

Premier of Ontario
Premier ministre de l'Ontario

**Minister of Agriculture, Food and
Rural Affairs**
**Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation
et des Affaires rurales**



June 29, 2020

The Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
pm@pm.gc.ca

The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau
Minister of Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada
aafc.minister-ministre.aac@canada.ca

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Bibeau:

As you know, COVID-19 has presented Canadians across this country with many challenges. Their health, the economy, and our food systems have all been affected by the pandemic. The agri-food sector and the contributions of its workers are critical to ensuring Canada's food supply chain remains strong. Our farmers and food processors are agri-food heroes, working long hours in challenging conditions to keep store shelves stocked and food on kitchen tables.

I want to thank you for the support of the federal government and for Minister Bibeau's ongoing engagement with us. However, the agriculture sector continues to experience urgent challenges through this crisis. Farmers are confronted with inadequate availability of labour, additional costs to keep employees safe, and tremendous market volatility.

Over the past few months, the livestock sectors have had losses driven by a shortage of processing capacity, flower growers have had to discard products because they were unable get them to market, fruit and vegetable growers have experienced increased costs and reductions in planting due to a shortage of labour, and grain farmers have seen increased volatility in markets.

It is clear that current support levels for our farmers are not sufficient to ensure food security for the broader public. The agriculture sector needs additional government support now.

Farm operations with employees are dealing with significant costs related to COVID-19 workplace safety including purchasing personal protective equipment, modifying workstations, and modifications to housing to enhance physical separation. Ontario has taken action to safeguard farm workers and protect the food supply, including providing up to \$15 million through the Enhanced Agri-Food Workforce Protection program. Additional federal support is critical to support our famers in taking necessary steps to protect their employees – including Temporary Foreign Workers – from COVID-19.

Increased protections for Temporary Foreign Workers after arrival in Canada should include the use of federal quarantine facilities for those who test positive and cannot self-isolate on the farm, along with increased in-person inspections of existing on-farm housing. The initial quarantine period should be used to educate workers about how to protect themselves from COVID-19, workplace health and safety, and labour entitlements. We request the federal government's help to ensure that farmers have access to the workers they need through the program and that those workers have the necessary supports while in Canada.

To ensure that no one is discouraged from seeking screening or treatment for COVID-19 for financial reasons, our government removed the three-month waiting period for Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) coverage on March 19, 2020 for uninsured people who do not meet the criteria for OHIP coverage. The ministry will seek approval for the three-month waiting period to be reinstated when it is advisable to do so. This applies to all new/returning residents to Canada who are eligible for OHIP coverage upon their arrival to Ontario (including Temporary Foreign Workers who meet all other criteria under law). Additionally, the province is covering the cost of COVID-19 services for uninsured people who do not meet the criteria for OHIP coverage.

Increased support from the Federal government would allow for better protection of Temporary Foreign Workers and help stop the spread of COVID-19. To support these efforts, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health is working closely with Ontario's local Medical Officers of Health to strengthen protection for workers under of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*.

Agriculture Ministers have been working closely together with their FPT counterparts every week to discuss how best to support the agriculture sector in response to COVID-19. However, we need those discussions to result in swift and meaningful action.

Commodity specific circumstances have required targeted support for extraordinary costs. However, all farms need increased income support at this time to ensure domestic food production. Farm groups across the country have clearly articulated their urgent need to governments. This is a national problem and requires a national solution.

AgriStability is the key national Business Risk Management program that helps protect agriculture businesses against large income declines. Working with other provinces, we have laid out a path forward that would promote nationally consistent support for farmers during this time of increased need and uncertainty, while accommodating the fiscal constraints that many provinces face. We are still awaiting a clear response to this proposal, or a counter proposal from the federal government around comprehensive support for farmers.

Our hope is that we can collectively find a way to provide farmers with certainty that they will be receiving the support they need. I remain confident that with collective leadership we can develop a path forward that works for all.

Ontario is committed to working with you on enhancements and providing our share. I urge you to work with us to provide the support our farmers need and to signal as soon as possible that this support is coming.

The agriculture sector is committed to feeding Canadians. Governments need to step in and ensure they can continue to do so. Provinces can't do this on their own. The joint provincial AgriStability proposal advances meaningful improvements to support the agriculture and food sector to weather this storm. We would ask for your response at your earliest convenience.



Honourable Doug Ford
Premier



Honourable Ernie Hardeman
Minister



Keith Currie
Ontario Federation of Agriculture



Ed Scharringa
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario



Don Ciparis
National Farmers Union

c: The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honourable Marco Mendicino
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

The Honourable Filomena Tassi
Minister of Labour

The Honourable Carla Qualtrough
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion