



Resourcing for the Future, the 2009 HR Congress

Summary Report — September 2009

The Agriculture & Food Council continues its commitment to acting as a catalyst for change within the industry. As we face ongoing challenges within developing talent in labour and management roles, it becomes clear that human resource tools will play an enhanced role in our future successes. During a two day event in April 2009, we addressed the critical issues of human resources and management development by exploring industry-specific options for recruiting, retaining, and developing agri-foods labour and talent at all levels.

HUMAN RESOURCE PROJECTS

Agriculture & Food Council (AFC) asked what can be done to address the needs, gaps, and timely relevance of a hitherto weak network of human resource information and practices in Alberta's agri-food industry. The efforts of Agriculture & Food Council to date, particularly with regard to human resource strategic projects, has given the organization the opportunity to work closely with a number of agri-food institutions, organizations, companies, and government bodies on topics relating to human resource challenges across the industry. The overall outcome of this work has been a clear indication that industry is doing meaningful work in human resources, but often doing that work tangentially and not cooperatively. Major players in the agri-food industry are often aware of others' effort in human resources, yet seem to lack a cohesive push towards a common goal or group to which new players can look when building and enhancing their own human resource efforts. It was here that AFC saw an opportunity for an event to not only facilitate networking and cooperation between leaders, professionals and stakeholders across the agri-food industry, but also to catalyze further actions to support ongoing cooperation and strong human resources practices in this industry as a whole.

Agriculture & Food Council has been working strategically in human resources as far back as 2002 when the Building Tomorrow Together report was presented to the Minister of (then named) Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. This report, and the subsequent 2003 Ag Summit and Agrivantage Strategic Initiatives report, concluded that there is a real and ongoing need to address human resource issues impacting the development and growth of the provincial agriculture and agri-food industry. AFC's initial momentum began with both the Human Resource Information Exchange Centre (HRIEC) and the Peer Networks Project (PNP) in 2004 and continued in 2007 with a suite of information tools developed under the banner of the Strategic Human Resources Initiatives Project (SHRIP.)

Resourcing for the Future, the 2009 HR Congress was not only an effort by AFC to extend awareness of this work and to continue to address the questions posed in the opening of this document, but also a carefully planned opportunity to host a two day conference that would bring together agri-food leaders and industry stakeholders to tackle a variety of objectives. By doing so we hoped to (a) create an atmosphere conducive to brainstorming, discussion, and prioritizing the human resource needs of agri-food, (b) provide access to a keynote speakers on identified human resource topics, and (c) share further information on their individual project and programs, ultimately all leading to the formation of collaborative industry leaders, professionals, and stakeholders working to better understand the issues facing the future of human resources in agri-food. It the intention of AFC that these discussions would culminate as the writing of this document (and prompt further analysis) to share the work and ideas of those participants. Thus, this document is meant to encompass a summary and analysis of the concerns and gaps surrounding human resources in agri-food and offer suggestions to improve or adapt in response.

PARTNERSHIPS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Agriculture & Food Council (AFC) is an industry organization which represents and serves all links in Alberta's agri-food chain. Through a range of investment, service, support and development programs, and as a policy forum, the Council supports the agri-food industry in achieving its long-term goals of increasing Alberta's share of world food, agriculture and agribusiness markets; improving sustainable resource and environmental management; and engaging industry and society in building understanding, awareness and capacity to learn, adapt, lead and improve quality of life.

Resourcing for the Future, the 2009 HR Congress was made possible through the efforts of our volunteer working group, numerous industry partnerships and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) program. In Alberta, the ACAAF program is delivered by the Agriculture & Food Council.

Industry cash and in-kind support of \$10,000 or more:

Dow AgroSciences
Country Guide
Alberta Farmer Express
Grainews
The Western Producer

Industry cash and in-kind support of \$5,000 or more:

Bayer CropScience
Syngenta

Industry cash and in-kind support of \$1,000 or more:

AgCall and AgCall HR
ATB Financial
Elanco
HRAC
The Little Potato Company
Monsanto
Scott Wolf Management
Viterra
Zuidhof Feeders Ltd.



KEYNOTE

David Baxter

Executive Director, Urban Futures Institute, Vancouver, BC

Presentation Title: Using HR as a Business Tool to Drive Profitability and Success

Published Synopsis: “David will discuss all the elements of human resources: recruiting and sourcing, retaining, engagement, performance, productivity and multicultural hiring. This will be a very interactive presentation session where you will be able to discuss your current situation.”

SPEAKERS

Dave Mowat

President and CEO, ATB Financial, Edmonton, AB

Presentation Title: A Different Kind of Branding: How ATB Financial Attracts the Best People... Then Markets Them!

Published Synopsis: “Companies that focus their marketing efforts solely on their products are only getting it half right, says ATB Financial President and CEO Dave Mowat. In a candid one-on-one conversation, Mowat will discuss how and why the biggest Alberta-based financial institution is harnessing its marketing muscle to get great employees AND customers.”

Andrew Raphael

Partner, Director Agri Food, MNP LLP, Vancouver, BC

Presentation Title: Innovative Approaches to HR Competitiveness in Your Own Backyard

Published Synopsis: “In today’s roller-coaster economy innovative approaches to human resources are more important than ever. Andrew will provide an overview of a study recently completed for the Alberta Food Processors Association regarding the relatively untapped potential for more Hutterite

Resourcing for the Future, the 2009 HR Congress

By many accounts the event, held in Calgary, Alberta on April 7 and 8th 2009, was a success. *Resourcing for the Future, the 2009 HR Congress* provided an opportunity for one hundred and thirty (130) industry representatives to participate in a two-day discussion and learning opportunity targeting the numerous issues and challenges of human resources in a modern agri-food industry. While the topics and tactics discussed were numerous and diverse, what emerged from that meeting (as well as the work both leading into and falling out of the event) was a set of high level and generalized strategic ideas about the state of human resources, hiring practices, recruitment, retention, and succession.

The Labour and Talent Challenge

In approaching the topic of human resources in Alberta’s agri-food industry, participants were presented with the following information to bolster discussion and prompt their input:

Canada’s agriculture and food industry faces a number of challenges within a changing labour environment. An aging population, inability to share knowledge and pass on crucial skills, continued shortages of engaged and skilled labour, and leadership issues ensure that our industry’s challenges are not going to simply dissipate as the economic environment changes. In order for Alberta agri-food to achieve long-term success and profitability, the industry needs to invest time and energy in resolving some of its labour and management challenges. Exploring human resource strategies and solutions can enhance our appeal to the next generation of engaged producers, processors, and support workers.

Since Ag Summit in 2000, the Agriculture and Food Council has been involved in human resources opportunities. Congress was conceived and realized as part of the Agriculture & Food Council’s ongoing commitment to our role as a catalyst. *Resourcing for the Future, the 2009 Human Resource Congress* is a venue for industry leaders and stakeholders to understand challenges and address opportunities in 2009 and beyond. Congress will also allow us to collect the information vital to creating a plan and report for industry and government in hand with supporting a viable agriculture and agri-food sector.

In addition three broad goals or challenges were presented as overall objectives for the event. These goals were intended to move the event past the basic idea of a conference (implying the one-way movement of information from speakers to an audience) and towards the idea of a congress (encouraging the participation of the audience in enriching the overall content presented.) AFC encouraged participants to consider the following objectives of Resourcing for the Future, suggesting that collectively we hoped to:

- Address multiple sources of information including expert speakers, panels, and participant ideas to highlight key aspects of the challenges in the industry and to proffer possible strategies and solutions for the short and medium-term viability of the industry.
- Provide a wide representation of attendees from the agriculture and agri-food who bring a large cross-section of diverse perspectives on the agri-food industry with the knowledge, connections, and tools necessary to affect positive and productive change within their sphere of influence.
- Capture the collective understanding of those leaders, stakeholders, experts and participants in the form of a plan, a document, and a call to action that will present a united front in working with industry and government to address these challenges and help affect future policy in a positive and productive way.



The goal of this document is both to (a) summarize the specific discussion as a summary and analysis of the concerns and gaps surrounding human resources in agri-food and (b) present a set of options and recommendations that could be implemented via a strategic initiative model commonly used by non-government organizations such as the host, the Agriculture & Food Council.

CONCERNS

Categorically speaking, it is probably no surprise that much of the content addressed at Resourcing for the Future fell under the high-level umbrellas of one of two topics:

1. Increasing the supply of labour.

How is the industry able to increase, in general, the population of people interested in a career in agriculture and food? The problem is that there seems to be a decreasing number of people who are interested in jobs connected with production and processing. And while there were a number of concepts presented to address this, there is little public information resembling either a cohesive strategy or a valid understanding of the root problem.

2. Decreasing the demand for labour.

At an event like the Congress, the audience was able to explore a small subset of the knowledge and tactics available to address the variety of scenarios in human resources relating to improving business practices and workflow that decrease the need to hire more people to deliver the same product.

GAPS

More specifically, speakers and participants touched on numerous issues and many of those issues came back to a handful of objective ideas suggesting the challenges and potential solutions of modern agri-food human resources. These included:

1. Agri-food still lacks a clear understanding of the connections between education and industry, and what that means for the availability of skilled employees now and in the future. Congress participants asked if prospective employees know what's required of them to work in agri-food jobs. Their perception was that employers often just expect to 'get lucky' with regards to finding an employee with the right skills for their available positions. While true that many agri-food jobs do only require basic, standard skills, training, or tickets, the question was asked: does the labour pool know that? And how can industry and education work together better to address this gap in knowledge that seems to be associated with the gap in qualified employees?

2. Successful recruitment and retention practices are linked to strong organizational marketing, and agri-food may not be doing a good job of this. Organizational culture and identity are emerging as strong factors for employee retention and Dave Mowatt, President of ATB, highlighted that potential for business to collaborate between marketing and human resource departments to improve recruitment and retention statistics. Participants expressed a need to help organizations build recruitment and marketing tools and/or increase awareness of tools and networks already in existence. The general and specific interest of participants at the Congress highlighted the thirst for better and more cohesive sources of this information, and, more importantly, examining the questions of why employees choose to transition either in or out of the agri-food industry's workforce.

collaborations with food processors that can provide the resources needed to increase the competitiveness of Alberta's food and beverage industry."

April Shand

Vice President of People, Development and Culture, ECL Group, Calgary, AB

Presentation Title: Enhancing Employee Engagement in the Workplace

Published Synopsis: "Explore different ideas and best practices that contribute to employee engagement and retention in today's marketplace."

Dr. Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D.

Kinsey Consulting Services, Berkley California, US

Presentation Title: Generations at Work

Published Synopsis: "You will learn how the four generations (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and the Millennials) differ in their approaches to work and their relationship with employers, how each generation changes the medium and the message of employee communications and what all generations have in common when it comes to engagement."

PANEL

Brian Hesje

Chairman of the Board, Fountain Tire, Edmonton, AB

Page Stuart

General Manager, Highland Feeders Limited, Vegreville, AB

Angela Santiago

CEO, The Little Potato Company, Edmonton, AB

Panel Presentation Title: Success in a Family-Owned Business

Published Synopsis: "Family-owned organizations pose their own unique benefits and challenges. Discuss how to handle some of those challenges, dealing with performance issues, and succession planning."



CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Karen Gingras

Manager Labour Retention, Agriculture and Rural Dev., Leduc, AB

Concurrent Session Topic Title: Human Resource Systems: Saving You Time and Money

Published Synopsis: “As a CEO or plant Manager you are likely spending a great deal of time on recruitment and retention when your focus should be on business development and production. This session will provide you with a ready-to-use HR system easily applied in your workplace. Loaded with practical tools, this session focuses on 4 key elements of an HR system: administration, business planning, performance management and recruitment.”

Dr. Marie Gervais

Director, Global Leadership Associates, Edmonton, AB

Concurrent Session Topic Title: Beyond Salary: Retention's Hidden Profile

Published Synopsis: “This session addresses considerations of race, culture, inclusion, mentoring, supervision and support in keeping employees working and engaged. The dual role of dealing effectively with the issues and creating a supportive work environment will be briefly explored through contrasting incident studies”

Val Carter

Success Centre, Calgary, AB

Concurrent Session Topic Title: How am I doing?

Published Synopsis: “Performance management is widely misunderstood. It is often interpreted as the way to 'fix' problem employees. In many organizations it is just a paper exercise. At worst, the old school report style of performance reviews can actually reduce motivation. A successful

3. Understanding workplace diversity is crucial for modern agri-food employers, particularly in light of both (a) employment of foreign workers and (b) a visibly aging workforce. Dr. Carol Kinsey-Goman and other Congress speakers addressed delegates on the emerging trends that differentiate the multiple generations and cultural backgrounds of employees. It was suggested that managers and employers need to understand and recognize that the differences between employees from an array of generations and cultural backgrounds can have an impact on both the subtle and overt needs of those employees. Employers who miss these differences risk losing employees due to strained internal relationships and a misunderstanding of the intrinsic rewards of the job that keep employees happy and on board.

4. Issues of succession and retention are not unique to family-business, but are amplified in that context, a prevalent reality in modern agri-food. Angela Santiago of The Little Potato Company and other speakers spoke about the challenges of human resources in a family-based business. Operational examples of barriers and obstacles highlighted a strong need to better understand and address strategic-level practices for an industry heavily populated by family-operated business. What kinds of services are available to work with businesses that are facing the numerous operational challenges in human resources in small to medium enterprises without the benefit of dedicated human resources departments?

5. Systems and ideas that decrease the need for labour may be valid, but are often unexplored in the context of agri-food human resources. As an example, keynote David Baxter alluded to models of consumer engagement that reduce labour demand on companies by shifting the final stages of production to post-sale. Any given company would need to find their own fit for such a model, but Baxter referenced two labour-saving models with this advice. ‘The Gumball Machine Model’ references a simple example of automated sales and delivery, shifting the dispensing of the product to the hands of the consumer. A more complex model was ‘The Ikea Model’ wherein final assembly of the product is shifted in part or in whole to a consumer, and often in a way that is marketed as ‘part of the experience’ of the brand. Is there a place for increased awareness and implementation of consumer engagement models in the agri-food industry that reduce the overall need for labour for individual businesses?

6. Automation is often misunderstood in agri-food as using technology to displace people rather than as using technology to automate busy-work and thus make those jobs more meaningful and desirable. As an example, the president of ATB, Dave Mowatt, spoke about marketing for better employee attraction. In his presentation he alluded to not only the desirability of particular positions in the company through those qualities we expect of great employment, but also through advancing the role of the employee by the reduction of simple tasks. Automation of processes that employees do now but that machines or information systems could perform as well or better is not just about improving systems and work flow, but freeing time for employees to do meaningful work and increasing their job satisfaction and consequently retention.

OPPORTUNITIES

Based on the information presented and discussed as a result of Resourcing for the Future, the 2009 HR Congress, the following information represents a set of recommended actions that have strong potential if delivered by a non-government agent on behalf of industry.

Opportunity 1: Create a collaborative HR Experts Network for agri-food

Issues addressed:

- Limited collaboration of experts in the industry.
- Spotty credibility of existing human resources information directed to industry.



- No centralization of tactical services to industry.

Individuals working for and with the industry to deliver human resources services and programs, as well as in the context of corporate human resources environments have expressed an interest and desire to belong to and contribute to a broader collective of resources and efforts. A regular group of term-based memberships in an experts network could facilitate the delivery of a cohesive program of human resources 'meta-services' for agriculture and food in Alberta.

Components may include:

- A centrally coordinated (by delivery agent) and broadly-marketed professional network of human resources "experts" with specialization in a spectrum of human resources modalities.
- Regular meeting schedule for the members of the network via phone or in person.
- Experts regularly contribute to an online public resource for human resources (blog, portal, articles, etc).
- Experts provide cost-recovery (travel, etc) consultation to industry through a centralized request system.
- Network supports the development of and hosts both Opportunities 2 and 3 of this plan.

Justification:

- The requirement of industry to quickly adjust to and be aware of a complex array of programs, services, tools, and methodologies for successful human resources.
- The desire for human resources agents and human resources professionals to collaborate in a regular and managed capacity.
- The need for a targeted collection of information and resources for addressing a disparate audience with limited capacity to seek and utilize decentralized tools.

Methodology:

- Convene action team to refine purpose of network.
- Develop and finalize terms of reference for group.
- Develop meeting schedule and processes.
- Using SHRIP tools website as a starting point, develop a collaborative website tool for network members, including editorial processes.
- Invite members and hold first meeting.
- Delegate responsibilities to members for supported continuance of group and also content creation tasks.
- Host regular meetings and respond managerially to group dialog and decisions.
- Compile summary report and present.

Opportunity 2: Conduct a province-wide series of HR policy forums

Issues addressed:

- Limited credibility of existing opinion on industry specific-perspectives.
- Limited resources to develop topic-specific policy discussion in human resources.
- Difficulty in guiding public policy without cohesive insight into the problems.

A public and broad-based process for understanding the position, needs, and ideas of members of the industry from a wide array of sectors and regions is a tried and tested model for the development of insights and strategic recommendations to all levels of agriculture and food.

Components may include:

- Essentially, a distributed, decentralized policy-development initiative with moderate central coordination by the delivery agent, with the goal of framing strategic recommendations for industry.
- Expert-driven agenda.

performance management program is a positive, ongoing approach that assists all employees to fulfill their potential and grow their skills while contributing to business goals. This approach to performance management has been shown to increase employee engagement, resulting in greater motivation and retention - critical in today's tight labour market."

Nicole Davis

Director, Human Resources, Bayer CropScience Inc., Calgary AB

Concurrent Session Topic Title:
Rewarding For Results: How to Use Recognition and Rewards to Inspire Motivated and Contributing Employees

Published Synopsis: "How can you get the most from your workforce? Studies show that highly engaged work groups are higher in retention, customer loyalty, productivity and profits. Nicole will discuss how you can use effective rewards and recognition to motivate and inspire your employees to higher levels of engagement to deliver better bottom line results."



CLOSING REMARKS

Dr. Denis Cauvier

Human Resources & Leadership
Expert, Ottawa, ON

Presentation Title: Low Cost / High Impact Methods to Attract and Retain GREAT Agriculture Sector Employees

Published Synopsis: “Alberta's agriculture sector employers are being squeezed by foreign and domestic competition; increasing taxes, fuel, and land costs; changes in technology and regulations; and increased consumer expectations. These challenges are further compounded by Alberta's booming economy and tight labour market. Dr. Cauvier will share practical and proven solutions that you can immediately use to find and keep great people.”

- Regional target audiences with a diagonal cross-section of industry representation.
- Topic-specific discussions.
- Outcomes relating to strategic human resources policy reporting.
- Coordinated by a third-party moderator (or moderators) with the goal of reporting to the delivery agent on outcomes.

Justification:

- The reality of an ever-changing economic landscape, labour pool, and set of regional and sectoral differences contributing to the complexity of strategic discussion.
- The value of public input by a third-party or other representative non-government group in shaping policy decisions.
- The need for an aligned strategy for the industry with roots in public consultation and broad-based “on-the-ground” insights.

Methodology:

- Convene action team to refine purpose of consultations.
- Finalize location, scope, agenda, and audience for forums.
- Book locations and moderators.
- Invite industry stakeholders.
- Hold event.
- Compile summary report and present.

Opportunity 3: Conduct a statistically valid study on the image of industry

Issues addressed:

- Limited credibility of existing opinion of industry by external audience.
- Loose direction of internal discussion without evidence merited directives.
- Difficulty in guiding tactical solutions without comprehensive insight into the perceptions of target audience.

Much of what is currently understood of the perception of agriculture and food as an employer in Alberta is understood in the context of anecdotal reactions from individuals, companies, or organizations in the context of recruitment campaigns. A better understanding of the perception, particularly with a focus on statistic and scientifically valid methodology would lend credence to future actions and ideas in addressing ongoing human resources challenges.

Components may include:

- Seeking to answer the question: “What does a career in Ag and Food look like to someone outside the industry?”
- Expert-derived questions relating to attraction, recruitment, retention in relation to a non-agricultural population perception of the industry.
- In-depth, scientifically-valid sample and analysis.
- Coordinated by a third-party firm equipped to sample a variety of demographics across Alberta and using a number of sampling methods.

Justification:

- The need to align marketing and messaging in the industry with regard to attraction for recruitment.
- The desire to better understand regional, cultural, and demographic differences of potential employees.
- The requirement of industry to understand itself within the context of a larger society that is increasingly urban and distanced from and agricultural mindset.

Methodology:

- Convene action team to refine purpose of study.
- Hire third-party survey firm to support development of concept.
- Conduct survey.
- Compile summary report and present.



LOOKING AHEAD – RECOMMENDATIONS

The dialog started by the process of initiating and hosting Resourcing for the Future, the 2009 HR Congress opens clear and important avenues for future work in human resources supporting agri-food in Alberta. AFC will continue to actively pursue this work given ongoing commitment of resources and strategic motivation devoted to this kind of work.

It is the recommendation of this report that work should manifest in three tiers, either in full or in part by AFC, fully supported by AFC and in partnership with industry:

1. By pursuing further actions relating to the opportunities outlined in this document. Suggestions for this work include fleshing out a proposal for funding for the included opportunities, developing project plans, and implementing through a strategic initiative project model by a non-government agency such as AFC.
2. By supporting the ongoing human resource dialog in Alberta's agri-food industry. Suggestions for this work include exploring options for AFC to find means to support successor events to Resourcing for the Future, the 2009 HR Congress.
3. By engaging in a deeper analysis of any and all of these reported gaps. Suggestions for this work include the development of a formal and extensive collaborative document through a professional research and analysis contract.

VOLUNTEER AND STAFF WORKING GROUP

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REPORT

This report was prepared in September 2009 by Brad Salomons with the guidance and feedback of the Congress Working Group and the Agriculture & Food Council's HR Action Team. For more information please visit www.agfoodcouncil.com

Resourcing for the Future: The 2009 HR Congress was hosted by:

Agriculture & Food Council
The Catalyst

