

Minister
of Agriculture and
Agri-Food



Ministre
de l'Agriculture et de
l'Agroalimentaire

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0C5

August 11, 2021

Quote: 266397

Mr. Jim Bradley
Chair
Niagara Region
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way
PO Box 1042
Thorold ON L2V 4T7

Dear Mr. Bradley:

I am writing in response to your letter to the Honourable Marco E.L. Mendicino regarding the continued financial support for employers of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) for quarantine-related costs, as well as other costs associated with implementing health and safety measures on farms, and the prioritization of rural internet access. As you know, the Minister's Office forwarded a copy of your correspondence to me for consideration. I appreciate having the opportunity to address your concerns.

The Government recognizes the vital role TFWs play in many sectors of the economy, including agriculture and agri-food, where they are instrumental in supporting Canada's food system. Agriculture and food processing workers, both domestic and foreign, are essential for the production of safe and reliable food in this country.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, protecting the health of all those who are working hard to support the food system has been a top priority. The Government has worked diligently, and continues to do so, to ensure tailored measures are in place to support our agriculture and agri-food sector in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 and protect workers across Canada.

To date, we have implemented a number of programs to assist producers and processors, including the one-time, short-term Mandatory Isolation Support For Temporary Foreign Workers Program, which helps support some of the incremental costs incurred by employers associated with the 14-day mandatory quarantine period for TFWs entering Canada. The 2020–21 program year ended with 4,823 applications, representing over \$82.32 million in federal funding. Between April 1 and July 9, 2021, 2,089 applications had been received, representing over \$35.6 million in federal funding. Additional support of up to \$2,000 per worker is also available through the 3-Day Hotel Quarantine Stream of the Program. This stream is intended to help offset a portion of costs associated with workers who are required to quarantine at a government-approved facility because they cannot travel by private means directly to their place of quarantine. As of July 9, 2021, 87 applications had been received, representing \$1.1 million in federal funding.

In accordance with Budget 2021, the Program will be gradually phased out and will stop accepting applications after August 31, 2021. The Government understands that the pandemic and the current travel environment continue to increase uncertainty and costs. The Program's intention has been to act as a temporary emergency support for employers during the most acute period of the COVID-19 crisis.

Our government has also announced a number of measures to provide support to the agriculture and agri-food sector since the beginning of the pandemic, including:

- the \$77.5-million Emergency Processing Fund, with a further \$10 million allocated from internal funds, which helped companies implement changes to safeguard the health and safety of workers;
- up to \$125 million to launch national AgriRecovery initiatives to help producers faced with extraordinary costs resulting from COVID-19, including set-aside programs for cattle and hogs to manage livestock backed up on farms due to the temporary closure of food processing plants;
- a stay of default under the Advance Payments Program to ensure that producers have the flexibility they need to manage their cash flow when facing lower prices or reduced marketing opportunities. As well, eligible producers who still have outstanding interest-free loans will have the opportunity to apply for an additional \$100,000 interest-free portion for 2020–21 if their total advances remain under the \$1-million cap. There is some flexibility for the Government to provide a stay of default for outstanding loans if the administrators make a request and a payment default is pending;
- a \$5-billion increase in Farm Credit Canada's (FCC) lending capacity to producers, agribusinesses and food processors, which will offer increased flexibility to producers who face cash flow issues and to processors who are impacted by lost sales, helping them remain financially solvent during this difficult time. FCC has approved more than \$850 million in loans to help alleviate short-term cash flow issues for producers in addition to supporting more than 4,700 producers and agri-food businesses who have used payment deferral options on FCC loans totalling \$5.4 billion; and
- \$60,000 interest-free loans available under the Canada Emergency Business Account, with up to \$20,000 forgivable. Based on the forgivable portions, these loans have the potential to provide \$1.7 billion in direct support to producers across the country.

Producers also have access to their AgriInvest accounts to manage cash flow issues. Across Canada, there is over \$2.45 billion in these accounts at the moment, which producers can use to help manage losses and invest in their farm operations.

Internet access to rural farm locations will continue to be a priority. The Government recognizes that improved rural connectivity could enable further adoption of precision agriculture and other technologies that can help drive productivity, growth and environmental sustainability in the Canadian agri-food sector. This is one of the reasons why the Government continues to invest in broadband connectivity and mobile networks in rural areas. Investments include the \$2.75-billion

Universal Broadband Fund and the Connect to Innovate program delivered through Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, as well as other initiatives from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, Infrastructure Canada, Indigenous Services Canada and the Canada Infrastructure Bank. Through these investments, the Government is committed to ensuring that 98 percent of Canadians have access to high-speed internet by 2026, and 100 percent of Canadians have access by 2030.

As you noted, on October 27, 2020, the Government of Canada launched consultations with the provinces and territories, workers, employers, worker support groups and other interested parties on a proposal to establish minimum requirements for employer-provided accommodations for the TFW Program across the country. This work is being led by Employment and Social Development Canada. A central objective of the consultations was to work with the provinces, territories and local officials to understand how requirements need to be aligned.

As part of the accommodation consultations, the Government proposed accommodation requirements for the purpose of discussion. These requirements will be revised and reworked in light of feedback from the consultations and are intended to complement existing standards at the provincial level. The requirements' goal is to provide clarity and consistency so that employers are able to judge whether they are in compliance. This measure aims to make sure that TFWs are consistently afforded accommodations that respect their right to live in reasonable comfort and dignity while they work to support Canada's agriculture industry.

Rest assured that your concerns regarding employer costs associated with meeting new requirements have been noted as part of this process. Any future changes will be made in collaboration with stakeholders, and sufficient notice will be provided to employers to ensure there is adequate time to implement any changes required as a result of the new federal minimum standard.

Protecting the well-being of agriculture workers continues to be a top priority for the Government of Canada. We will continue to work with the agriculture sector, as well as with our provincial and territorial counterparts, to explore additional steps we can take to protect this vital part of the workforce.

I trust that this information is of assistance to you. Thank you for writing on this matter.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, PC, MP

c.c. The Honourable Carla Qualtrough, PC, MP