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Accessibility Plan 2004-2005

Ministry of Agriculture and Food

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2001, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001 (ODA) was passed into law. Its purpose is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

One of the requirements under the ODA is that Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities and public transportation organizations develop annual accessibility plans to make policies, practices, programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. The plans must be made available to the public.

This document is the second annual accessibility plan developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. It highlights achievements of the 2003-04 plan and outlines commitments for 2004-05 so that no new barriers are created and existing ones are removed over time.

Ministries across government are increasing awareness of accessibility and integrating accessibility into daily business practices in a number of areas, including staff training, public information, facilities, and program and service delivery processes.

This ministry intends to build on its achievements by implementing initiatives that support the government's efforts and commitment to continue to make Ontario an inclusive and accessible province, where people of all abilities have a

chance to fully participate and achieve their potential.

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MESSAGE FROM MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD



On behalf of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, I would like to present our second annual Accessibility Plan.

The 2004-2005 Accessibility Plan reflects our ministry's efforts to make Ontario strong, vital and accessible to people of all abilities.

For more than a century, our ministry has fostered longstanding relationships with our agricultural, food and rural communities while becoming an accessible and inclusive employer and service provider that offers its citizens the chance to fully participate in building a stronger province.

I am proud that our ministry is delivering real, positive change that will make Ontario strong, healthy and prosperous.

The Honourable Steve Peters

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REPORT ON ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2003-2004 PLANNING COMMITMENTS

The ministry is pleased to report on the achievements for 2003-2004. We have moved forward on our accessibility commitments in many areas. You will note that our commitments are ongoing to ensure that accessibility continues to be considered in the delivery of quality public service.

1. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to establishing an Accessibility Planning Working Group (APWG) to assist in the identification of existing barriers as well as the development of strategies to eliminate existing and new barriers, including assisting in the completion of the Accessibility Quotient Questionnaire, identification of priorities, definition of timeframes and recommendation(s) of resource allocations.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The APWG was established with broad participation from across the Ministry. The group assisted in the completion of the Accessibility Quotient Questionnaire, reviewed progress on the commitments for 2003-2004 and identified areas of focus for preventing barriers and addressing new ones during 2004-2005 as part of the Accessibility Plan. Links were also established with the Wellington County Public Sector Consortium, whose members include accessibility planning leaders from a group of broader public sector institutions such as municipalities, school boards, and hospital boards.

2. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to ensuring that accessibility issues are taken into consideration in all of its collaborations with other ministries.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry partnered with the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) in the implementation of the nutrient management legislation. The ministry provided information in accessible format for clients and stakeholders as well as on its websites and in documents available through Publications Ontario.

3. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to consulting with its agencies, boards and commissions to determine the impact of the ODA on these organizations.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The Farm Products Marketing Commission (FPMC), Farm Products Appeals Tribunal (FPAT), Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario (ARIO) and Agricorp all work closely with the ministry.

Consultations took place with these organizations that are working towards improving accessibility in line with the requirements of the ODA. The FPMC, FPAT and ARIO websites are ODA compliant and Agricorp is in the process of achieving this goal. As these organizations are situated at the 1 Stone Road location, a number of the accessibility issues are addressed through the ministry's plan.

The ministry will continue to work with these organizations in 2004-2005 to assist them in achieving compliance.

4. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to undertaking an accessibility audit of its properties in relation to the new ORC barrier-free guidelines for government buildings, structures and premises.

Status: Deferred, pending the release of the new ORC Barrier-Free Design Guidelines

Action and Timeframe: An inventory of accessibility deficiencies for ministry premises is planned upon the release of the ORC Barrier Free Design Guidelines (please see commitments 2004-2005 for details). In the absence of the guidelines, the ministry continues to address barriers in the workplace. The 1 Stone Road location has undergone some modifications to address accessibility deficiencies (e.g.. For example, automatic door systems for washroom facilities and blue/red light beacons for emergency events and evacuation exercises). The ministry has continually informed ORC of any concerns / infrastructure problems in regional resource centres to remedy or enhance barrier-free access.

5. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to considering accessibility issues in the planning of public meetings and stakeholder consultations; and to continuing to ensure that these meetings/consultations engage the appropriate groups, and are conducted in accessible premises with interpretation services and background materials available in accessible formats as required.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: In 2003-2004, the ministry ensured that all public hearings were held in locations accessible to people with physical disabilities. In addition, the Farm Products Appeals Tribunal ensured that all off-site hearings were held in accessible rooms.

Currently, the ministry is in a better position to effectively address accessibility issues in the planning of

public meeting and stakeholder consultations. Several ministry offices already identify accessibility as a category in "meeting hall/room" inventories. In addition, mechanisms have been put into place to respond to requests for alternative formats and interpretation services as required.

During 2003-2004 the ministry conducted post evaluations of ministry clients and stakeholders attending ministry- sponsored events held at ministry locations to determine whether or not the event was considered accessible. The results, based on 12 key events/750 completed questionnaires indicated that 86 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the events were accessible.

6. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to reviewing and where necessary amending the Emergency Evacuation Procedures to include consideration for people with disabilities.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry's Health and Safety Committee at the 1 Stone Road location, promoted awareness of the ministry's Emergency Evacuation Procedures, which includes the safe evacuation of people with disabilities. Red and blue light beacons are located throughout the premises to enhance emergency evacuation. In addition, a buddy system is employed during evacuations and a search of the blue beacon areas takes place to ensure that people with disabilities are safely removed from the premises.

7. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to ensuring that the public facing Internet websites remained accessible and met the ongoing requirements specified in the ODA guidelines.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry Internet website is fully compliant. The ministry continues to monitor the website so that Priority 1 and Priority 2 accessibility standards identified by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) are being met. Division web editors are responsible for the reviewing, monitoring and testing of content to ensure compliance prior to posting. In addition, the ministry's webmaster monitors the entire site and conducts spot checks to identify compliance deficiencies, if any. All known at fault pages are immediately updated to ensure ODA compliance.

8. **Commitment:** The ministry agreed, partnership with Publications Ontario, to continue to provide its publications in accessible formats as requested by members of the public and staff.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry has identified a staff member to respond to requests for publications in accessible formats for people with disabilities.

9. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to implementing the Management Board Secretariat (MBS) guidelines on procurement of good and services once they were released.

Status: In Progress

Action and Timeframe: Ongoing

Rationale: As a general practice, ministry staff consider accessibility issues when obtaining goods and services for the ministry. With the Government's recent release of formal procurement guidelines, ministry processes will

be formalized in 2004-05 and communicated to staff to ensure compliance and consistency.

10. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to having the Human Resources staff review existing employment practices and processes to identify areas for improvement to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: All open competitions were posted on line. Human Resources staff with responsibility for recruitment activities were available to respond to questions as well as requests for accommodation from applicants to ministry job competitions. In addition, Human Resources staff were available to support candidates through the competition process.

A more complete review of employment practices and processes is scheduled in the 2004-2005 Plan.

11. **Commitment:** The ministry will continue to review desktop accessibility tools (e.g. screen readers, text browsers, software, etc.) to facilitate accessibility.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: Staff requests relating to visual, hearing or other desktop associated aids made during 2003-2004 were addressed. The ministry will address new requests, on an ongoing basis, when staff members identify them.

12. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to enhancing its internal employee Intranet site for staff to improve its accessibility.

Status: In progress

Action and Timeframe: The ministry is working with the Land and Resources cluster to complete this project. New database websites will be online as part of the overall redesign of the internal Intranet website within the 2004-2005 year.

To Date: ODA related issues have been flagged as content is developed; approval checkpoints in the workflow processes has been established to ensure that content is accessible; and manual processes have been developed to ensure that pages are updated and tested before posting takes place.

The ministry will review and re-engineer its employee Intranet sites to ensure that any new requirements of the ODA or MBS are met, once specified.

13. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to providing accommodation, as requested, to individuals involved in a competitive process, as well as to respond to individual staff requests for accommodation as it relates to their employment.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: Eight group information sessions on employee accommodation were conducted during the 2003-2004 year. In addition, Human Resources staff responded to questions and requests related to accommodation from candidates involved in a competitive process and reviewed 75 workstations of individual

staff members who requested accommodation. Fifteen accommodations were made possible through the assistance of external support. The ministry will continue to respond to requests for accommodation as received.

14. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to coordinating disability awareness training for its front line staff.

Status: In progress

Action and Timeframe: An individual has been identified to coordinate the training for the ministry. Work is underway to develop the project plan, schedule and content of the training. Training sessions will be conducted during the 2004-2005 year and continue on an ongoing basis after that.

15. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to ensuring that: all signage complies with universal standards; is written in plain language; is clearly posted; and readable at an appropriate height.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry's 1 Stone Road location and a number of field locations are fully compliant in this area. A complete review of ministry locations outside the Guelph area will be completed in 2004-2005 year.

16. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to promoting and monitoring the participation of managers and supervisors in the ODA electronic training program provided by the Shared Services Bureau in order to ensure one hundred per cent compliance with the training requirements outlined in the ODA.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: Over the 2003-2004 year, the ministry regularly reminded existing and alerted new management staff of the requirement to complete the ODA electronic training program. Statistical information from the SSB was reviewed on a regular basis to ensure the 100 percent compliance of the ODA requirement. The ministry will continue to monitor the participation rate on an ongoing basis and follow up with managers as appropriate.

17. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to developing a process and multi-year schedule to review all new/existing legislation and regulations and policies.

Status: Deferred to 2004-2005

Action and Timeframe: The ministry was unable to initiate this project during the 2003-2004 year. It has been identified as a year two priority for the APWG.

18. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to considering accessibility issues in the review/approval of requests/proposals for funding through transfer payments, as well as in the consideration/approval of applications for government-funded capital programs.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: No ODA issues were identified in the review requests for the funding of transfer payment organizations or of capital programs.

19. **Commitment:** The ministry committed to ensuring that TTY numbers are clearly identified in ministry publications, advertisements, etc. The ministry also committed to providing training to staff in the use of TTY equipment to enable their ability to provide information in response to inquiries through the TTY system.

Status: Ongoing

Action and Timeframe: The ministry reviewed its publications and information and amended it to include the appropriate TTY numbers. In addition, the Ministry's Agricultural Information Contact Centre processed requests for information from clients through the Bell Canada's TTY service.

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COMMITMENTS AND STRATEGIES FOR 2004-2005

1. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to supporting ongoing compliance with the ODA and improving accessibility for people with disabilities through the work of the APWG.

Action: The ministry plans to expand the number of participants on the APWG to include staff with disabilities and those who have an expertise in disability issues. The Group will develop their terms of reference; identify accessibility issues; structure planning processes to include consideration for ODA related issues; develop processes, tools, and plans to remove existing barriers and prevent new ones; monitor/track the ministry's progress against its commitments in the 2004-2005 plan and assist in the development of the 2005-2006 plan.

Timeframe: September 2004-March 2005 and ongoing.

2. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to conducting a review of accessibility issues in its locations across the province.

Action: The ministry's Facilities Management Unit, Service Management Branch and the ORC to undertake a review of physical accessibility in its facilities outside the 1 Stone Road location. In addition, the ministry will prepare a report on; the barriers identified, the methods required, and timeframe specified to make the appropriate adjustments. The report will also include a review of emergency evacuation provisions and signage at these locations.

The ministry will review the guidelines from the Ontario Realty Corporation, once they are released, to ensure that all work carried out meets at ministry locations meet the standards as defined.

Timeframe: September 2004-March 2005.

3. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing its practice of considering accessibility issues in its collaborations with other ministries.

Action: The implementation of cross ministry programs has expanded the number and variety of collaborations across ministries. The ministry intends to continue to expand its work with other ministries. It commits to consider accessibility issues in all of its collaborations. To that end, a ministry lead will be assigned for each initiative and will be responsible for ensuring that accessibility issues are addressed.

Timeframe: September 2004-March 2005 and ongoing

4. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing its work with its agencies, boards and commissions to assist them in becoming compliant with the ODA.

Action: The ministry will meet with each organization at least once during the 2004-2005 timeframe to determine the level of compliance of each organization, and provide advice and support as required, to assist the organizations to achieve compliance with the ODA.

Timeframe: September 2004 - March 2005 and ongoing.

5. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to develop a procedural guideline to support the planning of public meetings and stakeholder consultations.

Action: The ministry, through the APWG, commits to developing a guideline to support the planning of ministry-sponsored public meetings and stakeholder consultations that proactively considers and defines related actions to effectively address accessibility issues and respond to accommodation requests from people with disabilities. The ministry will continue to conduct and monitor client satisfaction evaluations of public meetings held in 2004-2005 to ensure that full consideration is given to accessibility issues. Accessibility issues identified in these evaluations will be considered and addressed for future events.

Timeframe: September 2004-March 2005.

6. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to maintaining its practice of providing publications in accessible formats members of the public and staff.

Action: The ministry has identified a member of staff to co-ordinate the response to requests for publications in alternate formats for staff and people with disabilities.

Timeframe: September 2004 - March 2005 and ongoing.

7. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to providing advice and direction to staff related to considering accessibility issues when procuring goods and services.

Action: The ministry will ensure that managers receive the Guidelines for Implementing the Procurement Procedures of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Training and support materials will be provided to managers to facilitate the effective use of the guidelines.

Timeframe: 2004-05

8. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continuing the practice of clearly identifying TTY numbers on publications, etc. and utilizing the TTY system to respond to inquiries.

Action: The ministry will continue to train staff in the use of TTY equipment and systems. The ministry will identify TTY numbers on new and reprinted materials, publications, advertisements, etc.

Timeframe: September 2004- March 2005 and ongoing.

9. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to maintain its compliance with ODA requirements for public facing Internet

sites and internal staff Intranet sites.

Action: The ministry will continue its practice of monitoring the reviewing all new content to ensure that it is compliant prior to posting. In addition, the Internet websites will continue to be monitored and spot-checked to ensure ongoing compliance. Work will continue on the ministry's Intranet site during the 2004-2005 year to improve accessibility. Should ODA related guidelines be issued during this timeframe, the ministry will review and adjust the Intranet websites to ensure compliance with the established standards.

Timeframe: September 2004- March 2005

10. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to conducting a full review of employment policies, processes, practices and tools to identify potential barriers to accessibility to people with disabilities.

Action: The ministry's Human Resources staff will undertake a review of employment policies, processes, practices and tools to identify potential barriers to accessibility. A report inventorying the barriers identified, as well as the methods recommended to remove them, will be prepared and will include an action plan with defined timelines. Current practices of advertising on line, and providing support to applicants requesting accommodation will be continued.

Timeframe: September 2004-March 2005.

11. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to reviewing all existing and new legislation, regulations and policies for ODA compliance.

Action: The ministry through the APWG will develop a process and multi-year schedule to facilitate the review of all existing and new legislation, regulations, policies, and programs. A report will be prepared to identify the changes required.

Timeframe: September 2004-March 2005 and ongoing.

12. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to continue the practice of considering accessibility issues in the review/approval of proposals for the funding for transfer payment organizations and capital programs.

Action: The ministry, through the APWG, will develop a procedural guideline to assist staff to consider accessibility issues in the review/approval of funding requests. At this time no ODA related issues have been identified with respect to funding initiatives. The ministry however will continue to monitor all funding requests to identify and take action to remedy any accessibility issues.

Timeframe: September 2004-March 2005 and ongoing.

13. **Commitment:** The ministry commits to improving access to people with disabilities.

Action: The ministry will increase awareness levels and skills in identifying, considering and remedying ODA related issues by continuing and building on its practices of providing; ODA related training to staff, accommodation to staff members and applicants involved in a competitive process.

Timeframe: September 2004-March 2005 and ongoing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Questions or comments about the ministry's accessibility plan are always welcome. Please phone:

General inquiry number: (519) 826-3100

TTY number: (519) 826-7402

Toll Free: 1 888 466-2372

E-mail: Accessibility@omaf.gov.on.ca

Ministry website address: www.omaf.gov.on.ca

Visit the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration's Accessibility Ontario web portal at: www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility. The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free province.

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