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Dr. Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

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Dr. Alexander Summers, Associate Medical Officer of Health

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Cc: Cathy Burghardt-Jesson, Middlesex County Warden

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MLHU Board of Health

Ms. Maureen Cassidy, Chair [mcassidy@london.ca](mailto:mcassidy@london.ca)

Ms. Aina DeViet, Vice-Chair [adeviet@middlesex.ca](mailto:adeviet@middlesex.ca)



Monday April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear Dr. Mackie,

The Middlesex Federation of Agriculture encourages the MLHU to invest in the food security that is so vital to the well-being of the residents of London-Middlesex. We are asking the MLHU to implement the guidelines and protocols of the Phase 2 vaccination program which has identified agriculture and farm workers as part of the Phase 2 rollout plan. Agriculture has met the challenge of providing a safe, stable, and strong food supply for the London Middlesex region as well as the Province of Ontario. Farm workers and agricultural processing workers have been considered essential as they, collectively, support the entire food system. This can only be maintained if these workers remain on the job and in good health.

We understand that those workers who live and work in congregate settings, including seasonal agricultural workers, have been prioritized in the Phase 2 rollout plan. We encourage you to follow the leadership of neighbouring Health Units who recognize the importance of our agricultural workers and food processors. They have encouraged, and offered, vaccinations for this group as they understand the importance of keeping our food supply chain strong. There are members of agricultural community in Middlesex who have been unable to access vaccines for themselves and their employees. They have followed all the guidelines and have yet to hear anything more than an automated response. There has been no communication, leaving many wondering what they can do to protect workers and provide food for our tables.

We recognize the challenge of vaccine demand and, as such, are asking for farm workers in congregant living, and their employers, to be recognized as a high priority. Understanding that yes, many farmers do “work at home”, however there are a number of operations that require regular interaction with processors and consumers. In order to maintain the current food supply chain, these farm families and employees should also be included in Phase 2 vaccinations. Farmers who are not in contact with foreign workers, or who are not transporting goods to and from processing centres need not fall into the priority group. Those who can wait and isolate with minimal off farm contact, can wait until such time as vaccine availability is greater.

We ask your office to consider these points and elevate those on the periphery of Phase 2 as essential. Our food supply, our farm families and their employees are depending on you.

Sincerely,

Craig Scott, President

Middlesex Federation of Agriculture

Also Copied:

*The Honourable Ernie Hardeman  
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs  
MPP Jeff Yurek  
MPP Monte McNaughton*

**If you ate today, thank a farmer. If you are a farmer, thank you!**

Middlesex London Health Unit

Dear Mr. Scott and all,

Thank you for sharing the concerns of the agricultural sector in the context of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. On behalf of Dr. Summers and myself, as well as the Board of Health and the whole of the Middlesex-London Health Unit, we hear your request for implementation of the provincial plan on this, and are fully committed to doing so.

We strongly agree about the vital importance of food security, with the agricultural sector being at the heart of this. The Board of Health of the Middlesex-London Health Unit has consistently championed issues related to food security in this region, including by helping to found the Middlesex London food Policy Council, appointing an MLHU Board Member to serve on the Council, and providing staff support to the Council since its creation.

We also hear that you desire enhanced communication on pandemic and vaccine related issues, and that you are concerned that there has not been enough such communication. In the table below you will find a high-level overview of the communication that has occurred with the agricultural sector since the beginning of the pandemic. As MLHU's inspections activities pertain primarily to farms with congregate living settings (mainly for Temporary Foreign Workers or TFW's), this is where most of our communication has been.

We acknowledge that the agricultural sector is much broader than this subset of farms where MLHU has an existing relationship, and appreciate your offer to help share information to others in the sector. As such, we have added those copied on this email to MLHU's pandemic stakeholder distribution list so that you have up-to-date information through our weekly newsletters, and would invite you to participate in weekly webinars each Tuesday at 12:30 (invitations will come through the stakeholder distribution list). We would also encourage you to follow our social media channels at @mlhealthunit (same handle on Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube) and @middlesex.london.health.unit on Facebook, as we are often able to provide even more timely information there.

We are completely aligned with the provincial plan to vaccinate agricultural workers. At the moment, the Provincial government has opened vaccination to farm workers in congregate living settings, and MLHU is currently vaccinating these workers through the three mass vaccination clinics in Middlesex and London. MLHU is also working on an option for group bookings at mass clinics so that an agricultural employer with multiple eligible employees can have them all attend for vaccine at the same time.

We agree with you that the agricultural workers that you mention – employers who have significant close contact with workers in congregate living settings and those engaged in transportation of agricultural goods – are eligible for vaccination in the upcoming component of Phase 2 in the provincial plan. We look forward to opening eligibility to these agricultural workers when vaccine supply is sufficient to do so is available.

MLHU updates vaccine eligibility for mass clinics online regularly here:

<https://www.healthunit.com/covid-19-vaccine-eligibility>. Those who are eligible for vaccination at the mass clinics can book here: <https://covidvaccinelm.ca/>.

Other strategies that are currently in place to address the vaccine needs of rural residents:

1. MLHU successfully advocated for COVID vaccine supplies for all **pharmacies** across Middlesex County that have capacity (all 10 such pharmacies in Middlesex now have vaccines, as well as 35 pharmacies in London). Everyone born in 1981 or earlier is eligible, and 21,400 vaccines have been made available in Middlesex and London through this route. Pharmacies can be searched by postal code here: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/vaccine-locations>
2. MLHU is providing **mobile pop-up clinics** at the congregate living settings across the County and City that the Province has prioritized. We hope to schedule mobile clinics on related farms once other provincially prioritized congregate settings in the County are completed – in the meantime, there is capacity for this purpose at area mass vaccination sites.
3. MLHU is currently providing vaccine to LHIN nurses and other partners who are going **door-to-door** to vaccinate home care patients in the County and the City.
4. MLHU ensured that **family physicians in the County** were among the first in the region to be able to offer vaccine in their clinics (clinic in Strathroy).
5. MLHU is operating a **mass vaccination clinic** in Mt. Brydges, which is delivering approximately 600 vaccines per day.
6. MLHU is setting up a **pilot** mobile pop-up for eligible individuals in partnership with Thames Centre.
7. MLHU is establishing a process for **group bookings for farms** with migrant workers and/or congregate living settings.

Here is the table that summarizes communications with the farms that have TFW's. We have also been in frequent communication with MPP's offices about agricultural issues throughout the pandemic. Again, your offer to assist with such communication is much appreciated.

Date	Communication
April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact made with all Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) employers to discuss the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provincial guidance for TFW operations during the pandemic</li> <li>○ Reviewed pandemic planning for quarantine housing upon TFW arrivals</li> <li>○ Discussed isolation procedures if a TFW tests positive for COVID-9, as well as testing of symptomatic individuals</li> <li>○ Discussed medical access if needed,</li> <li>○ Development of a Q and A for farm operations based on the Provincial guidance</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Email to all TFW operators providing resources in different languages and on-site signage.</li> </ul>
April 2020-Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All TFW employers have PHI contact information and MLHU staff continually reaching out for guidance.</li> <li>• Requested housing inspections have received priority by PHIs and have been scheduled as requested, by TFW employers, and have been carried out before workers arrive. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ These inspections have been deemed priority demand work during pandemic.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-site new isolation housing inspections when requested/required and regular inspections ongoing, provide signage, guidance, discussion.</li> </ul>
2021 to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication ongoing with TFW employers.</li> <li>Updates given when available.</li> <li>Continued inspections, COVID-19 precautions checks, isolation lodging approvals as priority.</li> </ul>
April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email sent to all TFW farm operators with a letter signed by Dr Summers outlining the process for Pre-registering for the COVID 19 Vaccine</li> <li>Environmental Health (EH) heard from multiple farm operators that they are finding it difficult to arrange for the immunization of their workers at the mass vaccination clinic, citing transportation and scheduling issues as main concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In response, EH and the vaccination clinic are currently organization specified time slots for farm operators to bring all TFWs to the site</li> <li>More specific communication will be provided to individual farms when the scheduling has been completed.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Best,  
Chris

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