



June 17, 2024

Honourable Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health

Re: Recommended Phase Out of Free Well Water Testing in the 2023 Auditor General's Report

Dear Minister Jones,

The Northumberland Federation of Agriculture represents over 750 farm families and works in partnership with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) to be the voice of agriculture in Northumberland County. We are part of a vibrant and innovative industry, taking pride in feeding our communities and our country.

In December 2023, the Auditor General released "*Value for Money Audit, Public Health Ontario*". Within this report there are two recommendations that will directly impact our members.

The first and most concerning is the proposal to end free microbial private water well testing. A 2019 study estimated that 1.6 million people in Ontario rely on private wells as their sole source of drinking water. We ask that you do not move forward with the recommended phase-out of free private water well testing.

The second proposal that is causing concern in our rural communities is the proposal to "streamline public health laboratory operations." A recommendation to close six of the eleven public health laboratories based on usage data collected during the pandemic would have negatively skewed the results. If these laboratories are closed, how will the government assure rural residents that the integrity of samples can be maintained due to the resulting increased travel and processing time. Northern and rural residents need access to "close to source" public laboratories to ensure well water testing safeguards.

Further, we have supported the work our local Source Water Protection Committees have undertaken to protect private well water sources. These committees access the private drinking water test data that Public Health Ontario has maintained. This data is used regularly to inform well owners of water quality concerns in the region that could be associated with health risks.

Safe drinking water is key to health! We ask that as Minister you support northern and rural Ontario residents by maintaining the service of free private well water testing and not closing rurally located public laboratories.

Sincerely,
Allan Carruthers
President, Northumberland Federation of Agriculture

Cc: Honourable Lisa Thompson, Minister of Rural Affairs
Honourable Rob Flack, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness
Honourable Andrea Khanjin, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
Honourable David Piccini, Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills
Development
Dr. Natalie Bocking, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge
District Health Unit
Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Kieran Moore
Drew Spoelstra, President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture