

Worker in open-air vegetable harvesting



A project by Boerenbond & Kenniscentrum
Groene Sectoren with the support of Cera



ACTIVITEIT

Harvesting vegetables in the open air

The activity involves open-air vegetable harvesting

Region in flanders

Outdoor vegetable cultivation is mainly found in West Flanders and in the region around Mechelen. Here you will find crops such as leeks, cauliflowers, zucchini, Brussels sprouts, mushrooms and so on. In the province of Limburg there are also a lot of companies that grow asparagus. In Flemish Brabant you will find mainly chicory.

Picking activity

The harvesting of different types of vegetables is done in different ways and depends very much on the product.

Some examples:

Harvesting the product:

- Cauliflower, head cabbage, zucchini: cut out and place on the belt or in the box
- Brussels sprouts: insert cut stem into harvester

Sorting and market preparation

- Cauliflower/sprout cabbage: remove leaves and lower quality product from sorting belt
- Leeks: peeling leeks and placing them in the box

It is very important to follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully!

Job requirements

- No prior knowledge or study is required
- Being flexible and motivated
- Be fit to perform (often) repetitive physical labor: especially when harvesting on the ground, good physicality is needed.
- Sense of accuracy: an eye for quality and safety
- Following rules and agreements - following work instructions
- Working in a team
- Working with persons from other origins/countries
- Work takes place outdoors or in a shed

Period of work

Work in vegetable cultivation depends on the crop. Below is an overview.

- Courgets
W-Flanders
Planting, maintenance and harvesting and market preparation (= sorting size, quality) and cleanup (e.g., plastic, T-tape, mini-domes,...)
Planting: April/May - maintenance - harvest June to August/September
- Cauliflowers (1st fruit)
W-Flanders
Planting, covering and harvesting
Planting: April/May - Covering: late May/June - Harvest: June/July
- Cauliflowers (2nd fruit)
W-Flanders
Planting, covering and harvesting
Planting: June/July - Covering: September/October - Harvesting: late September to late November
- Closing coals (white/red)
W-Flanders
Planting, harvesting and preparing for market
Planting: May - Harvesting: October/November - Preparing for market: October/November (without storage), December/April (with storage)
- Leeks (summer)
W-Flanders
Planting, harvesting and preparing for market
Planting: February/March - Harvesting: July/August

- Leeks (fall)
W-Flanders
Planting, harvesting and preparing for market
Planting: April/May Harvesting: September to November
- Leeks (winter)
W-Flanders
Planting, harvesting and preparing for market
Planting: May/June - Harvesting: December to April
- Brussels sprouts
W-Flanders
Planting, topping (maintenance), harvesting and sorting
Planting: May - budding: September/October - harvesting: November/December
- Mushrooms
W- & OFlanders
Harvesting (picking)
Peak around the holidays
- Chicory
W-Flanders and Flemish Brabant
Deploying the carrots, harvesting and preparing them for market
Peak around the holidays (mainly October to March)
- Asparagus
Limburg
Harvesting (stabbing)
Run-up early/mid-April Peak around May/June

Working conditions

- It involves employment as a seasonal employee (SWN).
- By 2024, 100 working days are possible for SWN.
- It's about day contracts.
- The minimum hourly wage in 2024 will be: 12.20 euros gross/hour

There is a payroll calculation per month. A deduction of 18.725% is made for taxes. This is the withholding tax. This withholding tax is in principle liberatory. This means that a tax return no longer needs to be filed in the year following the income year. The liberating character of the withholding tax is linked to having a certificate of residence. In principle, no taxes have to be paid afterwards.

Non-state residents are not eligible for the application of a tax-free allowance.

For Government residents, such as Belgians, the withholding tax is 11.11% and does require a tax return to be filed in the year following the income year. For national residents, there is a tax-free allowance.

As a seasonal employee, you will receive a copy of the wage calculation each month. This lists all hours worked, total gross pay, withholding taxes and net pay.

There may be, in agreement with the employee, 65 euros/week paid in hand as an advance and for 8 weeks per calendar year. An agreement must be drawn up in the employee's language and a discharge for receipt.

Note: if you have earned more than 75% of your total professional income (earned in Belgium and in your home country) in Belgium, it is in your interest to file a tax return in Belgium the following year. You will then receive a tax refund.

If more than 50 days have been worked, an end-of-year premium and a purchasing power premium of 227.43 euros is paid the following year by the Guarantee and Social Fund for Horticulture. This premium is paid the year following the season. Please provide your address in your home country and your account number to the Horticultural Social Fund if you wish to receive this premium.

If more than 30 days have been worked for the same employer, a loyalty premium of 0.5 euros per day is paid by the Guarantee and Social Fund for Horticulture. This premium is paid the year following the season. Please provide your address in your home country and your account number to the Horticultural Social Fund.

Labor

Seasonal employees work on daily contracts. The contract starts over every day.

Working hours in horticulture are normally 38h/week.

In season, more hours can be worked: up to 11 hours /day and up to 50 hours /week All hours worked are paid at the normal hourly rate.

Opportunity form

For seasonal employees, there is an occasional form on which the days of seasonal work are recorded. The seasonal employee can keep this form during the season. If you change employers you must bring this document with you.

The employer must initial the noted performance once a week, otherwise the employee's entries will be considered correct.

Logement

In many cases, the employer provides housing. Housing must meet certain standards (area, heating, plumbing, etc.).

The employer may charge a rent per month for lodging. Arrangements will be made for this at the beginning of the season.

A written agreement should be signed with the employee in this case in a language he understands, stating the monthly rent.

The rent is to be agreed with the employer and may be 150 to 250€/month.

The agreed-upon rent can be deducted from net pay when calculating wages.

Registration with the municipality

- You must be registered as a seasonal worker with the municipality where you reside. The municipality issues a residence document.
- In most cases, a Schedule 3TER (declaration of arrival) is issued. Often this is a 3TER seasonal labor. This document provides legal residence for as long as the seasonal work lasts (maximum 100 days of performance per calendar year).
- You also get a National Register number or bis number in Belgium.

Declaration to social security

- You do not pay social security as a seasonal worker. However, your services are declared quarterly to social security in Belgium by the employer.

Health concerns

As a seasonal worker in Belgium, you can enjoy free health care in the first two years you come to Belgium. Make arrangements for this with your employer.

Information about health care in Belgium can be found on the website: www.cm.be, www.kcgs.be, www.vdab.be, www.boerenbond.be, www.cera.coop.

Harvesting vegetables safely and healthily

There is a separate information leaflet on safe and healthy vegetable harvesting.

See flyer: 7 - Harvesting vegetables from the open ground

Additional information on vegetable growing in Belgium:

Farms with outdoor vegetable production, often have several different crops per year for which seasonal workers are used.

Composition of crops in the year 2024

- Zucchini fresh:
 - 28.05 ha
 - 26.66 ha
 - 25.06 ha
- West Flanders Antwerp Flemish Brabant
 - 188.56 ha
 - 60.29 ha
 - 20.43 ha
- Cauliflower fresh:
 - West Flanders Antwerp Flemish Brabant
 - 257.60 ha
 - 178.93 ha
 - 25.76 ha
 - Leeks fresh:
 - West Flanders Antwerp
 - East Flanders Limburg
 - Flemish Brabant
 - 1,457.53 ha
 - 188.23 ha
 - 182.43 ha
 - 53.84 ha
 - 47.14 ha
 - Brussels sprouts fresh:
 - West Flanders Flemish Brabant Antwerp
 - 228.56 ha
 - 111.82 ha
 - 39.63 ha
 - Chicory fresh:
 - Flemish Brabant West Flanders Antwerp
 - 38.35 ha
 - 19.83 ha
 - 11.07 ha
 - Asparagus:
 - Limburg Antwerp Flemish Brabant West Flanders
 - East Flanders
 - 310.91 ha
 - 119.09 ha