

Organic Sector Consultation Funded by *Growing Forward 2*

May 31st, 2016—The Organic Council of Ontario (OCO) received funding this April through *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)* to implement a sector-wide assessment of barriers to growth for the organic sector in Ontario. The Council signed the agreement with the Agricultural Adaptation Council (AAC) in late April, 2016 and is launching the project this week.

The \$35,718 project seeks to understand the barriers to growth for different organic value chains and to develop specific and measurable goals for overcoming those barriers for the sector. The Organic Council has contracted Carolyn Young, former Director of Sustain Ontario, to conduct an environmental scan, key informant interviews, commodity-specific focus groups and a survey of both organic businesses and conventional businesses wishing to transition to certified organic.

“This funding comes at a critical time,” says Tom Manley, chair of the OCO board. “With over \$1 billion in sales in Ontario alone, roughly 30% of all Canadian organic sales, the Ontario organic sector’s demand far outstrips supply and organic businesses are facing intense pressure from the US and Quebec to increase their market share in both Ontario and International markets.” In Canada, organic foods now make up 4 per cent of total retail sales, but only 1.3 per cent of total production area.

“Supply is the bottleneck in organic value chains” states Simon Jacques, organic grain grower and OCO board member, “and if we can help producers overcome barriers to scaling up and scaling out production, the whole sector will benefit.”

The project also aims to develop a sector-wide funding strategy for accomplishing the goals identified in the consultation process. “I’m really hopeful that, through this project, organic businesses will see the value of playing a greater role in determining the future of the sector” states former OCO chair Jennifer Pfenning. Pfenning’s Organic Vegetables were instrumental in making the grant happen by providing \$10,000 in matching funds.

The work will be overseen by a working group representing all commodity groups and value chains. “We are very fortunate to have such dedicated sector leaders to lead this work,” states Carolyn Young.

“The Canadian organic food sector is a growing industry. The Government of Canada is pleased to support the Ontario organic sector in growing its market share and expanding sales.”

– Lawrence MacAulay, Federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food

“Today there is an increasing demand from consumers to know more about the food they consume and a growing desire for organic options. Our government is pleased to support the Organic Council of Ontario in this project, looking at ways we can help the organic food industry and in turn strengthen Ontario’s broader agri-food sector.”

– Jeff Leal, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

“This project demonstrates excellent collaborative partnerships across the value chain.” - Judy Dirksen, AAC Chair. “By conducting a sector-wide consultation, the entire organic sector, from producers to retailers, will be in a better position to support the growing demand for organic products.”

The project is a year-long project and will wrap up in March 2017 with a report on the findings of the consultation.

This project was funded in part through *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. The Agricultural Adaptation Council assists in the delivery of *GF2* in Ontario.

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