

STATE OF FLUX

Trade with Mexico: hope or hype?



There’s a world of complexity in this handful of July-dug potatoes -- science, finance, culture and politics – as Canada seeks more trade with Mexico.
Photo by Glenn Lowson.

KAREN DAVIDSON

Guadalajara, Mexico’s third-largest city, is the capital of Jalisco, a state famous for tourists and tequila. Agriculture is a big part of the local economy, known for avocados, berries and tomatoes. Unexpectedly, it has also become a destination of choice for eager Canadian ministers looking to diversify markets for potatoes and other commodities.

After Prime Minister Mark Carney’s meeting in Mexico with President Claudia Sheinbaum in September 2025, the leaders stood at the podium and heralded a “new era of elevated cooperation.” Hot on Carney’s heels, federal agriculture minister Heath MacDonald travelled to Mexico City then on to Guadalajara accompanied by an impressive entourage including four provincial agriculture ministers.

Ramping up the government’s push, Dominic LeBlanc,

Canada’s minister for Canada-U.S. trade and intergovernmental affairs, will lead a trade mission from February 15-20, 2026 with Guadalajara again on the itinerary. While the list of participants joining him has yet to be announced – interested parties including small businesses had until November 28 to apply– it’s very likely representatives from the Canadian potato industry will be on board.

“We’ve been talking about the risks of tariffs on our fresh potato sector since January 20,” says Pamela Kolochuk, CEO, Peak of the Market, Winnipeg, Manitoba, referring to the 2025 inauguration day for U.S. President Trump. “Forty per cent of our fresh potatoes go to the U.S. and when tariffs were in place for three days in March, our members paid \$220,000 in tariffs so that we didn’t strand our customers.”

The gnawing worry is about the threat of future tariffs and how to mitigate that risk.

“The current trade situation continues to threaten our

existence,” says Kolochuk.

This new trade reality has spurred the Canadian Potato Council (CPC) to explore how to harmonize phytosanitary measures with Mexico which is placing a huge emphasis on testing and “clean” trade.

“Mexico is a doable market for Canada,” says Bill Zylmans, CPC chair and a potato grower from Delta, British Columbia. “We need to build a stronger working relationship so that we could potentially sell fresh potatoes from most provinces and seed potatoes from western Canada.”

Emphasizing a pan-Canadian approach, Zylmans and his board are working closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) which has been tasked to negotiate with its Mexican counterpart, Senasica. Any potential trade agreement will realistically take two to three years to hammer out, full stop.

Continued on page 3

AT PRESS TIME...

Update on Grocery Code of Conduct

While the Grocery Code of Conduct is scheduled to come into force on January 1, 2026, details about the dispute resolution mechanism have not been released. Look for final details before the year-end holidays.

As of mid-November, there were 106 signed up for membership which comprised 27 retailer members and 79 supplier members. Of the supplier members, seven were primary producers, seven were wholesalers/distributors and 65 were manufacturers. Together, Loblaw, Sobeys, Metro, Costco and Walmart represent about 80 per cent of retail food sales in Canada. Of these top five, only Empire (Sobeys, etc) has become a member. Other retailers include: Pattison Food Group, Stong’s Markets Ltd and Vince’s Market Group. The membership list is publicly available here: canadacode.org/membership/member-directory/

The motivation to join is that you must be a member in order to have voting rights that start in January 2026. That’s when the first invoices are issued and when elections will be held for a board

A guide for fraud prevention in produce now available

A coalition of produce industry leaders has released “A Guide: Fraud Prevention in Produce.” This comprehensive resource is designed to help companies protect themselves against the rapidly escalating threat of fraud, which has cost the industry tens of millions of dollars annually.

The guide was developed by experts representing the Fruit and Vegetable Dispute Resolution Corporation (DRC), Blue Book Services, the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA), Texas International Produce Association (TIPA), USDA/PACA, Kings River Packing, The Fresh Connection, and Latitude Group. It addresses

the dramatic surge in fraud schemes such as impersonation and the creation of fake companies targeting the specialty produce sector.

The complete guide is available through DRC resources and participating industry associations. It includes quick-reference desktop checklists for buyer verification and transportation fraud prevention. These one-page tools provide step-by-step guidance for sales and logistics teams, making it easier to vet new companies and evaluate transportation options with confidence.

Recent history has shown that even the most seasoned industry veteran can be susceptible to fraud. Bad actors only need you to be too trusting or to make one mistake. Reducing exposure requires a layered defense – one that blends strong identity checks, secure communication tools, transactional controls, staff vigilance, and shared intelligence across the industry.

Download here: fvdrc.com/guide-fraud-prevention-in-produce/

NEWSMAKERS

The Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada is seeking a new executive director as **Massimo Bergamini** transitions from his role to retirement. Hired September 16, 2024, he has revitalized the association’s approach to strategy, governance and advocacy. The board is finalizing its leadership search process.

The Prince Edward Island Potato Board has elected its first female chair: seed grower **Katie MacLennan**. She is joined by vice-chair **Shawn Birch**, a processing potato grower. **Randy Visser** remains secretary-treasurer. New directors include **Marijke Oudshoorn** and **Pat Clarkin**.



Katie MacLennan

Remaining board members comprise: **Rit VanNieuwenhuyzen**, **Guy Cudmore**, **Andrew Nieuhof**, **Ian Shaw**, **Dianne Huestis** and **Chris Rennie**. **Rylan MacLellan** remains the Young Farmer’s representative.

The Empire Company – parent of Sobeys, Safeway, IGA, Farm Boy and FreshCo – has appointed **Pierre St-Laurent** as the next CEO. A 34-year veteran of the company, he replaces **Michael Medline** who had been in the role for nine years. The company has distinguished itself as an advocate for the Grocery Code of Conduct. Canada’s second largest grocery retailer has annual sales of \$31 billion.

The Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers held its annual general meeting on October 22. The 2026 board of directors is chaired by **Steve Peters**, St. Thomas, Ontario who has been reappointed for another term. He is joined by: **Tony Coppola**, Coppola Farms Inc.; **Chris DelGreco**, Under Sun Acres Inc.; **Albert Mastronardi**, H & A Mastronardi Farms Ltd.; **Rick Mastronardi**, IPR Farms Ltd.; **Jason Whitcher**, Mastron Enterprises Ltd.; **Paul Mastronardi**, Envirofresh Produce Ltd.; **James Neven**, Neven Produce Inc.; **Jan VanderHout**, Beverly Greenhouses Ltd.; **Tim Verbeek**, Platinum Produce Company; **Trevor Voorberg**, Foothill Greenhouses Ltd. Vice-chairs are to be elected after Nov 19.

After the fall provincial election, Newfoundland and Labrador has announced a new forestry, agriculture and lands minister. **Hon Pleaman Forsey** (Exploits), a tireless advocate for rural communities, comes to the role after six years as a sitting Conservative member of the legislature.

Brock University professor of biological sciences **Dr. Liette Vasseur** has been elected for four years to lead an international environmental commission. The International Union for Conservation (IUCN) has appointed her to chair the Commission on Ecosystem Management.

The Grape Growers of Ontario, with the Honourable Speaker of the Legislature and MPP for Flamborough-Glanbrook, **Donna Skelly**, hosted the 46th Annual Wine Tasting event at Queen’s Park on October 28. Here are the official wines of Ontario’s Legislative Assembly for 2026:

Sparkling Wine: 2023 Sparkling Riesling by **Harbour Estates Winery**, Niagara Peninsula
Red Wine: 2021 Barrel 81 by **Riverview Cellars Estate Winery**, Niagara-on-the-Lake
White Wine: 2022 Pecorino by **Casa Dea Estates Winery**, Prince Edward County
Ice Wine: 2024 Vidal Icewine by **Between The Lines**, Niagara Peninsula

The Ontario agriculture minister **Trevor Jones** announced the Excellence in Agriculture awards at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. Congratulations to the horticultural winners as follows:

- Research and Innovation Excellence**
- **Haven Greens** – Regional Municipality of York
 - **Vineland Research and Innovation Centre** – Regional Municipality of Niagara
- Promotional Excellence**
- **Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers** – Essex County Farm Family Excellence
 - **The Fifty Acre Garden** – Simcoe County
- 2025 Honourable Mentions:
- Farm Family Excellence**
- **Goldsmith’s Farm Market and Bakery** – Grey County



Happy holidays!

As the winter solstice approaches, we express our gratitude to all of our readers, and those who have given generously of their time for interviews and photo shoots. We also acknowledge the loyalty of our advertisers. Without you, we couldn’t bring together this horticultural community from shore to shore. Thanksgiving at Christmas!

Karen, Carlie, Deanna and Doug

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COVER STORY

Trade with Mexico: hope or hype?

Mexico is self-sufficient in potato production with average yields exceeding 30 tons per hectare.

GRUPO CONSULTOR de MERCADOS AGRÍCOLAS.

Continued from page 1

There’s history to overcome here. During the 1990s, Zylmans sold seed potatoes to Mexico, trucking the load through Tijuana. Logistically, it was a straight line south from British Columbia. Other western Canadian growers also participated in that seed potato trade, until relations soured on which country’s laboratory test results would be recognized for trade purposes. There’s been virtually no potato trade between the two countries for almost a decade.

A world of its own

Fast forward to 2025 and a previously stable North American trade environment is being dismantled by current U.S. trade policy. If Canada aims to step up its trade with Mexico, there’s an immediate need to understand this vast Spanish-speaking neighbour to the south that’s home to 132 million people. It’s a country embraced by the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, with a geography that spans 31 states in between and local cultures dating back millennia. The country’s tourism tag line is key: a world of its own.

Perhaps it’s the case that market weight is a benefit when dealing with such complexity. A key announcement of Minister MacDonald’s agricultural trade mission was the JBS agreement to ship beef to 43 Costco stores in Mexico. The trade deal between the largest meat processor in the world, a Brazilian multi-national, to sell Canadian beef to one of the world’s top 10 grocers, an American multi-national, could foretell a model. Whatever the details, clarity in phytosanitary rules comes first.

Any consideration of a Mexican market should take heed that the National Potato Council laboured for 25 years to gain access on May 11, 2022. At that

time, U.S. growers were granted permission to sell to the entire Mexican market, not just the pre-existing access within 26 kilometres of the border. For the period October 2023 to September 2024, the USDA reported that U.S. potato sales to Mexico totalled \$135 million, a 20 per cent increase over the previous period.

An important footnote to this agreement, however, is that the eventual opening was linked to U.S. approval of avocado exports from Jalisco, confirms Amado Vázquez Martínez, editorial coordinator for Tierra Fértil, based near Guadalajara.

Reality check

U.S. potato trade aside, Mexico has its own potato industry. In fact, 8,600 growers are represented by the National Confederation of Potato Producers of the Mexican Republic (CONPAPA). In 2025, they planted 63,000 hectares (155,000 acres) of potatoes. At a March 2025 association meeting, president Gildardo González Saldivar told producers that Mexican border states such as Sinaloa and Sonora would be allowed to ship fresh potatoes to the U.S. for the first time.

According to Grupo Consultor de Mercados Agrícolas (GCMA), a Mexican agricultural consultancy firm, Mexico is self-sufficient in potato production with average yields exceeding 30 tons per hectare. Potatoes are considered a strategic crop for Mexico’s food security and imports remain minimal, limited mostly to processed potato products and certified seed.

Describing the recent deal for Canadian beef imports, Martínez says, “Applying a similar framework to potatoes and to other commodities would require clear phytosanitary access, well-defined logistics protocols and value-added certification since these crops are more sensitive



The 31 states of Mexico highlight the diversity of geography and culture. Guadalajara, a centre of agricultural production for avocados, berries and tomatoes, is located in the state of Jalisco.

and subject to stricter import controls in Mexico.”

Martínez continues: “This explains Mexico’s cautious approach toward Canada’s case: any future access for Canadian potatoes must guarantee zero introduction of pests or diseases absent in Mexico, particularly in key producing regions such as Chihuahua, Sinaloa and the state of Mexico where potato production holds internationally recognized sanitary status.”

With potatoes currently flowing into and out of Mexico, it’s unclear whether Mexican retailers would welcome Canadian potatoes. That said, all eyes remain focussed on the 2026 negotiations for renewing the Canada-US-Mexican agreement (CUSMA) or T-MEC as it’s known in Mexico.

On the ground

Greg Palmer, vice-president of trade and market development, Canadian Produce Marketing Association, noted at a logistics summit in Montreal, that trade flows are shifting, with the potential for both Canadian potatoes and apples to be shipped to Mexico.

“There may be a niche market for certain varieties or sizes,” says Palmer, who has visited grocery stores in Guadalajara. The import window for apples is January through July, when premium varieties such as Gala, Honeycrisp and Fuji could be welcomed depending on specific sizes and differentiated packaging.

On the ground, global logistics provider C.H. Robinson has



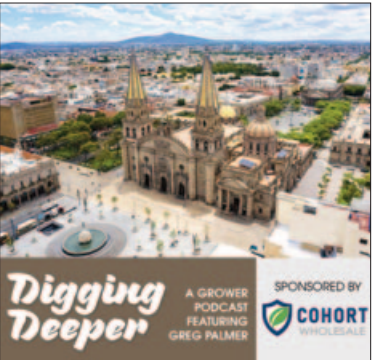
The Laredo, Texas crossing handles 50 per cent of the U.S.-Canada freight traffic into Mexico.

announced a new cross-border service to reduce shipping costs between Mexico, the U.S. and Canada by relying on artificial intelligence to determine mode, route, carrier, and delivery schedules. Such developments are giving hope to the Canadian Potato Council which is encouraging the federal government and its agencies to open the Mexican market.

For its part, CFIA is re-energizing its relationship with Senasica as part of the Canada-Mexico Action Plan 2025-2028 unveiled by the Canadian and Mexican leaders at their September 2025 summit. In a statement to **The Grower**, the agency confirms, “Canada is seeking market access for horticulture products such as cherries and blueberries and for easing import requirements for apples from eastern Canada. As next steps towards this, Mexico will perform risk assessments on those commodities to determine their import requirements. The timeline from Mexico on this has not yet been confirmed.”

Summarizing the potential for future trade, Zylmans concludes, “We’re doing our due diligence and then it will be up to individual businesses, wherever they are in Canada, to figure out the economics and logistics.”

The Grower is “Digging Deeper” with Greg Palmer, vice-president of trade and market development, Canadian Produce Marketing Association. Having visited Guadalajara’s grocers, he shares his perspective of the potential for trade with Mexico. This podcast is sponsored by Cohort Wholesale.



CROSS COUNTRY DIGEST

BRITISH COLUMBIA

BC Tree Fruits holds open house at Oliver

BC Tree Fruits, under new ownership of Wildstone Construction Group and management by Algoma Orchards, held an open house at the Oliver packing house on November 7. Operations manager Dion Boonzaier confirmed that 23,000 bins have been packed at the state-of-the-art facility in fall 2025. Capacity remains to pack 100,000 bins.

Jim Morrison, a board member with BC Tree Fruits told the crowd in attendance: “It’s about reaffirming the strength of BC Agriculture and one of Canada’s most iconic brands.” BC Tree Fruits has packed apples since its founding in 1936.

“The event was all about showing the BC Government that the tree fruit industry has dusted itself off and is back up and moving in a positive direction,” stated Kirk Kemp, president,

Algoma Orchards. “We wanted to have growers who have shipped us fruit and others who are considering shipping fruit to us, to see that we have the facility back up and running. And we wanted to reassure the tree fruit industry in the Okanagan Valley that we are committed to working with growers, government agencies and the people of British Columbia. The tree fruit industry has a bright and positive future. Not only are we committed to supplying the residents of British Columbia and the western provinces of Canada with excellent quality tree fruit, we are confident we can enhance the opportunity of the BC tree fruit industry as the gateway to the ever growing Asian market.”

BC agriculture minister Lana Popham attended the event, saying, “This is an iconic moment for the Okanagan.” She

applauded the return of growers, workers, food security and a logo and brand that is world recognized as quality.

Local news coverage from Castanet reported that Growers Supply, an agricultural supply business that closed its stores at the time of the bankruptcy, will be brought back on stream.

“The new Growers Supply will serve all of British Columbia and fill the void that we know is there,” said Jim Morrison. “We will start with four locations and grow as the demand dictates. Tree fruits, vineyards, vegetables, and cover crops throughout BC will now be able to get fertilizers, chemicals, and consumables that they need, and like BC Tree Fruits, we hope to employ a lot of the previous Growers Supply employees.”

BC Fruit Growers’ Association president Peter Simonsen said



BC Tree Fruits’ packing operation in Oliver was showcased November 10 at an open house. Photo by Myrna Stark Leader.

now that the plant is up and running, the next goal is to lobby Ottawa on issues such as anti-dumping and stability/risk management programs.

Source: Castanet November 7, 2025/Staff

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

The study of PEI soil-water interactions leads to more precise advice

When you’re surrounded by the ocean, soils tend to be sandier than more inland provinces. Water can enter groundwater more quickly in sandy soils and then migrate to nearby waterways. Because of this, farming practices can have a direct impact on the water quality of the limited freshwater streams and rivers that feed into brackish estuaries and eventually the ocean.

While there are many

important practices that farmers already use to help maintain healthy waterways, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) research scientist Dr. Yefang Jiang, based at the Charlottetown Research and Development Centre, set out to use soil and water modelling data to find out how various in-field beneficial management practices could help reduce nitrogen from entering groundwater and improve surface

water quality in streams, lakes, and coastal areas. This research work involved Prince Edward Island farmers along with collaborators from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and the Prince Edward Island Department of Agriculture.

“Ecologically, the whole Island is a living lab, and what happens

on land affects what happens in the water,” says Jiang. “When we can also connect and collaborate with broader partnerships through living labs, we can understand how even small changes to farming practices can improve water quality.”

Dr. Jiang and the team focused on farms in the Dunk River watershed in central Prince Edward Island as this region holds much of the province's farmland. Where water sampling typically occurs in summer months, the team used a model to simulate the sampling data from the fall, winter, and spring to determine the annual effects of nitrogen on waterways.

To understand how different crops contribute to nitrogen levels throughout the year in the Dunk River watershed, researchers adapted the Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) to local conditions to estimate how water, nutrients, and land use interact with the landscape over the course of a given year. This public domain model helps researchers across various government departments and academia estimate data more accurately to support land management decisions. It is useful in situations where large-scale watershed sampling is not practical due to logistics, cost, and the sometimes-long timelines needed to detect land use change effects on water quality.

“We applied the SWAT model that uses samples collected during the summer to predict what the nitrogen loading or excess nitrogen results would be in fall, winter, and spring. This provides a more accurate representation of annual nitrogen loading than the

estimates based on summer sampling alone; while better reflecting the way farming practices are affecting water quality,” says Dr. Jiang.

Researchers used the SWAT model, which was adapted using real-world local data, to serve as a virtual watershed, to test the effects that various on-farm beneficial management practices would have on water quality. It included studying the various crops used in farmers’ three-year rotation with potatoes such as red clover, soybean, timothy (a perennial grass), and buckwheat.

Dr. Jiang found that red clover and other forage legume crops can result in excess nitrogen in soils that can enter groundwater and receiving waterways if it’s not utilized by the next crop. Forage legumes, such as red clover and alfalfa, are commonly planted as rotation crops to improve soil organic matter, break pest cycles, control weeds, and provide nitrogen for future cash crops.

Red clover is used on Prince Edward Island in potato–cereal–clover rotations. However, because red clover adds large amounts of nitrogen to the soil, applying fertilizer without properly accounting for this natural nitrogen source can provide more nitrogen than the following crop, in this case, potatoes, needs. This excess nitrogen can enter groundwater, eventually reaching rivers and estuaries. Previous research also advises farmers to test their nitrogen levels in their soil to account for the nitrogen added by plowed-down red clover, helping to avoid over-fertilizing potatoes.

Source: AAFC

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CROSS COUNTRY DIGEST

NOVA SCOTIA

On-farm marketing leans into nostalgic stories and song

KAREN DAVIDSON

First cousins Katie Campbell and William Spurr are part of a fifth-generation farm that’s transformed over the last three years, meeting environmental challenges while serving community needs near Wilmot, Nova Scotia. Their sandy soils in the Annapolis Valley have supported apples, strawberries, peaches and pears, as well as root vegetables and field crops. But out of 850 acres, they’ve cut the majority of potato and carrot acres, kept smaller acreages of field vegetables and pivoted to a direct-to-consumer model that provides year-round cash flow. In 2022, they built an on-farm market and taproom for hard cider.

“My heart was always in the farm,” says Katie Campbell, who recalls picking up “drops” in her childhood. After high school graduation, she spent a couple years studying and travelling in the U.S. “Then for 15 years, I managed the potato packhouse, helped my cousin Lisa Jenereaux in the apple orchard and assisted with the books. Now I’m

managing the on-farm market.”

William Spurr realized that potatoes were not a good fit with the crop’s demand for land, water and fertilizer. Their decision to reduce exposure to the potato market has been prescient. The cropping years of 2023 and 2025 have been polar opposites: 2023 had too much rain and 2025 had no rain. Climate change has been a big challenge in Nova Scotia.

“My strengths were not in changing bolts on big machinery,” Spurr adds. “And the costs for upgrading potato equipment for the future were prohibitive. I’ve been playing with hard cider for a long time in my basement. So it’s been natural to make 12 blends of hard cider, building on the reputation of the Spurr Brothers Family Farm and transitioning from brothers Bill and Gordon.”

In the Annapolis Valley, the farmers’ origin story is well-known going back to 1875 with the adventuresome Shippy Spurr. He started with apples, hay and grains. He could never have imagined the effects of today’s hurricanes which call for row covers, wind breaks, frost protection and more. To some

extent, the farm’s viability is protected with a business model that depends on local community rather than national retailers or international buyers. When push comes to shove, the local links may prove to have more loyalty.

To this point, William Spurr is brewing small-batch hard ciders, with juice from farm-grown apples, strawberries, haskaps, peaches and pears. Current with packaging trends, the ciders are available in both bottles and cans. All of their inputs are locally sourced – a story that resonates with those buying at the on-farm market. Through social media of Facebook and Instagram, agri-tourists have grown steadily in numbers. A fall Hallowe-en event attracted 225 kids.

“For us, this is a good number in rural Nova Scotia,” says Campbell.

With the addition of live music events featuring local musicians in summer 2025, Spurr Brothers Farms Ltd has attracted as many as 400 to their community hub. Their website is tone-perfect extolling the virtues of “a song, a story and a night to remember.”

Their website -- www.spurrbrothers.ca -- is savvy



L-R: William Spurr and Katie Campbell

in listing not only market hours, but taproom hours and ice cream hours. Take-out, anyone?

“We’re very family-oriented,” says Spurr, pointing to the fact that they both have young families. “It’s good to see that kids can roam around.”

Earlier in 2025, their story captivated the judges of the Outstanding Young Farmer

contest in Atlantic Canada. Campbell and Spurr will be representing the region at the national event to be held November 26-30 in Toronto, Ontario.

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GREENHOUSE GROWER

Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers highlight growth

KAREN DAVIDSON

Headquartered in Leamington, Ontario, the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG) has reported updated statistics of \$1.8 billion in 2024 farmgate sales, a salient proof point when advocating for the sector’s importance in North American food security and its role in the Ontario economy. At its recent October 22, 2025 annual general meeting, executive director Richard Lee said that more than 4,300 billable acres of greenhouse vegetables are grown: 35 per tomatoes, 33 per cent peppers and 32 per cent cucumbers.

The United States remains the primary destination for Ontario produce, with more than 85 per cent of output shipped south of the border and volumes expanding in line with increasing consumer demand.

“Opportunities are tempered by challenges, as geopolitical uncertainty, trade disputes, inflation, and tariffs placed added strain on global markets and our sector in the last year,” said Lee. “Earlier in the spring of 2025, our members were confronted by a sudden 25 per cent tariff on produce entering the United States -- a measure that resulted in nearly \$7 million in duties in just 72 hours.”

Since then, the OGVG board has sanctioned efforts on creating a unified voice for greenhouse vegetable operators across Canada, ensuring the sector’s concerns are heard in Ottawa and that collaboration offers benefits to all. The Greenhouse Vegetable Working Group,

currently operating within the Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada, is building a strong national voice for Canada’s greenhouse industry. With leadership from growers in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Québec, the working group is uniting the sector under a shared identity.

This initiative is funded by greenhouse members, governed by its own bylaws and focussed on solutions tailored to greenhouse growers.

“Although we remain committed to working alongside FVGC, the working group was created to ensure the unique challenges of the greenhouse sector, compounded by the structure of the Canadian Potato Council, are effectively represented at the national level through these working groups,” says Lee. “As we finalize the framework for this national group, it will reflect the inclusion of all commodities with the potential to be produced within closed-environment agricultural systems.”

A successful renegotiation of CUSMA in 2026 is a top priority to ensure trade access for OGVG members along with priorities to push for the modernization of regulatory agencies such as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA). To meet ongoing needs for labour, the association is advocating for improvements to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program.

Here are four highlights of success in 2025, starting with successful advocacy to support payment protection in the event



2026 OGVG Directors

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Coppola Farms Inc.



Chris DelGreco
Under Sun Acres Inc.



Albert Mastronardi
H&A Mastronardi Farms LTD.



Rick Mastronardi
IPR Farms Ltd.



Jason Whitcher
Mastron Enterprises Ltd.

District 2



Paul Mastronardi
Envirofresh Produce Ltd.



James Neven
Neven Produce Inc.



Jan VanderHout
Beverly Greenhouses Ltd.



Tim Verbeek
Platinum Produce Company



Trevor Voorberg
Foothill Greenhouses Ltd.



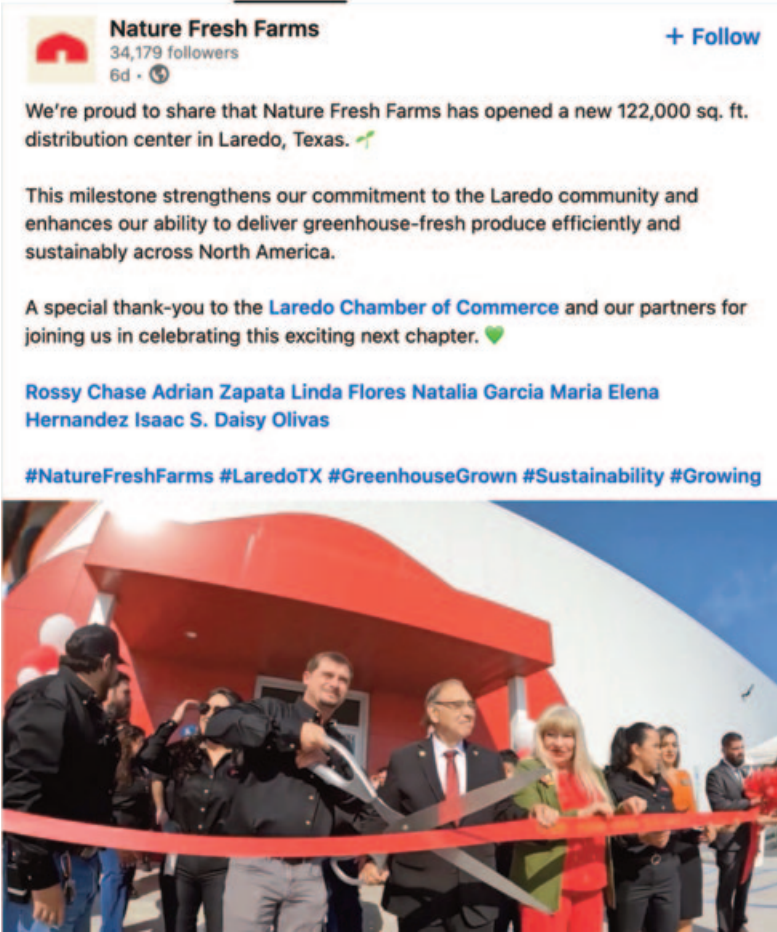
Steve Peters
OGVG Chair



Opportunities are tempered by challenges, as geopolitical uncertainty, trade disputes, inflation and tariffs placed added strain on global markets and our sector last year.

~ RICHARD LEE,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OGVG

SCENE ON LINKEDIN



of produce seller claiming bankruptcy or insolvency. Secondly, Bill C-282 An Act was passed to amend the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act (supply management). “Although we were successful in defending against the bill, Bill C-202 was successful and fast-tracked through the House and Senate receiving Royal Assent June 26, 2025,” says Lee. “This bill aims to protect Canada supply managed products which represents approximately 10 per cent of Canadian agriculture.” Thirdly, Canada’s federal carbon pricing system applies to fuels such as natural gas and propane, which are essential for heating and CO2 enrichment in greenhouse vegetable production. The OGVG needs the federal government to recognize that fossil fuels are needed for food production as we continue to explore viable, sustainable and cost-effective alternatives. Greenhouse growers currently receive an 80 per cent exemption on these fuels, recognizing their

limited ability to switch to alternatives and the importance of food security. Despite this relief, the remaining 20 per cent levy still translated into \$29 million in additional costs for greenhouse vegetable growers in 2024-2025. Lastly, there was an Ontario government allocation of \$41 million through the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program’s Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund to address crucial wastewater infrastructure in the Town of Leamington. Lee points out that advocacy continues at all three levels of government that include:

- balancing plastics reductions strategies, realistic timelines, and affordable alternatives for food packaging
- greater municipal oversight to ensure farming is protected from high-handed development fees or bylaws that look to unfairly penalize greenhouse farming
- increasing on-farm septic capacities
- challenging stormwater taxation

- wastewater fees
- environmental sustainability
- affordable energy solutions that include on-farm electricity generation options
- natural gas rebasing

One standout initiative in 2025 has been the “This is Greenhouse Goodness” campaign. This award-winning effort has earned three prestigious recognitions across North America, showcasing the strength of the brand and the value of greenhouse-grown produce. The campaign has been amplified through social media outreach, retailer partnerships, grocery giveaways and digital advertising. As Lee underlines, 2025 is the eighth year hosting elections using a fully auditable online voting format which resulted in 70 per cent voter turnout based on eligibility criteria. OGVG recognized Kevin Safrance for his 10 years of dedicated service as a director and vice-chair with the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers.

GREENHOUSE GROWER

Red Sun Farms creates excitement at California trade show with new product Innovations

Red Sun Farms generated major excitement at the International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) Global Produce & Floral Show in October 2025, delighting retail partners and new customers alike with fresh innovations in both the tomato and cucumber categories.

“IFPA was a tremendous success for our team,” said Carlos Visconti, CEO, Red Sun Farms. “We believe this success reflects not only our ability to deliver a consistent, year-round supply but also our ongoing commitment to bringing true innovation to our retail partners.”

Empress Purple Tomato

This striking new tomato variety stands out for its rich, deep purple colour — a natural indicator of its elevated antioxidant content and nutrient-dense profile. With a beautifully balanced, robust tomato flavour and vibrant presentation, Empress delivers both exceptional nutrition and visual appeal. This bioengineered variety incorporates genetics from the edible snapdragon flower, enhancing its health benefits, nutrient richness, and taste.

Chef’s Collection Premium Tomato Blend

Developed through extensive consumer and retailer research, this exclusive blend features tomato varieties selected for their exceptional flavour, texture, and colour. The Chef’s Collection was showcased at IFPA, where attendees were invited to re-taste and experience how this curated mix is set to redefine the snacking tomato blend category.

Chef’s Collection Mini Cucumbers

A standout in the cucumber category, the Chef’s Collection Mini Cucumbers feature a unique light green mini cucumber alongside the traditional dark green variety. Often mistaken for a peeled cucumber, the light green cucumber’s pale skin protects its crisp texture and sweet flavour. Early taste tests indicate this variety may quickly become a household favorite!

“Now more than ever, the team at Red Sun Farms is committed to being the grower of choice for our retail customers,” said Harold Paivarinta, senior director of sales



and business development. “We believe there’s only one way to do business — with honesty, integrity, and transparency in everything we do. Our focus remains on quality, flavour, customer service, and innovation as we build a stronger future together.

Source: Red Sun Farms October 28, 2025 news release

Sensei Farms launches locally grown greens in 24 Fortinos stores

Sensei Farms has officially entered the Canadian retail market, in partnership with Loblaw Companies Ltd. Starting November 10, Sensei Farms’ premium, locally grown greens are available at all 24 Fortinos supermarket locations across the Greater Toronto metropolitan area.

“At Fortinos, we take great pride in offering our customers the freshest, highest-quality produce — and partnering with Sensei Farms allows us to do just that,” said Kevin Climie, senior director, produce, floral and bulk foods, Fortinos Supermarkets. “Sensei’s innovative approach to greenhouse growing and their

commitment to sustainability align perfectly with our focus on supporting local growers and delivering exceptional freshness year-round.”

Sensei Farms’ products are grown in its expansive greenhouse in Leamington, Ontario, using advanced agricultural practices that prioritize supplying the local community with fresh, diverse produce.

“We are thrilled to bring our products to Canadian shoppers,” said Jessica Vasisht, senior vice president of sales and marketing at Sensei Farms. “Our shared commitment to provide locally sourced produce, preserve the environment, and promote

human nutrition makes Fortinos a great fit for our brand.”

Fortinos carries four Sensei Farms SKUs:

- Baby Spinach (4 oz) – Tender, nutrient-rich leaves perfect for salads and smoothies.
- Green Butter Lettuce (5 oz) – Soft, buttery texture ideal for wraps and fresh dishes.
- Green Lettuce Blend (5 oz) – A flavourful mix for versatile meal options.
- Romaine Lettuce (5 oz) – Crisp and refreshing, great for classic Caesar salads.

All Sensei Farms products are packaged in eco-friendly, recyclable paperboard trays featuring 360-degree product



visibility with a convenient peel-and-reseal closure to preserve freshness and extend shelf life.

Source: Sensei Farms November 10, 2025 news release



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GREENHOUSE GROWER

Heirloom tomatoes carry high-resistance gene to ToBRFV



At the Enza Zaden booth at the Canadian Greenhouse Conference in early October 2025, John Gray (L) and Chechade Chechade explained the unique characteristics of heirloom tomatoes.

KAREN DAVIDSON

Heirloom tomatoes comprise only three per cent of Canadian greenhouse-grown tomatoes, yet their winsome colours and shapes add differentiation to the broad offering in the tomato category. These consist of Marmande and cherry specialties. While heirloom tomatoes are part of Enza Zaden’s offering, the company also provides a wide portfolio with the high-resistance gene to tomato brown rugose fruit virus (ToBRFV) which includes beefsteak, tomatoes on the vine (TOVs) and grape tomatoes.

That’s why more growers are increasing acreage according to Enrique Estrada, product manager for North and Central America, Enza Zaden. What’s particularly interesting is that the company is breeding all tomatoes



Enza Zaden representatives slice open heirloom tomatoes to expose the interior.



Kardinata heirloom tomato

under conventional HPS, lit and dynamic lighting regimes.

“Heirlooms are getting a lot of attention these days due to agronomic improvements for growers and growing consumer preference,” says Estrada, based in Mexico. “Our first launch was in 2023 with the hybrid Kardinata and we have followed in 2024 with Oragio amongst others.”

The Kardinata variety has an average fruit weight of 280 to 350 grams with a ribbed shape, bright red colour, good shelf life and good taste. Oragio is a brown marmande variety that has high production and great tasting fruit. The first sales of these varieties were made in Canada for production under LED lighting. New colours are being developed ranging from pink and yellow to brown and oxheart type.

Achieving appropriate yields for economic success has

been a challenge for heirloom tomatoes which is why the breeding company has been investing in developing hybrids with improved yields to make production profitable for growers. The breeding is for a high-tech crop that’s harvested about 35 to 40 weeks after planting.

While not an heirloom variety, Enza Zaden is also highlighting its extra large cluster variety, Formoza. It has high production potential with great fruit quality. Due to its size, the variety is labour-friendly. Canadian growers who have trialled Formoza, with high resistance to ToBRFV, report that the variety performs well under high temperatures.

Because more growers are adopting lit acres, Enza Zaden has invested in research on how its tomato varieties perform under various environmental regimes.

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FARM & FOODCARE ONTARIO

How FFCO is bridging the gap between technology and trust

JESSICA McCANN

Few professions are held in higher regard than farming. The recently updated report on Public Trust, released by the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI), maintained that farmers and food producers are among the top sources for trusted information by Canadians, surpassed only by scientists. That said, across the media and social platforms, it's increasingly apparent that knowledge surrounding how modern farming is improving the way we grow food in Canada is limited and often misunderstood.

CCFI's report further uncovers that Canadians are hesitant, sometimes even fearful, concerning how innovation, artificial intelligence and technology are impacting our food systems. If we want to change the conversation surrounding technology and food, we need to strengthen how we communicate the progress it enables and its relevance to Canadian grocery shoppers. From improving food and worker safety, bolstering food system sustainability, and removing barriers to producing healthy food, innovation has revolutionized what's possible on Canadian farms.

Farm & Food Care Ontario (FFCO) is helping facilitate these conversations. As a whole-sector coalition made up of representatives from all farming types and associated businesses, FFCO's mission is to grow public trust in farming and food across Canada.

In 2025, FFCO created a new FarmFood360 virtual reality video, viewable in December at FarmFood360.ca. Filmed in Ontario apple orchards and processing facilities, this immersive experience showcases how innovation supports the production of apples and the creation of value-added apple products.

Using the apple video as an example, the content development and filming process highlighted how technology continues to transform apple production.

Starting early in the growing season, self-propelled platforms make apple orchard maintenance safer for the many workers integral in pruning, thinning, scouting and harvesting Canadian apples. Some platforms may be able to self-navigate between rows of apple trees. They are significantly safer than the ladders that prop up most Canadians' vision of apple orchards.

Irrigation is another example; while simple at face value, water

and nutrients delivered in the exact location and amount required by a tree is an incredible innovation. With watering cans and garden hoses being how most Canadians relate to watering their gardens, a system that delivers water and nutrients to precisely the right place on demand is to be envied and admired, not feared.

Let's also highlight Artificial Intelligence (AI). FFCO spoke with growers about how AI can help take the guesswork out of

harvest. Farmers are now piloting programs that use cameras mounted to tractors or quads, combined with AI technology, to help predict the quantities of apples on trees. This innovation could allow apple growers to determine how many apples they will have to sell, giving them confidence when it comes to planning for harvest, storage and marketing.

Finally, the intricacies of apple storage and sorting continue to advance. Sorting systems are

using imaging technology and hundreds of real-time photos to categorize apples based on size, weight, defects, and even colour.

While many of these innovations are featured in FFCO's FarmFood360 video, our work doesn't end there. This FarmFood360 tour, alongside another newly produced virtual reality tours that take visitors from tomato planting to tomato paste, has been added to FarmFood360.ca. Large-scale outreach events, such as Breakfast on the Farm and farm

tours, invite the public onto farms, while campaigns such as Faces Behind Food and The Real Dirt on Farming extend into the digital space to further expand FFCO and its national partners' reach.

Visit FarmFoodCare.org or email info@farmfoodcare.org. To learn more about CCFI's 2025 Public Trust Report, visit its website www.foodintegrity.ca.

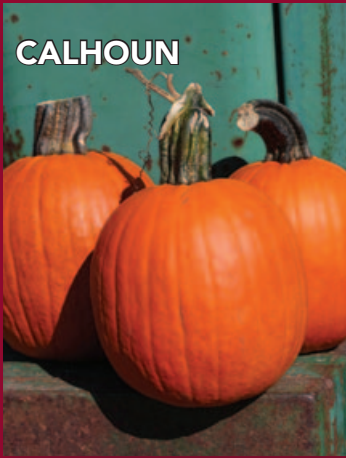
Jessica McCann is Farm & Food Care Ontario communications coordinator.



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CHAIR'S PERSPECTIVE

Speaking up for growers — wherever and whenever it's needed



SHAWN BRENN

The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association (OFVGA) is first and foremost an advocacy organization for its members, with provincial activities at the forefront. Many of the issues and challenges affecting growers, however, are national so we often also find ourselves ensuring our members' voices are heard at the federal level.

To do this, we actively support our colleagues at Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC) and their activities, but

we also find ourselves with opportunities for direct participation on our own when it comes to policies and regulations that shape how we farm, sell our products, and compete on the national and global stages.

As another year comes to a close, here are some highlights of OFVGA's work nationally to advocate for a fairer playing field for growers. Whether it's about labour, Grocery Code of Conduct, the need for modernized regulatory systems and funding for the Minor Use Program, or the proposed federal plastics registry, our message is consistent: we support strong, science-based policies, but they must make sense on the ground.

Earlier this fall, we took the lead in setting up a meeting with Opposition Leader Pierre Poilievre in response to his party's ongoing calls for an end to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). As the federal government works on redesigning the TFWP, we've been advocating strongly for the protection of the Seasonal

Agricultural Worker Program. FVGC labour chair Beth Connery, OFVGA labour chair Bill George and I were all part of this meeting.

OFVGA's senior government relations and policy advisor Gordon Stock shared grower recommendations on how to build on the new Grocery Code of Conduct in front of the House of Commons AGRI committee in October. A highly consolidated retail landscape, limited options for perishable produce, and contracts that leave growers carrying all the risk have created an imbalance that has allowed unfair practices, including long payment terms, arbitrary fees, and even delayed purchases of local product in favour of imports.

The Code is meant to encourage fair dealing and transparency between suppliers and retailers, and in its current form, it's a good start, but it must go further.

Growers need to be part of shaping how the Code evolves; the planned 18-month review

can't just be a box-checking exercise. Instead it should bring parties to the table with the goal of prioritizing Canada's ability to produce as much of its own fresh and processed fruits and vegetables as possible, including a commitment to fair business practices and transparency along the value chain.

OFVGA's crop protection advisor, Chris Duyvelshoff, who is also chair of the FVGC Crop Protection Working Group, also appeared in front of the AGRI committee this fall, speaking on another area that needs urgent attention: regulatory reform to make the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Pest Management Regulatory Agency more predictable and efficient. Growers support science-based regulation, but too often, rules are developed without a "food lens." This means policy and regulation don't consider how a decision will affect food production, food security, or our ability to compete with imports.

Common-sense changes, such as recognizing equivalent

pesticide reviews from trusted international regulators, eliminating duplicate audits when farms are already CanadaGAP-certified, or developing regulatory pathways for new technologies such as drones would make a world of difference.

We've also long been pushing for more funding and resources to increase the capacity of the federal Minor Use Program. Growers prioritize pest and disease problems they would like to see researched, but federal funding hasn't kept up with need, resulting in fewer projects funded each year, and ultimately, fewer solutions for growers.

OFVGA has also actively been calling for a pause on the proposed new Federal Plastics Registry. Implementation already implicates brand owners, but if the rollout continues as proposed, it will add new administrative burdens for all fruit and vegetable farms in 2026.

Quite simply, we already face enough paperwork on the farm, and tracking every type of plastic film, tray, and container used on the farm right down to its resin formulation isn't practical or productive. We want to work with the government to find productive ways to build on existing initiatives and address the challenges around plastic use in our sector.

Every one of these issues — access to labour, grocery relationships, regulation, packaging — connects back to one simple reality: the future of fruit and vegetable farming in Canada depends on a predictable, fair, and practical business environment.

Working on behalf of growers means speaking up clearly and consistently wherever and whenever grower interests are at stake. Whether that's at Queen's Park, in Ottawa, or around national industry tables, we work hard to ensure the realities of fruit and vegetable production are in front of policy- and decision-makers and that we bring forward solutions that are practical, evidence-based, and focused on keeping fruit and vegetable production strong.

WEATHER VANE



When Hurricane Melissa Category 5 slammed into Jamaica on October 28, there was a domino effect in Canada. The destruction was so severe on the Caribbean island that flights were cancelled for many temporary foreign workers about to return home after harvest. These 17 men were stranded near Meaford, Ontario, in the heart of apple country. Their employer Grandma Lamb's set up a Go Fund Me campaign so that the local community could support their recovery. During the holiday season, all Canadian farm employers are sending heartfelt wishes for the well-being of families abroad, with a special nod to Jamaica. Photo by Steph Lambe.

Shawn Brenn is a potato grower and chair, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association.

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THE GROWER

URBAN COWBOY

Canada-Mexico “complementary” trade deal must succeed



OWEN ROBERTS

Canada must capitalize on new momentum to strengthen vital trade relations with Mexico. The timing is critical.

In sharp contrast to the punitive U.S. trade mentality that shows no sign of relenting, Mexico is welcoming what officials there call the pursuit of a “complementary” trade relationship with Canada, one that works for both partners.

This drive is occurring at the highest levels. Mexico, like Canada, realizes that its traditional relationship with the U.S. — trade or otherwise — has lost its foundation with U.S. President Donald Trump and his government.

So over the past few months,

Canadian and Mexican trade officials have come together for talks, visits and photo opportunities designed to further nurture the trade culture between them.

In February 2026, a Canadian business delegation is headed to the storied city of Guadalajara, an epicentre for Mexico’s agri-food sector, where trade efforts are expected to intensify.

Grupo Consultor de Mercados Agrícolas (GCMA), Mexico’s leading agricultural market intelligence firm, describes Canada as a smaller but higher-value destination than the U.S.

It says Canada has potential growth in differentiated, organic, and processed products, as well as in winter-season import programs. It says bilateral trade between the two nations is advancing steadily.

That’s encouraging for Canada, whose new Prime Minister has promised to find alternatives to U.S. trade. But despite the upbeat attitude, this is not a done deal.

For one, Mexico does not share Canada’s exuberance for leaving the U.S. behind. Even though immigration has been a huge issue between Mexico and the U.S. for years, there’s no

“elbows up” anti-American movement driving Mexican nationalism like there is in Canada.

However, Mexico and the U.S. have certainly been at odds over imports and exports in the past. For example, Mexico mounted a huge campaign against genetically modified corn, worried that it could contaminate its heritage varieties. For its part, the U.S. has kicked back at Mexican cattle imports for fears of New World Screwworm contamination.

Nonetheless, the two countries clearly recognize their trade relationship’s value. Mexico sends 95 per cent of its agri-food exports to the U.S. That statistic speaks for itself.

But it’s not all one way. Last year, Mexico was the top market for U.S. agricultural exports in 2024. Shipments were valued at US\$30.2 billion; consumer-oriented products, including meat and meat products, dairy, processed food, fruits and beverages constituted nearly half of that trade.

To underline Mexico’s value to the U.S., in early November, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins led the largest Department of Agriculture



agribusiness trade mission in American history to Mexico City.

“The trading and diplomatic relationship between our two countries is of the utmost importance to President Trump and American farmers and ranchers,” Rollins said.

Whether or not that’s true, Mexico’s not giving up on the U.S. Luis Fernando Haro, Director General of Mexico’s National Agricultural Council, says Canada and the U.S. share high standards of quality, sustainability and food safety. But he says Canada represents a “complementary” trade partner, not a U.S. substitute.

“Mexico cannot and should not turn away from its principal market,” he says, “but it can use its ties with Canada to strengthen value-added production and open new opportunities for its

produce.”

Mexico is as tired as Canada of exporting raw commodities cheaply, then importing them later as more expensive processed products. That means the Canadian delegation that visits Guadalajara has common ground for discussion, even before the first round of tequila is poured, and well in advance of the upcoming USMCA rewrite.

So *salud* to productive negotiations, Canadian delegation. Mexico has opened the door.

- With files from Amado Vázquez Martínez and Alberto Ruiz/Tierra Fértil

Owen Roberts is a Guelph-based agricultural journalist and a past-president of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists.



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BITS & BITES

Some Jamaican farm workers returning from Canada have lost homes

The aftermath of Hurricane Melissa is still being tallied on the Caribbean island, home to many Jamaican workers of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. Althea Riley, chief liaison officer, Jamaica Liaison Service, in Toronto, Ontario, told The Gleaner, one of Jamaica’s newspapers, that more than 1,500 workers have returned home since October 31. Another 2,100 workers are expected to go by November 14.

According to the paper, “One of the workers who returned home to Trelawny sent Riley a voice note in which he said that his wife, two daughters and son were okay. However, his house

and car were severely damaged and he lost his farm, but his donkey and two goats are still alive.” Several farm owners have started GoFundMe campaigns to raise relief funds. Several groups such as The Neighbourhood Organization, the Farm Worker Hub and the provincially funded Ontario Agriculture Mental Health Awareness program have offered support to the Jamaican workers.

Photo right: House damage near Trelawny, Jamaica.

Source: Jamaica’s The Gleaner newspaper November 6, 2025



Did you know?

The number of Jamaicans who came to Canada via FARMS was about 6,000 for 2025. Others could have come through the FERME program in Québec or WALL in British Columbia.

COMING EVENTS 2025

Dec 2	Fresh Vegetable Growers of Ontario Annual General Meeting, OFVGA boardroom, Guelph, ON
Dec 2-4	Grow Canada Conference, Hyatt Regency, Calgary, AB
Dec 3	CanAgPlus Annual General Meeting, Westin Hotel, Calgary, AB
Dec 3	Ontario Potato Board Annual General Meeting, Delta Guelph Hotel & Conference Centre, Guelph, ON
Dec 4	Ontario Apple Grower Meeting, Cambridge Hotel & Conference Centre, Cambridge, ON
Dec 9-11	Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable and Farm Market Expo, Grand Rapids, MI
2026	
Jan 4-11	Farm and Food Care Ontario Men’s and Women’s Curling Championship, Woolwich Memorial Centre, Elmira, ON
Jan 6-8	Potato Expo, Dallas, Texas
Jan 7-10	North American Strawberry Growers’ Association Annual Meeting and Symposium, Holiday Inn Express, Savannah, Georgia
Jan 22-24	Pacific Agriculture Show Abbotsford Tradex, Abbotsford, BC
Jan 26-28	11th International Cool Climate Wine Symposium, Christchurch, New Zealand
Jan 27	Les Producteurs de Pommes du Québec Annual General Meeting, Plaza Rive-Sud, La Prairie, QC
Jan 27-28	45th Annual Guelph Organic Conference, Guelph Farmers’ Market, Guelph, ON
Jan 27-29	Nova Scotia Fruit Growers’ Association Convention, Old Orchard Inn, Greenwich, NS
Jan 28-30	Manitoba Potato Production Days, Brandon, MB
Feb 4-7	Fruit Logistica, Berlin, Germany
Feb 8-11	International Fruit Tree Association Annual General Meeting, Fresco, CA
Feb 10	Future of Food Conference, Rogers Centre, Ottawa, ON
Feb 11-12	Southern Interior Horticultural Show, Penticton Trade & Convention Centre, Penticton, BC
Feb 17	Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association Annual General Meeting, Hilton Fallsview Hotel & Suites, Niagara Falls, ON
Feb 18-19	Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Convention, Niagara Falls Convention Centre, Niagara Falls, ON
Feb 26	British Columbia Fruit Growers’ Association Annual General Meeting, Ramada Hotel, Kelowna, BC
Feb 26-27	International Potato Technology Expo, Eastlink Centre, Charlottetown, PE
Mar 5	Ontario Potato Conference, Delta Hotel & Conference Centre, Guelph, ON
Mar 8-10	Advancing Women Conference West, Hyatt Regency, Calgary, AB
Mar 10-12	Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada Annual General Meeting, The Westin, Ottawa

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RETAIL NAVIGATOR

Eight trends to watch on the 2026 horizon



PETER CHAPMAN

As we come to the end of 2025, let's shift focus to a new year. Here are the trends we believe producers should think about as we move into the new year.

1. Canadian content

During 2025 Canadians endured the roller coaster ride of the Canada-U.S. trade relationship. Consumers responded with an increased desire for Canadian content in their shopping carts. Retailers have responded with signage and more focus on Canadian-grown products. Although it can be confusing with labelling regulations and some consumer marketing, the numbers tell us there is an

increase in tonnage for Canadian products and a decrease for U.S. products. The political situation is not going to change in the near future, so Canadian producers and processors need to highlight the origin of their products for both consumers and customers.

2. Export beyond the U.S.

Despite efforts to negotiate reduced tariffs and begin work on a new Canada/U.S./Mexico trade agreement, we need to reduce our dependence on exports to the U.S. Look for support for Canadian producers to grow volume within Canada and export markets beyond the U.S. There are many opportunities in Asia, Europe and other parts of the world. It is more challenging with logistics and language, but these are huge markets and there will be programs to assist with learning and execution.

3. The decline of conventional stores continues

Formats such as discount and club continue to grow as do dollar stores and online options. The one format that cannot seem to get any momentum since the COVID-19 pandemic is conventional stores. This poses a challenge for Canadian-based

retailers who have significant investments in underperforming conventional stores. This also impacts producers as these stores have the biggest footprint and retailers are in need of price-based programs to drive traffic into conventional banners.

4. The sales role is shifting from relationships to technical capabilities

Retailers expect suppliers to do more work as they shift data entry for listings, price quotes and promo planning to suppliers. The required technical expertise is more than just understanding a spread sheet. Every retailer's system is different and the knowledge transfer to understand how to do it is not always great. They just expect suppliers to know. Some retailers are also eliminating the social components of the relationship with new policies designed to reduce or eliminate gifts such as tickets or dinners that employees can accept.

5. U.S. policy will impact Canadian processors

The U.S. administration is aggressively pursuing policy changes to food ingredients and processing such as eliminating

artificial dyes. Canadian processors should be exploring options if they are using these ingredients. The U.S. is also focusing on ultra processed foods (UPF). We even see certifications for non-UPF. Also be aware of recent announcements in the U.S. regarding the GLP-1 drugs, a class of medications that mimic the hormone glucagon-like peptide 1. Used to treat obesity, these products could impact consumption patterns in the market.

6. Protein seems to be in everything

Consumers are being inundated with protein in many products. It is being added to many items ranging from pancakes to water. As eating habits change, consumers have more options than ever to get the protein they need. Unfortunately, some people might start to believe if there is no protein there is something missing, just because other items in the category are adding protein.

7. Code of conduct dispute resolution in play

The Canadian Grocery Code of Conduct has been taking shape for activation on January 1, 2026.

The administrators are actively seeking people to serve in the role of dispute resolution. It will be interesting to see if any companies pursue this avenue or if the implementation is a deterrent and there are no issues worth taking to this level.

8. Stay laser-focussed on your category as prices change

Input prices, geo-political issues and labour continue to impact cost of goods. Some costs are going up and some have even gone down. Producers need to stay very close to these changes as retailers are definitely watching them. If your competition has moved up in pricing and you do not move in tandem, your customers wonder why not. And if prices are going down and you are not moving in the same direction, you will get challenged on your costing.

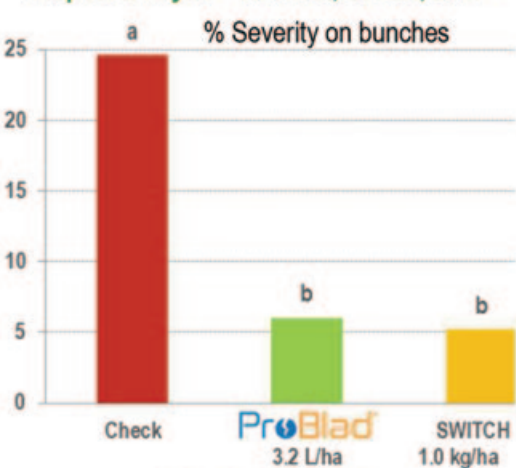
Peter Chapman is a retail consultant, professional speaker and the author of A la Cart – a suppliers' guide to retailer's priorities. Peter is based in Halifax, N.S. where he is the principal at SKUFood. Peter works with producers and processors to help them get their products on the shelf and into the shopping cart.



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FOCUS: SOIL HEALTH & CROP NUTRITION

Crimson clover glows as cover crop under grapevines



After four full seasons at the Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario site, Liam Reeves attests to the value of undervine cover crops in improving not only soil health but crop quality. Photos by Karen Davidson.



Liam Reeves has been winegrowing manager for Stratus Vineyards since 2022. He brings years of experience to his role, in both Ontario and Australia.

KAREN DAVIDSON

Under vine but not out of mind, cover crops are increasingly seeded below the canopy of grapes. In 2023, Liam Reeves tested the concept in one row, a year after he came to Stratus Vineyards as winegrowing manager. He’s now expanded the soil-enhancing practice to half of the farm’s 55 acres at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

“We want to be good stewards of the land and we’re taking the time to make that happen,” says Reeves.

No herbicides are used in the vineyard, necessitating manual removal of weeds, the most troublesome of which are bindweed and Canada thistle. But instead of using a grape hoe six or seven times in a season to decapitate the weeds, he’s using the machine, modified with a fertilizer spreader, to direct seeds of crimson clover in two bands. That’s a big saving in tractor time and diesel, contributing to the objective of sustainability, a key operating

principle of Stratus.

Commercially established in the 1980s, the vineyard’s land has an ancient history dating back to a lake bed formed by glacial till 13,000 years ago. The sediment left behind can be characterized as stony, silty or clay. Although the acreage appears flat, there’s actually a slope of 18 feet from top to bottom. With six wind machines operating on the property, Reeves has noted during cold winter nights that there can be a difference of one to five degrees Centigrade depending on the elevation.

How to start

Given these eccentricities in 49 blocks of vineyard, Reeves experimented with one row of cover cropping to start. He tried buckwheat, hairy vetch, ryegrass, nitro-radish and crimson clover. All had their drawbacks with the exception of crimson clover, not to be confused with red clover. Reeves discovered that crimson clover performed consistently when compared with these other candidates



Crimson clover has gone to seed at a height that does not interfere with harvest. The nitrogen-fixing legume is well beneath the crop canopy of these Sauvignon Blanc grapes.

which grew too bushy or interfered with the grape clusters. The nitrogen-fixing clover establishes easily in the spring and does not grow too tall.

“With a quick pass of the grape hoe, the seed can be raked into the soil just before a rain,” says Reeves. “And once it produces vibrant red flowers, it looks like a carpet under the vines. After it’s gone to seed, it can be pulled for a look at the root system which has little nitrogen-fixing nodules. That’s what I called an added bonus.”

Known botanically as *Trifolium incarnatum*, crimson clover is an annual. At a cost of \$105 per acre with a seeding rate of 30 pounds per acre, Reeves considers the cover crop to be a wise investment. After the first year of the experiment, soil tests showed that there was enough nitrogen to replace what the grapes were taking in.

“Maintaining a balance in the grape vine is so important,” says Reeves. “We don’t want to upset the natural order.”

The vineyard continues to evolve with

new plantings. A couple new blocks were planted in 2025 with Syrah at the top of the row, followed by Viognier and Chardonnay at the bottom. These will be underplanted to crimson clover after several years of establishment.

“Our planting methodology and variety map can be a logistical nightmare,” explains Reeves, “but all of our grapes are hand harvested. Our temporary foreign workers have been coming for 20 years or more and they know exactly what’s doing well.”

A stroll through the Stratus vineyard is a reminder that this is not your father’s vineyard. It’s a shaggy look underneath the grapevines with crimson clover gone to seed, but during veraison, the grape clusters are heavy and glowing with colour. The terroir of Stratus wines is complex, all the more so with crimson clover underfoot.



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FOCUS: SOIL HEALTH & CROP NUTRITION

New regional soil health report highlights pathways to healthier soils across the Greater Golden Horseshoe

WHAT WE MEASURED

Soil health is a multifaceted quality that includes biological, chemical, and physical aspects. At each location, we measured or calculated these indicators of soil health:

 Soil Organic Carbon (0 to 15 cm depth) measures the carbon contained in soil organic matter, and promotes soil structure, microbial activity, plant-available water, and plant-available nutrients.	 Potentially Mineralizable Nitrogen (0 to 15 cm depth) measures how much of the nitrogen in organic matter is converted, or mineralized, into plant-available form (ammonium nitrogen) under controlled temperature and moisture conditions.
 Soil Organic Matter (0 to 15 cm depth) represents all materials associated with living and dead organisms, and it promotes soil structure, microbial activity, available water, and available nutrients (calculated from soil organic carbon). It's composed of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, and various other elements.	 Respiration (0 to 15 cm depth) refers to the carbon dioxide released from soil due to biological activity of soil organisms. Increases in respiration indicate a greater biological capacity to cycle nutrients and plant residues. Respiration is measured as the amount of CO ₂ produced by soil microbes after rewetting the soil.
 Soil Organic Carbon Stock (0 to 30 cm depth) represents the amount of carbon stored in the soil, and is calculated using both soil organic carbon concentrations and bulk density measurements.	 Aggregate Stability (0 to 6 cm depth) measures soil structure and resistance to disturbance. Soils with greater aggregate stability are more resistant to erosion and have improved aeration, water infiltration, and water storage.
 Active Carbon (0 to 15 cm depth) represents a fraction of soil organic carbon that is not the most microbially available, but rather moderately stable and slightly processed. Greater active carbon is related to the benefits that come with healthy soil biology.	 Available Water Holding Capacity (0 to 15 cm depth) is the amount of water the soil can store and provide to plants, and is predicted from texture and soil organic carbon. Greater AWHC improves resilience to drought and flooding.

The Greenbelt Foundation, in partnership with the Soil Health Institute, has released a ground-breaking Regional Soil Health Report, offering farmers across the Greater Golden Horseshoe an entirely new way to understand and improve their soil health in southern Ontario.

This first-of-its-kind study in Canada provides farmers with clear, regionally relevant benchmarks that show how their management practices are affecting soil health and where

there is room for improvement. With this information, farmers can identify which practices have the greatest impact on building healthier, more resilient soils—allowing for more precise, evidence-based management decisions.

Based on two years of on-farm data, the report establishes the province’s first management-based approach to evaluate soil health and highlights practices that are already delivering measurable improvements. By

comparing results across different soil types and management systems, the study gives farmers the tools to evaluate performance within conditions that mirror their own operations.

“This approach provides a new opportunity for the soil health and regenerative agriculture movements,” said Dr. Wayne Honeycutt, president and CEO of the Soil Health Institute. “It shows farmers how much healthier their soils can become and which practices are working



Cover cropping in vineyards contributes to soil health. Photo by Marcella DiLonardo.

in their region, with benefits that extend far beyond the farm gate.”

This project responds directly to a significant recommendation from the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, led by Senator Rob Black, which called for a standardized, scalable approach to measuring soil health in Canada. By demonstrating how consistent indicators can be applied across the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the Regional Soil Health Report provides a science-based model for standardized measurement, reporting, and verification of soil health.

The study compared data from three different management systems:

- Baseline sites – cash crop systems using conventional tillage.
- Soil health sites – cash crop systems using reduced tillage and cover crops.
- Reference sites – minimally disturbed fields such as hay or pasture.

By comparing these systems across multiple soil texture categories (e.g., sandy loams and clay loams), the project accounted for the inherent differences in how soils retain water, store carbon and respond to management.

This regionally specific, texture-based approach ensures that farmers can compare their soils to meaningful benchmarks within similar conditions—a major advancement in how soil health is assessed, benchmarked, and communicated in Ontario.

Key findings

The results demonstrate that adopting beneficial management practices (BMPs) significantly improves soil health across physical, biological, and chemical indicators:

- BMPs improve soil health: On average, fields using soil health practices had higher scores across all measured indicators than baseline fields.
- Compared to baseline sites, farms using soil health practices showed on average:

- 6% increase in soil organic carbon and organic matter, resulting in increased nutrient availability.
- 12% increase in available water-holding capacity, resulting in increased resilience to flooding and droughts.
- 16% increase in aggregate stability, resulting in reduced soil erosion.
- 28% increase in soil respiration, resulting in improved nutrient cycling.
- 39% increase in mineralizable nitrogen, reducing reliance on synthetic fertilizers.

These results show that fields using BMPs have higher scores across all soil health indicators.

“Healthy soils are the fundamental basis of a resilient and productive agricultural system,” said Edward McDonnell, CEO, Greenbelt Foundation. “This report demonstrates that farmers in the Greater Golden Horseshoe are already making measurable progress through practices that enhance soil structure, boost biological activity, and build long-term resilience.”

The Regional Soil Health Report provides a model for evidence-based soil management, thereby bridging the gap between research and practice, and empowering farmers to make informed management decisions. Additionally, by testing 264 carefully selected sites, the project generated enough data to benchmark approximately 1.8 million acres of farmland across the Greater Golden Horseshoe, demonstrating the scalability and regional relevance of this model. By doing so, the project not only equips farmers with actionable insights but also offers a cost-effective framework for the broader agricultural sector and government to track, measure, and direct investment in soil health.

For more information and to access the full report, visit: www.greenbelt.ca/regional_soil_health_report

Source: Greenbelt Foundation November 5, 2025 news release



NOTICE OF MEETING

is hereby given that the
167TH Annual Members and Directors’ Meeting
of the
Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association
will be held in person at Hilton Niagara Falls/Fallsvue Hotel & Suites
on Tuesday, February 17, 2026

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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FOCUS: SOIL HEALTH & CROP NUTRITION

Manitoba potato growers connect the dots between water and soil

Four potato growers in the Lake Winnipeg basin have demonstrated practical results in an ambitious environmental project. Coordinated by the Potato Sustainability Alliance (PSA), the multi-year project shows how farm-level water stewardship practices can also contribute to soil health.

Covering more than 45,000 acres in Manitoba, the project has united farmers with eight partner organizations, including Cargill, Simplot, Syngenta, Nutrien, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Maple Leaf, Diageo, and others.

Chad Berry, Under the Hill Farms at Glenboro, Manitoba is one of the participants. The experience of watching gusty spring winds carry valuable topsoil off freshly planted potato fields is one that he has endured for years.

“As a farmer, I don’t ever want to see my soil blow away,” Berry says. “We have such a short four to five-week window from planting date to emergence date, and our soils are very exposed to the elements and erosion.”

But the third-generation owner of Under the Hill Farms sees the 12,000-acre operation’s application of sustainable practices turn wind erosion into a rare sight instead of a regular one.

The farm has a 25-year history of no-tilling most of its grain crops, and in 2019, Berry began adapting some of the same soil health principles into the operation’s field preparation for potatoes. The ongoing transition has included a dramatic reduction in tillage, going from multiple trips through the field to prepare soils and create seedbeds to a single-deep tillage pass ahead of potato planting.

“We had three goals in moving into a single-tillage pass for potatoes; reduce soil erosion, improve water infiltration and be more efficient with fuel,” Berry says of the transition. “After three years of field trials, we’ve seen improvements in each of those areas.”

Transitional tillage

Ongoing trials involve a fall pass with a narrow-shank Case IH Ecolo-Til in-line ripper. Potatoes are planted directly into the remaining wheat or canola stubble in spring.

“Ideally, we want to leave that previous crop’s stubble standing as long as possible in the field to hold the soil together,” Berry says. “In the past, we’d find a fine layer of silt at the bottom of a valley or a hill, which was that top layer of soil that had runoff.

“Those areas were traditionally wetter and harder to control

diseases in,” recalls Berry. “We don’t see that silting in the fields anymore with the one-pass system. We’re still leaving some of that stubble standing and reducing the erosion potential while we’re waiting for our potatoes to grow.”

So far, they’ve successfully planted into wheat and canola stubble, and aside from seeing potatoes emerge a day later than with conventional tillage practices, Berry says the one-pass system has not negatively impacted yields.

The operation acquired two new 12-row Spudnik planters in 2022, equipped with a hiller option in the back and ripper in front, which Under the Hill helped design for the one-pass system. Precision ag tools also enhance value, with GPS guidance, swath control, and sonar depth control technology part of their planter setup.

“Our next steps are to expand the one-pass system onto more soil types, and we’d like to be able to band phosphate and potash during fall tillage to

improve the consistency and availability of those nutrients,” Berry says. “We then want to set up our planter to apply nitrogen and reduce leaching and evaporation.”

The farm is conducting two-year erosion control trials with Province of Manitoba and Simplot Canada to assess the yield impact of its one-pass system vs. full tillage. Anecdotally, Berry says they’ve seen less erosion and better water infiltration, but he hopes to quantify more soil health

benefits. “We’ve been able to reduce fuel consumption by two to three gallons per acre,” Berry says. “That can be significant, and so far, we like the sustainable path we’re on.”

Source: Potato Sustainability Alliance

Supporting healthy soils

Best practices and tools lead to increased productivity



Farmers are responsible stewards of the land. They know that taking good care of the soil has multiple benefits. It sequesters carbon, increases water infiltration, supports crop growth, aids nutrient cycling and reduces impacts from precipitation extremes (too wet or too dry).

“When we focus on management practices that can help improve soil health, we can increase productivity and profitability on the farm,” says Mike Buttenham, Sustainability Manager with Syngenta Canada.

Soil health best practices

There are several practices farmers should consider adopting to achieve these targets and support soil health. The first is minimizing soil disturbance, which they can achieve by adopting no-till or reduced-till. Tillage can negatively impact soil organic matter and structure along with the habitat that soil organisms need. Minimizing soil disturbance improves the diversity and functionality of soil organisms and helps retain and build organic matter which aids in nutrient cycling, improves soil structure to support root growth, and water infiltration/absorption.

Practices that maintain cover year-round improve soil health and can protect soil from wind and water erosion. The use of cover crops between cash crops can help to protect soil from wind and water along with increase organic matter and improve soil health by adding living roots during more months of the year. In addition, cover

crops can create an environment to support soil microbes and beneficial insects.

Crop rotation can also help improve soil health.

“Farmers who adopt these soil health practices could realize increased yield,” says Buttenham. In addition, by focusing on management practices that improve soil structure, growers can also potentially access their fields for planting and harvest in a timely manner.

Soil health tools

Achieving soil health takes a collaborative approach by all stakeholders, including Syngenta.

“We are committed to expanding the toolset that enables farmers to nurture the health of their soils,” says Matt Wallenstein, Chief Soil Scientist for Syngenta Group. “I’m excited to collaborate closely with farmers from around the world to co-develop solutions that unlock the potential of their soil.”

He highlights three global strategies on Syngenta’s soil health journey – building scientific excellence in soil health research and product development; measuring and capturing the value of improved soil health; and solving farmer challenges through novel products, services, and digital insights.

For instance, biological innovations offer new tools to support soil health. Syngenta has added biological products such as Amatis™ to the toolbox, giving farmers additional choices.

Amatis 3-0-8 contains selected humic acids, amino acids, polysaccharides, and vitamins which help to revitalize and improve the rhizosphere and soil structure around plant roots, promoting root growth. Young plants with healthy roots are more capable of reaching essential nutrients and water in the soil, allowing for improved yield and fruit uniformity.

“Early stand establishment and root growth are essential to a high-performing crop. With Amatis, growers can enhance the soil environment, giving crops the best start to the season, and in turn, the greatest chance to achieve overall yield goals,” says Gustavo Roelants, Biologicals Marketing Lead at Syngenta Canada.

Amatis can be used on a wide variety of crops, including fruit and vegetables, potatoes, and row crops such as corn, wheat and soybeans. Amatis is soil applied with liquid fertilizers or transplant water.

“We are committed to expanding the toolset that enables farmers to nurture the health of their soils.”

Matt Wallenstein
Chief Soil Scientist
Syngenta Group

For more on soil health at Syngenta: syngenta.com/en/sustainability/soil-health

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Why crop rotation works



Figure 1: Common agricultural plant families and their relationships

CAIO CORREA

The practice of rotating different crops on the same field over time is ancient (dating back millennia!), but it has never been more relevant. As we become more aware of the importance of soil health and integrated pest management, crop rotation remains a simple yet powerful tool to promote both. It helps keep farms productive, resilient, and sustainable in the long run. The idea is simple: instead of planting the same crop year after year, you sequence crops across seasons and years. This is effective on multiple levels:

- **Lowering pest pressure:** Many pests and pathogens tend to target specific crops. By rotating to a different crop, you disrupt their life cycle and reduce their chances of surviving and multiplying.
- **Improving soil health:** Different crops have different root structures and nutrient needs. Rotating them helps balance

nutrient use and improve soil structure. Some crops even boost organic matter or fix nitrogen (such as legumes), making the soil more fertile and resilient over time.

- **Boosting productivity:** Rotating crops helps cut down on input costs by reducing the need for fertilizers and pesticides. Plus, it leads to better yields. AAFC research showed that corn and soybean yields increased by 40-50 per cent in diverse rotations compared to continuous monoculture.

There is no such thing as an ideal rotation for everyone, as it depends on your goals and the specific conditions and history of the farm. However, there are some key principles that you should keep in mind when designing your rotation strategy:

- 1) **Plant families**
It's better to rotate across different plant families (Figure 1-A), not just different crops. For example, while tomatoes and bell peppers are different crops, they

both belong to the same plant family (*Solanaceae*) and therefore share similar pests and diseases (such as anthracnose).

Some pathogens can survive in crops outside their preferred plant family, even if they don't cause major damage in those crops. For example, *Phytophthora infestans*, the causal agent of late blight in tomatoes and potatoes (both *Solanaceae*), can persist in legumes such as snap beans. So, in this case, rotating to a cereal crop (such as corn or wheat), which is more distantly related, would be a better choice to reduce pest populations.

- 2) **Pest history**
Keep track of which pests have been an issue in specific fields. While some pests are specialists that target specific plant families and can be managed more easily with rotation, others are generalists and can affect a wide range of crops.
For example, wireworms, the larvae of click beetles, are generalist pests that can attack crops from multiple plant

families, making it harder to manage through rotation alone. They build up in fields with grass crops, pasture, or weedy vegetation, and can remain in the soil for five to six years before maturing.

Similarly, *Fusarium* species are common root-rot pathogens that can survive in a broad range of hosts. This means that simply switching to a different plant family may not be enough to significantly lower populations.

In these cases, rotation planning should focus not only on changing crop families but also on integrating other control methods that target the pest's weak points. For example, wireworm management can be improved by including non-preferred-host crops for which there are effective insecticide options, combined with extended rotations of four to five years or more. For soilborne diseases like *Fusarium*, pairing rotation with resistant varieties, improved drainage, and organic matter management can be more effective than rotation alone.

- 3) **Cover crops**
Incorporating cover crops in a rotation system can have many benefits: improving soil health, reducing erosion, suppressing weeds, and supporting nutrient cycling between cash crop seasons.

Choosing the right species depends on their role, timing, and how they fit into your rotation. Fast-growing species such as buckwheat can suppress weeds in summer, while winter rye provides reliable ground cover during colder months. Legumes are useful for nitrogen fixation and can be especially valuable before planting crops with high nitrogen demand.

Remember that all the other factors mentioned -- plant families, pest history, and duration -- also apply to cover crops. For instance, following a snap bean field, it is more effective to plant a cereal cover crop such as winter wheat rather than another legume such as red clover, which may host similar pathogens. Even when options are limited, planting any cover crop is better than leaving the soil bare, as it helps protect and maintain the soil until the next crop is planted.

- 4) **Duration**
The length of your rotation cycle can make a big difference. While two to three-year rotations are common, such as corn →

soybean → wheat, longer rotations tend to deliver greater benefits. A four to five-year minimum is recommended.

Research shows that longer and more diverse rotations provide more significant improvements in yield, soil health and pest control. And it's not just about the length of the cycle, it's also about consistency. The longer you've been rotating, the more resilient your system becomes and the greater the yield gains.

It's important to note that some soilborne pathogens, such as *Phytophthora capsici* or clubroot (*Plasmodiophora brassicae*), can persist in the soil for more than 10 years. Crop rotation alone will not eliminate these pathogens, but it can still help reduce inoculum levels and slow disease buildup when combined with other management practices.

5) Designing a balanced rotation

Crop rotation works best when it's approached with flexibility. Start small by focusing on your most vulnerable or high-value crops, and build a rotation plan that considers plant families, pest history, and soil needs. For annual systems, effective rotations can be done exclusively with horticultural crops, provided fruiting vegetables (solanaceous and cucurbits) are not planted back-to-back, as they share many pathogens.

Alternatively, integrating horticultural crops with field crops helps balance revenue and increase diversity. In this case, a strong rotation includes four key elements: a main horticultural crop, a cereal, a legume, and a cover crop. Cereals improve soil structure and organic matter through added biomass, while legumes naturally supply nitrogen, reducing fertilizer needs and enhancing fertility.

These are general guidelines, not rigid rules. Every farm's rotation plan will depend on its primary crop, local conditions, equipment and markets. It can take a few seasons of trial and error to figure out what works best for your system, but each adjustment will move you closer to a healthier and more resilient farm.

This article was written with input from various OMAFA specialists, including Katie Goldenhar, Hannah Fraser, Steph Vickers, and Travis Cranmer.

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ONTARIO VEG NEWS

Strange bugs in pumpkins and squash

ELAINE RODDY

Squash bugs are nothing new, but populations do seem to be increasing over the past few years. The damage in the field is often localized to a few plants or one specific area. However, they are concerning as they can transmit the yellow vine decline virus. This isn't something we tend to see in southern Ontario, but it is worth being aware of.

Squash bugs prefer pumpkins and winter squash over other types of cucurbits. They are often attracted to weedy fields or shaded areas. They suck the sap from the leaves, resulting in a yellow speckling. Heavy feeding may cause the leaf to wilt, turn brown and die. Late summer populations may feed on the peduncle, leaving it more susceptible to fungal rots. Feeding on the rind of the fruit can prevent it from sizing properly and render it unmarketable.

Squash bug eggs are bullet-shaped, bronze-coloured and laid in clusters (Figure 1). Due to a prolonged egg-laying period, several different stages of development are often present in the field at the same time (Figure 2.). Squash bug nymphs have pear-shaped, pearly grey bodies with darker legs and antennae. Squash bug adults have flattened, tear-shaped bodies; they are brownish-grey with yellow-to-orange markings (Figure 3.). Adults are often confused with the brown marmorated stink bug. Brown marmorated stink bugs



Figure 1. Squash bug eggs



Figure 2. Squash bug nymphs and an adult feeding on a mature squash fruit.



Figure 3. Squash bug adult



Figure 4. Brown marmorated stink bug adult

are becoming more common, but they are still relatively new to the Ontario landscape. They can be distinguished from the squash by the presence of white bands on the antennae, and a more shield-like shape (Figure 4). Both

bugs have markings on the edges of their abdomen. The BSMB has triangular markings, while the ones on the squash bug are less distinct and more rectangular in shape. Cornell Cooperative extension

vegetable crops specialist, Elizabeth Buck will be discussing the squash bug and its role in transmitting yellow vine decline on February 19th at the 2026 Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention in Niagara Falls.

Elaine Roddy is vegetable crops specialist for Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA).



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FINANCE

Advance Payments Program offers interest-free cash advances

KAREN DAVIDSON

For a decade, Ontario asparagus and melon grower Mike Chromczak has used the Advance Payment Program (APP) to access \$100,000 interest-free. Up to \$1 million can be borrowed under competitive terms. It’s a federal program that he says should be used more because of the lack of bureaucracy.

“Inflation has bitten us hard, so being able to borrow money efficiently is important,” says Chromczak, chair of the safety nets committee, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association (OFVGA). “The team at the Agricultural Credit Corporation is farmer-friendly. The program has become so streamlined that I can call and have my line of credit updated in 10 minutes.”

That’s high praise for the Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC) helmed by CEO Jaye Atkins based in Guelph, Ontario. His team oversees 4,000 loans across Canada valued at \$1 billion. As a recent Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada report shows, among horticulture accounts, Ontario is the biggest user of the program with \$128.7 million in loans. Québec is the next biggest user with \$46.2 million in loans. Prince Edward Island is the third biggest user with \$27.7 million in loans. In total, APP has loans valued at \$277.5 million to horticultural producers as of September 30, 2025.

The APP is a federal loan guarantee program which provides agricultural producers with easy access to low-cost cash advances. Under the program, farmers can access up to \$1,000,000 in total advances based on the value of eligible agricultural products and those

in storage. Normally, the Government of Canada pays the interest on the first \$100,000 of the advance. But at the agriculture minister’s prerogative, the first \$250,000 has been interest-free for the 2024 and 2025 program years. The deal is that farmers with storable crops must repay the loan within 18 months. Otherwise, the repayment is due December 30.

According to Stefan Larrass, senior policy advisor, OFVGA, advocacy efforts are underway to make the interest-free portion permanent at \$350,000 to reflect increased costs of production in an inflationary environment. As it stands, ACC must wait for the minister’s decision, usually about two weeks prior to the roll-out of the government’s new fiscal year April 1. And this uncertainty impacts growers who are liaising with banking institutions for their total financing needs.

“For us, we need to have the budgets set for government, other banks and boards,” explains Atkins.

ACC followed the fall 2025 announcement of Bank of Canada’s lowered interest rate and adjusted its prime rate to 4.45 per cent as of October 30. The loan rate is calculated at approximately 50 per cent of the projected farmgate value of the commodity. It takes about 10 to 14 business days to process the application. Another advantage is that because the APP program is government funded, it is paid before banks in case of a bankruptcy.

As Larrass notes, “This is not your grandfather’s loan program. The four-page application can be completed with a phone call and you can save \$20,000 in 30 minutes.”

“This Advance Payments Program should be part of every farmer’s financial suite,” states Chromczak. “No collateral is

required other than the value of the crop. The program offers interest-free money to pay your upfront costs of seed, fertilizer and packaging materials early in the season.”

For more information, call 1-888-278-8807.

Advance Payments Program – Horticulture
As of September 30, 2025

Province	# of Producer Clients	\$ Advances
British Columbia		
Greenhouse, sod & nursery	25	\$11,152,288
Vegetables	31	\$10,281,429
Sub-total		\$21,433,717
Alberta		
Greenhouse, sod & nursery		\$430,000
Vegetables	37	\$8,540,410
Sub-total		\$8,970,410
Saskatchewan		
No loans to horticulture		
Manitoba		
Fruit	10	\$2,064,562
Greenhouse, sod & nursery		\$1,000,000
Vegetables	68	\$13,622,000
Sub-total		\$16,686,562
Ontario		
Fruit	143	\$32,781,011
Greenhouse, sod & nursery	59	\$19,392,480
Vegetables	212	\$76,588,242
Sub-total		\$128,761,732
Québec		
Fruit	121	\$17,376,787
Greenhouse, sod & nursery	10	\$3,927,780
Vegetables	93	\$24,948,878
Sub-total		\$46,253,445
New Brunswick		
Fruit	10	\$2,064,562
Greenhouse, sod & nursery		\$1,000,000
Vegetables	68	\$13,622,000
Sub-total		\$16,686,562
Nova Scotia		
Fruit	29	\$7,129,281
Greenhouse, sod & nursery	10	\$2,133,355
Vegetables		\$1,379,362
Sub-total		\$10,641,998
Prince Edward Island		
Fruit		\$615,423
Vegetables	99	\$27,074,880
Sub-total		\$27,690,303
Newfoundland		
Fruit		\$28,800
Greenhouse, sod & nursery		\$300,000
Vegetables		\$36,200
Sub-total		\$365,000
TOTAL		\$277,489,729

Source: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

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Thursday, October 23, 2025

CROP PROTECTION

Technology lag, bottlenecks and red tape continue to bog down productivity



MATT SHEPPARD

The policy decisions of Health Canada regarding crop protection products have restricted the Canadian grower’s ability to be competitive. Four issues exemplify grower challenges with Canada’s burdensome regulatory environment: reduced access to crop protection products along with zero access to RNA interference (RNAi) technology, bird control lasers and drones to apply pesticides.

Let’s start with the growing list of crop protection products that have had use patterns reduced or outright removed with producers of imported produce from other countries not held to the same standards. As an example, within the past five years, grape growers have seen a 51 per cent increase in the cost of crop protection, mostly due to the reduction of mancozeb fungicide applications from three to one, while our American competitors can apply a mancozeb product five or more times throughout the season.

As a result of this label change, growers have been forced to use crop protection products with a narrow spectrum of control, prone to resistance and at nearly three times the cost. The grape grower’s situation is not unique. Apple, carrot, celery and potato growers struggle with similar shocks to input costs and must figure out how to deal with the increased risks of resistance.

There is cutting-edge technology to battle resistance and meet our high standards for human health and the environment: RNA interference (RNAi). This mode of action uses double-stranded RNA to trigger a process in the target organism that disrupts critical gene

expression leading to the demise of pests and disease. The targeting of RNAi is highly specific, with no impact on non-target organisms and rapid breakdown in the environment. The elegance of this genetic solution is a very high safety margin with no cross resistance to existing crop protection tools. This technology has the potential to reduce reliance on conventional crop protection products and fill gaps left in a dwindling crop protection toolbox.

The United States has registered two products that use RNAi: Calantha controls Colorado potato beetle on potatoes, and Norroa controls varroa mites on honeybees. Despite the safe environmental profile and the respective company’s attempts and desire to commercialize these products in Canada, Health Canada has not yet given approval.

Furthermore, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) has also taken a different approach from the U.S.-based Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in that data requirements to register these products have not been standardized. This begs the question: why would Health Canada have a different standard to approve this technology? In a world of globalized food trade, implementation of common standards should be the default approach.

Another item on our radar is managing birds in horticulture crops such as berries and grapes. The long-established methods of control include falconry, netting, and sonic devices such as propane cannons. While commonly used and effective, sonic devices have a noise level that can test relationships with neighbours in rural communities. Enter bird control lasers. During a graduate project, a student discovered that green laser light, such as used in surveying equipment, also scares away birds. This led to the development of a mounted device, much like a CCTV camera, that scans over an area using green laser light to reduce bird activity by more than 70 per cent. One device by Bird Control Solutions is now used in more than 100 countries worldwide in agriculture, utilities and industrial applications. Despite a history of



“

Within the past five years, grape growers have seen a 51 per cent increase in the cost of crop protection, mostly due to the reduction of mancozeb fungicide applications from three to one, while our American competitors can apply a mancozeb product five or more times throughout the season.

safe use, Health Canada has not sanctioned their use for bird control in Canada, leaving the heavy lifting up to the controversial sonic devices.

In yet another area of contention, the use of drones for pesticide application has been grounded since 2019. The PMRA refers to them as Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS). Today PMRA’s counterparts in America, Australia and Brazil have approved the use of RPAS in horticulture crops. This is another example of putting up barriers to an innovative

technology rather than aligning with regulatory standards from other countries.

Canadian growers will not hesitate to invest in equipment and technology as they are constantly looking for efficiency. We need the PMRA to have the same focus on efficiency. The work done by Heath Canada, specifically PMRA is important but it is not unique. Rather than the PMRA creating new policy, we urge that the agency co-develop standards with their global peers for new technologies and accept the methodology of

other risk-based countries which have already studied and found the use of these technologies to be beneficial.

Matt Sheppard is general manager, Bradford Cooperative Storage Limited and chair of the crop protection committee, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association.



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CROP PROTECTION

Ecorobotix showcased world-first AI capability for safe, targeted use of non-selective contact herbicides

Ecorobotix, the global leader in AI-powered, ultra-high precision spraying, presented advancements in its Plant-by-Plant AI (artificial intelligence) technology at Agritechnica, showcasing how artificial intelligence is transforming sustainable crop care.

Building on its growing portfolio of more than 30 crop-specific algorithms, Ecorobotix now offers the most extensive range of AI-based detection systems in agricultural spraying.

This expansion enables the precise application of non-selective contact herbicides in a way that protects surrounding crops, a world-first in targeted weed control (see full list of algorithms).

Making this possible is Ecorobotix’s proprietary Safety Zone feature, which automatically generates a virtual protective buffer around each

crop. This ensures that treatments are placed exactly where needed, shielding crops from collateral spray and subsequent damage while allowing even small weeds near the crop to be controlled effectively.

Beyond herbicide management, the ARA sprayer can apply fertilizers, biostimulants and insecticides with unmatched accuracy, treating only the targeted area with a 6x6 cm spray footprint and reducing overall inputs by up to 95 per cent.

As regulatory restrictions tighten on selective herbicides, such as the European withdrawal of metribuzin, commonly used in carrots and potatoes, growers are under pressure to find alternative weed management solutions. ARA’s precision technology offers a viable path forward, making it possible to safely integrate contact herbicides while maintaining agronomic performance and



minimizing environmental risk.

“We’re seeing an increasing number of farmers transition to non-selective contact herbicides using ARA,” said Simon Gasser, agronomist and crop algorithm

product manager at Ecorobotix.

“Our AI-driven Plant-by-Plant recognition and Safety Zone function make it possible to safely apply these products, while still leaving room to use selective

products when available. This flexibility gives growers more control and helps them adapt to changing regulations.”

Source: Ecorobotic Nov 8, 2025 news

ProBlad biofungicide recognized for organic production

Canadian organic fruit and vegetable growers have recently gained a strong new biofungicide to control key diseases in their crops. ProBlad biofungicide is currently labelled for use in a wide range of crops including blueberry (high and low bush), grape, stone fruit and raspberry, as well as both outdoor and greenhouse use for tomato, pepper, eggplant and strawberry.

Manufactured in Portugal by C.E.V., ProBlad biofungicide is naturally derived from the sweet lupine seed in an innovative and

environmentally friendly manner and formulated for ease of use and stable shelf-life. It has a unique mode of action (FRAC group BM01) which makes it a perfect fit in IPM programs, especially for diseases such as Botrytis Cinerea and powdery mildew that may have natural resistance isolates to other fungicide groups in many parts of Canada. See label for detailed list of diseases controlled.

ProBlad biofungicide is exclusively distributed across Canada through the vast retail

network of N. M. Bartlett Inc. of Beamsville, Ontario. Business development manager, Matt Peters of Bartletts commented: “For many years, conventional fruit and vegetable growers have enjoyed using ProBlad biofungicide for effective disease control in their crops and now their organic neighbours can do the same. ProBlad biofungicide is effective in both preventative and curative spray windows with zero REI and zero PHI making it a very flexible and user-friendly product.”



The formulation, packaging, branding and rates are the exact same for conventional and organic users for ease of adoption by growers and retailers. Organic producers should always check with their certification body before using any product. If you would like a copy of the organic

input verification certificate, please e-mail info@bartlett.ca

Source: N. M. Bartlett November 10, 2025 news release

Gowan and Geco partner on strategic weed management

Gowan Canada is partnering with Geco Strategic Weed Management to help Canadian growers take a strategic approach to weed control through data-driven prediction and planning.

Geco’s technology uses data and AI to map where weeds have been over the past five years and predict where patches are likely to emerge next season. These insights allow farms and ag retailers to plan ahead and target actions in the most challenging areas.

“Our technology enables the question: if you could know where your most problematic patches are and where they are spreading to, what could you do differently? That’s what our technology makes possible,” said Greg Stewart, CEO of Geco. “Many of our farms are already using our prescriptions along with Gowan products, so this collaboration is a natural next step.”

“We are piloting our technology in potatoes for 2026,”

he adds.

After working with more than 150 farms, Geco heard from many growers who wanted help managing problem weed areas over multiple seasons to get them under control. In response, Geco is introducing a new multi-year program that provides a three-season subscription, continually identifies fields with persistent or spreading weed problems, and guides integrated weed management planning.

Through the Geco–Gowan promotion, growers who participate via Gowan receive an additional field of predictive weed mapping at no extra cost. The maps help growers and retailers identify where Gowan’s proven herbicides, such as Edge and Avadex, can deliver the highest impact, and are coordinated with other practices such as variable-rate seeding and in-season spray programs.

These maps strengthen discussions between growers and retailers by providing a shared

view of field conditions and a clearer basis for weed control decisions.

“Gowan is committed to providing growers and retailers with effective tools for long-term weed resistance management,” said Ralph Tessman, country manager for Gowan Canada. “By combining Geco’s historical and predictive maps growers can strategically apply our soil-applied herbicides. This information makes attacking problem areas a possibility and can allow growers to make a real difference in depleting weed seedbanks and recovering productivity in their fields.”

The Geco–Gowan program is being introduced across Western Canada as a model for how predictive agronomy, leading chemistry, and multi-season planning can work together to help farms plan control strategies and protect yield potential.

Interested growers and ag retailers can reach a Gowan rep at (https://ca.gowanco.com/

contact-us), or Geco at greg.stewart@geco-ag.com

Source: Gowan October 24, 2025 news release



BITS & BITES

New research shows rising pro-Canada sentiment is boosting confidence in the food system

The Canadian Centre for Food Integrity has released its annual Public Trust Research, showing Canadians have renewed optimism and growing confidence in Canada’s food system. But trust, while rising, remains delicate.

This year’s data shows a significant shift: nearly half (45%) of Canadians believe the food system is headed in the right direction — a 14-point increase from 2024, when only 31per cent felt the same.

Public confidence in the food system has rebounded to a five-year high, but context matters. Much like the “support Canada” movement during the COVID-19 pandemic, this year’s survey was conducted amid a new wave of pro-Canada sentiment, fueled by trade tensions and global political uncertainty.

“While the circumstances differ from 2020, the outcome is similar: the essential but often under-appreciated role of Canada’s food system has once again been thrust into the spotlight, both nationally and locally,” said Ashley Bruner, director of research and stakeholder engagement, Canadian Centre for Food Integrity. “Positive impressions are rising, but they remain fragile.”

To hold onto this elevated trust, the sector must turn temporary attention into lasting connection. Trust and transparency ratings for scientists (44%) and farmers (42%) remain at the top, underscoring the growing importance of science and research in shaping public perceptions.

“To sustain and strengthen this momentum, Canada’s food system will need more than temporary visibility, it needs continuity. It will require ongoing collaboration and a commitment from all stakeholders across the sector to amplify its importance,” said Lisa Bishop-Spencer, executive director, Canadian Centre for Food Integrity.

The survey also asked Canadians to share their level of worry about more than 20 different issues, including health care costs, inflation and the economy. The results show the cost of food, while down 4 points from last year, remains the top concern for 47 per cent of Canadians.

Public trust is the foundation of a strong and resilient agrifood system. How Canadians view the direction of the food system, its transparency, and the credibility of those who produce and provide food matters for every stakeholder. By



measuring and tracking these indicators over time, CCFI provides a clear view of where trust stands today and where it is heading in response to new challenges and expectations.

“The food system is not a simple chain, but a web woven through Canadians’ lives, connecting economy, health, culture and community. This insight should give us all reason to turn this moment into

momentum,” said Bishop-Spencer.

For more information and to view the full 2025 Public Trust Research visit: foodintegrity.ca/research

Source: Canadian Centre for Food Integrity October 28, 2025 news release

Watershed-scale conservation policies needed in Canada

In July 2025, the Canadian Agrifood Policy Institute (CAPI) in collaboration with Ducks Unlimited Canada and with support from the RBC Foundation through RBC Tech for Nature, hosted a two-day workshop which brought together stakeholders from across industry, government, farm groups, land-use experts, and conservation organizations to discuss conservation payments, biodiversity, measurement, and agricultural land use policy in Canada. Discussions revealed that despite strong national policies and growing producer interest in conservation, Canada’s patchwork of programs is falling short of achieving meaningful impact at scale.

The workshop reflected a shared desire for a “restart” — a move away from siloed initiatives towards a coherent, systems-based approach that puts farmers at the centre. From these discussions, a constructive and consensus-driven vision for the future emerged. In this What We Heard report, CAPI’s Doctoral Fellows — Ehsan Pashanejad, Kwaku Twum, Dislène Sossou, and Andu Berha — distill this vision into several key takeaways.

Key takeaways

- Current programs are a complex patch-work. A coherent, watershed-scale spatial plan is needed to strategically guide investment and align with the realities of farming.
- Conservation should be practical and profitable. Farmer interest is high, but participation is often limited by programs that are overly complex, unprofitable, or disconnected from their operational needs.
- Local organizations should be empowered to lead delivery. Using trusted local hubs as the primary point of contact can simplify processes, increase participation, and strengthen or rebuild working relationships.
- Environmental outcomes should be rewarded, not just practices. Shifting to an outcome-based model would position stewardship as a viable and profitable business choice for farmers.
- Farmers should have ownership and control of their data. This is a foundational step to address the trust deficit and ensure farmers benefit from the value their on-farm information creates.



HGS BioScience acquires NutriAg Ltd

HGS BioScience, a leading provider in humic and fulvic products, has acquired NutriAg Ltd., a Toronto-based innovator in bionutritional technologies.

This combination brings together HGS’s strength in humic acid-based products, U.S. market presence, and vertically integrated manufacturing footprint with NutriAg’s bionutritional product portfolio, Canadian market access, and research and development engine. The result is one of the most complete biostimulant and bionutritional platforms in North America.

“The biostimulant and bionutritional spaces are among the fastest-growing in

agriculture — but they are fragmented and often confusing for retailers,” said Mike Steffek, CEO of HGS BioScience. “By bringing HGS and NutriAg together, we are building one of the most robust platforms and pipelines in the market. Anchored by a strong research and formulation platform, we can now offer solutions across the biostimulant and bionutritional spectrum — including humics, fulvics, carbohydrate chelation, amino acids, plant and seaweed extracts, and microbial technologies. Even more importantly, we can stack these technologies on proven foundations like humics, fulvics, and micronutrients,

ensuring greater ROI and yield preservation for farmers.”

NutriAg president and CEO Martin Bloomberg added: “Joining HGS is the next chapter for NutriAg. Our combined capabilities make us the partner of choice for both retailers and farmers. Retailers gain one trusted source – a complete product portfolio and a market-leading innovation engine. Farmers gain proven, field-tested products that drive resilience, productivity, and profitability.”

The combined company will offer:

- Expanded portfolio: A full suite of products spanning humic and fulvic acids, bionutritionals, and microbials.

- Broader market access: Strong distribution networks across the U.S., Canada, and international markets.
- Deeper innovation pipeline: Proprietary technologies such as NutriAg’s PolyAldoCarbosate® (PAC) platform and HGS’s HumiK ONE and GrowPlex brands.

For more information, visit www.hgsbioscience.com

Source: HGS BioScience October 21, 2025 news release