



News Release

Health of farm workers critical to domestic food security

For immediate release

Guelph ON, June 10, 2020 – Ontario's fruit and vegetable farmers continue to work closely with the Ontario government and health authorities to protect all essential agricultural workers on Ontario farms during the COVID-19 pandemic. This workforce is crucial to ensure fresh, canned, and frozen fruit and vegetable products are available to Canadians year-round.

To help reduce the risks associated with COVID-19, the fruit and vegetable sector is supportive of ensuring all agricultural workers have access to a strategic, province-wide voluntary testing program that provides individual assurances, supports public health objectives, and identifies ways employers can improve proactive safety measures. This will provide maximum benefit to all involved.

"The health and safety of farm workers continues to be of the utmost importance to all fruit and vegetable growers," says OFVGA Chair Bill George. "The sector appreciates the efforts and leadership of local health agencies to support growers as they work to address existing outbreaks and prevent further spread."

The health and safety of all farm workers, whether international or domestic, is paramount to growers during normal circumstances and even more so during the pandemic. In addition to adhering to existing government regulatory and inspection programs for hiring and employing international workers, growers are taking significant additional steps to protect all agricultural workers against the risk of COVID-19.

Steps have included adjustments to housing, transportation, and work settings to create physical barriers between workers, or appropriate distancing, in addition to increased sanitation and use of personal protective equipment. Employers are communicating with their workers about the risks of COVID-19 and how individual employees can help prevent spread through individual actions. Employers are closely monitoring worker health regularly for COVID-19 symptoms.

"Our organization is proud of all growers who have risen to this extraordinary challenge and are working hard to protect farm workers and families during these unprecedented circumstances," says George. "We do not support non-compliance with the high standards of foreign worker programs or with local health agency orders."

Health officials have confirmed that the existing COVID-19 outbreaks among farm workers have been a result of community spread and not caused by workers arriving in Canada. All workers undergo a paid 14-day isolation period prior to beginning work. More information about Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Programs for agriculture, including employer compliance, can be found on [Economic and Social Development Canada's website](#).

The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association is the voice of Ontario's 3,500 fruit and vegetable producers on issues affecting the horticulture sector. Visit www.ofvga.org.

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