



March 30, 2020

The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Marie-Claude.Bibeau@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Bill Blair
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness
Bill.Blair@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Carla Qualtrough
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion
Carla.Qualtrough@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Deputy Prime Minister
Chrystia.Freeland@parl.gc.ca

Re: Impact to Canada's production and supply of fruits and vegetables

Sent via email.

Dear Honourable Ministers,

On behalf of the Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) – representing Canada's over 14,000 fruit and vegetable growers – I am writing to bring to your attention the potentially devastating impacts the delays and restrictions around receiving temporary foreign workers, and seasonal agricultural workers, is having and will continue to have on our sector throughout the year.

As you know, Canadian fruit and vegetable growers have depended on these programs to access a reliable supply of labour to meet their planting, growing and harvesting needs for decades. More than any other sector in agriculture, our growers have become dependent on these essential workers due to the seasonal nature of the work, the physical requirements, and their remote locations.

CHC recognizes that all sectors across agriculture are feeling the impacts of COVID-19. We have appreciated the action your government has taken so far in helping to ease the pressure that will be felt by businesses. However, steps must be taken to determine whose services are essential to the health of Canadians, throughout this crisis and beyond. [Countries around the globe](#) have already [warned of a shortage of fresh produce](#). If Canada does not take immediate action to address this, we will have severely hampered supplies of healthy fresh fruit and vegetables, not only this year, but into the following years as well.

On Friday, March 27, Employment and Social Development Canada released its guidance document for employers under SAWP and TFW-Ag Stream. It states that the employer cannot authorize the worker to work during the self-isolation period, even if requested by the worker, with the exception of those deemed as providing an essential service by the Chief Public Health Officer.

Each province, and some regions, have determined their own definition. Food has been included as critical on the government of Canada website: *Essential workers are considered critical to preserving life, health and basic societal functioning. This includes, but is not limited to, first responders, health care workers, critical infrastructure workers, hydro and natural gas, and workers who are essential to supply society by critical goods such as food and medicines*¹. We need clarity, through a federal definition, that the production of food and its supply chain is an essential service to ensure fairness and equity across the country and to give growers the supports they need to continue to provide a sustainable food supply to Canadians. Canada's fruit and vegetable growers are ready and able to take measures to ensure that the health and safety of their workers – and their communities – are top priority.

Many growers are facing imminent decisions regarding whether they should take on the considerable investments associated with bringing in TFWs. Right now, farmers are making the decision to plant or not. Some already have. It is therefore critical that we receive immediate clarity that the production of food is an essential service.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Brian Gilroy
President
Canadian Horticultural Council

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/preventing-covid-19-workplace-employers-employees-essential-service-workers.html>