

August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

Emergency Management Policy and Governance Branch  
Emergency Management Ontario  
Treasury Board Secretariat  
315 Front Street West  
Toronto, ON M7A 0B8

Sent via e-mail to: [EMOPolicy@Ontario.ca](mailto:EMOPolicy@Ontario.ca)

Dear Emergency Management Policy and Governance Branch,

**Re: ERO # 019-8860: Engagement on Proposed Modernization of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act***

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is the largest general farm organization in Ontario, proudly representing more than 38,000 farm family members across the province. OFA has a strong voice for our members and the agri-food industry on issues, legislation and regulations governed by all levels of government. We work to ensure the agri-food sector, and our rural communities are included, consulted, and considered in any new and changing legislation, regulations, and policies that impact the sustainability and growth of our farm businesses. OFA is the leading agricultural advocate for Ontario farmers, their businesses, and their communities.

OFA appreciates this opportunity to provide input on the Proposed Modernization of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*. **We believe that emergency management in Ontario must include agricultural emergencies and food security as a top priority.**

To enhance Ontario's emergency management framework, proactive measures with private entities and other stakeholders should be prioritized. Establishing Mutual Aid Agreements (MAAs) before emergencies occur can provide clear communication, guidance, and formal collaboration opportunities. These agreements delineate critical tasks and distinct responsibilities, ensuring a cohesive response from all parties involved. In addition, the legislative framework should emphasize the need for a flexible yet clearly defined structure. Rather than assigning rigid roles to provincial actors, the framework should focus on general definitions of roles and responsibilities. This approach allows for better mapping of involvement and intersectional coordination among government levels, ministries, agencies, stakeholders, and private parties. A proactive, clearly structured plan that can be rapidly scaled based on the incident's severity is essential for an effective response.

Given the recent experiences with natural disasters, such as the Derecho storm of 2022, it's crucial to address the specific needs of agricultural emergencies.

## Managing Agricultural Emergencies

The Derecho storm of May 2022 resulted in significant damages for farmers in Eastern Ontario. With winds reaching 190 km/h, the storm caused extensive damage to farm infrastructure, crops, and livestock. Many farmers faced significant financial losses due to destroyed buildings, equipment, and production systems, which were exacerbated by the lack of comprehensive insurance coverage for such events.

OFA surveyed our members in Eastern Ontario after the storm and found that:

- 92% of respondents experienced damage to their farm as a result of the storm.
- 44% of respondents reported damage to their crops and livestock.
- 47% of respondents indicated that the storm caused a delay in their production season.
- Only 53% of respondents indicated that they had insurance coverage that covered damages caused by the storm. However, the majority of respondents indicated that they did not receive adequate payouts from insurance.
- Only 20% of respondents who suffered crop damage received a payment from Production Insurance.

At OFA's 2022 Annual General Meeting, we received a resolution from the Ottawa Federation of Agriculture that highlighted the gaps in Ontario's municipal emergency programs, particularly the Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians. Despite the storm impacting many farmers across Eastern Ontario, only a small portion of farmers were deemed eligible for compensation.

The significant impacts of the Derecho storm and the lack of response and recovery support from existing programs highlights the need for an agricultural focus in Ontario's emergency management strategy. **The Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians program should be revised to ensure that adequate funding is available to help recover from natural disasters**, such as the Derecho storm of 2022. Additionally, the guidelines should be clear and ensure assistance is provided to all who were impacted by the same natural disaster, regardless of which municipality they happen to be in.

While the consultation discussion document covers a comprehensive range of emergencies, including natural disasters such as wildfires and floods, as well as technological hazards like cyber-attacks, **it's important that threats to our farming sector and food production are included as a focus in Ontario's emergency management framework.**

**Ontario's farming sector is vulnerable to emergencies ranging from extreme weather events, market disruptions, and animal health emergencies.** When widespread emergencies impact Ontario farmers, our food supply is put at risk. In these events, a rapid response is critical to protect animal welfare, public health, food safety, the environment, maintain a secure food supply chain, and protect our economy.

Given the nature of agricultural emergencies, Ontario needs an emergency management framework that is proactive, clearly structured, and has adequate resources to implement it. That means that the response to the agricultural emergency must be scalable depending on the size and nature of the emergency.


Managing agricultural emergencies requires education on the key risks, proactive measures to minimize those risks, and vigilant monitoring and communication of changing events. Municipalities have a significant role to play in preventing agricultural emergencies.

Communication is a vital part of emergency mitigation. However, to be effective, all relevant parties must receive the message and education to mitigate risk. Consider the case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), which is found to be present in Ontario. There are established channels to easily reach chicken farmers and provide education on how to spot the symptoms and transmission of HPAI and communicate best practices for biosecurity, depopulation, disposal protocols, and all the other steps required to manage HPAI.

However, chicken farmers are not the only parties that need to be educated on the risk of HPAI. There has been a significant increase in non-farmers keeping backyard chickens in municipalities across Ontario. Only 49% of municipalities have by-laws that regulate and control the keeping of backyard chickens, and 31% of those municipalities with by-laws in place allow for residents to keep backyard chickens. Individuals keeping backyard chickens are not only less experienced and knowledgeable of best practices to prevent the spread of HPAI, but they are extremely difficult to reach as they don't belong to a regular livestock network. This is a significant gap in preparing for this type of emergency as domestic chickens can contract and spread HPAI. That is where municipalities can play a crucial role in communicating risks and educating owners of backyard chickens on best management practices. These types of threats are not unique to chicken producers and is merely one example of the many biosecurity threats Ontario's livestock producers face and underscores the need for municipalities to play a bigger role in managing these threats.

OFA appreciates the opportunity to provide an agricultural perspective on the proposed modernization of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*.

Sincerely,



Drew Spoelstra  
President

cc: Hon. Trevor Jones, Associate Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response  
Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan, Minister of Emergency Preparedness  
Hon. Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing of Ontario  
Hon. Rob Flack, Minister, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness  
OFA Board of Directors