



Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Ontario AgriCentre

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September 17, 2018

The Honourable Christine Elliott
Minister of Health
Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Hepburn Block, 80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, ON
M7A 1R3

Dear Minister Elliott:

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) once again congratulates you on your appointment as Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. We believe that together we can achieve significant accomplishments to make our farming and food sector and our Ontario economy even stronger.

More than ever before, a social climate exists that is more accepting and supportive of mental health challenges. OFA is pleased to see that the Ontario Government intends to invest \$1.9 billion for mental health, addiction, and housing supports that will be matched by the federal government, resulting in a \$3.8 billion investment over ten years.

As the process of allocating these funds begins, OFA would like to highlight the needs of farmers and rural residents living with mental health challenges. Farmers face serious stresses in our service to society, our food system, and the broader economy. We also face a myriad of problems associated with mental health: poor access to comprehensive services; cultural and social stigmas; social isolation; and ready access to the means to commit suicide, to list just a few.

The lack of a coordinated, long-term approach to farmer mental wellness research and resource development has the potential to become a major detriment to the growth of our sector and a contributing factor to the on-going attrition of Ontario farmers. Recent research out of the University of Guelph has shown that our farmers experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout, and lower levels of resilience than population norms.

The Ontario farm community needs accessible and culturally relevant mental health resources and training to promote wellness and build resilience to withstand the enormous occupational stresses they face. We have a tremendous opportunity to build a sustainable approach to research, develop evidence-based programming, and create awareness and support specific for farmer mental health.

The OFA is joining other agricultural stakeholders, researchers from the University of Guelph, and mental health professionals in calling for the establishment of a Provincial Centre for Farmer Mental Health and Wellness to be housed at the University of Guelph. This Centre would provide a well-organized, systematic approach to developing easily accessible, evidence-based resources and interventions for farmers and rural residents.



Historically, government programming and assistance has focused on economic support and business risk management. There is, however, a significant deficit in the support available to farmers when it comes to their mental health. We need to do better and the farming community needs access to the generous support offered by the Ontario government.

OFA looks forward to working with you and the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care to secure a long-term funding commitment to support the development of mental health resources and training for Ontario's agricultural community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keith Currie', is positioned below the word 'Sincerely,'.

Keith Currie
President