

To: Ann-Marie Norio, Regional Clerk

From: Councillor Witteveen

Motion for consideration at Public Health and Social Services Committee:

NIAGARA'S AGRICULTURE SECTOR AND TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS

MOVED BY Councillor Witteveen

SECONDED BY Councillor Foster

WHEREAS agriculture plays a crucial role in Niagara's economy, contributing over \$1.4 billion to the Regional GDP;

WHEREAS Niagara's 1,800+ farms provide over 20,000 jobs to residents and temporary foreign workers;

WHEREAS Niagara's farms provide over 43% of the total agricultural economic impact of the Golden Horseshoe, despite only having 23% of the total farmland;

WHEREAS many of Niagara's farms play an important role in ensuring Ontario's food security;

WHEREAS the operations on many of these farms require the use of temporary foreign workers in order to meet processing demands;

WHEREAS the Federal Government requires farms that employ temporary foreign workers to complete a labour market screen in order to demonstrate that these positions to be filled cannot be done by domestic labourers;

WHEREAS the Federal Government protects temporary foreign workers under Canadian law, requiring farms who utilize temporary employees to ensure that they are paid for their work, the workplace is safe, they are provided with break time and days off and that the terms of their written contracts are respected;

WHEREAS since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, issues have been raised by numerous concerned groups regarding the living conditions of the temporary foreign workers and the potential impact of these conditions on the spread of the virus;

WHEREAS Regional Council acknowledges that many farmers in Niagara have made meaningful enhancements to their operations to address these concerns;

WHEREAS temporary foreign workers integrate into the Niagara community while they are in the country, including visiting retail and restaurant establishments;

WHEREAS a recent report published by the CBC found that temporary foreign workers are at least 10 per cent more likely to contact COVID-19 than compared to the general population;

WHEREAS since the beginning of that pandemic, over 1,600 temporary foreign workers have contracted the virus, meaning almost 1 in 5 of Niagara's cases was a temporary foreign worker;

WHEREAS temporary foreign workers have died of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic;

WHEREAS ensuring the health and safety of temporary foreign workers is crucial to protect their lives, the operational continuity on the farms and the amount of COVID-19 in circulation in the Niagara community;

WHEREAS the costs associated with improving these living conditions may be economically detrimental to farm owners due to drastic increases in construction materials, permitting and other fees and charges; and

WHEREAS the Federal Government is currently seeking input on the migrant farm-worker accommodation issue to strengthen its policies.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. That the Regional Chair **BE DIRECTED** to advocate to the Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship advocating for the federal government to:
 - a. Oversee (and provide the necessary financial assistance) for the mandated quarantine of migrant workers upon arriving in Canada and in the event of an outbreak;
 - b. Continue to make federal subsidy funding available for farms that employ temporary foreign workers so that the costs associated with protecting their health and safety not be an exceptional burden on Niagara's local farms; and
 - c. Ensure that internet access to rural farm locations continues to be a high priority;
2. That the Regional Chair **BE DIRECTED** to write a letter to the provincial Minister of Health and the Solicitor General advocating that temporary migrant workers be considered a priority group to receive the COVID-19 vaccine when made available; and
3. That Regional staff **BE DIRECTED** to explore, as part of the 2022 Development Charge By-law update, policy options that the Regional Municipality of Niagara, in partnership with the Local Area Municipalities, may consider pursuing that would be designed to provide financial relief (from local permitting, fees and development charges) for farm owners who are seeking to improve the living conditions of temporary foreign workers.