



News Release

Fruit and vegetable growers continue efforts to keep farm workers safe Sector calls on government, health agencies for proactive support

For immediate release

Guelph ON, July 27, 2020 – Ontario’s fruit and vegetable farmers continue to take an active role in preventing further outbreaks of COVID-19 in farm settings, including ensuring all agricultural workers have access to testing. The sector is also calling for continued support and proactive action by government officials and health authorities to help keep farm workers safe.

Farmers are continuing to ensure that farm workers are treated with respect and dignity, are paid fairly, have access to health care and benefits, and importantly, are safely housed. Farms, and employee living and working conditions, continue to be regularly inspected by multiple agencies and government. Seasonal agricultural workers have the same labour, human rights and social protections as all other Canadian farm workers.

“The safety of agricultural workers is a top priority for us and to enable early detection of the virus in the workforce, we need to ensure ongoing, proactive testing,” said Bill George, Chair of the Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (OFVGA). “It’s vital that government and local health authorities work with the fruit and vegetable sector to continue collective efforts to manage outbreaks and keep farm workers safe.”

Farmers also remain committed to:

- Informing workers about available testing and doing our part to make sure workers’ legal rights for job protection and income protection (e.g. WSIB) are respected if they must be isolated.
- Continuing to work with all levels of government to provide COVID-19 health and safety training guidelines for farmers and workers.
- Limiting the movement of local temporary contract workers from one farm to another to reduce the risk of community spread. This also means separating local and international guest workers to decrease the risk of infection.

Growers can do their part, but they can’t do it alone. Government and local health authorities are also key to success. That’s why the sector is calling on government and local health authorities to:

- Facilitate the availability of province-wide proactive testing of all agri-food employees through expanded and consistent deployment of on-farm testing resources.
- Ensure workers that must isolate, even though they test negative for COVID-19, have streamlined access to wage compensation.
- Provide financial support and develop workable solutions for farms that are ordered to shut down and for farmers facing economic hardship as a result of such a shut-down.



- Deploy resources to enforce compliance with local health unit orders to restrict movement of local temporary contract workers between fruit and vegetable farms.
- Ensure that temporary contract agencies comply with Canadian law. This includes being held to the same ethical and legal standards as any regular farm employer.

“During the pandemic, domestic food security is more important than ever, and therefore we must all work together to protect the food system and our essential agri-food workers” stated George. “Recent outbreaks have also illustrated why the government needs to ensure workers and growers are protected financially.”

During these challenging times Ontario’s farmers are committed to continuing to work with government and health officials to protect the health and safety of our essential agricultural employees so that they can continue to ensure that locally grown fruits and vegetables are available year-round.

The OFVGA is the voice of Ontario’s 3,500 fruit and vegetable farmers on issues affecting the horticulture sector. The sector grows products in fields and greenhouses across the province for fresh and processed consumption. Visit www.ofvga.org.

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