OFVGA Report on Municipal Challenges for Growers with Temporary Foreign Worker Housing (for SAWP and Ag Stream Users)

In recent years, fruit and vegetable growers across Ontario have been reporting a concerning increase in the obstacles they face dealing with municipal officials on matters related to Temporary Foreign Worker housing. This includes municipal actions that severely restrict the operational capacity of housing that has been approved for years, as well as new or increased administrative fees such as inspection and/or licensing fees for the worker accommodations owned by growers.

These developments have caused operational challenges and financial pressures for growers who must provide housing to their international workers in accordance with the federal regulations that govern the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) which includes the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Agricultural Stream (Ag Stream).

After aggregating individual grower reports of these instances in recent years, OFVGA collected a more comprehensive dataset on these municipal challenges through a province-wide grower survey in the spring of 2025. The survey results illustrate the wide-spread nature of certain municipal issues and confirms policy action is needed at the municipal and provincial level.

"We make our TFWs a top priority and are committed to providing them with safe, clean, and comfortable housing. While we fully support safety regulations, some municipal requirements appear excessive or inconsistent, leading to unnecessary delays and costs. These situations not only waste our time and resources, but also those of the municipalities — ultimately creating barriers to timely housing for the very workers we rely on and strive to support."

(Source: 2025 survey respondent)

In response to the mounting challenges illustrated by the survey responses and individual grower experiences, the report includes the following policy recommendations.

Recommendations for Municipalities

- Engage with OFVGA and industry partners to pursue potential adjustments to respective municipalities' existing policies and protocols where appropriate to achieve worker safety while reducing avoidable barriers and costs for farmers. This includes, but is not limited to guidance clarifying the "agriculture use" nature of TFW housing under the PPS.1
- Engage with OFVGA and industry partners to identify potential provincial policies or changes in policy (e.g. guidance, regulation, legislation, etc.) that could further help address the barriers to building and maintaining worker housing while maintaining human safety.

- Work with OFVGA and industry partners to advance fire and building safety for TFWs through fire safety awareness and training initiatives that could be delivered in the prevalent languages of the current TFW workforce in Ontario's agriculture sector, including English, Spanish, and Thai.

Recommendations for the Provincial Government

- OMAFA and MMAH to engage with industry and municipalities to identify and implement provincial policies or changes in policy (e.g. regulation, legislation, etc.) that would address the barriers to building and maintaining worker housing while maintaining human safety.
- 1 OFVGA has started work with industry partners such as OFA and with the province to develop guidance documents that can support this recommendation, including but not limited to guidance clarifying the "agriculture use" nature of TFW housing under the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS).
- Work with industry to develop or update provincial guidance as appropriate to help ensure that municipal policies are aligned with provincial policy intent, e.g. PPS guidance on agricultural use as it applies to worker housing1.
- Work with industry to provide clarity to questions and concerns about the intent and implementation of provincial and municipal policies impacting worker housing.
- Update provincial policy and funding related to local health units' role in providing oversight over the quality of worker housing, including:
    - Formally incorporating the inspection of TFW housing as an expected service/activity for health units in Section 5 of Ontario's Health Protection and Promotion Act; and by
    - Updating base funding to health units to reflect this added mandate.

- Develop policies that incentivize and/or otherwise encourage municipalities to find alternatives to their approach on building permit fees, development charges and license fees related to TFW housing and which growers have experienced rapid and concerning increases in recent years.

Implementing these recommendations would support Ontario's Grow Ontario Agri-Food Strategy, specifically the goals for making Ontario the destination of choice for TFWs[2] and increasing the production of food grown and prepared in Ontario by 30% which would not be feasible without the important contribution of our international farm workforce.

It would also be aligned with the Grow Ontario strategy's proposed action to improve service standards and reduce red tape for agri-food businesses. Finally, a successful resolution of the identified challenges with TFW housing can also be expected to support Ontario's Housing Action Plan[3], meaning that solutions could involve, and have implications across, multiple provincial ministries including but not limited to OMAFA, MLITSD and MMAH.

OFVGA believes that a collaborative approach between industry, municipalities and the provincial government is needed to address these obstacles, supporting Ontario agriculture's ability to provide quality housing for TFWs. We look forward to working with both levels of government to find

a path forward that achieves success for policy makers, our international employees, and our domestic agriculture and food sector.