

**Ministry of Agriculture,
Food and Rural Affairs**

Office of the Minister

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**Ministère de l'Agriculture, de
l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales**

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March 31, 2021

His Worship Nelson Santos
Mayor
Town of Kingsville
nsantos@kingsville.ca

Dear Mayor Santos:

I appreciated the opportunity to meet with you and your delegation during the 2021 ROMA Conference and to hear what matters to your community. In these challenging times our ability to converse and keep the lines of communication open is more important than ever. I appreciate as well that we were able to continue our conversation when we met on February 18th.

Thank you for sharing your concerns about the Temporary Foreign Worker program with me – I understand how very important this issue is. One of our government's top priorities is to guard against the spread of COVID-19 in agri-food workplaces so that worker health and safety is protected, and Ontario's food supply chain remains strong.

We are working collaboratively with our municipal, provincial and federal partners, and with the farming community to help protect farm worker safety and wellness, and maintain the sustainability and viability of the agri-food sector.

Developed in consultation with the agri-food industry, [the Prevention, Control and Outbreak Support Strategy for COVID-19 in Ontario's Farm Workers](#) provides COVID-19 prevention and control guidance to the province's food supply chain.

November's Ontario budget added \$25.5 million over three years for the new Agri-food Prevention and Control Innovation Program aimed at supporting a workplace's efforts to innovate and invest in new technologies for the health and safety of workers.

Farmers and their workers have access to an [online toolkit](#) that outlines the available supports in multiple languages, including information about prevention, outbreak isolation supports, health and wellness assessments, social supports, and their workplace rights and responsibilities.

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The Ontario government is encouraging the use of rapid antigen testing as an enhanced screening tool for essential sectors, including labour intensive primary agricultural production, food processing and key distribution centres. The newly launched program allows employers to add an additional safety measure in high-risk and essential workplaces, to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Agri-food employers who are interested in participating can contact omafra.labour@ontario.ca.

We are encouraged by the federal government's commitment to improve housing for temporary foreign workers, especially in light of the challenges brought on by COVID-19 and we look forward to the opportunity to be part of this important initiative and will look to the federal government to bring more clarity and consistency to Canada's housing standards. We also want to ensure the federal government takes into consideration the views and recommendations of Ontario's agriculture sector in any strategy being developed.

My ministry provides funding through programs such as the [Enhanced Agri-food Workplace Protection Program](#) (EAWPP). Last year we allocated more than \$25 million to this program in response to Ontario producer needs to support health and safety on their farms including worker housing and PPE. In the recent Ontario budget, we announced an additional \$10 million in funding for this program.

I also provided feedback to the federal government's housing consultation, where we indicated the importance of ensuring the continued health and safety of Ontario's agriculture workforce, the overall well-being of rural communities in the province, food security for Canadians, and the continued economic viability of the agriculture and agri-food sector.

I will continue to work hard for our farmers and our rural communities and by working together, I have confidence we will succeed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ernie Hardeman', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Ernie Hardeman
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

COVID-19 Reminders

- For vaccination booking details visit: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/book-vaccine/>
- Follow your local public health/safety measures: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/zones-and-restrictions>
- Practice physical distancing – stay 2 metres away from others in public
- Get the facts - www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-stop-spread