



## On-Farm Worker Housing: The Role of Municipalities

Municipal governments play a significant role in the building and ongoing inspection/approval of on-farm worker housing.

For example, municipal governments often have the following roles:

- Permitting and building approvals for new builds, expansions, and significant renovations.
- Annual inspections by the local health unit, are required for farm employers to gain approval from the federal government to hire temporary foreign workers (TFWs).
- Inspections by the local fire department.

How municipalities carry out these and other activities can have a significant impact on the success of fruit and vegetable farms and the experience and safety of international farm workers.

### How does the Provincial Planning Statement support the creation of on-farm worker housing?

The Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 (PPS) provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. The PPS sets minimum standards for planners to follow, and all planning decisions must be consistent with the policies outlined in the PPS.

The PPS establishes the ability for farms to have on-farm worker housing through the following sections:

- Section 8, Definitions, includes housing for farm workers as an *agricultural use* where the size and nature of the operation requires additional employment.
- Section 8, Definitions, includes farm worker housing as a *housing option*.
- Section 4.3.2.6 clarifies that worker housing is not included in the two additional residential units allowed on a lot in a prime agricultural area, but rather in addition to those two additional residential units.

### How can farms and farm associations work with municipalities to ensure safe worker housing?

A growing number of farms across Ontario municipalities are describing an increasingly unfriendly dynamic between municipalities and farms reliant on international workers to grow and harvest crops locally. This appears to be particularly the case in matters related to worker housing.

OFVGA is looking to engage in dialogue with rural municipalities interested in finding ways to achieve the goal of adequate and safe farm work housing in a collaborative way that makes best use of the finite resources of farms and municipal departments.

Specific emerging issues include:

- Ability to build and maintain on-farm worker housing as an agricultural use, as defined in the PPS;
- Need for more clarity in the intent and implementation of municipal policies when it comes to farm worker housing (e.g. local interpretation and application of the PPS, building & fire codes);
- Lack of understanding of the seasonal, logistical and economic circumstances of farms with international farm workers (e.g. that housing is typically provided with no rent charged);
- Lack of collaboration in addressing international farm worker safety (e.g. education, awareness opportunities).

### What are the consequences of not addressing municipal barriers to building and maintaining on-farm worker housing?

Farmers are reporting extensive drawn-out processes with local building and fire departments when it comes to farm worker housing. The inability to resolve impasses often consumes considerable amounts of time and resources by both the farm and the municipality.

Demands on local department resources could be dramatically reduced if collaborative approaches to these emerging issues could be achieved.

Aside from impacts on municipal resources, these barriers can have significant consequences for the farm, local community, and Ontario's food production capacity:

- Farms may not be able to access sufficient labour to support their operation, leading to lost production capacity and economic output.
- Higher labour costs due to increased worker housing costs through project delays or unnecessary building requirements.
- Forces higher than necessary investment in worker housing – investment funds that could otherwise support the farm and its overall economic and social impact to the municipality and the province.
- Increased use of family dwellings in local communities to house workers, further challenging limited supply on the housing market.
- Challenges farm employers from making Ontario a destination of choice for international farm workers by providing modern worker housing.

### How to engage with OFVGA

If your municipality is interested in engaging with us on ways to improve issues surrounding on-farm worker housing in your municipality, we would be happy to hear from you. Please contact Jenique Kennedy at [jkennedy@ofvga.org](mailto:jkennedy@ofvga.org) or 519-710-4047.

If you have any further questions about the nature of the programs through which international farm workers are employed on Ontario farms, or the workers themselves, we encourage you to visit [morethanamigrantworker.ca](http://morethanamigrantworker.ca).