

What does Bill 6 do exactly?

Paid employees in Alberta's agriculture sector are currently exempt from protection under all of Alberta's employment laws and workplace safety laws.

The new Alberta government believes that these exemptions are unjustified.

As a result, they have decided to remove the exemptions and grant paid agricultural employees the same rights and protections that workers in all other sectors of the Alberta economy have long taken for granted.

Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, will ensure that employees in Alberta's agricultural industry are treated fairly by offering them the same protections as employees in other industries and all other provinces.

Specifically, Bill 6 will remove the exemptions for agricultural workplaces from the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Workers Compensation Act, the Labour Relations Act, and Employment Standards.

Who is covered by Bill 6?

Bill 6 will help people who are paid to work in the agricultural sector.

This includes about 50,000 paid employees (according to 2011 census) who work on Alberta's feedlots, factory farms, large ranches, greenhouses and more. Over half of these employees are part-time workers.

Existing workplace laws allow for volunteerism, childhood chores and community work in all sectors of the economy. Bill 6 will NOT stop any of these things from happening in the agricultural sector.

Will this law kill the family farm?

No.

Similar laws exist in every other province in Canada, and family farms are still thriving in Saskatchewan, B.C., Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island.

These laws are designed to support the family farm by making them safer and more attractive places for farm workers to live and work.

Does this bill undermine farming as a way of life?

No.

While farming is a way of life, being a paid worker on a farm is a job.

If you are a small-scale owner/operator of a family farm, very little will change under Bill 6. Your family and neighbours will still be able to help out. Your way of life will remain.

What will change is that hired workers will be able to expect basic safety standards, labour rights, minimum wages, and compensation if they are injured.

Are farms different than other worksites?

Yes and no.

Small family farms are different because your coworkers are often family members who have a stake in the success of the farm. As family members, you all have a personal stake in treating each other fairly and keeping each other healthy and safe.

But larger farms and agri-businesses, like feedlots, with paid employees are basically the same as any other workplace. And agricultural employees deserve the same protections as any other employees.

Will my child be prevented from helping out around the family farm?

No.

This law applies to paid workers on farms.

If you currently don't have to file taxes with the federal government for the work that a person is doing, then this bill does not apply to their work on the family farm.

Is Bill 6 really an attack on farm families and the 'rural way of life'?

Most of the arguments made against Bill 6 are based on misinformation and misinterpretation.

Some of this is legitimate confusion; but a lot of it is the result of a very deliberate campaign of wilful misinformation and fear-mongering. This campaign has more to do with discrediting Alberta's new NDP government than it does with protecting farm families or their way of life.

Will these laws actually make Alberta farms safer?

Yes.

B.C. passed similar workplace safety laws for their farms in 1993. In the decade after the bill was passed, farms in the province recorded 63 per cent fewer workplace injuries, and 50 per cent fewer workplace deaths.

Agriculture is one of the most dangerous sectors to work in Alberta. Alberta needs to do everything it can to make farms safer.

Were farmers consulted?

Yes.

Bill 6 is the product of more than 40 years of discussions and debates about including the agricultural sector in Alberta's workplace standards.

These discussions have been particularly vigorous over the last 10 years, including consultations that led to a version of this law almost being introduced in the summer of 2013.

The Alberta NDP included this legislation as part of their platform during their winning election campaign in the spring of 2015.

Over the summer, the agriculture minister met with associations representing small farms and large-scale agribusinesses that would be affected by this legislation.

Farmers continue to be consulted during the government's current Farm and Ranch Sessions.

In fact, anyone still asking for more consultation after more than 40 years is just playing stalling games to avoid what needs to be done.

The opposition to this bill isn't about asking for more consultations, it's about continuing the exclusion in perpetuity.

How many people are killed on Alberta farms each year?

In 2014, there were 25 farm fatalities in Alberta. For the past 25 years, the annual number ranges from the high teens to mid-20s, and the average is 18.

Nearly 20 per cent of farm fatalities in Alberta are children.

Why isn't the government improving farm safety through education instead of legislation?

The government is doing both, but education alone hasn't worked.

In 2010, then Premier Ed Stelmach conducted consultations with farmers about the possibility of including the agricultural sector in OH&S laws. Instead of bringing forward a law like Bill 6, he introduced education and training.

In the five years since, there has been no reduction in the number of injuries or deaths on Alberta's agricultural businesses. In fact, there are indications that the situation has gotten worse.

Will the cost of Workers' Compensation Board coverage put my farm underwater?

No. And in the case of a serious incident, farms without WCB coverage are vulnerable to lawsuits ... which can be ruinous.

Under Bill 6, WCB only covers paid employees. The fees are based on how much those employees are paid, and the risk of injury at a given employer.

If a farmer has an incident where an employee suffers a serious injury or fatality, and they do not have WCB coverage, that worker can bring a lawsuit, which can cost much, much more than the premiums would have.

The lawsuits launched by injured farm employees, or their families, have bankrupted numerous farms in Alberta? Mandatory WCB coverage for all paid farm employees will reduce this risk.

Are Alberta's farms profitable?

Yes.

According to ATB Chief Economist Todd Hirsch, 2014 data shows that farmers have been producing record revenues even as their expenses have risen. The study concludes that "Farming continues to be one of the bright spots of Alberta's economy this year and into the future."

How has Alberta's agricultural sector been changing?

Farms are getting bigger. Over the past several decades, while the total number of farms has declined, Alberta has seen a dramatic rise in the number of large farms and a decline in the number of small operations. Bill 6 would go a long way to adapt our legal framework to reflect the new reality –which is characterized by more and more big farms that rely on more and more paid employees. Bill 6 will give paid employees in the agriculture sector the rights and protections they deserve, while at the same time ensuring that family farms are protected.

Table 1 Number of Alberta farms by size (acres), 1981-2011¹⁴

Year	<560 acres	560-1119 acres	1120-1599 acres	1600-2239 acres	2240-2879 acres	≥2880 acres	Total farms
1981	32,915	14,004	4978	2849	1222	2088	58,056
1991	32,143	12,497	5188	3232	1512	2673	57,245
2001	30,875	10,225	4382	3297	1594	3279	53,652
2011	24,512	7255	3335	2694	1575	3863	43,234
% chg	-25.5%	-48.2%	-33.0%	-5.4%	+28.9%	+85.0	-25.5%

Source: Parkland Institute, *A Dirty Business*. <http://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/parkland-research-pdfs/adirtybusiness.pdf>