

April 7, 2020

To: Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada

The Farm Income Crisis and the COVID 19 Crisis

Canadian farmers have been living through and struggling to survive the extended farm income crisis which has seen most of the value of their farm products captured by others in the food system. Since 1985 Canadian farms have produced over \$1.5 trillion worth of food, feed, and fibre, but have kept only 5% of that value to support their families. The rest has been captured by input companies, banks, railways, and other goods and services suppliers. Farmers are price-takers when buying inputs and when selling their output, and bear the burden on nearly all the risk in the food system. Under these conditions, many have left farming and fewer youth have become farmers. The result we have fewer farmers than ever, average age increasing to near 60, and a minority of young farmers.

Today, our remaining small population of farmers is facing another very immediate threat: the COVID 19 pandemic. Nobody has immunity to this new disease, and the illness hits older people the hardest, especially those whose lungs are affected by exposure to pollutants such as diesel fumes and irritants like grain dust.

COVID 19 is a direct threat to Canada's farmers' health, many of whom are in the high risk demographic. The pandemic is also presenting farmers with logistical and economic challenges, as Canadian society takes unprecedented but necessary measures to slow the spread of COVID 19. On our farms, we have to adjust how we do our work to protect our own and our workers' health. The pandemic is affecting our markets by changing demand patterns, prices, and access. It is affecting our families as households practice social distancing, children are home from school and community life shifts onto remote channels.

When we look around the world, we can appreciate our good fortune in not being among the first countries affected, thus we are able to learn from others' experience. Canada is also able and willing to put health first, providing financial supports to people affected by the pandemic's economic disruption. The social solidarity being demonstrated by Canadians is a genuine strength to be proud of and build upon when we move into the recovery stage.

Today, we need specific emergency programs to help farm families who are coping with the disruptions caused by social distancing measures, with illness in other parts of the food system, and to help them survive and recover in the event farmers themselves become sick with COVID 19. We need programs that address farmers' needs -- as people who are at risk

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Des communautés solidaires et des politiques sensées pour une agriculture durable.

of illness, whose workplace is also their home and thus are caring for others, and whose work is vital to Canada's food supply and external trade relationships.

Canada's emergency support for farmers needs to include measure for:

PREVENTION of ILLNESS

- Guidance for safe work practices in the event social distancing is not possible due to equipment design, work space configuration
- Support for purchasing supplies and PPE needed to prevent infection of family members and hired workers
- Free access to best available internet service with unlimited data to allow social and business needs to be met with reduced face to face contact

COMPENSATION for COSTS and LOSSES due to COVID 19 DISRUPTIONS at the FARM LEVEL

- Childcare support and/or support for hired farm workers to replace parental labour to allow families with school aged children care for them safely at home
- Income replacement for farmers whose off-farm job and/or farm-based business is affected by the emergency

SUPPORT FOR FARMERS WHO BECOME ILL

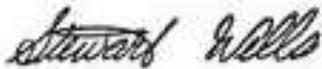
- Process to notify healthcare providers in the event a farmer becomes ill so necessary care can be provided, particularly if the individual lives alone.
- Financial support to allow farmers to hire qualified people to do farm work during illness and recovery
- Financial support to allow farm families to access services to deliver food, medications, etc. to the farm home, while quarantined
- Assistance to help farmers find qualified workers, particularly for specialized operations and work that requires highly skilled personnel

COMPENSATION FOR LOSSES DUE TO DISRUPTION TO LOGISTICS AND MARKETS

Disruptions affecting transportation, processing plants, storage facilities, and the grain handling system will reduce prices farmers receive and increase the costs they will need to cover. Simply delaying loan payments by extending deadlines will not be adequate. More powerful players in the food system will be able to offload costs onto farmers and/or pressure farmers to sell at lower prices. This unequal relationship must be offset by measures such as a guaranteed basic income and an established floor price for commodities to ensure farmers' cost of production is covered during the crisis.

Canada's 193,000 farm families are an irreplaceable national treasure. Each farmer, like a seed, carries the knowledge and culture passed down to them from preceding generations, along with a lifetime of their own learning and experience, and the promise of the future where farming will be practiced and developed by today's children and youth who will take on the challenges of producing our society's food, feed and fibre in the future. Today, let us make sure that our current farm population has what they need to make it through the COVID 19 crisis and carry on to build an even stronger food system in the years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stewart Wells". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

Stewart Wells

Vice President, Operations