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Archived - September 2016 Mandate letter: Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Premier's instructions to the Minister on priorities.



September 23, 2016

The Honourable Jeff Leal
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
77 Grenville Street, 11th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
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Dear Minister Leal:

Welcome back to your role as Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. As we mark the mid-point of our mandate, we have a strong and new Cabinet, and are poised to redouble our efforts to deliver on our top priority — creating jobs and growth. Guided by our balanced plan to build Ontario up for everyone, we will continue to work together to deliver real benefits and more inclusive growth that will help people in their everyday lives.

We embark on this important part of our mandate knowing that our four-part economic plan is working — we are making the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history, making postsecondary education more affordable and accessible, leading the transition to a low-carbon economy and the fight against climate change, and building retirement security for workers.

Building on our ambitious and activist agenda, and with a focus on implementing our economic plan, we will continue to forge partnerships with businesses, educators, labour, communities, the not-for-profit sector and with all Ontarians to foster economic growth and to make a genuine, positive difference in people's lives.

Collaboration and active listening remain at the heart of the work we undertake on behalf of the people of Ontario — these are values that ensure a common purpose, stimulate positive change and help achieve desired outcomes. With this in mind, I ask that you work closely with your Cabinet colleagues to deliver positive results on initiatives that cut across several ministries, such as our Climate Change Action Plan, Business Growth Initiative, and the Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy. I also ask you to collaborate with the Minister Responsible for Digital Government to drive digital transformation across government and modernize public service delivery.

We have made tangible progress and we have achieved the following key results:

- The industry, supported by your ministry, has made strong progress towards the targets laid out in the Premier's Agri-Food Growth Challenge. The sector is responsible for a record \$36.4 billion in GDP and the creation of more than 790,000 jobs. In 2015, agri-food exports rose to \$14.1 billion, up almost 13 per cent from the previous year.
- Over the five years of Growing Forward 2 (2013-2018) approximately \$1.5 billion will have been invested by the provincial and federal governments in Ontario's agriculture and agri-food sectors through both Strategic Initiatives and Business Risk Management programming.
- As part of the province's commitment to environmental stewardship, Ontario farmers have completed more than 23,900 voluntary on-farm Environmental Farm Plan projects, representing a total investment of \$366 million in on-farm improvements since 2005. In addition, in February 2015, Ontario launched the Great Lakes Agricultural Stewardship Initiative (GLASI) with \$16 million committed through Growing Forward 2 funding over four years to support the reduction of excess nutrients.
- Since 2014, Ontario has invested \$274 million to help build and repair critical infrastructure in small, rural and northern municipalities through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund (OCIF). To better meet local infrastructure needs expressed by Ontario municipalities, the government is increasing its investment in the fund to more than \$300 million annually by 2018-2019.
- Since 2013, there have been a number of important investments in jobs and growth through programs such as the Jobs and Prosperity Fund, which includes investments through the Food and Beverage Growth Fund, and Growing Forward 2 for communities in rural Ontario.

Your mandate is to support Ontario's agri-food sector, enforce and improve food safety and strengthen Ontario's rural communities. Your specific priorities include:

Supporting the Growth of the Agri-Food Sector

- Continuing to support the Premier's Agri-Food Challenge, which calls on the province's agri-food industry to double its growth rate and create 120,000 jobs by 2020, and reporting on new initiatives which reflect the recommendations made by the Agri-Food Growth Steering Committee.
- Promoting growth of world crops to meet the diversity of Ontario's consumer marketplace. For many Ontarians, traditional food ingredients need to be imported because they are not locally available. Working with stakeholders and industry partners, you will develop a strategy for the promotion of locally grown world crops by winter 2017.

Providing Business Support to Farmers

- Continuing to implement Growing Forward 2 (GF2). You will continue to implement GF2, the policy framework for Canada's agricultural and agri-food sector. You will also engage with the federal government, other provinces, territories and industry, to develop the next policy framework, calling for improved participation, timeliness, simplicity and predictability, in the future suite of national business risk management programs.
- Creating new economic opportunities for Ontario's agri-food industry through targeted investments across the agri-food value chain and minister-led trade missions.
- Supporting supply management and regulated marketing in the province to help maintain a stable, quality supply of products for Ontario's food processors and consumers. This includes continuing to champion

industry-led proposals for a national strategy to modernize dairy regulated marketing.

Supporting the Climate Change Action Plan

- Supporting the agri-food sector to adopt low-carbon technologies. Working with the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, you will assist the food and beverage processing sector to expand the use of innovative technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and support the transition to low-carbon, indoor agricultural facilities through retrofits to existing structures.
- Supporting the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and Minister of Energy, you will identify opportunities to strengthen rural economic development and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by promoting the production and utilization of renewable natural gas from Ontario farms and food processing facilities.

Ensuring Sustainability of Agriculture

- Improving pollinator health. Building upon the province's first Pollinator Health Strategy, which included a target to achieve an 80 per cent reduction in the number of acres planted with neonicotinoid-treated corn and soybean seed by 2017 and reduce mortality rates for honeybees to 15 per cent by 2020, you will continue your work with the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and key stakeholders to finalize the Pollinator Health Action Plan for public release in fall 2016. The action plan will build upon the province's achievements by setting out additional actions to address the key stressors that impact pollinator health.
- Preserving the productive capacity of agricultural land. You will continue to work with stakeholders to develop the Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy for public release by summer 2017. This will include investing in soil mapping and digital technology to help gather data and information needed to assess soil health, carbon sequestration and accounting.
- Supporting the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, develop a draft Lake Erie Action Plan by early 2018 that will move us towards our target to reduce phosphorus levels in Lake Erie by 40 per cent.
- Supporting the Minister of Municipal Affairs in finalizing the Co-ordinated Review of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan. This includes continuing the work to protect prime agriculture lands and natural heritage systems by supporting the work of the relevant ministries in their efforts to complete the mapping of these areas in summer 2017.

Expanding Agriculture in the North

- Continuing to lead the development of a Northern Ontario Agriculture, Aquaculture and Food Processing Sector Strategy to promote jobs and growth in Northern Ontario.
- As part of the Livestock in the Great Clay Belt Proposal, continuing your work with the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, as well as with Indigenous partners, local municipalities and stakeholders, to develop and finalize the initiative.

Fostering Vibrant Rural Economies

- Building upon the successes of the 2014 and 2016 Rural Summits, undertake and report on the next Rural Ontario Summit to be held in 2018.
- Working with partner ministries to continue to increase job opportunities and economic growth across Ontario through working with the Minister of Infrastructure, Minister of Energy, gas utilities,

municipalities and indigenous partners, you will continue to identify opportunities to expand natural gas access and affordability.

In addition to the priority activities above, I ask that you also deliver results for Ontarians by driving progress in the following areas:

- Continue to promote and advocate for Ontario's food processing sector at home and abroad, with the Minister of International Trade, including identifying trade and export opportunities through trade missions, such as the upcoming mission to India in November 2016.
- Continue to work on the Farms Forever program by supporting a strong and innovative agri-food industry, including investing in agricultural research and programs to support innovation in the sector.
- Continue to invest in and implement programs to support Ontario's farmers by protecting Ontario's farmland, building the capacity and diversity of farmers, and supporting innovation and new opportunities.
- Building upon the success from the Open for Business Agri-Food Stakeholder Forums, continue to work with the industry and partners on how the government can more effectively support agri-food businesses to be more competitive and productive.
- Promote, encourage and invest in innovative local food projects that celebrate the rich diversity of foods produced and made in Ontario through the Local Food Strategy and continued implementation of the *Local Food Act*.

As you know, taking action on the recommendations contained in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is a priority for our government. That is why we released *The Journey Together*, a document that serves as a blueprint for making our government's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples a reality. As we move forward with the implementation of the report, I ask you and your fellow Cabinet members to work together, in co-operation with our Indigenous partners, to help achieve real and measurable change for Indigenous communities.


Having made significant progress over the past year in implementing our community hubs strategy, I encourage you and your Cabinet colleagues to ensure that the Premier's Special Advisor on Community Hubs and the Community Hubs Secretariat, at the Ministry of Infrastructure, are given the support they need to continue their vital cross-government work aimed at making better use of public properties, encouraging multi-use spaces and helping communities create financially sustainable hub models.

Responsible fiscal management remains an overarching priority for our government — a priority echoed strongly in our 2016 Budget. Thanks to our disciplined approach to the province's finances over the past two years, we are on track to balance the budget next year, in 2017–18, which will also lower the province's debt-to-GDP ratio. Yet this is not the moment to rest on our past accomplishments: it is essential that we work collaboratively across every sector of government to support evidence-based decision-making to ensure programs and services are effective, efficient and sustainable, in order to balance the budget by 2017–18, maintain balance in 2018–19, and position the province for longer-term fiscal sustainability.

Marathon runners will tell you that an event's halfway mark is an opportunity to reflect on progress made — but they will also tell you that it is the ideal moment to concentrate more intently and to move decisively forward. At this halfway mark of this government's mandate, I encourage you to build on the momentum that we have successfully achieved over the past two years, to work in tandem with your fellow ministers to advance our economic plan and to ensure that Ontario remains a great place to live, work and raise a family.

I look forward to working together with you to build opportunity and prosperity for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Wynne
Premier

Updated: August 9, 2019

Published: September 23, 2016

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