



LONG-TERM THINKING FOR TODAY'S ISSUES

October 9, 2020

The Honourable Ernie Hardeman, MPP
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
77 Grenville St. 11th Floor
Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1B3
Delivered via email to: minister.omafra@ontario.ca

Re: Preparation for the FPT Agricultural Ministers' Conference

Dear Minister Hardeman,

The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) is an Accredited Farm Organization representing the interests of over 4,000 farm families in Ontario who are called to the vocation of farming. CFFO policy promotes economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable farming, advocating that farmers receive fair return for their production and stewardship efforts.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the discussion on business risk management programs, labour issues, as well as other ongoing issues for agriculture in preparation for the upcoming Annual Conference of Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Agriculture in November.

Our Recommendations:

Risk management programs, such as AgriStability and AgrilInvest, need to be available to a very broad spectrum of commodities, at levels that encourage strong participation to ensure coverage for difficult times. Practicing wise risk management should be rewarded. We are concerned for fair treatment for different commodities, different sizes of farms, and also for those who have stuck with BRM programs over the years. We urge you to work together with the federal government and other provinces and territories to make sure these programs are fair across sectors and for different sizes of farms. Ontario, in particular, has a significant number of small farms whose needs differ from much larger farms, especially those in other regions of Canada.

AgriStability – The CFFO recognizes that higher coverage levels are needed to help farms who are experiencing hard times. We support the request of several commodity groups, both national and provincial, to increase coverage from 70% to 85% to help those farmers who are in crisis. We recommend a return to 85% coverage in AgriStability starting in 2020.

AgrilInvest – This program is intended primarily to help farmers save during good years in case of a difficult year to come. The CFFO supports this principle and wants to see farmers encouraged to be able to sustain themselves through smaller fluctuations in overall farm income by practicing good management and saving in good years with the help of programs such as AgrilInvest.

We recommend that government matching for AgrilInvest be increased from 1% to 1.5% of Allowable Net Sales (ANS) to help encourage use of this program.

We also recommend stronger parameters around when participants may withdraw funds from AgriInvest accounts, in order to better encourage savings to be reserved for use in problematic years, rather than ordinary operational expenses. We recommend that participants be required to prove they are experiencing a year of loss in order to be able to withdraw the government matched portion from the account. This could be used as the bridge between years of profit and when AgriStability coverage is triggered. As a suggestion, we would recommend they need to prove 10% loss, according to the same methods of calculation used for AgriStability.

Labour

The CFFO continues to participate in working groups focused on the issue of labour and protecting the health and safety of farm workers in Ontario. This is a vital part of our overall agri-food system, especially for certain sectors such as horticulture.

We strongly encourage all levels of government to cooperate and coordinate to ensure clear, consistent regulations for the 2021 year for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, especially around regulations for housing requirements, but also for quarantine and other special measures to address the risk to farm workers because of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, there needs to be enough flexibility for accommodating the differences between farm businesses to find suitable on-farm solutions to meet the requirements to manage risk and protect workers.

We appreciate this opportunity to offer input on these key issues and I look forward to joining the conversation in the meeting on Tuesday.

Yours sincerely,



Ed Scharringa, President
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario