

From: Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) <minister.omafra@ontario.ca>
Sent: April 4, 2020 2:14 PM
Subject: From the Honourable Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

April 4, 2020

Dear Friends:

As the COVID-19 outbreak continues to evolve I want you to know that I've heard the concerns and challenges from people across the agri-food sector. There has never been a time when securing Ontario's food system has been more important. I want to start by thanking you, your members and staff for the work that you are doing every day to keep that system strong.

Jobs portal

Over the last few weeks as I've spoken to stakeholders throughout the agriculture and food sectors one of the critical issues has been shortages of labour throughout the food and agriculture sector.

As we continue to work with the federal government and industry to bring in temporary foreign workers, we also need to publicly recognize the importance of the people working in the industry and make people looking for work aware of jobs in the food supply chain.

Today Premier Ford announced another initiative in our effort to support the agri-food sector – an online portal to connect people looking for work with important jobs in the agriculture and food supply chain. This website gathers job listings and resources for grocery retail, food processing, distribution, agriculture and agribusinesses.

The website is available <https://www.ontario.ca/page/agriculture-and-food-jobs-ontario>

This is an initiative that we look forward to building and promoting along with the sector. I ask you to use your communications channels to share it and ask the people in your organization to do the same. As the situation evolves if you know of urgent needs in the sector that should be included please let us know.

Thank you

Over the last few weeks Premier Ford and I have talked a lot about the Ontario heroes on the front lines keeping our essential services functioning. We are thankful for all the people who are working to keep our agriculture sector and food supply strong, including those providing inputs, farmers and those working in food processing, distribution and food retailers.

To you, the people in your organization and all of the other people in the sector we want to say thank you for keeping our agriculture sector strong and working to provide the food that the people of Ontario depend on. I shared that same message in a media op-ed earlier this week. In case you haven't had an opportunity you can read it at:

www.farms.com/news/ontario-agri-food-sector-heroes-supporting-families-during-covid-19-outbreak-155097.aspx

Over the next few weeks I encourage all of you to continue to say thank you to the workers along your value chain that continue to make the system function. Some organizations have already done this and it has had an impact. Please tag me in your social media posts and I will share when I can.

Deadlines

We understand that deadlines can be an additional source of stress during this stressful time. That is why I am reviewing deadlines and working to extend them where possible. For example, I have already approved extending the deadlines for new enrollment and coverage changes to RMP Livestock, as well as extend the enrollment deadline for RMP Grain and Oilseeds to June 30th. Additional extensions are intended over the next few weeks.

In the many conversations I have had with stakeholders, I have come to appreciate that small steps like extending reporting deadlines and giving our farmers more time to apply for risk management programs would be helpful in making sure our industry can focus on the present needs.

Moving forward

I want you to know that I and the team at OMAFRA are working with you and for you at this critical time. We will work together to protect our food system from farm to fork and address the challenges as they arise.

Like you, we are dealing with fast moving circumstances and issues that sometimes change daily, if not hourly. I ask for your understanding as we sometimes work to address the most urgent challenges first. As this situation continues to evolve please feel free to contact me if there are concerns that you want to share. We are all in this together.

Please stay safe and healthy,

Original signed by

Ernie Hardeman
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs