

grow PROJECT

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Leamington has the highest concentration of greenhouses in North America

- 2,700 acres (Chatham-Kent-Essex)
- 13,000 jobs
- \$1.7 B to Ontario's economy
- 6% growth per annum

Labour market pressures in the agribusiness sector include:

- Increasing demand for labour over the next 5 years
- Skills gap

- Lack of population growth
- Youth out-migration
- Lower post-secondary completions

Program Included:

- ~ soft-skills and general agri-business training sessions
- ~ Ministry of Labour Health and Safety Awareness and Bring Your "A" Game to Work® Certification.
- ~ 4-1/2 day internships at local businesses to learn about career paths in the agribusiness sector

This project received funding from the Local Employment Planning Council pilot led by Workforce WindsorEssex

PROJECT OUTCOMES

- 18 registered participants
- 11 completed the program
- 11 received H&S Certification
- 7 achieved 90% or higher to receive
- Bring Your “A” Game to Work® Certification
- Participants were very positive about the training
- It helped to dispel some myths about the industry
- Employers valued the process of meeting potential new hires and showing them around their facilities

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

- 2/11 self select out of sector (Positive result)
- 4/9 now employed in agri-business sector
- 2/9 found work in other sectors
- 3/9 still looking for work (timing, etc)

WHAT WE LEARNED:

- Working with multiple partners requires clear communication about expectations, roles, and execution
- Recruiting participants was difficult due to the stigma attached to the industry
- Add food safety certification and WHMIS training to the curriculum
- Explore options for liability insurance for the on-site job sampling visits; no-cost provision of required PPE to program participants (industry sponsorship)
- On-site work sampling is key to effective recruiting and workplace retention
- Timing wasn't optimal for employers

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Continue to advocate “career” potential in the agri-business sector – show clear progression paths for new entrants from entry level roles
- Program should be repeated with other potential employers (especially smaller sized)
- Develop and promote “best practices in recruitment” across the entire agri-business sector
- Reach out to Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG) Association to better engage the greenhouse sector
- Look at timing program for new high school grads (late June to end August) with a focus on co-op opportunities to train for quality technician or maintenance (Note: this may not be an optimal time for employers)



Presentation for CANNEXUS

1) Overview of WFWE and SECC

- Carolyn
- Michelle

Carolyn/Michelle

2) Intent of Research and Innovation Grant

Michelle

3) Overview of project

Carolyn

a) Some background on LMI (agribusiness sector, HR challenges)

- Approximately 2,700 acres in Essex-Chatham Kent
- 13,000 jobs
- \$1.7 B to Ontario economy
- Growth of 6% per annum
- Increasing demand for labour over the next 5 years
- Skills gap (higher skilled positions)
- Lack of population growth
- Youth out-migration
- Lower post-secondary completions

b) Outline of project

- The GROW Project was a pilot training and internship program to be delivered over 4 weeks to 32 participants.
- Target groups for the training included newcomers and unemployed individuals.
- Eight hours per week delivered as two half days of classroom training on foundational and customized sector specific soft skills
- Four hours per week (one half day on-site with each of the four participating employers) spent in “work sampling” in the agri-business environment to provide an introduction to the sector and build awareness regarding employment opportunities.
- Job matching
- Follow up after placement to gauge job retention
- Several partners:
 - i. SECC (lead; participant screening and registration, soft-skills training facilitation)
 - ii. Stepstone Consulting and GCI Consulting (evaluation and employer recruitment)
 - iii. Leamington Chamber of Commerce (previous research)
 - iv. Employers (Highline Mushroom, Pure Flavour, Mucci Farms)

c) Research Component

- Measure the value of the proposed training
- Provide some immediate and short-term outcomes for employers
- Pre and post testing for participants
- Compare current existing employer recruitment procedures and outcomes with the pilot group who received customized pre-employment training to enhance foundational and soft skills specific to the agri-business sector
- Follow up with the participating employers after the training intervention to compare workplace performance and job retention of standard control hires to those in the pilot group who are hired after the training intervention.

d) Training Component

- The training was informed by feedback from employers.
- Soft Skills Training (Bring Your “A” Game)
- Workplace Safety Training
- Food Safety Training

e) Objectives

- To provide a pre-employment training option that would address challenges as identified by employers in a previous feasibility study conducted by the Leamington Chamber of Commerce (assess the viability of creating a skills training and education centre for the agri-business sector in the Leamington area).
- To obtain feedback from employers and participants on the effectiveness of the training.
- To increase awareness of the employment opportunities in the agri-business sector.
- To examine ways to make the GROW project sustainable

4) Challenges

- Recruitment of participants (offered incentive but it didn’t seem to make a difference)
- Recruiting employers (time of year—busy season)
- Work sampling (requirement for PPE)
- Working with multiple partners

5) Results

- 18 registered; 11 completed the program
- Those who participated and completed the program were very positive about the training and the work sampling opportunities.
- 7/ 11 successfully achieved 90% on soft skills program (required for certificate)
- Everyone achieved the Health and Safety Certification
- Employers valued the process to meet potential new hires and “show-off” their companies
- **2/11 self select out of sector (Positive result)**
- **4/9 now employed in agri-business sector**
- **2/9 found work in other sectors**
- **3/9 still looking for work (timing, etc)**
- Sustainability—relationship with OGVG, growers

6) Recommendations

- Program should be repeated with other potential employers (especially smaller sized)
- Add food safety certification and WHMIS training to the curriculum
- SECC to examine options for liability insurance for the onsite job sampling visits
- SECC to explore options for no-cost provision of required PPE to program participants
- Develop and promote “best practices in recruitment” across the entire agri-business sector
- On-site work sampling is key to effective recruiting and workplace retention
- Engage OGVG with this program to spread the word about best recruitment practices
- Look at pharmaceutical industry for best practices and transfer to agri-business and cannabis firms
- Continue to advocate “career” potential in the agri-business sector – show clear progression paths for new entrants from entry level roles
- Look at timing program for new high school grads (late June to end August) with a focus on co-op opportunities to train for quality technician or maintenance

- Combine technical growing expertise with soft skills training. Use OGVG as the delivery mechanism for new hire ORIENTATION to the sector, supported by SECC and other vetted agri-business source (like Ridgetown or St Clair or other suppliers)