

DECARBONIZING

Carbon taxes vs climate change: a hot potato for farmers



The cost of energy-intensive fertilizer is set to increase under a new carbon tax regime. A fertilizer delivery is captured in progress at the onion and carrot operations of Gwillimdale Farms, Bradford, Ontario. Photos by Glenn Lowson.

KAREN DAVIDSON

Up, up and away. That’s the real-world trajectory of fertilizer prices, one of the most energy-intensive inputs in agriculture. Increases, current and proposed, to Canada’s carbon tax are set to have a seismic impact on fuel costs, reverberating with unintended, negative consequences on food production.

“At the gas pumps in my hometown of Meaford, Ontario, gasoline went up \$0.15/litre early in January 2021, when it was predicted to increase by only \$0.05/litre due to the carbon tax,” reports Brian Gilroy, an Ontario apple grower and president of the Canadian Horticultural Council. “I have also heard from fertilizer

suppliers that significant increases are anticipated and locking in pricing now is recommended.”

That advice is confirmed by Spenser Greenfield, sales manager for Niagara Orchard and Vineyard Corporation. “Nitrogen supplies were brought in last fall at stable prices, but the big one will be phosphorus. That price will be going up significantly,” he says.

It’s a strange marketplace right now, with ocean freight rates going up and fewer boats on the water, adds Greenfield. Some growers may have pre-purchased fertilizer for some of the 2021 season. Refill prices will depend on your local supplier.

As recently as early December 2020, the federal government announced that carbon taxes will increase to \$170/tonne by 2030.

That’s a jump of \$15/tonne every year, starting in 2023. Canadian horticulture is primed to lobby hard for exemption on all on-farm energy use, says Gilroy.

“You have heard the statement that the carbon tax system as currently structured is a death by a thousand cuts for agriculture in Canada,” says Gilroy. “It has created greater competitive challenges for Canadian farmers in a global economy. We’re price takers. We can’t produce food for less than last year.”

The case for exempting horticulture on energy use is complex. Not all growers are created equal when it comes to carbon reduction. Orchardists, by virtue of their perennial crops, are able to sequester carbon because they don’t disturb their soils. Potato growers, on the other hand,

use annual tillage which stimulates the loss of organic carbon to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide.

Consider the regional differences. Approximately 75 per cent of the grains and oilseeds grown on the prairies is planted under minimum or zero-till conditions points out Mitch Rezansoff, executive director of the Canadian Association of Agri-Retailers (CAAR). Practically speaking, the region is a carbon sink. In contrast, Ontario and Quebec vegetable crops, grown in abundance, need tillage so not surprisingly these commodities have an added hurdle when it comes to carbon offsets.

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AT PRESS TIME...



Brian Gilroy (L), president of the Canadian Horticultural Council, inspects the pruners of James Hindle at the 2020 Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Convention.

Education Series rolls out

In lieu of a physical show, the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention is presenting an Education Series January 25 – March 22.

Recorded presentations will be distributed as part of digital newsletters via five scheduled, bi-weekly eBlasts. Growers and industry partners are welcome to browse this library of materials accessed through the website at their convenience. www.ofvc.ca

A calendar of events highlights upcoming live presentations hosted by OMAFRA specialists and provides links for registering for these events. www.ofvc.ca/events.html

A virtual poster session, sponsored by the University of Guelph/Ontario Agriculture College will continue the tradition of informing growers of

ongoing research. www.ofvc.ca/posters.html

A Supplier Directory puts a spotlight on businesses that would typically exhibit at our trade show. www.ofvc.ca/supplier_list.html

Thanks to generous sponsors and suppliers of the virtual programming for OFVC in 2021, there is no cost to growers.

If growers have missed the emails thus far, be sure to join the mailing list at www.ofvc.ca

U.S. immigration reform on the table

On the occasion of the January 20 inauguration of Joe Biden, the new U.S. president, the United Fresh Produce Association stated its support for immigration reform.

“We congratulate President Biden and Vice President Harris on their swearing in today.

Given the many challenges facing our country, we are grateful that the President immediately moved to address the need for immigration reform, sending a new legislative proposal to Congress,” said Tom Stenzel, president and CEO.

“We strongly support President Biden’s proposal to create a pathway to legal status for America’s immigrant population, including some 1 million farmworkers critical to feeding the nation. We also call on the President and Congress to include a future agricultural guest worker program which will be required to secure an adequate workforce to harvest, pack and ship our products. The bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act passed by the House of Representatives in the last Congress charts a clear path forward to a long-term, bipartisan solution to these challenges.”

NEWSMAKERS



Congratulations to Leonard Pennachetti, named as a new member to the Order of Canada. In the December 30 announcement, the governor-general cited the president and co-founder of Cave Spring Vineyard, Beamsville, Ontario, for his key role in developing the Ontario wine industry and for fostering tourism in the Niagara Peninsula region.

Ken Wall, a vegetable grower near Port Burwell, Ontario, has been appointed to the board of the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario (ARIO) for a three-year term, ending December 2023.

Youbin Zheng, School of Environmental Sciences, University of Guelph, has been appointed for a term ending January 2024. Reporting directly to the provincial ag minister, ARIO’s role is to increase the production efficiency and marketing of agricultural products by stimulating interest in research.

The British Columbia Blueberry Council, representing more than 600 highbush blueberry growers, has elected its 2021 roster. Jack Bates is chair; Dalbir Benipal is vice-chair. Congrats to five new directors: Gurprit Brar, Dave Gill, Bryce Guliker, Harjot Toor and Eva Wang. Other directors include: Bar Hayre, Humraj Kallu, Ripan Malhi and Jason Smith. Carolyn Teasdale is the BC agri-representative.

Robert Van Der Geest has been named general manager for Nature Fresh Farms Mexico. The company has invested in operating a 15-acre greenhouse in central Mexico with an additional 15 acres under construction. Originally from Holland, he has extensive experience in both cut flower and greenhouse produce operations in Mexico.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) has announced staffing changes within the horticulture crops unit.

Congratulations to Erika DeBrouwer, the new tree fruit specialist. She will be based in Simcoe. Elaine Roddy reprises her role as vegetable specialist after a leave of absence. She is based in the Ridgetown office. Andrew Wylie, who had been an acting vegetable crop specialist, has transitioned to a new temporary role as acting greenhouse floriculture specialist.



Erika DeBrouwer

The Nova Scotia Fruit Growers’ Association has elected its 2021 slate of officers. They are: Peter Eisses, president; Janet Chappel, vice president, Larry Lutz, past president, Douglas Nichols, treasurer and director, Starr Best, director, Rene Penner, director, Dave Eisses, director, Dwayne Barteaux, director, Jeffrey Walsh, director, Travis Pearson, director, Stephen Van Meekeren, director. David Parrish is the Scotian Gold representative. David Power is Canadian Horticultural Council representative. Another virtual orchard tour is planned for summer 2021.

Raymond Desjardins, a renowned atmospheric scientist at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa, has been named to the Order of Ontario. He’s worked with researchers, producers and consumers for more than 55 years, to help minimize the impact of the agricultural sector on the environment.

Outgoing U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer announced the appointment of 67 members to serve on seven agricultural trade advisory committees on January 18. Terms last until 2025. Alicia Alder, North American Blueberry Council, Mark Haney, Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation, Matthew Lantz, Cranberry Marketing Committee, Molly O’Conner, CropLife America, W. Kam Quarles, National Potato Council, Harvey Reed, Louisiana Association of Cooperatives, Alicia Rockwell, Blue Diamond Growers.

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COVER STORY

Carbon taxes vs climate change

We’re price takers. We can’t produce food for less than last year.

~ BRIAN GILROY

Continued from page 1

On a parallel track, the federal government published a proposed Clean Fuel Standard (CFS) in the Canada Gazette in late December 2020. There’s a 75-day window for feedback. The aim of CFS is to reduce yearly greenhouse gas emissions by 30 million tonnes and covers all fossil fuels by providing individual regulations for each of liquid, gaseous, and solid fuels, defining fertilizer production under the gaseous stream.

CFS currently does not exempt either fertilizer production or the crop production carbon sequestration activities (4R and others) of farmers. Under the proposed schedule, plans are to finalize a CFS regulation in 2022 with enforcement to start January 1, 2023.

A rising carbon tax is not fair to farmers writes John Ivison for the *National Post*. “There is no offset or rebate, which means it is not revenue neutral. It is pretty clear that increases in the price of inputs such as fertilizer and transportation mean that farming in this country is going to become more and more precarious because of the carbon tax increase.”

And of course, fertilizer production is a big deal for Canada. Nutrien, the largest producer of potash fertilizer in the world is headquartered in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. It’s also the third largest global producer of nitrogen, a high consumer of natural gas.

It’s of interest to note that, late last year, Nutrien launched a carbon program to support sustainability in agriculture, partnering with growers to plan, plant and track sustainable farming practices to improve carbon performance.

“Working with select growers, Nutrien will design programs that facilitate climate-smart products and sustainable practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, sequester carbon and measure the resulting improvements in financial, productivity and environmental performance,” according to the company’s November 30, 2020 news release. The Canadian government has expressed interest in exploring potential benefits from cross-border carbon trading, saying Canada would look to work with like-minded economies such as the E.U., the United States and Mexico. This may be just a calculated outreach to Joe Biden Jr’s new climate-minded administration, but then again, it could be a surprising nod to good business.

At least two outstanding questions remain. Will individual growers be able to create and trade carbon credits? And will growers receive an exemption to compensate for past and present soil conservation efforts or carbon reduction practices?

During a year of ongoing issues such as labour and crop protection, such burning questions are on a top 10 list. As Brian Gilroy says, “Recent announcements about carbon taxes by the federal government have reawakened the threat.”



Source: www.nutrien.com/sustainability/carbon-program

The Grower goes “Behind the Scenes” with Brian Gilroy, president of the Canadian Horticultural Council. The Ontario apple grower explains the association’s lobby efforts to exempt agriculture from carbon taxes. This series is sponsored by BASF Agricultural Solutions.



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CROSS COUNTRY DIGEST

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Quarantine program for TFWs continues

Since the New Year, 14 temporary foreign workers (TFWs) have tested positive for COVID-19. As of January 21, TFWs positive for COVID-19 are self-isolating in the provincial government’s quarantine program. Five have fully recovered and are medically cleared to work on farms.

The B.C. government’s quarantine program requires all TFWs to self-isolate in government accommodations near Vancouver’s airport for 14 days before going to farms and are screened for COVID-19. This program has proved its value

in that these positive workers have not gone to farms where they could pose a transmission risk to other farm workers -- or cause multiple community outbreaks.

“The government-sponsored program ensures that all of the TFWs are treated to the same circumstances during their quarantine,” says Linda Delli Santi, executive director, BC Greenhouse Growers’ Association. “Also, the TFWs realize that it is not their employer who is making them quarantine but government officials are requiring the

quarantine.”

The BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries confirms that since the New Year, more than 530 TFWs have entered the quarantine program and 240 of those TFWs have completed their quarantine and started working on B.C. farms. The vast majority of these workers are from Mexico. They are working in the greenhouse vegetable, horticulture, mushroom or grape-growing industries.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the British Columbia government has spent approximately \$15 million on



accommodations, meals and laundry service for the 5,000 temporary foreign workers. This sum was spent between April and December 2020.

Through this program, the BC government has preserved the province’s food supply by ensuring local food continues to be grown and harvested through-

out the pandemic. The program has been regarded as a best practice by other jurisdictions. Its success is such that the government is continuing with the self-isolation program for 2021 without significant changes.

Source: BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries

MANITOBA

New rural service delivery model announced

Blaine Pedersen, Manitoba’s agriculture minister, has announced a new rural service delivery model that will take effect April 1. Agriculture and resource development department offices as well as crop insurance and ag lending agency offices will be closed in 21 communities.

Consolidating these offices is intended to reduce the physical footprint and to provide a multichannel model to meet the changing needs of farmers.

The 10 combined offices will be at Arborg, Brandon, Dauphin, Headingley, Killarney, Morden, Neepawa, Portage la Prairie, Steinbach and Swan River.

“Meeting the needs of our clients with professional knowledge, current research and data, connections to appropriate links, and timely, unbiased information has always been a priority for our department,” said Pederson.



NOVA SCOTIA

Food waste technology company plans to expand in Ontario

Bedford, Nova Scotia is home to Outcast Foods, a company that makes plant products out of ugly

produce. Specifically, the company makes plant powders for sale to a range of B2B

multinationals, contract packers and B2C businesses. Since incorporating in November 2017,



the company has earned \$2 million in sales of its proprietary sports nutrition brand.

“We are progressing well in opening our first commercial-sized facility in mid 2021 in the Annapolis Valley,” says Werner Müller, CEO. “Our validated farm and processing research shows a substantial positive impact on farmgate revenues and profitability of vegetable and fruit farms.”

From a global perspective, plant-based ingredients are expected to reach a value of \$13 trillion by 2025. There are several ways to process food waste including juicing, individual quick freeze, freeze drying, UV drying, drum drying or spray drying. As Müller points out, China predominates in the space of drum drying and spray drying. However each of these processes has differing capital costs, energy usage, shelf life and nutrient

values. Outcast Foods has met these challenges with proprietary technology that maximizes nutrient value while reducing the carbon footprint.

Its first pilot project launched in September 2019, purchasing food waste from a grocery chain in Nova Scotia. With the success of that initiative, Outcast Foods projects similar benefits in buying food waste from farmers.

Of 13 major horticultural crops in Nova Scotia, there is promise of returning \$13.6 million in revenue back to farmers in purchases of spoiled or B-grade food waste. The causes of waste are usually beyond the farmer’s control such as weather events, fresh surplus or produce that’s off-specification from retailer demands.

A second facility is in the works for southern Ontario.

For more details, go here: www.outcastfoods.com.

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CROSS COUNTRY DIGEST
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Living Lab – Atlantic
is yielding positive results

Research at Living Lab – Atlantic is addressing several key areas impacting potato producers in PEI, including soil health, water quality management and crop productivity.

Launched in 2019 by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), the project includes the East Prince Agri-Environment Association, Kensington North Watersheds Association, Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation along with 17 other organizations and numerous farmers in three important PEI watersheds: Dunk River, Kensington North and Souris.

Together these groups are measuring soil health under various tillage or plowing strategies, identifying crop rotation strategies and soil amendments (fertilizers and manure) to improve soil health, and reducing erosion of healthy topsoil by planting cover crops. They are also exploring eco-friendly irrigation strategies that benefit potato yield, as well as constructed wetlands and water drainage basins that act as filtration systems to remove harmful pollutants before entering waterways. Finally, the team is measuring the socioeconomic impacts to farmers when adopting these practices.

While research results will be more fully understood by the end of the 2021 growing season, the group is encouraged by data showing that winter cover crops can reduce soil erosion and nitrate leaching. Researchers have also created a searchable database for farmers to access historical data for soil, land use, topography, and weather in PEI.

“One of the biggest accomplishments so far from Living Lab – Atlantic is that farmers and researchers are now more connected than ever,” says AAFC engineer and Living Lab – Atlantic site coordinator, Scott Anderson.

“Farmers proposed a study where AAFC could explore a four-year crop versus usual three-year rotation for potatoes on their farms,” says Anderson. “The farmers came to us with anecdotal evidence that showed a four-year rotation has potential to increase potato yield, improve soil health and reduce pesticide use, and we were eager to explore this.”

For farmers, having the ability to be directly involved in planning and overseeing activities, as well as understanding the economic impact, will be vital when the time comes to adopting these new farming practices. A socioeconomic survey and interviews are now underway with

participating farmers which will help researchers establish estimated costs to implement new farming practices.

Source: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada January 4, 2021.



East Prince Agri-Environment Association executive director, Andrea McKenna (far left), AAFC and Living Lab – Atlantic co-lead researcher, Dr. Judith Nyiraneza (left), and Scott Anderson (far right) discuss activities with farmers and other partners in September 2019.

RAISING THE BAR

Red Snapper is a main season large round tomato from **Sakata**. Fruit have exceptional smooth shoulders and a deep red interior. It can be used as a vine ripe or a mature green type. It is well suited for cool season production.

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ONTARIO FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS' AGM REPORTS

Properly designed, funded and executed business risk management tools needed more than ever

MIKE CHROMCZAK

A lot has changed over the past 12 months, and that is probably the understatement of the year! On a personal note, I reached my 40th birthday amid the pandemic while planting my 10th watermelon crop and struggling to harvest and pack my asparagus crop. It made me realize -- and feel -- that I am no longer a “young farmer.”

My optimism, drive and passion are still intact. However, if the past year has taught me anything, it is that properly designed, funded, and executed business risk management tools are needed now more than ever.

COVID-19 has exposed countless vulnerabilities across our industry, but at the core our collective determination to put healthy food on the table was largely successful and is something our industry should be proud of. However, determination is not always enough to protect a business while outside factors bombard our farms; business risk management programs have been put to the test in 2020 and will certainly face a heavy burden as we forge into 2021.

Over the course of the year, the OFVGA’s safety nets section worked relentlessly to advocate for growers to ensure government decision-makers had our backs,

and that this manifested in deeds, not just words.

The year began with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) participating in its desired redesign of the Self-Directed Risk Management (SDRM) program to meet the Minister’s goal of a more insurance- and needs-based program. Our expectation has always been that any changes to the program must be at least as good as the current program and ideally better.

As the pandemic intensified, we reached a consensus that redesign changes to the program could not be implemented in 2020. More importantly, the



Photo by Glenn Lowson



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provincial government recognized the increased financial pressure that the pandemic was putting on growers and accelerated their platform commitment of increasing the program funding by one year ahead of schedule. We, as edible horticulture, were successful at securing our historical share of the funding increase, effectively increasing program support by 50 per cent for growers.

Even since OMAFRA has accelerated this program improvement, we remain committed to working with the Minister to try and meet his goals for the program design. The greatest issue is the complexity of redesigning a program that adequately covers the diversity of crops grown by our farmers. Further complexity can be found in the individual practices of each farm and their varying production costs as well. We will continue to work with OMAFRA in 2021 on the redesign with these facts in mind.

Late winter and early spring 2020 brought a fever pitch of uncertainty with a widespread travel ban due to the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented many of our international workers from arriving. When the travel ban was lifted and 14-day isolation protocols and ongoing measures were put into place, we called for a highly targeted standalone quarantine support program to assist our growers who were receiving workers through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). The \$1500 per worker isolation support program that was implemented assisted in covering some of the costs associated with the 14-day period (wages, food, supplies, PPE, housing modifications etc.).

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ONTARIO FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS' AGM REPORTS

Business risk management tools needed

Continued from last page

These costs were unprecedented with additional and variable measures placed on growers and workers by their local health units. The extension of the federal program throughout the year and into the indefinite future has been welcomed by growers and our committee. As vaccine and testing availability evolves, so will our support requirements and we will continue to advocate for the mitigation of costs and risks to our growers.

By spring 2020, the decisions that had to be made by growers were agonizing. Our workers, partners, suppliers, and buyers had difficult decisions to make too. The unknown that COVID-19 created was a huge factor and those growers with access to production insurance were no exception. Uncertainty surrounding workforces, access to inputs and markets was unprecedented. We advocated to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), OMAFRA and Agricorp and were successful in having labour disruption named as an insurable peril for Agricorp's 2020 coverage. It has just been announced that the labour peril will be extended into 2021, helping Ontario growers to make decisions albeit still difficult surrounding their 2021 crops.

For many farmers (with or without crop insurance), AgriStability is the last line of protection. However, with dwindling participation levels and underperforming results, it is clear that coverage level changes are required to make this a viable Business Risk Management (BRM) tool. OFVGA and the Safety Nets section have been advocating for years around the importance of returning the AgriStability Program's trigger to its pre-2013 level of 85 per cent of the historical reference margin and the removal of the reference margin limit.

Throughout the course of the pandemic, we also highlighted the value of increasing the compensation rate for covered losses from 70 cents on the dollar up to 85 cents on the dollar. Going into the fall's Federal, Provincial and Territorial (FPT) ministers of agriculture meeting, we were very pleased to have the support of Ontario Premier Doug Ford and Agriculture Minister Ernie Hardeman as they committed to funding their provincial portion of the program restoration. However, at the time of this report being written, growers have no more certainty about AgriStability than they did before the FPT meeting.

The one positive development was that the federal government finally officially and publicly agreed with industry's position

that the current program coverage is insufficient. However, beyond tabling a proposal, no action has occurred since the required consensus among provinces could not be reached, meaning that the program remains weak going into the 2021 season.

We pressed on in a joint letter signed by OFVGA, Grain Farmers of Ontario, Beef Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Pork, Ontario Sheep Farmers and Veal Farmers of Ontario highlighting shortcomings in the federal proposal and urging our provincial

leaders that if a FPT consensus cannot be met and the needed improvements to AgriStability do not take place, that the provincial government commit the additional funds that would have gone toward AgriStability enhancements go to Ontario growers through existing provincial programs such as the Risk Management/Self Directed Risk Management Program. We will continue to work with the Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) and our provincial farm allies to build on the progress we

have made throughout the year and fuel the momentum as well.

As we move into 2021, it is likely these challenges will persist and new challenges will arise, but we strive to conquer them one by one in our ongoing pursuit for robust, fair, and reliable business risk management programs. Improvements to SDRM, production insurance, COVID-19 relief and AgriStability are in our sights and I look forward to the opportunity to continue working with our Safety Nets section working group and with

Stefan, Gordon Stock and the entire OFVGA team to support our farms.

Mike Chromczak is the chair of the OFVGA Safety Nets Section.



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CROSS-CANADA SEED POTATO SURVEY

Seed potato supplies are tight



Photo courtesy of Potato Growers of Alberta.

KAREN DAVIDSON

Last year’s drought in eastern Canada has shortened 2021 seed potato supplies for tablestock. As contracts for processed potatoes get hammered out this spring, the picture will become clearer for that end-use segment.

Here’s what is happening in each of the major potato-producing provinces.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Sold out. That’s the sign at the end of the laneway for each of British Columbia’s seed potato growers.

“The sector has shrunk to about 750 acres, but quality is second to none,” says Bill Zylmans, chair, BC Seed Potato Growers’ Association. There is no processing industry in the province. Due to lack of demand in foodservice such as fish and

chip shops and Whitespot restaurants, sales are sluggish for the Kennebec potato variety.

All other seed varieties for the local fresh market – yellows, reds and russets – are close to being sold out or spoken for. To date, there’s been a mild winter, says Zylmans, so an early spring would be welcome.

ALBERTA

Alberta’s seed potato growers planted just shy of 12,000 acres in 2020 says Terence Hochstein, executive director, Potato Growers of Alberta. “My best guess will be 2021 will not change much, just varietal mix changes.”

Seed quality is excellent with no storage issues to report. The size profile is somewhat smaller this year in some varieties, therefore more single drop seed will be available. Hochstein predicts that open chipping varieties are going to be short, especially early-season

varieties. It’s too early to tell what planting intentions might be in the U.S.

MANITOBA

“Seed potato supplies are tight here with no extra,” reports Dan Sawatsky, general manager, Keystone Potato Producers’ Association. In 2020, growers harvested 3,529 acres for processing seed, 2048 acres for fresh market seed and 172 acres for chipping market seed. “Fairly decent quality” is coming out of storage with only one lot with a breakdown issue.

Manitoba potato processors communicated their volume intents in December 2020, giving confidence to growers for the upcoming season. The ongoing uncertainty relates to COVID-19 and the speed of vaccination roll-out. Once the economy opens up again, increased demand should materialize for all potato sectors.

Canadian (Seed) Potato Storage Holdings by Province
January 1, 2021 Infohort: AAFC (000 cwt)

Province	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	3-yr. Average	2020-21	2021 vs. 3-yr. avg
Prince Edward I	1,926	2,030	1,957	1,971	1,872	-4.8%
New Brunswick	1,923	1,770	1,753	1,815	1,138	-37.3%
Quebec	1,224	1,279	1,207	1237	1,167	-5.7%
Ontario	119	114	71	101	69	-31.7%
Eastern Canada	5,192	5,193	4,988	5,124	4,246	-17.1%
Manitoba	1,593	1,241	1,341	1,392	1,531	+10.0%
Alberta	2,300	2,800	3,507	2,869	3,428	+19.5%
British Columbia	200	197	138	178	156	-12.4%
Western Canada	4,093	4,238	4,986	4,439	5,115	+15.2%
Total Canada	9,285	9,431	9,974	9,563	9,360	-2.1%

ONTARIO

“Supplies are very tight,” says Duane Holm, president, Ontario Potato Seed Growers. and a producer of 150 acres of seed potatoes for the fresh market. “I’m sold out myself.”

The market is changing in that end users such as Frito-Lay want to secure their chip supplies in different regions as a means of risk management. Grocers are also looking for the environmental story behind the food chains. They are curious to know about environmentally sustainable practices, right back to the seed grower.

At the moment, Alberta is a major supplier of seed potatoes to service Ontario’s 38,000 acres. That’s a long haul for a bulk product. For Ontario growers, transportation represents 25 per cent of the cost of their seed potatoes.

QUÉBEC

“Really tight seed supplies” is the word from Laurence Coté, sales and business development manager, Québec Parmentier. “Round whites, chipstock and yellows are particularly tight this season.”

She explains that the pandemic has driven demand for home snacking on potato chips. Overall, Québec grows about 6,130 acres of seed potatoes which are in particularly high demand this year due to Prince Edward Island’s challenges with potato wart. Seed is travelling freely between provinces, but PEI’s seed cannot be exported to the U.S.

Québec Parmentier will be marketing about 350,000 hundredweight in 2021. PVY levels are very low, says. Coté. The Alliston variety is proving popular.

Moving forward, Coté predicts that demand for fresh potatoes in retail will remain strong. “Other produce such as carrots and onions had a very challenging 2020 growing season so Québec retailers put potatoes on ads very often last fall,” says Coté. “Fresh consumption increased during the 2020 spring lockdown and sales

continued very strong into the fall. Hence, demand for seed in our segment is very good.”

Here's the link to the Quebec Seed Potato Directory: <https://bit.ly/3nS7QdS>

NEW BRUNSWICK

Matt Hemphill, executive director, Potatoes New Brunswick, reports that PVY results have never been better in the province. Seed supply for the coming planting season will be tight on volume due to the 2020 drought. Volumes are adequate for all varieties.

“We are optimistic that we will be back to 2019 planting volume at a minimum,” says Hemphill. From the perspective of consumer demand which translates back to processing contracts, he anticipates that drive-throughs will remain open. “I believe consumers have shifted their eating habits to more drive-throughs at the moment.”

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

The 2020 summer drought in the central part of the island trimmed seed potato yields. For Pat Clarkin, Clarkin Farms Seed Potatoes, that meant a 30 to 40 per cent reduction of yields on his 250 acres near Emyvale. Overall, PEI grows 15,000 acres of seed.

Post-harvest virus testing is coming back with a lot of results between one and three per cent and with less seed testing at zero per cent.

“This will make it hard for some varieties to be recertified for another year which could mean a shortage next year of some key varieties,” says Clarkin.

As a supplier of seed potatoes for the processing market, Clarkin says there is a strong market for the Shepody variety as well as Mountain Gem.

The trend on the island is for seed to be between 1.5 and 7 ounces with the smaller sizes to be planted whole and the larger to be cut in two.

His biggest worry is extreme weather with drier summers, wetter falls and early frosts in September killing later-maturing varieties.



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RISK MANAGEMENT

A look back at 2020 from Agricorp

Year after year, farmers across Ontario choose to make Business Risk Management Programs part of their risk management plans to protect their investments. That is because these programs offer stable coverage that farmers can count on and can provide a vital lifeline in times of disaster.

2020 came with many unique challenges for producers. Agricorp worked with the federal and provincial governments to respond to the challenges. Changes were made to deadlines across programs to give producers more time and flexibility to make business decisions, including enrolment deadlines for AgriStability, Production Insurance and the Risk Management Program (RMP), which includes the Self-Directed Risk Management plan (SDRM) for edible horticulture.

Other program changes included an announcement by the Government of Ontario of increased RMP funding from \$100 million to \$150 million, adding Production Insurance coverage for on-farm production loss due to labour issues caused by COVID-19, and increasing the AgriStability interim rate to 75 per cent.

These changes were made to help producers assess their individual situations so they could maintain the coverage they needed for their operations.

As of January 14, 2021, Agricorp has provided \$105.2 million in payments for 2020 Production Insurance, \$33.5 million in payments for 2019 AgriStability and \$22.8 million in payments for the SDRM: Edible Horticulture program.

Production Insurance

Production Insurance covers yield reductions and production losses caused by adverse weather, disease, pests, wildlife and other uncontrollable natural perils. Depending on the plan, coverage is available on a total-yield or acreage-loss basis. Producers can choose the type and level of coverage that best meets their needs.

In 2020, Agricorp insured horticulture crops covering approximately 29,980 acres in fruit and 83,470 acres in vegetable crops. Overall, the main reasons for production losses were excessive rainfall, frost and dry conditions.

AgriStability

AgriStability protects producers from large declines in farming income caused by production loss, increased costs or market conditions. AgriStability is an affordable option – producers can get coverage for the

low fee of \$315 for every \$100,000 of their reference margin.

SDRM: Edible Horticulture

Under the self-directed risk management (SDRM) plan for edible horticulture, producers can deposit funds into SDRM accounts and the provincial and federal government match deposits. The government contributes to SDRM accounts in

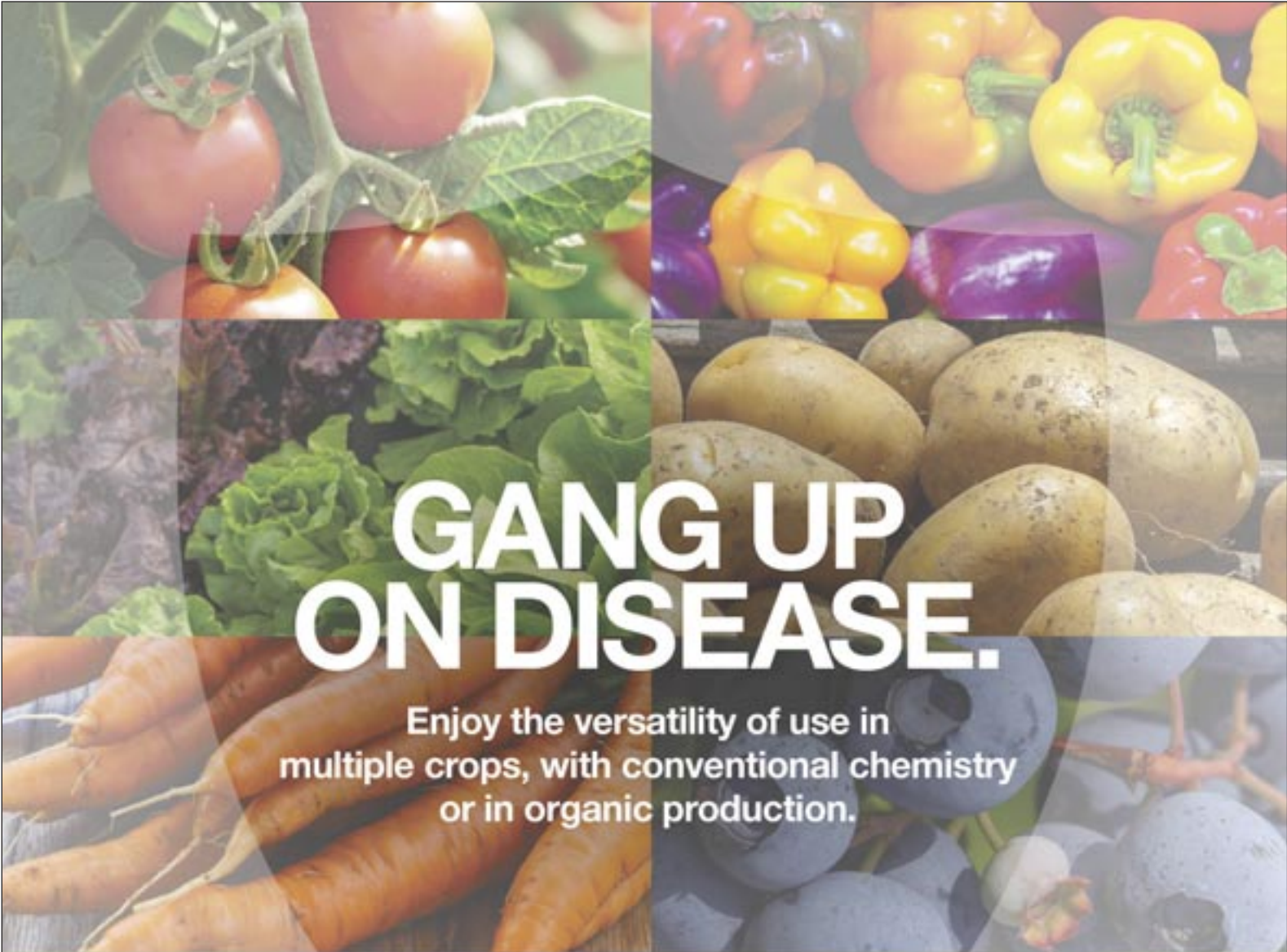
instalments to ensure producers who make deposits later in the program year will have equal access to the available funding.

To learn more about program coverages for horticulture crops, including premium rates and enrolment dates for 2021,

producers can visit agricorp.com.

Source: Agricorp





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CHAIR'S PERSPECTIVE

A year unlike any other



BILL GEORGE JR.
CHAIR, OFVGA

If you had asked me a year ago what might be in my next AGM report, a global pandemic and all the related fallout for both our sector and the broader world would not have been on my list. To say 2020 was a year unlike any other is an understatement. The COVID-19 pandemic threw extraordinary obstacles our way, but our entire industry rose to the occasion to ensure store shelves stayed stocked and Canadians could count on the fresh produce they know and love. Each one of us faced our own individual obstacles in our respective

businesses, and for those of us involved with farm organizations, the pandemic added never-before-seen challenges to our regular workloads. Needless to say, it was a busy year for the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association (OFVGA) on many fronts, with pandemic-related issues front and centre most of the year. You'll find greater detail on all of our activities in the reports by the section chairs and the staff, so I will just touch on some of the highlights. Labour has always been a key file for OFVGA, but never like it was this past year. When the Canadian border closed in March, it served as a quick and stark reminder of just how much we all depend on the temporary seasonal workers who come to work on our farms every year. Our organization did a tremendous amount of work on our own and in tandem with partners such as the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Farm & Food Care Ontario and Canadian Horticultural Council to convince government to let them come to

Canada for this past growing season. OFVGA also played a key role in getting resources and information out to member organizations to support employers in protecting their workers and adapting to many new restrictions and regulations put in place to keep people safe. We worked with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to establish worker accommodation guidelines and to develop the prevention and control strategy for farm workers that was announced by Minister Ernie Hardeman in November. We're also still actively participating in the federal government's consultation around housing and developing a formal response on that issue. But it wasn't just about labour. It was also an extremely active year for safety nets as OFVGA began advocating in April for special programming to support growers during the pandemic. A 50 per cent increase to the provincial Self-Directed Risk Management (SDRM) program was subsequently announced, and redesign work on the program

with OMAFRA that started before COVID-19 remains ongoing. We were also successful in having labour added as an insurable peril under existing crop insurance plans for the 2020 season. The provincial and federal governments came to the table with cost-share funding for growers to help with a broad range of additional costs related to protecting workers, from PPE, transportation and quarantine to housing improvements and measures to separate workers in the workplace. We appreciate the support we've received from both levels of government this past year with respect to programming and other resources, and their willingness to work with us through this past year. Those of you who attended the AGM last year may remember a resolution that was passed for OFVGA staff to work in a supportive capacity with Fresh Vegetable Growers of Ontario to help that organization build its outreach capacity and explore new opportunities. Work on that issue was set aside due to

the pandemic, but we hope to return to it this year. Another non-pandemic issue that we'll be watching very closely in 2021 is retailer fees. Last summer major retailers announced they were increasing fees to their suppliers, which is extremely concerning in an industry with margins as thin as edible horticulture. OFVGA has been actively raising this issue with the provincial and federal governments. At the federal-provincial-territorial ministers of agriculture meeting in November, ministers agreed to study the issue and bring recommendations to their next meeting. We will be following this and making contributions on behalf of Ontario growers where possible. I would like to thank the directors and section chairs who play such a key role in OFVGA's lobby work, as well as the staff team behind the scenes that works so hard to support everything we do. In this year without precedent, it really wouldn't have been possible without them.

WEATHER VANE



Masks? That's something that other people wear over there, in other countries, where the smog is so dense that you can't breathe. COVID-19 altered that viewpoint forever. COVID-19 is here. COVID-19 is now. For John Beardsley, farm manager for Exeter Produce, wearing a mask became routine in the summer of 2020. Photo taken near Exeter, Ontario by Glenn Lowson.

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URBAN COWBOY

Food protectionism: every country for themselves



OWEN ROBERTS

The global food system was regaled for keeping people fed through the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Any food shortages were, for the most part, a result of panic buying and production shifts. They were addressed with the same determination in which food is normally produced – efficiently, effectively and safely. There would be instances of benevolence and goodwill, but mainly, feeding people meant torqueing up business as usual. Especially important was keeping supply chains open. But when you put a food security lens on what’s happening

lately on the export market, there’s new cause for concern. First, Argentina -- normally the world’s second biggest corn exporter, with sales of about \$4.4 billion – announced in late December it would suspend corn exports until March. The country said it needed that corn to ensure ample domestic food supplies in its summer months, when feed can be scarce. Now, much of its own cereal crop is fed to the livestock that Argentineans, renowned for their love of meat, devour. Depleting livestock herds at home because feed is unavailable or expensive would be unpopular. The country’s government didn’t struggle with the suspension. It was only quick pressure from Argentina’s own exporting sector that eased the hard line decision of the government. From a business viewpoint, importers don’t like unpredictable supplies, and the country was apt to do itself some harm. But the bottom line is this: Argentina first. That move was followed by news early in the New Year from Mexico that it’s banning GMO corn by 2024. Further, it said it

wouldn’t allow the glyphosate to be used in the country anymore. It’s ironic that as parts of the world that have long resisted GMOs, like Africa, are opening up to this technology, Mexico is going the other way. But the country believes GMO corn is contaminating its heritage varieties, and further, it doesn’t want anything to do with the glyphosate resistance that’s being experienced elsewhere in North America. As with Argentina, the country’s main agricultural group pushed back, saying such measures will put producers there at a disadvantage. But so far, the powers-that-be have remained firm: Mexico will “revoke and refrain from granting permits for the release of genetically modified corn seeds into the environment,” it says, and phase out GMO corn imports in three years. That will hurt the U.S. more than Canada. Even though about 80-90 per cent of the corn grown in our two countries is genetically modified, the U.S. is a major corn exporter to Mexico. No doubt, significant sabre rattling and embargo threats will come forward. But Mexico’s decision is cultural, and its government is



showing it won’t back down from what it thinks is safeguarding its people. Our response shouldn’t be outrage. Every country has a right to look after its own people, in a way it sees fit. The question is . . . are we? Recent developments and the global pandemic underline how Canada’s newly minted national food policy needs to put food security above all else. It was created before the pandemic arrived. And although it had a strong nationalistic tone, every sector now needs to be viewed with an eye towards how it can play a bigger part in Canadians’ diets, particularly where they’re typically lacking, and where we depend so heavily on imports. And that would move fruit and vegetables to the front of the line.

We simply don’t eat enough fruit and vegetables. We’re told we should eat more, that we should waste less, that we should eat local and that we should eat Canadian. Given our climate, that means more investment in research, more technology use, and a clear acknowledgement from the federal and provincial governments that such investment is essential for food security and for Canadians’ health. I think Canadians would support this approach, especially with food security an issue like never before. We can’t afford to be left wondering what happens if our supplies fall short of our needs. And that possibility is staring us in the face. Owen Roberts is a faculty member at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

PROTECTING FARM WORKERS FROM COVID-19

With the 2021 growing season upon us and the ongoing pandemic, persistent and increased vigilance by employers of all farm workers is vital.

All farms with workers must take extra precautions to protect workers during these difficult circumstances.



Have a COVID-19 workplace safety plan in place



Actively screen employees daily for symptoms of COVID-19 and enable testing when circumstances warrant



Have strong protocols for physical distancing, masks, increased cleaning of workplaces and worker housing



Educate workers on how to protect themselves at home, in the workplace, and in the community



Take additional precautions if employing temporary help agencies

Together, employers and workers can help stop the spread of COVID-19. Resources for employers and employees can be found at: www.ofvga.org/covid-19. Check back regularly as resources are being updated on an ongoing basis.



2020 Farm & Food Care year in review



MADELINE RODRIGUE

As COVID-19 realities landed early in 2020, Farm & Food Care Ontario (FFCO) was faced with some challenging but necessary decisions to cancel all planned physical events for the year. Fortunately, the organization’s work is divided between in-person activations and online programming. FFCO was able to shift strategies and activate a number of meaningful virtual programs that made this a remarkably successful year, despite the complicated circumstances.

Key to that success was the continued support of Platinum Members such as the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association (OFVGA), which enables us to pursue the important work of building public trust in Ontario agriculture.

Training and workshops

FFCO supports member groups, farmers and the broader agricultural industry through a variety of speaker services and workshops, which included 36 presentations and 15 virtual Speak Up and media training sessions in 2020. Training helps participants effectively engage with the public (in-person and online) and speak with the media about issues impacting their industry. While in-person Speak Up training sessions had to be cancelled for OFVGA in March, FFCO is eager to offer these virtually in 2021. FFCO also established regular cross-commodity staff meetings in response to a need for greater communication around shared and individual COVID communication strategies.

COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH

The Real Dirt on Farming

The fifth edition of The Real Dirt on Farming, released in November 2020, includes updated or expanded explanations of crop protection, genetic engineering, pollinator health, sustainable packaging, farm labour and much more. A new, interactive website (www.RealDirtOnFarming) will provide opportunities for digital learning and content sharing, and can be updated to reflect advances in science, global events and changing consumer questions over time. Readers will be introduced to 32 diverse agriculture career profiles including a product development specialist from Nature Fresh Farms, seasonal agricultural worker, fruit and vegetable grower, potato farmer and a viticulturist. A supplementary Teachers’ Guide created in partnership with

Agriculture in the Classroom Canada and Farm Credit Canada will be distributed in 2021 to educators across Canada.

FarmFood360°

The addition of three new farm tours capped off a tremendous year for FarmFood360°. This immersive technology allows Canadians to tour farms and food processing facilities using virtual reality (VR) headsets, and mobile and desktop devices. These tours were a natural fit for the thousands of teachers and students transitioning to online learning and agricultural organizations seeking to connect with consumers virtually in 2020. As a result, the website (www.FarmFood360.ca) welcomed more than 835,000 users and 2.95 million page views in 2020. The “apple” experience released in 2019 has now had a total reach of 1,120,900. The top two videos in the series are the VR tour generating a reach of 593,500 and a video interviewing a seasonal agricultural worker with 278,800.

Virtual Food & Nutrition Forum

FCO’s long-running farm tour program was suspended in 2020 to ensure the safety of the farmers and many food writers, bloggers, chefs, Registered Dietitians, culinary artists and professional home economists who look forward to these events each year. Instead, FFCO partnered with the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, Farm & Food Care Saskatchewan and PEI to host a virtual version of the annual Food & Nutrition Forum and connect with 250 members from the same target audience. Three keynote speakers and a farmer discussion panel were well received, inspiring an online national speakers’ series to begin in March 2021.

Farm to Facebook

A move to online learning sparked a partnership between FFCO and AgScape to offer a series of Facebook Live farm tours throughout 2020. Farm to Facebook allows viewers, including students and teachers, to connect with farmers in real-time. A total of 17 tours attracted upwards of 93,429 views, including tours hosted by Norfolk-area strawberry grower Dusty Zamecnik and greenhouse vegetable grower Mike Del Ciano from outside Leamington.

Faces Behind Food

Faces Behind Food continues to highlight the diversity of people and career opportunities

within the Canadian agri-food system. In 2020, 134 people were profiled for a growing audience @FacesBehindFood, including many growers and seasonal agricultural workers in the Holland Marsh, orchards of Chatham Kent and grape vineyards of Niagara. Faces Behind Food also received recognition at the Best of CAMA awards with a Certificate of Merit in the category “Social Media Campaign Directed at the General Public.”

ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVES

Farm Environment Advisory Council

In 2020, three Farm Environment Advisory Council meetings provided a helpful space for cross-commodity dialogue, especially as COVID-19 began to impact the agri-food sector, including access to essential Seasonal Agricultural/Temporary Foreign Workers. These meetings, currently virtual, provide FFCO’s Platinum, Gold and Silver level members an open forum for dialogue on farm environmental issues and direction to the issue-specific work of FFCO. Gordon Stock was elected chair of the Farm Environment Advisory Council in June.

Soil Health Project

With funding from the Canadian Agricultural Partnership program, FFCO has been working on an ambitious Soil Health Project to develop a 12-part video series on soil health attributes, how it is measured, and important practices, such as erosion management and compaction reduction. In addition, a six-part video series on the economics, logistics, technology and environmental benefits of strip-tillage systems was created.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021

As we plan for 2021 and another year of uncertainty, we are confident in the new and re-imagined programs and initiatives that will allow FFCO to connect meaningfully and safely with our target audiences. We will continue to collaborate with other like-minded groups in 2021 and utilize the strengths and expertise of each organization.

To learn more about all of FFCO’s outreach and environment initiatives, visit www.FarmFoodCareON.org and subscribe to the monthly e-newsletter. Comments and questions can always be directed to info@farmfoodcare.org

Madeline Rodrigue is communications manager, Farm & Food Care Ontario.

COMING EVENTS 2021

Feb 8-11	Mid-Atlantic Fruit & Vegetable Convention, Hershey, PA VIRTUAL
Feb 16	Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers’ Association Annual General Meeting, 9 am – 3 pm VIRTUAL
Feb 16-17	Berry Growers of Ontario Annual General Meeting and Conference, VIRTUAL To register, email: info@ontarioberries.com
Feb 17-18	Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Convention, Scotiabank Convention Centre, Niagara Falls, ON CANCELLED
Feb 22-24	International Fruit Tree Association Annual Conference, VIRTUAL
Feb 24	British Columbia Fruit Growers’ Association Annual General Meeting, VIRTUAL
Mar 4	Ontario Potato Webinars VIRTUAL
Mar 15-18	Canadian Horticultural Council Annual General Meeting, VIRTUAL
March 30	Ontario Tender Fruit District 3 & 4 annual general meeting (Essex, Chatham-Kent, Lambton) VIRTUAL
March 31	Ontario Tender Fruit. District 5 annual general meeting, (Brant, Elgin, Haldimand & Norfolk) VIRTUAL
April 12	Canadian Produce Marketing Association Fresh Week VIRTUAL
May 1-5	International Strawberry Symposium, Rimini, Italy
May 18-20	Fruit Logistica Special Edition, Berlin, Germany
May 30-June 3	11th World Potato Congress, Dublin, Ireland POSTPONED to May 30-June 2, 2022
June 24-26	United Fresh Convention and Expo, Los Angeles, CA
July 23-29	Potato Association of America, Delta Hotel, Charlottetown, PE
July 31	Food Canada Day
Aug 11-12	AgriExpo, Grands Falls, NB
Sept 23-27	Canadian Farm Writers’ Federation Annual General Meeting, Windsor, ON
Oct 6-7	Canadian Greenhouse Conference, Scotiabank Conference Centre, Niagara Falls, ON
Nov 5-14	Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, Exhibition Place, Toronto, ON
Nov 4 -6	Interpoma, Bolzano, Italy
Nov 22-24	Alberta Potato Conference and Trade Show, Cambridge Hotel and Conference Centre, Red Deer, AB
Nov 30-Dec 2	Grow Canada Conference, Calgary, AB

2022

Feb 23-24	Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention, Scotiabank Centre, Niagara Falls, ON
March 7-10	Canadian Horticultural Council Annual General Meeting, Ottawa, ON
May 11	Census of Agriculture results

RETAIL NAVIGATOR

The value of food is changing



PETER CHAPMAN

As we continue the journey in 2021, we will be challenged by COVID-19 and uncertainty with sales forecasts and how consumers will react. By listening to consumers and customers we will find solutions and continue to produce food and beverage for the marketplace.

As difficult as 2020 was for many people, one positive was that the consumer's perception of the value of food has changed. When people experienced stores with no product and read stories about employees in the food industry going to work in a pandemic, many paused to think about food. I would guess many had taken it for granted in the past.

As a person who has worked in this industry for many years it has always been a frustration for me that consumers placed more value in a phone or clothes, than they did for food. Food is essential to life and we have been more focused on de-valuing it than getting the right price. My message is not to arbitrarily increase prices but to get the right price.

There are a few reasons for the value of food changing.

First, for many producers and processors the cost of producing food and beverage has increased. Input costs are rising, packaging costs are increasing and there are examples everywhere illustrating that processing costs are increasing. Efficiencies are not there in production due to physical distancing and other limitations from the pandemic. Some companies have had to increase pay to maintain their workforce. As we look forward to the 2021 growing season there will be increased labour costs in Canada.

Second, supply and demand are a determining factor in produce as much as any other department. With limited supplies and higher demand, it is natural in our economy for prices to increase. Production and packing facilities cannot produce as much and consumers have shifted from food service to retail so there are increased sales across the store. In one virtual Nielsen presentation, the presenter stated: "it's close to Christmas sales every week."

We also see disruptions in supply from around the world. We know many countries are struggling with the pandemic. Lead times are usually longer on imported product so the holes on the shelf might not be right away but they are showing up.

Third, consumers are thinking about food. The empty shelves and stories of people risking their own health to produce food have had an impact. It is impossible to quantify this but the awareness around food has changed. Consumers want to know and they need the reassurance the our food supply system will be there for them.

Given these changes producers and processors do have an opportunity.

You have an opportunity to ensure you understand your cost of goods and achieve a fair price for your product. Customers and consumers want your products so make sure you know your numbers and negotiate a fair price. This is not a license to just take an increase or charge too much. Use the facts and stay close to market pricing. You can also check Statistics Canada for inflation and the Dalhousie Food Analytics Lab for their forecasts. These can be helpful tools to ensure you are close to the market.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000403>
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Given an increased focus on what we are doing in the food industry it is also the time to improve relationships with customers and consumers. Share your story and the benefits of your products. People are more interested now in how local food is produced than they were this time last year. Grow your online community and enhance the consumer's relationship with your brand. Now is the time to have conversations with retailers about your plans. Make sure you are on the same page for volume and share your proactive initiatives to ensure delivery of your products. This is not bragging -- it is building relationships.

There will be challenges in 2021, as there were in 2020. The successful producers and processors will focus on the opportunities and benefit from an improved perception of the value of food from consumers and customers.

WHAT'S IN STORE

We are seeing more products catering to groups of people getting together at home as gathering sizes and visits to



“ Consider the opportunities in the future to bundle items and make it easier for consumers to entertain a small group at home. ”

restaurants are limited. These were holiday items where we would expect to see some different shopping habits.

Consider the opportunities in the future to bundle items and make it easier for consumers to entertain a small group at home.

This is also a chance to put different items together and change the price point at the same time.

Peter Chapman is a retail consultant, professional speaker and the author of *A la Cart—a suppliers' guide to retailer's priorities*. Peter is

based in Halifax, N.S. where he is the principal at SKUFood. Peter works with producers and processors to help them get their products on the shelf and into the shopping cart.





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MAKING DECISIONS IN COVID'S SHADOW

Difficult to predict when Canadian economy will stand up again



KAREN DAVIDSON

Once the Canadian economy fully reopens, watch the foodservice industry as a bellwether for demand for fruits and vegetables. It's impossible to predict if this sector will return to pre-pandemic levels says J.P. Gervais, chief economist for Farm Credit Canada.

In the interim, Gervais offers insight on the value of the Canadian dollar vis-à-vis competitors, an important economic barometer for produce exporters. The Canadian dollar

has appreciated significantly from 69 US cents in March 2020 to just shy of 79 US cents in January 2021. Recently, a *Globe and Mail* business columnist predicted that the dollar could rally to 82 US cents.

"I don't agree," says Gervais. "I think there's so much we don't know about the economic recovery in the U.S. and Canada. I think 2021 will be mixed. In the short term, I don't see the dollar going over 80 US cents."

Going forward, horticulture is slightly better off because of the strengthening currencies of competitors. Chile's peso, for

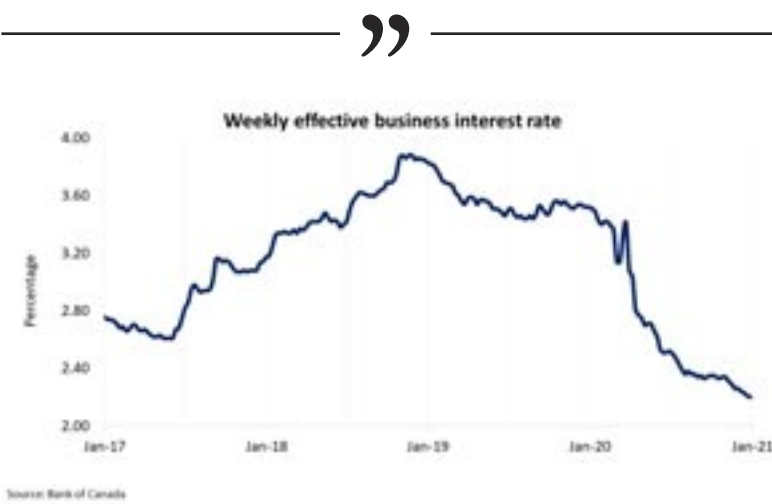
example, has gained 17 per cent against the U.S. dollar while Mexico's peso has gained 28 per cent against the U.S. dollar. In contrast, Canada's loonie is up 14 per cent.

The weak U.S. dollar is part of this story, reflecting the gloomy outlook for global economic activity and commodity prices. A weak U.S. dollar is bad news for American consumers who have less purchasing power.

For Canadian exporters, an appreciating currency lowers the price received when the currency is converted back to Canadian dollars.

“The pandemic has amplified the vulnerability of the horticultural sector in accessing labour. If there’s an opportunity to mechanize, then this is the environment to invest.

~ J.P. GERVAIS, FARM CREDIT CANADA



This chart is an average of all interest rates that businesses face (short-term, long-term, fixed, variable).

And that's a direct hit to margins.

For those growers with cash and the appetite to build, it's a good time to take advantage of low interest rates in the short term. Gervais doesn't expect the Bank of Canada interest rate to budge upwards from its 0.25 per cent rate in 2021. Long-term rates, on the other hand, are determined by supply and demand of bonds in the marketplace.

"These (long-term) rates could go higher," says Gervais. "The pandemic has amplified the vulnerability of the horticultural sector in accessing labour. If there's an opportunity to mechanize, then this is the environment to invest."

Horticulture represented about 11 per cent of Farm Credit Canada's total loan portfolio of more than \$38 billion by the end of 2020.

Economic recovery is tied to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout

Until four to 4.5 million high-risk Canadians are vaccinated, Dave McKay, CEO for the Royal Bank, isn't expecting a robust rebound. He was speaking at the Canadian Bank CEO Conference on January 11.

The speed of the vaccine roll-out in the first quarter of 2021 will foretell how quickly the economy can stand up again. In total, there's 37.59 million Canadians who need to be vaccinated. So it's conceivable that it will be the back end of 2021 or even 2022 before economic activity returns to pre-pandemic levels.

Victor Doig, CEO for the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, also anticipates that a recovery will be slow to materialize, pointing in particular to the hospitality and transportation sectors. Discretionary spending patterns may change going forward, as Canadians pay down debt.

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MAKING DECISIONS IN COVID'S SHADOW

Pressure testing your financial health

KAREN DAVIDSON

Like physical fitness, financial fitness can be measured in a myriad of ways. That's exactly why the work of John Molenhuis, business analysis and cost-of-production specialist for the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) is so valuable. He's worked with the grape, tender fruit and apple groups for years, updating baseline measurements every five years that compare the average of the group to the top 25.

"The biggest reason for this production systems approach is that the data can be used as a planning tool," explains Molenhuis. "Each individual can springboard from that data to decide on different varieties or replant strategies to improve profitability." A new initiative using the Ontario Farm Income Database and Business Risk Management program data is developing financial benchmarks to help farmers measure their financial fitness. Currently, benchmarks for 13 farm types are available including grapes.

Analysis of Ontario's grape sector is particularly robust with an average of 120 farms per year in the data over the last five years. Molenhuis presented results at a recent webinar called: "Vineyard profits: how do you measure up?" "Farm size is not the biggest factor in determining profitability," explains Molenhuis. The average size of the Ontario grape vineyards in the data is 74 acres. The top farms have virtually the same number: 76 acres. As the data show, it's about who does the best job of deploying their physical assets, labour and financial capital. Here are five of the financial benchmarks.

- 1) Direct operating costs.** Labour is expensive. This line item comprises a large proportion of the input costs in horticulture. In the grape sector study, farmers are spending 30 per cent of their revenue on labour whereas the top 25 out of 120 farms are allocating 20 per cent of their revenue. Why the big difference? These farmers are getting higher yields, higher revenues.
- 2) Cost of goods sold.** Fertilizer, seed and crop protection products fall into this category. On average, grape farmers are spending 16 per cent of their revenue on these costs, whereas the top 25 farmers are spending only 10 per cent.

3) Capital costs. This line item includes depreciation, rent and taxes. It's an indicator of how efficiently farmers are accessing

- and deploying capital. On average, grape farmers are spending 14 per cent of their revenue whereas the top 25 are spending eight per cent.
- 4) Interest costs.** On average, grape farmers are spending three per cent of their revenue on interest costs whereas the top 25 are spending one per cent.
 - 5) Direct operating costs.** This category includes machinery, fuel and labour. On average, grape farmers are spending 65 per cent

of their revenue to operate whereas the top 25 are spending 41 per cent. Why the difference? Perhaps the most efficient growers are automating more than their neighbours. Efficiencies can be gained by either increasing revenues or cutting costs – or both. For the top 25 grape growers, Molenhuis found that two-thirds of their financial advantage came from revenues. "Cost control is important, but achieving higher yields and earning higher prices were also

drivers of success," says Molenhuis. While cost of production analysis requires meticulous record-keeping, it's a reliable indicator of financial health. The 2020 pandemic year will no doubt reveal spikes in expenses but also the buffer of both federal and provincial funds to offset those unusual costs of personal protective equipment and worker accommodations. In the future, an analysis should show how effectively farmers tapped into those resources to steer through

the crisis. For related charts, go to: <http://thegrower.org/news/pressure-testing-your-financial-health>

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Best advice on hosting seasonal workers

In 2020, British Columbia's growers were stressed with extremes. Untimely weather events from spring through fall complicated harvest. But most of all, the late arrivals of seasonal workers and new COVID-19 safety rules stretched resources to the max.

The BC Fruit Growers' Association (BCFGA) has calculated that only 73 per cent of its normal work force of 10,300 arrived in 2020. That's like working without a limb.

This amputation of manual labour is expected to continue for 2021, as new protocols demand that international travellers test negative for COVID-19 72 hours before boarding flights. The unemployment rate in Kelowna, at the heart of the tree fruit sector in the Okanagan Valley, is very low at 4.6 per cent. Efforts to recruit local labour have not been fruitful. The usual flow of foreign backpackers is not likely to resume due to travel restrictions. And the time-honoured

migration of Québécois youth to the scenic valley may be a trend in freefall.

"I'm concerned that the cycle might break," says Pinder Dhaliwal, BCFGPA president, referring to the Québeckers. "Their parents came in the '60s. Trekking across Canada and living in the Okanagan Valley for a summer is a thing. They have travelled to BC for years and I'm afraid that no one will carry on that tradition."

In a recent BCFGA newsletter, another worry is on the immediate horizon. Cherry production is expected to spike significantly from the poor crops of 2019 and 2020, with more acres of cherries bearing fruit. More hands will be required to harvest the tender fruit which start maturing in early July.

As has already been experienced in Mexico since January 2021, communication breakdowns are occurring between workers travelling from remote areas of a vast country to Mexico City. As Dhaliwal points out, there are low rates of infection in the rural areas but

	Jan - Oct 2019	Jan - Oct 2020	Percentage (2020/2021)
British Columbia	10,364	7,538	73%
Ontario	22,620	19,805	88%
Quebec	15,436	14,164	92%
Rest of Canada	7,353	5,855	80%
Canada - Total	55,773	47,363	81%

Source: BC Fruit Growers' Association

these workers are now arriving in a “hot spot” of higher infection rates, seeking affordable housing while COVID-19 tests are processed. There are risks of exposure during that short time in a densely populated city.

To address potential labour gaps, BCFGA has counselled its members to consider Caribbean workers in 2021 rather than Mexican workers for the practical reason that Jamaica, in particular, already has a receiving and departure centre in Kingston. For seasonal workers who are

travelling from all parts of the island, they can be COVID-19 tested, housed and registered with travel documents in a coordinated fashion with the island's Ministry of Labour.

It's the role of Donna Adams, deputy chief liaison officer, Jamaican Liaison Service, and her team to soften the edges of anxiety for both employers and seasonal workers. Based in Kelowna, she provides support to workers during the arduous arrivals process and acclimatizing to new housing rules. She applauds the BC government's approach of funding and managing a two-week quarantine in hotels near the Vancouver airport. It's a window for BC authorities to inspect employer housing before the workers arrive at their final destination.

“During 2020, we lost the ability to visit farms in person and to offer that physical support to employees,” Adams explains. “It has become more challenging. However, the support was even more important this past season hence our team made many more telephone calls and our office developed other creative ways of communicating with workers and their employers.”

What works is WhatsApp. The free service allows users to send texts, voice messages, make voice and video calls and to share images.

"Internet access has become almost a basic right like water," says Adams. "Most workers have a smart phone which they use to communicate with their families, for online shopping and to watch movies. This is so important for the social aspect of living."

Where possible, she advises employers to offer as much privacy as possible and provide the necessary amenities to make the workers' housing more accommodating.

Coordinating with local supermarkets to offer specific shopping hours for workers is important to limit exposure to the public. Adams commends Independent Groceries for going above and beyond to accommodate workers in an effort to keep everyone safe.

She highlighted the importance of communication



between employers and workers. It is very helpful to identify a specific person to be “go-to” for addressing needs and resolving issues. “What happens when the hand sanitizer runs out?” Adams says rhetorically. “Have a system in place before the days get busier.”

Signage is one way to remind workers of proper hand hygiene and COVID-19 protocols, but it does not replace one-on-one conversations, Adams says.

“Acknowledging the individual and their anxiety is important. Take time to understand the cultural differences as this can go a long way in improving relationships on the farm.”

As the year unfolds, Adams is ramping up for bigger flows of Jamaican workers in February, with the peak expected in July at the start of cherry picking.

For seasonal workers, adjusting to restricted and socially distanced living within an assigned bubble is physically taxing. For employers, the pressures are slightly different.

Cherry grower Pinder Dhaiwal concludes, "Our own mental space is tight. Living in a bubble is an unnatural state for humans."



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MAKING DECISIONS IN COVID'S SHADOW

A virtual winery raises the bar

KAREN DAVIDSON

Thinking outside the box, Kelle Neufeld is now into the can. The Niagara entrepreneur has been nursing the concept of a virtual winery for two years, not knowing how opportune the timing would be to launch canned wine for the COVID-restrained 2020 holidays. She called it Codeword Winery.

“It’s been a learning curve,” says Neufeld who works with the grape, tender fruit and apple industries. “We originally underestimated the cost of producing canned wine versus going with a traditional bottle.”

Undeterred by the upfront costs, the owners of Codeword Winery orchestrated a social media launch on Instagram and Facebook to target millennials with their tongue-in-cheek brand: Take Your Clothes Off. It’s not as naughty as one might think, pinned to the graphics of Laundry Day.

The marketing is precisely tuned to a demographic that’s locked down, working from home and tackling chores between Zoom calls. In other words, it’s an appeal to a go-go generation that wants convenience, portability and a tippie without the guilt of opening an entire bottle. It’s very tempting to sample terroir from the comfort of a couch.

Another timely intersect is that Ontario consumers are willing to support local business, provided that taste and price align. In this regard, Codeword Winery meets that bar with VQA white and red wine in 250 mL formats. The Laundry Day white is 11.5 per cent alcohol while the Laundry Day red is at 12.5 per cent alcohol. Pricing works out to \$5.50 per can, the equivalent of a near nine-ounce pour.

The virtual venture has been made into reality by Genesis Wine Group and their co-packing facility at Between the Lines Winery in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

“These folks took us through concept to fulfillment,” says Neufeld. “They are pioneers in the Ontario canned wine niche.”

Lest any high-brow connoisseur of wine breathe contempt on cans, there are Americans who have led the way. Oregon Union Wine Company, for example, was a leader in no-fuss cans. Forbes magazine, in an August 2019 feature, cited Nielsen statistics that off-premise canned wine sales for the 52-week period ending June 15, 2019, had risen 69 per cent from the previous year, totaling \$79.3 million in U.S. sales.

Neufeld is convinced that canned wine is a trend, not a fad, and that it’s an evolution from the screw-capped wine bottles of 15

years ago. Her own experience with friends at wine tours is that they are intimidated by the language and the protocol. They don’t care about legs, for instance, the residue left around the side of the glass after it’s swirled. They just want a sip during Netflix.

“We want to take the pretension out of this experience and make drinking wine fun,” she says.

The Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) agrees with this assessment. The world’s biggest

purchaser of alcoholic beverages is already carrying “cooler-friendly” canned wine. It wasn’t a big leap to move from sparkling wines in cans to still wines.

Was a dry January bigger than ever? Codeword Winery didn’t bank on that in the time of COVID-19. They’ve got 12,000 cans of Ontario VQA ‘Laundry Day’ wine to sell to consumers who find themselves thirsty between loads.



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MAKING DECISIONS IN COVID'S SHADOW

Berry category ripe for expanding Ontario-grown product

We see such a huge growth potential for local berries. The objective is to build this category with retailers.

~ MIKE ECKER

KAREN DAVIDSON

Vineland Growers' Co-operative Limited, Canada's leading shippers of stone fruit, grapes and pears, has entered into an agreement with the Norfolk Fruit Growers' Association to market Ontario-grown strawberries, raspberries and blueberries in 2021.

The foray into berries isn't the first for the Jordan Station, Ontario-based cooperative, but it's certainly a nod to the quality advances of blueberry varieties, ever-bearing strawberries and tunnel-grown raspberries.

Why now? "We see such a

huge growth potential for local berries," says Mike Ecker, Cooperative president. "The objective is to build this category with retailers."

Growth in the berry category was well under way before the COVID-19 pandemic. But now, the health halo of antioxidant-rich, locally grown berries is only more attractive. Packaging and branding, however, are key to telling the story. The recyclable paperboard containers will have further on-farm testing with growers this summer to make sure they stand up through the cold chain.

"No one size fits all," says Ecker. "We start from the ground

up, testing first with growers to make sure different-sized containers work for them. Then we take the concept to retailers to see if it fits their consumers."

Broadly speaking, retailers are quickly moving away from polystyrene and styrofoam packaging as well as the green mesh containers commonly used for berries. Another packaging format is recycled polyethylene terephthalate (rPET). The vision is to source plastic bottles that are discarded in Ontario and have an Ontario company transform them into new-life packaging. That's truly what a circular economy is all about.



A new line of recyclable paperboard will be used for tender fruits in the 2021 season. Pictured at the 2020 Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention are: L-R, Steven Roberts, Mike Ecker, Matt Ecker, Vineland Growers Cooperative, Vineland, Ontario. Photos by Glenn Lawson.




EarthCycle materials will be used for packaging strawberries, raspberries and blueberries in 2021.




These tabletop, hydroponically-grown strawberries are sourced from Ontario's Norfolk County.


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MAKING DECISIONS IN COVID'S SHADOW

Recyclable and biodegradable packaging meets millennial values

KAREN DAVIDSON

Canadian consumers are rediscovering the heart of the home: the kitchen. The new-found focus on comfort food has also sparked more awareness of food packaging, especially if the groceries were home-delivered. There's a line of dots to be connected on food expenditures, how to store and utilize fresh fruits and vegetables. And eventually, how packaging can preserve shelf life and reduce food waste.

"The COVID-19 pandemic could potentially make younger generations more familiar with a space – the kitchen – which seems like a fable to them," wrote Sylvain Charlebois, senior director of the Agri-Food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia.

More than ever, this new generation of consumers will be scrutinizing packaging and labelling for its green bona fides.

The team at Blue Mountain Fruit Company is tuned into these millennial values. Headquartered in the town of Blue Mountains in the Georgian Bay area, they hold the exclusive rights to grow the Red Prince apple. It's a winter apple, cellared after harvest until its natural sugars and acids mature to a peak eating experience. But beyond that, the Red Prince apple will be sold in innovative packaging for the first time in the 2021 season.

Consumers will have a choice of recycling the bag or disposing of it with household waste. The bag will naturally biodegrade five to 15 per cent in the first 30 days and is estimated to totally degrade in five years.

Unlike other alternatives which require specialized environments to degrade, the Red Prince bag is consumed by billions of microbes present in local landfill sites. According to the company, the Eco-One organic additive allows microbes to consume the plastic, then signals other microbes to the site. They collectively feast on the polymer chains, breaking down the chemical bonds of the plastic at an accelerated rate.

The bag degrades into methane, carbon dioxide and inert humus. The technology is introduced by miDori-Bio and distributed by Vortex Packaging.

According to Blue Mountain Fruit Company, the Red Prince apple bag has moved from a number five recyclable bag to the most efficient recyclable option, a number two bag. New technology makes it possible to have a clear bag with high-impact graphics. It's the first company to launch this technology in Canada.

Red Prince apples will continue to be available loose, without packaging to ensure that grocery store partners and consumers also have this option.

Challenges with recycling

Canadians produce an estimated 3.3 million tonnes of plastic per year. Despite recycling efforts, about 86 per cent of Canada's plastic waste ends up in landfill, and just nine percent is recycled. Traditional plastic is air-tight and water-tight, and most are designed to be incredibly stable. As a result, polymers do not biodegrade easily and will last in the environment for centuries.

Other options in the market may claim to be biodegradable

but oxo-degradable and PLA plastics require an environment with oxygen, heat and moisture in order to begin breaking down. Neither of these options will degrade in a regular landfill. Furthermore, oxo-products are not recyclable and can leave behind harmful metals and chemicals in the polymer chain. PLA products are not recyclable and use up valuable food resources.

Source: www.bluemountainfruit-company.com





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ONTARIO FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS' ASSOCIATION AGM REPORTS

Access to labour tested in the year of COVID-19



Photo by Glenn Lawson

KEN FORTH

2020...you and I never expected this!!!
So that you are aware, when travel of foreign workers was suspended last March 2020, many people were involved in its reinstatement – Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services (FARMS); Ontario Fruit and Vegetable

Growers' Association (OFVGA), Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC), Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) and all provincial commodity groups.
We all learned about this COVID-19 virus as we went. I will not go into detail as you all are aware of the protocols and demands made to keep our workers and us safe. Even though there were a few outbreaks, you all did an extraordinary job!

Thank you for that.
2021: the requirements as expected could be a bit more than 2020. Do your best – they are evolving as more is learned about this virus.
You have been recognized for it. The Ontario Ministry of Labour, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Public Health Agency of Canada and the Integrity Branch of Service Canada have said

publicly that almost all employers were compliant.
Housing: this concerned all of us. First off, your local health unit will tell you what you need; some areas are different, but they are the ones who direct us.
All of our documents have been submitted to the federal consultative process on housing. No changes will be made in 2021, as the federal government considers the input. We will be in ongoing dialogue and will keep trying to keep workers' and farmers' safety and common sense top of mind.
So, there is nothing I can tell you about new federal regulations -- there simply are none. Just continue to comply with your public health department and do the best you can.
This year started with great optimism. Mexico had workers more ready to go than ever. Then, the requirement for a negative COVID test 72 hours before flying was announced on New Year's Eve when all foreign governments were closed. There was no chance to organize anything. These foreign offices are certainly trying but they need more time. We have lobbied for 96 to 120 hours not 72; to date, no federal response. The main issue is distance. For example, some Mexican workers travel many hours on buses to get to an airport and a 72-hour test time is too tight. We all hope some resolution is at hand. We, as always, at FARMS will keep you informed.
FARMS and OVGFA

continue to have articles published that are positive in nature about farmers, workers, and the program in general. We will continue to do this. I know it seems there is no impact, but we believe there is. We believe the silent majority are on our side – they are just that, silent. The zealots have their loud voices but for the most part they come off too sensational, too bad, and full of lies. We will never stop telling your story.
The bottom line is there are many people who have your back: FARMS – especially Sue Williams, staff and Board of Directors
OFVGA – Alison Robertson, Bill George, Gordon Stock, staff and especially Stefan Larrass who has the labour file. We have formed a good team to address these labour issues between the Labour Issues Coordinating Committee and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program
Federally – we have partnered with CFA & CHC on federal labour issues
This issue is not part-time but each and every day. Changes are happening every day.

Ken Forth is OFVGA labour section chair, Labour Issues Coordinating Committee chair and FARMS president.

Shackelton Auctions – 2021 Early Listed Auctions

MARCH 2ND – MCEACHREN FARMS – GLENCOE ONTARIO - John Deere 8320, 8120, 4555, 6400 & 2355 tractors, John Deere 9660 combine & heads, John Deere 4830 sprayer, John Deere 1990 CCS drill, John Deere 1770NT planter, Kongskilde 9100 Vertical Till, RJ 600bu. wagons and more.
MARCH 13TH – BRUCE & BRIAN GARDEN – AMHERSTBURG ONTARIO - John Deere 7810 & 4450 low hour tractors, IH 706 & White 2-70 tractors, John Deere 9510 combine, great line of tillage, planting, grain handling and farm equipment
MARCH 19TH – DAVID DURHAM – DUTTON ONTARIO - John Deere 8285R & 8245R low hour tractors, John Deere 4520 compact with loader, John Deere 1770NT & 1990 planters, Great Plains vertical till, 3 tandem grain trucks, John Deere 850D Gator
MARCH TBA – TED HILHORST FARMLAND – TILLSONBURG ONTARIO - Over 400 acres of farmland for the TED HILHORST estate. Full details will be posted as they become available.
MARCH 27TH – WRAY KNOX – SCOTLAND ONTARIO -Case IH 8920 tractor, John Deere 2955 & 2555 tractors, John Deere 1750 planter, John Deere 750 drill, Sunflower 1434 21' disc, line of farm & grain handling equipment.
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is hereby given that the
162nd Annual Members
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Ontario Fruit and
Vegetable Growers' Association
will be held virtually

on

Tuesday, February 16th, 2021

Election of Directors of the Association will take place as well as dealing with resolutions and any other business that may arise.

BITES AND BITES

Pharr International Bridge to expand

The crossing between Reynosa, Mexico and Pharr, Texas is expanding to accommodate \$35 billion in trade and more in the years to come. It's the number one crossing in the U.S for produce. More than 10 per cent of the crossings are in high-value berries.

In an interview with Hortidaily, Tony Martinez explained that the COVID-19 crisis heightened the importance of the bridge, with year-end records showing an increase in traffic. He's vice-chair of the bridge board.

According to Luis Bazan, bridge director, April 2020 turned out better than expected with a loss of 13 per cent loss of truck traffic compared to the 30-40 per cent anticipated. He says that traffic dipped only in April and May, then rebounded with traffic spikes in some months.

Looking ahead, he expects January through March 2021will

see record traffic flow, with avocados and berries representing the highest-value commodities.

The bridge is destined to grow in importance with construction underway on two additional north-bound lanes on the bridge. This project should be completed by March 2022. It will offer gate-to-gate service for trucks to be checked electronically. Some trucks will be pre-certified, not necessarily for produce, but alleviating a bottleneck so that 800 trucks per day won't be handled directly by Customs and Border Protection crews.

A twin bridge is now greenlighted for completion in mid-to late summer 2023. It's all part of a Texas-Mexico Border Master Plan that will set new standards for logistics.

Source: Hortidaily January 14, 2021



Pandemic underscores rising value of traceability, supply chain management

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic is the kind of “black swan” event that is disrupting countless aspects of business around the world, and the produce supply chain is not exempt. To prevent the virus from spreading, an American company called Fusionware looked for a way to limit person-to-person contact.

That meant changes to how members of the produce supply chain document all production, processing and distribution steps to facilitate full traceability while maintaining COVID-19-compliant touchless solutions.

Since 2000, the U.S.-based Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act has been in force for interstate commerce. But in most systems, a physical signature is still required, often drawn with the finger or a stylus on a tablet or smartphone. As a way to prevent potential spread of COVID-19, Fusionware has eliminated that kind of physical touch altogether.

A no-touch system to solve the problem for the produce supply chain

“A lot of companies have everything running through a mobile device, and in order for the system to work at a place such as a shipping office, every truck driver has to touch the pen or screen to sign for that load. But with COVID-19, we can't do that,” said Fusionware president and CEO Greg Fielding. “Fusionware was faced with creating a 100% real-time e-signature system that would maintain the necessary health and safety standards but still provide

full traceability.”

How touchless e-signatures work

The touchless technology enables a user to transfer ownership to the next member of the supply chain via a text exchange that facilitates electronic signature verification on each individual's own mobile device. The process is permission-based; no data is shared from the Fusionware system unless the individual user allows it.

Optimized for mobile, the system gives users the ability to sign remotely from anywhere, making it more convenient for Fusionware customers in streamlining personal touchpoints in the supply chain without physical contact.

Post-COVID-19 system utility

The touchless e-signature technology will stretch well beyond the pandemic and will facilitate more efficient transfer and verification of ownership, Fielding said. Ultimately, the new utility will help improve produce quality for the consumer.

“The COVID-19 pandemic caused us to think outside the box and develop a better way to handle this step safely and securely. At the end of the day, it is a way better process,” Fielding said. “We can ultimately use this technology to provide the necessary verification to streamline other steps in the supply chain such as managing temperature for loads of produce in transit. It's just one of many

new value propositions this system is creating for our customers.”

Roots in innovation and service

Since its founding in 2016, Fusionware, a North American cloud-based produce supply chain solution, has been quietly providing its “SaaS” (software as a

service)-based traceability solution to grow/pack/ship operations of all sizes. In doing so, the company has assembled a customer roster including some of the largest names and landowners in the produce industry.

“Fusionware was built using blockchain technology and links all business intelligence into one platform that tracks every supply

chain touchpoint. Our technology has the power to revolutionize the industry,” Fielding said. “We can eliminate food waste, simplify traceability, promote sustainability, mitigate risk and make a positive impact on the planet and profitability of our customers. Fusionware is the platform to do all of that, now and well into the future.”

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Dealing with Delia without chlorpyrifos

TRAVIS CRANMER

Cabbage, onion, and seedcorn maggot flies (*Delia radicum*, *antiqua* and *platura* respectively) lay their eggs at the base of the plant and several days later those larvae, often referred to as maggots, immediately start feeding on the host plant’s roots. Small amounts of feeding at the initial crop development stages can lead to severe reductions in yield and in severe cases, crop failure in many crops.

In onions, one maggot can kill up to 20 plants early in the season and without control, onion maggot can reduce plant stands by more than 50 per cent if crops are not protected. Later generations of onion maggot can cause distorted growth and open wounds making it easier for pathogens to gain entry. In Brassica crops, cabbage maggots feed on roots, killing young plants and stunting older ones. If the plants survive, the wounds act as points of entry for soft rot bacteria. For root Brassicas such as rutabaga and turnip, the tunnels result in an unmarketable crop.

Onion maggot management relies heavily on neonicotinoid seed treatments (such as Supresto 75 WS), or on group 1B organophosphates, specifically chlorpyrifos insecticides. In Brassica crops for cabbage maggot management, group 5 spinosads (Success & Entrust) can be used as a greenhouse transplant drench, and group 28 cyantraniliprole (Verimark) and chlorpyrifos can be applied as a drench after and at planting. With the uncertainty surrounding future uses of neonicotinoids, and the limited length of protection the group 5 spinosads offer, both onions and Brassicas rely heavily on group 1B organophosphates for maggot control.

Chlorpyrifos—marketed under the trade names Lorsban, Pyrinex, Dursban and Shaphos in Canada—has been primarily relied on for maggot fly control in many vegetable crops. Most agricultural uses have been cancelled with a phase-out scheduled over the next few years due to risks to the environment that have not been shown to be acceptable. It is

uncertain whether there will be other chemicals registered on *Delia* maggot flies on these crops before the uses are completely cancelled and whether they will even be effective at managing these flies.

Other management strategies exist, however, they require more planning and/or labour. One of the most effective management strategies that is often not practical for most growers, is a long-term crop rotation with fields spaced several kilometers apart. If distance between fields is not possible, even a crop rotation with a smaller distance between fields will reduce the pressure. A four-year crop rotation will reduce *Delia* fly pressure as well as many other pests and pathogens.

In all vegetable crops, discing in crop residue immediately after harvest will help to speed up decomposition and make it more difficult for the *Delia* flies to complete their lifecycle. Planting the crop later is another cultural management strategy, as later plantings are less likely to see as much damage.

In Brassica production, specifically Daikon radish, exclusion nets over large acreages have shown to be effective for this crop whose quality is greatly impacted by feeding damage to the root. Reels help mechanically to roll out and bring in the nets but labour is still required to secure the edges and prevent entry points for the adult fly to enter. In some crops, pest control products are sprayed through the exclusion nets, resulting in protection against pathogens whose spores can easily fit through the holes. Weed control becomes more difficult for crops that are in the ground a greater duration of time. For shorter maturing crops, such as daikon radish, the crop can be harvested before weeds become an issue but crops such as rutabaga require season-long protection.

In Allium production, exclusion nets are used in garlic fields that have high populations of leek moth. Nets with small enough holes for protection against leek moth would also protect against seedcorn or onion maggot. In onions, the crop canopy may not be strong enough



Figure 1. Sterile, pink, adult onion maggot flies during a weekly release in 2020.



Figure 2. Fields seeded with onions from 2018–2020. Fields in blue represent fields where sterile flies were released in 2018, 2019 and 2020 while fields in yellow were fields where no flies were released. Despite onions being grown in adjacent fields for three continuous years, the peak number of flies did not increase as would be expected with such a short crop rotation.

to hold up the net without causing damage to the plant and removing the net for weed management or other pest management strategies would also cause more harm.









As far as biological controls are to be considered, products such as *Nemasys* containing the beneficial nematode *Steinernema feltiae*, have been tested for onion and cabbage maggot control at the Muck Crops Research Station at


the University of Guelph. These beneficial nematodes, applied as a drench, have the potential to parasitize maggot larvae and limit the amount of feeding damage. In onions, no significant differences in the percentage of maggot damage or yield was observed, however there was low onion maggot pressure for the trial overall. When *Nemasys* was tested to manage cabbage maggot in 2017, *Nemasys* significantly

reduced the per cent incidence of maggot damage in one assessment and concentration of nematodes in both radish and cabbage compared to the untreated check. However, in both trials, two out of three concentrations of *Nemasys* had maggot damage incidence similar to the untreated checks.

Continued on next page

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ONTARIO VEGETABLE NEWS

Dealing with Delia without chlorpyrifos

Continued from last page

In other years, maggot pressure was often too low to make any clear conclusions on the efficacy of the product.

In Quebec, Sterile Insect Technology (SIT) has proven to eliminate the application of soil and foliar chlorpyrifos insecticides in most fields while maintaining onion yields comparable to pesticide-based programs. Sterile male onion maggot flies are released into the field on a weekly basis and as a result, the eggs that pre-existing female flies will lay will not be fertile. As a result, the population of flies decreases over time. Work in Quebec has shown that the release rates of sterile flies could be decreased by up to 90 per cent within five years of repeated releases.

Over the last three field seasons, sterile onion maggot flies have been released as part of an Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) project in collaboration with Phytodata Inc. and OMAFRA, and the level of flies were recorded on sticky cards on a weekly basis. Sterile flies were differentiated on sticky cards by their colour, as these flies were dyed pink prior to their release (Figure 1). Despite high density onion sets being grown in adjacent fields for three continuous years (Figure 2), the peak number of flies per trap per week did not increase as expected with such a short crop rotation (Figure 3). In all three years, the levels of fertile flies did not amplify to levels where maggot damage was observed in the field. A full report of this trial will be posted on ONvegetables.com shortly and if you are interested in applying this management strategy on your farm, please contact me: travis.cranmer@ontario.ca or Anne-Marie Fortier at afortier@phytodata.ca.

Sterile insect technology has

shown to be effective to manage onion maggot in commercial onion fields in Ontario and Quebec, but what is stopping it from working for other species of Delia maggot flies? Primarily the logistics of rearing large amounts of the insect, putting them into a dormant state and then waking them up to be released on a weekly basis throughout the season. Anne-Marie Fortier, and her team at Phytodata are getting closer to developing a successful rearing, storing and release protocol for cabbage and seedcorn maggot.

Delia maggot flies and their larvae are considered community pests, meaning that even if you manage the insect well in your 30-acre onion field and your neighbour chooses not to, their flies will easily find your field. This is a concern for onions since the majority of onion production is concentrated in muck soils with very small distances between fields. Brassica crops, such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage and cauliflower, are scattered more throughout the province and therefore if/when the sterile insect technology is developed for cabbage maggot, it should be easier for individual growers to implement and see effective results if their field is secluded and the entire Delia population for the area is managed.

Without chlorpyrifos in the IPM toolkit for growers, it will create an uneven playing field where Canadian growers may have to practise longer crop rotations, overseed due to expected stand losses, use sterile insect technology, implement exclusion nets, or apply more expensive pest control products compared to growers in other countries. For many growers, managing maggot flies without chlorpyrifos will increase expenses and make it even more difficult to compete with imports from the United States and Mexico.

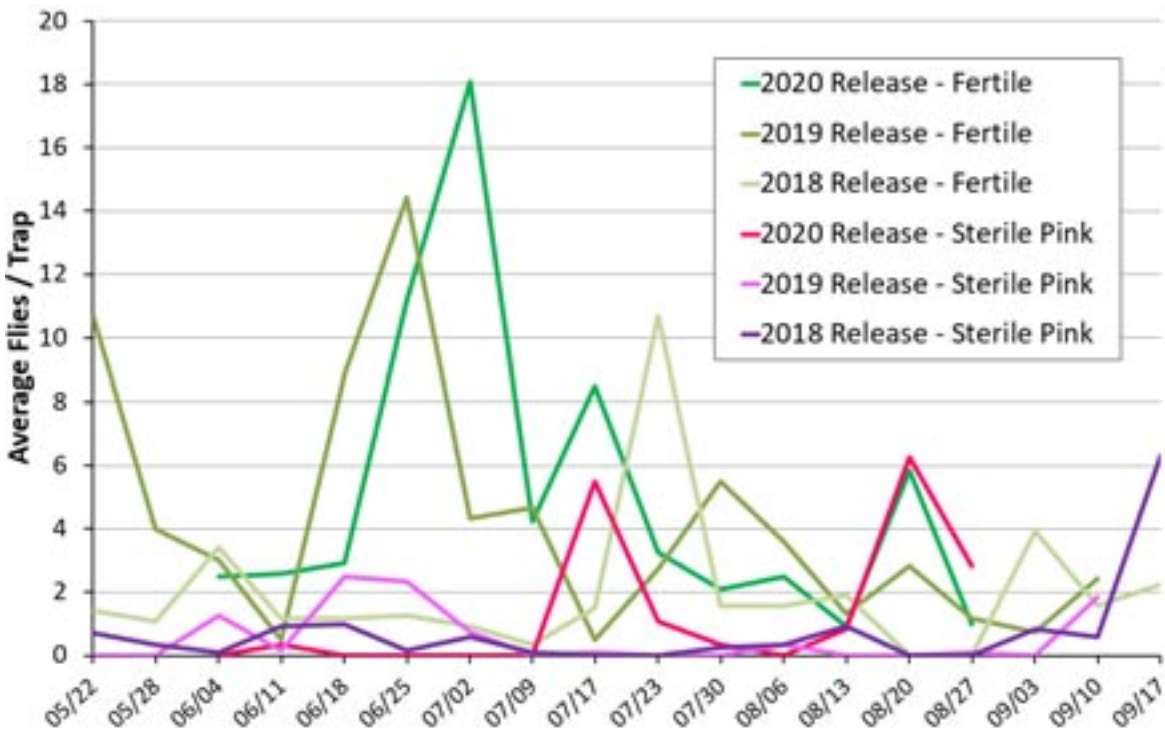



Figure 3. Average onion maggot flies per sticky trap per week. Fertile fly counts for the last three years are depicted in shades of green. Sterile flies were found in relatively low numbers throughout the field seasons and are displayed in shades of pink/purple.

Is it fair to allow for produce that has been grown with the help of chlorpyrifos in other countries to be imported to Canada when Canadian growers are unable to

use the product here?


Travis Cranmer is a vegetable crop specialist for OMAFRA, based in Guelph, ON.



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ONTARIO FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS' ASSOCIATION AGM REPORTS

Progress to be celebrated on the crop protection file

CHARLES STEVENS & CHRIS DUYVELSHOFF

Despite the ongoing challenges with COVID-19, the Crop Protection Section is pleased to report progress on several initiatives in the past year. Specific challenges remain in certain areas which the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association (OFVGA) will continue to advocate for in 2021.

Ending duplicate pesticide classification in Ontario

The OFVGA commends the Ontario government for ending the duplicate pesticide classification process. As of May 1 2020, crop protection products in Ontario are now classified according to the federal system, bringing Ontario in line with other provinces. This eliminated a historic bottleneck in accessing new crop protection products in the province.

Modernized PMRA re-evaluation program

Many challenges with the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) re-evaluation program have been experienced by both growers and PMRA themselves in the past few years with both parties indicating the current system is not sustainable. After a thorough process to evaluate the program, the PMRA has proposed a new model for re-evaluation called the integrated approach.

Several changes in the new proposed approach should provide for more predictable outcomes, enhanced stakeholder engagement, and improved empirical data for risk assessments, including refined grower use information. It is expected this new approach will be implemented over the next few years and should lead to the re-evaluation program being less disruptive for growers.

Clarification of end use dates on amended products

As a result of re-evaluation decisions, the use of some products may be cancelled or modified (amended). After an

extended period of uncertainty, the PMRA has clarified the transition period for products requiring label amendments following a re-evaluation decision. It was previously uncertain when these label changes take effect for growers.

What has been clear is that growers have three years from the date of a PMRA final decision to the last use date on farm if all uses of a product have been cancelled. However, when a product needs to be amended (i.e. some label changes but product is not cancelled), phase-out dates were not previously clear. The PMRA now clarifies that users will also have a two-year transition period from the date of the final decision to transition to using newly amended labels, which will be available on the Public Registry. This provides clarity for growers on the effective date for changes to product use information prior to application.

Busy year of re-evaluations

The past year saw another round of key final re-evaluation decisions from PMRA. While some uses were unfortunately lost, several active ingredients that were previously proposed for complete cancellation ultimately retained continued use on some crops including mancozeb (Manzate), phosmet (Imidan), and linuron (Lorox). This was undoubtedly a result of significant efforts and collaboration by growers, grower organizations, and registrants to update and refine the information used in the risk assessments. These active ingredients would have been cancelled if not for these initiatives and lessons have been learned that we can apply to future re-evaluations.

Final decisions were also issued for thiophanate-methyl (Senator), ethephon (Ethrel), acephate (Orthene), dimethomorph (Forum/Zampro), and folpet (Folpan) that allowed for continued use on some crops with label amendments required. Finally, despite the best efforts of growers and registrants, all uses of chlorpyrifos (Lorsban) and dichlorvos (DDVP) have been cancelled. This will leave a significant gap in management programs for some crops.

Minor Use Program limitations

The Minor Use Pesticides Program (MUPP) of the Pest Management Centre (PMC) is an important source of data for new crop protection registrations for horticulture crops. Many of these registrations would not otherwise occur without the help of PMC as the market size is too small to justify the registration costs for these crops. In recent years, PMC has generally conducted about 37 projects annually to generate efficacy and/or crop residue data in support of new registrations.

Due to restrictions as a result of COVID-19, the PMC was only able to conduct about 40 per cent of the required trial work in 2020. The remaining trials were postponed to 2021, causing the capacity of the program to take in new projects to decrease significantly.

Only 10 new projects were selected at the 2020 Minor Use Priority Setting Workshop instead of the usual 37 because of the backlog of trial work. With restrictions possibly remaining in place in 2021, trial capacity may be further reduced this upcoming season, resulting in another year of limited space for new projects. The PMC will provide an update prior to the 2021 workshop regarding capacity for new trial work for the 2022 field season. In any case, the cascading effect has resulted in reduced new registration capacity that may last several years.

Ontario Minor Use Coordinator position

A key part of the MUPP is the role of the Provincial Minor Use Coordinator, a position held by Jim Chaput in Ontario since 2000 and from the inception of the PMC and the MUPP. His minor use work has resulted in hundreds of new crop protection registrations in edible horticulture over the past 20 years and improved the crop protection toolbox for all of OFVGA's members. His work has benefitted growers not only in Ontario but across Canada, and not only towards economic success in our sector, but also in promoting domestic food security in Canada.

Jim will be retiring from his role in June 2021, leaving behind



Several changes in the proposed integrated approach for PMRA re-evaluations should provide for more predictable outcomes, enhanced stakeholder engagement and improved empirical data for risk assessments, including refined grower use information.

a knowledge gap within the minor use system. Fortunately, the OFVGA successfully advocated for a successor to be hired prior to his retirement for knowledge transfer and training. It is expected that a new hire will begin in early 2021.

What to expect for 2021

Collecting crop protection use information has been recognized as a key gap in our industry in providing updated data to support regulatory decisions. The OFVGA conducted a scoping exercise in 2020 which identified some promising data sources among some Ontario crops. It was determined that there are some current high-quality data sources that can be accessed, particularly among processing crops, but also some fresh commodities. The OFVGA, along with Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) now intend to have follow up discussions with PMRA to refine more precisely when and how use data will be requested from industry.

Several more important final re-evaluation decisions are expected in 2021 including on

neonicotinoids, lambda-cyhalothrin (Matador), and naled (Dibrom). While initial decisions related to pollinators have already imposed restrictions on some neonicotinoids, the upcoming decisions could add more restrictions to other crops and on seed and in-furrow uses which are important in several crops. The OFVGA will be paying close attention to these publications.

Collaboration

The OFVGA collaborates with numerous organizations in order to advocate for crop protection on behalf of edible horticulture in Ontario. We wish to thank our member organizations - CHC, PMRA, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs, and CropLife Canada -- who continue to work towards making crop protection in Canada better for growers and ensure safe and abundant food for consumers.

Charles Stevens is chair, Crop Protection Section. Chris Duyvelshoff is Crop Protection advisor.



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Miravis fungicide labels expanded

Syngenta Canada has announced key additions to the Miravis fungicide product lineup. Previously registered in several vegetable crops, Miravis Duo can now help potato growers safeguard quality and yield against early blight, in addition to several other diseases.

At the core of Miravis Duo is ADEPIDYN fungicide along with difenoconazole (Group 3), which provides an added layer of protection and built-in resistance management.

Depending on their geography, potato growers can expect to make multiple in-season applications of a fungicide specifically targeting early blight. With every application of Miravis Duo, growers can also control

brown spot while protecting against Botrytis and white mould. Ongoing changes to the use pattern of multi-site fungicides also means a shift from traditional foliar disease management. The broad-spectrum activity of Miravis Duo helps fill this gap and is the only non-chlorothalonil fungicide on the potato market offering activity against Botrytis.

“We believe that Miravis Duo is going to help growers streamline and simplify their spray programs by being able to treat multiple costly threats with one product,” says Janette Stewart, national horticulture marketing lead with Syngenta Canada.

In addition to potatoes, Miravis Duo is now registered in

bulb, root and Brassica vegetables, along with ginseng and stone fruits.

In other news, the Miravis Prime fungicide label expansion now encompasses strawberries and highbush blueberries. The product was initially registered in grapes and leafy greens.

Miravis Prime combines ADEPIDYN and fludioxonil (Group 12) for built-in resistance management and long-lasting control of key diseases, such as Botrytis fruit rot and Grey mould.

“Berries infected by fruit rot diseases can’t be sold, and decay often takes place during storage and transport,” explains Stewart. “Miravis Prime provides a higher level of in-season disease protection as well as increased



berry shelf-life compared to the standard fungicide program.”

For more information about Miravis fungicides, visit [Syngenta.ca/Miravis](https://www.syngenta.ca/Miravis), contact your local Syngenta sales representative, or call the

Customer Interaction Centre at 1 87 SYNGENTA (1 877 964 3682).

Source: Syngenta Canada January 11, 2021 news release

Serifel fungicide label expanded

BASF Canada Agricultural Solutions (BASF) has received a Health Canada PMRA label expansion for Serifel. New for the 2021 season, Serifel is an innovative biological fungicide with multiple modes of action now available for use on a range of fruiting, leafy, root and cucurbit vegetables, and berries. Serifel was previously registered for use in targeting powdery mildew and botrytis in grapes.

“Serifel’s strong performance and low use rate will make Serifel fungicide an excellent addition to growers’ current disease management programs,” said Anne McRae, technical services specialist, Horticulture, BASF Canada Agricultural Solutions.

Whether it is used as a tank-mix or rotation

partner with products such as Kumulus, Sercadis or Vivando on registered crops, Serifel complements established disease management programs, offering alternate modes of action for resistance disease management right up to harvest. Serifel can also be used for organic production.

For more information about Serifel fungicide or other BASF crop protection products, visit www.AgSolutions.ca/horticulture or contact your retailer.

Source: BASF Agricultural Solutions January 20, 2021 news release



Cormoran insecticide label expanded

ADAMA Agricultural Solutions Canada (ADAMA) has been granted a label expansion for Cormoran insecticide to include control of spotted-wing drosophila in the bushberry crop group (13B), including highbush and lowbush blueberries.

Cormoran, a new broad-spectrum insecticide with multiple modes of action, had already demonstrated ‘Serious Insect Protection’ during its introductory year in 2020. The label expansion for spotted-wing drosophila control provides additional utility for Canadian fruit and vegetable growers targeting this potentially devastating invasive species.

Cormoran delivers rapid knockdown of all damaging stages of target insects as well as extended residual control. Cormoran is registered for use on apples, bushberries, including blueberries, brassica vegetables, peppers, potatoes, stone fruit and strawberries as well as alfalfa and sweet corn.

To learn more, visit [ADAMA.com](https://www.adama.com) or contact your local crop input retailer. Technical and sales support for Cormoran is provided by Cohort Wholesale.

Contacts are: Scott.Hodgins@CohortWholesale.com 519-494-9300 or

Karin.Younghans@ADAMA.com, 519-831-5207

Source: Cohort Wholesale January 18, 2021 news release

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