



## News Release

### ***Fruit and vegetable sector stands with Ontario's plan to protect agri-food employees***

For immediate release

Guelph ON, June 25, 2020 – Ontario's fruit and vegetable growers welcome the ongoing efforts by government and health officials to support growers to protect the health of all agri-food employees. Yesterday's announcement by the Ontario government to further support ongoing and expanded on-site testing, access to employment benefits and supports, and new public health guidance will support the sector as it works to address ongoing challenges with COVID-19 outbreaks on farms.

"Growers are committed to protecting the health and safety of agricultural workers. Yesterday's announcement by the province aligns with the five-point plan released by the fruit and vegetable sector last week," says OFVGA Chair Bill George. "As we learn more about how these outbreaks occurred, the sector is working to prevent these circumstances from happening in other regions of the province."

Based on investigations undertaken by government and health officials, a significant risk factor for a COVID-19 outbreak amongst a farm workforce is the comingling of employees that live on the farm, with contract work crews that live offsite and work on multiple farms. To address this risk factor and proactively identify positive cases of COVID-19, the OFVGA is calling for the use of stricter approaches in high priority regions to:

- Undertake proactive testing of all agri-food employees through expanded deployment on-site testing resources.
- Limit all employees to working on one farm operation at a time during the pandemic.
- Deploy resources to enforce compliance with local health unit orders to restrict movement of contract workers from farm to farm.

"During these challenging times it is even more imperative that growers do everything they can to protect their employees," says George. "I am calling on growers to take the risk of an outbreak on their farm extremely seriously and take every step possible to protect your employees. We must work together to protect our essential agricultural workers."

As local public health agencies have the expertise to ensure the health of employees, growers are working closely with public health officials for preventing and managing outbreaks, including taking direction in how the new public health guidance announced yesterday is applied. Growers respect the rights and wishes and workers. Even if public health direction allows for asymptomatic COVID-19 positive employees to work, those individuals always have the choice to self-isolate if they are not comfortable working.

During these challenging times, the OFVGA is continuing to work with governments and public health officials to ensure the protection of essential agriculture workers so we can continue to ensure



a secure, domestic food supply. The OFVGA continues to keep its members informed of ways to protect employees, including public health guidance, and access to programs and services available to them, including the Ontario government's Enhanced Agri-Food Workplace Protection Program.

The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association is the voice of Ontario's 3,500 fruit and vegetable family farms on issues affecting the horticulture sector. These farms grow fresh and processed fruits and vegetables in fields, greenhouses, orchards and vineyards across the province. To support the sector, the OFVGA works with its member organizations, which include over 20 regional and provincial commodity marketing boards and associations. Visit [www.ofvga.org](http://www.ofvga.org).

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