

Ontario Investing \$25.5 Million in Technology to Protect Agri-Food Workers

New funding in agriculture innovations to help reduce the spread of COVID-19

NEWS

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WOODSTOCK — The Ontario government is launching a modernized cost-share intake as part of a \$25.5 million program to increase the adoption of technological innovations within the agri-food sector to enhance the health and safety of workers and improve the sector's efficiency and productivity.

Today Minister Hardeman announced the Agri-tech Innovation Program— a \$22 million cost-share program that will help farming operations and processor businesses adopt innovative and new technologies.

"This large investment is a significant step forward by our government in using innovative technology to guard against the spread of COVID-19 in agri-food workplaces and protect worker health and safety," said Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. "Through the adoption of advanced agriculture technology, we're helping the sector find new and unique ways to address pandemic challenges while at the same time setting agri-food businesses up for future growth and success in modern agriculture."

This intake will support implementation of sector-specific, unique and innovative technologies in the workplace that enhance protection of workers against COVID-19, lead to increased business efficiencies and productivity, and help build the sector's resilience. Subject to program eligibility criteria, applications for funding could include for example advanced technologies such as optical grading and sorting system in vegetable processing or automated, robotic vineyard pruning robots. Ontario will also invest in high-impact social projects for agri-food workers as part of this component.

The intake announced today is the second stage of the Agri-food Prevention and Control Innovation Program announced in [Ontario's fall 2020 budget](#). Under a separate stage of this broader program, the Sector Innovation Road Mapping program, up to \$1.4 million was provided to agri-food organizations to identify the best path forward for agri-food businesses looking to implement innovative technical solutions and develop best practices for adoption of such technologies.

"This is an investment in the health and safety of our workers for today and in our sector for tomorrow," said Hardeman. "Our government strongly encourages the adoption of technological innovations that protect workers in both large and small agri-food businesses, where the risks are highest and the impact of technology on modernizing these businesses will be significant."

"Technology and modern equipment make today's farms more efficient and safer — both for people and the environment. Ontario farmers are excited at the prospect of working with the provincial government to further push innovation on the farm. This program will not only protect farmers and farm workers from the COVID-19 pandemic. It will enable investments in new processes and state of the art equipment," said Peggy Brekvelde, President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

“The Ontario Tender Fruit Growers extends its appreciation for the Agri-tech Innovation Program that will enhance worker safety on our farms,” said Phil Tregunno, Chair, Ontario Tender Fruit Growers. “With the recent completion of an extensive analysis of the sector, we are well positioned to implement labour saving technologies that will help our competitiveness and grow the industry.”

The first intake will run from May 17 to June 21, 2021. Further details about the intake will be available through the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs website as of May 17, 2021.

QUICK FACTS

- The Agri-tech Innovation Program will provide substantial incentives in two separate streams:
 - The Early Adopters stream will foster adoption of advanced technology to modernize businesses that are not yet widely adopted within the sector (e.g., production or automation technology); the province will cover 35 per cent of the project cost to a maximum of \$100,000. This stream is designed for significant projects with a minimum value of \$150,000.
 - Phase three of the program will focus on truly innovative projects, where the innovation is new to Ontario, North America or the specific sector (e.g., prototyping/customization of an autonomous farm harvesting equipment). The projects will involve piloting or demonstrating the technology and will need to be a collaboration between at least two businesses/organizations.
- The Agri-food Prevention and Control Innovation Program complements the province's [Prevention, Control and Outbreak Support Strategy for COVID-19 in Ontario's Farm Workers](#), which recommends 35 actions to prevent and control COVID-19 on farms, protect farm worker safety and wellness, and maintain the sustainability and viability of the agri-food sector.
- Agri-Tech Innovation Program information and application forms will be available as of May 17, 2021 for the Early Adopters Stream. The intake for the Innovators Stream will open following the closing of the Early Adopters Stream.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Organizations that are being funded to prepare sector innovation road maps under the Agri-food Prevention and Control Innovation Program include: Asparagus Farmers of Ontario, Berry Growers of Ontario, Dairy Farmers of Ontario, Flowers Canada Ontario, Food and Beverage Ontario, Garlic Growers Association of Ontario, Grape Growers of Ontario, Holland Marsh Growers' Association, Landscape Ontario, Meat and Poultry Ontario, Ontario Apple Growers (partnering with Ontario Tender Fruit Growers), Ontario Aquaculture Association, Ontario Ginseng Growers Association, Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers, Ontario Sheep Farmers, Poultry Industry Council and Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (working with the Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers).

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MEDIA CONTACTS

Avi Yufest, Minister's Office
avi.yufest@ontario.ca

Christa Roettele, Communications Branch
OMAFRA.media@ontario.ca
519-826-3145

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