

May 17, 2019

The Honourable Lisa Thompson
Minister of Education
5th Floor, 438 University Ave
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Via email: minister.edu@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Thompson,

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is Canada's largest voluntary general farm organization, representing more than 38,000 farm family businesses across Ontario. These farm businesses form the backbone of a robust food system and rural communities with the potential to drive the Ontario economy forward.

To keep farm families on the farm and maintain their substantial contributions to the economy, farmers require access to a variety of affordable services and infrastructure. This includes our schools. Schools play a very important role in rural communities. Not only are the schools a place where our children spend a large portion of their days being educated; they are also our children's playgrounds, adult learning centres, child care centres, community centres, recreational facilities, and meeting halls. Without such facilities available, it becomes difficult to maintain a viable population and economic base in rural areas.

Education was a topic of discussion at the OFA's Annual General Meeting in November 2018 and the following two resolutions were passed:

THAT the Ontario Federation of Agriculture lobby the provincial government to implement regulatory oversight of school boards and strengthen the role of municipal and county council in decisions impacting education in their communities.

THAT the Ontario Federation of Agriculture lobby the provincial government to incorporate an addition to the educational curriculum, focusing on Modern Agriculture and its associated practices.

It is very important that the Province of Ontario periodically review the education curriculum with the goal of aligning both the skills and knowledge that our children require in order to prosper throughout their life.

One very important element of knowledge that is currently insufficiently presented to our children revolves around agriculture and the food they eat. Learning about modern day agriculture and nutrition will help our children make informed decisions as adults that will contribute to their long-term health and well-being. Modern agriculture is a very complex system, that relies on the use of technology, science (chemistry, biology, environment), and an understanding of finance. It is reflected in all aspects of the curriculum – explaining our history and geography (settlement patterns), science, math, business, and health.

OFA recommends that the Ministry staff work with the organization AgScape (<https://agscape.ca/index>). AgScape has developed grade and curriculum appropriate lesson plans that are factually and scientifically accurate.

In addition to the Province's consultation on aspects of the existing education curriculum, it must be acknowledged that the physical school(s) and their relationship to the local community are also important considerations in our children's education. All the work on the curriculum will not mean anything if our rural children do not have a school to attend. The process for assessing school accommodations needs significant work to ensure the needs and rights of all our children are met regardless of where they live.

The Ministry needs to work with rural communities and parents to ensure the best decisions are made, while acknowledging the financial implications. This should include consideration of regulatory oversight of school boards, and an increased role for municipal and county councils in decisions impacting education in their communities.

We would be pleased to further pursue these considerations at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Keith Currie
President