



## A FARMER'S COMMITMENT:

Putting food  
on your table.  
Keeping our  
workers safe.

### An open letter to the people of Norfolk,

My name is Dusty Zamecnik, and I'm the fourth generation of my family to live and work on our farm here in Norfolk County. We're Ontario's largest commercial wholesale producer of high bush blueberries; you'll see our berries in the large grocery chains in July and August. We additionally grow strawberry plants for commercial farmers in Canada and the U.S.

Just as it has for everyone across Ontario and Canada, COVID-19 has made our lives a balancing act as we work hard to grow food while adjusting our business and our local and international workforces to this new normal.

For us, our workers are like family: we're all in this together and we've made changes across everything we do to help keep everyone safe. Many of our international employees are still arriving and as soon as they get here, they complete a two-week quarantine with daily health checks.

Groups of workers who live together also work together to minimize community spread and we've done as much as possible to limit how often they need to go to town. We have set up a store on-site where they can get all of their groceries, as well as clothing and shoes that have been donated from the local community. We provide PPE and we lead by example when it comes to wearing masks and keeping distance.

We've had employees through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) on our farm since the 1960s, and we treat them as if they're family - we work side by side and we don't ask them to do anything that we wouldn't also do. Some of our employees have been coming here for 15 to 20 years and are an integral piece of running this farm.

SAWP is essential to growing fruits and vegetables here in Ontario and our employees take the skills and knowledge they learn here back home to support their families and their communities, including by developing businesses there.

We're not doing nearly as many innovation trials this year or running other projects that take a lot of management, so that we can focus instead on growing food and providing a safe work environment. Food security is our priority second only to the health and safety of our employees and our community.

Everyone is constantly learning more about COVID-19 as this pandemic progresses. It can strike anywhere and we all have to be constantly vigilant and adapting our efforts to keep people safe as things change to ensure food production the entire year through and into the future.

Our industry is addressing issues as they arise and quickly taking steps to keep them from happening again. Recent outbreaks on some Ontario farms, for example, have been linked to unregulated local recruitment agencies whose contract workers moved from farm to farm with adhering to proper protocols.

As growers, we all can play our part in reducing community spread by limiting movement of local temporary workers from one farm to another and keeping teams of local and international employees separate from each other.

It's also really important to make sure employees know their rights for job and income protection if they have to go into isolation, and to help them feel safe by leading by example and holding ourselves to the same standards that we and others are asking of them. Our industry organization, the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, is working with all levels of government to provide COVID-19 health and safety guidelines and training for growers.

Personally, we are continually encouraging the community and all parties to support these amazing people. We work year-round to make our farm and Norfolk feel like home when they are away from theirs and if there was ever a year to support one another above and beyond, this would be it.

Great things can be achieved when people work together. Our common goals are keeping people safe and growing food, and I'm proud of what everyone at EZ Grow Farms is doing to make those happen.

Yours truly,

**Dusty Zamecnik**, blueberry grower & plant nurseryman  
Langton Ontario

