COVID-19 information for Ontario consumers

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented fluctuations in demand for fluid milk across the Canadian dairy industry. We, at Dairy Farmers of Ontario, are committed to supporting Ontario’s dairy farmers during this time and will be taking all necessary steps and precautions to ensure Ontarians in all communities have access to safe, high-quality milk and dairy products. A message from Cheryl Smith, Dairy Farmers of Ontario’s Chief Executive Officer, on the current situation can be found here.

We recognize consumers have questions about the impact to the dairy industry during this time. Dairy Farmers of Canada, the national policy, lobbying and promotional organization representing Canadian dairy producers, has provided a wealth of information for consumers, which can be found at the Dairy Farmers of Canada website.

We have also assembled answers to additional questions that pertain specifically to Ontario.

Has Dairy Farmers of Ontario been deemed an essential service? What about dairy producers?
DFO and dairy producers in Ontario have been deemed an essential service by the Government of Ontario as we are a vital part of the food supply chain in the province. Like dairy processors and grocery retailers, we are critical to ensuring that high-quality milk and dairy products are available for Ontario consumers across all grocery and convenience stores. However, we are taking the necessary precautions to ensure the safety of our dairy farmers, drivers, processors, retail workers and all those in between who keep the supply chain moving.

Are DFO’s supply chain partners also considered essential?
Yes, all elements of the dairy production supply chain have been considered essential. This includes our farmers, truck drivers, employees at processing facilities and grocery stores. All elements of the supply chain are fully functional to ensure consumers have access to high-quality milk and dairy products.

What are the organizations in Ontario’s dairy supply chain?
The foundational organizations in Ontario’s dairy supply chain are:
- Dairy Farmers of Ontario
• Ontario Milk Transportation Association
• Ontario Dairy Council
• Dairy Processors Association of Canada
• Retail Council of Canada

How do essential services differ from province to province?
Essential services are determined by each province. In Ontario, agriculture and its supply chain partners have been deemed essential.

What are the stages in getting milk into my local grocery store?
Raw milk is collected from farms in Ontario and transported to a local processing facility where it is used to make the high-quality fluid milk and dairy products for sale in your local grocery store. The processor distributes the milk and dairy products to grocery retailers or distribution throughout each retailer’s network of stores. Retailers are then responsible for replenishing products inside the store.

This supply chain has been overwhelmed over the last few weeks, resulting from consumer panic buying and stockpiling early in the crisis, and the impact created by the shutting down of the food service and hospitality industry. Replenishment at grocery is happening and the situation is improving.

What protocols has Dairy Farmers of Ontario put in place to operate safely during the COVID-19 pandemic?
We are committed to continue to provide safe, high-quality dairy products during the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure we operate in as safe a manner as possible, all producers and supply chain partners have enacted a variety of new protocols on physical distancing, disinfecting procedures on-farm, and contingency plans to deal with any potential COVID-19 infection. Farmers who do not comply with the requirements of these protocols will not have milk picked-up from the farm, nor will they be compensated for that milk. It’s our responsibility to maintain these standards in order to provide nourishing food for Canadians.

Who does Dairy Farmers of Ontario work within the Ontario government to ensure our supply of milk continues?
The Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs is our main government partner, but we work closely with many others to ensure our food supply chain remains safe and highly functional.

Does DFO and the Ontario government have a plan in place if any parts of the supply chain shut down?
DFO has established a Business Continuity Task Force that is focused on ensuring our business operations continue under a variety of scenarios related to the COVID-19 crisis. We are in close communication with our processor partners, our Ministry and other government stakeholders as the crisis evolves and will align with them where appropriate.

**Why have I seen farmers dumping milk when stores don’t seem to have enough stock?**
The COVID-19 outbreak remains a deeply concerning health emergency and economic disruption both here at home and around the world. It has created a very unstable demand for dairy products due to several factors, most notably the significant reduction in demand from food service providers and the hospitality industry. Dairy farmers were asked to take the unprecedented step of disposing of milk as a temporary, emergency measure. It is not expected that this will need to continue. The flow of milk and dairy products through the food supply chain is beginning to normalize, and the inventory situation at grocery stores is improving.

**Why are you not able to donate milk directly from farms in Ontario?**
Provincial regulations prohibit the sale of raw milk; it must be processed (pasteurized and packaged) before it can be sold or donated. DFO is working with processors and Feed Ontario to find solutions that allow increased product donations to food banks. In the meantime, we know that what food banks need most right now are cash donations. Because of this, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DFO has donated $100,000 to Feed Ontario, a longstanding partner of the organization. This is over and above annual monetary and product donation support.

For additional information and questions on the impact of COVID-19 on the dairy industry in Canada, once again, please visit the [Dairy Farmers of Canada website](https://www.dairyfarmers.ca).

**Contact**
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