



July 15th, 2020

Honourable Ernie Hardeman
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
11th Floor
77 Grenville St.
Toronto, ON
M5S 1B3

Dear Minister Hardeman:

RE The Ontario Immigrant Nomination Program (OINP)

On behalf of Meat & Poultry Ontario, Beef Farmers of Ontario, Canadian Meat Council, Food and Beverage Ontario, Ontario Sheep Farmers, Ontario Pork, Ontario Turkey, Veal Farmers of Ontario and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, we are writing in follow up to our discussion last month about the needs and opportunities of our livestock, poultry and processing sector to ensure viability, sustainability and prosperity post-COVID-19. One of the key limitations to our sector as identified in our discussion is access to labour.

The Ontario Immigrant Nomination Program (OINP) was mentioned as a means of alleviating the chronic labour shortage in the spectrum of agriculture and agri-food sectors. While we know this program will not entirely satisfy our labour needs, we would like to communicate our strong support for any amendments that can be made that will allow Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) a pathway to becoming a permanent part of the Ontario labour force.

TFWs are a key to the success of the agriculture and agri-food sector and while we support the principle of providing jobs to Canadians first, we recognize foreign labour will also be required to fill a significant and ever-increasing shortfall in farm and processing labour. Labour Market Inventory (LMI) research completed by the Canadian Agricultural Human Resources Council (CAHRC) details how severe this labour gap has become and the impact it has on the growth potential of the agriculture and agri-food sector.

OFA has provided formal comments to both 2019 and 2020 Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation, and Trade (MEDJCT) consultations supporting their goals of improving the responsiveness of the OINP to current labour market needs. Some of these needs are exacerbated now in the COVID-19 environment.

We can see the potential of this program to provide Ontario's farms and food processors who have year-round occupations with a more stable, skilled workforce, improve their international competitiveness, and continue to provide employment to Canadians but there are a number of barriers remain that restrict the applicability of In-Demand Stream of the OINP to the agricultural and agri-food sector and act as red tape getting between fully qualified workers and their farm and food processing employers who value and want to keep the practical experience and skills of their employees for the long term.

One of the barriers that could be reduced or eliminated is by having the OINP In-Demand Stream follow the same guidelines as the *Federal Agri-food Immigration Pilot Program* that was announced in spring 2019. This pilot program is expected to make the eligibility criteria for permanent residency more flexible and practical for year-round agri-food TFWs and their employers. The Federal Agri-food Immigration Pilot (AFIP) Program provides a flexible approach to the education criteria that now include accepting a high school certificate and transcripts from the worker's home country (i.e. not Canadian or Ontario equivalency), with an educational credential assessment (ECA) report by an officially recognized organization or professional body. This alignment would increase the utility of the In-Demand Stream make immigration more accessible for farm workers.

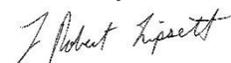
Secondly, because our farms and food processors rely on a range of technical skills that span across multiple National Occupational Classifications (NOCs), we believe that urgently updating the range of agri-food related skill levels and occupational classifications that are eligible for the In-Demand Stream can also increase the utility of this program. We suggest including¹:

- 0821 - Managers in agriculture (A)
- 8252 - Agricultural service contractors, farm supervisors and specialized livestock workers (B)
- 8431 - General farm workers (C)*
- 6331 Butchers, meat cutters and fishmongers – retail and wholesale (B) (2011 NOC)
- 9462 Industrial Butchers and Meat Cutters, Poultry Preparers and Related Workers (C)*
- 9617 Labourers in Food, Beverage and Tobacco Processing (meat products processing labourers) (D)

Improving the OINP In-Demand Stream has the potential to address the growing gap for trained, permanent workers facing the agriculture and food-processing sector in Ontario. Improving long-term access to labour will significantly help Ontario's farm and food sector improve its international competitiveness and economic performance with no additional cost to the taxpayer.

We look forward to working with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and MEDJCT to facilitate the immigration of trained, skilled workers to rural communities with the goal of growing existing businesses and attracting new opportunities for regional economic development in Ontario.

Sincerely,



Rob Lipsett, President
Beef Farmers of Ontario

¹ Skill level associated with each NOC is indicated in parentheses; asterisk indicates NOC currently eligible for In-Demand Stream.

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