

## Special

## Organic Week, September 21-28, 2013

## Food movements driving market shift

Consumers ask more questions and choose organic



By Matthew Holmes  
Executive Director, Canada Organic Trade Association

Where does your food come from? It's a loaded question. Food has become intensely social and political: less about the egg than the hen that laid it and the farmer who raised the hen.

This shift isn't just about where you shop or what you choose to buy. The business news focuses on Canada's merging mega-grocers; our smartphones offer us countless food-themed apps; reality TV serves up more types of cooking shows than ever imaginable; books like *Wheat Belly* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* are bestsellers. And who isn't a little tired of seeing tweets of everyone's meals?

Food has become a cultural driver in North America. We're being asked to think about our food a lot more, to think before we eat, and that is leading people down two very different paths.

There's been a clear movement to create connections and community around food. The United States Department of Agriculture tracks the number of domestic

farmers' markets, and counted over 8,100 in 2013. Compare this to just over 3,000 markets 10 years ago, and it is clear that something important is happening. In British Columbia, there's been a 147 per cent growth in farmers' market sales since 2006, and a five-fold increase in organic sales at those markets.

But just as the "foodie" movement is on the ascendant, there seems also to be a counter-movement, one long championed by adolescent boys and the corporations that excel at hyping "super-sized" death-defying meals.

The source of this summer's unfortunate outbreak of food poisoning at the CNE in Toronto, the Cronut burger, is but one of many over-the-top, highly processed and fundamentally unhealthy foods being marketed today. The recipe seems to be equal parts bragging rights, indulgence and a willful ignorance of what we're actually eating.

But organic food market trends, the continued popularity of the locavore movement and the success of the many chefs who embrace local, seasonal and organic food demonstrate that most Canadians are eager to know more about their food.

It's an aspiration that can prove challenging.

First, think about where your food comes from. If something is grown "close to home" does it mean much? It might; it might

not. Knowing where something was grown and made is certainly the first step to understanding more about the product and the practices behind it.

But knowing where your food is raised doesn't tell you everything you need to know. Do your local farms use pesticides and herbicides on your vegetables that you wouldn't use on your own front lawn? Do they raise their animals

in conditions that would be unconscionable for your family pets?

What about packaged foods: do their ingredients include canola, soy, corn or sugar? Are they fried in "vegetable" or canola oil? If the

answer is yes, unless the food is certified organic, you're almost guaranteed to be eating genetically modified organisms (GMOs). That's your choice, but chances are that the information wasn't disclosed on the package, and what kind of choice is that?

How is your food grown and made? Do the farms use sewage sludge for fertilizer? Do they use pesticides that are known toxins, hormone-disruptors and neuro-development inhibitors? Are the animals kept in cages away from the sun and fresh air? Are otherwise healthy animals fed antibiotics to promote weight gain? Are products made with artificial flavours, preservatives, colours, nitrites, GMOs or other new (and unpronounceable) additives and "ingredients"?

It is sometimes very difficult to find the answers to these questions. But if your food is organic, you can rest assured that Canada's government-regulated organic standards and inspections forbid any of these practices on organic farms or additives in organic products. And the government's "Canada Organic" logo makes it easy to spot them.

So when you remind yourself to think before you eat, as many of us are doing these days, think Canada Organic. Ninety-eight per cent of Canadians polled think they will increase or maintain their current purchases of organic this year. What do you think?

## ONLINE?

For more information, visit [globeandmail.com/organicweek](http://globeandmail.com/organicweek).

## Estimated value of total Canadian organic sales in 2012

	Sales Value (\$ Millions)	Market Share
Total Organic Food & Beverage Sales (excluding alcohol)	2,978.6	1.7%
Organic Alcohol	135.0	0.67%
Organic Supplements	34.4	1.25%
Organic Fibre (linen & clothing)	24.2	0.15%
Organic Personal Care	41.1	0.45%
Organic Pet Food	4.1	0.25%
Organic Household Products	8.2	0.2%
Organic Flowers	3.0	0.1%
Organic Exports from Canada	458.0	
<b>Total Canada Organic Market:</b>	<b>\$3,686.6M</b>	

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OPTIONS

# Study reveals 300% growth in Canadian organic foods sales

**F**rom expansive organics sections in grocery stores to burgeoning farmers' markets, Canadians are hungry for food produced without pesticides or genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and that comes from environmentally sustainable agriculture.

According to a 2013 report by the Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA), organics now represent \$3.7 billion a year in sales in Canada, a number that has tripled since 2006, making our market for organics the fourth-largest in the world.

Canadians who believe in the value of organic food are putting their money where their mouth is: 58 per cent buy organic foods

weekly, with such foods representing 23 per cent of their grocery bill, according to the report. Organics are the fastest-growing sector of the food industry and show no signs of slowing down.

Why are Canadians buying organic? It all comes down to health – our own personal health, the health of the communities we live in and the health of the environment.

"We live in an increasingly complex world where we don't have a lot of control over things, but the one thing we do have some control over is the choice of food we buy," says Linda Edwards, a spokesperson for the Ambrosia Organic Growers, an organization that represents 50

organic ambrosia apple farmers in British Columbia. "We can make good choices and buy certified organic products, which give us the assurance that this fruit hasn't been sprayed with synthetic pesticides, isn't GMO and is grown in a way that is beneficial to the environment."

Sales are phenomenal, and every year farmers work to keep up with the demand, says Edwards. "People want these organic apples because it's healthier for the consumer, for the people who work on the farms and for the environment."

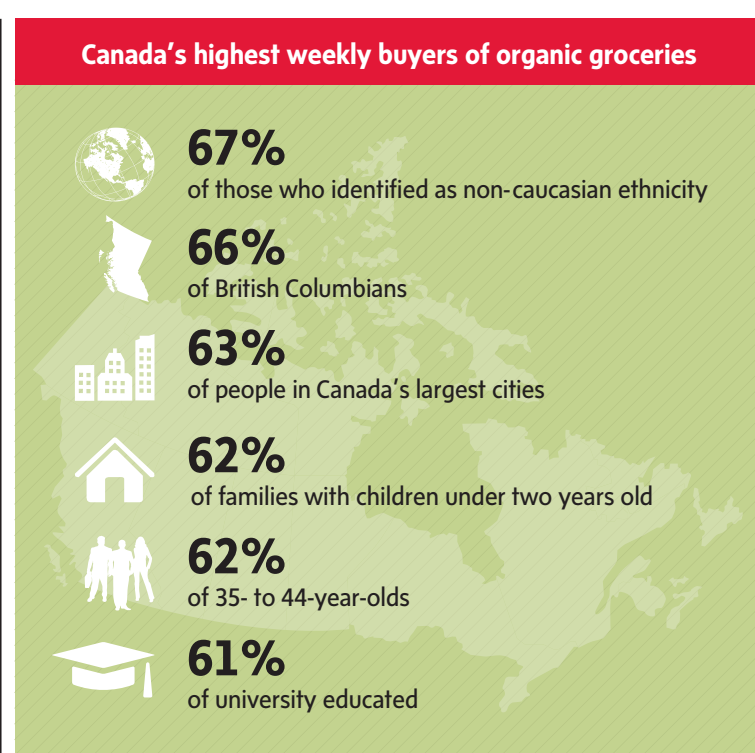
The COTA report shows that 59 per cent of Canadians believe organic farming is better for a healthy environment, while 46 per cent agree that ecological sustainability is an important consideration when deciding what products to buy.

"More and more people are voting with their dollars and choosing products that fit with their values," says Julie Poitras-Saulnier, sustainability marketing specialist with coffee roaster GMCR Canada, which promotes the Van Houtte fair trade organic collection of six coffee blends, grown by certified fair trade and organic producers.

"We want to provide options for those consumers and encourage them to use their purchasing power to support more sustainable products across the entire beverage industry," she says. "Organic blends contribute to a reduction in health risks for coffee producers and to better environmental practices."

Concern for personal health is also a key driver for consumers. COTA reports that 41 per cent of Canadians believe organic foods offer better nutrition and are healthier. Many are also motivated to buy organic to protect the health of their children; COTA reports that households with children under two are the highest buyers of such products.

Don Rees, CEO of Organic Meadow, a co-op of 100 organic family farms that produce milk,



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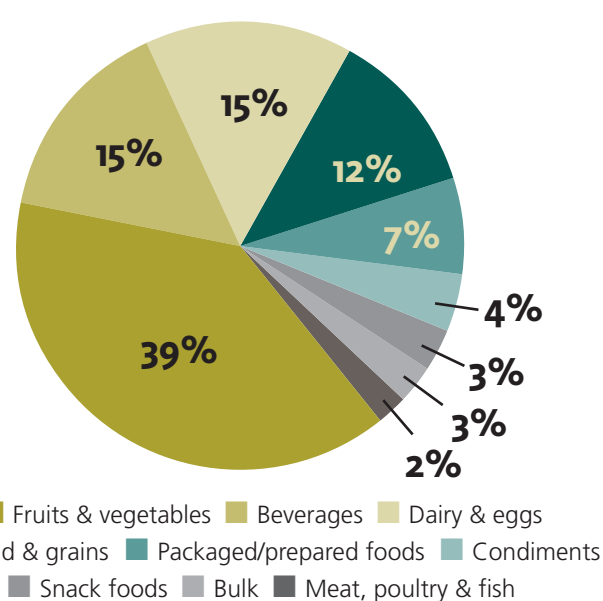
Linda Edwards is a spokesperson for the Ambrosia Organic Growers

eggs, cheese and other dairy products, says that "informed and educated consumers" care about what their families are consuming, especially those with kids.

"When it comes to milk, many consumers want to know that the product comes from animals that are treated humanely, that have access to pastures where they are exposed to sunlight and that there are no pesticides used in the soil where they graze," explains Rees. "Some of our farms have as little as 60 cows on 100 acres... You can see that the animals are outside, grazing everywhere."

While organic milk currently has a 2 per cent share of the dairy market, it's underdeveloped relative to the U.S. and European countries, adds Rees. "There's lots of room for continued growth, as consumers become more informed about the benefits of going organic."

Canada organic food and beverage sales by product categories  
Grocery banners, mass merchandisers and drug stores, 2012



Source: The Nielsen Company, 2012

PROFILE

## Programs grow organic farmers

**S**hannon Jones and Bryan Dyck of Broadfork Farm, River Hebert, N.S., are active participants in the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network's (ACORN) first organic farmer training initiative: the Grow A Farmer Apprenticeship and Mentorship programs.

Through these programs, ACORN facilitates curriculum-guided, farm-based appren-

ticeships to aspiring organic farmers; mentorship support to newly established growers in the Atlantic region; and targeted events offering education and training on critical topics facing new entrants to organic agriculture.

To learn more, visit [www.growafarmer.ca](http://www.growafarmer.ca) and [www.broadforkfarm.com](http://www.broadforkfarm.com).



Shannon Jones and Bryan Dyck grow a wide selection of organic vegetables. They also keep honeybee hives, for pollination, honey and "because we really love them." PHOTO: SUPPLIED

By the numbers

**\$3.7 billion**

Value in 2012 of the total Canadian organic consumer market (up from \$1.1 billion in 2006)

**3,732**

Number of organic farms in Canada (employing more than 11,167 people in agriculture)

Source: COTA



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ORGANIC FOODS

GMO UPDATE

# Certification helps families make informed choices

One of the many factors driving the demand for organic food is concern about genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Many countries around the world have banned GMOs, and 64 have introduced legislation making labelling mandatory. In North America, however, Health Canada and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have accepted the premise that genetically modified foods are "substantially equivalent" to their non-genetically engineered counterparts, and that there is scientific consensus that GMOs are safe.

But experts on both sides of the argument agree that politicization of the issues makes it difficult to address growing consumer concerns: GMO proponents say that anti-corporate fears lend credibility to badly conducted research; anti-GMO activists contend that industry-led attacks on critical researchers have stifled truly independent research.

Arran Stephens, CEO and "chief gardenkeeper" of Nature's Path, the organic food company, has opposed GMOs for more than 18 years. "It's something we feel very passionate about," he says. "Biotech companies are interfering with evolutionary processes that have taken thousands – even millions – of years to perfect. Genetic modification is not a continuation of selective breeding, but the alteration of life forms."

He notes that the development of herbicide-resistant GM crops has contributed to a 15-fold increase in the use of herbicides, a trend that biologists say is a factor in colony collapse disorder in bees. And while GMOs are claimed to increase crop yields, a 2011 United Nations report found that it's possible to achieve similar results with "agroecological" processes, such as organic agriculture, that are more sustainable and affordable for developing nations. Their study found that the agroeco-

Estimated Canada organic grocery sales by distribution channel, 2006 and 2012				
Distribution Channel	2006		2012	
	Sales (\$ Millions)	Market Share	Sales (\$ Millions)	Market Share
Supermarkets, Mass Merchandisers and Drug Stores	\$411.6	59%	\$919.7	45%
<i>Retail Channel Adjustment</i>	\$174.7		\$430.6	
Natural Health Stores and Online Retail/Delivery Services	\$329.8	33%	\$864.7	29%
Farmer-Direct Sales: Farmers' Markets, CSAs, Farm-Stands	\$70*	7%	\$377.6	13%
Foodservice/Institutional	\$10.0	1%	\$371.0	12%
Co-ops/Buying Clubs	\$5.0	0.5%	\$15.0	0.5%
<b>Total Organic Food Sales: \$1,001.1 M</b>			<b>\$2,978.6 M</b>	

\* 2006 farmer-direct sales figures include box delivery schemes (CSAs and on-line delivery services). 2012 figures include on-line delivery services with natural health stores.

**"Biotech companies are interfering with evolutionary processes that have taken thousands – even millions – of years to perfect. Genetic modification is not a continuation of selective breeding, but the alteration of life forms."**

Arran Stephens is CEO and "chief gardenkeeper" of Nature's Path

logical processes resulted in an average increase in crop yield of 80 per cent among 57 developing countries, with an average increase of 116 per cent for all African projects.

While there are many reasons to be concerned about the environmental impact of GMO crops, as well as their potential long-term effect on human health, the findings of a study published in September 2012 were "sufficiently alarming to warrant revision of how governments assess the safety of genetically engineered foods," says Maureen Kirkpatrick, standards coordinator for The Big Carrot Natural Food Market in Toronto.

In the peer-reviewed U.S. journal *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, Professor Gilles-Eric Seralini reported that rats fed a diet of Monsanto's Roundup-tolerant GM maize (corn) NK603 for two years developed higher levels of cancers and died earlier than

control subjects. The study used protocols similar to the 90-day studies biotech companies use

to meet Health Canada and U.S. Food and Drug Administration safety-testing requirements, but continued for two years, closer to the full life cycle of the rats.

"When people become aware that the government is not doing safety testing independently, it is a huge wake-up call, and they're galvanized to action," says Kirkpatrick. "We see real momentum building in the opposition to GMOs, and our shoppers tend to be highly informed on the issues."

Certified organic agriculture and the Non-GMO Project appeal to shoppers partly because they provide information that people need to make good decisions for their families, she says. "It takes the guesswork out of it. You know what's in your food, by the designation."

The Non-GMO Project, of which The Big Carrot and Nature's Path are founding members, is advocating mandatory GMO-labelling legislation in North America.

In the meantime, for those who wish to avoid GMOs, "eating fresh, whole foods, buying organic and buying Non-GMO Project Verified are the three most powerful tools," stresses Kirkpatrick.



A Big Carrot employee stocks Ontario organic sweet corn, a GMO-free alternative to the genetically modified sweet corn that has been grown in Canada since 2011. PHOTO: SARAH DOBEC

By the numbers

**96%**  
Amount of the global organic market (valued at \$63 billion USD annually) accessible by Canada

**4th**  
Canada's rank in the worldwide organic market

**\$450+ million**  
Value of Canada's organic exports per year

PROFILE

## Health food industry association supports new standards

"Organic standards make 'organic' a trustworthy brand and allow consumers to shop with confidence," says Helen Sherrard, president for the Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA). The association's members include manufacturers, retailers, wholesalers, distributors and importers of

natural and organic products. "To help support organic standards, CHFA and our members are proud to partner with the Canadian Organic Trade Association and the Canadian Organic Growers, working collaboratively to ensure Canadians continue to have access to properly regulated organic foods," says Sherrard.

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OPTIONS

# Strict national regulations govern producers

**W**ith Canadians spending close to \$3 billion a year on organic food, the need to ensure that they are actually getting what they pay for has become paramount.

“Our sector has fought long and hard to achieve the standards that are required for products to be labelled organic,” says Rochelle Eisen, president of the Canadian Organic Growers (COG) and a chair of Canada’s organic standards committee.

“A rise in consumer demand for organic food and other products, however, means some manufacturers are trying to muscle into the market with labels that give the impression that they are organic when they are not,” she says. “They’ll use ‘natural’ and all kinds of other empty words.”

Eisen points out that foods labelled with the Canada Organic logo show that they meet Canada’s stringent national organic requirements, which are overseen by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). What that means is that on top of all the other health and safety requirements that producers must adhere to, they also have to meet organic standards, making this the most regulated and inspected food system in Canada.

Daniel Miller, executive director, food labelling and claims directorate at the CFIA, says all food products must be labelled



and advertised accurately and truthfully to protect consumers from fraud and must comply with the Food and Drug Regulations.

He notes that the Organic Products Regulations were created as a response to requests by the organic sector and consumers to protect against misleading or deceptive labelling practices; reduce consumer confusion about the

definition of organic; facilitate the access of Canadian organic products to foreign markets that require regulatory oversight; and support further development of the domestic market.

“Labelling food as certified organic provides Canadians with reliable information on which to base their food choices,” says Miller.

Eisen agrees. “Research tells us that more than half of all Canadians are buying organic foods every week. As an industry, we have a duty to those consumers to uphold and protect the standards they expect from organic producers, and the best way to do that is to make sure the consumers know what those standards are.”

No one knows that better than Mike Meeker, Canadian fish farming pioneer and founder of Meeker Aquaculture, now a division of Canadian-based organic and natural food producer Blue Goose.

There is a growing demand in Canada for organically farmed fish among well-informed and savvy consumers who understand the benefits and want to know that what they are buying meets rigorous certification standards, says Meeker.

Organic aquaculture is a relatively new field when it comes to the standards. Although the Canadian regulations cover food, drink, livestock and crops, aquaculture was not covered by the government’s organic regulations in 2009 because the detailed standards didn’t exist yet. So Canada’s organic sector began to innovate in order to give consumers transparency in their entire food system, recently publishing new voluntary national standards for organic aquaculture. These standards are founded on the same principles as Canada’s organic agriculture system.

“Anyone can go online and read exactly what standards I need to meet to earn and keep my certification, so I’m not making claims that I can’t back up. That transparency is critically important to me and to consumers,” Meeker says.

To achieve organic certification for Blue Goose Aquaculture’s rainbow trout, Meeker had to comply with a lengthy set of conditions including water quality, environmental standards, quality of fish feed, fish health and welfare, cultivation conditions and reproduction. Meeker’s Aquaculture is the first and only certified organic grower of rainbow trout in Canada.

HIGHER STANDARD



A label consumers trust

Canadian organic standards ensure that foods that cross interprovincial or international borders are regulated under both the Food and Drug Regulations, and the Organic Product Regulations, and are subject to enforcement by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Similarly, organic foods that are made and sold only within their province of origin are subject to federal truthful-labelling laws and may be subject to provincial organic regulations, says Helen Sherrard, president for the Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA), which represents the natural health industry. “Having provincial regulations in place that align with federal regulations gives Canadians added confidence that the products they are purchasing within their province and those that have been imported are following the strict standards established for organic.”

Organic standards help Canadians make buying decisions they can feel good about by ensuring the products they are purchasing have met the strict established requirements for organic, Sherrard adds. “This verified third party credibility gives consumers peace of mind. When they see the certified organic logo, they can feel confident that they are not only investing in their health, but also supporting sustainable, environmentally friendly practices and animal welfare.”

PROFILE

## Agriculture approach yields healthy, viable family farms

**S**cott and Amanda Roes of Milverton, Ont., transitioned to organic after purchasing the farm from Scott’s parents in 2009, because they wanted to provide the healthiest place for their family to live. “When a cow eats pasture, it is what nature intended for her to eat so the cow is

healthier and naturally the milk she produces will be healthier too,” says Scott.

The Roes are part of Organic Meadow, an Ontario-based co-op with close to 100 organic farmer-owners.

To learn more, visit [youtube.com/OrganicMeadowInc](http://youtube.com/OrganicMeadowInc).



Tyrell, 11, Chloe, 8 and Ava, 6, help their parents Scott and Amanda Roes on the family’s organic dairy farm.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED



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In fact, Canadians bite into \$3 billion worth of organic food annually, supporting nearly 4000 certified organic producers in Canada. The Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA) is a proud partner of **Organic Week**, helping to raise awareness and educate Canadians on the benefits of organics and the *Organic Products Regulations*. **Learn more at [chfa.ca](http://chfa.ca).**

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