Rural Career Development

CHRONIC LABOR SHORTAGES IN AGRICULTURE: US AND CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES
MELISSA MESSER AND JENNIFER WRIGHT

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When we began preparing for this issue in late December and early January the idea of a pandemic, stay at home orders, social distancing, and an unemployment rate we have not seen since the 19040’s was not on anyone’s radar. As a result, the articles in this issue are not meant to address the impact of COVID-19, but instead were prepared to continue to provide NCDA members with useful information on an important topic.

Workforce development is a relatively recent term and concept that has developed over the past two decades or so to describe a wide range of activities and policies related to learning for work. Typically, the efforts are aimed at creating and/or sustaining a viable workforce for current and future business and that provide individuals with the opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. Rural areas across the United States are home to different cultures, people, businesses, and infrastructure, and are far from geographically or economically homogenous. However, since these rural areas are less densely populated and less connected to major centers of employment, they share common workforce development challenges. During the last half century, rural counties across the United States have suffered from a shrinking population and workforce. Since the 1990s, rural population growth continues to remain low compared to urban and suburban areas. Rural counties experienced a 3% population growth rate since 2000, which can be attributed to gains in rural communities on the edges of metropolitan areas, while more remote counties continued to lose population. During this same period, by contrast, suburban and urban counties grew by 16% and 13%, respectively.

In addition to our focus on rural workforce development, we have also collaborated with CERIC to create a joint issue. This special issue will include columns that will also appear CERIC’s Careering magazine (https://ceric.ca/careering-magazine/). Articles that appear in both magazines are noted at the end of each column.
Our rural communities were facing hard times before the outbreak of COVID-19. Their young people are leaving, the internet is inaccessible, and automation is replacing jobs previously available in rural communities.
Rural Workforce Development
Deneen Pennington, Executive Director

Growing up in the hills of northeastern Pennsylvania, I always dreamed of what it would be like to live and work in a big city. I moved to Oklahoma the summer before my senior year of high school and although the city of Tulsa isn’t that large, it seems like a metropolis compared to the rural surroundings of Butler County. Upon earning my bachelor’s degree, I accepted a position working for a large downtown convention hotel. I experienced firsthand that working in a large city meant I had to deal with the congested morning commute, parking in the crowded parking garage spaces were frequently a challenge, and braving inclement weather in hose and high heels just wasn’t everything I envisioned. It is exciting to work downtown but I quickly learned that I am a rural girl at heart, and I value wide open places and the quiet sounds of nature over the traffic and buzz of a big city.

The need for skilled workers in rural areas, even in the city of Tulsa, is a challenge. Just last year, our city started a Tulsa Remote Program where they pay young professionals to move to the city and provide them with desk space to work in a “coworking community with other remote workers, entrepreneurs, and digital nomads.” Funded by the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the Tulsa Remote was created to enhance Tulsa’s talented and successful workforce community by bringing diverse, bright, and drive individual to the city for communication building, collaboration, and networking. The founders believe once people experience the growing city, they will want to stay longer than the first year. With Tulsa’s low housing prices, plentiful career opportunities, and many attractions, the success of the programs first year are impressive. Many young professionals, especially those from California, never dreamed of owning a home. Many had delayed starting their families because of the financial struggles in their home areas. Although this program is still relatively new, its results in attracting diverse young professionals impressive.

I hope all NCDA members are enjoying the summer months and upcoming school year. We hope to see all of you at the Regional Career Practitioner Institute, co-sponsored with the New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York Career Development Associations, on October 16 at New Jersey City University. This multistate event will feature exciting presentations focused on the practitioner. Register Today!
In a sentence or two, describe why career development matters.

DB: Career development matters because work is a vehicle to fulfill many of our dreams while also optimally fulfilling our needs for survival, power, relatedness, social contribution, and self-determination.

Which book are you reading right now and why did you choose it?

DB: I am reading Beaten Down, Worked Up: The Past, Present, and Future of American Labor by Steven Greenhouse, which can inform my efforts to advocate for effective workers’ organizations.

What was your first-ever job and what did you learn from it?

DB: When I was 16, I worked selling and stocking shoes at a department store in Queens. My mother also worked in this store, and to stand on her feet for many hours a day even into her late 50s. I deepened my compassion for the struggles of work during this job, which has been a lifelong lesson.

What do you do to relax and how does it help you?

DB: I relax by walking, exercising, spending time with my family, reading, and listening to music.

What is the one thing you wouldn’t be able to work without? Why?

DB: My laptop! Sadly, it has become a staple of my life and in the lives of so many others. During this pandemic, I have learned that in-person meetings are essential for many reasons, not the least of which is to have genuine human connection.

What is the most unusual job interview question you’ve ever been asked and how did you respond?

DB: I do not recall—can we leave this question out?

What’s something you want to do in the next year that you’ve never done before?

DB: I would like to develop an integrative intervention for unemployed adults. I am hoping to develop a workshop curriculum that can be readily used by career counselors, vocational psychologists, and employment specialists.

Who would you like to work with most and why?

DB: My pipedream would be to somehow connect with Bruce Springsteen and collaborate with him on the plight of invisible and forgotten people across the world. I do not write music, but I can envision how his empathy and creativity would elevate my work.

What talent or superpower would you like to have and how would you use it?

DB: I wish that I could use mediation skills more easily, both in my personal life and in day-to-day interactions.

What do you consider your greatest achievement and why?

DB: For me, developing the psychology of working framework and theory is my greatest professional accomplishment. This initiative was a dream of mine back in the 1990s—to develop a perspective that would be inclusive, integrative, and transformative. With the help of amazing colleagues, we have created a movement that is integral to our field and that is particularly needed during this crisis. Even more importantly, I feel that having a wonderful family of adult daughters and a caring and loving wife is the most precious achievement of my life.

What do you think will be the biggest lasting change of the pandemic on work?

DB: I think that this crisis has brought the fault lines in our work lives into a vivid sense of clarity. As described in my recent book The Importance of Work in an Age of Uncertainty, the essence of work has changed, creating a sense of erosion in the workforce and within our inner lives. I hope that the biggest change is that our workers and public leaders will now insist on decent and dignified work for all.
If you had one piece of advice for jobseekers navigating COVID-19, what would it be?

DB: I would suggest that jobseekers develop support groups of others who can provide active assistance in the hard process of looking for work and critically needed social support.

What is one way we can leverage the power of career development right now?

DB: I think that career development needs to embrace a transformative agenda that will be inclusive of all who work and who are aspiring for a decent job that provides sustainability in a humane and safe environment.

CERIC is a Canadian charitable organization that advances education and research in career counselling and career development. It funds projects to develop innovative resources - many of which are available for free download - that build the knowledge and skills of diverse career professionals. CERIC publishes its Careering magazine, a free print and digital resource by and for career development professionals, three times a year. CERIC also annually hosts Cannexus, Canada’s largest bilingual career development conference; publishes the country’s only peer-reviewed journal, Canadian Journal of Career Development; and runs the CareerWise website, with a popular free weekly newsletter that sends you the top career development news and views. Visit ceric.ca to learn more.
US Perspective

BY MELISSA MESSER

As we enter mid-summer, many of our favorite foods are ripe and ready to be harvested. There’s fresh corn, fruits and vegetables, and more—all ready to be picked. However, what may not be ready is a workforce that is available when crops are.

CURRENT LABOR SHORTAGES

The American Farm Bureau Federation indicates that U.S. agriculture needs 1.5 to 2 million hired workers (Economic Impact of Immigration, 2020). These challenging, often seasonal, positions are essential to food production—but few U.S. citizens are willing to fill them. A California Farm Bureau Federation survey found that 56 percent of California farmers have been unable to find all the workers they need during the last five years (Survey: California farms face continuing employee shortages, 2019).

Given this chronic labor shortage, immigrants—most from Mexico—play an increasingly crucial role in our food system. Foreign-born workers can legally come to the United States to perform short-term farm labor under the H-2A Temporary Agricultural Worker Program, often referred to as the H-2A visa program.

Rules are in place so that the H-2A program does not take jobs from domestic workers or lower the average wage. Before hiring H-2A workers, farm employers must demonstrate to the DOL that they are unable to recruit U.S. citizens for their open positions. They are also required to pay a state-specific minimum wage that may not be lower than the average wage for crop and livestock workers in their region during the prior year, known as the Adverse Effect Wage Rate.

Once approved, H-2A visa holders are allowed to work in the U.S. temporarily. The visa can be re-approved annually for up to three years. A worker loses their H-2A status if they leave their job. After a worker has three years of H-2A status, they are required to leave the United States for at least three months before applying to receive a H-2A visa again. The H-2A visa does not apply to a worker’s family members and does not give workers a way to gain permanent legal status. Unlike the H-2B program, there is no cap set on the total number of H-2A visas that can be granted each year.
THE FUTURE OF FARMING

“By the year 2050, U.S. growers will need to reach an impressive level of food production to help feed a growing world population. Fewer in number, they will operate multifaceted businesses with stunning new technology to increase efficiency on farms.”
(The Future of Farming, 2020)

There are several predictions as to what the future of farming will look like and what additional labor demands will be:

- **Food demand increases** — Farmers will be expected to increase their food production by 70% in order to meet the needs compared to 2007.

- **Consolidation acceleration** — the 2012 census data revealed the significant number of older farmers (65 and older) who will soon be exiting the workforce with fewer younger growers to replace them.

- **High Tech Solutions** — in order to deal with the lack of labor it is likely that more tech solutions will be utilized including drones, robots, increase use of data in farm management, gene-editing, and other emerging agriculture technology.

RESOURCES FOR CAREER COUNSELORS AND PROFESSIONALS

National FFA and Discovery Education have joined forces to create a robust, comprehensive career resource to help you explore the broad range of careers within the industry of agriculture.
https://agexplorer.com/career/career-counselor-career-services-coordinator

AgHires is a recruiting, job posting website, and HR company for the Agriculture and Food Production industries. AgHires helps agribusinesses, farms, grain operations, specialty crops, food processors, livestock, biotechnology and other relatable businesses hire employees. We’re dedicated to connecting top talent with the top employers. We understand what it takes to find the right people and we’re determined to help you succeed. We grew up in the industry, we’re beyond passionate for agriculture and food production, and we’re working hard to promote its culture and showcasing what the industry has to offer.
https://aghires.com/career-advice/

The year 2050 is a key moment in time – the world’s population will be a projected 10 billion. Food production needs are expected to rise by 60-70% and changing agronomic conditions will put pressure on agricultural yields. Journey 2050 is a FREE agriculture education program that challenges participants to answer the question “How will we sustainably feed 9 billion people by the year 2050?”

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Canadian Perspective

BY JENNIFER WRIGHT

For decades, Canada has been a world-leading exporter of agriculture products, and our contribution to food production is expected to continue to grow in the years to come. Unfortunately, most provinces and many commodities in Canada are affected by the agriculture sector’s chronic and significant labor shortages. In 2018, more than 16,400 positions went unfilled, costing the industry $2.9 billion in lost sales. The inability to find a skilled and knowledgeable workforce directly affects sales, productivity and expansion plans.

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council’s (CAHRC) Labor Market Forecast to 2029 helps us understand today’s agricultural workforce requirements to be able to source and train an adequate workforce. The forecast confirms that future operational success, expansion and innovation are not possible if the industry does not increase youth interest, focus on effective recruitment channels, invest in knowledge and skill enhancement, and expand retention practices to secure the labor pool required for the future.

IDENTIFYING KEY CHALLENGES

As part of the Labor Market Forecast research, CAHRC conducted a survey that had participation across the country by industry, types of workforce (e.g., management, owners, family workforce, employees and foreign workers) and across all provinces. Over 1,700 farm employers, managers and employees participated in the labor market forecast, including more than 1,300 farm business owners.

The survey found that the key challenges in attracting and retaining workers included too much or too difficult manual labor and that the seasonal nature of work does not interest applicants. The rural location of operations and low wages were also reported as challenges in attracting and retaining workers. Rural areas are also seeing declining populations, which means a decline in the local labor force. A need to increase awareness of the opportunities in agriculture and food production was also mentioned in the survey and may affect the ability of food producers to attract applicants.

Evolving Skills

In many industries, advancements in technology have reduced labor requirements, but they have also resulted in the need for workers with highly technical and advanced skills. Data from the forecast indicates that the evolving skills required to work in many agriculture sectors will demand training to improve worker expertise.

A shift in skills also brings with it new career opportunities. This includes training related to data management, oversight of digital equipment and specialized animal care. The development and promotion of agriculture-related training and careers is essential...
to create interest in working in agriculture. Businesses, educational institutions and government will need to work with industry to co-ordinate training and career development programs that address the need for specific competencies and knowledge development within the agriculture sector.

“Continuing to find ways to make agriculture an attractive and viable career path will be an important strategy in accessing more of the domestic workforce,” says Portia MacDonald-Dewhirst, Executive Director of CAHRC. “It will take concerted effort, multiple strategies and a sustained approach so that we can truly make a difference. Developing and implementing training and education programs that support the future needs of the sector will certainly be one solution for ensuring a healthy future for Canadian agriculture.”

DEVELOPING HR EXPERTISE

Employees should not be the only focus. We must also ensure employers are adequately trained to effectively work with their staff. Many farmers rely on international workers for labor. However, applications for the Government of Canada’s Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) programs are complex, and navigating these initiatives requires a deeper understanding of human resource management techniques. Not following all the regulations related to TFW programs can result in serious consequences for farmers’ businesses.

Regardless of the source of labor, ensuring farm employers have human resource skills to manage their workforce is critical. The adoption of best practices in human resource management and manager training will assist the agriculture sector with the development of more effective recruitment and retention strategies. Farm business owners need to be knowledgeable about the latest human resource practices to support employees on the farm.

Farm managers also need to be knowledgeable about human resource practices to reduce turnover and associated costs. Retaining employees is easier and less expensive than finding new workers. Giving farm business owners the tools they need to be able to hire and keep qualified, reliable employees will be vital to lowering turnover costs. To address the labor issues identified in the research, CAHRC has developed agriculture-specific human resource tools and training programs designed to help modern farm operations manage their workforce.

SECURING THE FUTURE

This data and understanding of the current agri-workforce issue highlights the fact that unless the agriculture sector can adapt and secure a reliable, qualified and skilled workforce, our ability to produce food now and in the future will be at risk. Information and data from the labor market forecast can help us find solutions and develop strategies to address workforce issues effectively. Ensuring human resource best practices are well entrenched across the industry will also support attraction of workers to the industry and retention of workers once they join the industry.

Jennifer Wright, CAHRC’s Senior HR Advisor and Stakeholder Engagement Specialist, grew up on a family farm and farm equipment dealership in southwestern Ontario. She has worked in HR policy, leadership, inclusion and diversity, recruitment and retention in agriculture.

This article also appears in the 2020 Spring/Summer Issue of Careering Magazine, the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC) print and digital magazine.

A complete list of references is available upon request from the authors.
The 2020 NCDA Global Career Development Conference is Going Virtual

July 14-16, 2020

The program, scheduled July 14 – 16, 2020, will feature three virtual keynote addresses, four presidential choice live virtual presentations, numerous pre-recorded breakout presentations, interactive networking chat rooms, and the traditional Annual Membership Meeting.

The cost of registration is $250 for members; $375 for non-members. Fifteen hours of continuing education are available for this event, with the opportunity for so much more at a modest additional fee.

For more information, visit the NCDA Website at www.ncda.org/conference.
How to Create Effective Online Career Workshops

BY DIANE MOORE

Developing pre-recorded presentations can help broaden access to career services for rural and remote communities.

Many career development organizations have begun creating online workshops to complement their face-to-face offerings or as a substitute for live seminars. Online workshops can be a great way to provide services to a broader audience, particularly in rural and remote communities where it can be difficult for clients to travel long distances to attend a workshop in person, especially during the winter months. This may be especially important now, as COVID-19 social distancing has reduced or eliminated opportunities for face-to-face training. There are two approaches you can take to offering online workshops: live online webinars or pre-recorded, on-demand seminars. Pre-recorded seminars, which will be the focus of this article, make more sense as offerings in remote communities.

While we take easy access to Wi-Fi for granted in urban and suburban settings, network connections may be unreliable in rural settings. Also, individuals may not have access at home to the electronic devices they need to connect with webinars in real time and may need to travel to a nearby town to access equipment at a library. By offering pre-recorded, on-demand training sessions, you will ensure clients can access the information they need to support their job search or career decision-making when they need it. If you are asked to create an online workshop for your organization, here are some steps and tools to help you get started.

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While we take easy access to Wi-Fi for granted in urban and suburban settings, network connections may be unreliable in rural settings.
Compile workshop content on your topic and create an outline.

When converting a live workshop to an online offering, the content from a face-to-face workshop is a good place to start. If you’re starting from scratch, research and create your content just as you would for a face-to-face seminar. Assess the needs of your audience and consider what will work effectively in an online format. Be clear about your learning outcomes. What do you want participants to know or be able to do as a result of your seminar? Ensure that every component of your content connects to these outcomes. Keeping it simple is particularly important for online workshops as viewers can quickly “tune out” and lose interest if there is too much information for them to easily absorb. Keep your topic narrow and don’t try to cram in everything you might do in a live workshop. Once you have your content compiled, create an outline of your key points to use later for your narration script.

Select a platform to create your visuals.

PowerPoint is the most common software used for presentations. However, you may want to experiment with other programs. Prezi (prezi.com) is a more dynamic way of displaying your visuals as it allows you to zoom in and out on the different components of your presentation. Canva (canva.com) provides some good presentation templates with colorful and engaging graphics. VideoScribe (videoscribe.co) is also an excellent tool for creating animated presentations. These programs have free trial versions, but check their limitations to ensure they meet your needs. If your organization wants to make online presentations a permanent feature, a full version of the program(s) you prefer will need to be purchased.

Create the visual framework for your presentation.

Design a rough draft of your visuals using the program you’ve selected. Put each of the key points you outlined on separate slides. It’s okay if you don’t have wording fully fleshed out yet. As you work through the remaining steps, you may decide to replace some of the text with images or graphics.

For each slide, decide on the best way to deliver the content.

In live workshops, we usually alternate content delivery with activities that participants do independently and in small groups. You want to replicate this process as much as possible when designing online presentations. For example, you might do a two-minute introduction to your topic, then ask a question and have participants write down their answers.

Add visual interest to your presentation by displaying some information in graphic form.

For example, you might place a mind map at the beginning of your presentation showing all the points you’re covering at a glance. Popplet.com offers a good tool for creating mind maps. Or you might create an infographic (venngage.com) to provide statistics related to your topic. Shutterstock.com offers a good inventory of free images. Allow extra time as visual elements take a bit longer to design than just putting text on a slide.
Fill in the rest of your content on the slides.

Go back to any slides where you have just rough ideas written down and flesh them out further. Continue with this step until you have finalized the text and images you want on each slide. Ensure your text is correct and visuals are all firmly in place before you begin recording.

Create a script for your narration.

Use the key points from the outline of your text to create a word-for-word script. Some people can do their narration just using a list of bullet points. However, if you’re nervous about recording yourself, using an exact script will help you to eliminate “ums” or “ahs” and present your content smoothly. Rehearse your script a few times by reading it out loud before trying to record.

Choose a method to record your narration.

PowerPoint has options for recording narration on slides, but it can sometimes be a bit glitchy depending on the version you use. A program like Screencast-o-matic (screencastomatic.com) is an excellent alternative for recording narration. It’s easy to learn and there’s a good trial version allowing users to record videos up to 15 minutes long. You can record your narration using your computer’s microphone as you advance through your slides on your screen. There are other options for recording narration, but pairing Screencast-o-matic with PowerPoint is an easy place to start if you’re creating your first online presentation. Ensure that the program you choose allows you to add closed captions in compliance with accessibility guidelines.

Record your narration in a professional manner.

Incorporate some inflection into your voice rather than reading your script in a monotone. Experiment with your microphone to get the best sound quality. Using good headphones can sometimes produce better sound quality than speaking directly into your microphone. Record your narration in a quiet room where you will not be disturbed.

Save your final product as an mp4 file and post it on your chosen platform.

View your finished video. If you’re satisfied with it, you’re ready to post it online with links to any relevant handouts or tools. The easiest way to publish videos is to post them on YouTube. There are many online tutorials available to guide you through the process. Alternately, your company may opt to post on-demand videos directly on its own site, along with extra materials related to the topic. Consider having a transcription available for clients who may need that option.
Oakwood, Texas, has a population of 510 residents. In this small, rural town, the Oakwood Independent School District (OISD) is the hub of the community. Student enrollment is typically anywhere between 175–200 PK-12 students at any given time, as enrollment tends to fluctuate. As the entirety of the school counseling department, my counselor-to-student ratio falls well within the recommended American School Counselor Association (ASCA) ratio of 250-to-1 (ASCA, 2019). The challenge is not in the number but in the varying grade and maturity levels of the students I work with every day.

With the ultimate goal being “to give all students adequate opportunities to be successful academically, socially, personally, and in their chosen careers and to help students to become productive members of society,” as the OISD School Counseling Mission Statement conveys, this is no small feat for one school counselor. Add to this a dynamic lack of resources and limited funding and the task of getting graduating students ready for college, the workforce and the world, and the workload could appear to be a bit daunting. If I am being honest, getting pulled in so many different directions is sometimes overwhelming.

So, what does student academic, social/emotional, and college and career development look like at OISD? Truthfully, it looks different every day. Flexibility is a critical aspect of being the only counselor in the district. Students are always my first priority. It may seem like that should go without saying but in a rural school district, counselors have a number of duties, many of which do not fall under our job description. Therefore, advocating for my role as a school counselor has been critical to making sure my students’ needs are met.

A key factor in preparing students is to start early at the elementary level. It is here that foundation, trust and rapport is built. At this level, the primary focus is on social and emotional skills. However, this is also where discussions begin about goal
setting, interests and career exploration. I either create my own lessons or purchase lessons from resources such as Teachers Pay Teachers. I especially like to use the website Counselor Keri’s career lessons as they are tailored to particular grades and introduce students to various career clusters based on their everyday skills and interests.

Once students reach middle school, the focus becomes more in-depth career exploration and preparation for high school. All middle-school students are required to complete a career exploration course. This course is taught by a certified Career and Technical Education (CTE) teacher. We currently use the ICEV Career Exploration online course for the curriculum. In addition, students are able to start earning high school credits in middle school. This opens the door for more opportunities in high school.

In Texas, all high school students graduate under the Foundation High School Program. It requires each student to earn a minimum of 22 credits in general education and then allows them to add additional credits to earn one or more “Endorsements” across five different content areas (STEM, Business & Industry, Public Services, Arts & Humanities and Multidisciplinary Studies). Students are tasked to select their Endorsement area(s) at the end of eighth grade utilizing Personal Graduation Plans (PGPs). In order to accomplish this goal, I meet with each student to help them figure out what endorsement area(s) captures their interests, knowing that might change over time.

These requirements were designed to give students more flexibility in choosing their high school courses to help them either to follow a traditional path to college or to move directly into the workforce. Essentially, this was a move to put more career and technical education (CTE) programs into our curriculums and to move away from the one-size-fits-all pathway to graduation. While I agree with the goal of this new graduation program, putting it into place in a rural district has not been without difficulty. Still, we have found ways to meet these challenges and address student needs. It is important to note that OISD has a high population of economically disadvantaged students and we never want cost to be a barrier, so most components of our programs are offered free of charge.

The first thing we do as a leadership team is to be creative and intentional in building our master schedule each...
year. This involves reviewing the certifications and qualifications of our faculty and adding in elective courses of interests to students. As a Texas “District of Innovation” we are given some latitude with faculty and course offerings. As a result, we poised to offer four of the five different endorsement areas for Texas students. In addition, since we have an eight-period school day and students can earn high school credit in middle school, they are typically able to graduate with more than one endorsement and quite a well-rounded transcript.

A key component to preparing our students is through our dual-credit program. We do not have enough faculty to offer AP courses like many other schools, so we put a great deal of emphasis on our dual-credit partnership with the local community college. Students who qualify can take both academic and CTE coursework, depending on their individual career interests. Several of our students graduate with 24-30 college credit hours and are well on their way to earning an associate’s and/or bachelor’s degree. Studies have shown that taking these courses in high school increases the likelihood that students will continue their education after graduation.

Recently, the district has also started to offer our students the opportunity to earn industry certifications. In Texas, this involves completing coursework and then sitting for a certification exam that students can later use for job or college applications. These are typically administered through our CTE programs and we currently offer certifications in small-engine repair and vet science, just to name a few.

An important piece in providing effective college and career development is utilizing valid assessments. At OISD, we administer the entire College Board suite of assessments (PSAT 8/9, 10, PSAT NMSQT, and SAT School Day). In addition, we offer ACT District testing, ASVAB and the TSIA (Texas Success Initiative Assessment). Since OISD picks up any costs for these assessments, we make most of these tests mandatory. This gives us a wealth of data for each student as we plan each year. We then use the results of these assessments to guide instructional offerings and counseling services.

The culmination of all of the above components and programs is college and career counselling. Small numbers afford me the luxury of working with students on an individual basis to help them plan for their futures. I work closely with students on college applications, financial aid and scholarships, as well helping them decide on a career path. I am a big proponent of the ASVAB Career Exploration Program, College Board Big Future website, and the website Texas OnCourse. These are free, valuable resources for counselors, parents and students to work together in college and career planning. We look at all options and help guide students in their next steps after graduation. Along with working individually with students, I host freshmen orientation, senior college night and financial aid and scholarship workshops. I also take students on four to six campus tours throughout the school year, visiting community colleges, universities and trade schools.

These are just some of the things we do at OISD to promote college and career readiness for our students. Our graduation rate each year is almost 100%, with about 80-90% attending college or trade school and the remaining 10-20% joining the military or the workforce. It’s not a perfect system by any means, but it works for us and for our students and we will continue to improve our programs every year.

**Students are always my first priority. It may seem like that should go without saying but in a rural school district, counselors have a number of duties, many of which do not fall under our job description.**

Lori Olive, M.A. (lolive@oakwoodisd.net) received her Bachelor’s degree in Business-Journalism from Baylor University and her Master’s degree in School Counseling from the University of Texas at Tyler. She has served as an educator and school counselor for the past 21 years at Oakwood Independent School District in Oakwood, TX and currently serves as the district’s PK-12 school counselor. In 2017-2018, Lori was selected as the Region VI All-Level School Counselor of the Year.

A complete list of references is available upon request from the author.
North America Looking to Diversity

BY SCOTT FISCHER AND KRISTEN KIRKPATRICK

Rural communities and the US Agriculture industry are building up a diverse workforce in developing industry solutions to tackle problems as they boost productivity.

Agriculture to Fill Talent Pipelines with Diversity Lens

To address the monumental challenge of feeding a rapidly growing global population while using fewer resources, some of the largest agribusiness interests on a worldwide scale have joined forces to think strategically about the pipeline of talent that will be needed to drive rapid innovation in agriculture. Recently establishing an educational and research center in partnership with Colorado State University, the consortium members of the new Center for an Enhanced Workforce in Agriculture include such invested corporations as ADM, Bayer, Bunge, Cargill, Land O’Lakes, Caterpillar, DuPont, and Tyson Foods.

As global population growth booms over the next three decades, reaching around 9.7 billion people by 2050, experts estimate that we’ll need to produce more food in the next 30 years than we have had to produce in all of human civilization. To add complexity to that challenge, we will be seeking to meet the demand for food while needing to use fewer resources and creating a lighter environmental impact than ever before. In fact,
earlier this year, the USDA announced their ambition for the US to increase agriculture production by 40% while cutting the environmental footprint by half. Across the industry, there is broad recognition that the solutions to tackle these challenges will focus heavily on innovation that might drive production while lessening environmental impact, most likely through the deployment of existing and emerging technologies such as precision agriculture, genomics, precision breeding, predictive data analytics, and so on. However, we need to focus on more than the technology. We also need to think strategically about building the teams who will create this innovation and the individual contributors needed to power this work.

This focus on the challenge of feeding our future led to the formation of an industry consortium in 2016 called Together We Grow (TWG). Started by Michael D’Ambrose, the chief human resources officer of ADM and Secretary Tom Vilsack, who served as the Secretary of Agriculture under President Obama, TWG is working across the country to create awareness and opportunities for more people to do the important work of feeding our world. Together We Grow is a consortium of some of the world’s largest agribusiness interests in collaboration with nearly 50 members, including modern food and agriculture companies, educational institutions, government agencies, and national non-profits committed to improving and expanding diversity in agribusiness. The consortium sponsors’ research invests in scalable pilot projects and provides a platform to share best practices for building future workforce capacity.

Diversity is a proven strategy for driving innovation. According to research compiled by McKinsey & Company (Hunt, Layton & Prince, 2015; Hunt, Yee, and Prince, 2018) and also by the Harvard Business Review (Rock & Grant, 2016), diverse teams generate more solutions to a given problem, they are more objective and careful when discussing facts, they generate more innovations, and they are also more profitable. TWG’s Center for an Enhanced Workforce in Agriculture has defined diversity broadly and is tracking gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, ability, and veteran’s status as starting points.

Meeting the next 30 years of complex challenges related to global hunger and food insecurity is not something that any one organization can do individually. As a consortium of diverse interests, Together We Grow aims to help more people from diverse backgrounds see their own future as leaders in agriculture.
Growing Diversity Pipelines Among Our Rural Workforce

Professions North/Nord (PNN) is a unique regional Canadian program to develop new talent pipelines among diverse populations. Our strength is in our ability to reach individuals across an area of approximately 308,882 square miles. Add into the equation that the area is sparsely populated with large distances between centers and the challenges became daunting. However, the project has prevailed, developing techniques and tools that are well equipped to handle these conditions. These techniques/tools have been applied to further assist in the attraction of skilled professionals to add to our rural/remote/northern workforce; many of whom are immigrants with international training and non-portable credentials which fail to be recognized, as new residents of the province.

PNN was established in 2010 and is a part of a network of bridging programs. These bridging programs—mostly in the larger urban areas—facilitate the transition of highly skilled foreign-trained professionals into the labor market. PNN is part of the Faculty of Management at Laurentian University in the north of the province of Ontario (Canada). Although it may seem like a very distant and remote area, northern Ontario has so much more to offer to professionals and families. A constant challenge has been to erase inaccurate stereotypes, and to highlight the wonderful opportunities and quality of life in our centers and region, instead.

One project that has been developed to assist in the promotion of our centers to highly skilled-yet unaware-talent pools of professionals located in larger, urban areas was to develop ‘Spotlights’. These were interactive ‘live’ streaming events that promoted our northern/rural/remote areas with the purpose of attracting such pools of talent to our area. The presenter was located in the city-region that we were highlighting while all logistical aspects were coordinated through our central office—sometimes 16 hours away! During the real-time streaming, individuals had the ability to join in from anywhere, some would join in from a classroom, others would join in from their home, or, in some cases, they would join in from their car during a lunch break at their survival job. Not only those in Canada were participants, others were participating from abroad including China. It was a robust and easy to use platform. Additionally, screen shares were incorporated—live video from the central office and then immediately switched back to the remote presenter—and dynamic chat features to allow for a seamless and fuller experience.

A key lesson learned is that the connection becomes meaningful when it was possible to simulate a realistic, live experience for the audience members. This has been instrumental in promoting our region (rural/remote/northern) to the masses in larger, urban areas that are surprised to learn about the opportunities and quality of life that our region can offer. Once this meaningful connection is established, there is a much stronger message-and more success-in attracting and growing our workforce.

To learn more about these projects, visit www.professionsnorth.ca and togetherwegrowag.org

This article also appears in the 2020 Spring/Summer Issue of Careering Magazine, the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC) print and digital magazine.

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the edges of metropolitan areas, while more remote counties continued to lose population. During this same period, by contrast, suburban and urban counties grew by 16% and 13%, respectively. In Canada, population growth has increased by 1.4% in 2019 (Opinko, 2019). Canada has experienced similar growth and today, 81.4% of the population live in urban and suburban areas (Plecher, 2019). Thus, in the US and Canada, the lack of available workers adversely affects rural economies and stymies population growth, eroding economic growth and stability in these areas. These issues combined may pose a threat toward access of services (NCDA, 2015, F.4.d).

To insure American and Canadian Career practitioners are able to effectively service those in rural communities, access issues may need to be considered and resolved. As stated, in our Ethics Code: “When appropriate, career professionals advocate at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels to examine potential barriers and obstacles that inhibit access and/or the growth and development of clients.” (NCDA, 2015, A.6.a).

Historically, rural employment opportunities have consisted largely of blue-collar and unskilled jobs including agriculture and reliance on natural resources. As discussed in their list above, in order for workforce development in rural areas to be successful, public policy efforts must widen the scope in order to attract new industries, and grow the population, which in turn increases the economy.

In the US and Canada, 70 years ago, over 70% of workers lived in remote areas while today the inverse is true with 66% of workers living in urban areas (Leeson, 2018). In the US, rural counties experienced a 3% population growth rate since 2000, which can be attributed to gains in rural communities on the edges of metropolitan areas, while more remote counties continued to lose population. During this same period, by contrast, suburban and urban counties grew by 16% and 13%, respectively. In Canada, population growth has increased by 1.4% in 2019 (Opinko, 2019). Canada has experienced similar growth and today, 81.4% of the population live in urban and suburban areas (Plecher, 2019). Thus, in the US and Canada, the lack of available workers adversely affects rural economies and stymies population growth, eroding economic growth and stability in these areas. These issues combined may pose a threat toward access of services (NCDA, 2015, F.4.d).

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Internet and other technological tools to reach our clients may be less available. Cost for counseling services may be an additional consideration and practitioners may consider sliding or reduced fee scales to make services affordable for those who are earning less per capita. In addition to providing affordable and accessible sessions to rural clients, access to more training programs is essential. Students and employees who are looking for a sustainable future may need different training programs such as those in agriculture or other non-traditional college pathway. Career counselors are encouraged to advocate for social justice and advocate for these types of accessibility.

Once barriers are overcome, there are many strengths that...
a rural workforce provides for the entire economy of a country such as food supply for export and domestic consumption. There appears to be a rural population shift in Canada and the US with increased immigrant populations settling in them (Ajilore & Willingham, 2019). As career practitioners and social justice advocates, we can help our clients recognize and develop their own social capital through a review of interests, abilities, and values they hold. Government funding can go a long way to growing workforce opportunities in rural areas. Land is cheaper and larger distribution centers and manufacturing may be more profitable in these areas. In addition, natural resources, and community social capital bolster the threads in these communities and with government subsidies, institutions of higher education can also contribute to the growth of these communities.

As new industries and technologies are introduced, institutions of higher education can support these efforts by adding programs that provide skill training to rural employees. Since 2017, partnerships between governing bodies and community colleges have increased focused on legislation to provide more equitable access to education for adult learners, especially in states largely compromised of rural populations. These actions are removing barriers and providing funding to support short-term programs that meet the local industry needs (NCLS, 2018). Short-term skill training programs offered by community colleges and job training centers have wrap-around benefits for the economy and must be better equipped to ‘nimbly’ respond to current rural workforce demands (Dews, 2013). These programs benefit the employee by increasing their skills and abilities, making them more valuable, and thus—hopefully—increasing their wages. Employers benefit from partnerships with these programs, as they can provide a pipeline to human capital for companies that are experiencing worker shortage. Colleges benefit from increased enrollment in a time when enrollment in traditional programs is on the decline.

Rural areas across the US and Canada are home to different cultures, people, businesses, and infrastructure, and are far from geographically or economically homogenous. Rural areas are less densely populated and less connected to major centers of employment and thus face unique challenges affecting job growth and advanced work skills training. It is our responsibility to the profession to insure we provide services that are accessible to all, are inclusive and social-justice minded, and honor the diversity within and between communities.

A complete list of references is available upon request from the authors.
Canada and the US have remarkably similar rural economies and workforces despite significant national demographic and economic differences. Rural industries and issues are much the same in both counties.

With a population of 37 million Canada is about one tenth the size of the much larger US’ 321 million people. However both have nearly the same rural population proposition with 18% or 6 million of Canada’s population considered rural compared to 19% (60 million) in the US, based on slightly different definitions. While rural areas are found in all geographic areas of both counties it is concentrated in the Atlantic eastern provinces of Canada and in the Rocky Mountain west and Appalachian south in the US.

Both have slightly higher recent unemployment rates in rural areas (US 4.5% rural versus 3.9% urban and Canada 5.7% and 5.1% respectively). However, the rural unemployment situation is actually worse than this official statistic since a smaller portion of the rural population are in the official labor force and thus not available for work due to age, disability or educational/skill differences.

With employment opportunities limited, many residents, especially those in the prime ages of 25-54, are forced to move to urban areas for work and education. This population decline reduces demand for existing trade and healthcare services, resulting in a spiral decline. Those that remain have lower incomes resulting in overall higher poverty and unemployment and lower wages and labor force participation rates.
Significant differences that favor rural Canada over the US are the internationally leading natural resources found in the country with vast forests for lumber and a wide range of metallic and non-metallic minerals for mining. Unlike the US, Canadian rural communities have been little impacted by railroad route abandonments and interstate highways and airlines growth which has led to the decline of many small communities in the United States.

Both counties have billion-dollar programs federal workforce programs serving urban and rural job seekers provided to their states and provinces for skill training, apprenticeships, career counseling, and job search assistance: the United States Workforce Investment Opportunities Act and the Canadian Labor Market Transfer Agreements. These as well as other workforce programs for target populations such as displaced workers, youth, veterans and native/indigenous as well as smaller state/province and local programs assist rural populations, but are not considered sufficient in scope or policy by many.

Recent economic, technological and governamental policy factors could slow or even stabilize the decline in rural areas. The sizable increase in tourism employment, especially outdoor recreation, adventure and experience based (56% of Canada’s tourism jobs are found in rural areas and several US states are actively promoting rural based tourism). Technology advances such as low orbit communications satellite projects underway could alleviate the critical infrastructure lack in both counties of high-speed internet broadband (only 37% access in rural Canada and 40% in the United States) Solution of this problem could substantially improve the availability of local health services through telemedicine, education through distance learning, shopping though online purchasing, sales for rural entrepreneurs and small businesses through customer connectivity, and solo work through remote telecommuting. Canada’s much more open and targeted immigration policy is favorably helping its rural and urban economy in comparison to restricted US immigration policies.

Much of the decline in rural population over the decades has been due to automation in agriculture and forestry; only 1.6% of Canadian and 1.3% of US private sector jobs are in farming and ranching now. Mining, the other major rural industry has been less affected by technology and has jobs that pay well, but is less than 2% of the total private employment in both countries. Global economic events and climate change are negatively affecting coal mining and oil drilling as well as such major Canadian products such as potash with the decline in coal mining in both countries devastating some rural communities.
The NCDA website is organized around the mission statement:

*The National Career Development Association (NCDA) provides professional development, publications, standards, and advocacy to practitioners and educators who inspire and empower individuals to achieve their career and life goals.*

Career Developments readers will find the following information, pertinent to this issue’s theme, on the NCDA website at www.ncda.org.

Readers will find the following online sources of information relevant to this issue’s theme. The first set lists articles found in the archives of the NCDA web magazine, *Career Convergence*. Search online at www.careerconvergence.org by title or author to read the complete article.

**Career Convergence articles on rural workforce development:**

- “Career Counseling Trends in Rural America”
  By Cynthia Gurne

- “Occupational Exposure for Students in Rural and Isolated Communities”
  By Meghan Brown

**Career assistance for specific groups:**

- “Opportunity Found: Chaos Theory for Military Spouse Employment”
  By Candina Janicki

- “Aboriginal Career Development in Canada: Techniques Also Applicable to Other Clients Facing Barriers”
  By Sharon Ferriss

**General help for community support:**

- “Bolstering Resources, Partnerships, and Community Engagement for Career Practitioners through Community Asset Mapping”
  By Christopher T. Beiser

Another online source of information can be found by visiting www.ncda and looking under Resources: Internet Sites for Career Planning. Scroll down to Industry and Occupation Specific Information to find links to sites that clients and students may find helpful during the planning stage of career development. Don’t forget to also look under Special Populations to see if those categories also might fit your clients’ needs.

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