

Notes from Web Meeting on COVID-19

March 18, 2020

Ministers Opening Remarks

- Recognizes the unprecedented circumstances meat plants are facing and the importance of meat inspectors to maintain continuity of services
- Government is putting every contingency plan in place to ensure that there will be inspectors available for meat plants and plants keep operating
- Message of thanks from the Minister and Premier to you and your employees who continue to put food on the plates of Ontarians
- Your importance now and all times cannot be overstated and the government is committed understanding any challenges you are facing and doing what they can to help the sector.
- We are in close contact (daily with Meat and Poultry Ontario) to stay on top of any issues that are arising.
- Challenging time for everyone, but no doubt we will come through this stronger and more robust.

Q & A

Q) Is meat processing inspection deemed an essential service?

A) The entire food chain is an essential part of the province's Declaration of Emergency – guiding protocols in emergency situations. Each province has ability to determine what is in the protocol. In Ontario's protocol, the food sector in its entirety will be protected from shutdowns and restrictions. The province will do everything they can to make sure food inspectors will be made available. Plants will not be shut down if workers get sick but sick and the province is looking at all their options to ensure there are enough inspectors to be at the plants when they are needed.

Q) What about supply inputs like packaging?

A) Technicality that needs to be worked out. Any business that helps the food sector operate must be included. The province will not intentionally put anything forward to shut them down. MPO will continue to update OMAFRA and the Minister's office if we hear there are any challenges or disruptions in input and services needed to keep plants operational.

Q) There is going to be a labour shortage going forward, farmers and processors will not have staff because foreign worker programs were cancelled. How can we deal with this?

A) Minister Blair announced that agriculture Temporary Foreign Workers has been exempt from the ban but they will need to be isolated for 14 days. AS you know since Minister Blair made the announcement there has been a lot of clarification and other messages from the government (some a little confusing). At this point I think we can safely say that the federal government has announced that they are working towards allowing temporary foreign workers being allowed but more details to come.

Q) Will openings of Temporary Foreign Worker program include the newly announced pilot and OINP programs?

A) More details will be coming out. It is unclear if it will include OINP program.

Q) Employment Insurance - Can the Canadian government look to removing the 30 day wait period for Job Sharing (when companies need to reduce work time from 5 days to 3 days)

A) Yes please see below from [Employment and Social Development Canada](#)

Work-Sharing Program

The Work-Sharing program is implementing temporary special measures to support employers and employees affected by the downturn in business caused by COVID-19. The new temporary special measures are available to employers impacted directly or indirectly by COVID-19. The measures allows for eligible employers to retain skilled employees and workers to remain employed during the temporary downturn in business due to COVID-19. The temporary special measures will:

- extend the Work-Sharing agreements by an additional 38 weeks
- waive the mandatory waiting period between agreements
- ease the recovery plan requirements

Access the [Work-Sharing page](#) to learn more about the program and its requirements.

Access the [Work-Sharing temporary special measures](#) page to find out if you are eligible for temporary special measures.

Q) What is happening for people that do not qualify for Employment Insurance if they must self-isolate?

A) Not known at this time. We are making inquiries to find out.

Q) Can COVID-19 be transmitted through food?

A) From the [FDA website](#) on COVID-19 Facts

“Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread from person-to-person through respiratory droplets. Currently, there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 by food. Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses like norovirus and hepatitis A that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a virus that causes respiratory illness. Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission.”

Q) What do I do if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?

A) FROM FDA WEBSITE ABOVE “If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality. Sick employees should follow the CDC’s [What to do if you are sick with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#). Employers should consult with the local health department for additional guidance.

While the primary responsibility in this instance is to take appropriate actions to protect other workers and people who might have come in contact with the ill employee, **facilities should re-double their cleaning and sanitation efforts to control any risks that might be associated with**

workers who are ill regardless of the type of virus or bacteria. For example, facilities are required to maintain clean and sanitized facilities and food contact surfaces.”

Q) My staff are afraid to come to work, what do I do/tell them?

A) Staff are your most valuable and vulnerable resource. Communication is vital to ensuring they know this. Here are some things that were discussed

Assuring Staff workplace is safe:

- Educate yourself daily on COVID and then communicate and educate your staff daily.
- Share your policies with them and increase signage around the building about reminders to wash hands/surfaces. Remind them on regular basis.
- Share Minister’s message with staff that supplying food is critical and they are a providing essential service to Ontarians.
- Increase protective gear (face masks, shields, gloves).
- Increase frequency of cleaning of high touch areas (door ways/knobs, machine surfaces)

Other issues that were brought up that need to be addressed:

- Concern of price increases going up as much as 20-30%
- Lack of availability of Freezer space
- Lack of availability of protective gear (N95 or surgical face masks)
- Fatigue of staff is high
- What to do if there is a labour shortage?
- What to do if there is a positive in the plant?
- Want assistance with setting up best practices regarding policies and protocols
- How to transport staff that do not want to take public transit
- Need emergency services of trades such as electricians, plumbers, and engineers if your own are not available.
- Do plants have legal right to force staff to wear protective gear?
- Can we use infra-red temperature checks to screen employees? Customers?
- Cash flow is going to be an issue for many plants, what are the programs that are going to be available?
- Foodservice business is down. Many suppliers concerned about Accounts Receivables. Number of suppliers that are focused on foodservice are very concerned.

Action Items for MPO to Follow up On:

- Share list of who attended the call (I have put this in the COVID folder – still need to add names and company)
- Develop guidelines and best practices on sanitation
- Share study related to transfer of COVID from meat/food (From Food Safety Alliance)
- Best practices on what to do if an employee tests positive
- Follow up on EI job share program – will waiting period be exempt during this time (COMPLETE)
- Schedule weekly touch base Tuesdays at 3:30 (adding Thursday AM call)