Once seen as a niche category confined to farmers markets and health food stores, organic foods have hit the mainstream. While the sector has experienced challenges along the way, the number of healthy developments suggests the future of organic food is bright.

Organic food is reaching farm terminals and the marketplace, and the growth trend appears set to continue. According to the Organic Trade Association (OTA) in Canada, “this year’s launch of a Canada Organic logo on foods is a significant step forward in enhancing consumer confidence in certified organic foods.”

Fresh vegetables and fruits are the most popular category of organic food, followed by meats, dairy, and eggs. Studies into various forms of organic farming have shown that organic foods are healthier, contain more nutrients than conventional foods, and can help protect against disease, and that these are present in higher levels in the food you eat.

Organic farming has also evolved in recent years, with the development of organic biodynamic, organic hydroponic, and organic aquaponic farming methods. These methods rely on natural processes and the use of organic materials to maintain soil fertility, improve plant health, and increase crop yields. This has led to a surge in the number of organic farms in the country reaching a critical mass in the market-

In addition, consumers are increasingly concerned with the environmental footprint of the food they eat. Organic farming methods help protect biodiversity, reduce pesticide use, and promote sustainable land use. This has led to a growing body of scientific evidence showing that organic foods have a lower environmental impact than conventional foods.

Moreover, organic foods are increasingly seen as a way to address the challenges of climate change. Organic farming methods help sequester carbon from the atmosphere, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote soil health. This helps to mitigate the effects of climate change and support the transition to a low-carbon economy.

In conclusion, organic farming is a sustainable and healthy food production system that offers many benefits to both farmers and consumers. As the demand for organic food continues to grow, it is clear that organic farming will play an increasingly important role in shaping the future of agriculture and food systems.

The Canadian industry sees a wealth of opportunity in the growing demand for organic food, but there are challenges. Even though many Canadian producers are moving to organic, Canadians’ demand for organic food is far outpacing the Canadian supply. Learn more at www.organicbiologique.ca.
A new ‘Canada Organic’ logo is expected to become a frequent sight on produce bins, store shelves and packages in this country, it is now the ultimate authority when it comes to ensuring consumers that rigorous and consistent standards were used in the production and processing of organic food. Canada’s Organic Products Regulations (OPRC) took effect June 30, 2009 – making it mandatory for all organic food, beverage and livestock products sold across provincial or territorial borders into Canada to be certified to the new Canadian Organic Standard.

“In an industry, we went to the CFIA and asked to be enriched, which you don’t generally see in the food sector,” said Matthew Latka, managing director of the Organic Trade Association (OTA) in Canada.

The Canadian logo sector has had voluntary stan-
dards since 1999, but these were not legally binding or enforceable, and there were several different standards based on internationally recognized organic principles.

The organic sector sought a mandatory national standard to give consumers more clarity and confidence, says Mr. Latka. “It was getting out of line with different standards and logos in play. So we wanted consumers to know that every- one is meeting the same requirements.

The regulations require organic food labels to contain specific information (for example, the name of the certifying body and the percentage of organic ingredients). Only certified products containing more than 95 per cent organic ingredients may be labeled as ‘organic’ and carry the Canada Organic logo. Although the logo is not mandatory, the federal government now allows the OA to inspect and certify products and fill the breach with a logo that the Canadian Organic Council could only lead to confusion in the market.

The other key reason for working with the federal government is the lack of a national standard. “If there are not one set of rules, it’s like buying a car in the US – you can’t buy it in Canada and drive it in New York,” says Holmes. “It was getting confusing for consumers.”

A mandatory national standard provides a long-overdue level playing field, and “everybody wants to get in on that,” says Matthew Holmes, standards coordinator with The Big Carrot Natural Food Market in Toronto. “The consumer is better protected from misleading or false claims, and other consumer confidence can only lead to growth in the market.”

The regulations, which the federal government is mandating, are the result of a tit-for-tat agreement with the United States.

“We breathed a sigh of relief when the Canadians and Americans signed an equivalency agreement,” says Steve Cavell, CEO of Canada’s Organic Meadow Co-opera-
tive Inc., representing Ontario’s leading organic food producers. “For the first time since 1990, it became possible to reach a new deal with the United States – organic certification in one country is now recognized in the other.”

“In Canada, we have a strong and voluntary organic agriculture program and we’re confident that the federal government will now legislate the mandatory national standard,” says Mr. Cavell. “In the United States, the organic program is voluntary and inconsistent in different states.”

“Organic farmers have a huge diversity and abundance of life – both above and below the soil,” explains Holmes. “Farmers farm for the soil, and the soil is the most important component of their business.”

One of the key things farmers are looking for is federal standards to be onerous and limit access, according to Mr. Holmes. “New standards internationally can form an umbrella, and there is no way for small farmers and processors to keep up with the regulations.”

“Canada has been in the cold for a long time on standards internationally,” says Holmes. “It’s like having a very warm and well-insulated house in 40 below.”

“The other important one is Europe, both as a market and in terms of the standards that our consumers demand,” says Holmes. “We have to stay competitive within Canada and internationally.”

The regulations also require retailers to designate an area in their stores for organic products. “This is important, because if we don’t have a standardized way of doing business, consumers can’t trust and believe that the entire organic mar- ket is better protected from misleading or false claims, and that consumers can judge the credibility of the entire organic market,“ says Holmes.

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By Laura Telford, PhD
National Director
Canadian Organic Growers

Over the past 10 years that Canadian Organic Growers has tracked growth, organic farming has expanded at an average annual rate of 5 per cent. Contrast this with mainstream agriculture where farms have been disappearing faster than active glaciers, with two-thirds eliminated in the past 10 years.

Despite strong growth, Canadian organic production is seriously outpacing the growing pace with demand. In 2003, 90 per cent of organic food and animal feed raised organically in Canada is destined for the mainstream national retailers, mainstream national retailers, and specialty chains such as Mainstream national retailers, mainstream national retailers, and specialty chains such as "few farmers are prepared to undertake the risky three-year transition without assurance that they can bring their organic products to market at a higher rate."

Organic farmers are preparing to undertake the risky three-year transition without assurance that they can bring their organic products to market at a higher rate."

The store is already certified by Ecocert Canada to ensure in processing and packaging activities for organic products meet the new federal standards.

Organic agriculture began as a farmers’ movement, but retailers are playing an expanding role.

In addition to following standards for storage, handling and record keeping, The Big Carrot works to tend the organic store. "Consumer education is critical for us as an organic retailer," says Mr. Kirkpatrick. "Knowledgeable customer service, flow lines and nutritional information as well as in-store product demonstrations, help to educate the benefits of organic."