

**Voluntary Report** – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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## **Report Name:** Germany Closes Borders to Seasonal Ag Workers

**Country:** Germany

**Post:** Berlin

**Report Category:** Agricultural Situation, Agricultural Trade Office Activities, Agriculture in the Economy, National Plan, Policy and Program Announcements, Agriculture in the News, Avocado, Canned Deciduous Fruit, Dried Fruit, Fresh Deciduous Fruit, Fresh Fruit, Kiwifruit, Raisins, Stone Fruit, Strawberries, Vegetables

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### **Report Highlights:**

Starting March 25, German borders are closed to seasonal agricultural workers from key countries including Bulgaria and Romania. Germany relies on seasonal agricultural workers, which make up nearly 30% of the agricultural work force. This will primarily impact Germany's fruit and vegetable sectors, especially asparagus, strawberries, lettuce, and cucumbers. Agricultural Minister Julia Kloeckner stressed, "One can only harvest what has been planted," and called for additional aid to support primary agricultural operators.

## BACKGROUND:

Starting 17:00 h on March 25, the German border is closed for seasonal agricultural workers from a number of countries including Bulgaria and Romania. Workers are still permitted from Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovak Republic. However, Poland implemented a mandatory 14-day quarantine for all workers returning from other countries, which might limit the desire of Polish workers to come.

The Germany Farmers Union commented, "[The] impact is difficult to assess but should not be underestimated. Currently most impacted will be the planting of vegetables. This can be delayed for a couple of days but the longer the lack of workers lasts the more difficult it gets. Short- and medium-term availability of fruits and vegetables will also depend on the situation in Spain, as Germany imports substantial amounts from there."

Regarding the EU Commission's draft framework for State Aid, adopted March 19, Minister Kloeckner requested a doubling of grants and tax benefits to primary agricultural producers, noting that farmers should also be compensated for the loss of seasonal workers.

In 2016 (latest available data), the German Office of Statistics listed 286,000 seasonal agricultural workers, or nearly 30 percent of total agricultural workers. 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 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, Germany had 22,975 ha of asparagus and 16,685 ha of strawberries in production.

**Attachments:**

No Attachments.