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LONG-TERM THINKING FOR TODAY'S ISSUES

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April 15, 2020.

Hon. Ernie Hardeman  
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs  
77 Grenville St., 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON  
M5S 1B3

## Re: Processing Responses to Market Changes

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 are writing to urge your government to work cooperatively and creatively, especially with processors, to prevent bottlenecks and allow food to get from producers to consumers in this rapidly changing marketplace.

With the emergency measures that have been implemented and government instructions to Ontario citizens to stay home and reduce their grocery shopping trips, consumer behaviour has changed dramatically. Before the arrival of COVID-19, a significant percentage of meals were consumed through restaurants or away from home. Now, the restaurant and hospitality industry, as well as school and university cafeterias, are closed or serving only minimally. This represents a sudden and dramatic change in how people are buying and consuming their food.

This has resulted in problems and bottlenecks in areas experiencing a new surge in demand, and languishing product in areas where demand has suddenly dropped. We saw a surge and then a drop in demand for many staples. This situation resulted in milk being dumped, cutbacks in quota for supply managed sectors as well as reduced demand in other sectors. However, as the new pattern of food consumption gets established, the food value chain needs to be able to nimbly respond to demand. Red tape must be removed to make sure products can efficiently be processed and get to customers.

On the whole food production has remained strong and demand remains strong. The main challenge is getting food processed, packaged and marketed through the new preferred value chain—to grocery stores for consumption at home.

We urge your government to work with processors to allow flexibility of regulations and creative solutions where possible so that problems like labeling (such as missing nutritional information) or other packaging issues (small or large packaging) can be overcome to still allow safe nutritious food to be

available for household purchase and use. We also ask that greater effort be made to help prevent food waste, especially because of processing or packaging issues.

The risk of sickness and absenteeism from self-isolation has affected workplaces in every sector. We recommend that government help support training of backup workers to ensure that employees are available to fulfill essential jobs in the food sector across the whole value chain.

We also raise the importance of charitable food distribution. There has been a significant increase in the need for food banks and access to other charitable sources of food. Where programs and facilities already served this need, we ask you to make workable regulations that will still allow this growing need to be met while protecting public health and safety.

In this time of crisis, maintaining Ontario's food security is vital. This means allowing processors to quickly adjust to changes in the market place, preventing food waste, trained workers to fulfill essential food system jobs and ensuring charitable organizations can deliver food to those who need it most.

Sincerely,



Ed Scharringa, President  
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario