

May 28, 2024

Hon. Sylvia Jones
Minister of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, ON
M7A 2J3

Dear Minister Jones,

RE: Value-for-Money Audit: Public Health Ontario

On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), I am writing with regards to the recommendations contained within Office of the Auditor General of Ontario's "Value for Money Audit: Public Health Ontario".


OFA proudly represents more than 38,000 farm businesses across the province, supporting our members and the agriculture industry on issues, legislation and regulations governed by all levels of government. We are the leading agricultural advocate for Ontario farmers, their businesses and their communities.

We are concerned with the recommendation from the Auditor General of Ontario to discontinue offering free microbial private water well testing. A study in 2019 estimated that approximately 1.6 million people in Ontario are dependent on private wells. It is imperative that this testing remain available, free of charge to these residents. It not only provides assurances as to the safety of the drinking water, but by being tested by local Public Health Units, it also enables a means of ensuring the safety of the aquifer that may serve a large portion of the local population. This important collection of data and tracking is simply not possible if residents were to use private laboratories. The mission of Public Health Ontario is to "enable informed decisions and actions that protect and promote health and contribute to reducing health inequities." Removing this very important service provided to private well owners, who do not have access to municipal drinking water, would perpetuate health inequities.

We do appreciate your statement to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on April 16, 2024 that "The ministry has not made any decisions about changes to the provincial well water testing program, including which laboratories conduct testing of water samples." We understand that to date, no changes have been made to the existing private water well testing. OFA urges the province to not proceed with the recommended phase-out of free private well water testing in Ontario, now, or at a later date.

Furthermore, OFA has concerns regarding the proposed closure of some public health laboratories. Ultimately, the streamlining of public health laboratories must ensure that the integrity of samples to be tested can be maintained given the need to consider additional the travel time to different laboratories, and a reasonable processing time for results. Residents across all of Ontario, but specifically our rural and northern residents must be assured of equivalent if not improved service by these changes, with no additional processing fees.

Sincerely,



Drew Spoelstra
President

cc: Hon. Lisa Thompson, Minister, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Hon. Andrea Khanjin, Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
Shelley Spence, Auditor General of Ontario
OFA Board of Directors