



A LETTER FROM ONTARIO FARMERS

COVID-19 has changed all of our lives. And although Canada continues down the path of re-opening, the pandemic remains an ever-present threat to our health, our livelihoods, our communities and our domestic food supply.

As fruit and vegetable farmers, we are devastated by the recent deaths of three Ontario farm workers from COVID-19 and we are very concerned about the recent outbreaks that have affected our farms, our dedicated employees and our ability to produce food for you.

Seasonal farm workers play an essential role on our fruit and vegetable farms. The federal government created the seasonal agricultural worker program (SAWP) in 1966 and many of us have been welcoming the same international workers for years (even generations). We care about their health and well-being and we are committed to doing everything possible to protect the health and safety of our employees.

Part of this is ensuring that farm workers are treated with respect and dignity, are paid fairly, have access to health care and benefits, and importantly, are safely housed. Our 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 workers.

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As we learn more about recent outbreaks on local farms, our farmers and our sector are working to quickly remedy issues and prevent them from happening elsewhere. While we don't have all the answers and know there might be more challenges ahead, what we have learned is that some recent outbreaks were associated with the use of unregulated local recruitment agencies whose contract workers moved from farm to farm.

So, we are taking action.

- We are calling on all fruit and vegetable farmers to limit 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.
- We are helping to inform 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 have to go into isolation.
- We continue to work with all levels of government to provide COVID-19 health and safety training guidelines for farmers.

We look forward to working with government to ensure these unregulated agencies are held to the same ethical and legal standards as the federal regulated seasonal agricultural worker program.

We all have a responsibility to do the best that we can to keep people safe during this pandemic and there is no tolerance for employers who don't follow the rules when it comes to public health and worker safety.

During these challenging times we must all work together to ensure the health and safety of our farmers and agricultural employees so that we can continue to ensure that locally grown fruits and vegetables are available to you, our customers, year round.

We are proud of farm workers, we are proud to be Canadian farmers and we are proud to grow the food you eat.

Sincerely,

Ontario's 3,500 farm families who grow your fruits and vegetables