COVID-19 and labor issues: An assessment

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COVID-19 has not been an equal opportunity virus… it has exposed and exacerbated inequalities between countries just as it has within countries. — Joseph Stiglitz (2020)

Abstract
Canada’s unemployment rate increased rapidly in the spring of 2020 in response to strict public health measures. Low-wage workers were hit particularly hard, including restaurant workers. The production and distribution of food being essential and agri-food supply chains being resilient, other workers in the agri-food sector were less impacted by public health measures and the pandemic. Employment in grocery stores remained steady and employment of agricultural workers, including temporary foreign workers, proved more robust than expected. Dealing with contaminated workers proved challenging in meat processing plants. Temporary plant shutdowns and slowdowns created livestock queuing problems and temporary increases in meat prices. The federal and provincial governments implemented several programs to mitigate the pandemic’s adverse effects on labor markets. The pandemic will have permanent effect on labor markets, but with unemployment rates falling rapidly across Canada, recruiting and retention remain the main labor issues in agriculture.

Résumé
Le taux de chômage au Canada a augmenté rapidement au printemps 2020 en réponse aux strictes mesures de santé publique. Les travailleurs à bas salaire ont été particulièrement touchés, y compris les travailleurs de la restauration. La production et la distribution de denrées alimentaires étant essentielles et les chaînes d’approvisionnement agroalimentaires résilientes, les autres travailleurs du secteur agroalimentaire ont été moins touchés par les mesures de santé publique et la pandémie. L’emploi dans les épiceries est resté stable et l’emploi des travailleurs agricoles, y compris les travailleurs étrangers temporaires, s’est avéré plus robuste que prévu. La gestion des travailleurs contaminés s’est avérée difficile dans les usines de transformation de la viande. Les fermetures temporaires d’usines et les ralentissements ont créé des problèmes de files d’attente pour le bétail et des augmentations temporaires des prix de la viande. Les gouvernements fédéral et provincial ont mis en œuvre plusieurs programmes pour atténuer les effets néfastes de la pandémie sur les marchés du travail. La pandémie aura un effet permanent sur les marchés du travail, mais avec une chute rapide des taux de chômage partout au Canada, le recrutement et la rétention demeurent les principaux problèmes de main-d’œuvre en agriculture.
The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic hit the world by surprise in early 2020. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in advanced economies fell faster than during the 2008–9 recession and the hardship was felt the world over. In 2008–9, many developing and emerging countries kept on growing, with China’s GDP growing at a pace in excess of 9% per year (World Bank 2021). In contrast, China’s GDP for the 1st quarter of 2020 was 6.8% lower than in the 1st quarter of 2019. Canada’s GDP dropped by 11.1% in the 2nd quarter of 2020, a symptom of the enormity of COVID-19 induced labor markets disruptions in Canada and in other countries. Lemieux et al (2020) report that COVID-19 triggered a 32% drop in aggregate hours of work in Canada between February and April of 2020 after adjusting for anticipated February-April variations, with job losses and reduced working hours roughly equally to blame.

At the beginning of the pandemic, one could easily foresee that the demand for workers was going to be severely diminished by strict public health restrictions. In the agri-food industry, restaurant workers were going to be dramatically impacted (Larue 2020). Governments reacted promptly and some government programs, like wage subsidies, limited job losses, while others, like the $500/week Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) allowed idle workers to be more selective in job searching, particularly workers in the bottom quartile making at most $646/week (Lemieux et al 2020).

With so many meals away from home being replaced by meals at home, some food manufacturers faced abrupt changes in product demand and were incited to drop or hire more workers. It was also obvious early on that COVID-19 was going to disturb the labor supply. COVID-19 was posing unique challenges to meat plants, but it was not clear how many would have to temporarily shutdown and the extent to which productivity in others would fall. There was going to be queuing of live animals, lower prices for livestock producers and higher meat prices for retailers and consumers. I was confident that supply chains would prove to be resilient (Larue 2020). This turned out to be the case and changes in employment along agri-food supply chains have been rather mild, except for restaurant workers. However, protecting workers proved challenging and costly for meatpackers and so have temporary labor shortages due to COVID-19 infections.1

The next section discusses the incidence of COVID-19 on labor markets generally and then more specifically at various levels along agri-food supply chains. The last section addresses changes in labor markets induced by COVID-19 and why some old issues still need to be addressed in a post-COVID-19 world.

2 | COVID-19 MITIGATING MEASURES AND PROGRAMS AND LABOUR MARKET ADJUSTMENTS

COVID-19 has forced governments to self-inflict economic pain to slow down the rate of infection and save lives. Measures undertaken by governments to deal with the pandemic vary across countries, within countries and over time, depending on infection risks, strengths and weaknesses of the health care system; fiscal capacity to provide financial support to individuals and businesses; and implicit valuation of human lives. Strict economy-wide measures, like confinements, had highly heterogeneous direct and indirect effects. Mandated closures and operational restrictions had drastic effects on the demand for labor by non-essential businesses. Indirect impacts through variations in unemployment and employment uncertainty led to significant reductions in aggregate consumption, which, in turn, changed the fortunes of food manufacturers. Some benefitted from episodes of strict confinements while others experienced sudden and drastic demand reductions. The effect of the pandemic on labor demand varies across sectors, but it is mainly conditioned by the stringency of the measures adopted or terminated by governments.

The stringency index, computed by the Oxford COVID-19 government tracker, is based on nine response indicators, including school closures, workplace closures and travel bans, that summarizes the quantity and stringency of public health measures adopted or terminated by governments over the course of the pandemic.2 The index makes it possible to compare the COVID-19 management between Canadian provinces, US states and other jurisdictions in other countries. Quebec and Ontario stringency indices followed similar patterns. The two provinces first broke the 60-stringency mark on March 23rd and 25th, 2020, respectively, and broke the 80-mark on April 20, 2020. The stringency index tracks the

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1 Amounts invested to protect workers by large US meatpackers are in the billions of US$ (Almeida and Hirtzer 2020). Still, meatpacking plants were found to be accelerators of COVID-19 community spread (Taylor et al 2020). Without a proper counterfactual analysis, it is impossible to gauge how much worse community infection rates would have been without these investments.

2 A temporal mapping of countries’ stringency indices going back to January 21, 2020 can be seen at https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/covid-stringency-index.
imposition and termination of an array of measures, but it does not account for enforcement and possible variations in efficiency across jurisdictions. Business closures are less efficient in curbing infection in poorer and more densely populated areas and in areas where COVID-19 variants have taken hold. Accordingly, COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 persons can be substantially different in jurisdictions that adopted similarly stringent measures. More specifically, the number of COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 stood at 127 in Quebec in April 2021, and at 52 in Ontario (NY times 2021).

However, the evolution of manufacturing employment in Quebec is very similar to that for all of Canada as shown in Figure 1. EventhoughQuebecsufferedamuchworstfirst-waveofCOVID-19casesthanotherprovinces,itsemploymentdropinmanufacturingwasonlyslightlyworse than that of Canada as a whole. The employment patterns for Canada and Quebec are remarkably similar considering that unemployment differences within and between provinces were harder to arbitrage than under normal times because of all of the restrictions limiting travel between and within provinces. The late divergence between the Quebec and Canada employment lines in the fall of 2020 can be explained by the fact that Quebec tightened its economic restrictions earlier in the fall than did the Atlantic and Western provinces.

Unemployment in Canada jumped from 5.6% to 13.7% between February and May of 2020. These spikes in unemployment occurred when strict confinement measures were imposed to contain the first wave of COVID cases. North American labor markets are notoriously more flexible than European ones and this can be seen by glancing at Figure 2. Italy, which had been hard hit in March of 2020 by the pandemic, experienced a drop in unemployment in April, followed by relatively modest increases in May, June and July by North American standards. Unemployment increases have also been modest in the UK. Sweden, which aggressively pursued herd immunity with lax mitigation strategies, experienced larger increases in unemployment than the UK. While there were no lockdowns in Sweden, its unemployment increased more and its GDP decreased more than that of Norway, which had imposed stricter measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. Brazil is another country that was averse to self-inflicting economic pains, but its unemployment has been over 14% since August of 2020, up from 11.2% in January of 2020. The stringency of mitigating measures tracks well with unemployment in North America, but lockdowns and curfews are not necessarily the main factors conditioning unemployment in other countries. Countries that chose to adopt few mitigating measures to limit economic woes still have to contend with drops in world aggregate demand for all goods.

3 Workers in the bottom earnings quartile are less likely to distance-work, are more likely to provide essential services and have a higher probability of contracting COVID-19. Poorer people are also more affected by misinformation and miscommunication about public health warnings (Ahmed et al 2020). Finally, a rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in an area will likely trigger stricter public health measures in the area as well as neighboring areas. In neighbouring areas, the measures act as prevention as opposed to containment.

4 Quebec and Ontario death rates per 100,000 have since declined and converged, as one would expect.

5 Out-of-province visitors entering Nova Scotia (New Brunswick) have to quarantine for 14 (5) days. Generally, inter-provincial travel has been discouraged all across Canada unless necessary. For workers searching for employment, the cost of their quarantine substantially increases their moving costs. This makes it harder to arbitrage differences in unemployment rates between provinces.

6 This massive increase in unemployment combined with reductions in hours worked among employed workers made Canadian labour productivity jump by 15% during the first two quarters of 2020 (Blit et al 2020). The drop in national output, while huge by any standard, embodies a compositional effect due to job losses and reduced hours impacting low-wage workers disproportionately.
and changes in the behavior of citizens in response to the faster spread of the disease. For a country with relatively low trade to GDP ratio like Brazil, unemployment can only rise when people are scared to go out.

### 2.1 Protecting jobs versus protecting workers

It is easy to criticize the policy response in Canada and elsewhere, but policymakers were under tremendous pressure and had very little information to rapidly adjust current policies and programs and to design and implement new ones. Scientific information about COVID-19 was sketchy in the spring of 2020. Testing and tracing capacities were limited and all governments around the world were desperate for medical supplies. Regulations had to be developed urgently for all work places and so were financial incentives to get businesses and workers to comply with lockdowns. Getting incentives right is not easy, especially when policy must be made “on the fly”. Governments had to decide between protecting jobs or protecting workers, or doing a bit of both. As shown in Figure 2, there are drastic differences in the variations in unemployment rates between North American and European countries. It is obvious that European governments have been much keener to protect jobs. Such differences in labor market regulations have been the focus of many studies over the years. Blanchard and Portugal (2001) argue that the European regulations protecting jobs makes for more “sclerotic economies”. Regulations aimed at reducing ins and outs in labor markets induce increases in the use of capital and non-production workers which tend to raise labor productivity while lowering total factor productivity. Making dismissals more difficult also reduces employment flows and firm entry rates (Autor et al 2006). This explains why European countries have suffered larger GDP contractions than Canada and the United States even though their unemployment rates did not increase as much.

Much has been said about how the pandemic has accelerated the digitization of the economy and the trend toward distance working. As a result, some jobs may become obsolete more quickly and, in this context, protecting workers might make more sense than protecting jobs. One might be tempted to argue that the matching of employers and workers, once the economy begins to recover, might be less efficient after a massive increase in unemployment and that time

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7 Some of the programs put forth include: the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB); the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB); the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB); the Mortgage Payment Deferral; the Employment Insurance Program (EI); the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS); the Work Sharing Program; the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA); the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance Program (CECRA); the Business Credit Availability Program (BCAP); the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF); and Tax Filing and Payments accommodations.
invested in job searching might reduce the speed of the economic recovery. However, rapid declines in Canadian and US unemployment rates after their peak in the spring of 2020 suggest that matching can be done efficiently even when unemployment is close to 15%. In this light, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) has likely been a better instrument than Canada’s Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS). Roughly $85 billion was spent on CERB and on Canada’s Emergency Student Benefit versus $49 billion on CEWS.

2.2 Labor issues along agri-food supply chains

A major concern in the agri-food industry was the costs of the adjustments necessary to deal with the pandemic. When demand from restaurants abruptly fell at the beginning of the pandemic, many food products needed to be stored or further processed to avoid waste. That is why the Canadian Dairy Commission saw its borrowing limit increase by $200 million. Farm Credit Canada’s lending capacity was increased by $5 billion to help farmers deal with cash flow problems and lost revenues early on during the pandemic, made possible by a $500 million pandemic related contribution. AgriRecovery provided up to $125 million to help defray COVID-19 related adjustment costs, such as set-asides for cattle and hogs due to reduced processing capacity. Additional liquidities were injected through AgriStability’s interim payments which were increased from 50% to 75%. With the exception of restaurant workers, the demand for workers along agri-food supply chains remained consistently strong in 2020.

2.3 Employment from food retail, restaurant to food processing

Government measures imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 have drastically reduced employment in the restaurant and food service sector. This is by far the hardest hit segment of the industry. Figure 3 illustrates the massive blow suffered by the industry in April of 2020, with employment falling by 50%. The figure also illustrates employment effects after mitigation measures were eased during the summer months and when Quebec returned to stricter measures early in the fall of 2020. Like other laid-off workers, restaurant workers received financial assistance from various programs.

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It was reported that 4500 FCC customers had stopped making payments on their loans early on during the pandemic, but that almost all had resumed making regular payments (Zochodone 2020b). Thus, it would appear that the $500 million capital injection was precautionary and has not been fully used.
Restaurant owners have also received some assistance and many are trying to weather the storm. This shows up in the statistics about insolvcies. Bankruptcies and bankruptcy proposals in accommodation and food services for November of 2020 are actually down by 12.2% relative to November of 2019! Other sectors hit hard by the pandemic, like retail trade and arts or entertainment and recreation, have increases in insolvcies of 4.8% and 57.3%, respectively. Generally for both consumers and businesses, insolvcies are down by a whopping 26% because of the unprecedented array of programs put in place to help individuals and businesses that were adversely impacted by the pandemic. The return to “normal” may trigger a record number of bankruptcies, including in the restaurant business. However, this is an industry with low entry barriers and the demand for restaurant workers should remain strong even if several establishments are forced to exit.

Figure 4 shows a temporary 4% drop in employment in grocery stores between February and May of 2020. The number of supermarket workers dropped by 1.9% in Quebec and 5% in Ontario between February and August of 2020 even though major chains offered temporary wage increases to retain their employees and implemented safety protocols to protect their workers and customers (MAPAQ 2020). Specialty food stores suffered a larger temporary drop in employment than grocery stores (19,272 versus 17,551 jobs) and has yet to fully recover.

The main labor supply concerns at the beginning of the pandemic focused on processing facilities and agricultural workers, especially meat plant workers and temporary foreign workers. Some people in the industry were afraid that agri-food supply chains could break down and bring chaos and unrest. Governments all over the world tried their best to keep regional and international supply chains running as smoothly as possible. Agri-food supply chains remained resilient during the pandemic and this is why retail food prices remained quite stable. Figure 5 shows that prices of dairy products have increased slightly and smoothly, while poultry and egg prices fluctuated around an upward trend and fresh fruits and fresh vegetables prices fluctuated around a constant trend. All of the fluctuations are of comparable magnitudes to past price movements except for red meats. The employment portraits for Canada’s medium-sized food manufacturing sectors show short-lived dips for fruits and vegetables preservation and seafood preparation, but the dip for the latter is large, accounting for a quarter of normal employment. Figure 6b shows the evolution of employment in three large manufacturing sectors, namely, meat, bakeries and other food. The most pronounced drop in employment was recorded

9 For more details, see https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/bsf-ost.nsf/eng/br04407.html.
10 The drop in insolvcies in 2020 is also due to creditors being more lenient than under normal circumstances. This is expected to change soon.
11 The Canadian government was keen on keeping the Canada-US border open for trade purposes, but to shut it down for non-essential travel.
12 Food supply chains are proficient in dealing with primary products’ sourcing disruptions caused by climate shocks, insect infestations, plant and livestock diseases and in managing food recalls and import bans.
in the bakery sector. The drop in employment extended over several months for all three sectors, which simply reflects that some plants were confronted with labor shortages at different times.

Canadian beef and pork retail prices experienced a temporary, but significant, spike in May and June of 2020 shortly after several meat plants in Canada and in the United States were forced to operate at reduced speed or for fewer hours or to shut down. The drop in processing capacity created a queuing problem for live animals that could not be processed. The lower volume of meat manufactured by meatpacking plants triggered increases in retail prices, widening the gap between farm and retail prices. Meatpacking plants were hit hard and fast by COVID-19. Statistics from the Douglas (2021) show that over 57,000 US meatpacking workers had tested positive for COVID-19 and that 284 had died by March 2, 2020. There is evidence that contamination in US meatpacking plants significantly accelerated community spread, adding an estimated 4,300 to 5,200 deaths by July 21, 2020 (Taylor et al. 2020).

As previously mentioned in Larue (2020), a plant closure is an extreme measure. Many plants, like the JBS plant in Brooks, Alberta, dealt with their shortage of healthy workers by operating fewer hours per day (i.e., only one shift per day instead of two). Slowdowns are sustainable only if infections among workers can be contained. When COVID-19 cases increased rapidly in Iowa meatpacking plants in April of 2020, the Governor took a stance against plant closures to avoid economic losses from livestock queuing based on the belief that COVID-19 was going to infect workers and communities sooner or later (NPR 2020). To ease the pressure mounting on meatpackers and state politicians, President Trump issued an executive order on April 28th of 2020 to prevent meat processing plants from closing, but temporary closures and slowdowns continued. The management of the pandemic by industry and government drew much criticism. Industry concentration and plant size made for easy targets. Workers work in close proximity of one another in large and small plants regardless of who owns the plants, but large plants having more workers face higher probabilities of contamination and faster contamination, all else being equal. Plant size evolves according to processing technology advances and transport costs. Increases in average plant size has spurred industry concentration, but large plants have served society well before the pandemic with gains from costs savings dominating losses from oligopsony pricing (Azzam and Schroter 1995). Industry concentration offered some advantages during the pandemic in increasing the speed and homogeneity in the implementation of measures aimed at protecting workers. Multi-plant companies can more easily reassign livestock

13 Plant closures included the pork processing plant of Conestoga meats in Waterloo, Ontario; Maple Leaf Foods’ poultry plant located in Brampton, Ontario; Vancouver’s United Poultry Co. Ltd. Plant; and Olymel plants in Red Deer, Vallée Jonction and Yamachiche
14 Having deep pockets helps in managing a crisis. The Almeida and Hirtzer (2020) reported that Smithfield and Tyson had invested $700 million and $540 million, respectively, to make their US plants safer, while JBS invested $200 million in health and safety measures and an additional $160 million to top up wages.
deliveries and possibly even workers to optimize processing capacity under constraints and minimize queuing issues when dealing with COVID-19 induced labor shortages, provided gains in economic efficiency are sufficient to cover additional labor costs.

2.4 Agricultural workers and COVID-19

Farmers have had perennial difficulties in recruiting and retaining agricultural workers. This problem is more acute for farms producing field fruits and vegetables, dairy farms and greenhouses. The surge in unemployment in spring 2020 was not expected to bring many people to the fields because many laid off workers hoped to be re-hired soon and CERB payments made the need for employment less pressing. To counter this, there were provincial programs designed to bring new blood into agriculture. In April 2020, the Quebec government announced a $45 million investment of direct incentives (100$/week wage subsidy), as well as farm subsidies to enforce public health regulations and employer-employee matching
services (Entreprises Quebec 2020). Figure 7 shows an increase in agricultural employment in Quebec in the fall of 2020 relative to the fall of 2019 and a mild reduction for Canada. US statistics also show a small drop in the number of hired workers, with 777,000 workers for the week of July 12–18 of 2020 compared to 802,000 workers for July 7–13 of 2019 (USDA 2021).

The difficulty in recruiting domestic workers has increased the reliance of Canadian farms on Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs). COVID-19 affected both their supply and their demand. Some farmers anticipated that it would be too costly to bring TFWs into Canada, and to protect them adequately, and reduced planned production. To counter this, the federal and provincial governments committed funds to subsidize the required 14-day quarantine and transport and housing adjustments to facilitate social distancing. AgriInsurance was expanded to include labor shortages as an eligible risk for the horticulture sector. There was much uncertainty last year about the supply of agricultural TFWs. Statistics Canada does not have recent data about agricultural TFWs, but Ker and Biden (2021) reports that 84,815 TFW visas were delivered in 2020, a drop of 14,000 relative to 2019. In the past, agricultural TFWs made up about 65% of all TFWs, but they probably made up a larger proportion in 2020 because of the assistance provided by the federal and provincial governments. Statistics about Quebec’s agricultural TFWs between February and August reveals that the number of TFWs dropped by only 5%, from 14,066 in 2019 to 13,300 in 2020 (MAPAQ 2020). Stricter regulations imposed recently on TFWs, like the obligation to produce a negative COVID-19 test prior to boarding a plane going to Canada, are not likely to hinder the flow of incoming TFWs if recent statistics are indicative of the future. Of the 169 TFWs that were expected to arrive in Montreal in January 2021, 148 actually arrived as scheduled (Morneau 2021). TFWs are tested for COVID-19 upon arrival and must test themselves again 10 days into quarantine.

Overall, the availability of agricultural TFWs has not been as large of a problem as initially feared. The biggest problem might have been the mistreatment of TFWs. Statistics pertaining to Canadian TFWs are hard to find, but there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that suggests that there has been more abuse during the pandemic than in previous years. Inadequate housing and transport are serious concerns in normal times, but could be deadly during a pandemic. Some workers complained about the lack of protective equipment. The pandemic further isolated TFWs, making wage-gauging and sanitary abuses harder to report. Villarejo (2020) reports that agricultural TFWs are three times more likely to contract COVID-19 than other California workers. Chen et al (2021) report that California food and agriculture workers have a 39% excess mortality rate due to COVID-19, the rate going up to 59% for Latinos and dropping to 16% for Whites. For perspective, the excess mortality rate for Asian healthcare workers, a group much at risk, is 40%.

15 The mandatory isolation cost support for the TFWs program provided up to $1,500/TFW to cover the costs of the 14-day isolation period. Bureaucratic hurdles were also lifted. Employment and Social Development Canada reduced administrative requirements relative to labour market impact assessment applications.
16 To its credit, Statistics Canada provides a wide array of statistics about COVID-19, but the most recent information about temporary foreign workers (TFWs) pertains to 2018 and cannot shed light on the extent by which the supply of TFWs was rationed during the pandemic.
3 | POST-PANDEMIC LABOR ISSUES

The problem with recessions, even short-lived ones, is that it takes time to make up for lost output. It will take years to catch up to the pre-pandemic growth path. Fortunately, the recovery is expected to be rapid. Unemployment is falling and should continue to fall as curfews and temporary business closures are lifted, but not all is well. Workers that were laid off before the pandemic and who have been idle for a year or more will face greater challenges than recently laid off workers in finding employment. They are more likely to settle on a lower-paying job that will lower their life-long earnings and to experience health issues that will lower their life expectancy (von Wachter 2020).

The practice of distance working has been widely adopted. In Canada, the fraction of the workforce doing some distance working is 35.1%, with British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec raising the national average (Statistics Canada 2021). This is lower than the 42% reported for the United States by Bloom (2020). Long uninterrupted sequences of distance working reportedly lower productivity, but 2–3 days a week may be productivity-enhancing and pleasant for workers (Bloom 2020). With improved broadband service, extended well beyond densely populated urban areas, some workers have decided to relocate to rural areas. Time will tell whether this is a solid trend or a simple fad.

A classic result in the international trade literature is that the outsourcing/offshoring of tasks increases the wage gap between skilled and unskilled workers in both poor and rich countries (Feenstra 2016). The delegation of tasks to foreign workers has become easier with Zoom, Teams, Adobe and Skype becoming ubiquitous tools and this raises concerns over inequality.17 Furceri et al (2020) argue that past pandemics have lowered employment prospects amongst poorer workers and increased the gaps between top and bottom income deciles. Sayed and Peng (2020) are more ambivalent about long term effects of COVID-19 on income inequality, in part because the most adverse health effects were felt by retired workers. The short run inequality effects in Canada were obvious. Lemieux et al (2020) found that half of Canada’s job losses between February and April of 2020 fell on non-union, low wage, paid hourly workers in the bottom earnings quartile. Qian and Fuller (2020) reported that women with younger children lost employment and working hours disproportionately.

The most pressing challenge when it comes to agricultural labor remains the recruiting and retention of agricultural workers. COVID-19 brought more attention to this issue in Canada and in other industrialized countries. With unemployment in the economy at large falling, the hiring of agricultural workers will be increasingly difficult and the demand for TFWs is bound to increase.

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