

France on Tuesday appealed to workers laid off by the coronavirus crisis to help farmers pick fruit and vegetables that would otherwise be left to rot in the fields due to a shortage of seasonal workers, [Reuters](#) reports.

Farmers forecast a nationwide shortage of around 200,000 farm laborers over the harvest period as tight border restrictions imposed to help curb the spread of coronavirus make it much harder to recruit from outside France.

This has raised the prospect of strawberries, asparagus and other crops rotting in the fields.

With hotel receptionists, restaurant waiters, hairdressers and many others deprived of work by an unprecedented lockdown, Agriculture Minister Didier Guillaume issued a rallying cry to what he called France's "shadow army".

"I tell them: join the great army of French agriculture. Join those who will allow us to eat in a clean, healthy, sustainable way," he told BFM TV.

Two-thirds of seasonal workers in France are foreigners, farm unions say, and come from central and eastern European countries as well as Tunisia and Morocco.

Christine Lambert, head of France's biggest farm union, FNSEA, said the farm sector needed 45,000 laborers in March and 80,000 in both April and May to help farmers, mainly to harvest fruit and vegetables.

"Due to the closure of the Schengen borders but also to movement restrictions in Europe, the Poles and the Romanians who used to come won't anymore," Lambert wrote on Twitter.

"If our call is not heard the production will remain in the fields and the entire fruit and vegetables sector will be damaged," she was quoted as saying.

There have also been labor concerns in the produce industry in many other countries, including the U.K., Australia, New Zealand and the U.S.