

April 2, 2020

Honourable Jeff Yurek
Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
5th Floor
777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON
M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Yurek:

The OFA would like to join the OFVGA in raising concerns regarding number of Ontario farmers and vendors who are now unable to renew their pesticide safety certifications this spring. As a preventative measure to slow the spread of COVID-19, the Ontario Pesticide Education Program (OPEP) cancelled in-person community certification and training courses from March 14, 2020 onwards. Therefore, farmers whose certifications have expired or will soon expire are left unable to legally purchase and use Class 2 or 3 pesticides for the upcoming growing season.

The current situation leaves about 1,375 farmers and 141 vendors currently unable to fulfill certification requirements between March 14 through the end of April.

While we understand that the options of increasing online and other alternatives to in-person courses are under consideration – these will take at minimum a few weeks to put in place and not be timely to allow for an efficient delivery prior to spring planting and practical on-farm needs. In addition, the online delivery is difficult for some of our members who do not have suitable broadband access from their homes to participate in the rigorous program outline.

The OFA strongly supports the request of the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks to extend pesticide certificates, which have expiry dates anytime in 2020 for farmers and vendors who have been unable to recertify this year to December 31, 2020.

An alternative solution would be to allow growers and vendors to each have an extension to their existing licences by 1 year from their individual expiry dates. This would ensure that the recertification process could be managed and spread out over a reasonable period of time for OPEP delivery, rather than having 1,500 certifications expire in a single month.

We feel the risk to food safety, environment and human health is low, as these farmers and vendors have successfully completed certification within the past six years. The province has given Ontarians a reprieve on renewing driver's licences, health cards and licence plate stickers during the COVID-19 pandemic and we would respectfully request that a similar reprieve be offered immediately to Ontario's farmers.

I would be more than happy to discuss this with you or your staff in more detail at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Keith Currie
President

cc: Honourable Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs
Bill George, Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association
Dave Buttenham, Ontario Agri-Business Association
Markus Haerle, Grain Farmers of Ontario