

DOMESTIC LABOUR COMMITTEE

Minutes of the **Domestic Labour Committee** held virtually via MS Teams on January 17, 2025.

Members Present:

Annelise Simonsen	BC Fruit Growers' Association
Benoit Gauthier	Noble Ridge Winery
Beth Cavers	BC Cherry Association
Kellie Garcia (CO-CHAIR)	Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project
Shamore Watson	BC Fruit Works
Shelby Austen	Cross-Commodity Leadership Support Project

Regrets:

Connor Williamson	BC Ministry of Agriculture & Food
Sukhpaul Bal	BC Cherry Association
Tyrion Miskell (CO-CHAIR)	BC Grapegrowers' Association

Guests:

Kristi Tatebe	Kwantlen Polytechnic University
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1. WELCOMING REMARKS

2. REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

ACTION ITEMS		
MEMBER	ACTION REQUIRED	STATUS
Shelby Austen	Send updated meeting invite to all members.	✓

3. MEMBER ROUND TABLE UPDATES

- Beth shared that labour needs were minimal in 2024 due to the lack of crop but anticipates significantly higher demand in 2025 as there are many buds on the trees. However, uncertainty remains due to weather conditions and concerns about an early crop, which could lead to timing challenges with American competitors and pricing. She also noted their AGM is scheduled for February.
- Benoit reported that recovery from the 2024 freeze is progressing well, and preparations for 2025 are underway. Labour needs are expected to be high due to vineyard maintenance and replanting, though the harvest will likely be smaller with less picking required. He primarily relies on returning seasonal workers and walk-ons, with additional hires through WorkBC, Indeed, and BC Fruit Works. His year-round crew consists of six people, with eight more hired seasonally.
- Annelise expressed concern about buds already appearing on trees in January, signaling potential challenges for the season if a cold snap occurs. She noted the ongoing struggles of operating within small budgets and adapting to industry changes. Many farmers are expected to work their properties with minimal resources, often relying on shoestring budgets and a limited pool of returning employees with existing knowledge. Despite this, she remains cautiously hopeful.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

4.1 BC FRUIT WORKS: UPDATE

- BC Fruit Works has extended its deadline to March 31, 2025, to finish deliverables for producer education and engagement and developing a long-term strategy. Three promotional videos are being created to highlight reasons to work in the tree fruit and wine grape industry, available resources, and the variety of available roles. Initial drafts were updated to ensure timeless content. Discussions with the Canadian Agriculture Human Resource Council about adding a tree fruit and wine grape module to their eLearning program are ongoing but delayed. Feedback from labour research interviews and surveys is also being analyzed to guide the program's long-term strategy. The BC Fruit Works website is transitioning to Twirling Umbrellas, a local company, to reduce costs, improve support, and streamline management by sharing a hosting plan with the CCLSP website.
 - Annelise suggested that CCLSP/BCFW staff look into the uptake of the existing eLearning modules before committing funds. Shamore clarified that the modules are part of a national program and serve as living resources. She agreed to research their reach and update the committee.
 - Benoit asked if BC Fruit Works would continue working on attracting and retaining domestic labour. Shamore confirmed that the other pillars of the program will continue and suggested a self-directed approach for job matching, such as a job board. Annelise questioned how a job board would compete with platforms like Indeed and proposed partnering with existing platforms to create an agriculture-focused section. Beth supported this, and suggested collaborating with other commodities, like berries or field crops, to address similar labour needs.
 - Benoit suggested building stronger connections with high schools and post-secondary institutions to support long-term labour attraction. Shamore agreed that this should be a future focus of BCFW.

4.2 LABOUR RESEARCH PROJECT: UPDATE FROM KPU

- The Domestic Labour Research Project has finished participant interviews and data collection, with analysis now underway. The team conducted interviews with 22 producers and 12 domestic workers, focusing on their experiences. Most participants were from the South Okanagan/Similkameen, with producers typically operating farms under 50 acres and workers being a mix of year-round residents and seasonal migrants. Secondary data was gathered from literature reviews and Statistics Canada. Using NVivo software, the team is analysing labour challenges, worker retention, and industry recommendations to provide a clear picture of workforce dynamics. Preliminary findings will address recruitment and retention and will be shared with CCLSP partners and collaborators in June 2025. Input is welcomed to help shape the analysis and align it with project goals.
 - Beth commended the team's progress and noted that greater transparency around wages could help attract domestic workers, especially students. She also suggested seeking input from workers outside the industry for a fresh perspective, which Kristi agreed could be a valuable follow-up.
 - Benoit suggested using grants and incentives to attract students to the industry. Shelby asked about demographic trends and workers' willingness to do physical labour. Kristi noted that while some workers choose jobs like Tim Hortons for better perks, a smaller group views agriculture as a long-term career. She emphasized the need to make agricultural jobs more appealing as the industry evolves.
 - Kellie highlighted the importance of domestic labour for small farms, which cannot depend on the Temporary Foreign Worker program to stay operational.

5. NEW BUSINESS

5.1 DISCUSS COMMITTEE PRIORITIES FOR 2025

- The committee decided that they would wait for the results and recommendations from BC Fruit Works and the Labour Research Project before setting priorities for 2025.

6. ADJOURNMENT

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