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McGUINTY GOVERNMENT EXEMPTS FARMERS' MARKETS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS FROM RIGID REGULATIONS

Public Education to Support Food Safety

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is ensuring that farmers' markets and community groups will be able to operate as they have for decades, while at the same time protecting the public's health, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

The government has exempted farmers' markets from rules that apply to restaurants and other commercial establishments through amendments to Regulation 562 (Food Premises) under the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA). This will ensure that farmers' markets are not held to unrealistic standards developed for very different types of retail establishments like grocery stores and restaurants.

“We know Ontarians grow, sell and enjoy eating locally produced foods,” said Smitherman. “We have heard the concerns raised by people who operate farmers' markets and run community events. The exemption we're creating allows them the freedom to continue their proud tradition of providing a wide range of high quality goods to the public.”

The government has also expanded the exemption in the existing Food Premises Regulation to include religious organizations, service clubs and fraternal organizations where events such as picnics, fairs and church suppers are open to the public.

The exemption does not apply to laws prohibiting the sale of uninspected meats, unpasteurized milk or ungraded eggs.

“We know that farm market vendors and organizers of community events believe in food safety and want to provide food that is wholesome and safe,” Smitherman said. “That's why we will be working with these groups to promote food safety. At the same time we will ensure that public health officials have the authority they need to safeguard the public's health.”

Beginning this summer the ministry will undertake a \$1.5 million education campaign to widely promote safe food handling and preparation practices at farmers' markets and community-based events.

Local public health officials will continue to investigate complaints, and take appropriate measures if a health hazard is identified. Public health inspectors will also be working with farmers' markets and local community groups to provide outreach and advice on food safety.

This is just the latest example of how the McGuinty government is on the side of Ontario families concerned about their health. Other initiatives include:

- The creation of 150 Family Health Teams which will improve access to primary care for more than 2.5 million Ontarians in 112 communities
- An additional \$110 million in funding for public health mandatory and related programs as part of our commitment of covering 75% of public health funding by 2007
- Providing \$75 million over three years to create an additional 22 Community Health Centres and 17 satellites to improve access to the full range of primary care services, including health promotion and disease prevention
- The Ontario Universal Influenza Immunization Program, which provides free influenza vaccine to all individuals aged 6 months or older who live, work or attend school in Ontario.

This initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan to build a health care system that reflects the needs of patients and communities, and will keep Ontarians healthy for generations to come.

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