

# To sustain the growth of organics, Canada must take ownership of its ownership

If we want to continue to see the positive benefits of organic production on our environment, health and economic well-being, the Government of Canada has a responsibility as the owner of this logo to show its support for the benefits the sector is delivering.



Tia Loftsgard

*Opinion*

Once considered a tiny, fledgling market, organic food and beverage production in Canada is growing at an accelerated pace. With double-digit growth rates recorded annually over the past several years, and with a grocery market share of 2.6 per cent, it is now regarded as the fastest-growing sector in Canadian agriculture. It has an estimated value of over \$5.4-billion, and is the fifth-largest market for organics in the world.

Given the feedback recently reported by the federal government for its consultations on a food policy for Canada, the increased consumer demand for organic should come as little surprise. Quantitative results ranking the four themes of the policy shows the highest priority among them is conserving our soil, water and air. According to the government's report, "... results suggest that respondents are very concerned with protection of land, rural and remote access to food, local and organic food production, and food costs."

In an era of unprecedented changes to our climate and environment, organic makes sense. Organic farming systems are known to increase biodiversity, lead to lower levels of synthetic pesticide and fertilizer runoff, and improve soil conditions—including their ability to sequester carbon and retain water to better adapt to a warming planet. Importantly, organic's impact on climate and the environment align neatly with Canada's policy goals and commitments.

And with the rise of chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension and obesity stemming in part from highly processed foods, organics provide a healthy and nutritious alternative for Canadian families. Organic food processing prohibits the use of artificial food colours, flavours, sweeteners, preservatives and numerous other processing aids and ingredients commonly found in processed foods. Once again, organics align well with Canada's commitments to providing safe and healthy food both domestically and for export markets.

With Canada's target of \$75-billion in agriculture and agri-food exports by 2025, there is an economic incentive to see the continued growth of the organic sector. Organic is unique in that it contributes to the growth of just about every major commodity group. Boosting organics helps us increase our dairy and meat production while adhering to strictly regulated animal welfare principles, for instance.

It is important to remember that the Government of Canada owns the Canada Organic logo. The Canadian Organic Standards (COS)—which are followed by operators who choose to use this logo—must be subject to a technical review every five years. This ensures that the most current and updated practices in organic farming and processing from around the world are incorporated into our standards here at home.

The federal government recently an-

nounced funding for the 2020 technical review of the COS, after years of sustained industry engagement. This generous funding has enabled the industry to maintain Canada's trading relationships in organics. However, this partial funding of the standards review was made available on an ad hoc basis, whereas each of Canada's key organic trading partners provide full and ongoing funding of their respective standards.

If we want to continue to see the positive benefits of organic production on our environment, health and economic well-being, the Government of Canada has a responsibility as the owner of this logo to show its support for the benefits the sector is delivering. For the organic sector to remain competitive with Canada's major trading partners, the sector requires full, ongoing funding for the standards.

As the Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA) prepares for our annual Parliament Day on Oct. 16, we will make this request heard while expressing gratitude for the incredible support provided for organics by the federal government.

Tia Loftsgard is the executive director of the Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA). With members across Canada, COTA works to connect everyone along the organic supply chain and provide a clear, unified voice on all issues that affect the Canadian organic sector.

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