



Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers
32 Seneca Road
Leamington ON
N8H 5H7
OGVG.com

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Emma Heffernan
Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines
Distribution and Consumer Assistance Policy Branch
Via email: emma.heffernan@ontario.ca

RE: 019-3191 Phase 2 of the Natural Gas Expansion Program

The Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG) are pleased to provide comments on the *Phase 2 of the Natural Gas Expansion Program* through the Environmental Registry of Ontario. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for unity, cooperation and strategic planning of the greenhouse vegetable sector and Ministerial bodies is critical for the success of Ontario's economic recovery. The accessibility requirements for greenhouse operators' ability to utilize natural and compressed natural gas is imperative to sustaining the value chain and getting product to market. OGVG represents approximately 200 farmers responsible for over 3,300 acres of greenhouses tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers across the province. With farmgate sales exceeding \$1.5 billion in 2019, a contribution of \$1.8 billion to the economy and a consistent track record of growth, the sector is a valuable economic driver for the province. Our members strive to grow fresh, high quality food year-round and contribute to meeting healthy eating and food security goals both provincially and nationally.

The expansion of natural gas and access for farming and rural communities should be a top priority when determining infrastructure investment to support on farm production, and available servicing requirements critical to getting fresh greenhouse vegetables to consumers. OGVG supports a multi-year expansion plan for rural energy infrastructure, which leads to increased efficiency of greenhouse vegetable growers, vegetable storage facilities, and processing operations that add value to Ontario grown greenhouse vegetables. The investments in funding support for expansion projects realize immediate, continued direct and indirect economic benefits.

When comparing economic impact to investment in Ontario, the greenhouse vegetable sector is a key leader. Implementing optimized and efficient construction processes enable our members to annually expand at an average rate of 6%, with the anticipation of doubling our acreage footprint by 2025. With the approved infrastructure investments regarding natural gas expansion in rural areas, our membership can not only grow their operations, but expand into previously unexplored areas of the province and begin creating jobs and opportunities for Ontarians in new regions.

OGVG supports the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's recommendation that the government consider additional criteria to inform the selection for applications for funding consideration. Key challenges for government are not to determine the most viable projects but conduct thorough cost-benefit analysis that weighs the subsequent opportunities infrastructure investment will have on the future, and the impending costs (monetary, jobs) associated.

We support the comments provided by the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and appreciate them representing and speaking on behalf of OGVG on specific Provincial matters. We look forward to continuing to work with the Province to identify, develop and execute key projects to advance the economic opportunities in Ontario.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Sbrocchi".

Joe Sbrocchi

General Manager