

OFVGA 2025 PROVINCIAL ELECTION PRIORITIES

The following policy priorities have been developed by the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association (OFVGA) for the 2025 provincial election with the goal of promoting and prioritizing our domestic fruit and vegetable sector.

PRIORITY: NEW POLICY FOR AGRICULTURAL WORKER HOUSING

With the steady decline of the rural farm labour pool, international agricultural workers are increasingly critical to the continued success and sustainability of labour-intensive agriculture sectors like fruit and vegetables. Federal policy requires that farms provide housing to these workers.

In recent years, Ontario farms have faced a growing number of obstacles when trying to renovate, replace or add worker housing. This includes provincial and municipal red tape, and escalating costs to meet provincial, municipal and federal government requirements. Farms and their workers are negatively affected by this.

A new agricultural worker housing policy is needed to address these obstacles and facilitate the ongoing modernization of farm worker housing in the province. An effective policy should include at minimum the following:

- Helping growers meet on-farm housing septic system criteria in an economically feasible yet environmentally acceptable means by amending the *Ontario Water Resources Act*.
- Working with municipalities to develop and implement a provincial agriculture lens for municipal decision-making regarding worker housing (e.g. through guidance documents etc.) that:
 - Enables municipalities to more consistently apply the Ontario Building Code, Ontario Fire Code, and Provincial Planning Statement to farm worker housing in ways that support domestic food production and reduce barriers for on-farm worker housing.
 - Provides municipalities with viable alternatives to charging farms prohibitively high development charges, permitting fees, and other fees relating to on-farm farm worker housing, and encourages the adoption of these alternatives.
- Investing in cost-share support programs to help farms offset the increasing costs associated with building or upgrading on-farm worker housing.

PRIORITY: PROTECTING AND PROMOTING ONTARIO'S BOUNTIFUL PRODUCTION

Ontario's growers rely on local and international markets to sell their safe, high-quality fruits and vegetables. To ensure strong demand for locally grown fruits and vegetables the OFVGA is looking for the next Ontario government to commit to:

- Modernizing the province's Foodland Ontario program with renewed brand recognition and modern messaging that promotes the economic, social, and environmental benefits of buying local.
- Implementing a policy that prioritizes "local first" for government procurement of fruits and vegetables, including for programs like the Student Nutrition Program, and further promoting produce consumption through health care policy.
- Promoting barrier free trade and policy alignment interprovincially and with our largest trading partner, the U.S., where 85% of Ontario's greenhouse vegetable production is destined.

PRIORITY: INVEST IN THE GROWTH AND MODERNIZATION OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLE FARMS

Fruit and vegetable farms are continuously investing and innovating to increase their efficiency, grow their output and improve their financial performance. An efficient and growing sector supports Ontario's economy, jobs, and protects our domestic food production capacity.

To ensure fruit and vegetable farms are supported as they invest in the future of their operations the OFVGA is looking for the next Ontario government to commit to:

- Increasing investments in natural gas and three-phase power transmission infrastructure in rural areas to support modern produce packing and storage facilities and greenhouse operations.
- Continuing investments into reliable highspeed internet in rural areas.
- Providing municipalities with viable alternatives to charging farms prohibitively high development charges, permitting fees, and other fees relating to building modern facilities on-farm.
- Creating a provincial exemption from municipal stormwater taxes for infrastructure that doesn't benefit farms.
- Ensuring that any provincial climate policies do not adversely impact the financial viability of Ontario's fruit and vegetable farms and our domestic food production capacity.
- Supporting farms as they invest in climate change adaptation and sustainable practices, including recognition for early adopters and innovators.
- Investing further into research and associated infrastructure to support innovations in the sector including clean plant propagation, new varieties, and more efficient growing and storing practices.

PRIORITY: RESPONSIVENESS TO U.S. POLICIES IMPACTING ONTARIO AGRICULTURE

Since the U.S. election in November 2024 the risks to maintaining a sustainable and level playing field have risen dramatically, including the continued threat of tariffs by President Trump, but also a massive injection of farm subsidies into their farm sectors directly competing with Ontario's fruit and vegetable farms.

The OFVGA and its members will be looking for the Ontario government to provide leadership to ensure that growers are not unduly and unfairly impacted by such adversarial U.S. policies, or any Canadian retaliatory actions in response to U.S. tariffs.

ABOUT ONTARIO'S FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SECTOR

The OFVGA represents 3,500 fruit and vegetable family farms that grow 125 different crops in Ontario. The sector:

- Generates more than \$3.2 billion in farm gate sales, contributing to Ontario's massive \$51 billion agri-food sector.
- Employs more than 30,000 people directly on-farm and generates an additional 66,000 jobs along the value chain.
- Supports fruit and vegetable provincial exports that have grown in value by over \$1.2 billion since 2019.

LOOKING TO LEARN MORE?

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