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www.christianfarmers.org



642 Woolwich Street,

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September 23, 2017.

Denise Zaborowski
Manager, Domestic Marketing Unit
Business Development Branch
Economic Development Division
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
1 Stone Road W
3rd Floor NE
Guelph, ON
N1G 4Y2

Dear Minister,

Bring Home the World: Improving Access to Ontario's World Foods

The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) is an Accredited Farm Organization representing the interests of over 4,000 farm families in Ontario.

Ontario is indeed a highly diverse province, and this is reflected in our populations, both urban and rural, and most clearly in the incredible diversity of the foods grown, processed, prepared and eaten by Ontarians all over the province. Each region is different in the particular food cultures that are present and predominant.

Expanding consumer access to locally grown World Foods will require, first, more promotion of what is available through consumer-facing initiatives such as Foodland Ontario. Second, it will require support for regional smaller scale processing for all types of foods. Third, it will also require research that will demonstrate the viability of growing and marketing new food products within Ontario and support for innovators trying out products that are not yet well established. Finally, it will require support for new Ontario farmers, many of whom may be experienced farmers but new Canadians, who, with proper support, can expand production of World Foods here in Ontario.

Foodland Ontario

The Foodland Ontario logo has been successful in gaining recognition among consumers and in promoting Ontario grown and raised foods. The Foodland Ontario marketing system is well suited to improving awareness and thus increasing demand for Ontario-grown World Foods. As is done with other Ontario foods such as strawberries and asparagus, seasonally available locally grown World fruits and vegetables will need marketing efforts to encourage grocery stores to carry and promote this seasonal local produce. Other foods that can be stored, that are available from greenhouse

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production, or foods like meat and dairy products can be promoted year-round and may have more opportunity to enter larger grocery chains.

Regional Small-Scale Processing

Many World Foods also need the flexibility of small scale production. Niche local markets need to be better supported by small abattoirs and processing facilities that can handle their value-added products in a way that brings them to consumers at reasonable cost and within a reasonable distance of the farms producing them and consumers eating them. Regulations for abattoirs and other processing facilities cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach. In particular, it is important to ensure that they do not unfairly burden smaller enterprises.

In the past, on-farm inspection allowed inspected animals slaughtered on the farm to qualify for sale within the food system. Regulations that would allow for this type of practice (or something that would as effectively meet this need) would improve access to slaughter for small numbers of animals. For farms in more remote locations, such regulations would improve animal welfare and reduce food waste.

While the GGH region gets a lot of attention, other regions of the province also have growing local food systems that include farmers markets, local food processors, and consumers interested in local food. World Foods within these regions, suitable to the interests of the populations in the region, can be expanded along with promotion of this local food infrastructure.

Research to Support New Crops

New opportunities exist to meet expanding interest in locally produced World Foods and to expand the types of meats, dairy products, fruits, vegetables and other crops grown to better suit the tastes of the diverse food cultures we share here in Ontario. However, in all cases, be it introduction or expansion of new crops, or consideration of increasing processing, proper cost analysis needs to be done to ensure that these changes are viable for both growing and selling within an Ontario context. Having established the viability, research to support production within the Ontario context will also be necessary. Extension and financial support for farmers venturing into these new farm products also needs to be in place.

The GGH is an area with a thriving local World Food culture. However, there is currently little opportunity for new crops within the specialty crop land within this region. Further opportunities to expand World Food crops on the prime agricultural land in this region should be explored as well. With a market so close at hand, government should consider what is hindering expansion, and what might better support expansion of World Food production within this region.

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Support for New Farmers

Young and new farmers have skills and entrepreneurial enthusiasm to meet market needs, including for World Foods. Some may be experienced farmers but new Canadians, who, with proper support, can expand production of World Foods here in Ontario. These farmers already know how to grow or produce World Foods to meet the expectations of customers but are unfamiliar with the local landscape, climate and regulatory context. Others may be young or new farmers who are willing to try raising new crops or animals with the proper supports to get them going.

New farmers continue to face challenges that make entrance into the industry difficult. Although interest rates are low, land prices are high and other costs to start a farm business, depending on the commodity in question, can be prohibitive for young or new farmers. More education needs to be available to help new farmers navigate the intricate system of regulations within Ontario agriculture as well.

Government needs to review regulations that impact farm succession planning, both within families and from a farming family to a new farmer who may be outside the family. Tax rules in particular should not make it difficult to pass farms on to new farmers, within or outside the family. Land use planning and lot sizes also need to take into consideration the opportunities needed for new farmers to get started within and outside the GGH region.

Finally, organizations to support starting farmers (i.e. those farmers who do not yet qualify for an FBR number) do not fit within the usual funding models of either accredited farm organizations or commodity organizations. These “starting farmer” organizations fill a vital role in supporting new entrants, and government needs to find a suitable funding model to support these organizations within the agricultural industry as a whole.

Summary

Through consumer-facing promotion of Ontario-produced World Foods, such as Foodland Ontario and support for local food infrastructure, consumers will have better access to and awareness of our diverse Ontario-grown and processed products. Regional scale processing, both abattoirs and small food processing facilities, will ensure the flexibility needed for a greater diversity of World Foods to be processed close to where they are produced and consumed. Financial analysis of the viability of new farm products and research on production within Ontario will be needed along with extension to farmers in order to support and expand production of World Foods within Ontario agriculture. Effective and ongoing support for new farmers will also bolster the expansion of World Food production and marketing within Ontario.

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We appreciate this opportunity to respond to this discussion paper, and thank you for consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clarence Nywening".

Clarence Nywening, President
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario