



**RURAL
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE**

Hiring Temporary Foreign Workers: Discussions with Rural Employers Report

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Introduction

Context

From 2007 – 2009, the Rural Development Institute (RDI) explored the impact of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) on the demographics of Brandon and the community's ability to absorb and support newcomers. These foundational projects provided the impetus for the development of dialogue groups and networks that resulted in gathering information on what contributed to and constituted a welcoming community.

The *Building Welcoming Communities: A multi-sector regional collaborative approach to rural immigration, 2009 – 2010* project, funded by the Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, delved into rural areas of western Manitoba as communities in this region are also experiencing an influx of immigrants and are establishing welcoming strategies and processes that include inviting, settling and retaining immigrants.

As the project unfolded and through dialogue with economic development officers, rural employers and others it became apparent that the processes for hiring TFWs were complex and unique to each circumstance. The overall goal of the project was to produce a realistic description of the TFW hiring processes based on government agencies' requirements coupled with real-world experiences of employers. Objectives of this research included getting first-hand accounts of hiring TFW from employers in rural areas; "truthing" the hiring steps with government agencies and the actual experiences of rural employers; and creating a record of what's working and what needs improvements.

Rural Employers' Information Pathway for Hiring Temporary Foreign Workers

In an attempt to provide a pathway for these complex processes, RDI researchers Anisa Zehtab-Martin and Jill Bucklaschuk researched websites of the many stakeholders involved in the processes, and documented hiring TFWs for small rural employers in the *Rural Employers' Information Pathway for Hiring Temporary Foreign Workers in Manitoba* (2010) <http://www2.brandonu.ca/organizations/rdi/Publications/Immigration/RuralEmployersPathwayforHiringTFWs.pdf> which is hereafter referred to as the *Employers' Pathway*. The *Employers' Pathway* is organized into seven steps, with one optional action which is transitioning temporary foreign workers to permanent residents of Manitoba.

- Step 1: Confirm Labour Market Shortage: Recruit Canadian Citizens and/or Permanent Residents
- Step 2 : Register your Business with the Manitoba Employment Standards Branch
- Step 3: Recruit Temporary Foreign Workers
- Step 4: Apply for a Labour Market Opinion (LMO) from Service Canada
- Step 5: Temporary Foreign Worker Applies for a Temporary Work Permit and Visa (if applicable)
- Step 6: Temporary Foreign Worker Enters Canada
- Step 7: Welcome and Settle Employees

During interviews, (discussed later in this section), selected rural employers were provided with draft copies of the Employer Pathway and invited to provide feedback on the content and design of the document. In addition, provincial and federal government departments/agencies involved in the hiring TFWs processes provided feedback on the content of the document. RDI received comments from both the employers and government agencies on the use and applicability of *the Employers' Pathway*.

A rural employer stated: "I had a chance to look over the book you left with me. It is very thorough and impressive. I wish I would have had such a resource when I started this process."

A service provider stated: "The document appears to be something that would be a valuable resource for someone looking at the option of hiring TFW's."

A government representative who provided feedback and edits to the document stated: "I think it is absolutely a great document."

Rural Employers Interviews

From July 28 to August 19 2010, RDI researchers Anisa Zehtab-Martin and Jill Bucklaschuk and RDI student research assistant Karen Marchand interviewed mostly small rural employers in western Manitoba to discuss the opportunities and challenges they faced when hiring TFWs. Interviews were conducted with seven employers in four communities. Approximately half of the interviews were conducted in one community. Employers in this community are all drawing from a small pool of potential employees and had difficulty filling positions because of a large demand for workers, and a supply of mostly seniors and students in the community. While the employers participating in this research were diverse, the small sample limits the applicability of the findings to other locations and other businesses.

The employers that were interviewed welcomed the RDI researchers and were eager to provide their points of view, despite their busy work schedules. One of their main concerns regarding the interviews was that their comments would be held in confidence. The employers were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The employers interviewed included those in the agricultural, food-processing, industrial, food service and hospitality sectors. Most of the employers were recruiting low-skilled TFWs, although one employer stated he was recruiting high-skilled TFWs. Employers require high-skilled workers to carry specific qualifications/credentials to do the job, while employers of low-skilled do not require specific qualifications/credentials for the job.

Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the Government of Canada's Rural Secretariat for contributing funding to RDI's rural immigration project, "Building Welcoming Communities: A multi-sector regional collaborative approach to rural immigration, 2009 – 2010". This employer pathway is an initiative of that project.

We would like to thank representatives of the province of Manitoba's Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives and Manitoba Labour and Immigration and the government of Canada's Service Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada for providing critical reviews and edits of the content of this document.

We sincerely thank employers in western Manitoba who were interviewed by RDI and who provided feedback on the content of the employer pathway. This report gives voice to those rural western Manitoban employers and is a reflection of their viewpoints.

Recruiting

Canadians/Permanent Residents

Before hiring TFWs, employers must attempt to hire Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada and they must verify (prove) that there are no Canadian citizens or permanent residents eligible and available for employment.¹ Without exception, throughout the interviews, the employers stated that their first preference was to hire eligible Canadians or permanent residents; however they aren't able to recruit Canadians/permanent residents because of labour shortages in their industry and region. From their viewpoints, validating that there are no Canadian workers, which they know from recruiting experiences, is a costly, time-consuming and often frustrating experience, especially when it is often the owner or manager who, in addition to recruiting workers, is also responsible for the day-to-day operation of their businesses. The following quotations reflect their viewpoints:

The thing that nobody seems to get is [hiring a foreign worker] is not your first choice.

“Without question—the thing that nobody seems to get is [hiring a foreign worker] is not your first choice—it's not an easy process, it's expensive, and then beyond that when you get them here...we need to give them every support that we can to make it successful for both of us. There's a lot of extra stuff you have to do for these employees. There's just so many things to help them transition. Everything from finding accommodation, to making sure they've got food that is going to agree with them, to making sure they've got stuff to cook with, making sure they've got adequate furniture, something to sleep on, I mean the list goes on and on.

This is not my first choice I would gladly hire a Canadian if I could find some that actually wanted to work and show up on time...I think they think that we're going to get these workers in and have cheap labour and actually it's done the exact opposite because you have to pay so much more to get a foreign worker over here. Our minimum wage is \$9.00 an hour, right now I'm having to advertise at \$11.00 an hour and I don't even know if that's going to be enough [...] everybody is always hiring in this town like we're always all chronically short staffed, and they flip from place to place to place.”

¹ Employer Pathway **Step 1** - Confirm Labour Market Shortage: Recruit Canadian Citizens/Permanent Residents

<http://www2.brandonu.ca/organizations/rdi/Publications/Immigration/RuralEmployersPathwayforHiringTFWs.pdf>

I would rather uproot someone from Saskatchewan than Germany.

“Oh yes. I would rather uproot someone from Saskatchewan than Germany because it’s a big onus on us as a company to take on that responsibility and there are expenses on both sides, so this is something that we take very seriously. There are no Canadians here.”

“Besides...advertising in our papers I put signs up at the post office, because everyone has to get their mail every day. [Human Resources and Skills Development Canada] felt I hadn’t targeted the disadvantaged...I didn’t have to—but I sent applications and advertising to our Indian Reserves around, the closest one being 80 miles away. Like someone’s going to drive 80 miles to come to work but I did.

My submission, I think, was 97 pages long.

Having a letter from the national job bank employment services was not enough; I had to have a print out of the actual ad. They could have gone on the website and found it themselves but I mean it was just all these stalling tactics it was so beyond ridiculous.

My submission, I think, was 97 pages long...you know when you are critically short staffed the last thing you have time to be doing is running around and taking pictures of where you have hung your posters but anyways you do what you have to do; you jump through their hoops.”

Nobody is going to give up their job down there [Ontario] to come over here and work for that.

“The government has come through and said if you want to hire chefs you have to be under chef level... [Since] the economic turndown in Ontario there’s a lot of unemployment. [The government is saying] why aren’t you hiring more from that area? Where I’m at a \$14.00 to \$15.00 labour rate [Ontario is] at \$25.00 down there. Or you’re competing with the manufacturing which is at like \$60.00 dollars...nobody is going to give up their job down [in Ontario] to come over here and work for that. “

“To hire a Canadian basically you’re stealing from somebody somewhere [else]. You either pay them more money or offer them something better and that doesn’t work you know because somebody else will do it to you after awhile.”

To hire a Canadian basically you’re stealing from somebody somewhere [else].

Rural living isn't for everybody and sometimes that's the hardest thing.

“Some [Canadians] I only have for a few weeks, some I have for a few months. If you have a Canadian that's working in Northwest Territories or something like that more often than not when they apply they just want to get out of there and they're looking for a bus ticket to get here. They usually only last 3 weeks or a few months. Rural living isn't for everybody and sometimes that's the hardest thing...it's not Winnipeg...especially for a young person. You don't have vibrant activities going on and if they come without transportation that's even more of a problem so when they've got time off they have a hard time.”

Temporary Foreign Workers

Recruiting TFWs is a screening step in which employers seek and interview potential foreign employees.² The employers that were interviewed found recruiting TFWs a difficult process because they are often recruiting workers sight-unseen half a world away with the associated problems of time zone differences and understanding of language and cultural differences. These employers also stated that the process of recruiting was often hit and miss as all of these employers were not professional recruiters. Those employers who continued to recruit learned from their experiences - both the positive and the negative ones. The following quotations reflect their viewpoints:

“I am presently working with a contact in the Philippines and a few people here in [community]. When I first heard about the German initiative there was incentive for me to go with that. I also went to a seminar in France.

I asked one person there why people in France would be interested in coming to Canada. She said that they wanted a change in lifestyle, steady work etc but then she said that they would not stay and eventually return to France.

On the other hand, the Philippines [workers] are sending money home to their country and there is lots of incentive to stay in Canada.

What we look for is continuity with the new employee and our needs as an employer as well; we hope that it is a win-win situation.”

What we look for is continuity with the new employee and our needs as an employer as well; we hope that it is a win-win situation.

² Employer Pathway **Step 3** - Recruit Temporary Foreign Workers

<http://www2.brandonu.ca/organizations/rdi/Publications/Immigration/RuralEmployersPathwayforHiringTFWs.pdf>

When I first started doing this...it was a full time job emailing in the morning, emailing in the afternoon and then you're dealing with people that are out the whole half time zone so you're catching them going to work when you're going to bed at night.

"Once you get through the paperwork you're basically hiring people on the fact that you think they can cook and it's very hard like you can check references until you're blue in the face...

When I first started doing this...it was a full time job emailing in the morning, emailing in the afternoon and then you're dealing with people that are out the whole half time zone so you're catching them going to work when you're going to bed at night

and you're trying to make sure the paperwork going through—quite often they don't know what to do on their end."

"I hire the 6641 [National Occupational Classification] which is sort of a double entry ...I look for...English [skills], you have to understand them. They have to read English because all of our [information] comes up on screens.

Now a requirement that I have is that they have to have lived away from home. My first two [TFWs] I brought over had come right from their home and they were so homesick...it just too big of a shock for them. It really affected their work performance.

It's difficult; you feel bad for them and there's not much you can do for them really other than try and make everything as positive as you can but it's an extremely difficult transition. I've learned [some things] through the process."

Now a requirement that I have is that they have to have lived away from home.

My first two [TFWs] I brought over had come right from their home and they were so homesick you know it just too big of a shock for them. It really affects their work performance.

The first time we did... we had no clue where to find these people.

" I'm gathering applications which once you've had foreign workers are really easy to get because they've all got family and friends and cousins and...I find I'm being inundated with applications. The first time we

did... we had no clue where to find these people where now it's a little different.

Again I've learned through the process...so right now I'm basically gathering information and getting all the information ready to submit in terms of why we're looking for foreign workers."

Assessing Impact on the Canadian Labour Market

Employers contemplating hiring TFWs must obtain a Labour Market Opinion (LMO) which assesses the impact that the potential TFWs will have on the Canadian labour market, that Canadians and permanent residents have had an opportunity to apply for the position, and that foreign workers will be treated fairly.³ It takes approximately 4-6 weeks to process LMO applications after which an employer will receive a positive or negative LMO. With a positive LMO the employer can proceed in the process of hiring a TFW. If employers receive negative responses to their LMO applications, they will have to complete remedial actions and apply again before they can continue in the hiring of TFWs process.

Labour Market Opinion Application

All of the employers interviewed found the LMO application process to be onerous and frustrating. While they understood the reasons for the LMO, most employers felt the LMO application process could be more sensitive to small rural employers that do not have dedicated and expert staff to complete the application. The following quotations reflect their viewpoints:

“LMO-it’s a big process for a small business...I understand the Canadian government’s idea now is...what if a Canadian applies in the meantime. They used to be 2 to 3 [applications] all the time so we were hiring Canadians and we were going through 3 or 4 Canadians before I got my foreign worker here in the first place. Now we’ve gotten to the point I need more people...so I’m always looking for 1 to replace somebody that might leave in the future.”

LMO-It’s a big process for a small business.

To some degree I know why the government puts us through the ringer.

“To some degree I know why the government puts us through the ringer. I mean we have been audited, they have asked for our paper work, reviews, etc. I know they are doing this because people have been exploited through this process but for those of us who are not exploiting them, we are the ones being exploited in the process –to protect the TFW. It has gone too far the other way.”

³ Employer Pathway **Step 4** - Apply for Labour Market Opinion

<http://www2.brandonu.ca/organizations/rdi/Publications/Immigration/RuralEmployersPathwayforHiringTFWs.pdf>

“We’ve been trying to hire another one...well the LMO has been rejected 3 times...the 80 some page LMO. Through the LMOs there’s no leeway it’s like Simon says one wrong move and you’re out. That is the thing that we dislike the most is the fact that once it’s rejected you have to start all over again. There’s no room for making a little change or say missed this can we submit it now—no. Yeah they can take the time to write out a whole page and tell you all the things you did wrong. They could have called and said you know can we amend this or that.”

Through the LMOs there’s no leeway it’s like Simon says one wrong move and you’re out.

In the year [it took us] we’ve been trying to get 3 [LMOs] we got 2 but I’m still trying to get that third one.

“One time it was [rejected] because [HRSDC said] we didn’t do enough advertising...We had been advertising steadily for a year. Last time again I submitted all our local paper ads, advertised in 5 or 6 internet sites. The problem was I had lost my folder that had my printouts of my internet ads and all the other websites. Every other [website] sends you an email after you have registered your ad with your ad number and everything else but the job bank doesn’t, so ...once that ad is done running you can’t get it. All the other ones make it very accessible but the one important one that you have to have does not make it accessible. They don’t send you an ad number so that you can email them back and say you know I lost mine can I get a copy to submit. The other ones say your ad is just about done do you want to continue. The job bank of Canada it needs some work. In the year [it took us] we’ve been trying to get 3 [LMOs] we got 2 but I’m still trying to get that third one.”

“Well it was rejected the first time as well because the wage we offered was the Manitoba average ...they said no it has to be the national average. So we had to redo that [LMO]...then the next one went through. Once those [LMOs] were done I started working on the [next] one. It took me 2 weeks to get the next one together and they rejected [that as well]...It’s the process...I mean I understand they don’t want to just hand them out freely. For those of us in the communities that don’t have skilled workers we can’t afford to be short [staffed] for a year like we were. “

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For those of us in the communities that don’t have skilled workers we can’t afford to be short [staffed] for a year like we were.

They’re not breaking down our doors to come and work here or in town or we wouldn’t all be advertising.

“On the last LMO [it said] that we hadn’t made a sufficient effort to hire Canadians. Yes we did and where are they? They’re not breaking down our doors to come and work here or in town or we wouldn’t all be advertising.”

“They used to reject me, but now they phone and just say send it in. But that is because we have established a relationship with them. Otherwise every time there is a problem I would have to start the process all over again. The timeline was ridiculous. You put in application it would take 3-4 months before you get a review. “

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The paper work is astounding, 1 application is usually 40 pages, and it takes me 3 days to complete the paper work.

“LMO- we had problems at first, but now smoother. They seem to work with us a lot more. The paper work is astounding, 1 application is usually 40 pages, and it takes me 3 days to complete the paper work.

Prevailing Wage Rates

In addition to the LMO application process, several of the employers stated that they felt the prevailing wage rates were not reflective of rural western Manitoba. The following quotations reflect their viewpoints:

“I did have an incident and had to specify the rate in the ad which now it is law that it starts at \$20.00. We had one person who had a skill level at \$16.00 and yet we had to pay him \$20.00.”

We had one person who had a skill level at \$16.00 and yet we had to pay him \$20.00.”

We can't afford to pay wages like that, otherwise we wouldn't be here.

“I spent 20 minutes on the phone with the director for prevailing wage – on the Labour Market website it says for our area we should be paying \$12.40 an hour for [the job] – we can't afford to pay wages like that, otherwise we wouldn't be here. The wages were an issue; they have always been an issue. They told me they get their information from census, associations for professional occupations, and job bank summary - but now the information I received since spring could have changed. “

“Yeah it seems to be a big secret what these wages are supposed to be. The first thing I did was phone to see okay what am I going to have to pay this time because it changed three times in the process last time—I started at \$10.25 then it went to \$10.75 and then they said they'd give me a positive LMO if I put it up to \$11.00. This is after I had five contracts. Everything was done. I had gone through all their hoops and then they said oh \$11 an hour—okay so I did that and then you know what they wanted me to do? They wanted me to have signed

You know they have a process and they kept changing it and changing it and changing it.

lease agreements—signed lease agreements from where [TFWs] were going to rent in town I had given them documentation—written documentation about where they would be staying and what their rent would be. They wanted signed lease agreements for people that weren't even here yet. Now why on earth as an employer would I put my neck on the line or be paying \$500/month for each for four or five employees I haven't even got yet—like it got so that it was just like what next? You know they have a process and they kept changing it and changing it and changing it and then half way through I had to do that Manitoba...register with that Manitoba...what was that called?"

Transitioning from Home Country to Canada

Welcoming and Settling

In addition to recruitment, the employer has the responsibility of assisting the TFWs with their settlement process by providing them information about the community in which they will live, workplace information, and helping them transition to their new workplace.⁴ All of the employers interviewed undertook this responsibility willingly. The following quotations reflect their viewpoints on initial welcoming and settling:

“I think it’s been mostly like making allowances for extra training, teaching them about the money...those little things—ensure that they have proper clothing for winter. It’s making sure they’ve got their food. I’ve lent my car so that the [TFW] fellow we have could get his wife in for a doctor’s appointment to Brandon.

It’s more than just accommodating their needs and making sure they know about the services that are available.

I picked him up and took him around so he could find housing because he didn’t have a vehicle. I mean it’s more than just accommodating their needs and making sure they know about the services that are available. As well, I make sure they know about our settlement worker and I make sure that they know about what’s available to them in town and that there’s English lessons for them if they desire it. We do take the responsibility very seriously in terms of helping them settle in.

At Christmas time our one worker from [country] has a wife and two kids and they moved from Edmonton with virtually nothing—stuff they could put in a vehicle and then his vehicle was stolen. So one of the staff went on ebrandon [website] and put on some sort of an ad...they had more than enough stuff and toys for the kids...we got them a barbeque this summer and just stuff like that like.

When [another TFW] moved into his new apartment [a fellow employee] went out because Home Hardware had a sale and got him some dishes and got him some pots and pans just little things. We’ve made sure they had clothing to wear to work and I’ve shopped for winter jackets for them and stuff like that. Anything to try and transition them a little bit easier but nothing terribly structured. We kind of just go with the flow.”

⁴ Employer Pathway **Step 7** - Welcome and Settle Employees
<http://www2.brandonu.ca/organizations/rdi/Publications/Immigration/RuralEmployersPathwayforHiringTFWs.pdf>

“We have a mobile home here at the [place of business], and everyone who comes stays there when they first arrive...They have really become part of the town. That is why the town has made an effort to help these guys out, they have reached out. The first TFWs we had to do everything for them, banking, furniture, housing, but the town has been so helpful to help them find a place, find furniture for them. “

They have really become part of the town. That is why the town has made an effort to help these guys out, they have reached out.

Whatever their interests are if they let us know we send them in the right direction or help them get involved.

“We help them find and make certain that they have housing. We’ve had them over for dinner. We’ve barbequed for them. We integrated them into our team here. We encourage them to stop by and visit and things like that. I mean they’re actually waiting for winter. They want to go to hockey games and stuff the one we tried to get in touch with the local soccer team and things like that depending on their interests. It’s in our best interest to make sure that they’re well settled and happy so we certainly endeavour to do that. If they have questions about things or activities that are going on like [TFW] was curious about soccer so we put him touch with someone. Whatever their interests are if they let us know we send them in the right direction or help them get involved.”

“We show them where you buy your groceries and it is a lot of work for us and some hidden expenses and we pay for the first two months rent, and provide a vehicle as well. One month of lodging is required but we have ethical concerns and want to provide them with an apartment and car until they get settled.”

One month of lodging is required but we have ethical concerns and want to provide them with an apartment and car until they get settled.

“We show them around the community. We offer to take them if they want to go into Brandon. One of the first things they usually find out is if somebody on staff has to have a car because when they have a day off they want to go see things and they usually work towards that. We help them out if they need a used car or whatever.”

We help them out if they need a used car or whatever.

I pick them up from airport so we talk all the way home.

“I pick them up from airport so we talk all the way home. The first TFW that arrived were the only ones on the block so I would take them – show how to use heat, microwave, laundry, it was pretty detailed. Now that I have a lot more TFWs here they show them around and teach them how to use equipment. Next day I show them around town, tour the town and hotel. Then I take them to the settlement officer here and she helps them with their bank account, box number, MB health card, SIN, etc. We get them working right away so they don’t feel lonely”.

“We subsidize their housing, so we try to make it easier. Their housing is cheap. Their apartments are fully furnished. Cable, WIFI, and telephone they pay for.

We subsidize their housing, so we try to make it easier.

Benefits of Temporary Foreign Workers at Work and in the Community

The RDI researchers also asked the employers about the benefits of having the TFWs working at their business and living in the community. The following quotations reflect their viewpoints on these benefits:

““Our history with TFWs is that they’re committed to the job. We have hired I don’t know how many [Canadians we] train... but they get a hang nail and they go home. I mean there is no work ethic. Yeah [TFWs are] here specifically to work so they’re not happy unless they’ve done their job properly. They don’t want to just get the orders out they’re eager to impress.”

Our history with TFWs is that they’re committed to the job.

I would have to say the biggest benefits are that they really appreciate having a job.

“I would have to say the biggest benefits are that they really appreciate having a job. They’ve all been hard working, they’ve all been 100% reliable although two of them didn’t fulfill their contracts so they weren’t reliable in that sense but they were reliable when they were scheduled they were here and they showed up and they worked hard when they were here.”

“The TFWs are positive and eager – they cross train into other departments. It only makes our staff better – they try and do better...they’re here specifically to work so they’re not happy unless they’ve done their job properly. They don’t want to just get the orders out they’re eager to impress.”

The TFWs are positive and eager – they cross train into other departments.

The TFW [initiative] has really opened the doors for people who want to start a new life.

“The TFW [initiative] has really opened the doors for people who want to start a new life and so those people when they go through the recruitment process and they sign an initial contract they are elated and when they come over to work. They are highly motivated and will contribute to the community and even more so when they come to Canada.”

Employers’ Challenges with Settling Temporary Foreign Workers

Once the Temporary Foreign Workers arrive, there are often challenges, including housing, language, cultural and workplace differences. The following quotations reflect the employers’ viewpoints on the challenges:

“The language has been a bit of an issue but we just work around it and ask them to speak slower. When we had the two [TFWs] we asked them several times to speak English in the workplace because we would explain to them that that it is rude to speak in [their] language in front of other people...that definitely was an issue a few times...They’re trying hard and we’re trying hard and when you look at the whole picture. We are happy with them—very—we’ll work with the language.”

The language has been a bit of an issue but we just work around it.

She didn’t want to work but I think she was just really tired and overwhelmed.

“We had some challenges with a [TFW]. I think we’ve worked them out. She didn’t want to work but I think she was just really tired and overwhelmed. We tried to work with [her] but she’d missed ten days in six weeks and had been late half a dozen times and so we finally sat down and said okay this not acceptable if you want a job this is what you need to do. She hasn’t missed a shift since so I don’t think she realized just what extent...and we try to approach it like it’s not just you it’s all your fellow employees you let down.”

“A lot of them haven’t lived in cold climates. Economic standards are different. The apartment I’ve got is subsidized by the Manitoba government and at \$350/month is very cheap but a lot of them find that expensive because they’re sending money back home to support the family.”

A lot of them haven’t lived in cold climates. Economic standards are different.

Housing is a huge problem.

“Housing is a huge problem for us, but that is our community problem.”

“The thing I fear with that, if you put them out too much in the community, there is a fear that other businesses try and steal our staff. That happened to us with one of our workers.”

The thing I fear...if you put them out too much in the community...other businesses try and steal our workers.

Temporary Foreign Workers Becoming Permanent Residents of Manitoba

The *Employer Pathway* was intended to provide information specifically for hiring Temporary Foreign Workers. However, it is possible for TFWs to apply for permanent resident status through Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program (PNP).⁵ TFWs can begin the application process after being offered a full-time permanent job and have worked six months in the province.

The interviews with rural employers in western Manitoba included discussions of TFWs and the PNP. Some of the employers expressed frustration with the short period of time that they had to assess TFWs' job performance. Often TFWs are in Canada on a one-year work permit, which then requires the employer to evaluate the work performance within the first six months of employment in order to access the PNP. Another dilemma that employers face is that they invest a lot to get the TFW to their workplace and usually hope to keep them beyond the duration of the temporary work permit. In order to keep them permanently, the TFWs need to go through the PNP to get permanent residency. However, once TFWs have permanent residency, they are not obliged to stay with the employer who brought them to Canada. The following quotations reflect the employers' viewpoints:

"Historically Service Canada gave LMOs for two years and in the situation where there is a tight labour market the time frame is not there and Service Canada moved to a one-year [work permit]. Now the time-lines are so tight that you have to have your PNP application ready to go after 6 months and employers have to assess employees right away."

Now the time-lines are so tight that you have to have your PNP application ready to go after 6 months and employers have to assess employees right away.

With a work permit we have a hold on them. Once they receive their provincial nominee status they can go anywhere.

"As an employer I am reluctant. With a work permit we have a hold on them. Once they receive their provincial nominee status they can go anywhere. Some of them are torn because they want to stay and work for us, but there isn't much in [the community]."

⁵ Employer Pathway – From Temporary Foreign Workers to Permanent Residents in MB (optional)
<http://www2.brandonu.ca/organizations/rdi/Publications/Immigration/RuralEmployersPathwayforHiringTFWs.pdf>

“We have a settlement worker that helps them with that. I’ve really only done the letters for them saying that I will provide employment and will continue to provide them employment - that sort of thing.

You’re kind of caught between a rock and a hard place as an employer. The only thing you can do is try and make it a good workplace for them.

The other side of that is there is some reluctance especially like once they’ve got their PNP. When you bring them over and they’ve got their work permit they can only work for you so you have a little bit of a hold over them but once they’ve got their PNP they can go and work anywhere so on one hand there’s some reluctance on the part of the employer to have them get their PNP. On the other hand you’re torn because you do want them to stay and in order for them to stay they have to have their PNP. So you’re kind of caught between a rock and a hard place as an employer. The only thing you can do is try and make it a good workplace for them and you know for a lot of them this the stepping stone to get into Canada and they want to go the big cities or whatever.”

Conclusions

RDI researchers sought employers to interview in western Manitoba to learn about employers' experiences in seeking and maintaining an adequate labour force for their businesses. We intentionally sought out rural employers who had been unable to staff their businesses with Canadian employees and had to look into recruiting foreign workers. The employers that were interviewed welcomed the RDI researchers and were eager to provide their points of view, despite their busy work schedules. This eagerness and openness was refreshing and was an indicator of trust by those employers that their viewpoints and perspectives would be documented.

All of the employers interviewed believed they had no choice but to hire temporary foreign workers because of the labour shortages in their communities and their previous experiences in unsuccessfully seeking Canadian workers. The employers valued the foreign workers who arrived at their businesses and went beyond what was legally required to ensure that their new employees were welcomed and settled into the community. All of the employers cited the benefits of having workers who were highly motivated and committed to the job. They noted that the workers were positive and eager to cross-train into other positions as well.

As has been stated in this report, the employers faced many challenges when hiring temporary foreign workers. They stated that, while they understood the reasons for a particular step in the hiring process, they found the bureaucratic processes and procedures frustrating, time-consuming and costly. They especially found proving there were no qualified Canadians or permanent residents available to do the jobs particularly onerous. The Labour Market Opinion application process was very frustrating from their perspective. They found inconsistencies in messages from the government officials, apparent "rule" changes midstream, and when they received a negative response, there seemed to be no remediation process other than starting the application process again from the beginning. Added to that was what they believed to be discrepancies between the official prevailing wage rates, and what the realistic wage rates were in rural western Manitoba. They believed the official provincial wage rates were more reflective of urban centres than rural. In fact more than one employer believed the prevailing wage rate was too high for their business to be sustainable.

Another challenge was recruiting workers from foreign countries without meeting in-person and the associated challenges of environmental, language and cultural differences. In addition, once the temporary foreign workers arrived in Manitoba, the employers had the initial responsibility and expense of orientating their employees not only to the job, but also to the culture and environment of the small rural community in which they were settling. Although not overtly stated in the interviews, it must be noted that in many cases employers also undertook the responsibility of orientating the community to the foreign workers, which wouldn't have had to be done if they had hired Canadian workers.

The employers interviewed also faced dilemmas when it came to the process of having temporary foreign workers seek permanent residency under Manitoba's Provincial Nominee Program. While the employers welcomed the opportunity to secure a proven worker and enjoy potential long-term benefits for their investment in securing the worker, they recognized that once a temporary foreign worker achieved permanent residency status there was a risk of losing the worker. That being said, the majority of employers supported applications to the PNP and were willing to assume the risk. They assessed the worker and provided a permanent offer of employment, a prerequisite for temporary foreign workers applying for permanent residency.

The overall impression the RDI researchers came away with upon completion of the employer interviews was that although hiring temporary foreign workers was first and foremost a business decision, employers made every effort to welcome and integrate the foreign workers into their businesses and communities.