

# FROM THE FIELD

*From our field office to yours – timely information for MPPs about Ontario's agri-food sector, from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture*



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of Agriculture

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

This summer season has been unpredictable, at best. From drought to drenched, the challenging weather made it tough to get crops in the ground, grow and harvest. Amid these conditions, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) continues our advocacy work on the issues that affect our 36,000 farm members and the way they operate their businesses.

In this late summer issue of *From the Field*, you'll read about issues that we hope are not entirely new to you and your staff. We work hard to keep you informed through this newsletter, meetings at Queen's Park, our annual Field Day and casual summer barbecues in your constituencies. We've covered the importance of rural economic development, our position on the changes to minimum wage, implications for the new Canadian Agricultural Partnership, our work on the ongoing issue of phosphorus in the Great Lakes, and the continued investment needed for rural infrastructure.

As the fall season approaches, take a drive in the country and stop in to see OFA at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show or the International Plowing Match. You can find more information about these events on page 3.

Enjoy the final days of summer. Support all the harvest bounty that is produced in Ontario at your local farmers' market or country market. We look forward to meeting with you when the fall session begins.



## ISSUES FOR THE ELECTION TRAIL

With a provincial election on the horizon next spring, the OFA has a number of important issues we'll be working on as the fall session gets back to business. Here are the main messages you'll be hearing about from us.

### Distributed Economic Development

Investing in Ontario's rural economy will grow all of Ontario and produce good jobs in family-oriented communities while alleviating what is dubbed our urban crisis of housing and transportation. Distributed economic development is a sound investment for Ontario.

- ✓ Expanding natural gas throughout rural Ontario is the single most important investment the Ontario government can make to support thriving farm and rural businesses
- ✓ Rural Ontario roads, bridges, drainage and broadband internet will support the viability and growth of farm businesses, and goods and services along the value chain
- ✓ Rural schools are essential to attract and retain local employees by providing quality education and local community hubs for the next generation of Ontarians

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## ISSUES FOR THE ELECTION TRAIL



158,000 jobs are generated by the farm sector

### Changing Workplaces Review

The agricultural sector and many small businesses across Ontario are reeling at the Liberal government's plans to increase minimum wage by a staggering 32% in an 18-month period.

Bill 148 — *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act* — is set to raise the minimum wage in Ontario to \$15 by 2019. Here are OFA's top concerns that need to be addressed.

- ✓ Farmers have been given just six months to prepare for the first increase of 21% by January 1, 2018
- ✓ Farm income will drop as agriculture is unable to transfer increased costs of production that result from the minimum wage increase through the value chain
- ✓ Increasing minimum wage will make Ontario farmers and agri-food businesses less competitive, less able to innovate and will threaten food security and undermine the sustainability and variety of agricultural products available to Ontario consumers
- ✓ The minimum wage issue jeopardizes the government's own challenge to double the sector's growth rate and create 120,000 jobs by 2020

### Employment Standards Act Review

The negative impacts that a sudden increase in minimum wage will have on the agri-food industry will be further compounded if any changes are made under the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA). Any changes that result from the government's proposed review of agricultural exemptions under the *Employment Standards Act* (fall 2017) would negatively impact the current, flexible approach for farm workers.

The ESA exemptions exist to recognize and account for the fact that farming must co-exist with the climate and work with living organisms. Flexibility is critical in working with the land, sometimes in conflict with the weather and often in a hurry to get perishable products to market.

OFA will consult extensively with the government later this fall on the need to maintain labour flexibility on agriculture, via the existing exemptions.



## NEW GROUP WORKING TO REDUCE LAKE ERIE PHOSPHORUS

When you consider that Ontario's Great Lakes basin includes 95% of Ontario's agricultural land, it's important to note farmers take their role in phosphorus reduction very seriously.

OFA is part of a new working group of farmers and municipalities called the Thames River Phosphorus Reduction Collaborative. The group is developing innovative tools, practices and technologies to reduce phosphorus entering southwestern Ontario waterways.

Several Lake Erie algal blooms in recent years are causing increasing concern. Excess phosphorus — including from agricultural practices in Canada and the U.S. — can run into municipal drains and promote the bloom in downstream water bodies like Lake Erie.

The new working group is creating tools and practices farmers can use to address different circumstances, including gathering

best practices from around the world that could be applied in Ontario.

OFA has also been working with similar groups across the province to evaluate agronomic practices to reduce nutrient loss. Ontario farmers are already implementing Best Management Practices, 4R Nutrient Stewardship principles (the right source, the right rate, the right time, the right place), growing cover crops and timing nutrient applications to reduce phosphorus loads in watersheds.

The Great Lakes are the largest freshwater system on earth, with 20% of the planet's fresh water. OFA continues to work with groups including the new Thames River Phosphorus Reduction Collaborative to embrace phosphorus reduction in waterways, improve agricultural practices and preserve the health of our land and water.

## COMING EVENTS

Fall is a great time to take a drive to the country and attend an agricultural event. There are local fairs, food festivals and two big events for Ontario's agri-food industry. OFA has a booth at both these events. Hope to see you there.



**Canada's Outdoor Farm Show**  
Woodstock, ON  
September 12-14, 2017  
[www.outdoorfarmshow.com](http://www.outdoorfarmshow.com)



**International Plowing Match and Rural Expo**  
Walton, ON  
September 19-23, 2017  
[www.plowingmatch.org/ipm-2017](http://www.plowingmatch.org/ipm-2017)

## New federal program brings mixed news for Ontario agriculture

In late July, Canada's agriculture ministers reached agreement on a new five-year investment for the agri-food industry with the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP). The program starts in April 2018 and will invest \$3 billion to strengthen the agri-food sector in Canada.

### CAP will focus on six key areas:

1. Science, research and innovation
2. Markets and trade
3. Environmental sustainability and climate change
4. Value-added agriculture and agri-food processing
5. Public trust
6. Risk management

The new federal/provincial/territorial agreement brings a continuation of Business Risk Management (BRM) programs. It's great news for Ontario agriculture that there was consensus among all provincial ag ministers to carry out a comprehensive review of the suite of BRM programs. OFA and its industry partners have been advocating

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for a review and we commend Minister Leal for his hard work in gaining the support and agreement with his provincial colleagues to make this happen.

Another component of the CAP announcement is not good news for farmers. OFA shares the disappointment of other groups, including the Grain Farmers of Ontario, at the unilateral decision by Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Lawrence MacAuley, to cut back the annual contribution limit of the AgrilInvest program. Farming is an unpredictable occupation, and farmers need an effective support system to help manage risk beyond disaster relief funding. AgrilInvest is a key component of the BRM programs.

Ontario's Great Lakes basin includes 95% of our province's agricultural land

The Great Lakes make up 20% of our planet's fresh water



# OFA FIELD DAY

— 2017 —

Every summer OFA invites Ontario politicians to an exclusive tour of an innovative Ontario farm. This year's event was hosted by Beverly Greenhouses of Dundas on August 10. Owned by brothers Jan and Dale VanderHout, the vertically integrated English cucumber farm showcased Ontario's greenhouse industry. More than 60 people attended the event, experiencing the innovation and diversity that fuels our provincial agri-food sector.

Attendees toured the cucumber greenhouse, learning about each stage of plant production, packing, employee management and energy requirements for the 30-acre greenhouse operation.

OFA believes events like Field Day are an important part of our role as advocates for Ontario's agri-food sector. It's an opportunity for us to show, and not just tell, our provincial leaders about the outstanding innovations happening on our farms and introduce them to the farmers themselves so they can hear their stories. Field Day is also an opportunity to talk to politicians about the challenges Ontario farmers face. Labour and minimum wage were timely discussions at this year's event, along with need for cost effective energy, including natural gas expansion across rural Ontario to keep our farms viable and competitive.



THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO ATTENDED OFA'S 2017 FIELD DAY.



**Do you have questions about Ontario's agri-food sector or want to learn more about issues impacting our industry? Contact OFA for insight and information.**

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