

News Release - for immediate release

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Reducing the vulnerability of the Canadian food supply system by increasing the provincial capacity to slaughter, transform and market local agricultural products.

At the end of World War II, Winston Churchill was quoted as saying: "Never let a good crisis go to waste". This is exactly what we should do in regards to agriculture in Ontario.

The Covid-19 crisis is shaking the entire food supply system and is causing the entire agricultural community to worry. The situation is compounded by the uncertainties related to the foreign worker program and quarantine management constraints, as well as the drastic changes in demand for dairy products forcing producers to quickly adapt their production. This crisis will undoubtedly have significant economic repercussions.

At the height of the crisis, however, we now have to address the vulnerability of the food supply system as a result of our probable over-reliance on foreign products or centralized facilities. Food sovereignty for Ontario and Canada is a paramount issue brought forward by the actual pandemic.

L'Union des Cultivateurs Franco-Ontariens (UCFO) welcomes the recent announcement by the United Counties of Prescott-Russell (UCPR) to create a federally regulated agri-food processing and distribution centre in Eastern Ontario. UCFO supports this project as long as the vulnerability of livestock producers in eastern and northeastern Ontario will be mitigated, in the face of closures or accessibility restrictions at slaughterhouses in the western or northeastern United States. In the current trend towards food sovereignty and the « Eat Local » movement, it is imperative that processing and distribution facilities be accessible to smaller, emerging, specialty and organic producers. In addition, such a proximity project should reduce transportation costs and constraints while promoting animal welfare.

In order to ensure that «Eat Local» is not just a transitory phenomenon and to ensure its sustainability in the pursuit of a more assertive food sovereignty, it is essential to support emerging local producers by integrating an agri-food processing and distribution system that complies with the fundamental principles of food safety and traceability.

UCFO therefore intends to continue its representations to provincial and regional authorities to ensure the interests of agricultural producers and to support the success of such projects, by reconfirming the importance of training federal inspectors, adapting regulations to increase market development, and creating financial and technical support programs to enable emerging local and specialty agricultural producers to integrate the Ontario agri-food supply system.

UCFO is involved in defending and representing the rights and interests of more than 2,000 Franco-Ontarian family farms.

For more information:

Danik Lafond

Director General

Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens

613-488-2929 ext. 100

direction@ucfo.ca

Janie Renée Myner

Development & Communications Officer

Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens

613-488-2929, ext. 102

communication@ucfo.ca