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Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada  
1341 Baseline Road,  
Ottawa, ON  
K1A 0C5

Submitted by email to: [AAFC.AqEM-GUAq.AAC@agr.gc.ca](mailto:AAFC.AqEM-GUAq.AAC@agr.gc.ca).

## **RE: Emergency Management Framework for Agriculture in Canada**

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is pleased to provide comments to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) regarding renewal efforts to modernize and adapt the 2016 Emergency Management Framework for Agriculture in Canada. OFA is the largest general farm organization in Ontario, proudly representing more than 38,000 farm family members. OFA has a strong voice for our members and the agri-food industry on issues, legislation and regulations administered by all levels of government. We are passionate and dedicated to ensuring that the agri-food sector and rural communities are considered and consulted with for any new or changing legislation that would impact the sustainability and growth of our farm businesses.

The Emergency Management Framework is now eight years old, and after the COVID-19 global pandemic, there have been significant lessons learned about how we manage emergencies at the local, provincial, and federal levels. We are pleased to see AAFC engaging in this consultation to improve the Framework and incorporate what we have learned over the past eight years.

### **OFA Response to the Discussion Questions**

#### **1. What is your current role in emergency management in the agriculture and agri-food system?**

OFA is a general farm organization representing the interests of our members on a wide range of issues. We generally do not provide emergency response services other than to act as a trusted source and conduit for information during emergencies. Our primary role is to advise government during discussions of emergency management prevention and mitigation and communicate ways that our membership can be better prepared to respond to emergencies affecting their farm operation, the commodity they grow, or the agricultural sector as a whole.

During times of crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic, OFA leveraged our grassroots connection with our membership and provincial level communications channels to provide health and safety advice.

**2. In your opinion, is there any relevant information or gaps that should be added to the 2016 Framework? If so, what is missing?**

In the course of our review, we identified a number of potential gaps and areas for consideration in a revised Framework:

- Target Audience and Implementation of the Framework
  - Unclear who the target audience is for this framework. How is this framework to be used by its various stakeholders?
  - Additional clarity is needed to support the implementation of this framework so that it could be effectively leveraged in preparing an emergency management plan.
  - How could this framework be applied at a local level?
  - Guidance could be given to support the development of local emergency plans
- More emphasis on the importance of communication
  - Roadmap for communication – how information is shared during and after an incident
  - Crisis communication – ensuring that clear, concise information is available and monitoring of social media disinformation
- Capacity Building for those implicated in the framework

**3. Are the Roles and Responsibilities in the Framework accurately reflected?**

- Roles and responsibilities could be more defined. While the existing list in Annex 2 provides a starting point, additional clarification and details could be added, including:
  - The responsibilities are quite generalized and need additional detail.
  - Define who is considered a producer organization
  - Who is responsible for funding response and recovery efforts?
  - During the response phase, who are producers and industry supported to report to?  
How?
  - What is the threshold for when incidents need to be reported through this framework?
- Need to consider the capacity of commodity groups. There needs to be a recognition that of small organizations may not have the capacity to accomplish the tasks being assigned to them in this document. The framework needs to also recognize the need for capacity building and additional support.
- Need a Roadmap for communication – how and to whom information is expected to flow in an emergency.

**4. Are there any emerging threats not mentioned in the Framework that could pose a risk to Emergency Management in the food system?**

- Emerging threats that are not mentioned in the existing Framework include:
  - Mental health
  - Role of technology as a significant risk to production – i.e. cybersecurity
  - Market interruptions, including border closures and market access

**5. Are there any lessons learned from your experience over the last five years that would be valuable for our understanding and policy development?**

- Farmers need to see their interests reflected in the Framework. A comprehensive Emergency Management Framework must acknowledge the impact of market interruption in addition to reducing impact on people and property (this could be better stated)
- Clarity that primary purpose of this framework is for the well-being of people first, and then business continuity and animals.
- Crisis communications structure. Good communication is key.
  - Importance of early communication
  - Importance of accurate information
  - Importance of transparency – acknowledging mistakes when they occur
- Need for capacity building for agencies and organizations.
  - Recognizing the HR component to emergency response – in some situations, there are limited
  - Educating responding organization.
  - Volunteer management – means of coordinating volunteer human resources like someone who speaks Spanish who volunteers to help with TFWs during an emergency.
- Recognize the mental health impacts on producers and other responders, including veterinarians. Refer them to the support resources that are available.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our feedback and agricultural perspectives on this Framework. We look forward to working with the federal government and other stakeholders to preserve the safety of our food system and those that work within the agricultural sector.

Sincerely,



Drew Spoelstra  
President