April 21, 2021

Honourable Christine Elliott
Minister of Health and Deputy Premier
College Park 5th Floor
777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Honourable Sylvia Jones
Solicitor General
George Drew Bldg 18th Floor
25 Grosvenor St.
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y6

Honourable Ernie Hardeman
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
11th Floor, 77 Grenville St.
Toronto, ON M7A 1B3

Dear Ministers,

Re: Farm and Food Workers and COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture sincerely appreciates the incredible complexity of vaccine procurement and distribution facing the federal and provincial levels of government, as well as the public health units across the province.

Over the past year, the farm and agri-food sector has stepped up to the challenge of providing a strong, stable food supply for Ontarians, Canadians and global export markets. This would not be possible without the thousands of individuals working across the agriculture and food sector, from farm to fork. Our sector has taken the calling of essential workers in support of the entire food supply system seriously and with success, focused both on family and employee health and continued supply of food.

We appreciate that people who live and work in high-risk congregate settings, including our seasonal agricultural workers, have been prioritized as part of the Phase 2 rollout plan for the province of Ontario and we are encouraged to see progress in vaccination of our valued essential foreign workers — including the recent implementation of the airport vaccination program. In addition, we appreciate that agriculture and farm workers have been further identified as part of the Phase 2 rollout plan.
We understand that vaccine supply is limited. As our vaccine supply increases, the OFA strongly encourages the province and the public health units to elevate the farm and food processing communities in vaccination prioritization. Farmers and food processing employees are indeed essential front-line workers, and we encourage the province to review and reconsider the language in Phase 2 which suggests that essential workers are only those that do not work from home. The farm is a home but also a place of work for our members. This distinction of working from home for the farm community overlooks farmers who work from home also travel to deliver their products and other goods and services to various locations. They often have employees and are working in close proximity.

When an essential worker gets a COVID-19 vaccine, they protect themselves, their families, co-workers and their communities. The health and safety of this sector is critical to ensure the availability of a safe and plentiful food supply for Ontarians.

Sincerely,

Peggy Brekveld
President
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