to achieving long-term agriculture labour market stability. The plan outlines goals and actions which focus in an integrated manner on the key attributes of the labour market, thereby achieving a balanced approach and laying out a roadmap to stability. This balance is necessary to not only meet the objective of long-term sustainability of the agri-food industry, but also to maintain and enhance BC's competitive ability within the national and international marketplaces.

The Strategic Plan was authored using direct input of representatives from the agriculture industry and provincial and federal government agencies. As such it identifies those areas and issues which need to be addressed for development of a stable, self-sustaining agriculture labour market, merging industry and government perspectives and forging a cooperative approach. The primary changes sought in the agriculture labour market through implementation of the strategic plan will be development of a vigorous industry stakeholder group facilitating an adequate supply of workers with relevant skill sets; fostering recognition among employers that quality of life incentives are important in addition to wages; and, developing competitive ability through maintenance of a healthy demand for labour in which supply and demand are easily matched.

## ***Introduction***

Traditionally, many of the skills needed to operate a farm were passed from generation to generation. Today agriculture requires skills and knowledge that cannot always be transferred in the same fashion. Modern farming in the global marketplace involves a high degree of knowledge about technology, world commodity prices, and production trends. A combination of business management, human resource

Farming today requires:  
business management skills  
human resource management  
technical skills

Identified AFFF priority:  
Agriculture labour market  
and skills development

management and technical skills are all required to successfully run British Columbia farms. The development of BC's agriculture labour market and skills development was identified as a priority initiative under the Agri-Food Futures Fund (AFFF) announced in March 2001.

ALPC

Discuss and determine solutions  
to labour market issues  
Improve competitive ability of  
primary agriculture

*Make agriculture a place where  
people want to work!*

In response to the need for a long-term approach to labour market and skills development issues, representatives from across agriculture and several government agencies came together in 2002 to hold the first Agriculture Labour Partnership Committee (ALPC) meeting. Its purpose is to be a forum to discuss and determine solutions to labour market issues that improve the competitiveness of primary agriculture and make agriculture a place where people want to work.

The actions identified in this strategic plan will focus on key gaps in the factors needed to achieve a balanced labour market in the agriculture sector. It will also provide a framework for planning to manage and preclude future labour market shortages. The goals of this strategic plan will be accomplished through industry leadership from within the sectors in cooperation with government. A Management Committee derived from the ALPC membership will manage the ALMSDI, determine financial disbursements, evaluate the impact of projects, and report back to the BC Investment Agriculture Foundation (IAF) on the outputs and outcomes. The ALPC will work to achieve long-term labour market stability within BC's agriculture sector, following the goals and principles laid out in the ALMSDI's Strategic Plan.

### **Vision**

*In the future, agriculture producers will be able to recruit and employ enough workers with the right skills to meet their production goals, all workers will have rewarding careers within the sector, and new entrants, including youth, will seek out jobs in the agriculture sector.*

### **Mission**

*Partners of the Agriculture Labour Partnership Committee will identify barriers that prevent agriculture producers from finding sufficient workers, and develop options that will help ensure that the labour market in this sector reaches a balance.*

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## Section 1 – Strategic Challenges and Framework

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### Where are we now?

With almost 40,000 farm workers in British Columbia, and over 8,500 farm employers, the family farm represents a diversity of workplace issues and commodities. Human resources have not been a priority within the agriculture sector or for public agencies. The introduction of technology into farming operations and the average age of the current labour market in this sector, present very real challenges for replacing existing workers, and for attracting new skills and competencies. In BC there is an economy-wide surplus of labour,

In BC:  
Economy-wide labour surplus  
BUT  
Deficit of agricultural labour.

yet agricultural producers for the past three to four years have had persistent difficulty finding and keeping harvest workers. In order to support future production goals of individual farmers, and the sector as a whole, the following challenges will need to be addressed.

40,000 farm workers in BC  
8,500 farm employers  
↓  
diversity of commodities &  
workplace issues

### What key challenges need to be addressed?

- **Greater understanding of the key skill gaps within the agriculture sector and analysis of where future skill gaps will emerge.**

Have we kept up with worker and farmer skill development? Are we able to identify skill gaps in the labour market and to find ways for workers and employers to obtain the skills needed in the future? Do we have adequate means of attracting new workers into the sector?

- **Improving the image of employment in the agriculture sector.**

The image of agricultural employment plays a role in attracting workers, as do human resource management practices on farms. Improving the image of the agriculture sector through innovative human resource practices will also have a payoff in terms of increased retention of workers and improved farm profitability.

- **Alignment of regulatory requirements with the production model used in agriculture.**

Farmers have expressed concerns about the increasingly complex regulatory world and its effects on the daily operation of our farms. The unique attributes of farm work are poorly understood by many regulatory agencies.

- **Greater understanding of why the sector faces chronic job vacancies.**

Are we able to fill labour market demands? Where will the future labour force come from? What steps need to be taken to attract labour to fill both seasonal and full time needs in all sectors? Worker shortages become a priority during peak seasonal periods, although skill shortages cross all sectors and are linked to a variety of causes.

- **Leadership capacity within the agriculture sector**

The need has never been greater for strong leadership in agriculture, as we face the challenges of globalization, biotechnology, rural communities in crisis, and sustainability, to name just a few. Today's leaders need the skills to challenge the process, model the way forward, and enable others to act. The diversity of the industry is matched with equally distinct views, often-conflicting science, greater individuality, and busy schedules.

- **Ensuring that public agencies and training bodies are able to keep pace with the rate of change in the agriculture sector.**

Public agencies whose mandates touch on agriculture labour market issues are not well organized to deal with the unique and rapidly changing nature of careers in agriculture. For the most part, even agencies with clear mandates established to protect workers are not aware that there are more farm workers in BC than the combined number of workers in primary forestry, fishing and mining in the province.

In order to construct a Strategic Plan for the initiative, we must be aware of these challenges and develop a plan that addresses where we are, where we want to be, and the critical actions necessary to achieve our collective vision of the agriculture sector in BC.

## **Guiding Principles of the Initiative**

- Approach labour market issues as a partnership between industry and all orders of government.
- Take action on labour market issues, which include but are not limited to addressing labour supply issues, enhancing the image of agriculture and building a skills development culture to help assure the future of agriculture in British Columbia.
- Recognize that human resources are an input that needs to be treated differently than other agricultural inputs.
- Recognize that there are underlying public health, food and personal safety concerns in agricultural production.
- Encourage employers and workers to uphold their responsibilities and rights under legislative and regulatory requirements.
- Ensure that solutions are identified and implemented in a timely manner.
- Employee input and participation will be sought via subcommittees, surveys or other processes.

## The Framework

The vision will be achieved through identification of gaps and actions in five key areas over the next three years. These key areas are:

1. The sector must have an **adequate supply of workers**
2. The sector must have **workers with the right skills**
3. Employers in the sector must recognize the importance of both monetary and non-monetary incentives – individual workers make choices based on **more than just wages**.
4. Competitiveness of the sector – ensuring there is **healthy demand for labour**
5. **Matching labour supply and demand** – workers and employers need to be able to find each other efficiently.

The Strategic Plan outlines a balanced approach to achieving long-term labour market stability in the agriculture sector. Achieving this stability can only be done by developing actions and measures that focus on all aspects of interactions in the labour market. Focussing on one area to the exclusion of others may address short-term problems, but will not aid the sector to address the goals of long-term stability. For example, focussing only on training will leave the seasonal needs for unskilled and semi-skilled harvest workers unresolved.

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Individual strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are found in the following tables as identified via the ALPC forum and grower focus group meetings. Agriculture and the public structures that support production systems are commodity-based. The diversity of BC agriculture presents both challenges and opportunities. The challenges relate to the continuing need for farmers to wear many hats and come to terms with today's environment. The opportunities relate to the potential for improved labour supply initiatives, new partners, new ventures and skills. The common threads include the necessity of balancing family and business, shortages of skilled and unskilled labour, human resource management, a greater understanding of the economy and awareness of agriculture.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<p>Agriculture is a diverse industry and an important part of the BC economy. It produces over 250 different commodities with cash receipts at approx. \$2.1 billion. It directly employs over 30,000 people, with spin-offs at an additional 24,000, generating \$4.8 billion in value-added products.</p> <p>Industry input is a strength, especially agriculture's ability to communicate practical hands-on solutions to labour market problems. Farm workers and other stakeholders have also agreed to help work towards solutions. There is an opportunity within the Agriculture Labour Partnership Committee to develop senior level commitment.</p> <p>BC is home to committed agriculture producers. Expertise within public and private sectors can aid industry competitiveness through leadership development.</p> <p>There is great potential to develop a partnered collaborative strategy for BC agriculture, working with public agencies on labour issues. Co-ordination is critical for farmers, farm workers and the public sector to work together in creating an Agriculture Labour Market and Skills Development Initiative in British Columbia, making agriculture a choice for the future</p>	<p>Each commodity has unique needs, creating equally unique challenges to address labour issues. There is a lack of investment in the 'people side'. There are insufficient resources to build capacity and engender proactive strategies rather than reactionary responses.</p> <p>Lack of a consistent long-term strategy results in shortages of skilled and seasonal workers during peak harvest periods. Further, there is a lack of resources to retain a labour market, which weakens industry growth.</p> <p>The need for leadership has never been greater for agriculture, but there are insufficient resources to support leadership and to address unique issues. Capacity to provide strategic management skills and access to choices to enhance the future has been lacking.</p> <p>Lack of proactivity and ownership has resulted in public agencies developing their own strategies and delivery of services for individual farm sectors. The current approach is costly and inconsistent. In addition, BC agriculture lacks women and youth in leadership roles.</p>

Opportunities	Threats
<p>There is opportunity for partnerships: for the development of greater understanding of the labour market; to recognise the importance of collaborating / addressing agriculture labour market issues; and, to ensure development of a sustainable ag industry in BC.</p> <p>To maintain/enhance a resident labour market and an adequate supply of seasonal and full-time labour through strong human resource management -- greater productivity results in lower per unit labour costs on farms. To develop options for partnered approaches.</p> <p>Strong leadership with the required resources will open the door for greater involvement, with ability to excite youth and the industry as a whole. Development of leadership with broad and open vision that results in the ability to initiate change</p> <p>The ALMSDI outlines the commitments made with the private and public sectors to work together towards a set of common goals. There is an opportunity to integrate the public sector initiatives with ALMSDI as part of the strategy for working on farm labour issues.</p>	<p>Failure to build investment by public sector agencies to work toward a Memorandum of Understanding and framework aimed at long-term labour market development will further enforce the ad/hoc reactionary approach.</p> <p>Apathy and changing public opinion regarding labour market issues result in narrow window time-frames to develop strategies in an open and transparent way that is conducive to agriculture's unique needs.</p> <p>BC lacks an integrated policy framework with common goals and effective mechanisms for implementation of labour market development. Continued lack of resources to build capacity within agriculture has diminished the ability to participate.</p> <p>Labour market needs differ among crops, regions and seasons. Agriculture lacks the public sector labour market development tools established in other industries to support employers and workers. Significant gaps include tools to help beginning farmers to prepare for their careers, or to help established farmers to assess situations and choose their best options.</p>

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## **Section 2 – Elements of the Strategic Plan**

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To address the labour market and skills development concerns associated with BC agriculture five key areas have been identified. Goals and specific action items have been further developed to address key gaps within each area.

This section identifies changes and approaches required in order to create labour market stability within the agriculture sector. Addressing critical skills and labour shortages within the industry are first order priorities. However, in order to achieve long-term labour stability other dimensions of labour market interactions must be addressed. The five key areas provide a framework for identifying and addressing all priorities. The key priority areas are:

1. The sector must have an **adequate supply of workers**
2. The sector must have **workers with the right skills**
3. Employers in the sector must recognize the importance of both monetary and non-monetary incentives – individual workers make choices based on **more than just wages**.
4. Competitiveness of the Sector – Ensuring there is **healthy demand for labour**
5. **Matching labour supply and demand** – workers and employers need to be able to find each other efficiently.

### **ALMSDI Goals**

From the vision and mission statements and the current state of the agriculture labour market in British Columbia five goals for industry development have been identified, compatible with the key priority areas listed above. The achievement of the actions which will realize each goal build upon one another. Thus the interacting factors in the labour market are accounted for and addressed. The result will be a solid base from which the Initiative may develop further strategies for the next strategic planning cycle, on which activities will be developed which build on the successful relationships created and projects and programs initiated through this strategic plan. Thus the ALMSDI will continue to drive toward the ultimate long-term objective of a stable, sustainable and self-sustaining BC agriculture labour market.

1

**Goal: Ensure there are enough workers to meet growers' production goals.**

#### **ISSUE: Adequate supply of workers**

**Context:** Without an adequate number of workers to perform responsibilities available, sectors will experience a 'labour shortage'. This is distinct from a 'skills shortage', as labour demand outstrips labour supply at all skill levels. Lack of labour force can occur for a number of reasons, including reductions in new workers coming into the sector, as well as changes in production practices which may be more labour intensive. If labour shortages cannot be

alleviated over the long-term, wages may be bid up, leading to increases in commodity prices which are passed on to consumers through higher product prices. Stable labour markets and a reliable source of workers are of benefit not only to producers with crops to harvest, but also to the overall economy in terms of keeping wage-push inflation in check.

**2** **Goal: Ensure the pool of available workers in the agriculture sector has the necessary skill sets and competencies to meet the growers' production goals.**

**ISSUE: Workers with the right skills**

**Context:** At times, the labour market may have a greater number of people looking for work than there are job openings, yet those unemployed people do not possess the skill sets necessary to perform the available work. This is known as a 'skills shortage', and is different than a general labour shortage.

One reason for the mismatch between the skills of available workers and the skill requirements of employers is the increasing complexity of work, and the introduction of technology. The agriculture sector is no exception to changing skill requirements, and employers in this sector require workers with a full range of employability skills, and in a number of cases, require workers with specific technical skills.

A stable labour market will have mechanisms in place for employers to clearly communicate what their skill needs are, and mechanisms to ensure that existing and potential workers are able to gain those critical skills.

**3** **Goal: Ensure that growers are aware that a range of factors – not just wages – influence individuals' decisions about work, and that those factors are incorporated into production models.**

**ISSUE: More than just wages**

**Context:** Wages are one of the clearest "market signals" that employers can communicate to attract prospective workers. However, there are a number of other non-monetary factors that influence a worker's decision to take a particular job. Many of these factors relate to issues of quality of life, work-life balance, personal interests and social dynamics in the workplace – all of which are more difficult to quantify and communicate in a job posting. Focussing exclusively on wages, however, will not help the sector reach a balanced labour market, but will leave persistent gaps that financial solutions alone cannot address. By taking these factors into account, growers will have satisfied workers, and will ensure that new entrants including youth are attracted into the sector in the future.

Where possible, activities will link with projects being done under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between agriculture and the Employment Standards' Branch of the

Ministry of Skills Development and Labour. (The MOU focuses on education around the *Employment Standards Act.*)

**4** **Goal: Ensure there are viable employment opportunities in the agriculture sector, and that those opportunities provide clear signals to attract potential workers into the sector.**

**ISSUE: Healthy demand for labour**

**Context:** Developing a vibrant, efficient labour market in any sector requires a healthy demand for workers. Without good opportunities for sustainable employment, workers will not be attracted to the sector, but will choose alternatives in other sectors. Communication of the opportunities and the potential benefits (for example, earnings and career prospects) are also critical if workers are going to be attracted to agriculture.

**5** **Goal: Ensure that growers with job vacancies in the agriculture sector can find an adequate number of workers and are able to fill job vacancies such that production is not compromised.**

**ISSUE: Matching labour supply and demand**

**Context:** In a balanced labour market, employers who require workers and people looking for work are able to find one another quickly and efficiently. Ideally, efficient labour markets have no more job vacancies than would occur with normal rates of turnover.

In order to achieve this goal of efficient matching of employers and workers, both parties require complete, comprehensive, and current information. Employers need to know where the pool of workers is, what compensation they are looking for, what skill sets are available in the existing pool and the number of other employers who are looking for the same skills. Job seekers, on the other hand, need to know where the job vacancies are, what the skills sets required are, how many other people with the desired skill set they are competing with, and what wage and compensation rate the job market will bear.

In the real world there are impediments to creating a perfect match such as lags in timing for information and limited access to information. A good match also depends on personalities and attitudes which are not easily measured or predicted. While it is unlikely that a perfectly efficient system for matching employers and employees can be created, this Strategic Plan addresses the inefficiencies within the current mechanisms, thereby alleviating some of the skills shortages resulting from systemic problems. By removing the systemic problems, the sector will be better positioned to in the future to focus on the challenges presented via external factors (such as aging of the labour market).

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## Section 3 - Fiscal Strategy

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### Proposed Expenditures

The ALMSDI is based on a three-year strategic plan. Table 1 outlines the details of the proposed three-year budget. Since this Strategic Plan outlines a proactive, responsive approach to achieving long-term agriculture labour market stability, these allocations are guidelines to be used in effecting the actions outlined within each goal. Thus, as labour market issues or concerns arise and shift within the term of the strategic plan, projects to address those changes will be allocated appropriately within the goal framework. The overall cost sharing between industry and the ALMSDI is 50 percent each. However, variation will be allowed on a project by project basis dependent upon the projected needs. The overall 50:50 balance will be achieved over the term of the initiative. The budget is based on a three-year allocation of \$500,000 from the AFFF and 50:50 cost sharing between the AFFF and industry.

**Table 1. Proposed Three Year Budget**

<b>Key Priority Area</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Year 1 Approval to Dec. 31 2005</b>	<b>Year 2 2006</b>	<b>Year 3 2007</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1. Adequate Supply of Labour</b>	Industry	43,750	87,500	43,750	175,000
	Program	43,750	87,500	43,750	175,000
<b>2. Workers with the Right Skills</b>	Industry	18,750	37,500	18,750	75,000
	Program	18,750	37,500	18,750	75,000
<b>3. More than Just Wages</b>	Industry	18,750	37,500	18,750	75,000
	Program	18,750	37,500	18,750	75,000
<b>4. Healthy Demand for Labour</b>	Industry	31,250	62,500	31,250	125,000
	Program	31,250	62,500	31,250	125,000
<b>5. Matching Labour Supply and Demand</b>	Industry	12,500	25,000	12,500	50,000
	Program	12,500	25,000	12,500	50,000
<b>Total</b>	Industry	125,000	250,000	125,000	500,000
	Program	125,000	250,000	125,000	500,000

## Cost Sharing

As outlined in the Agri-Food Futures Fund, Background Information document, cost sharing of initiatives between governments and industry is a primary principle of the AFFF. The ALMSDI target level for cost sharing with the AFFF is 50:50 by the end of 2006. Because the BC agriculture labour sector is cross-sectoral in nature influencing all production and experiential-based agri-food industries, significant challenges are evident in developing self-funding mechanisms. Therefore the target levels of industry contribution increase over the course of implementation of the strategic plan, concomitant with increasing industry awareness and investment in their labour pool. Thus the proposed weighting of funding accounts for a higher contribution from the AFFF in the initial phase of the strategic plan and a decreasing contribution in the latter phases.

Each application to the ALMSDI Management Committee will be expected to provide for the necessary matching funds. If the project involves several sectors, each sector will be expected to contribute to the project. Some sectors will be able to access research or trust funds. While trust funds may not be matched by the ALMSDI, they can be stacked resulting in a more comprehensive project. In addition, the ALMSDI has identified an approach for developing strategic partnerships focussing on common goals and priorities, as well as several specific vehicles by which the 50:50 cost-sharing target can be met.

A few of the specific vehicles identified for attaining industry contributions include:

- Industry levies.
- Fees for workshops and training sessions.
- Industry auctions or galas.
- Contributions from industry associations and association members.
- Fees for publications produced under the Initiative such as best management manuals.

Partnerships will be approached as collaborations between individuals and organizations whose contributions include cash, professional and technical expertise and other resources. Potential partners are listed below, and separated into three broad categories. Other partnerships with other associations and agencies will be created as needed and as new potential partners are identified.

### *Industry Related*

- Industry associations and organizations such as the BC Cattlemen's Association, BC Sheep Federation, BC Landscape and Nursery Association, Direct Farm Marketing organizations, British Columbia Agriculture Council, the United Flower Growers' Co-operative Association, the BC Greenhouse Growers Association, BC Milk Producers, BC Pork Producers, BC Blueberry Council, Horse Council of BC, Fraser Valley Cole Crop Growers, BC Potato and Vegetable Growers, Fraser Valley Strawberry Growers Association, etc.
- Regional economic development associations (e.g. Community Futures)
- Agriculture Advisory Committees

### *Educational and Outreach*

- Provincial Universities and University-Colleges
- AgAware BC
- Regional and Community Colleges
- BC 4-H
- Agriculture in the Classroom

### *Governmental*

- BC Ministry of Human Resources
- BC Ministry of Skills Development and Labour
- BC Ministry of Advanced Education
- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

All of these partnerships may provide financial resources to support specific programs in order to meet the cost sharing requirements.

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## **Section 4 - Goals and Actions**

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<b>1. Goal 1: Ensure there are enough workers in order to meet growers' production objectives.</b>
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### **Potential Areas of Activity:**

#### **1.1 Pilot projects:**

Test alternative methods of recruiting workers into the agriculture sector for seasonal work opportunities.

- Partner with other sectors using seasonal workers during the winter months, to tap into foreign workers that are already in BC for “working holidays”. For example, Australian youth working in Whistler may be an opportunity.
- Develop a pilot project taking the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) program components and apply them to a pool of unemployed British Columbians.

#### **1.2 SAWP to bring in temporary guest workers** to meet labour requirements during peak harvest times.

- Form a SAWP subcommittee to pursue, coordinate, and oversee the implementation of the federal government’s SAWP in BC in key sectors with a track record of unmet labour demand. Initial round of workers would probably be negotiated with Mexico for the 2004-growing season. Due to the critical needs this initiative should be implemented in time for the 2004 growing season. This subcommittee would also manage the pilot program described in section 1.1 b above.

#### **1.3 Develop and deliver career awareness products** with a focus on agriculture. Career awareness about options in the sector could be introduced into the Personal Planning, and Career Development curriculum in BC schools.

- Organizations such as 4-H are well positioned to serve as a starting point, given their mandate to work with children re: agricultural awareness. Other links to build on include expanding the career component for Agriculture in the Classroom.
- Options for building on products already in use in BC classrooms to provide an agriculture-specific focus. One example of a product is “The Real Game” developed by the National Work/Life Centre.
- Develop existing products such as “Food for Thought” for a younger audience.
- New approaches to career awareness should be done in partnership with local school districts, using their ability to create locally developed curriculum.
- Link with the Pacific Agriculture Show to show case career opportunities in agriculture to students in primary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions.

**1.4 Research project:** Develop an on-line inventory of seasonal work postings, and maintain season-long records and analysis of patterns.

- This would build on the bank of jobs through agricultural labour services and other agencies, but attempt to capture a greater number of postings. This would provide “hard” data on how many seasonal vacancies existed in the sector, how many were unfilled, and provide better perspective on the recruitment efforts expended by farmers.
- Parallel studies could also be set up with one or more producers, to track work requirements over the season at the point of the grower. This would provide a direct grower perspective through a case study approach.

**2. Goal 2: Ensure that the pool of available workers in the agriculture sector has the necessary skill sets and competencies to meet the production goals of growers.**

**Potential Areas of Activity:**

**2.1 Research project:** Develop a skills map to identify the skills necessary for working in the agriculture sector in BC. (Gap analysis.)

- Identify core employability skills that are shared across all sectors.
- Identify specialized skills required only in individual agriculture sectors, both technical and non-technical.

**2.2** Develop a **skills assessment tool** using the results of the research project on skills mapping.

- This skills assessment tool would build on the identification of skills unique to agricultural occupations, and could be tested and distributed with career development practitioners in school districts; post-secondary institutions and community based training facilities as a tool to direct people into careers in agriculture.

**2.3** Develop a sector-wide **career path/ladder** that can be used by career practitioners as a component of career exploration.

- Development of the career path should include an examination of the relationship between direct crop and animal production and indirect, or “supplier” jobs. (For example, veterinarians, farm equipment suppliers, feed and fertilizer suppliers.)
- Career path should also clearly identify opportunities for developing full-year work by bundling seasonal opportunities. (Do options to partner within the sector exist?)

**2.4** Develop and deliver training programs that **build agriculture-specific skills**.

- Self-employment training focussed on building the capacity of smaller producers.
- Workplace based training programs that focus on bridging workers between different levels of the career path/ladder. (For example, moving workers from

entry level upwards through on-the-job training.) This could include some kind of internal industry establishment of skills benchmarks.

- Creation of supervisory skills training – operations management skills.

## 2.5 Create **new apprenticeship programs** in agriculture.

- There are existing apprenticeship programs in the area of horticulture, but other sectors may be candidates for establishing apprenticeships. (For example, dairy, poultry, greenhouse vegetable, organic farming operations.)
- A feasibility study should be conducted as part of this project.

## 3. **Goal 3: Ensure that growers are aware that a range of factors – not just wages – influence individuals' decisions about work, and that those factors are incorporated into production models.**

### Potential Areas of Activity:

#### 3.1 **Research project:** An analysis of best practices in the area of human resources (HR), within BC and in other jurisdictions.

- What is happening in other provinces in the agriculture sector?
- What is happening in other sectors in BC?
- What is applicable from those analyses to agriculture producers in BC?

#### 3.2 Develop an **employers' toolkit** for agriculture producers.

- The toolkit would identify options for best practices, based on the jurisdictional analysis.
- The toolkit would identify a list of factors, including wages, which employees feel are important both in choosing a job, and in staying in a job. Specific examples of how other jurisdictions have incorporated these factors into production models would be provided along with the list.
- Based on the best practices, the toolkit would contain a number of templates and demonstration sheets with things such as: recruitment strategies and how to implement them, job descriptions, identification of government and community resources to call on, what steps to take if they want to develop in-house training.

#### 3.3 Develop a series of **employer workshops** to build on the content of the toolkit.

- For producers who wish to get more in-depth or who learn better from hand on training, a series of workshops geared towards each of the toolkit components would be developed and delivered during the winter months. For example, employers who were interested in developing job descriptions for incoming workers could attend a half day workshop, where some assistance would be available.
- Workshops could also be focussed on regulatory areas where similar questions were being asked across the sector.
- Materials could also be developed for delivery on-line.

### **3.4 Minister's/BCAC Award program** for innovative HR practices.

- To encourage the evolution of new and innovative practices in the sector, a Minister's/BCAC award for innovative HR practices could be given every one to two years in the sector.
- For those who may not be the top, but are also consistently "best practice" employers, a voluntary program of documenting HR practices on the worksite and sharing with government might be paired with some kind of incentive re: government regulation.

### **3.5 Pilot project:** Test a number of options for new HR options/Employee Incentive programs.

- Based on identification of what has been successful in other areas, and what might be applicable to agriculture in BC, set up some demonstration projects to test their effectiveness in practice.
- Program evaluation results would determine their applicability on a broader scale.

<b>4. Goal 4: Ensure there are viable employment opportunities in the agriculture sector, and that those opportunities provide clear signals to attract potential workers into the sector.</b>
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#### **Potential Areas of Activity:**

#### **4.1 Research projects:**

##### 4.1.1 Analysis of various wage payment mechanisms, and their impact on harvesting rates and productivity.

- Comparison of the impact of payment by piece rate and hourly wage would be one component.
- Other options for analysis would include the impacts of productivity bonuses. Are there tradeoffs to increasing volume per hour harvested (for example, greater time spent cleaning crops) which may reduce the initial productivity gains?

##### 4.1.2 Analysis of what labour market signals are being sent by employers in the agriculture sector.

- Are there factors interfering with those signals?
- How clear are those signals? (for example, are wage increases or job vacancies easily communicated to potential workers)
- Are there unintentional signals being sent?
- How does the communication of market signals compare with other sectors of the BC economy? (Are some workers being drawn into sectors where return on investment is clearer?)

##### 4.1.3 Analysis of capital/labour substitution options for growers

- What are the options?

- What are the benefits?
- What are the drawbacks and considerations? (For example, does increased use of mechanized harvesting methods raise the level of skills needed by employers?)

#### **4.2 Program development:**

Creation of a leadership development program within the agriculture sector, focussed on developing capacity within the sector to identify key challenges and create solutions for those challenges.

- Link with existing farm business management programs to develop distance curriculum focussed on building leadership skills.
- Develop a web resource that can be used to recruit potential leaders, and serve as a toolkit for existing leaders, and leaders “in training”.
- Create a mentorship component, which builds on existing leadership within the sector, transfer of knowledge and experience, and aims to create support networks to manage stress and burnout issues.
- Develop a youth leadership element, building on existing programs such as 4-H, but also expanding the network to include other youth agencies and organizations.

#### **4.3 Educational Campaign:**

To produce a balanced, positive view of agricultural employment to assist in creating demand.

- Target groups: youth 15 to 24 years of age, workers 25 years and older that are considering a career change.

**5. Goal 5: Ensure that growers with job vacancies in the agriculture sector can find an adequate number of workers and are able to fill job vacancies such that production is not compromised.**

#### **Potential Areas of Activity:**

##### **5.1 Research projects:**

5.1.1 Analysis of potential labour market distortions in the agriculture sector, including the benefits and challenges they bring to growers and workers in this sector.

- Where market distortions exist, identify what gap in the existing labour market they evolved to address, and identify whether it remains a gap today.
- Identify options and alternatives that might help address the same gaps.

5.1.2 Monitoring and forecasting labour supply and demand in the agriculture sector.

- Develop a forecast of labour supply and demand to identify current and anticipated shortfalls in key occupations within agriculture and to identify gaps within each sector of agriculture.

### 5.1.3 Wage survey within the agriculture sector.

- Good matching prospects requires clear information (or market “signals”) be sent to prospective workers. Wages are perhaps one of the most straightforward signals that can be sent, yet little is known about the effect of changes in wage. (For example, if wages increase by 5%, how many more workers will be attracted?)
- Furthermore, more could be documented about wage ranges in the agriculture sector. This information could be invaluable in recruiting entry-level workers, and providing some sense of career progression within the sector.
- Results of this project should be incorporated into career awareness materials and the career path/ladder.

### 5.2 Develop a monitoring tool to **track and anticipate skills and labour shortages**.

- Develop a framework for monitoring labour market dynamics in the agriculture sector, to help determine the effectiveness of initiatives intended to alleviate skills and labour shortages. A monitoring framework revisited on a regular basis can serve as an early warning tool to identify new pressure points.
- The monitoring framework should also include more direct measures of short-term labour market imbalances – wage changes and job vacancy rates being two. This could be done through a growers’ survey.

### 5.3 **Pilot program:** Test alternative models for matching workers with growers.

- Build on agricultural labour services’ programs – perform a meta-analysis of the current labour pool sites, including perspectives on the difference in industry structure, difference in worker profiles etc. that would lead to differences in success.
- Within existing mechanisms, identify one or two key gaps that could be addressed, and develop new options that address the key gaps. Example, in the Fraser Valley, referral to jobs alone may be insufficient to ensure growers have the quality of workers needed for harvest. A pilot project might involve inclusion of a screening or assessment component with the referral process. Other alternatives might be to refer crews of workers, with an older worker operating as a site supervisor.
- Evaluation of this project is necessary from the outset, in order to determine what the impacts of the changes are.

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## **Section 5 – Program Oversight and Management**

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The elements identified in Section 1 provide the framework for the broad visions, strategies and actions to address labour market imbalances in the agriculture sector; however, this does not represent all of the current or potential actions that might address the key challenges. Linkage to other Agri-Food Futures activities and initiatives developed through the Agriculture Policy Framework will be critical to ensure that all are working towards a common vision and direction. Establishing this common direction and creating the necessary linkages will help ensure the collective success for the sector as a whole.

### **The ALMSDI's Management Committee**

The ALMSDI's Management Committee will have oversight responsibility for approving and funding projects conducted through this Strategic Plan. (See *Appendix B for the terms of reference for the Management Committee.*) It is comprised of industry representatives with the mandate to manage the ALMSDI funds and projects. It falls under the authority of the ALPC. Vision and direction are provided by the ALPC as a whole. The Management Committee has the final authority on all strategic decisions including the approval of all projects subject to compliance with the terms of funding established by the Investment Agriculture Foundation and the ALPC. The committee, through its annual plan, establishes program priorities. There is ex-officio representation within the Management Committee.

The initial Management Committee will be:

<b>Mary Hof</b>	<b>BCAC Board Liaison &amp; Dairy sector</b>	<b>Duncan</b>
<b>Michel Benoit</b>	<b>Greenhouse, nursery, floriculture</b>	<b>Delta</b>
<b>Ranbir Kambo</b>	<b>Tree Fruits</b>	<b>Oliver</b>
<b>Rhonda Driediger</b>	<b>Berries and Vegetables</b>	<b>Langley</b>
<b>Lucille Dempsey</b>	<b>Cattle sector</b>	<b>Kamloops</b>
<b>IAF</b>	<b>Ex-officio –Bob McCoubrey</b>	
<b>BCMAFF</b>	<b>Ex-officio –Christine Koch</b>	
<b>Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada</b>	<b>Ex-officio Philip Bergen</b>	

Input and advice will be provided by technical advisory committees and appropriate other partner agencies and the Agriculture Labour Partnership Committee.

Employee input will be provided through representation from the Agriculture Labour Pools Services and directly by employees where appropriate.

### **Agriculture Labour Partnership Committee**

A key mechanism to identify sector priorities and provide the structures to implement a number of projects will be the Agriculture Labour Partnership Committee. The ALPC will help the Management Committee ensure its priorities and goals reflect the needs of the industry.

Creating a linkage between the ALPC and the Management Committee will also help ensure that the specific needs of specific commodity sectors are also heard and addressed by ALMSDI initiatives.

Signatories include:

- British Columbia Agriculture Council
- British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries
- British Columbia Ministry of Skills Development and Labour
- British Columbia Ministry of Human Resources
- Human Resources Development Canada
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

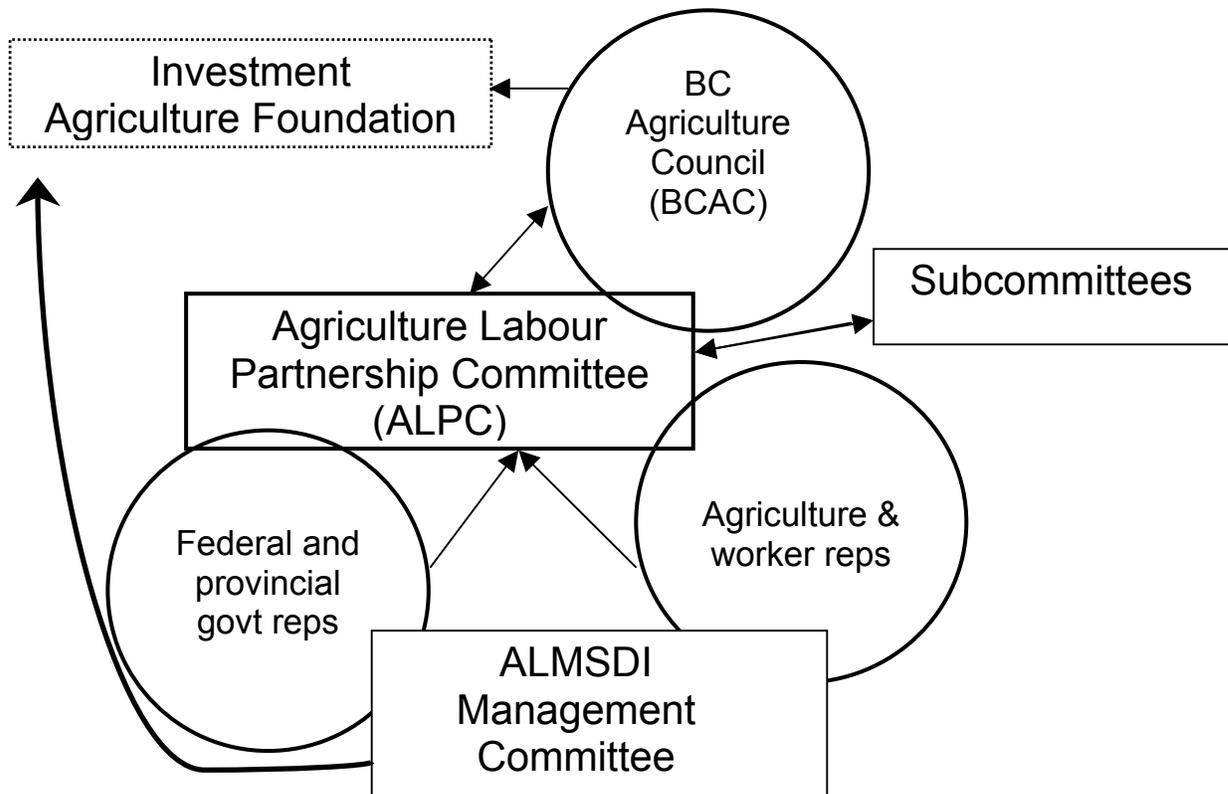
Its objectives are:

1. To foster effective and streamlined communication between industry and government and, as appropriate, with or to other interested parties.
2. To serve as the "first-stop" co-ordinating forum for consultation and actions on agricultural labour market and skills development issues and needs.
3. To find and promote workable solutions with respect to agricultural labour market issues, including, but not limited to skills development and acts and/or regulations that affect the labour market.

While BCAC represents industry as a whole, a representative from each sector of agriculture also sits at the table. Each group provides direction and support to the partnership. Provincial, federal, and other agencies may provide additional technical review and feedback if needed. Where appropriate, the Management Committee may require co-operation with other agencies for joint project funding. Finally these groups may provide support during the evaluation phase

The schematic below illustrates the various committees and stakeholder groups, and their relationship to one another. Note: arrows represent reporting and accountability.

**Figure 1. Schematic of ALMSDI, ALPC and BCAC Relationship**



**Program Administrator**

A program administrator will be hired or appointed and will be under the direction of the Management Committee. This person will have the responsibility for day-to-day administration of the program.

- Duties include:
- Developing and distributing materials to communicate the purpose and goal of the program;
- Handling public enquiries;
- Co-ordinating the preparation of applications for presentation to the management committee;
- Contract management;
- Program planning and reporting.

The BCAC will have overall responsibility of the initiative and will be in charge of its administration. BCAC will be the signatory to the IAF funding agreement. The BCAC will be eligible to claim up to 10% for project administration for eligible expenses as per the AFFF's policy.

Through its connections to the ALPC, the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) will provide supporting resources to assist with program administration and delivery primarily through MAFF liaisons assigned to approved projects. As the committee and initiative matures, it is expected that the MAFF need to provide this type of assistance will diminish. In addition, MAFF staff will provide expertise as required to evaluate projects and facilitate their completion.

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## **Section 6 – Administration and Communication**

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### **Accountability**

The Management Committee, working with the guidance of the ALPC, has the final authority on all strategic decisions including the approval of all projects. The Management Committee will, through its annual plan, establish annual program priorities and will present this plan to the AFFF Management Committee for approval.

### **Evaluation and Performance Monitoring**

Each project will have, prior to approval, a clear identification of what activities the funding will enable, how those activities address an identified gap or challenge in this Strategic Plan, the expected outputs, products, or deliverables from the project, and the expected outcomes or impact of the project. For larger scale projects, program evaluations may be undertaken.

### **Program Administrator**

The BCAC will act as the Program Administrator and will be the legal entity that will administer the program and will be accountable to the Investment Agriculture Foundation as trustee. The British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries may provide resources to assist with program administration and delivery.

### **Application Processing**

1. Benchmarks/priorities for progress established.
2. Process to address strategic initiatives
  - Proactive as determined by the Management Committee
  - Also a responsive process where self-initiated, innovative ideas from industry will be actively sought that meet the terms of the strategic plan
3. Solicit proposals received based on priorities
  - Project Numbers assigned
4. Receipt of application acknowledged by Project Administrator
5. Application file cover sheet initiated
  - Application name and number entered into tracking log
6. Summary sheet prepared by Project Administrator
7. Technical review by Project Administrator
8. Technical review completed
9. Application forwarded to Management Committee in advance of meeting with summary sheet including comments from technical review

## **Formal Review by Management Committee**

Not approved

- Letter of rejection drafted by Project Administrator for signature of Chair
- Letter signed and sent to applicant

Approved

- Confirmation of acceptance received from applicant
- Project liaison (contract management) responsibility assigned
- Letter to applicant from Project Administrator sent with conditional terms outlined in a contract.
- Applicant returns signed contract for signature by authorized representative of ALMSDI

## **Project Commences**

- Funds advanced, if required, as agreed to in the contribution agreement
- Interim reports received by Project Administrator, as agreed
- Additional advances, if required
- Project completed
- Final report and final financial statement received
- Final payment made as agreed to contract.

## **Management Strategic Approach and Responsibilities**

- Coordination of an effective and efficient process
- Development of a comprehensive communication strategy with all stakeholders, and a clear process outlining representation and communication
- Provide administrative and project financing
- Development of guidelines and criteria for industry funding commitments (including in-kind) in consultation with the trustee.
- Identification of opportunities for further leveraging of industry, sponsorship and other stakeholder funding.
- Bring forth partners at all levels, through the ALPC and other sub committees in order to avoid duplication.
- Establishment of a program operation that is open, accountable and transparent.
- Operation of the Management Committee and the Program Administrator

## **Financial Management and Control Procedures**

- The BCAC is the signing authority to the initiative and will administer the project.

- The Management Committee has the responsibility to evaluate and select projects.
- The Management Committee reports to the trustee.
- A project administrator will be responsible for the day-to-day paper work of the initiative.
- The Management Committee will submit a six month and annual progress reports to the trustee.
- The Management Committee will requisition new funds when appropriate.

### **Evaluation**

- The management committee will develop and implement an evaluation process for Agriculture Labour Market and Skills Development Initiative.

### **Program Advances**

- The IAF will provide for a process of program advances

### **Communication**

- The BCAC will prepare an announcement note containing information on the formation of the ALMSDI, the availability of funds, the goals, the principles, and how to apply to the ALMSDI. It will be distributed electronically to all BCAC's member associations and will be posted on the BCAC website. The member associations can either post the notice on their own website via a link to BCAC's website or distribute paper copies.
- Final reports from funded projects will be placed on the BCAC website.
- Where applicable, short articles will be written on the findings of specific projects, placed on the BCAC website, and distributed to BCAC member associations.
- Where applicable, reports on projects, both their process and results, will be presented verbally at BCAC and grower associations' annual general meetings. They will also be presented at educational events such as the Lower Mainland Horticultural Improvement Associations' Horticulture Short Course, industry field days and other educational events.