Setting the Stage

- Paid employees in the agricultural sector were excluded from occupational health and safety protections and coverage under the Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB) in the event they were injured at work.
- The Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act addressed the lack of protection for these workers in four areas.
  - Occupational Health and Safety Act
  - Workers’ Compensation
  - Labour Relations
  - Employment Standards
- As of 2015, there are more than 62,000 Albertans working in the agricultural industry. This group of workers makes up 2.7 per cent of the workforce in 2015. 82.5 per cent of these workers are full-time and 17.5 per cent are part-time workers.
- There have been numerous calls for years questioning why farm workers did not have the same protections as other workers in the province in different sectors.
- Even before the NDP government was in power, the previous government recognized there was an issue and commissioned a report to see if private insurance or WCB coverage was better for these workers.

Limitations of Private Insurance

- The report found about 4,000 farm work-related injuries will occur each year and 2,000 of those will be lost-time accidents.
- Each year an estimated 700 Alberta farm workers will suffer work-related injuries losing more than $3,000 in income. 400 of the 700 workers injured will lose two or more months of income in total.
- The total estimated uninsured income loss suffered by injured Alberta farm workers is estimated to be three to four million dollars.
- 40 per cent of those injured on farms will be employees and 60 per cent will come from the Hutterite communities or be owner/operators.
- Each year approximately 18-20 farm workers will die in work-related accidents. About half of these will be employees. Out of the worker deaths each year, there will be four deaths where the employer has not provided enough accidental death insurance to cover dependent-survivors and one to two deaths of those four where there is absolutely no death insurance at all.
- Overall, farm work has about two and a half times the injury risk of the average Alberta occupation. The rate of death because of a workplace injury is twice that of the average Alberta occupation.
The study found that with a typically farm worker earning $36,000 per year, an owner/operator would have to pay approximately $1,000 per year to cover that workers under WCB. Whereas the private insurance options varied according to the vendor, wage and age of the worker, the size of the workforce and the amount of insurance. The study concludes for farms with fewer than ten full-time workers WCB is the most cost-effective option.

Categories of farms:
- **Small sized-farms**: These farms are usually described as hobby farms that have no full-time employees, although these farms may hire seasonal or part-time workers. The study estimates there are approximately 25,000 small-sized farms in Alberta.
- **Medium sized-farm**: These are farms with one to four full-time employees. The study estimates 10,000 of these farms in Alberta with 1.5 full-time workers or equivalents on average. Of these 10,000 farms, 60 per cent have acceptable employee disability insurance while 40 per cent had no disability coverage at all. For the farms that did have accidental death coverage, this coverage tended to be inadequate for the loss of income that would be suffered.
- **Large sized-farm**: Large-sized farms are ones that have more than four employees. The study estimated there to be 3,000 – 4,000 of these kinds of farms in Alberta with an average of six full-time employees or equivalents. 24 of these farms surveyed already had WCB coverage and 10 per cent had no employee disability insurance whatsoever. For those farms that did have some private coverage, they tended to have inadequate coverage for accidental death.

The study found for worker groups of less than ten, the cost of commercial insurance is significantly more (60 to 100 per cent) than WCB for roughly the same coverage. This means for the majority of farms in Alberta WCB is the most cost-effective option. Also, for farms with seasonal and part-time workers WCB may be the only insurance option available. WCB offers the option to cover owner/operators to ensure they are protected in the event of an injury and indemnifies them against further law suits by injured workers.

The study does have some limitations as it is based on data provided by other parties that have not been verified by the authors. As well, estimates were used for the number of workers on each farm and the results may be biased towards the sample of farms used.

**Conclusions**

- The need for further occupational health and safety and WCB protection for workers in this sector is long overdue and was clearly needed. The government could no longer leave worker injury compensation up to individual farm operators.
- Before including these workers under WCB they were not being protected by private insurance options and in the case of part-time and seasonal workers WCB is one of the only options for any coverage. The cost of helping these workers when they are injured often fell to families and the Canada Health Care system before *The Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act* came into force.
- WCB is the most cost-effective option for the vast majority of farms in Alberta compared to private or commercial insurance plans.