

August 19, 2011

The Hon. Thomas Lukaszuk
Alberta Employment and Immigration
#418 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Lukaszuk:

Eight months ago, the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) wrote to you about the deaths of three Alberta farm workers in preceding weeks.

We made a simple request: That the ***Farming and Ranching Exemption*** be amended to allow for investigations into all farm-related deaths, serious injuries, or injuries involving a child. This could be accomplished by extending section 38 of the ***Occupational Health and Safety Act*** – which permits a Minister to convene a board of inquiry into the circumstance of an accident – to apply to the farming and ranching industries.

This change to the ***Farming and Ranching Exemption*** could be accomplished by a simple Order-in-Council and would result in a legal avenue for investigation into serious incidents involving paid farm workers. The information that would be obtained from these investigations would be invaluable in preventing future deaths and serious injuries on Alberta's farms.

The AFL was not alone in making requests concerning deaths and injuries on farms. Similar letters were sent to you by the NDP, the Alberta Liberals, the Farmworkers Union of Alberta and by Wayne Hanley, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Canada.

None of these letters has been answered. The only related announcement from your office has been the formation of a Farm Safety Advisory Council, whose 15 members include 11 employer /operators and **only one** worker representative.

Farm workers in Alberta deserve better. There have been more than 160 farm deaths in Alberta in the last decade. Farming is a dangerous industry. Farms are industrial worksites are like any other. Paid farm workers risk their lives every day to put food on our tables and to fuel our economy – and yet your government refuses to provide them with the same workplace protections that other Albertans enjoy.

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Tomorrow, August 20, is the seventh annual Alberta Farm Worker Day. We ask that you mark this occasion by remembering all those farm workers who have been killed or injured – and that you end your silence on the multiple requests to allow investigations into farm accidents. Make the simple change to allow these investigations – or explain to Albertans why you won't. Silence on such an important issue is unacceptable.

The AFL continues to urge the inclusion of all workers under the ***Occupational Health and Safety Act and Workers' Compensation Act*** as the only equitable course of action. We are not alone in this view. Indeed, in 2008, after investigating the workplace death of Kevan Chandler, Justice Peter Barley recommended that farm workers be included in Alberta's legislation to prevent future workplace injuries and deaths.

Amending ***the Farming and Ranching Exemption*** would be a good first step towards making farms safer. It is inconsistent to say the government wants to improve farm safety when it does not investigate accidents to establish how they happened.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Nancy Furlong', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Nancy Furlong
Secretary Treasurer
Alberta Federation of Labour