



April 28, 2021

The Honourable Jeff Yurek
Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
5th Floor
777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON
M7A 2J3
Sent via email to: minister.mecp@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Yurek:

Re: Request to Extend the Validation Period of Expiring Pesticide Safety Certificates

The Ontario Agri Business Association (OABA), the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), and Grain Farmers of Ontario have heard concerns from Ontario vendors and farmers who cannot renew their pesticide safety certifications this spring.

The Ontario Agri Business Association (OABA) is a voluntary, non-profit trade association representing the collective interests of crop input, grain elevator, feed manufacturing and allied businesses operating out of approximately 500 locations throughout Ontario, representing \$15.2 Billion in annual sales.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) proudly represents more than 38,000 farm family members across the province, supporting our members and the agri-food industry on issues, legislation and regulations governed by all levels of government. OFA works to ensure the agri-food sector and our rural communities are included, consulted and considered in any new and changing legislation that impacts the sustainability of our farm businesses. We are the leading agricultural advocate for Ontario farmers, their businesses and their communities.

Grain Farmers of Ontario is the province's largest commodity organization, representing Ontario's 28,000 barley, corn, oat, soybean, and wheat farmers. The crops they grow cover over 6 million acres of farm land across the province, generate over \$4.1 billion in production value, result in over \$18 billion in economic output and are responsible for over 75,000 jobs in the province.

Our groups greatly appreciated that in early 2020, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) extended the validation period of expiring pesticide safety certifications due to

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the COVID-19 pandemic. Growers and vendors whose certification expired on or after January 1, 2020 were granted an extension until December 31, 2020. This allowed approximately 1,400 Ontario growers to continue to purchase and use the products they needed for the 2020 growing season. Since the last provincial shutdown, the Ontario Pesticide Education Program (OPEP) certified approximately 2,200 growers through their online course and physically distanced in-person courses, when allowed. Due to the third wave of the pandemic, the province implemented another lockdown until at least May 20, 2021. Prior to the current shutdown, OPEP had approximately 700 growers registered for in-person sessions in April, which have since been cancelled. As the growing season begins for Ontario farmers, the province has not returned to “business-as-usual”, and farmers must recertify using the virtual course, or be left unable to legally purchase and use Class B or C pesticides for the upcoming growing season.

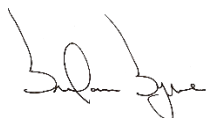
While we appreciate that growers have the option to recertify online, our groups are concerned that online-only delivery is difficult for a significant number of Ontario farmers who do not have suitable broadband access. On OPEP’s website, it states that a high-speed internet connection is required to enroll in the course. Access to high-speed internet in rural and remote areas of Ontario is an ongoing struggle. OFA’s 2020 broadband survey showed 62% of participants had unreliable internet access. Rural Ontarians are left without a viable alternative to online courses to renew expiring certificates if they don’t have access to high-speed internet.

We respectfully request MECP extend pesticide certificates which have an expiry date in 2021 for farmers who have been unable to recertify this year to December 31, 2021. An alternative solution would be to allow growers a one-year extension from their individual expiry dates.

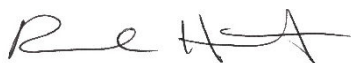
Our groups feel the risk to food safety, environment and human health is low, as these farmers have successfully completed either certification or recertification within the past six years. The province has given Ontarians a reprieve on renewing driver’s licences, health cards and licence plate stickers during the COVID-19 pandemic and we would respectfully request that a similar reprieve be offered immediately to Ontario’s farmers. Extending these certifications dates will allow Ontario’s growers to continue to purchase and use the products they need for the 2021 season and allows vendors to continue selling pesticides.

We look forward to discussing this with you or your staff in more detail at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Brendan Byrne, Chair
Grain Farmers of Ontario



Russel Hurst, Executive Director
Ontario Agri Business Association



Peggy Brekvel, President
Ontario Federation of Agriculture

cc: Honourable Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs
Susan Fitzgerald, Ontario Certified Crop Advisor Association