



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

June 19, 2020

Hon. Patty Hajdu
Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

The community and economy of Windsor-Essex is being left behind most of Ontario due to outstanding weaknesses the COVID – 19 Pandemic has exposed, in terms of our collective capacity to address some of our agricultural labour systems that have existed for some time.

Particularly here in Chatham-Kent Leamington, our agriculture industry's reliance on labour from four different groups of workers has exposed cracks in the systems that have existed before, and now see the light of day.

These issues need to be addressed on both a short term and long-term basis.

Our local ag labour needs are filled primarily from the following 4 groups:

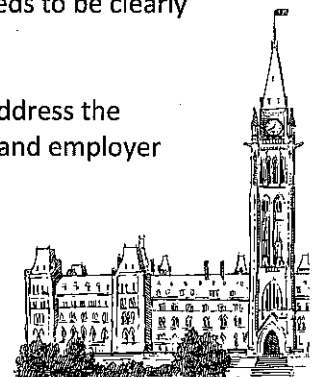
- **Canadians** are given first priority and make up the largest portion of our local agricultural and food processing labour needs
- **Temporary Foreign Workers Programme (TFWP)** helps fill in shortages of labour in a two-year contract format
- **Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme (SAWP)** helps fill in shortages of labour in up to an 8-month contract format
- **Recruiting Agencies**, using a mix of labour from various sources help fill in shortages of labour in short term assignments

In the immediate term, the protection of the health of all four groups are primary.

To that end, the process of testing, tracing and isolation of affected workers needs to be supported. To facilitate this first step of testing, and to provide services on-farm to decrease the spread amongst congregation at central facilities, more resources for testing will be required by local health care providers, and I strongly support the requests from local officials, and fellow MP's for additional provincial and federal resources to facilitate testing.

Communication of the processes of testing, and the implications of the results of testing to symptomatic COVID +, asymptomatic COVID + and contacts of both COVID + and negative workers needs to be clearly understood by both the employer and employees – both Canadians and guest workers.

Therefore, I support the efforts to provide culturally appropriate communications that address the stigma and fears associated with this process. These fears reside both in the employee and employer community!





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Of the four groups working locally in our agricultural sector, the primary source of difficulty in getting ahead of the pandemic comes from labour sourced through short term contract with recruiting agencies. This is a necessary and appropriate source of labour for short term needs, but it must be acknowledged that there is a problem with lack of oversight with respect to short term contract agencies that move farm to farm.

I am encouraged by the industry leadership of Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association's Chairman Bill George, when he states "The industry is recognizing that there is a significant gap in oversight with respect to contract workers that move from farm to farm". These recruiting agencies must be made to conform with all quarantine and public health requirements, as well as industry standard labour and housing practises. Additional measures to bring compliance into this aspect of the local labour force is essential, . In fact, I wrote industry leaders specifically on this issue on May 15 (Letter attached) urging them to take a leadership role in developing process for this to occur.

Your department is encouraged to coordinate with OMAFRA and Ministry of Labour officials who also are working towards the same end. Local resources are insufficient to deliver mobile on-farm, on-factory site testing, and additional oversight of labour agencies is required.

Minister, discussions to address longer term solutions to these issues also need to occur with industry and relevant agencies so that this situation is not repeated. Additional measures, which we share with various jurisdictions could include additional resources for contact tracing for all workers (cell phone access), additional pre-screening for underlying health conditions, and most importantly, an accreditation process for recruiting agencies.

We look forward to working with you to immediately implement the resources to allow Windsor-Essex to more immediately and safely proceed to Phase 2.

Sincerely,

Dave Epp, MP
Chatham-Kent—Leamington

cc. Irek Kusmierczyk, MP for Windsor Tecumseh, PS for Employment,
Brian Masse, MP for Windsor West; Chris Lewis, MP for Essex; Gary McNamara, Warden of Essex County
Hilda Macdonald, Mayor of Leamington; Drew Dilkens, Mayor of Windsor
Bill George, OFVGA Chair; George Gilveesy, OGVG Chairman

