

Friends of Urban Agriculture

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London, ON

April 9, 2020

Attention:

**Re: Inclusion of Community Gardens as recreational amenities**

Dear Premier Doug Ford and Members of Provincial Parliament;

Greetings, and thank you for strong leadership in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

March 30<sup>th</sup> 2020, Ontario issued a new [emergency order](#) under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act to close all outdoor recreational amenities. This measure extended to include Community Gardens. We ask the Province to recognize Community Gardens as Essential Food Production Resources.

We take safety precautions and [physical distancing seriously](#) amidst the COVID-19 crisis and propose that Community Gardens can be used responsibly to deliver essential services. [Tens of thousands](#) of Ontarians, many on fixed or low income, rely on food grown in community gardens to feed their families, other community members and support local food banks with tonnes of fresh produce. Community Garden production is not marginal. A London Community Gardener expressed in a personal email, April 2, 2020 that they grow 85% of their produce on their plot. This food source allows growers many culturally diverse crops of fresh, nutrient-rich, affordable foods that help support our body's immune systems. We feel that small crop production is an essential social safety net and merits support from all levels of government.

Ontario has a short growing season with some of the best growing weather in Canada, so, early access to the land is essential for production of most crops. In 2019, there were [1.1 million visits to food banks](#) and 5.6 million meals served on average each month in Canada. Gisèle Yasmeen, executive director at Food Secure Canada, said even before the coronavirus outbreak, food insecurity in Canada was already [trending in the wrong direction](#) with approximately [1 in 8 households food insecure](#). Food security experts are [warning of supply shortages](#), higher prices, and a growing nutrition gap between rich and poor. In light of impending economic hardships, it is essential that Community Gardens be accessible to growers to offset their food costs and provide greater self-sufficiency. This will aid in improving food prosperity, which enhances the quality of life and essentially increases the health and wellbeing of Ontarians. It is important to consider the [physical and mental health](#) benefits derived from gardening, given the high levels of stress and anxiety resulting from the pandemic.

We are asking that the Provincial Government designate Community Gardens as an essential Agricultural Enterprise and advocate that Municipal Councils open Community Gardens. We are confident that growers can work with relevant authorities to enable safe access to the land in April, along-side all Ontario farmers. We and many partner organizations are preparing garden safety protocols, in accordance with current public safety requirements, that will best protect growers.

On behalf of our --- members and supporters we thank you for your timely help with this matter. If we can provide information or policy support please contact us.

Sincerely,

*Stephen Harrott*

Stephen Harrott; Executive Committee Chairperson, Friends of Urban Agriculture, London ON