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CO-OPERATIVE SECTOR DEVELOPING RESOURCE TO MEET EMPLOYMENT NEEDS IN RURAL ONTARIO

GUELPH, ON – August 27, 2020. Ontario’s co-operative sector is creating an employment resource to collaboratively meet hiring, training and labour retention needs in rural Ontario.

The project, funded in part by the Government of Ontario’s Ontario Human Capital Research and Innovation Fund, was conceived pre-COVID pandemic when job vacancies were projected to be 16,500 full-time positions in the Ontario agricultural sector by 2029. Obviously the employment landscape has changed significantly, however, the need to attract, train and retain great people in the agricultural sector has not.

“Our co-operatives work in a competitive industry and yet have a long history of working together to ensure farm businesses in Ontario are successful,” says Claude Gauthier, Executive Director of Ontario Operations for GROWMARK, Inc. “This ‘people first’ initiative will allow us to offer great employees the best employment situation in the co-operative sector, and share resources amongst our businesses to attract and train them.”

The project will study the current and future skill needs of the co-operative agricultural businesses and the challenges they face in filling these needs. It will also explore the barriers that limit their access to international labour through permanent and temporary migration programs. Our co-operatives will then create an online portal to share existing and create new training resources, make connections with post-secondary programs to find employees, and provide opportunities for seasonal employees to find off-season work.

“While this project was initially planned before the outbreak of COVID-19, it also presents an opportunity to explore the ways that the pandemic has altered agricultural labour markets for our member co-operatives and the challenges and opportunities that accompany these developments,” says OCA Executive Director Erin Morgan.

Once complete, this project will just be the beginning of collaboration between our co-operatives to address the labour needs of rural Ontario. Future phases of the project will address ongoing issues as a result of COVID-19 and other potential barriers to workforce success, such as housing and social programs.

In Ontario, there are 22 agricultural co-operatives, operating in 82 rural and urban communities in the southwest, east and north, delivering products and services to approximately 15,000 farmer-members and employing 4,000 Ontarians. These co-operative businesses operate in all areas of agriculture

including grain, meat, horticulture, dairy and fuel. They also support the entire agricultural value chain from input suppliers to finished processors.

Co-operative enterprises all share a set of seven international principles of co-operation. The sixth, “Co-operation among Co-operatives,” is what brings a unique opportunity to our 22 co-operatives when it comes to their common labour issues. It allows us to set aside competition and focus on a common, collaborative solution that all co-operatives in Ontario can share, and one that will improve the sustainability of 82 communities.

This Project is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. The Government of Ontario and its agencies are in no way bound by any recommendations contained in this document.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ABOUT THE ONTARIO CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION (OCA): Co-operatives are a different kind of business model that are driven by people, planet and profit. OCA supports, develops, educates and advocates for Ontario’s 1,500+ co-operative businesses. We exist to strengthen and unite the co-operative movement and we believe that co-operatives are the solution to creating stronger communities, which help to build a better world. Visit us at <http://www.ontario.coop> for more information.

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