

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Germany Partially Re-opens Borders for Seasonal Agricultural Workers

Country: Germany

Post: Berlin

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

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Report Highlights:

COVID19 impact/mitigation update: On April 2, 2020, Germany announced it will re-open its borders for seasonal agricultural workers under strict conditions and in a limited fashion. This is in reaction to intense pressure from the farming sector. Arrival is limited to about 40,000 workers in April and again in May. In addition, the German government seeks to attract an additional 10,000 workers from the local market. If successful, this would theoretically meet Germany's demand for the 100,000 agricultural workers needed until the end of May. However, it is expected that there will still be a substantial gap as unskilled workers are not as effective as trained labor.

On April 2, the German Ministers of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) and the Interior (BMI) announced a partial re-opening of the border for seasonal agricultural workers. To limit the spread of COVID19, BMI had closed the borders for to all non-Schengen countries and those that established additional border restrictions on March 25. This severely affected German agriculture which typically employs 300,000 seasonal workers per year, 100,000 thereof of are needed in the spring (late March until the end of May). Work carried out by seasonal workers during this time includes harvesting asparagus, strawberries, and cucumbers as well as the planting/sowing of vegetables, for example cauliflower, broccoli, lettuce, cabbages, carrots, and onions. While the fruit and vegetable sector is most affected, some seasonal workers are also helping out on dairy farms with feeding and milking and in slaughter houses.

The German Farmers Union, regional farmers associations, and other association along the value chain heavily protested against the border closure and demanded limited exceptions. The associations argued that a lack of workers in the planting season would impact agricultural production in the long run and result in a shortage of produce and inputs for food processing companies later in the year. Or as agricultural Minister Julia Kloeckner stressed, "One can only harvest what has been planted."

While there have been initiatives to fill the gap with domestic workers that are currently unemployed or on reduced schedules, these showed only limited success for a number of reasons:

- Farm work is difficult. Farmers reported that many workers who apply quit after a couple hours or days because they cannot stand the strain.
- Untrained workers are much slower than experienced seasonal workers.
- Unskilled workers can do more damage than good in some cases. For example, harvesting asparagus requires special skills to prevent damaging this perennial culture.

In order to balance the need for workers while ensuring protection against the spread of COVID19, BMI and BMEL developed a strategy to allow a limited numbers of workers into Germany under strict conditions, taking into account the recommendations from the Robert-Koch-Federal German Institute for Public Health (Germany's Center for Disease Control equivalent)
https://www.rki.de/EN/Content/Institute/institute_node.html

Key points of the agreement between BMEL and BMI regarding the entry of seasonal workers

- In April and May, up to 40,000 seasonal workers are allowed to enter Germany. These are selected based on the feedback from the profession and the demonstrable strict hygiene standards.
- In addition, in April and May they strive to recruit 10,000 people from various groups of people in Germany (unemployed, students, asylum seekers, short-time workers).
- The foreign seasonal workers will only travel by plane (no bus trips through Europe for reasons of infection protection). The federal police will determine the appropriate airports in coordination with the farmers' associations. Through a coordinated procedure for the unambiguous identification of seasonal workers, the contingents and contact chains with regard to COVID19 have to be traceable at all times. The workers are picked up at the airport by the company (no individual arrival).
- Upon entry, a health check arranged by the employers is carried out by medical staff using a standardized procedure. The results must be sent to the local health department.
- New arrivals must live and work strictly separately from other employees in the first 14 days and must not leave the company premises (factual quarantine with simultaneous job opportunities). There is a mandatory division of accommodation and work teams: working in constant, small groups of five to ten, max. approximately 20 people.
- Minimum distances must be observed during work or (if minimal distancing is not possible) mouth protection, gloves or protective panes / foils must be worn.
- With the exception of families, the maximum occupancy of accommodation is half its capacity. In the accommodations, strict hygiene regulations apply, which are made available in the respective national language.
- If there is reason to suspect that a worker is infected with the coronavirus, they should be isolated immediately, and a doctor must be contacted so that the worker can be tested for the virus. In addition, the entire team should be isolated and tested for the virus.

For more details on the restrictions please see the BMI/BMEL concept paper (available in German language only) https://www.bmel.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/Presse/PM062-Corona-Saisonarbeitskraefte.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

Previous action by the German government to alleviate the worker shortage

- BMEL established the internet platform www.daslandhilft.de to connect domestic workers and farmers
- The maximum period in which foreign workers are allowed to work in Germany without having to contribute to the German social security system was raised to 115 days (normally 70 days). This enables those seasonal workers already in Germany to stay and work for longer.
- The limits on additional income for retirees, people on pre-retirement systems, and shorter-work-compensation systems were temporarily raised.

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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.

Germany Closes Borders to Seasonal Ag Workers_Berlin_Germany_03-26-2020

German Farmers Fear Lack of Seasonal Workers | 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 | Berlin | Germany | March 18, 2020 | GM2020-0015

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 Fear Lack of Seasonal Workers_Berlin_Germany_03-17-2020

Attachments:

No Attachments.