

GRACIAS TRABAJADORES

## Guatemalan workers bridge the labour gap for Québec growers



About 20,000 temporary foreign workers come to Québec every year to fill the demand for farm labour. FERME Québec is responsible for managing that migration from countries such as Mexico and more extensively Guatemala. Martin Gibouleau examines the field pepper harvest with some of his 100 Guatemalan workers at Les Productions Margiric, Laval, Québec. Photos by Michael Abril.

KAREN DAVIDSON

Montréal is a long way from Guatemala City, physically and culturally. Yet, in 2023, about 13,000 Guatemalans journeyed 5,600 kilometres to Québec to work in agriculture.

Les Productions Margiric, located in Laval about 30 minutes north of Montréal, is one recurring destination for some of these workers. Here, several generations of the Gibouleau family have been expanding their farm since 1945. And today, Martin Gibouleau along with his brother Jocelyn and cousin Jean-François, grow more than

2,000 acres of vegetables and cantaloupes in no small part due to the more than 250 temporary foreign workers who work there every year.

Edvin Armando Del Cid Arrendondo is one of their farm workers. He's from the village of El Sapote, in the municipality of Santa María Ixhuatán and has participated in the Québec temporary foreign worker program for eight years.

"I come from a family of limited resources," says Arrendondo. "But that did not prevent me from being taught human values and working in the fields since I was seven years old. Work in agriculture has been the breadwinner for my family to this day."

He continues: "The best thing about working at Les Productions Margiric is that I can work for a period of half a year, making the most of my time to save money and then I have the possibility of returning to my country to live with my family."

These arrangements work well for the field vegetable growing season. Martin Gibouleau explains, "I rely on many workers for the harvesting season because my production is very large and the turnaround for my product is very short, not like apples or potatoes."

Continued on page 3

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AT PRESS TIME...

Grocery price stabilization measures fail to consider Canadian growers

The rising cost of groceries continues to be a pressing issue for Canadians, affecting consumers and the growers who constitute the backbone of the food supply. The Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC) emphasizes that the federal government’s recently announced price stabilization measures fail to consider the repercussions on Canadian growers.

“We appreciate that the government is taking steps to address the pressing issue of rising grocery costs, by asking retailers to take steps to lower prices. However, it’s vital that we delve deeper to tackle the policies that are contributing to these hikes,” says Jan VanderHout, president of FVGC. A recent FVGC survey revealed alarming statistics: 44 per cent of surveyed Canadian growers are selling produce at a loss, while 77 per cent are unable to adjust their selling prices to match escalating operational costs. Factors such as the Carbon Tax, the Pollution Prevention Planning Notice for Primary Food Plastic Packaging (P2 Plastic Program), and the recent tariff on fertilizer exacerbate these financial pressures.

Quinton Woods, chair of the FVGC Trade and Marketing Working Group, notes, “We are dedicated to ensuring that the



complexities and struggles faced by our growers are neither oversimplified nor overlooked by policy-makers. We’re providing data-driven insights and realistic recommendations to address the immediate challenges and long-term sustainability of Canadian fruit and vegetable farming.”

To that end, the FVGC Trade and Marketing Working Group has drafted a comprehensive letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The letter outlines FVGC’s concerns and provides constructive recommendations. Specifically, it calls for:

- 1. **Re-evaluation of the Carbon Tax**, considering its accumulative impact on production costs.
- 2. **Review of the P2 Plastic Program**, which places undue financial burden on operations.

3. **Reassessment of the Tariff on Fertiliser**, as it affects both production costs and final consumer prices.

4. **A reconsideration of the government’s fertilizer emission reduction goals**, acknowledging responsible practices already in place among our members.

FVGC is calling for the inclusion of its organization and the wider agricultural community in any upcoming government consultations and decision-making processes related to grocery price stabilization.

Quinton Woods emphasized, “The moment has come for a more collaborative approach. Inclusive policymaking, involving all stakeholders, is crucial for developing balanced and effective strategies.”

NEWSMAKERS

Congratulations to **Andrew Smith**, named the 2023 Food and Farming Champion in Prince Edward Island. He’s a fifth-generation potato grower who grew up in the tractor beside his dad at Newton, PEI. Together, they grow 1,200 acres of chipping and processing potatoes. “Agriculture has a great story to tell,” he says in a September 28, 2023 video.



Andrew Smith

Manitoba’s October 3 election was one for the history books as NDP leader **Wab Kinew** was elected the province’s first Indigenous premier. On October 18, the new cabinet was unveiled including agriculture minister **Ron Kostyshyn** (Dauphin). He reprises the role that he held from 2012-2016.

Welcome to **Danny Jefferies**, a new hire for the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to the role of soil management specialist for horticulture. Based out of the Ridgetown College office, he will be responsible for technology transfer in assessment of new, emerging or existing practices, products, technology and research related to soil management in horticulture.



Danny Jefferies

Vineland Research and Innovation Centre welcomes **May Chang** as the new chair of the board. She brings more than 25 years of experience in the healthcare sector. Supporting her on the board is **Tony DiGiovanni** as vice-chair and new director **Rick Mastronardi**.

The World Potato Congress Inc welcomes **Blair Richardson** as a board member. Over the past year, he has played a pivotal role as an international advisor. As CEO of Potatoes USA, he brings a depth of knowledge and a global perspective which will bring significant value to the organization.

The **J.M. Smucker Co.** has sold its Bick’s pickles, Habitant pickled beets, Woodman’s horseradish and McLarens pickled onions brands to TreeHouse Foods. The all-cash transaction is valued at approximately US\$20 million, subject to a working capital adjustment.

The Canadian Farm Writers’ Federation (CFWF) has honoured **The Grower** with an unprecedented five awards in its 2023 competition.

Editor **Karen Davidson** won second place in the Current Affairs Reporting category for the January 2022 cover story: Facing a long ban on PEI potato exports to the U.S. She also won second place in the Technical Reporting category for her February 2022 cover story: Ground truthing robotic weeders starts now. A third-place award was won in the Electronic Media-Audio category for her podcast recording with **Jenny Lemieux** and **Kirk Kemp**: Vivid Machines comes alive for apple growers.



Freelance photographer **Glenn Lawson** was honoured with second place in the People Photography category for his portrait of **Amanda Hehr**, Sunterra Greenhouses, Acme, Alberta. He won third place in the Production Photography category for catching a delivery man on the run augering fertilizer at Gwillimdale Farms, Bradford, Ontario.

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COVER STORY

# Guatemalan workers bridge the labour gap for Québec growers



Martin Gibouleau (L), president of the board, FERME Québec, signs off on paper-work with Fernando Borja, executive director. In addition to the Laval, Québec farm, the family operates near Chatham, Ontario. He contracts 30 workers through FERME which flies them directly to Toronto and transports them to their Ontario quarters.



Edvin Armando Del Cid Arrendondo says, “I’m in Québec because I need to support my family in Guatemala.”

“ It would be good for the Canadian government to defend the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. There are thousands of good actions by farmers every day.

~ FERNANDO BORJA

Continued from page 1

In 1976, the Gibouleau family started with Mexican workers but in 2003 added Guatemala to diversify the workforce. As a result, Guatemala opened a consulate in Montreal with the condition that there would be the same kind of relationship as with Mexico.

“We have a Latin understanding here that workers are part of the family,” explains Fernando Borja, the tri-lingual executive director, of FERME Québec for the last 15 years. “Most of our farm employers speak Spanish.”

FERME Québec is the non-profit agency that looks after managing the files for about 20,000 migrant workers every year, providing service to about 70 per cent of the temporary worker market in the province. About 2,000 farm employers representing pork, dairy and horticultural farms, pay an annual membership fee plus a small fee per worker each growing season.

These fees pay for FERME’s multicultural, full-time staff of 36 as well as five part-time employees. Beyond year-round administration, FERME’s staff are also deployed to the airport to welcome all workers arriving in Québec at the beginning of the season, and then again at the end to assist with their departures.

Looking to South America and Africa

Additional to the Guatemalan work force, Mexico sent 6,000 workers to Québec in 2023. The balance of approximately 1000 workers came from El Salvador, Honduras, and surprisingly, the French-speaking country of Madagascar. This island off the eastern coast of Africa is participating in a program to provide mechanics, electro-mechanics and truck drivers interested in moving to Canada.

“From Madagascar, we have gone from 20 to 200 workers in three years,” says

Borja. “These workers are looking for permanent residency in two or three years.”

The need for workers continues to grow. The dairy sector along with expansion of Québec’s greenhouse industry is fuelling demand. FERME is now exploring using Colombia as a new source of workers, particularly for the province’s dairy farmers.

“We have tried Tunisia and will be trying Morocco in the fall of 2023,” adds Borja. “These countries are more advanced in their visa requirements, looking for a one-year commitment.”

Borja points out that the average length of contract under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program is 24 weeks. With the aforementioned growth in the greenhouse sector, there is a new need for year-round employees.

In May 2023, a project was launched to provide social services to workers in remote areas. A FERME manager and four contracted assistants visited farm workers around the province, conducting information workshops on various topics including responsible alcohol consumption, how to manage money, and ways to adapt to life in Québec.

“We present these situations in a humorous way so that the employees see themselves in these common predicaments,” says Borja. “These are workers who are used to making \$100/week and are now making \$1,000 per week. We explain that it’s not important to have the nicest cell phone, for example.”

The goal for the 2023 pilot was to reach 1,000 farms and 10,000 workers. More than 70 per cent of that target was achieved by mid-October 2023.

“There’s a social outreach part of our FERME team called CONTIGO that works with local community groups to encourage activities such as fishing, cooking lessons, BBQs and soccer,” says Borja. It’s connected to funding by the federal government through Immigrant

Québec. And there’s Centre de familles latino-américaines à Montréal Québec (CAFLA), an organization also funded by Immigrant Québec that’s available to help Latin Americans with cultural integration issues. Its call centre is available 7 am to midnight daily, offering telehealth as well as psychological support in Spanish.

Under the Senate’s lens

The treatment of temporary foreign workers is currently under the microscope of the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science & Technology which has been researching and traveling the country since November 2022. The committee, chaired by Senator Ratna Omidvar visited farms and lobster processing plants in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island in early September 2023.

In a recent interview with **The Grower**, Senator Omidvar said, “The committee is looking at the issue of migrant workers because they are becoming a larger part of the labour workforce in agriculture, trucking, retail and hospitality.

We’re interested in worker protections as well as employer needs. We’ve heard from employers and their associations, migrant workers and their associations. We visited farms in New Brunswick and PEI to get to the truth.”

Omidvar went on to observe, “The system is broken for both sides. Employers complain that they can’t get workers in time for the growing season. The turn-around time on Labour Market Impact Assessments (LMIA’s) is lengthy. What struck me most is that every employer said they would have to shut down business without these migrant workers.”

To date, the committee has heard from the Québec-based Association for the Rights of Household and Farm Workers. The Senate committee is deliberating on what they’ve heard and seen. Expect the

report in March 2024. In the interim, the Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers’ Association (OFVGA) has taken to heart the need for a more diverse source of temporary foreign workers. Looking to FERME Québec’s success in Central America, the OFVGA is actively exploring a pilot with the El Salvador government. Stefan Larrass, OFVGA senior policy advisor, labour, reports that several Ontario growers are currently participating, with activities planned to connect growers with a visiting delegation from El Salvador later this fall. As Fernando Borja and his staff capably manage the logistics of thousands of workers returning home, he observes, “It would be good for the Canadian government to defend the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. There are thousands of good actions by farmers every day.”

**The Grower is “Digging Deeper” with Fernando Borja, executive director, FERME Québec. It’s the non-profit agency that’s responsible for bringing about 20,000 temporary foreign workers to Québec each year. He shares the agency’s experience in recruiting from new countries: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Madagascar. This podcast is sponsored by Cohort Wholesale.**



CROSS COUNTRY DIGEST

BRITISH COLUMBIA

KPU researchers awarded \$1 million for year-round sustainable berry production

Researchers at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) are advancing plans to sustainably grow berries out of season in Canada with a \$1-million award from the Weston Family Foundation.

A proposal from the Institute for Sustainable horticulture (ISH) at KPU has advanced to the Shepherd Phase of the Homegrown Innovation Challenge. Researchers now have 18 months to develop and demonstrate a small-scale proof of concept to create and deliver a market-ready system to reliably, sustainably and competitively produce berries out of season in Canada.

“I worry about climate change a lot, and what makes me optimistic is working at a university where I see innovations that give us hope. We have some hard decisions to make, but we also

have the tools we need – and this project is such a beautiful example,” says Dr. Deborah Henderson, director of the Langley-based ISH, one of three research institutes at KPU.

The KPU team’s proposal is to grow strawberries and blackberries inside high-tech greenhouses in a pesticide-free, carbon-neutral environment with support from industry collaborators and Simon Fraser University researchers.

“We believe we’ve chosen the berries which will enter the market with the greatest ease, be the most attractive for producers and consumers alike, and facilitate future berry varieties to be produced out of season,” says Henderson.

KPU researchers have outfitted an ISH greenhouse compartment at KPU Langley with a unique combination of

cutting-edge technology focused on plant health and clean energy to create a prototype suitable for widescale rollout in greenhouses across Canada.

Sensors and robotic technologies driven by artificial intelligence will control the growing environment while monitoring for pests and diseases, which will be treated with non-chemical solutions. Clean energy will be harvested and stored between seasons, waste heat will be recovered, and carbon dioxide will be extracted from the air to enrich the plant environment.

“Growers everywhere are interested in these technologies. The last job anyone wants to do is put a chemical in a tank and spray. If you can use a biological solution, or prevent the need for it by maintaining your soil or growing medium, the growers are there,” says Henderson.



KPU researchers Dr. Deborah Henderson (left) and Dr. Li Ma inside a greenhouse at KPU Langley. Photo by Jay Shaw.

KPU researchers are among 11 teams advancing their projects for the Homegrown Innovation Challenge, a six-year, \$33-million competition that will ultimately allow four teams to develop and scale their idea. The scaling phase is scheduled to begin in 2025, when up to \$5 million will be awarded to each of the top four teams over three years to scale and demonstrate a market-ready solution. By 2028, the

Homegrown Innovation Challenge will award two \$1 million prizes: an overall winner, and a breakthrough technology winner.

Source: Kwantlen Polytechnic University October 5, 2023 news release

BRITISH COLUMBIA/CANADA

Funding announced for Canadian AgriScience Cluster for Horticulture

On October 10, the Hon. Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, travelled to Abbotsford, British Columbia to meet with the BC Federation of Agriculture and visit local food producers.

While there, he toured the Maan Farm’s strawberry greenhouse and highlighted a \$9.8 million partnership with the

Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC) through the AgriScience Program – Clusters Component. It’s a program under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, that will assist Canada’s horticulture industry by enhancing research that protects the environment, builds greater resilience, and helps ensure Canadians have

access to high-quality products.

The investment will fund research that builds off of previous cluster investments, under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, supporting the development of new varieties, disease management, labour cost-savings, climate resilience, and greener pesticides and energy, with a focus on apples, berries,



Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (L) enjoys a coffee chat with Marcus Janzen, vice-president, Fruit & Vegetable Growers of Canada.

field vegetables, greenhouse vegetables, and potatoes. The goal of this research is to reduce the reliance on synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, advance innovative technologies, and create new disease control technology.

The Cluster consists of research activities that focus on the AgriScience Program priority areas: Climate Change & Environment, Economic Growth & Development, and Sector Resilience & Societal Changes.

“Agriculture creates jobs and a sense of pride in communities right across Canada. The Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada have demonstrated continued leadership over the past 100 years, and we will continue to support Canada’s fruit and vegetable growers, while building a sustainable sector for the future,” said MacAulay.

“We are incredibly excited to renew our collaboration with

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the approval of the Canadian AgriScience Cluster for Horticulture 4,” said Marcus Janzen, vice-president, FVGC. “This significant investment of \$17.5 million, including AAFC’s substantial \$9.8 million contribution, will be a catalyst for research spanning five commodity groups. This program will bolster our efforts in areas such as climate change mitigation, economic development, and sector resilience. Cluster 4 is not merely funding; it’s a commitment to equipping Canadian farmers with the innovative tools they need to produce world-class fruits and vegetables and ensure our sector’s sustainability.”

Source: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada October 11, 2023 news release



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NATIONAL NEWS

# CPMA announces strategic plan for 2024-2026

The Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA) has announced the launch of its 2024-2026 strategic plan which will guide its work beginning in January 2024.

The three-year plan highlights amended vision and mission statements that reflect the values and future goals of the organization as well as the modern landscape of the produce industry.

**Vision:** Drive industry prosperity and increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

**Mission:** Enable the growth and success of an inclusive fresh produce industry by creating opportunities for economic development while enhancing the well-being of Canadians.

Building on the 2015 strategic plan that focused on growing businesses, connecting the industry, and advocating for produce, the newly announced plan outlines three goals that will define CPMA's success over the next three years. These include:

- advocating for produce – by increasing produce consumption, addressing supply chain issues, and engaging with the government on industry issues and solutions.



- connecting the industry – by delivering a world-class international convention and trade show, providing business-to-business events in Canada and abroad, and supporting the development and growth of talent within our industry.

- empowering the industry – by supporting training initiatives that meet the industry's needs, providing an environment that allows members to identify new innovations, and offering relevant and timely research data on the fresh produce marketplace. "At CPMA we are dedicated to working for our members and advancing our industry," said

Ron Lemaire, CPMA president. "The landscape of our industry has changed drastically in recent years shifting the priorities of our members. And this is the right time to reposition our organization through this strategic plan and focus our work on meeting the emerging needs of our members."

CPMA's 2024-2026 strategic plan also outlines the expansion of the following three initiatives.

## Women in produce industry

Building on our diversity, equity and inclusion work in 2019, CPMA has partnered with

Grocery Business Magazine to recognize the contributions of women in the industry through the Outstanding Women in Produce initiative. This year, CPMA has formalized a Women in Produce Working Group to encourage an inclusive and diversified workforce in the industry.

## Young professionals

In addition to the Passion for Produce program which provides young professionals with mentoring and professional growth opportunities, CPMA will organize several events to

increase its engagement with this audience.

## Sustainability

CPMA has been at the forefront of enhancing sustainability within the produce industry for years. In 2019, the association established a Packaging Working Group to identify a path forward to address the use of packaging within the produce sector. To expand on the efforts already undertaken, and better understand and support the members' sustainability needs, CPMA:

- has created a permanent role within the organization entirely dedicated to advancing sustainability.
- will host a Sustainability Summit focusing on global sustainability in partnership with allied partners on April 26, 2024, in Vancouver right after its annual Convention and Trade Show.

To learn more about the 2024-2026 strategic plan, visit CPMA's website.

*Source: Canadian Produce Marketing Association October 12, 2023 news release*



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GREENHOUSE GROWER

# Wendy’s Co seeking more greenhouse lettuce capacity in the U.S.

Bloomberg financial service is reporting that Wendy’s Co. is seeking more greenhouse-grown lettuce in the U.S. Capacity is lacking right now.

Liliana Esposito, chief corporate affairs and sustainability officer, says that extreme weather events are affecting assurance of supply. In California, the ash from wildfires has also affected quality of lettuce. Her concerns extend to sufficient water access for outdoor crops.

The company’s 2022 Corporate Responsibility Report itemizes a number of sustainability goals, incentivizing company managers for meeting those targets.

Since July 2020, Wendy’s Canada has sourced Canadian greenhouse-grown lettuce in its salads and sandwiches. The move followed its greenhouse-grown tomatoes launched in 2018. The company has 417 restaurants across the country.



# Pure Flavor launches Tiki tomatoes and Oronai Sweet Charentais melons

Pure Flavor’s innovation pipeline is yielding fresh results that are injecting new life into the snacking category.

The launch of Tiki tomatoes, a vibrant, cosmic-coloured, tropically sweet and juicy cherry tomato and Oronai Sweet Charentais melons are the latest product innovations. Both products were unveiled at the IFPA Global Produce & Floral Show in Anaheim, California October 19-21.

“Consumers want innovative products to wow them; size, colour, consistency of availability, and most importantly, flavour – are all core traits of a greenhouse-grown specialty snacking tomato but with our new Tiki Tomatoes, we really have something special that is all of the above and more”, said Matt Mastronardi, executive vice-president. “We continue to strategically invest in R&D to bring items to market that create niche and incremental opportunities to help our retail & foodservice partners grow their business. The flavour profile of the Tiki Tomato checks all the boxes of what a snacking tomato is all about; sweet, bite-sized, versatile, and full of flavour!”, said Mastronardi.

“When we launched our Solara Mini Galia & Alonna canary melons, the next melon in line was already in trial to ensure it could be grown at scale and in a controlled environment,” said Mastronardi.

Oronai Charentais melons, hailing from the Charente region of France, are a beloved heirloom variety. Greenhouse-grown and weighing approximately 850-900gr, Oronai’s are personal in size, round, and feature a finely netted, fragrant skin. Inside, Oronai’s vibrant orange, succulent flesh offers a delectable combination of sweetness and floral notes. These gourmet melons are a prized delicacy for their exceptional flavour and aroma.

“As a lifestyle-focused consumer brand, being in tune with consumer trends is key to our brand & product development. Earlier this year, we surveyed thousands of consumers as part of our #LoveForFresh campaign with more than 90 per cent of consumers noting that convenience is the most



important factor when looking for a healthy snack option – our new products are dialed right into that,” said Chris Veillon, chief marketing officer.

# Mastronardi Produce adds two Kentucky greenhouses to U.S. network

Mastronardi Produce, the fourth-generation family-owned business that pioneered commercial greenhouse growing in North America, has added two high-tech greenhouse operations in Kentucky into its U.S. farm network. The high-tech greenhouse facilities – separately located in Richmond and Morehead, Kentucky – represent a combined 120 acres of fully lit production.

“We are very proud to keep the Morehead and Richmond facilities online and to grow with the teams there,” said Paul Mastronardi, president & CEO of Mastronardi Produce Ltd., Kingsville, Ontario. “It is a privilege to continue to serve this region through sustainable farming, providing local jobs in Appalachia and nutritious food across the U.S.”

The company welcomes current employees at each of the facilities into the “Flavor Nation” family.



Source: Mastronardi Produce October 5, 2023 news release

# Canadian Greenhouse Conference celebrates student poster winners

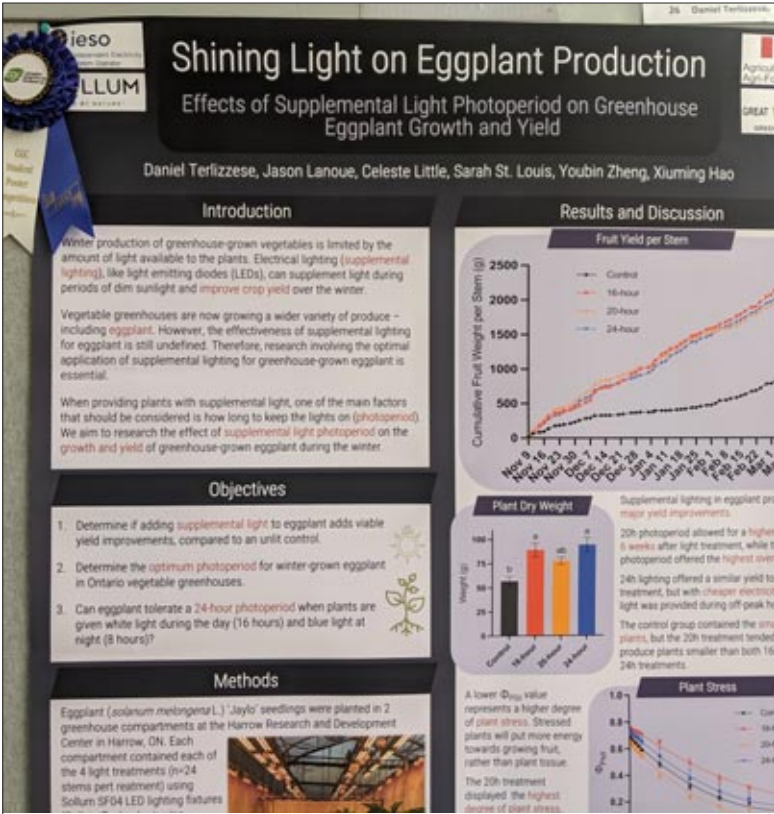
KAREN DAVIDSON

The first-ever student poster competition was a key attraction at the 2023 Canadian Greenhouse Conference held October 4-5 in Niagara Falls, Ontario. There were 19 entries with an additional 14 posters in the regular session, submitted by researchers.

The first place winner is Daniel Terlizzese, University of Guelph, for “Shining Light on Eggplant Production.” His team looked at the effects of supplemental light photoperiod on greenhouse eggplant growth and yields.

The second place winner is Elyse Aubry, Brock University for “Identifying a new nematicide to control northern root-knot nematode infection in greenhouse strawberry production.”

The third place winner is Noémie Gonzalez,



GREENHOUSE GROWER

## Enza Zaden introduces new cucumber variety

Enza Zaden is introducing E23B.2448, an impressive mini cucumber that’s notably strong against powdery mildew (Px) and cucumber green mottle mosaic virus (CGMMV).

A top performer in both high- and low-wire systems with an open plant architecture, E23B.2448 is high yielding, with excellent fruit quality and uniformity.

“After two years of trials, I am truly excited about this variety and all the positive feedback it’s receiving,” said Roberto Haveroth, product specialist, Enza Zaden.

Currently, E23B.2448 is the main variety grown on the high-wire system at Cielo Vista Farms in Leamington, Ontario. Over several plantings, E23B.2448 has performed very well, with growers recognizing the strength of this variety and its excellent resistance package.

“E23B.2448 upholds downy and powdery mildew better than any other variety we’ve trialed. It also has a very strong root system,” said Henry Klassen, grower at Cielo Vista Farms. “We appreciate E23B.2448’s labour efficiency, as its short nodes require less clipping. It fits very well on the trellis, and consistently produces great quality fruit. We really enjoy growing this variety,” adds grower Pancho Giesbrecht, also of Cielo Vista Farms.

E23B.2448 is early harvesting, with multi fruiting beginning around the 10th node. Fruit length is very stable at 13.5 to 14.5 cm (5.3-6.5”) of nicely filled fruit when the temperature is kept relatively warm, with pre-nights not lower than 17°C.

For trial seed or more information, contact your Enza Zaden sales representative: [customers.canada@enzazaden.com](mailto:customers.canada@enzazaden.com).



## De Ruiter launches cherry plum tomato

The De Ruiter brand is excited with the prospects in its tomato pipeline, and one particularly noteworthy addition is DRTC8089\*\*. This cherry plum loose (grape) tomato hybrid is looking to deliver a flavourful experience to the industry.

One of the best features of DRTC8089\*\* is its exceptional flavour profile. With good average degrees brix content, this tomato offers sweet-tasting fruits.

And DRTC8089\*\* doesn’t stop at taste alone. It also offers several other desirable characteristics that make it a standout choice for growers and consumers alike. The fruit offers a delightful juiciness, further enhancing its overall quality. Coupled with this are its anticipated disease-resistant properties, particularly its anticipated intermediate resistance to Tomato brown rugose fruit virus (ToBRFV).

The visual appeal of DRTC8089\*\* is equally striking. Its fruits are shiny, with an intense red colour that captures the eye

and has shown to retain uniformity throughout the entire crop cycle. The fruits produced have an average weight of 11 to 12 grams, with a consistency that is valuable for growers aiming for a top-quality product.

The compact and vigorous nature of the DRTC8089\*\* plant adds another layer of practicality. It is well-suited to high-tech production environments, making it an ideal choice for growers looking to optimize their operations. Additionally, this tomato variety has shown to be versatile and adaptable, making it suitable to be produced across all geographic regions in North America.

In summary, DRTC8089\*\* shows De Ruiter’s commitment to delivering a high-quality product that meets the current demands of the market

*\*HR = High Resistance. IR = Intermediate Resistance. To find out more about disease resistance and the applicable levels of disease resistance, visit [www.worldseed.org](http://www.worldseed.org), and view the*

*“Definition of the Terms Describing the Reaction of Plants to Pests for the Vegetable Industry” paper in the Vegetable Resources section.*

*\*\* Anticipated commercialization Spring/Summer, 2024. Experimental/precommercial varieties are being shown/described for demonstration purposes only and are not being offered for sale.*

*Performance may vary, from location to location and from year to year, as local growing, soil, and environmental conditions may vary. Growers should evaluate data from multiple locations and years whenever possible and should consider the impacts of these conditions on their growing environment.*

*The recommendations in this material are based upon trial observations and feedback received from a limited number of growers and growing environments. These recommendations should be considered as one reference point and should not be substituted for the professional opinion of agronomists, entomologists or other relevant experts evaluating specific conditions.*



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SCAN ME

FOOD SAFETY

2023 CanadaGAP highlights

HEATHER GALE

Expanded scope for the CanadaGAP Greenhouse program

- In 2023 CanadaGAP released the updated Greenhouse Food Safety Manual (Version 10.0) which covers a significantly expanded scope of crops
- Available as a free download at [www.canadagap.ca](http://www.canadagap.ca)
- Cooperated with Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada to obtain federal funding for this project

Additional tools made available on CanadaGAP website

- Many new FAQs published at [www.canadagap.ca](http://www.canadagap.ca)
- Updated and new brochures and PowerPoint presentations (topics include unannounced audits, new certification options, main changes to manuals)

More course offerings and greater promotion of Understanding the CanadaGAP Program introductory course

Flooding, wildfires, hail and other adverse weather events becoming more frequent and may introduce new food safety hazards

- CanadaGAP created additional guidance and procedures to deal with flooding, deferral of audits due to wildfires, remote auditing, and extension of certification due to extenuating circumstances

Full digitization of CanadaGAP

Manuals within Provision Analytics software

- An affiliate of the program, Provision Analytics, a third-party software provider, invested in fully digitizing the CanadaGAP Food Safety Manuals
- CanadaGAP worked closely with software developers to ensure integrity of content

Pandemic Fallout: Instability in Certification Body and Auditor Pool

- Auditor recruitment and retention efforts greatly intensified as a result of the effects of the pandemic
  - Increased difficulty of travel
  - Safety concerns especially for older auditors
  - Remote auditing a frustrating experience for auditors and auditees
  - Auditors who were on the cusp of burnout or who were considering retirement were pushed into leaving the profession during the pandemic
- Exacerbated an already existing auditor shortage
- One third of the CanadaGAP auditor pool has turned over since 2021
- CanadaGAP and certification bodies have experienced double the usual number of auditor retirements and new recruits during this period
- Extra time to vet and qualify potential candidates
- Double the number of auditor training courses have been offered

Enhanced efforts have been made to recognize auditors and facilitate auditor career path

- CanadaGAP working closely with certification bodies to identify potential sources of new auditor candidates
- CanadaGAP Award for Auditor Recognition was introduced in memory of Sheri Nielson to recognize auditors who have shown extraordinary heart, dedication and commitment to their role
- The first awards were presented in December 2022 to Isabel Varey and Natalia St-Amand
- Delivery of CanadaGAP Auditor Training program has gone fully virtual and offers increased flexibility in dates
- A new group of auditor trainers was qualified
- CanadaGAP introduced in-house exam proctoring on Zoom

Certification Body Changes

- Unprecedented turnover in certification bodies since the beginning of the pandemic
- Perry Johnson Registrars Food Safety, Inc. joined the program as a service provider in 2020 and decided to stop providing CanadaGAP audits in 2023
- Some certification bodies have seen significant staff turnover during the pandemic
- The largest certification body for CanadaGAP, NSF Canada Ag, has experienced significant service challenges in the last year



Greenhouse peppers. Photo by Marcella DiLonardo



Field cantaloupe. Photo by Michael Abril.

- Staff turnover has put a strain on CanadaGAP administrative and technical expertise within the certification body
- Three certification bodies joined CanadaGAP and became active service providers in 2023:
  - Control Union
  - dicentra
  - TSLC
- Additional audit companies have approached CanadaGAP and are under consideration for licensing

Benchmarking-related activities

- CanadaGAP underwent benchmarking to the SAI Platform Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA) in cooperation with McCain Foods
- CanadaGAP participated in produce working group to review upcoming changes to GFSI benchmarking requirements (GFSI is working on its 2024 updates)
- CanadaGAP continues to receive complaints from program users about unannounced audits
  - Complaints have been collated for presentation to GFSI
  - CanadaGAP conducted surveys of program participants, auditors and CBs to collect additional data regarding

unannounced audits

Internally, two new databases are under development:

- CanadaGAP Operations and Auditor management databases to be deployed in 2024

**What’s ahead for 2024?**

- Maintenance of Canadian Government Recognition: 5-year review begins in the last quarter of 2023
- Re-benchmarking next version of GFSI Requirements in 2024-2025
- Correction Notice will be issued for manuals (Version 10.0) in 2024 but no new version will be released
- CanadaGAP will publish updated Audit Checklist for 2024

For more information, visit the CanadaGAP website at: [www.canadagap.ca](http://www.canadagap.ca)

If you have any questions, write [info@canadagap.ca](mailto:info@canadagap.ca) or call 613-829-4711.

Heather Gale is executive director, CanAgPlus





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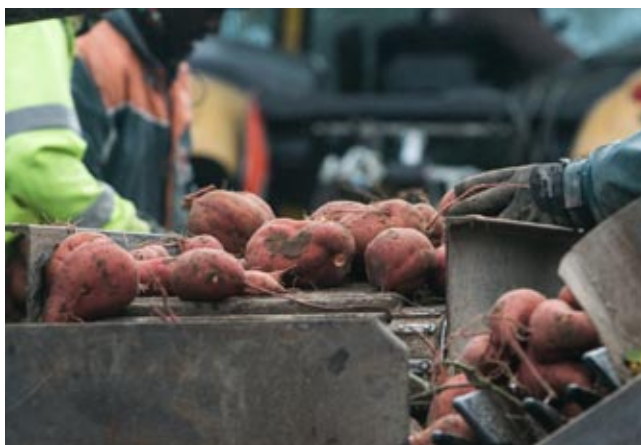
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CANADIAN CENTRE FOR FOOD INTEGRITY

Public trust in the Canadian agri-food system holds steady



In mid-October, the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI) released the results of its 2023 Public Trust Research at its annual Public Trust Summit in Toronto, providing more insight into the latest trends and challenges in Canada’s agri-food system. Based on a large representative national survey, the results indicate that Canadians are growing increasingly concerned about food costs and affordability of healthy food.

The 2023 research has revealed that 47 per cent of Canadians rate their concern about the affordability of healthy food as a 9-10 out of 10, which is a significant increase of eight points higher than 2022 and a staggering 19 points higher than in 2020, with 28 per cent being “very concerned”.

“Year after year, we continue to be impressed by the scope and magnitude of our Public Trust Research and the value it provides our agri-food system,” noted Mike Dungate, chair of the CCFI Board of Directors. “We urge the Canadian food system to take a collaborative and proactive approach to addressing consumer concerns and encouraging informed food choices that Canadians can feel good about.”

The CCFI research results also indicate that despite the dominance of cost concerns, Canadians remain confident in the agri-food industry’s ability to innovate, grow, and operate freely. Two key indicators have remained unchanged year over year: public trust across most food and agriculture stakeholders, and the proportion of Canadians who feel the food system is headed in right direction. Despite this stability, the food system must continue to communicate proactively and transparently about the central consumer issue of food costs and affordability.

As the world transitions from a pandemic to an endemic state, Canadians are increasingly focusing on concerns close to home and recognizing the importance of health and food. 54 per cent of Canadians reported actively seeking information about nutrition and healthy eating.

Source: CCFI October 17, 2023 news release



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CHAIR'S PERSPECTIVE

Getting proactive on communications about the fruit and vegetable sector



SHAWN BRENN

The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association (OFVGA) has historically always been an advocacy organization dedicated to making sure the grower voice is heard by government. We've focused our efforts on the key issues that impact most if not all growers in Ontario, such as labour, safety nets, crop protection, competitiveness and more.

It's a job we do well, but we know that as public and media scrutiny of our sector increases, we also need the grower voice to

be heard more widely so that our sector is part of the public dialogue on issues that impact our farms.

The pandemic brought our industry, growers and workers into the public and media eye like never before, and unfortunately, media coverage and online dialogue aren't always accurate or balanced, making incorrect or misguided narratives a source of growing frustration for our sector.

This led us to develop and launch the More than a Migrant Worker (MTAMW) initiative a little more than two years ago, shining a spotlight on the importance of seasonal and temporary foreign workers to our sector – and to Canadians – and to let them tell their own stories in their own words about why they come to Canada to earn a living while helping our local farmers grow food for Canadians. We also wanted to make sure that if people are searching for information online about migrant farm workers, our resources are part of what they find.

Over the last two years, we've been placing sponsored news

stories with the *National Post*, *Toronto Star*, *Ottawa Citizen* and *Windsor Star* to help address top issues and questions Ontarians have about migrant farm workers who are here through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) or the agricultural stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program.

Our most current story is running in the *National Post* and focuses on how keen most workers are to return home to their families and communities as harvest season wraps up. Other topics have addressed housing, compensation, work permits, worker rights and the results of the Jamaican government fact-finding mission. You can find all of these articles on the More than a Migrant Worker website under "news".

OFVGA has also been responding more frequently to negative media stories about seasonal and temporary workers, such as recent comments by the UN rapporteur about Canada's TFW programs and the findings of positive TFW employer compliance statistics, particularly

in the farming sector.

Senior policy advisor Stefan Larrass and OFVGA Labour Section chair Bill George were both interviewed by multiple publications for response to the UN rapporteur comments, and following the OFVGA news release around the positive compliance statistics, we saw mainstream media coverage that used several quotes and statistics from the release.

Since the spring of 2023, OFVGA has been actively meeting with elected government officials, bureaucrats and industry stakeholders to present the MTAMW initiative and its activities, which has been positively received. Some of the most recent meetings include Senator Rob Black and Ontario Energy Minister Todd Smith. And just this past month, we sponsored a farm bus tour for Toronto-area dietitians that included the opportunity to discuss MTAMW and answer questions about migrant farm workers and Canada's TFW programs.

Although labour is a very

important file for OFVGA, we're also starting to address other issues with positive outreach too. Our first sponsored content story about sustainability in Ontario's fruit and vegetable sector is live with the *National Post*, along with digital ads on urban panels and billboards this fall, and posters that will be seen in GO commuter trains throughout the month of November.

And September saw OFVGA host its first farm tour for government and industry staff to introduce them first-hand to the issues and realities of fruit and vegetable production. Our farm, which grows potatoes and other vegetable crops, was one of the stops on the tour, along with a vegetable greenhouse and a vineyard. It was a great opportunity to interact with government policy staff, while discussing topics specifically related to the horticulture sector.

*Shawn Brenn is chair of the Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers' Association.*

WEATHER VANE



Last Push! Temporary foreign workers from Mexico load up butternut squash that's destined for a Nortera processing plant at Ingersoll, Ontario. That's an hour away from the farm of Pete and Tracy Gubbels, Mount Brydges, Ontario. Photo by Glenn Lowson.

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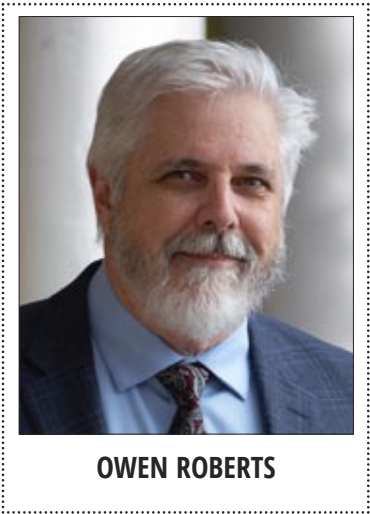
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**THE GROWER**

THE URBAN COWBOY

Could Saskatchewan be the new California for fruit and vegetables?



OWEN ROBERTS



Dan & Chelsea Elardson, Spring Creek Garden, depend on irrigation for their field vegetables near Outlook, Saskatchewan. Photos by Nicolas Mesly.

Saskatchewan has much of what the agri-food world urgently needs: unencumbered vistas for crops and livestock, a warm (and getting warmer) growing season and relatively stable politics for development.

What’s missing though is a steady source of water.

But that could all change if the province committed itself to a \$4 billion project to open up irrigation there, says a new report from the Ottawa-based Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute (CAPI).

According to the 23-page report, “Irrigation, Saskatchewan’s Unfulfilled Dream,” the time is ripe for Saskatchewan to take another look at further developing the controversial 500,000-acre Lake Diefenbaker irrigation project, located in the semi-arid region of the Palliser Triangle. Lake Diefenbaker, a huge 225-kilometre long reservoir, was created by the Gardiner Dam project on the South Saskatchewan River. The dam was built between 1959 and 1967. Irrigation was to be one of its key features.

But as the report notes, in 1973, Saskatchewan’s Minister of Agriculture killed the Lake Diefenbaker irrigation development project because he felt farmers in the area were not adopting irrigation technology quickly enough. And not all farmers supported it: those who had long grown conventional crops such as wheat considered it “a costly move that required substantial investment,” according to the report.

With the farming community split, the detractors won. Today, only 104,000 acres of Saskatchewan farmland are irrigated. That pales in comparison to its neighbour Alberta, with 1.5 million acres irrigated.

And although Saskatchewan feeds the world with commodities such as wheat and canola, the province imports 95 per cent of its fresh vegetables. Proponents say that leaves ample room to develop the domestic market, prompting calls to increase the outflow for irrigation by the equivalent of five percent on the

lake’s inflow.

A grower cited in the report agrees with the plan. Spring Creek Garden, the husband-and-wife team Dan and Chelsea Elardson, use irrigation to produce 400 acres of broccoli, pumpkins, carrots, lettuce and Brussels sprouts, about 35 kilometres outside of Outlook. They sell their fresh vegetables to major chains such as Loblaws, Sobeys and Federated Co-operatives Limited.

“Without irrigation,” says Dan Elardson, “it would be impossible.”

Other believers featured in the CAPI report include Jazeem Whazab, an agronomist and researcher at the Canada-Saskatchewan Irrigation Diversification Centre. Whazab, a horticultural production specialist, believes that leafy vegetables such as chard and bok choy, as well as mixed vegetables such as broccoli, carrots, onions and peppers could be grown in the region.

He says the volumes produced under irrigation would likely attract frozen vegetable processing companies to the region and allow Saskatchewan to compete with Québec and Ontario. He admits Saskatchewan wouldn’t fully replace California. But, he says, climate change has already extended the province’s growing season by 10 days, from 110 to 120 days.

“So, we could make Canadians less dependent on California,” says. “But we will still face the challenges of good water management and finding enough workers.”

Management is indeed a challenge. Lake Diefenbaker provides water to 60 per cent of the province’s population, for cities such as Regina and Saskatoon. Industries such as potash mining, tourism and recreation also count on it.

And on the pecking order, that can leave Saskatchewan growers on the outside looking in. As the CAPI report notes, the flow of water from the South Saskatchewan River is subject to an interprovincial sharing agreement between Alberta,

Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the federal government. Alberta must allow half of its water to flow to Saskatchewan. In turn, Saskatchewan must allow half of its water to flow to Manitoba.

Good relations have prevailed among provinces, says the report. But, it adds, increasingly severe droughts that put pressure on water reservoirs could risk “souring relations.” So could the perception of draining vital drinking water sources.

But the report says

development can’t wait and wants the federal government to ante up.

“Given the urgency of climate action and the geopolitical context, how long can Ottawa afford to put off doing its part in funding [more irrigation]?” the report asks. “Because the price we’ll have to pay to remedy the state of

the world is only getting higher.”

*Owen Roberts is a past-president of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists and a communications instructor at the University of Illinois.*



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TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS

Growers welcome release of positive TFW compliance statistics



The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association (OFVGA) welcomes the release of findings by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) from its recent compliance activities aimed at protecting temporary foreign workers during their employ in Canada.

The results from ESDC show that of their more than 2,100 completed inspections of employers of Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) across all sectors of the economy including fruit and vegetable production between April 2022 and March 2023, 94 per cent were found to be compliant with employment regulations and standards. This follows ESDC’s introduction last year of new regulations to

improve its ability to conduct TFW program inspections and help employers adhere to the rules.

“We are proud of the fruit and vegetable sector’s strong track record of compliance and the ongoing investments growers and governments are continuing to make to ensure temporary foreign workers have a safe and positive experience working in Canada,” says Bill George, grape grower and chair of the OFVGA’s labour committee. “Temporary and seasonal workers play a critical role in Ontario’s food supply system, and we support measures that encourage their safety, protection and well-being while they are working here.”

Ontario’s fruit and vegetable growers employ more than 20,000

seasonal and temporary foreign workers annually. These are workers who come to Ontario legally under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), or the agricultural stream of the federal government’s TFW program and help Canadian growers address labour needs on their farms.

Canadian farmers who employ seasonal and temporary farm workers under SAWP or the TFW program have the same obligations to those workers as they do for their Canadian employees. Government regulations stipulate that this includes government-approved wage rates; access to health care such as OHIP in Ontario; Employment Insurance and the Canada Pension Plan as well as workplace insurance coverage such as WSIB in Ontario; and coverage under provincial employment standards and occupational health and safety legislation. Farms are also required to provide every worker with a copy of the federal government’s publication outlining workers’ legal rights and protections to ensure they are aware of their rights.

To ensure these requirements are being followed in practice, farms are subject to frequent federal, provincial, and in many cases, foreign government compliance inspections. ESDC statistics show that the agriculture sector in Canada has above-average employer compliance rates compared to other industries and sectors that use the TFW program, and compliance rates for Ontario farmers are particularly high.

Workers with permits under SAWP or the TFW program have access to a multilingual, 24/7 federal government support line they can use to raise concerns and seek help relating to their current employment. If workers are unable to have their specific employment-related concerns

resolved through these channels, an open work permit program is available for vulnerable workers in these situations.

Through its More than a Migrant Worker initiative, the OFVGA has been giving a voice to the many thousands of seasonal and temporary farm workers in Ontario who take pride in the work they do here by letting them tell their stories in their own

words, while also drawing attention to the critical role that legal international farm workers play in the Canadian food system and efforts by farmers and government in recent years to invest in worker safety, protection and well-being.

*Source: Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers’ Association September 29, 2023 news release*

COMING EVENTS 2023

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Nov 3-12  | Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, Toronto, ON   |
| Nov 8-9   | National Horticulture & Invasive Species Conference VIRTUAL   |
| Nov 14    | Arrell Food Summit, Toronto, ON   |
| Nov 16    | Farm and Food Care Annual Harvest Gala, Milton Banquet & Conference Centre, Milton, ON                    |
| Nov 19-21 | Advancing Women in Agriculture Conference, Sheraton Fallsview, Niagara Falls, ON                          |
| Nov 20-22 | Potato Growers of Alberta Conference & Trade Show, Grey Eagle Resort & Casino, Calgary, AB                |
| Nov 20-22 | Canadian Produce Marketing Association/Fruit & Vegetable Growers of Canada Fall Harvest, Ottawa, ON       |
| Nov 21-22 | Ontario Federation of Agriculture Annual General Meeting, Delta Hotel and Conference Centre, Toronto, ON  |
| Nov 22-26 | Canada’s Outstanding Young Farmer National Event, Laval, QC   |
| Nov 24    | Ontario Produce Marketing Association Annual Gala & Awards Ceremony, Bellvue Manor, Vaughan, ON           |
| Nov 28    | Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers’ Association Lobby Day, Queen’s Park, Toronto, ON                       |
| Nov 29    | CanAgPlus Annual General Meeting VIRTUAL  |
| Dec 5-7   | Great Lakes Expo, DeVos Place, Grand Rapids, MI   |
| Dec 6     | Ontario Potato Board Annual General Meeting, Delta Hotel, Guelph, ON                                      |
| Dec 13    | Fresh Vegetable Growers of Ontario Annual General Meeting, Springfield Golf Course, Guelph, ON            |
| 2024      |   |
| Jan 10-11 | Potato Expo. Austin, Texas  |
| Jan 23-25 | Manitoba Potato Production Days, Keystone Centre, Brandon, MB   |
| Jan 24-27 | Guelph Organic Conference, Guelph, ON   |
| Jan 25-27 | Pacific Agriculture Show, Tradex, Abbotsford, BC  |
| Jan 30    | Greenhouse Health & Safety Symposium, Best Western Leamington Hotel and Conference Centre, Leamington, ON |
| Jan 28-31 | North American Strawberry Growers’ Association Meeting & Conference, Hershey, PA                          |

SCENE ON TWITTER/X

**John Kowalchuk** @kowalchukfarms1 · 1h

This years harvest took just over a month to complete

And I'm thankful for the many hands that helped

My wife along with family and friends who run equipment, to the parts people and elevator companies who help it go smoothly

Agriculture truly is a team sport!

#Harvest23✓

RETAIL NAVIGATOR

Legitimate concern or photo op?



PETER CHAPMAN

Recently the leaders of the five largest companies selling food and beverage in Canada were summoned to Ottawa by our federal politicians. The purpose of the meeting was to find opportunities to make food more affordable for Canadians. My first reaction was this is a photo op. But full disclosure. I did work for one of these companies in the past, so I decided to focus on some numbers and then come to a fact-based conclusion.

My second reaction was we should be celebrating our Canadian food and beverage industry. We have just been through a challenging time and the entire value chain worked so hard to get food to stores and to Canadians. The system is not perfect and there is always work to be done. However, we need leaders in Ottawa and others to celebrate and promote a robust, sustainable food production and processing industry. Not focus on pitting one member of the value chain against another.

Food is a global discussion

It is true food inflation in Canada has increased and Canadian consumers are experiencing higher grocery bills every week at the store. Hopefully the peak was reached in the summer of 2023, and we will begin to see the year-over-year increases subside. According to Statistics Canada, food purchased from stores was up 6.9 per cent in August, 2023 from the previous year, which is a drop from the July number of 8.5 per cent.

To jump to the conclusion this is a Canadian issue is a major mistake. The first place our leaders should look is how we measure up against other nations. Food inflation has been a challenge everywhere due to supply chain issues, geo-political crises and a challenging climate to produce food. To compare Canadian food inflation, we were able to explore the monthly food inflation in a number of countries. (See chart 1).

It is apparent food inflation is an issue in almost every country in the world. Overall, Canada has followed a similar trend to our major trading partners. The United States has been able to

Chart 1 – Food inflation by country

	Oct 22	Nov 22	Dec 22	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Apr 23	May 23	Jun 23	Jul 23	Aug 23
Canada	10.1	10.3	10.1	10.4	9.7	8.9	8.3	8.3	8.3	7.8	6.8
United States	11.0	10.6	10.4	10.1	9.5	8.5	7.7	6.7	5.7	4.9	4.3
United Kingdom	16.7	16.7	17.0	17.0	18.5	19.8	19.5	18.9	17.5	15.0	13.5
France	13.2	13.3	13.1	14.4	16.1	17.2	15.9	15.0	14.3	13.2	11.6
Germany	20.3	21.0	20.4	20.2	21.8	22.3	17.2	14.9	13.7	11.0	9.0
Mexico	14.5	12.4	12.7	12.8	12.3	11.0	10.0	9.1	7.7	7.3	6.8
Japan	6.4	7.5	7.9	7.8	8.1	8.3	9.2	9.6	9.8	10.1	10.3

Source: <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/40ebbf38f5a6b68bfc11e5273e1405d4-0090012022/related/Food-Security-Update-XCIII-Oct-12-2023.pdf>

Chart 2 – Retailer gross margin

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Loblaw companies	29.8	29.4	30.9	30.6
Empire (Sobeys)	N/A	24.9	25.5	25.4
Metro	N/A	N/A	20.0	20.0

Source: [www.loblaw.ca](http://www.loblaw.ca), [www.empireco.ca](http://www.empireco.ca), [www.corpometro.ca](http://www.corpometro.ca)

parts of the store. (See chart 3)

It was also interesting to note only food retailers were being called to the meeting. Our food industry in Canada is split between food retail and food service. No doubt food service was impacted during the pandemic but according to Farm Credit Canada, the split between retail and food service is now back to pre-pandemic levels. In Canada, we are close to a 60-40 split with retail making up the larger portion. If our leaders in Ottawa were serious about food inflation, they probably should have included some food service operators. According to Statistics Canada the inflation in food service is as listed in Chart 4.

A more thorough analysis would also include the cost of operating in Canada relative to our major trading partners. Regulatory costs, taxes, carbon taxes and other expenses need to be compared by category to really understand the issue in depth.

Photo op or legitimate concern?

Photo op.

Relative to our major trading partners, our food inflation issue was no worse and in many cases consumers here are better off. The United States has improved faster however part of Canada’s challenge could be currency.

Our leaders should focus on true change.

Prices are not just a retailer issue. By forcing retailers to ‘come to the table’ the suppliers will be forced into change. Retailer’s bottom lines are big dollars but low percentages. They will not reduce their bottom line so lower prices will come out of suppliers or with reduced costs in the retailer’s business. I know where my bet is.

Our leaders should explore Canadian content in categories. This will increase volume and provide more opportunities for

Chart 3 – Food categories with biggest increases – 2023

	June	July	August
Food purchased from stores	9.1	8.5	6.9
Fresh or frozen beef	9.4	5.8	11.9
Fresh or frozen pork	2.3	2.2	-0.9
Fresh or frozen poultry	8.1	13.7	8.9
Fresh or frozen fish	4.8	2.0	3.1
Milk	6.5	6.2	6.0
Eggs	8.9	3.3	3.6
Bread rolls and buns	11.6	8.1	5.9
Breakfast cereal	14.8	14.6	10.3
Pasta	8.3	17.1	12.8
Fresh Fruit	10.4	4.1	-0.2
Fresh vegetables	8.2	9.2	8.7
Coffee and tea	7.3	5.8	9.0
Sugar and confectionary	9.3	8.0	10.9
Edible fats & oils	19.4	15.5	13.1

Source: <https://shorturl.at/LCFGJ>

Chart 4 – Inflation rates by sector – 2023

	June	July	August
Food sold in grocery stores	9.1	8.5	6.1
Food purchased from table service restaurants	6.1	5.8	6.0
Food purchased from fast food restaruants and take out	7.3	6.5	6.2

Source: *Statistics Canada*

Canadian businesses and Canadian workers.

Consolidation in Canada is an issue, especially when compared to markets such as the United States. This needs to be addressed and it will take time. We should be finding incentives for Canadian-based retailers to start. Enticing an international retailer to come to Canada will just make it more difficult for suppliers. We need Canadian-based solutions, not international discounters.

It would be refreshing to see a value chain-focused approach

with the facts applied. We should celebrate the people who produce and distribute food with focus on change to improve the system. Photo ops are a waste of 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.*

FOCUS: SEED & ROOTSTOCK

New varieties of table grapes show promise in Niagara



Fresh Grape Growers of Ontario hosted a tasting event at the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (Vineland) on September 22, 2023. L-R: Edith Arancibia, leader of the Canada project for Bloom Fresh; Michael Kauzlaric, technology scout and grower outreach, Vineland; Sarah Marshall, Ontario Fresh Grape Growers Marketing Board; Nicolas Vargas, technical manager for Bloom Fresh U.S. Timpson is a promising fresh table grape variety.

KAREN DAVIDSON

Tucked into a tangle of vines, there is a glow of green seedless grapes. Once they’re brought into the sunlight, they look tantalizing enough to eat. For the curious, Timpson is the name.

Bloom Fresh, an international fruit-breeding company, wants the name of that proprietary variety to stick. To date, the Niagara peninsula is the most northerly latitude for the

company that licensed the production of premium grapes in more than 24 countries. As recently as August 2023, the company was created through a merger of SNFL Group (Special New Fruit Licensing) and International Fruit Genetics. The Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (Vineland) has been home to five varieties – Timpson (Sheegene 2), Strawgrape (Sheegene 26), Ivory (Sheegene 21), Magenta (Sheegene 3) and K2 (Navsel 4) --

since they were planted at the Vineland test block in 2019 with clean plant material coming from virus testing at the Sidney, British Columbia facility operated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The Timpson green seedless grapes are leading the pack with their quality and unique taste. They were so promising in 2022 at Vineland’s grape open house that three acres were planted at a commercial grower’s block in 2023. “We have a great vision for the

future in Canada,” says Edith Arancibia, Fresno, California, who has been leading the Bloom Fresh project and developing awareness of table grapes. “In the last year, local growers have expressed interest in our varieties, mostly Timpson. We licensed this variety in Canada in two local nurseries,” says Arancibia. They are Canadian Fruit Tree Nursery and Vinetech. Michael Kauzlaric, technology scout and grower outreach for Vineland, has been working on new grape varieties for more than a decade. The project leapt forward in 2014 when Josep Estiarte, currently chief innovation officer at Bloom Fresh, agreed to allow Vineland to evaluate the potential of these new varieties in the Canadian climate.







something we have seen before in other countries,” explains Arancibia. “In conjunction with Vineland, we are thrilled to conduct experiments to improve the performance of the varieties and develop specific regional growing protocols. We are continuously administering different treatments and management according to each variety’s needs in order to guarantee high-quality production for our licensed growers.” Having worked in her native Chile, Arancibia notes that it takes times for growers to adopt new varieties under different growing regimes. Once growers make the change, she says they often regret not moving more quickly.

Another aspect is the consumer environment. How easily will consumers accept new grape varieties? “When I was in Ontario, I toured supermarkets on my own time,” she says. “Your retailers emphasize locally grown and they are very proud of their produce which I really like. Also offering new varieties to consumers will allow them to compare grapes and make the best shopping choice for them.”

For Ontario growers who sense a season-lengthening opportunity in new fresh grape varieties, the arrival of Bloom Fresh has been a confidence booster. “This is an exciting time for growers and consumers in Ontario,” says David Hipple, chair of the Ontario Fresh Grape Marketing Board. “New locally grown table grape varieties are a huge opportunity to extend our season and reduce reliance on imports.”

“Shatter at harvest is

At a September 2023 tasting event at Vineland, growers remarked on the vigorous growth habits of the grape varieties, noting that more canopy management would be required to ripen the crop. The Bloom Fresh team agreed. In 2024, the experts want to try a different trellis system, sharpen the vine trimming for better airflow and customize the spray program for more efficacious coverage. Along with local consultants, the plan is to tailor 2024 management for better yields and quality. Growers are also eyeballing the variety called Strawgrape, so named for its unique strawberry-like flavour. It’s an early-maturing red variety with a small berry size.



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FOCUS: SEED & ROOTSTOCK

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FOCUS: SEED & ROOTSTOCK

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**TEMPO XR – 76 Day Bicolor Sh2 Sweet Corn -** Adapted over many environments, Tempo XR has excellent husk protection and consistent tip fill. Great ear size for mid-season roadside markets. HR: Ps (Rp1G)



**CRACKERJACK – 82-84 Day Triploid Seedless** Watermelon - Consistent yields over wide range of growing conditions. Very uniform fruit shape, firm flesh and deep red interior. Time and time again customers rate this our best-tasting watermelon. Have your customers ask for this variety by name. 13-17 lbs. IR: Co1, Fon1

FOCUS: SEED & ROOTSTOCK

Upper Canada Growers Ltd. has expanded its tissue culture laboratory



Starting out using traditional fruit tree growing methods, Upper Canada Growers’ nursery decided to explore a different way to scale up production and quality by adding an on-site tissue culture facility at Harrow, Ontario in early 2018. President Rob Haynes was no stranger to the technology as he had been involved in past tissue culture projects with Dr. Praveen Saxena, director of the Gosling Research Institute for Plant Preservation (GRIPP) at University of Guelph.

Leveraging that experience, as well as accessing funding from the Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP/NRC) and valuable guidance from industrial technology advisor, Ron Evans, the state-of-the-art lab was soon producing apple rootstocks of several different varieties.

The next major hurdle in tissue-cultured apple trees

was to decrease the production time using micro-grafting techniques -- grafting plants at a juvenile stage -- to create a seamless union between the marketable varieties of apples that consumers demand and the hardy, vigorous rootstock that farmers require. With further help from GRIPP and IRAP, the laboratory and greenhouse technicians were able to perfect the process.

“Once our protocols were established for apples, we began to notice that we were frequently being approached by grape farmers looking for a source of clean grapevines, as they were discovering a host of different viruses in their vineyards,” says Rob Haynes. “Given the similar growth patterns, it seemed natural to focus on grapevines next and to incorporate further biosecurity into our operations to help ensure the plants are free from pathogens.”

Upper Canada Growers is now initiating several

different species of rootstock for commercial production including many varieties of stone fruits, hazelnuts, strawberries and asparagus. The company’s scientists are frequently asked to evaluate new species for their suitability for tissue culture.

Because of the expertise developed through internal research, the plants are provided with optimum levels of growth hormones and nutrition through each stage of their growth in the laboratory, making the *in vitro* process far more efficient than traditional propagation. The plants have superior vigour and additionally, the union in the micro-grafted varieties is virtually seamless eliminating the entry point for pathogens and increasing disease resistance.

Continued on page 19

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FOCUS: SEED & ROOTSTOCK

Alberta harvested quality seed potato crop

Alberta seed growers enjoyed a good growing season in 2023. While the spring started off dry, by the end of June, the majority of the northern seed region started receiving regular precipitation and the southern field districts still had access to irrigation.

“While the official yield numbers have not been finalized, we are anticipating an above average crop,” says Stacey Bajema, seed coordinator, Potato Growers of Alberta. “The quality is excellent. With ideal amounts

of moisture and moderate harvest temperatures, we expect the crop to store well.”

The Alberta potato seed industry will hold its Seed Business Meeting on November 20, the first day of the annual general meeting. This will be followed by a session with staff from the National Seed Potato group at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

“With Seed Potato Regulation Modernization consultations happening on a regular basis, we invite all seed growers and other



members of the potato industry to engage in discussions on how we update our seed potato regulatory

system to ensure confidence in our products while adjusting to modern potato crop systems,”

says Bajema.

Upper Canada Growers



Continued from page 18

The laboratory has now expanded to a footprint of more than 10,000 square feet of space with a robust, highly-skilled staff of more than 40 scientists and technicians. With this capacity, Upper Canada Growers can now produce exclusive international varieties. In turn, industry alliances are formed with other people who share the belief that it is possible to improve agriculture in Canada by collaborating and learning from each other across different commodities.

“We continue to foster innovation within our tissue culture program and aim to be the premier Canadian provider of healthy and reliable plants for the domestic markets and the international growers who have reached out to establish contracts as well,” says Haynes.

Future plans include expanding to more plant varieties and increasing focus on maintaining plants in a clean, virus-free condition. This means increased investment into virus testing and biosecurity facilities for the health of the plants and the industry as a whole.

Photos by Upper Canada Growers



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Potatoes

KAREN DAVIDSON

Farmers’ markets are good hunting grounds for the trends in vegetable cuisine. Here’s what was on offer in summer 2023. Scan your favourite seed catalogues for something new to order in 2024.

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Seed potatoes to consider



These seed potatoes were some of dozens on display at the Ontario Potato Day held in mid-August near Alliston, Ontario.

FOCUS: SEED & ROOTSTOCK

Centre for Plant Health to be rebuilt by 2025



An artist’s rendering of the new Centre for Plant Health



The sod-breaking ceremony was meaningful for many partners, including the local Indigenous community.

On British Columbia’s Vancouver Island, construction is underway for a new Centre for Plant Health in Sidney. The \$80 million project is due to be completed by 2025.

It is Canada’s only post-entry quarantine (PEQ), research and diagnostic facility for virus testing of all fruit-bearing trees, grapevines and small fruit (e.g. berries). These facilities ensure the safe introduction of foreign plant material into Canada. The renewal project at the Sidney Laboratory will build a new world-class plant health diagnostic and research facility that will provide Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) scientists and partners with state-of-the-art amenities to advance plant science. Having the right tools is essential to help develop and partner on new ideas and opportunities to protect Canada’s plant resources and to grow the agriculture and agri-food sector.

Services include:

- Pathogen testing of imported tree fruits, small fruits and grapevine (i.e. bacteria, virus and virus-like organisms).
- Export certification for the trade of tree fruits, small fruits, and grapevine.
- Elimination of virus infections from valuable fruit and grape varieties.
- Maintenance of the national repository of Generation 1, virus-tested tree fruit and grapevine varieties for Canadian export certification and domestic distribution.
- Support trade through participation on international panels to develop harmonized standards for the movement and testing of plant materials.

Plant-related research to:

- Develop and validate methods for supporting quarantine and virus testing activities.
- Validate and apply new technologies such as Next Generation Sequencing.
- Identify and characterize new viruses and virus-like diseases.
- Develop rapid, sensitive, molecular diagnostic tests to support the implementation of

the Plant Protection Act.

Scientific techniques include:

**Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA)**

- ELISA determines the presence of a particular substance (e.g. food allergens, toxins, or pathogens) using antibodies that bind to specific target protein(s). A subsequent reaction producing a detectable signal such as colour change shows the presence of the target substance. The strength of the signal gives an indication of the amount present in the sample.

**Polymerase Chain Reaction assay (PCR)**

- PCR is a technique that can detect a pathogen in a plant sample by targeting nucleic acid (e.g. DNA or RNA) that is specific to the pathogen of interest. It then amplifies the target until it is detectable. The presence of the amplified nucleic acid indicates the presence of the pathogen in the original sample.

**Woody-host bioassays**

- Bioassay of a woody-host (i.e. plant that produces wood as its structural tissue) starts with an indicator plant that is disease-free and is then inoculated with a sample from a plant with an unknown health status. The indicator plant is then monitored for any symptoms of disease. If symptoms are observed, then the original plant that was used for the inoculation harbours a pathogen.

**Herbaceous-host bioassays**

- Bioassay of an herbaceous (i.e. non- woody) disease-free indicator plant is inoculated with sap from a plant with an unknown health status. The indicator plant is then monitored for any symptoms of disease. If symptoms are observed, then the original plant that was used for the inoculation harbours a pathogen.

All CFIA laboratories are accredited in accordance with the International Standard ISO/IEC

17025, General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories. The Standards Council of Canada (SCC) provides accreditation for routine testing, test method development and non-routine testing, as identified on the laboratory’s Scope of Accreditation on the SCC website. Accreditation formally verifies the CFIA’s competence to produce accurate and reliable results. The results are supported by the development, validation and implementation of scientific methods, conducted by highly qualified personnel, using reliable products, services, and equipment, in a quality-controlled environment. Participation in international proficiency testing programs further demonstrates that our testing is comparable to



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laboratories across Canada and around the world. *Source: Canadian Food Inspection Agency*

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# Strawberry blossom weevil is on the radar of Canadian berry growers

DR MICHELLE FRANKLIN

Strawberry blossom weevil (*Anthonomus rubi*) was first found in North America in 2019 in a backyard patch of raspberries in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia (BC). It is now known to be established throughout the Fraser Valley of BC and northwest Washington State. This small black weevil is native to Europe, Asia, and parts of North Africa. Although its name may mislead you to think it is only a pest of strawberries, this is not the case. It is a pest of many wild and cultivated plants in the rose family, including raspberry, blackberry, thimbleberry, and rose.

The adult weevils are long-lived and complete just one generation per year. They spend the winter in plant debris near the soil surface and become active in the spring when temperatures start to warm up. Adult weevils feed on leaves, flowers, and fruit, but it is the female weevil and her offspring that are responsible for most of the damage. After an adult female mates in the spring, she lays her eggs inside of developing flower buds. She first chews a hole in the bud, then lays her egg inside (typically one per bud) and partially severs the stem below causing the bud to shrivel and no fruit to form. The egg hatches inside of the bud and the larva feeds inside until it pupates and develops into an adult. The adult weevil exits by chewing a hole in the bud. Weevils that emerge from buds over the growing season will overwinter, completing the annual cycle.

We know that the weevil can cause significant damage in berries in its native European range, so the pest might also be cause for concern for Canada’s berry growers. In Europe, bud clipping in raspberries has been found to exceed 30 per cent in some cultivars. In strawberries and roses, clipping damage has been found to exceed 50 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively. However, the weevil’s impact on strawberry yield may vary due to the ability of strawberries to compensate for

damage through new bud production. In BC, we have observed clipping damage in strawberry and raspberry field crops as well as some berries grown under high tunnels.

Over the past couple of years, this small weevil has impacted the movement of strawberry, rose, and raspberry into the United States (US). As of September 14, 2021 the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service put in place a Federal Order (DA-2021-25) that amended the entry requirements for plant imports of these species (not fruit) from Canada to the United States. Plants exported from Canada to the United States are now required to have a pest module in place to establish facilities as strawberry blossom weevil pest-free places of production or pest free production sites. This status must be documented on phytosanitary certificates issued in support of plant exports.

With the help of many researchers, provincial specialists, and crop consultants across Canada, a surveillance team has been helping to delimit the current range of strawberry blossom weevil in Canada. We designed standardized survey methods, along with an app to records all sample collections in a standardized way.

With the collection of many weevils across Canada, identification can be a challenge. There are approximately 40 species of weevils across Canada that belong to the same group (*genus Anthonomus*) as strawberry blossom weevil, some of which could easily be confused with strawberry blossom weevil. One of the most likely look-alike weevils that some Ontario berry growers may be familiar with is strawberry clipper weevil (*Anthonomus signatus*).

This weevil is native to eastern Canada and causes similar clipping damage to strawberry blossom weevil in strawberry and raspberry fields in Ontario. These weevils can be distinguished by colour – strawberry blossom weevil is black, whereas strawberry clipper weevil is



Strawberry blossom weevil adults feeding on green fruit and bud clipping damage in high tunnel production in British Columbia (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Food).



Strawberry blossom weevil (*Anthonomus rubi*) (Photo by Tim Haye)

## SCENE ON TWITTER/X

**Berry Growers of Ontario @OntarioBerries · Sep 20**  
Last week we held our annual Twilight meeting at @blueberryhillca. Growers walked through what are the oldest blueberries in Ontario! Planted in 1973, those blueberries are still producing. After learning about the farm, we enjoyed delicious blueberry flatbread and blueberry wine



reddish brown in colour. Weevil identification is still underway with the help of our beetle expert, Dr. Patrice Bouchard from the Canadian National Collection of Insects, Arachnids, and Nematodes. The good news is that so far, the distribution of strawberry blossom weevil remains limited to coastal BC and northwest Washington State.

To date, we do not have any scouting threshold (count of clipped buds or adult weevils that would be used to indicate when a management action should be taken) or insecticides registered for strawberry blossom weevil in Canada. However, in the meantime, we can look to some of the cultural practices that the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) recommends for management of strawberry clipper weevil.

For example, crop rotations and

keeping strawberry planting for two years or less (Ontario Crop IPM, OMAFRA) could potentially help to reduce strawberry blossom clipping damage in BC. In addition, we have found a tiny parasitic wasp in BC, likely a species that is new to science, that is contributing a small amount (~1-3% parasitism) of natural pest control. Lastly, through collaboration with the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) in Switzerland we are conducting foreign exploration to search for other specific and effective potential biological control agents for strawberry blossom weevil.

*Dr. Michelle Franklin is a research scientist, Agassiz Research and Development Centre, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.*

Agricultural Information Contact Centre: 1-877-424-1300  
ontario.ca/crops

Ontario Berry Grower

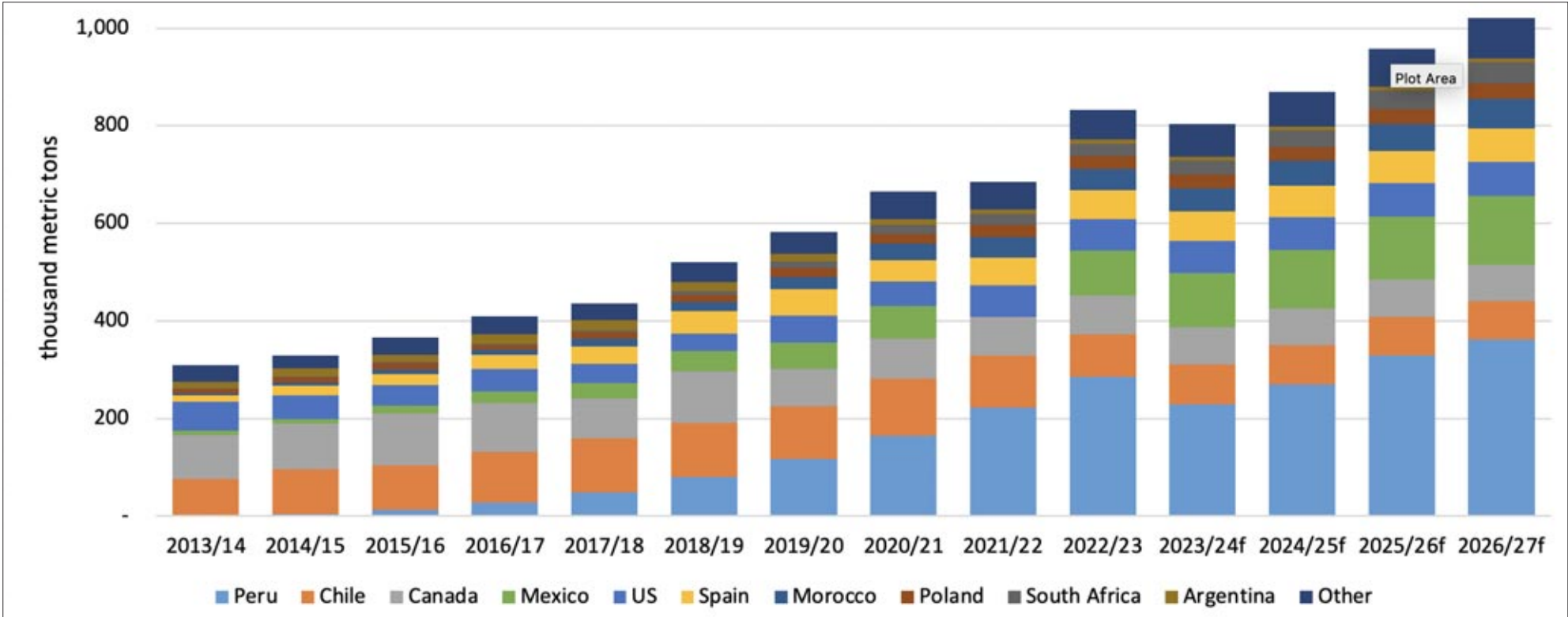
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INTERNATIONAL

# Global blueberry industry set for growth in coming years

World blueberry exports in metric tons



Note: Re-exports excluded. Source: ODEPA, MIDAGRI, SIAVI, Trade Map, UN Comtrade, Eurostat. Rabobank 2022



The global blueberry industry is set to expand in the coming years as long as the sector embraces operational efficiency and ‘premiumization.’ North America, particularly the U.S., will remain the largest destination market for fresh and frozen blueberries, with Peru, Mexico, and Chile being the largest exporters in the fresh category, according to a recent study by Rabobank.

“Supply-side challenges such as logistics and input costs are easing, but margin pressures will continue to prompt the industry to improve efficiency and productivity, including variety upgrades. The industry has also raised the bar in terms of fruit quality. This will be critical for fostering further consumption growth. Despite the inflationary environment, consumption of blueberries in key markets has been quite robust,” says David Magaña, senior analyst – fresh produce at Rabobank. “Adoption of new technology and varieties will be key to providing blueberries that will keep satisfying consumers globally.”

## Global fresh blueberry exports to expand

Over the past decade, global fresh blueberry exports have expanded steadily, driven by a diversifying base of growing regions. Countries with the highest growth rates in recent years include Peru, South Africa, Morocco, Mexico, Poland and Spain.

Potential lingering effects of El Niño-related weather anomalies are likely to limit the rebound of Peruvian exports in 2024/25. However, in the longer run, Rabobank forecasts that global fresh blueberry exports will resume a growth trajectory as yields improve in Peru and exports from other growing regions continue to expand. By 2026/27, global fresh blueberry exports are expected to exceed 1 million metric tons.

## Largest blueberry exporters

Peru, Mexico, and Chile remain the largest exporters in the fresh category, but a warm winter in Peru delayed the harvest and will negatively impact yields and shipments. Blueberries and other berries represent the

largest share by value of Mexico’s agricultural and food exports, and the berry industry is the fastest-growing agricultural industry in the country. Chilean fresh blueberry exports, on the other hand, have declined since the peak exports of the 2020/21 season, and Rabobank expects further declines in 2023/24.

## Frozen blueberries are one of the most popular frozen fruits in the U.S.

According to Magaña, frozen blueberries rank among the most consumed frozen fruits in the American market in terms of per capita availability and are the fastest-growing fruit in the category. U.S. imports of frozen blueberries continue to expand, with Canada remaining the largest source, followed by Chile, Peru, and Argentina.

“The powerful combination of health benefits, convenience, flavour, and versatility that blueberries offer will continue to be critical demand drivers, setting the industry up for success,” stresses Magaña.

Source: Rabobank

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WATER POLICY

CAPI releases new report: A National Agri-Food Water Action Plan



The latest Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute (CAPI) report recommends governments across Canada develop and release a National Agri-Food Water Action Plan (NAFWAP) by 2025. At the core of this plan should be a strategy for sustainably managing and leveraging water for the agri-food sector. The report further recommends that governments commit to ambitious outcomes, embrace shared responsibility, partner with stakeholders in agriculture and food, and prioritize this increasingly strategic, critical natural resource. To lay the groundwork for effective water management, immediate action is required,

including:

- Developing uniformity in data collection for both groundwater and surface water.
- The creation of a diverse expert panel to report on the state of agri-food water.
- Investment in mission-driven research – to the tune of \$18 million – and infrastructure.
- Leveraging the watershed level as the basis of water management.

“Water will increasingly be a strategic asset that can be leveraged for the growth of agriculture and food in Canada, but it is essential that it be conserved and protected,” says Tyler McCann, managing director of CAPI and co-author

of this report. “With increasing pressures in Canada and around the world we can no longer take water for granted.” Today, management and stewardship of this vital resource should be prominent in growth, adaption and climate plans across levels of government. The issues impacting the strategic management of water in Canada are global and multi-faceted, stemming from trade, governance and competition across industries. Responsible water management at all levels of government is essential to ensure that Canada remains among the top 10 agricultural producing and exporting countries, but a lack of leadership, systems approaches,

and strategic thinking are significant roadblocks. The role and needs of the agri-food sector have been left out of existing legislation. For CAPI Distinguished Fellow Nicolas Mesly, “Amid current climate and geopolitical change, water quality and quantity will redefine production and trade of agri-food products. It’s the challenge of the 21st century!” Hence the urgency for the country to adopt a National Agri-Food Water Action Plan. A National Agri-Food Water Action Plan was developed by CAPI researchers in collaboration with Distinguished Fellow Nicolas Mesly. Interviews were conducted with government representatives,

industry leaders, farmers, non-profit organizations, and academia. CAPI offers this peer-reviewed report as a guide toward an action plan on agri-food water in Canada to better monitor and manage water, and to foster coordination between watersheds and other jurisdictions, looking to federal leadership to sustainably harness Canada’s water resources and ensure the country’s viability as an agri-food producing nation. The report is available for download at [www.capi-icpa.ca](http://www.capi-icpa.ca). Source: Canadian Agri-food Policy Institute October 23, 2023 news release Photo by Glenn Lowson

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CROP PROTECTION

# The time has come for regenerative agricultural supply chains



Recently, I had the opportunity to participate as a panelist in the second episode of McCain’s new “Hot Potato” podcast which was recorded live at the UN General Assembly in New York City. The overarching episode subject was food insecurity, in line with the key themes of New York Climate Week.

I shared the “hot” seat with Charlie Angelakos, vice president of global external affairs and sustainability at McCain Foods, and Grant F. Reid, chair of the Sustainable Markets Initiative Agribusiness Taskforce. Together we tackled the challenging topic of keeping everyone fed in a changing climate and discussed how farmers, food businesses, and the entire food supply chain must work together to implement regenerative agriculture on a global scale.

An estimated 30 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions is from agriculture. Paradoxically, agriculture may also be at the heart of the solution to these challenges. Is regenerative agriculture the answer? The term regenerative agriculture can be considered a bit buzzworthy and currently lacks a clear, agreed-upon, scientific definition.

McCain defines it as an ecosystem-based approach to farming that aims to improve farmer resilience, yield and quality by restoring soil health, enhancing biodiversity, and reducing the impact of synthetic inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides. While completing a literature review for a research paper on this topic, I came across a report that reviewed 28 studies looking at areas of similarity and differences between the activities and objectives that define

regenerative agriculture to find a comprehensive definition. This more widespread definition included the same key themes related to enhancing the environmental dimensions utilizing soil conservation as the entry point, but also addressed the importance of the socio-economic aspects that contribute to food security.

This builds upon simply improving farmer resilience and speaks more to the importance of a holistic approach that builds resilience into the whole food supply chain. Therefore, in order to undertake the paradigm shift necessary to transition to more regenerative practices on-farm, we first need to take a step back and acknowledge that the agri-food supply chain has morphed into a large segment of the capitalist market in a global economy, resulting in the commodification of food and farmers receiving a diminishing portion of the retail price. We have created a systemic infrastructure that favours large-scale monoculture. As Grant shares on the podcast, the whole economic system is broken; we are paying farmers for the wrong thing, they are incentivized almost solely on yield.

This has contributed to the evolution from smallholder mixed farming operations to larger, more specialized farm entities which are often labelled as “industrial agriculture” and criticized as a leading cause of environmental degradation.

Shaming farmers and demanding changes in farm practices that reduce their economic viability is no more beneficial than insisting that food companies fully subsidize these costs. Everyone along the food supply chain must be prepared to work together and take on their share of the risk. This aligns with the Sustainable Markets Initiative’s mandate which is to build a coordinated global effort to enable the private sector to accelerate the achievement of global climate, biodiversity and Sustainable Development Goal targets.

It’s reassuring for growers to know that the burden of feeding a growing population in an increasingly variable climate, in a more sustainable manner is not exclusively theirs to bear. There’s no better example than crop



**It’s reassuring for growers to know that the burden of feeding a growing population in an increasingly variable climate, in a more sustainable manner, is not exclusively theirs to bear.**

protection companies which, for the last decade, have researched, developed and registered more specifically targeted pesticides. More recently, the integration of biologicals and chemicals extends that trend. It takes the financial heft and R & D capabilities of corporations – yes, those global entities! -- to bring these new products to market.

So how do we create systems that drive better choices and make them more convenient for farmers?

I believe that applying the concept of a circular economy to the agri-food supply chain might be a good place to start, especially at a regional level. A generally agreed-upon concept of a circular economy is characterized by the collection, transformation, and reuse of materials at each stage of the supply chain to circulate products and materials at their highest value and avoid waste.

There are many circular economies that operate at a micro-level (product or company specific), but I envision the development of regionally specific, circular food supply chains that work cross sector to capitalize on synergistic opportunities.

There are many parallels that can be drawn between the benefits of a circular food supply chain and those related to regenerative agriculture. These include improved resource efficiencies, reincorporation of biological materials back into the ecosystem, mitigation of climate change, improved biodiversity, creation of new value streams, eradication or valorization of waste, reduced business risk and mitigation of food insecurity.

The creation of regenerative agricultural supply chains is intriguing and may lead to greater success versus a focus on

creating regenerative farms. The small family mixed farm model which relied upon cheap land and labour is no longer a viable option. Let’s let go of the assumption that this is the only way to achieve a sustainable, nutritious food supply. Let’s embrace new innovative solutions where various agricultural sectors collaborate for more resilient supply chains and greater adoption of regenerative practices.

*Susan Ainsworth is general manager, Keystone Potato Producers’ Association, Manitoba.*



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CROP PROTECTION

# Private Member’s Bill recommends provisional registration of pest control products, seeds and feeds within 90 days

The Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC) enthusiastically welcomes the introduction of a new Private Members Bill by MP Kody Blois aimed at amending the Feeds Act, the Seeds Act, and the Pest Control Products Act. FVGC has strongly supported the ongoing initiative for a renewed, efficient, and adequately funded pesticide regulatory system that supports Canadian agriculture.

“Bill C-359 represents a significant leap toward creating a competitive, sustainable, and resilient sector, while also ensuring safety to human health and the environment,” says Jan VanderHout, FVGC president. “We are particularly optimistic about the potential for environmental benefits and the reduction of regulatory burdens on Canadian growers.”

MP Blois’ Private Member’s Bill proposes amendments that would create a pathway for the provisional registration or approval of pest control products, seeds, and feeds within 90 days, provided they have already received approval in at least two other trusted jurisdictions. This is a practical approach to quickening the approval process while

maintaining stringent safety and efficacy standards.

The bill offers a myriad of advantages that directly address the needs of Canadian growers. For starters, the bill facilitates faster access to innovative crop protection solutions, allowing farmers to better combat threats such as pests and diseases, thereby improving both yield and produce quality. It also aims to reduce the cumbersome regulatory burden that our growers face. By recognizing approvals from at least two other trusted jurisdictions, the bill streamlines the approval process, saving farmers valuable time and resources that are better invested in their operations. This regulatory relief translates into tangible cost savings for growers and enables them to be more competitive in both domestic and global markets.

Furthermore, the bill opens the door to more environmentally friendly farming practices by accelerating access to sustainable crop protection products. Growers gain added flexibility in managing their crops and can adapt more swiftly to emerging challenges, an increasingly important capability in the face

of climate change. The bill also offers an improved pathway for addressing specific concerns related to crop protection, presenting a win-win scenario for both the agricultural community and government agencies tasked with regulation.

As the agricultural sector confronts the escalating challenges of climate change, the provisions in this bill take on even greater significance. Climate change introduces new variables into crop management, including the emergence of novel pests and diseases previously unseen in Canadian agriculture. The bill's streamlined approach to approving crop protection products allows for quicker responses to these unpredictable challenges, thereby fortifying the agricultural sector's resilience against a changing climate. By enabling faster access to state-of-the-art, environmentally friendly solutions, the bill not only sustains current agricultural practices but also lays the groundwork for an adaptable and robust future.

VanderHout added, “This bill brings us one step closer to realizing a future where Canadian growers are



**Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC)**  
@FVGC\_PFLC

FVGC President Jan VanderHout was with @KodyBloisNS today as the MP introduced his new Private Member Bill. "Bill C-359 represents a significant leap toward creating a competitive, sustainable, and resilient sector, while also ensuring safety to human health and the environment."



empowered, efficient, and environmentally responsible. It's more than legislation; it's a blueprint for a thriving and sustainable agricultural community. We thank MP Kody Blois for championing this cause and encourage all Members of Parliament to support this landmark bill.”

*Source: Fruit & Vegetable Growers of Canada October 19, 2023 news release*

## BASF Canada appoints Leta LaRush



BASF Canada Agricultural Solutions has announced Oleta (Leta) LaRush will assume responsibility for BASF Canada Agricultural Solutions, effective November 1, 2023. In this role, Leta will lead Canadian operations and the Canadian Leadership Team for the agriculture division at BASF and will join the North American Leadership team. She will also continue to serve as a member of the BASF Canada board of directors.

“Leta has spent numerous years working within BASF Canada and Agricultural Solutions both in Canada and Australia and her customer focus and passion for agriculture makes her an excellent fit for the role,” says Paul Rea, senior vice president, Agricultural Solutions North

America.

“One of the reasons I most love the agricultural industry is because it’s a people industry,” says LaRush. “With the foundation of our incredible portfolio and innovation pipeline, I’m excited to help build on how BASF supports our customers as a leader in the industry. Stewarding the continued evolution of a holistic customer experience to support the success of our farmer customers and retail channel partners will be a key focus,” says LaRush. “Jonathan Sweat will assume responsibility for the position of Seed Treatment North America based in North Carolina.

“I want to thank Jonathan Sweat for his leadership of the business over the past six years,” says Rea. “There has been tremendous change and growth within the Canadian Agricultural Solutions business and Jon has done an excellent job of advancing the organization to better support Canadian farmers and retail partners. I’d be remiss if I didn’t also thank our customers for their support through this transformational period in Canadian agriculture. I wish Jon all the best as he steps into his new role, guiding this important portfolio. I have no doubt Jon will make a meaningful impact across North America to

the benefit of our customers.”

*Source: BASF Canada September 29, 2023 news release*



# NOTICE OF MEETING

is hereby given that the

## 165TH Annual Members and Directors’ Meeting

of the

### Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association

will be held in person at Hilton Niagara Falls/Fallsview Suites on February 20th, 2024

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



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BITS & BITES

New crop profiles published



The Pest Management Centre has published two new crop profiles:

- Field cucurbits -- <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.913652/publication.html>
- Field lettuce & spinach -- <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.913654/publication.html>

As well, the following crop profiles have been published under new editions:

- Allium vegetables -- <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.908269/publication.html>
- Brassica vegetables -- <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.908256/publication.html>

Conagra upgrades tomato processing plant in Ontario

Conagra Brands Canada is unveiling new state-of-the-art upgrades to its tomato processing plant in Dresden, Ontario. This multi-million-dollar investment represents Conagra Brands Canada’s commitment to meeting consumers where it matters most, with high-quality, local food made in Canada.

“These advancements to our Dresden plant represent an investment in Canadians and a continued commitment to expanding our operations in Canada,” said Paul Hogan, vice president and general manager, Conagra Brands Canada and International. “This investment will create more jobs, increase our capacity and ultimately meet the changing needs of our consumers, employees and those of the

communities where we live and work.”

Every September, tomato packing kicks into high gear as local farmers process harvested tomatoes, marking the end of a year-long cycle. This season, Conagra Brands Canada’s Dresden plant will pave the way for an advanced packing season with a 25 per cent increase in tomatoes produced, thanks to several upgrades including:

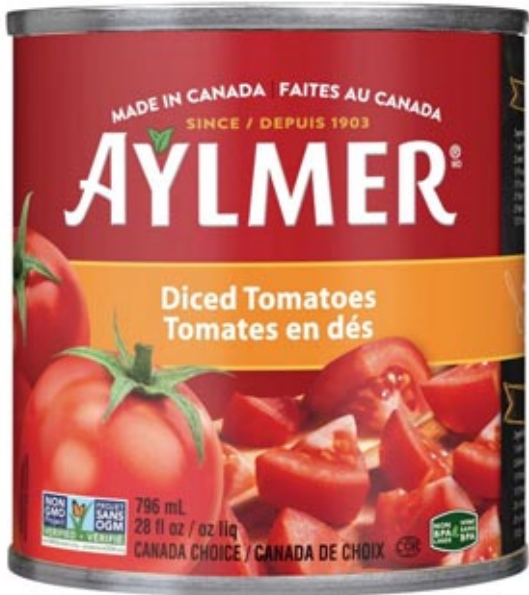
1. Streamlined production and supply chain operations with upgraded software
2. Increased production of tomato paste with new, state-of-the-art evaporator
3. Addition of a RO\*TEL line to support Canadian volume

Conagra Brands Canada’s

Dresden plant produces the country’s favourite tomato brands, including:

- Aylmer: Celebrating its 120th anniversary this year, the Canadian treasure Aylmer offers Ontario-grown tomatoes from field to can in just 24 hours.
- Hunt’s: Grown, prepared and packaged in Canada, offering tomatoes at the absolute peak of freshness. Several varieties including whole, tomato sauce and tomato paste.
- RO\*TEL A beloved U.S. brand with an array of diced tomato and green chili blends that will “bring the bold” to your food.

Source: ConAgra September 28, 2023 news release



The Alymer brand is celebrating its 120th anniversary this year.

Algoma Orchards launches Snowflake winter apple

Algoma Orchards, head-quartered near Newcastle, Ontario, has partnered with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s prolific tree fruit breeding program to bring consumers a uniquely Canadian apple. The non-GMO Snowflake apple has rosy-red skin, much like the glowing cheeks of those who delight in Canadian winters, and is dusted with delicate white snowflake-like lenticels.

Its snow-white flesh is juicy, crisp and sweet with a hint of tartness, besting long-time consumer favourite Honeycrisp in blind taste tests. Canadian

retailers and consumers will both benefit from this winter apple’s excellent storage attributes in the supermarket and the home.

The Snowflake apple brings together two long-standing stalwarts of the Canadian apple industry. Algoma Orchards and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada have been plying their respective trades for a century or more. Algoma Orchards is led by the Kemp family, whose multi-generational expertise in apple growing dates back to the 1800s. Four generations of Kemp family members have dutifully tended to their apple orchards

across the Durham Region of Ontario through sun, rain and snow.

“At Algoma, we take pride in searching out the best varieties to grow,” says Kirk Kemp, president of Algoma Orchards. “We partner with our retail customers so they in turn can excite their customers with new great tasting varieties. The Snowflake apple is a great example of this collaboration.”

Source: Algoma Orchards October 6, 2023 news release



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