

# DOMESTIC LABOUR COMMITTEE

Minutes of the **Domestic Labour Committee** held virtually via MS Teams on November 22, 2024.

**Members Present:**

Annelise Simonsen	BC Fruit Growers’ Association
Beth Cavers	BC Cherry Association
Connor Williamson	BC Ministry of Agriculture & Food
Kellie Garcia (CO-CHAIR)	Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project
Shamore Watson	BC Fruit Works
Shelby Austen	Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project
Sukhpaul Bal	BC Cherry Association
Tyrion Miskell (CO-CHAIR)	BC Grapegrowers’ Association

**Regrets:**

Benoit Gauthier	Noble Ridge Winery
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**Guests:**

Cooper McGeough	Kwantlen Polytechnic University
Kaelan Watson	Kwantlen Polytechnic University
Kent Mullinix	Kwantlen Polytechnic University
Kristi Tatebe	Kwantlen Polytechnic University
Morgan Game	Kwantlen Polytechnic University

**1. WELCOMING REMARKS**

**2. REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS**

ACTION ITEMS		
MEMBER	ACTION REQUIRED	STATUS
K. Garcia/T. Miskell	Identify potential new “at-large” members and invite to join committee.	IP
All Members	Review marketing materials and provide feedback to Shamore.	✓
All Members	Send potential interviewees to Shamore.	✓
Shelby Austen	Send updated meeting invite to all members.	✓

**3. MEMBER ROUND TABLE UPDATES**

- Tyrion reported that the wine industry experienced a brief season due to the cold snap impacting grape production. Many chose not to harvest as production costs exceeded the product's value. With an anticipated 30-50% crop next year, there will be some labour needs early in the season but significantly less for harvest.
- Sukhpaul shared that it was a challenging year for cherry labour, with a sharp decline in domestic workers and reduced foreign labour needs due to the smaller harvest. The year overall was tough, and uncertainties for next season persist, particularly with labour shortages.

- Annelise noted that other tree fruits faced significant losses from the cold snap, particularly stone fruits, leading to reduced crop sizes and labour needs. Many producers struggled to retain long-term employees, compounding challenges in what has been another difficult year for the industry.
- Beth mentioned that a smaller crop this summer required export programs to adapt. They hired one summer student while most coordination was handled by Abbey. Although less busy than usual, the team focused on updating the website and staying productive.
- Kristi introduced the KPU research team: Kent, Kaelan, Cooper, and Morgan. A labour research project update will be provided later in the agenda.
- Connor explained that the Ministry recently transitioned out of an interregnum period, limiting updates. However, IAF's Recruitment and Retention funding stream will launch in mid-December, with a significant portion dedicated to Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for domestic labour project funding.

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

##### **4.1 BC FRUIT WORKS: UPDATE**

- Key highlights from the BC Fruit Works update include the completion of most deliverables, such as the website, HR materials, marketing campaigns, job matching, and industry engagement. Remaining work focuses on producer education and a long-term strategy. The project timeline has been extended to March 31, 2025, to use all budget allocated to the project. To address low participation and engagement challenges, the Project Lead integrated survey questions into the broader labour research study to gather feedback and inform recommendations. She is also collaborating with industry partners and plans to work with the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) to develop an eLearning module for tree fruits and wine grapes, addressing a critical resource gap.
  - Annelise thanked Shamore for her work and asked for clarification on the effort and budget allocation for job matching. Shamore explained that job matching consumed over 50% of her time during harvest but resulted in only six successful matches, with one employer hiring two workers. Kellie clarified that job matching is just one of eight deliverables but agreed that it has taken too much time for not enough benefit.
  - Sukhpaul commended the report, acknowledging the industry's prior understanding of the limited domestic labour pool. He highlighted that this project demonstrates the time and money invested by the industry and reinforces farmers' preference for the foreign worker program. He suggested future efforts explore transferring foreign workers between farms to align with changing seasons and harvests.
  - Kellie emphasized the need for BC Fruit Works to operate under the Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project (CCLSP) and industry associations, rather than as a standalone initiative. It needs to be embraced by industry and not seen as a standalone project. She noted that recommendations for next year will be shared in the final report.

##### **4.2 LABOUR RESEARCH PROJECT: UPDATE FROM KPU**

- The Domestic Labour Supply Research Project, conducted in collaboration with KPU's Institute for Sustainable Food Systems, explores challenges in domestic labour for the Okanagan tree fruit and wine grape sectors. As of mid-November, the team has completed a literature review, analysed census data, and conducted most grower and worker interviews, focusing on recruitment, retention, housing, and wages. Final interviews will wrap up in December, with analysis and reporting scheduled for winter and spring 2025. Key themes include labour reliability, competition from other sectors, and worker housing issues, with policy recommendations to follow.

- Tyrion inquired about how current challenges are affecting people's willingness to work in the industry and emphasized the need to address this with employers to ensure better access to quality labour. Kaelan responded, highlighting the importance of providing good working conditions to retain skilled workers.
- Sukhpaul proposed that the government introduce a policy eliminating tax deductions for workers in food security roles as an incentive for Canadians to work on farms.
- Kristi added that a literature review is underway to explore how other countries tackle similar issues, noting the systemic challenges and broader questions about the sector's sustainability.

**5. NEW BUSINESS**

**5.1 PROPOSED 2025 MEETING SCHEDULE**

- Kellie presented the proposed 2025 meeting schedule. The meetings are planned for January 17, April 17, June 13, and November 14.

ACTION ITEMS	
MEMBER NAME	ACTION REQUIRED
Shelby Austen	Send calendar invites to members.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

The next Domestic Labour Committee meeting will be held on January 17, 2025, at 9:00 am via MS Teams.