

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Holland Marsh: Government there for farmers when bad weather hits

By Chris Ballard, MPP
Newmarket-Aurora

Farmers have a tough job but they do it well, even in difficult times. This season several parts of the province have been hit with unseasonably wet and cool weather, impacting planting and potentially growing conditions for some Ontario farmers. Locally in the Holland Marsh, many farmers experienced flash flooding in their fields due to heavy rains and a local pumping issue. My colleague Jeff Leal, Ontario's Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, has been actively monitoring this year's weather situation across the province, and has visited farms affected by the wet weather. I have also been talking with local growers to get a sense of the damage their crops have sustained by flooding as well as to get a better understanding of the challenges that bad weather is causing for them.

Our government recognizes the stress that unpredictable weather and severe weather events cause for farmers and their families, and that's why we commit more than \$230 million per year into Business Risk Management programs to help growers cover loss and damage due to risks that are beyond their control.

Staff from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs have also been reaching out to affected grower groups to discuss their members' needs, and to provide information on programs available to farmers. They are working to help them get the support they need.

With more carrots, celery, onions, lettuce and greens grown here than any in other region in the country, the Holland Marsh is fondly referred to as 'Ontario's Salad Bowl', and I want to thank our local growers for the hard work they do each and every day to feed Ontario families.

While it is too soon to determine the full impact the heavy rainfall will have on our crops this growing season, we want you to know that our government will continue to monitor the situation closely, and that we have supports to help growers manage challenges caused by unpredictable weather conditions.

Ontario's Economy

Ontario's growth is strong and sustained. We have led the G7 in growth for the last three years - the last time that happened was from 1998 to 2000. Since this time last year, Ontario has created 137,900 jobs, with most of the increase in full-time work. Our unemployment rate has been lower than the national average for 28 months straight.

Since the worst of the recession, Ontario has enjoyed consistently solid growth, having added over 700,000 net new jobs in that period, most of which are full-time, private sector jobs that pay an above-average wage.

This month, we're seeing growth in places like Hamilton (+3,900), Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo (+2,800), and St. Catharines-Niagara (+2,300).

Our economy is strong because of our competitive business environment: our highly skilled workforce, our low corporate tax rate, and significant investments in infrastructure.

Province Investing in New Online Tools to Improve Patient Experience

Ontario has launched a new online tool to help people find wait times information for surgeries and procedures at hospitals across the province, and is providing more digital tools to help improve the patient experience.

Dr. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, and Hillary Hartley, Chief Digital Officer, were at OneEleven innovation hub in Toronto to announce a number of new digital tools for patients, including:

- Enhanced wait times information: developed in collaboration with Health Quality Ontario (HQO), the new, easy-to-use wait times tool now includes the length of time between a referral received from a family physician or nurse practitioner and the patient's first appointment with a specialist or surgeon, in addition to the time between the decision on a procedure and the date the procedure is performed. Data is available down to the hospital-level, and will help patients better understand what to expect and allow them to make more informed choices about their health care needs, including being able to talk with the referring physician about options to reduce their wait times.
- Ontario.ca/health: a user-focused, mobile-friendly and trusted source for information about a wide variety of health services in Ontario, including how to renew health cards, find health services in your community and get dental care for children. The website

will be continually refined based on users' experience and feedback. People are invited to complete the first user survey before September 1, 2017.

? Expansion of the innovative, online eReferral system in Waterloo-Wellington Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and seven more LHINs. eReferral helps reduce wait times by connecting patients and primary care providers to specialists and other health care services in their community faster.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.