

Career choices in agriculture and agri-food

by Heidi Riley

Agriculture Sector

Did you know that production, processing, and marketing of food products accounts for more than one out of every four jobs on PEI?

According to the 2006 census, there are about 1,700 farms on PEI, including dairy, beef, hog, egg and poultry producers. Potatoes account for almost half of total farm income. Although agriculture has been experiencing difficulties, it is still very important to PEI's economy, with approximately \$391 million in total cash receipts in 2008.

Changes in agriculture

Vegetable and fruit production is getting a boost from the "buy local" movement. Grain and oil-seed production is benefitting from research and development in the bioscience sector. Organic production is also becoming more mainstream as producers respond to consumer demands.

How many people work in primary agriculture?

In August 2009, about 3,300 people were employed directly on farms as agriculture workers. This number does not include farm owners, migrant workers, or those working in food processing, government, or wholesale and retail.

There is a wide variety of careers in agriculture and agri-food:

- Agriculture Equipment Operator
- Agricultural Equipment Repair Technician
- Agriculture Laboratory Technologist
- Crop Specialist
- Farmer/Farm Manager
- General Farm Worker
- Livestock Specialist
- Horticulturist
- Nursery and Greenhouse Worker
- Quality Control Inspector
- Sales and Marketing Representative
- Straight Truck Driver (3A License)
- Tractor Trailer Driver (1A License)
- Veterinarian

Learning agriculture skills

A farm technician apprenticeship program is being offered for the first time on PEI. The three-year program has just completed its first year. "With this designation, the employer gets better skilled, better trained workers," says **Thomas MacLellan, PEI Agriculture Sector Council**. "Workers get more credentials, so they should get better benefits and salaries."



Thomas MacLellan,
Executive
Director
of the PEI
Agriculture
Sector
Council.



Are farmers finding the workers they need?

PEI agriculture is more than just meat and potatoes. "Our agriculture employment officers get calls from a cross-section of commodities. Farmers need people to cut rhubarb, pick blueberries, cranberries, and apples, and work in a vineyard, a mink farm, or help produce honey," says Thomas. "For this harvest season, our numbers are staying consistent with previous years in matching employers and workers."

Immigrants are an important source of farm workers and possible future farmers. "They have a good work ethic," says Thomas. "They are willing to take any job and become imbedded in our culture. It benefits our farmers when people who have worked in agriculture in their country of origin choose PEI as their new home."

Labour is important to agriculture

"When harvesting crops such as turnips, cabbage, and cauliflower, many producers don't use machinery because it damages the product. It's better to harvest the produce by hand. These jobs are labour-intensive and physically demanding. It's difficult to attract people to these jobs."

"According to Statistics Canada, the biggest growth in agriculture is in small farms near big cities," says Thomas. "Small farmers can't always afford big machinery, so labour is important."

New areas of agriculture

Bioscience is a new area of agriculture with great potential for jobs. "The Island Prosperity document outlines the importance of adding value to agriculture products through processing or nutrient extraction," says Thomas. "Agriculture career opportunities can come from the bioscience cluster."

Encouraging people to work in agriculture

The PEI Agriculture Sector Council is involved in a number of initiatives to promote agriculture careers:

- **Employer/Employee of the Year** awards gives public recognition to farmers and employees
- **Farm Technician Apprenticeship** program brings professionalism and image enhancement to the career
- **Agriculture employment officers** connect employers and workers
- **One phase of the Passport to Employment Program** helps older workers connect to trucking jobs. This addresses the issue of the shortage of potato truck drivers in the fall
- **Agriculture Education Certificate** programs offered by three PEI high schools encourage students to consider a career in agriculture.

Transferrable skills

"Working on a farm builds skills that are transferrable to other jobs," says Thomas. "You learn about mechanics, welding, carpentry, science, physics, sustainability, renewability, animal care, and more. Problem solving is another valuable skill you learn. If you are stuck in a farm field, you have to come up with a solution on your own. You can't just google it!"



For more information, contact the **PEI Agriculture Sector Council** at 892-1091 or visit www.peiagsc.ca

The PEI Agriculture Sector Council is funded in whole or in part by the Canada/Prince Edward Island Labour Market Development Agreement.

www.employmentjourney.com