

## AAFC – Industry-Government COVID-19 monitoring call

May 8, 2020

Noon – 1:00 PM EST

There were approximately 390 participants on the call.

Summary of the government updates are below.

### **Introductory remarks (Frédéric Seppey - AAFC)**

- On May 7, 2020 an email was sent from the AAFC [Roundtable](#) account outlining COVID-19 related public health guidance that may be applicable in responding to commonly asked questions from the agriculture and agri-food sector. The information focuses on public health guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic and does not cover existing occupational health and safety requirements for the workplace, nor does it replace public health guidance from local Public Health Authorities or the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).
- AAFC has worked with federal partners to develop this guidance and provide links to key resources for the agriculture and agri-food sector, based on questions received over the last few weeks. The information is now available on-line at “[Workplace guidance for sector employers and employees](#)”. AAFC noted that it will continually update this webpage as new guidance is available or as the need for more information is raised by industry, so please check back regularly.
- On May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Department of Finance announced action to further ensure Canadians have access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and other necessary medical equipment.
- To keep Canadians safe, the government is [waiving tariffs](#) on certain medical goods, including PPE such as masks and gloves. This will reduce the cost of imported PPE for Canadian businesses, which face tariffs of up to 18 per cent in some instances, help protect workers, and ensure our supply chains can keep functioning well.
- This action complements the government’s ongoing efforts to increase domestic PPE production by Canadian industry. Tariff relief for these goods will remain in place for as long as necessary to deal with the COVID-19 crisis.
- On May 7, 2020 the Prime Minister announced the conclusion of negotiations with Provinces to boost wages for essential workers. Additional information is below.

### **Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) (Steven Strenthal and Lisa Landry)**

- PHAC is very overwhelmed due to recent events, however continues to engage with partners, health authorities and stakeholders to understand the COVID-19 impacts as the situation evolves.
- It is vital that industry is provided accurate, science-based information during the COVID-19 crisis and PHAC hopes that “[Workplace guidance for sector employers and employees](#)” will be a resource that addresses frequently asked questions that have been received.
- There are a few specific areas that PHAC would like to highlight.
  - The first is related to asymptomatic cases:
    - COVID-19 can be spread by infected individuals who have not yet, or who may never develop symptoms. Someone can be infected with COVID-19 and never show signs or symptoms while other people with COVID-19 may not show signs and symptoms right away but can still spread the virus before signs and symptoms start.

- Strategies to prevent transmission and protect our essential workforce need to take into account the role of both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals.
- It is critical that we continue to practice the set of behaviours that we know are effective in preventing the transmission of COVID-19:
  - Physical distancing (staying 2m or 6 feet apart);
  - Staying home if you are sick, even if just mildly un-well;
  - Washing your hands;
  - Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects;
  - Covering your cough with tissues or your sleeve or considering wearing a non-medical mask to prevent spread of respiratory droplets;
  - Use of physical barriers such as transparent barriers, or other methods such as change of workflow, and taped floor spacing in public or work environments; and, .
  - Limiting contacts among workers by creating teams, staggering breaks, assigning seating, etc.
- With regards to screening and if it can prevent transmission in the workplace:
  - Fever is not usually the first symptom of COVID-19 and many cases never develop a fever or can mask a fever with over the counter medicines like Tylenol. For this reason, screening measures based only on fever detection (taking temperatures) are not recommended.
  - It is also important to note that screening will only identify people with symptoms. There are people infected able to spread the infection to others who do not have any symptoms at all.
  - Similarly, testing on its own will not be sufficient to eliminate all risk of transmission, even when testing becomes more readily available. A negative test result does not mean someone has not been exposed. Testing an asymptomatic person cannot confirm the individual is not carrying the virus.
  - For this reason, it is essential that all staff continue to practice the set of behaviours that we know work and that employers plan to address each of these as is practical in their workplace.
- Regarding cloth face coverings or non-medical masks
  - If physical distancing (which is the most important thing), and modifications to the workplace are not consistently possible, the use of [non-medical masks](#) or face coverings (constructed to completely cover the nose and mouth without gaping, and secured to the head by ties or ear loops) can be encouraged.
  - These masks can be used to prevent the infectious respiratory droplets of an unknowingly infected person from coming into contact with others or contaminating surfaces.
  - They should be replaced when they become wet, soiled, or otherwise visibly contaminated. This may be more important in areas like meat processing or greenhouses where conditions are humid.
  - Cloth face coverings are intended to protect other people—not the wearer. The use of these masks does not replace good hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and physical distancing wherever possible.
  - Cloth face coverings are not PPE. They are not appropriate substitutes for PPE such as respirators (like N95 respirators) or medical facemasks (like surgical masks) in workplaces where respirators or facemasks are recommended or required to protect the wearer.
  - The use of PPE continues to be required in the agriculture and agri-food sector based on the operational requirements of the organization. If, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, an occupational health risk assessment has determined that an employee is required to wear a

respirator as part of normal operations, they should continue to do so. Using a face mask is to limit someone that doesn't know they are infected from spreading droplets.

- Regarding the guidance for high risk exposures and how we describe close contact with a known positive COVID-19 case:
  - A close contact is a person who lives in the same household as a person infected with COVID-19 or a person who had close, prolonged contact (within two meters for more than 15 minutes) with another person who has tested positive for COVID-19 without the consistent and appropriate use of recommended personal protective equipment.
  - This type of contact is considered a high risk exposure and it is recommended that a close contact of a known case self-isolate at home for 14 days starting from the date of the last unprotected exposure.
  - Employees may be permitted to continue work following potential exposure to COVID-19, provided they are not close contacts at high risk, remain asymptomatic and additional precautions are implemented to protect them and the community.
  - Employers will work with local public health to determine required approaches for each unique situation.

### **Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) & Other Labour issues (Steve Jurgutis - AAFC)**

- AAFC noted that the TFW numbers remain strong and indicated that 11,914 TFWs entered Canada in the month of April 2020 compared to 13,000 for April 2019. AAFC mentioned that it estimates that 914 TFWs have arrived in Canada in May 2020, with another 1,517 expected to arrive within the coming weeks.
- AAFC's team continues working with employer groups to address bottlenecks and to help facilitate TFWs entry to Canada. All questions on logistical challenges can continue to be sent to the [Roundtable account](#).
- May 7, 2020 the Prime Minister (PM) announced all provinces and territories have confirmed, or will confirm, plans to cost share wage top-ups for essential workers deemed eligible in their jurisdiction.
- This follows-up on the PM's April 17th announcement of up to \$3 billion in support to increase the wages of low-income (earning less than \$2,500 per month) essential workers with a wage top up.
- Through this transfer, each province or territory will determine which workers would be eligible for cost-shared support, and how much support they will receive.
- While the federal government and all PTs have identified "essential workers" for the purposes of COVID activities, those eligible for the cost-shared wage top up will be determined by each PT and could vary from the broader list of essential workers.
  - PEI was the first to announce their approach (May 7th) with a one-time payment of \$1,000 for essential workers through their employers. This is expected to cover approximately 17,000 Islanders and will include those employed in Agriculture.

### **Research Update (Javier Gracia-Garza - AAFC)**

- AAFC concluded a careful analysis of its field-dependent research projects and identified certain activities to move forward with implementation, including (on a limited basis):
  - co-op, early generation and agronomy trials;
  - integrated pest management research; and,
  - environmental sampling critical for spring.
- It is important to note that these project activities are being implemented in addition to the research-related critical services already being conducted at AAFC centres across the country.
- Various criteria were taken into consideration when making this decision, including: the differences across the country in terms of the local situation of the pandemic, as well as announced provincial

activity resumption plans; the timelines required for conducting those activities, such as planting times; and, most importantly, AAFC's ability to deliver these activities in a safe manner for our staff and the communities where they work.

- AAFC Research Directors and staff will contact project partners and collaborators to provide the individual implementation details of approved project activities set to resume and will consider the dates and timing of fieldwork, and the need to meet strict health and welfare guidelines.
- Discussions continue within the Department, including with AAFC scientists, to determine the implications for other research activities not approved to proceed at this time. If there are other project specific questions, AAFC Research Directors are your best source of information. If you are not sure which Research Director to contact, please email the Round Table account.
- Although some additional research activities will happen, it is important to underscore that 2020 will not be 'business-as-usual' for the rest of the summer for AAFC research given the ongoing public health restrictions. AAFC recognizes that the environment continues to evolve and we will continually monitor and evaluate the situation to further identify opportunities to return the Department to its full course of research operations.

### **International Supply Chains (Luc Rivard)**

- The update on international supply chains included the following information.

#### United States

- Yesterday, President Trump signed an Executive Order (EO) on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth. As the details are made available, we will monitor how the order will be implemented and its impact on Canadian seafood exports to the U.S.
- The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service has extended its temporary allowances related to both domestic and imported products originally labelled for distribution to hotels, restaurants, or similar institutions. These products may continue to be distributed and re-labelled for retail sale until July 26. The original timeframe was set to end on May 26.
- Updates were also provided on the extension of measures in Japan and India - both announced on May 4th.

#### Transportation

- AAFC continues to monitor the current situation related to transportation and border crossings. We are working in close collaboration with other departments (CBSA, Transport, GAC) to understand and respond to some issues that have been raised by you and others from the agricultural industry. Please continue to contact us if you are experiencing any border or logistical issues.

#### General

- As always, we appreciate your insights. Please don't hesitate to let us know what you're hearing or seeing through the Roundtable email account.

### Next Call

- The next stakeholder call will take place on Monday, May 11, 2020 at noon EST.