

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

Office of the Minister

77 Grenville Street, 11th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1B3  
Tel: 416-326-3074  
www.ontario.ca/OMAFRA

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

Bureau du ministre

77, rue Grenville, 11<sup>e</sup> étage  
Toronto (Ontario) M7A 1B3  
Tél. : 416 326-3074  
www.ontario.ca/MAAARO



September 24, 2021

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

Dear Mr. Robbins:

First of all, I want to thank you and your employees for everything you continue to do to keep Ontario's agriculture and food supply chains operating. These have been difficult times for everyone. But through your hard work and dedication, the people of Ontario have been reassured by the fact that our agri-food sector continues to bring food to our tables at this critical time.

I know we are all working hard to do our part in helping stop the spread of COVID-19. I am writing to you today to remind you that with the emergence of new variants, it is now more important than ever that we do not let our guard down in our fight against this ruthless virus.

Vaccinations remain Ontario's best protection against further outbreaks across the province. As unvaccinated individuals are 24 times more likely to be hospitalized and 43 times more likely to be in ICU, than fully vaccinated Ontarians. As a result of the direct effects of the vaccination program, an estimated 84,540 cases have been prevented to date among individuals 18 years of age and older. Further, an estimated 5,332 severe outcomes (hospitalizations or deaths) have been prevented among individuals 70 years of age and older.

For the latest data about COVID-19 vaccinations, please go to our government website at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/data>. To find out more about the vaccine, how to book an appointment to get your vaccine, get a copy of your proof of vaccination and more, please go to <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-ontario>.

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Eligible Ontarians can book an appointment for a vaccine through Ontario's online booking system. Residents with a red and white health card, or those who need help with booking, can call the Provincial Vaccine Booking Line at 1-833-943-3900. The Booking Line is open Monday to Sunday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., with service available in 300 languages.

There are other health and safety precautions that you should continue to take to control the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the farm or workplace. These include things like physical distancing, frequent hand washing, wearing a mask and following other important public health advice.

We also have a number of programs in place to help support you during this time, such as:

### **Enhanced Agri-Food Workplace Protection Program**

The Enhanced Agri-food Workplace Protection Program is open. This, \$36.6 million program, which includes \$10 million in 2021-2022 to support the implementation of measures to help more farmers and agri-food businesses purchase personal protective equipment, enhance cleaning and disinfection and redesign workstations to better protect workers. The program will also help farmers who experience unexpected costs as a result of a COVID-19 outbreak among on-farm employees.

- Farms and agri-food businesses that hire three or more employees will be eligible for funding.
- Additional businesses and workers are eligible including corn detassellers, transporters, hatcheries, and primary processing
- The intake opened April 22, 2021, and applications are being accepted until the funding has been fully distributed or until November 30, 2021.

### **Testing available for agri-food workers**

Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) will be able to access publicly funded PCR diagnostic testing if they have symptoms or exposure to a positive case AND for travel purposes. Rapid antigen testing is available for unvaccinated TFWs and other farm workers if they are asymptomatic.

Testing continues to be an 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: [www.ontario.ca/assessmentcentres](http://www.ontario.ca/assessmentcentres)

## **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Directory**

Our government has also 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 [www.wsps.ca](http://www.wsps.ca)

We are here to support you as we all do our part to slow the spread of COVID-19. Through the work you continue to do you are helping to keep food on the shelves, and on the table, for the people of Ontario, and we are deeply grateful.

Please accept my best wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa M. Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" being particularly prominent.

Lisa M. Thompson  
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

## **COVID-19 Reminders**

- For vaccination booking details visit: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/book-vaccine/>
- Follow your local public health/safety measures: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/zones-and-restrictions>
- Practice physical distancing – stay 2 metres away from others in public
- Get the facts - [www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-stop-spread](http://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-stop-spread)