

July 2, 2020



STATEMENT REGARDING UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS AND OPENING LOCAL ECONOMY

The communities of Leamington and Kingsville have been left behind the rest of the country, as we remain in Stage One of the re-opening plan. Our small businesses, through no fault of their own, are not able to open, or open with expanded offerings. Despite the best efforts of local and regional officials, many businesses feel left as hostages in the situation of bringing about testing and tracing compliance in another sector of the economy. This simply is not fair, and it needs to be specifically addressed immediately.

Shortly after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a world-wide pandemic on March 11th, the Federal Government closed the border to all non-essential travel. This travel ban included the entry of guest workers through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program.

The horticultural industry lobbied the government to allow entry of these workers, as they were an essential part of Canada's food security. In a letter to the Prime Minister/Employment Minister on March 17, [available HERE](#), I supported this request. The Government did reverse their decision and with additional protocols did allow guest workers to enter. [For an up to date listing of my actions related to COVID-19 please visit www.DaveEpp.ca](#)

Those protocols were effective, in that no cases of COVID-19 were introduced to Canada through properly vetted Temporary Foreign Workers. This program remains essential to Canada's Food Security.

However, the integrity of this program is threatened by the use of undocumented workers unscrupulously employed by labour recruiting agencies. **THIS HAS TO STOP!** In a letter dated May 15, 2020 to Chairman George Gilvesy of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers, I called on the organization to stop this practice as "the use of undocumented workers cannot be condoned at any time, let alone now during a period of extreme unemployment". [That letter is available here.](#)

With recent revelations that an estimated 2,000 such workers exist the problem is even much larger than I envisioned 6 weeks ago. And it appears that this practice of contract labour is the primary vector for COVID-19 infections into the legitimate Temporary Foreign Worker community. **THIS HAS TO STOP**, and I call on the industry leadership to publicly commit to a process of accreditation of labour recruiting agencies, so that the integrity of other programs essential to our food security are maintained. There must be one set of rules for everyone.

If we need to make improvements to the TFWP to take away the temptation to use undocumented workers as a supplement, then let us engage in that discussion and fix this industry problem. While we

recognize that undocumented workers exist in other sectors such as construction, nail salons, cleaning, companies, nannies, etc., it is their use in the horticulture sector locally that is holding small business owners and the local community hostages in this crisis.

We can fix this. We must fix this. We must safely and immediately end having the community pay the price for something they have no control over. This is not fair, and it needs to be addressed immediately. I and others continue to stand ready to find sustainable solutions for our community's greatest economic engine in the Leamington/Kingsville area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Epp". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dave Epp, MP
Chatham-Kent--Leamington

CC:

Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada;
Hon. Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion;
Hon. Marco Mendicino, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship;
Hon. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health;
Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food;
Hon. Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance;
Chris Lewis, MP for Essex; Irek Kusmierczyk, MP for Windsor-Tecumseh; Brian Masse, MP for Windsor West;
Hilda MacDonald, Mayor of Leamington;
Nelson Santos, Mayor of Kingsville;
Bill George, Chair, Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers' Association;
Brian Gilroy, President, Canadian Horticulture Council
Ontario Federation of Agriculture;
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario;
George Gilvesy, Chair, Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers