

The Honourable Pierre Poilievre
Leader of the Opposition
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

September 11, 2025

Dear Mr. Poilievre,

I am writing to you on behalf of Canada's restaurant and foodservice industry to share our concerns and some additional information about the immigration system and the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program.

Founded in 1944, Restaurants Canada is a not-for-profit, member-based association representing Canada's diverse and dynamic foodservice industry. Our membership includes restaurants, bars and caterers from coast to coast to coast. Our sector is the fourth largest private employer in the country serving over 23 million customers daily, generating nearly \$124 billion in sales and \$26 billion in taxes annually. We employ nearly 1.2 million workers, 40% of whom are youth. In fact, foodservice is the number one source of first-time jobs in Canada.

We are a proudly diverse industry. While your recent comments on Temporary Foreign Workers stem from concern for unemployed Canadian youth, they have unintentionally cast a harmful spotlight on racialized frontline workers in our restaurants—whether they are Canadian-born, immigrants, or TFWs. Operators are reporting disturbing incidents of harassment and boycott threats based on assumptions about workers' immigration status. We urge you to avoid placing the blame on any specific businesses or workers, as that can lead to real harm and we're deeply concerned more people will be hurt if it continues.

TFWs make up only 3% of our workforce and are concentrated in hard-to-fill roles like chefs and cooks, overnight shifts, as well as rural and remote areas of the country where the aging population does not provide the necessary labour pool. Some tourism-focused communities also see their population swell from 3,000 to 20,000 during busy seasons, making temporary workers a necessity.

For many foodservice businesses, TFWs are not a replacement for local workers but a necessary part of keeping their Canadian workers employed. Nor are they a cheap alternative to local talent, when it can take over a year and cost nearly \$9,000 to recruit a single TFW. Our operators follow established rules and systems that enable them to maintain the operational capacity required to remain viable, serve their communities, and continue as the nation's fourth-largest private employer.

We agree with you that Canada's immigration system needs to serve Canada's needs and that improvements can be made. But scrapping the entire program without offering a viable alternative for the businesses that rely on it would be devastating for many communities. Our industry is already facing a labour shortage, with nearly 70,000 job vacancies primarily in non-urban centres, and that number is expected to increase to over 100,000 by 2027. This threatens not only the viability of those businesses, but the economic resilience of their communities and the job security of their workers, including many youth.

We are asking government to grandfather newcomers and TFWs currently working in Canada who want to stay. They have established lives here, contribute to our economy and pay taxes. They are filling critical roles and businesses have invested in training and development. Extending their work permits is the right thing to do and a smart economic policy. Restaurants Canada is also one of many signatories to the Commissioner for Employers with the Canada Employment Insurance Commission's ***Reimagining Immigration recommendations***. Finally, we ask that government work with the foodservice industry on initiatives to attract more Canadians, particularly youth, to jobs in foodservice.

We believe these simple and sensible policies would better align Canada's immigration targets with its labour force needs and help our industry continue to drive economic prosperity and create jobs in communities across the country.

My team and I would be happy to discuss these recommendations with you further or answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Kelly Higginson
President & CEO,
Restaurants Canada