

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

Office of the Minister

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**Ministère de l'Agriculture, de
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July 17, 2020

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

Dear Mr. Robbins:

I am writing to you today to share information about important changes to the AgrilInsurance program to protect farmers against economic loss due to COVID-19.

Over the past four months I've heard from farmers across the province that COVID-19 is making things particularly difficult for farmers to manage. That is why I was proud to announce that Ontario is enhancing AgrilInsurance (Production Insurance) coverage to include labour shortages due to COVID-19 during the 2020 growing season.

AgrilInsurance protects producers against significant production losses that threaten the viability of their farm and are beyond their control. While insurance contracts are already finalized for this year, we are committed to working with the federal government to ensure that our farmers have the certainty to grow and harvest the food we eat every day.

Ontario farmers who purchased production insurance for the 2020/21 season will be eligible for extended coverage of labour shortages due to COVID-19. Farmers will be expected to follow health and safety guidelines to help protect their workers.

Farmers will also be expected to notify Agricorp as soon as possible if they experience COVID-19 related labour disruptions that are having an impact on their crops.

These changes follow several other programs that are new or have seen changes to be more responsive to the needs of Ontario producers.

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Enhanced Agri-food Workplace Protection Program

As you may recall, in May, the Ontario and federal government 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.

Our government has since expanded that program and announced 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
- More hand-washing facilities
- Tent rental to expand lunchroom space

For more information please visit:

www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/about/agrifoodprogram.htm.

The government has also developed a [Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) directory](#) of companies that sell PPE and other supplies to keep your employees and customers safe from COVID-19.

Health Guidelines

The Ontario Government has provided resources, best practices and information to help keep your workers safe and healthy, and your business in operation, during COVID-19. You can find more information on those guidelines for the agriculture sector on the [Agriculture health and safety during COVID-19 website](#).

Employers can work with their local Public Health Units to address the needs of their workers and to better understand how their facilities can be equipped to manage the spread of COVID-19.

Testing

Our government is making COVID-19 testing more widely available as a tool to help provide confidence and identify infection even when people are asymptomatic. By identifying illness early we can limit the spread among workers ensuring better health and safety for employees and helping farms manage the impact of illnesses.

That's why our government is committed to testing everybody, even those who have no symptoms. Further information can be found on the [Ontario Ministry of Health COVID-19 website](#).

Asymptomatic testing does not replace public health protocols around maintaining physical distancing when feasible, diligent handwashing, and self-isolation requirements. But it can be a valuable tool to help prevent outbreaks of COVID-19 and increase peace of mind that the enhanced protocols you have put in place are working.

I encourage you to work with your local Public Health Unit or contact OMAFRA if you have questions around proactive testing.

Sector-Specific Health and Safety Guidance

Everyone has a duty to protect the health and safety of workers in Ontario. The COVID-19 pandemic has created unique challenges for businesses and individuals around the world, including farms and farm workers.

More than 170 workplace health and safety resources, including guidelines, tip sheets are available at [Ontario.ca/covidsafety](#). They include resources translated into French and Spanish specifically for the agricultural sector.

OMAFRA has also partnered with the Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS) to provide agri-food businesses, organizations and associations with educational resources, tools and consulting services to help them implement COVID-19 health and safety protocols. Additional details about businesses that may qualify can be found online on the [WSPS website](#).

As more information becomes available, I will continue to keep you updated on these and further initiatives.

We are all in this together. Thank you for all that you've done and that you continue to do for our sector, our province and the country. It has never been clearer how important you are to the people of this province. We are all grateful for your continued efforts to feed us during this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ernie Hardeman', written in a cursive style.

Ernie Hardeman
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs