

**Ministry of Agriculture,
Food and Rural Affairs**

Office of the Minister

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**Ministère de l'Agriculture, de
l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales**

Bureau du ministre

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June 17, 2020

Keith Robbins
General Manager
Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers
keith.robbs@opvg.org

Dear Mr. Robbins:

As always, I'd like to begin by recognizing and thanking everyone in Ontario's agri-food sector for your continued efforts to feed our province during the COVID-19 outbreak. I want to relay to you how often I hear the gratitude in people's voices that you continue to produce the safe and healthy food that we all enjoy eating every day. Your work has not gone unnoticed by me, our government or the people of Ontario and I want to thank you for that.

I am writing to you today to provide another update on the latest actions we are taking to help support our agri-food sector during the COVID-19 outbreak.

For some parts of Ontario, the last couple of weeks have been especially difficult. I am constantly looking for ways to ensure that you, your business, and your employees have the supports needed to weather through these challenging times.

I commend all of you who have taken the necessary precautionary measures so that we can come out of this outbreak as quickly as possible. When we all work together, we ensure that our people stay healthy, and our agri-food sector and food supply chain stay strong.

Enhanced Agri-Food Workplace Protection Program

As you may recall, the Ontario and federal governments announced the availability of \$4.5 million for farms and provincially licensed meat processors to enhance workplace health and safety in response to COVID-19 requirements.

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Good things grow in Ontario
À bonne terre, bons produits

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Our government has since enhanced that program and expanded it up to \$15 million dollars—more than tripling the initial total investment—to provide even more support to better protect agri-food workers during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Enhanced Agri-food Workplace Protection Program is providing cost-share funding for measures like:

- Additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Building physical barriers for worker separation
- Temporary housing and transportation for ill workers
- More hand-washing facilities
- Tent rental to expand lunchroom space

If you would like more information or if you are interested in applying, please visit omafra.gov.on.ca/english/cap

Proactive testing available for agri-food workers

As a priority sector, farmers and their workers have access to proactive testing as another important tool in the effort to reduce the spread of the COVID-19. Even if workers do not have symptoms, they can now access testing. They do not need to show an OHIP card if they do not have one.

I want to personally ask every farm operator to encourage their employees to get proactively tested. This is a very important step to ensuring that we keep our farm workers safe and it will help our farms by identifying illness before it can spread.

More information about the assessment centres is now easily accessible on Ontario's dedicated COVID-19 website: ontario.ca/assessmentcentres

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Directory

A reminder that our government has put together a directory of PPE suppliers to help you access the equipment that you need. The directory is available at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/how-your-organization-can-help-fight-coronavirus/#find-ppe>

Health & Safety Resources

Partnering with Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS), OMAFRA is providing the sector with educational resources, tools and consulting services to help them implement health and safety protocols. Additional details about businesses that may qualify can be found online on the WSPS website at wspss.ca.

AgriStability Deadline Extension

As a reminder for our farmers, we have extended the enrollment deadline for AgriStability to July 3rd to give more time to make decisions on coverage options.

Hydro rate extension and new rate

During the COVID-19 outbreak, our government is extending electricity support for residential, farm and small business electricity consumers by extending the suspension of time-of-use pricing.

As you may be aware, as of June 1, 2020, Ontario introduced a fixed, flat “COVID-19 Recovery Rate” to provide continued stability for time-of-use customers, reflecting the continued increase in time spent at home by Ontarians during the day. Time-of-use customers are now billed a flat rate of 12.8 cents per kilowatt-hour 24 hours a day, seven days a week until October 31, 2020.

I want to conclude by reiterating my commitment to ensure Ontario’s agri-food sector stays strong now and into the future. Thank you again to everyone in our sector and the entire food supply chain for the tireless and exceptional work you do and thank you for taking the steps to keep our agri-food workers safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ernie Hardeman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a long, sweeping tail.

Ernie Hardeman
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs