

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

Office of the Minister

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**Ministère de l'Agriculture, de
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Ontario

March 16, 2021

Gary Sands
SVP, Public Policy and Advocacy
Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers
garys@cfg.ca

Dear Mr. Sands:

Our government is committed to doing everything we can to keep our agriculture and food supply chains strong during this difficult time. I want to thank you for all that you are doing to ensure your members, business, and Ontario's food supply stay healthy and strong.

Since I last wrote, we have continued working with municipal, provincial, federal and industry partners to reinforce public health protocols around maintaining [physical distancing](#), frequent hand washing, [wearing a mask](#) and [other important public health advice](#) including self-isolation requirements. Our work includes enhanced testing, education and guidelines for employers and workers, increased inspections of agri-food businesses, and improved data sharing between partners to better understand the transmission, control and prevention of COVID-19.

I wanted to take this opportunity to share some resources that may be helpful in ensuring that your new protocols reflect the most up to date best practices.

Our government is providing resources and information to help keep your workers safe and healthy and your business in operation during COVID-19. You can find more information on those guidelines on the [food manufacturing and processing health and safety during COVID-19](#) website including this [video](#) about COVID-19 safety specifically for food processors. Additional webinars are being planned and, as it becomes available, more information will be shared at the website : <http://omafra.gov.on.ca/english/about/webinar-registration.htm>.

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The Provincial Antigen Screening Program is a newly launched program that allows employers in priority settings to add an additional safety measure in high-risk and essential workplaces to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Ontario continues to deploy these tests on an ongoing basis and is expanding their use into more agri-food businesses to quickly identify and help stop the spread of COVID-19. This includes essential sectors, such as primary agricultural production, food and beverage processing and key distribution centres.

A rapid antigen test can be performed anywhere (i.e. on-site, at the place of employment) by a health professional or other trained individuals. It takes approximately 15 minutes to yield results.

Rapid antigen screening does not replace existing workplace infection prevention and control measures such as symptom screening, physical distancing, masking, and hand hygiene. It adds an additional layer of protection to potentially prevent a person with COVID-19 from entering the workplace who would have otherwise gone undetected. Early detection can help to prevent virus spread.

Frequent screening with antigen point-of-care tests increases the chances of early identification of cases in otherwise asymptomatic individuals.

For employers participating in the program, the provincial government will provide free rapid antigen test kits. Employers will have significant flexibility in the implementation of rapid antigen testing within their respective workplaces, so long as they adhere to the terms of the program agreement, which outlines the parameters for participation in the Provincial Antigen Screening Program.

Ontario has also released [guidance](#) for individuals or organizations that choose to participate in COVID-19 testing that falls outside of the public health care system, to ensure there is appropriate oversight and consumer protection and that public resources are supporting public health initiatives.

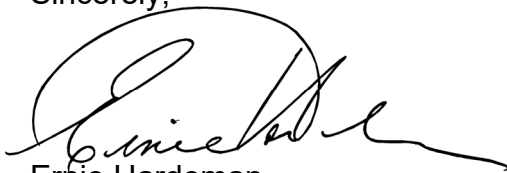
We continue to add the most recent information to the online COVID-19 toolkit for farmers and workers (www.Ontario.ca/covidfarmertoolkit). The toolkit outlines available supports, including information about prevention, outbreak isolation supports, health and wellness assessments, social supports and their workplace rights and responsibilities.

I encourage you and other individual or local businesses to work closely with your local health officials to confirm which protocols and other emergency orders are appropriate for their particular operation to ensure appropriate measures are in place, such as cleaning and disinfecting, and screening of individuals. Local public health units have authority in their own jurisdictions, and businesses must comply with any specific requirements that may apply.

These are exceptionally challenging times, and efforts to keep Ontario's agriculture and food supply chains operating are very much ongoing. As more information becomes available, I will continue to keep you updated on these and further initiatives.

Only together can we keep one another safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ernie Hardeman', with a large, stylized initial 'E'.

Ernie Hardeman
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

COVID-19 Reminders

- 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
- Wash your hands – with soap and water thoroughly and often
- Get the facts - www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-stop-spread