

MEDIA RELEASE
WEDNESDAY APRIL 16, 2020

A PULSE OF THE WINDSOR-ESSEX ECONOMY - AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Windsor-Essex County, Ontario, Canada – April 16, 2020 – The Windsor-Essex region is an important player in agriculture and food processing. With technologically-advanced growing systems, an efficient cross-border logistics industry and proximity to consumer-rich U.S. markets, Windsor-Essex is among the leaders in agriculture and food processing. The region is home to major national and world-wide brands.

COVID-19 has presented many challenges to the agriculture and agri-food sector that have influenced other industries. According to the [Windsor-Essex COVID-19 Business Impact Survey](#), 60% of respondents from the industry cited significant negative impact due to the current pandemic. As with other sectors, the sector is also keeping a watchful eye on international supply chains as both farm inputs and outputs are fully integrated across international borders. Access to personal protective equipment is also a growing concern as much of this same equipment is critical to maintaining food safety standards.

The Agriculture and Agri-Food Committee of the [Windsor Essex COVID-19 Economic Task Force](#) is chaired by Dr. Justine Taylor, Science and Government Relations Manager with the [Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers](#) (OGVG). “The agriculture and agri-food sector plays a critical role in distributing safe, high-quality food to Canadians. Maintaining the integrity of the agri-food supply chain during an emergency is essential for all Canadians,” Taylor explained.

“We are very grateful to the Governments of Canada and Ontario for recognizing the importance of agriculture and agri-food and establishing supports to ensure we can continue to feed Canadians during these trying times,” she said. “Our number one priority is protecting the health and safety of Canadians, our rural communities and our agricultural workforce.”

Agriculture and agri-food also face a unique challenge pertaining to establishing the annual workforce. The agri-food sector relies on the temporary foreign worker program to meet critical workforce needs when Canadian employees cannot be secured. Implementation of the travel ban as of March 18, disrupted travel plans for international farm workers scheduled to arrive in Canada during critical planting and harvesting schedules. The sector worked closely with the Canadian government to facilitate the safe introduction of this critical workforce to Canada, while simultaneously protecting the health of Canadians and our rural communities.

Federal protocols dictate that workers self-isolate for the standard 14-day period during which employers must provide approved accommodation, wages, food, hygiene and sanitation products. Recognizing the critical importance of this workforce to the Canadian food supply system, as of April 13th the government of Canada has pledged up to \$1,500 per worker to help cover the cost to employers, provided that employers meet the strict requirements of the isolation protocol. OGVG has worked closely with the [Windsor Essex County Health Unit](#) (WECHU) and the [Windsor-Essex Community Health Center](#) (weCHC) to ensure employers and employees are provided with consistent information and that responsibilities for both parties are clear.

“In these uncertain time, we have been given an opportunity to reevaluate our approach to things that are most important. Each day the industry receives new information and guidelines which require us to adjust our ways of working. What remains consistent is our priority for the health and safety of all our employees, while ensuring that we do our part to feed consumers in Canada and the USA” states Jim DiMenna, President of Red Sun Farms.

“Ultimately, with the ever-changing demands of COVID-19, our team is finding new ways of working together to ensure fresh & nutritious vegetables to all of our retail partners and the opportunity to give back to our local communities.”

ABOUT THE WINDSOR ESSEX COVID-19 ECONOMIC TASK FORCE

The Windsor Essex COVID-19 Economic Task Force was established March 18, 2020 and is comprised of 40 members who represent a broad cross-section of industries in Windsor-Essex, Ontario Canada. The Task Force is sub-divided into six separate committees, each with upwards of 15 members.

The mission of the Windsor Essex COVID-19 Economic Task Force is to collect, coordinate and disseminate information on strategies, programs, and other remedies that are available to mitigate the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the economic well-being of workers, entrepreneurs, businesses and the regional economy. The Task Force has, and will continue to, strategize and formalize re-ignition plans for their respective industries in the context of the overall Windsor-Essex, provincial and national economies. Learn more [choosewindsor.essex.com](https://www.choosewindsor.essex.on.ca).

QUICK LINKS:

- [WECHU Temporary Foreign Workers Information](#)
- [weCHC Website and Videos](#)
- [An important message for migrant workers video by OPP and Migrant Workers Community Program](#)
- [OGVG COVID-19 Website](#)

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