

# DOMESTIC LABOUR COMMITTEE

Minutes of the **Domestic Labour Committee** held virtually via MS Teams on April 12, 2024.

**Members Present:**

Annelise Simonsen	BC Fruit Growers’ Association
Benoit Gauthier	Noble Ridge Winery
Connor Williamson	BC Ministry of Agriculture & Food
Kellie Garcia (CO-CHAIR)	Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project
Melissa Tesche	BC Fruit Growers’ Association
Shamore Watson	BC Fruit Works
Shelby Austen	Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project
Tyrion Miskell (CO-CHAIR)	BC Grapegrowers’ Association

**Regrets:**

Beth Cavers	BC Cherry Association
Brent MacKinnon	BC Tree Fruits Cooperative
Sukhpaul Bal	BC Cherry Association

**1. WELCOMING REMARKS**

- The committee welcomed Benoit Gauthier, Melissa Tesche, and Shamore Watson to the meeting.

**2. REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS**

ACTION ITEMS		
MEMBER	ACTION REQUIRED	STATUS
S. Austen	Send project lead job advertisement to subcommittee.	✓
K. Garcia/T. Miskell	Identify potential new “at-large” members and invite them to join the subcommittee.	IP
K. Garcia	Hire BCFW Project Lead by Jan 2024.	✓

**3. MEMBER ROUND TABLE UPDATES**

- A. Simonsen provided the group with an update on labour, covering both farm and cidery operations. She noted a significant influx of highly experienced tasting professionals from wineries and cideries seeking employment due to recent shortages. With uncertainties stemming from cold damage, there is a surge in demand for short-term contracts. On the farm front, many producers are still assessing their labour requirements, awaiting clarity on the extent of on-farm damage before committing to hiring costs.
- C. Williamson shared updates with the group regarding the Ministry of Agriculture and Food’s internal restructuring. His team has undergone expansion and reorganization, including the recruitment of a Senior Policy Analyst tasked with addressing both domestic and foreign labour issues. Currently, MAF is providing advisory support on the [Recruitment and Retention](#) funding stream, which will be administered by IAF. The focus is on assisting producers in developing/adopting the necessary tools and resources to meet their labour needs, with plans to launch the program later this year.
- B. Gauthier emphasized that the severe impact of recent cold damage on the wine industry has led to many uncertainties. He shared with the group that he will not have a crop this year and is awaiting bud break to assess the extent of the damage. While he does not anticipate needing labour for harvest, he will have to wait and see regarding replanting needs. Due to these uncertainties, many producers will likely

delay hiring until the last minute, if at all. More information on how to proceed is expected by the end of May. The primary focus for this season is cost reduction, survival, and long-term sustainability. When asked about thoughts on replanting, Gauthier expressed that it is a waiting game, noting the substantial cost for his 25 acres. He also anticipates potential scarcity of vines if most producers are in a similar situation, potentially delaying their plans by another year.

- T. Miskell echoed these concerns from the BCGA perspective.
- M. Tesche shared with the group insights gathered from numerous discussions with growers, indicating an expected normal crop for apples but a lighter yield for cherries and soft fruits. Growers, who typically employ 50 workers, are now projecting to hire less than half of that number. She foresees a heightened demand for domestic labour, partly due to shifts in visa requirements from the Mexican government. A. Simonsen added a suggestion for policy adjustments allowing travelers to apply for work visas within the country they are visiting. Both K. Garcia and M. Tesche mentioned ongoing efforts to facilitate collaboration between domestic and foreign labour for the upcoming season, with plans to further define this integration within their scope of work.

#### **4. OTHER BUSINESS**

##### **4.1 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- The Terms of Reference was reviewed for new members.

##### **4.2 COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

- The committee is encouraged to provide recommendations for new members and CCLSP staff will reach out to them directly.

##### **4.3 BC FRUIT WORKS 2024: UPDATE**

- K. Garcia introduced the Committee to the new BC Fruit Works Project Lead, Shamore Watson. With an extensive background in human resources and experience with foreign worker programs, Shamore brings valuable expertise to the team.
- S. Watson updated the group on her efforts to familiarize herself with the industry and stakeholders, aiming to develop a new strategy. She conducted a thorough review of requirements, including translating materials into Punjabi and ensuring access to HR resources. The objective is to centralize information on the website to serve as a primary labour resource. A marketing campaign is scheduled to launch on May 1st to promote this initiative.
- This season, BCFW will adopt a personalized approach to manually identify candidates and facilitate matches with producers, with a focus on tracking metrics through follow-up. Industry engagement efforts are ongoing, with a focus on clarifying messaging based on producer needs. She informed the committee of the decision to discontinue the use of the term "Branch Hand" this year, with "Seasonal Farm Worker" deemed more appropriate following discussions within the committee.
- S. Watson proposed the idea of having producers and workers create simple testimonials for use as promotional content. These testimonials would consist of short video clips filmed by individuals on their cell phones, expressing their positive experiences working on BC farms. A. Simonsen stated she could help with this initiative.
- Lastly, S. Watson updated the committee on her efforts to explore and access alternative labour markets, including high schools, recent university graduates, and prison systems. B. Gauthier highlighted the importance of BCFW's role in identifying grants and bursaries available for students. M. Tesche expressed concern about recent policy changes concerning worker housing and suggested promoting these resources on the BCFW website for producers.

ACTION ITEMS	
MEMBER NAME	ACTION REQUIRED
All members	Send any relevant industry events to S. Watson.
M. Tesche	Follow up with grower RE: Orchard worker housing requirements
S. Austen/S. Watson	Share contacts for high school summer job advertising.
S. Watson	Look at bursaries/grants available for students.
S. Watson	Investigate hiring using alternate routes (ski hills, prison systems, tree planters, etc).

#### **4.4 KPU LABOUR RESEARCH PROJECT: UPDATE**

- T. Miskell updated the group on BCGA's labour research project with Kwantlen Polytechnic University. They are currently waiting on approval for MITACS funding and anticipate an update at the end of April.
- During this period, the proposed plan is to migrate the project from BCGA to CCLSP to help create capacity, but this needs to be discussed with the funders. At the next meeting, K. Garcia will present the project details.

ACTION ITEMS	
MEMBER NAME	ACTION REQUIRED
K. Garcia	Update committee on KPU labour research project.
M. Tesche/T. Miskell	Connect RE: labour project budget.

### **5. NEW BUSINESS**

#### **5.1 COMMITTEE PRIORITIES FOR 2024**

- Due to time constraints, this agenda item was not addressed during the meeting. Members who have ideas or projects they wish to prioritize this season are encouraged to contact CCLSP staff directly.

### **6. ADJOURNMENT**

- The next Domestic Labour Committee meeting will be held on June 21, 2024, via MS Teams.