

**Voluntary Report** – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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**Report Name:** German Farmers Fear Lack of Seasonal Workers

**Country:** Germany

**Post:** Berlin

**Report Category:** Agricultural Situation, Agriculture in the News, Avocado, Canned Deciduous Fruit, Dried Fruit, Fresh Deciduous Fruit, Fresh Fruit, Kiwifruit, Raisins, Stone Fruit, Strawberries, Vegetables, Pest/Disease Occurrences

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**Report Highlights:**

COVID19 impact update: The upcoming asparagus and strawberry harvest, as well as vegetable planting may be endangered due to COVID19 related travel restrictions that impact seasonal workers from Eastern Europe. This report lists mitigation options that are currently being discussed as well as the potential impact if no solution is found.

German farmers depend heavily on seasonal workers for the fruits and vegetable harvest, for example asparagus and strawberries, as well as the planting, for example cucumbers and lettuce. The majority of seasonal workers come from Eastern European countries such as Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria.

A shortage of seasonal workers may arise as, 1) transiting countries such as Austria and Hungary have closed their borders, and 2) seasonal workers may prefer not to come because they will have to go into a 14-day quarantine upon return.

In order to alleviate the situation, the German government, including the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, currently investigates the following measures:

- Transit solutions for seasonal workers to Germany
  - Agreements that work contracts suffice for entry at the borders.
  - German authorities could issue special permits that are accepted by Austrian and Hungarian border police.
  - Flying seasonal workers from their countries to Germany so they do not have to transit other countries.
- Temporary exemptions in German labor law
  - Extending the maximum number of days that seasonal workers are allowed to work in Germany without having to pay into the German social security system (health, retirement, and unemployment insurance). Currently this threshold stands at 70 days.
  - Exemptions to short term work contracts and maximum daily/weekly work hours.
- Incentives for people already in Germany

This includes unemployed people, retirees, students, people that currently cannot work in their normal professions (e.g. hotel, shops etc.), asylum seekers, and refugees.

  - Suspending the income ceiling until which so-called 'mini-jobber' can work before having to contribute into the social security system. The ceiling is currently at 450 Euro per month and 5400 Euro per year (=approx. USD 500 per month/USD 6000 per year.)

## **Background: Importance of Seasonal Workers in German Agriculture**

Seasonal workers constitute an important element of labor in German agriculture. In 2016 (latest available data), the German Office of Statistics (destatis)<sup>1</sup> listed a total of 940,000 workers in German agriculture including 286,000 seasonal workers. Seasonal workers accounted for 30 percent of total workforce and 11 percent of total worker units<sup>2</sup> in German agriculture.

Seasonal workers are most crucial for fruit and vegetables planting and harvesting but are also working in other agricultural sectors, for example on dairy farms. The sectors that will be impacted the most in the short term include those with upcoming plantings (mainly vegetables, including lettuce and cucumbers) and harvests (including asparagus and strawberries). Asparagus harvest has already started in the very early regions and will last until June 24. Traditionally, asparagus is not harvested after this date to allow the spears to develop into ferns and stock up nutrients for next year's production. Strawberry harvest usually starts a bit later and does not have a set cut-off date. In 2019, German had 22,975 ha of asparagus and 16,685 ha of strawberries in production.

### **Attachments:**

No Attachments.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Querschnitt/Jahrbuch/jb-land-forstwirtschaft.html>  
<https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Branchen-Unternehmen/Landwirtschaft-ForstwirtschaftFischerei/Landwirtschaftliche-Betriebe/Publikationen/Downloads-Landwirtschaftliche-Betriebe/arbeitskraefte2030218169004.html>

<sup>2</sup> Worker units are a means for comparison as not all workers work full time.