

## Organic Agriculture in Canada

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With roots dating back to the 1950s, and the presence of numerous regional and national organic organizations, the organic sector in Canada is strong. National statistics compiled in 2011 indicate that Canada is home to just over 3700 certified organic producers,

representing 1.8% of all Canadian farmers. These organic farmers make their living on an estimated 900,000 hectares of land. Indicative of the vibrancy of the Canadian organic community, while the total number of farms in Canada is on the decline, the number of organic farms continues to grow. The strong organic farming community is complemented by 870 organic processors and 245 organic handlers who help create value added products and market access.



In 2009, the Canadian government introduced organic regulations that require organic producers who sell their products for export to other countries or provinces in Canada to adhere to a national organic standard. At the same time, a new “Canada Organic/Biologique Canada” label was launched. Over twenty accredited certification bodies now oversee organic certification in Canada. Since 2009, Canada has established organic equivalency agreements with the United States of America and the European Union, granting Canadian organic producers access to these lucrative markets, with Canadian organic exports valued at an estimated \$59 billion per year in 2010. Regulations for within province sales have not yet been developed or implemented, although these are desired.

The organic market in Canada was worth an estimated \$2.6 billion in 2010, growing from \$1 billion in 2006. Canada boasts the fifth largest organic mar-

ket in the world and ranks in ninth place in terms of per capita consumption of organic products. While markets for organic fruits and vegetables are strong, field crops and pasture are the top organic agricultural products in Canada. Statistics from 2010 suggest that Canadians import over 80% of the organic food consumed within the country, suggesting a strong potential for local supply growth and development. The majority of organic food in Canada is sold in conventional grocery chains, although direct to consumer and specialty store sales also account for a significant portion of sales.

### Organic Research in Canada

A strong rooting in science can serve to strengthen and grow the Canadian organic sector, bolstering supplies for both local and export markets. While organic researchers have prospered in Canada, up until recently organic research was scattered and relatively small, with few researchers leading programs focused solely or largely on organic research.

### Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada

The Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada (OACC) was founded in 2001, and as the only institution of its kind in Canada, plays a leading role in organic research and education. Guided by a vision of sustainable and science-based organic agricultural systems supporting healthy Canadian communities, OACC’s mission is to facilitate research and education for organic producers and consumers to build sustainable communities. The OACC team, led by Director Dr. Andy Hammermeister, has a high degree of enthusiasm for our mission and a strong commitment to academic rigour.

OACC’s goal is ultimately to link sound, scientific knowledge about organic agriculture with those on



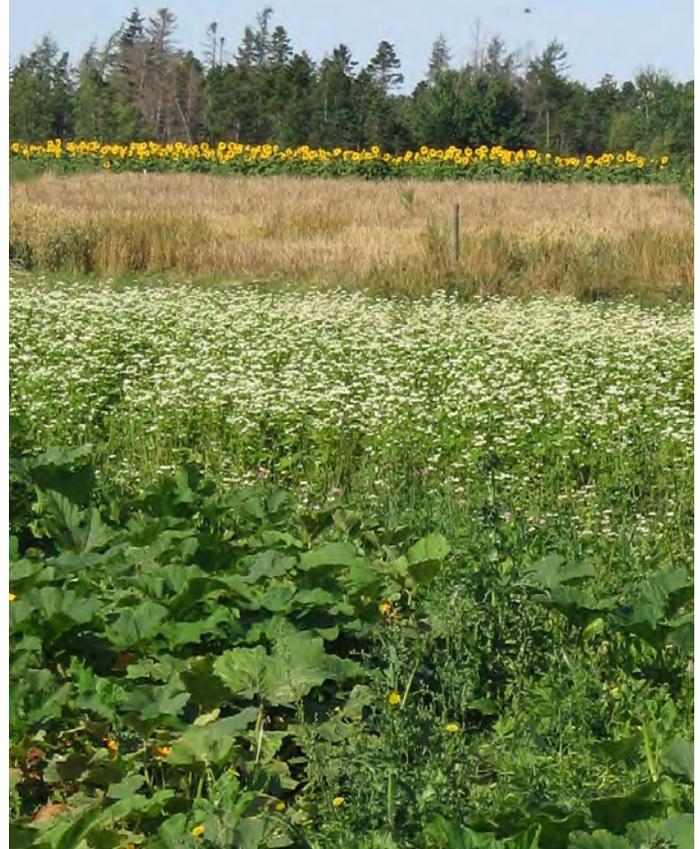
the ground who put this information into practice: the farmers, students, stakeholders and consumers of organic. OACC strives to provide resources and respond to the needs of the Canadian organic community. We focus on providing resources through our website, [www.oacc.info](http://www.oacc.info), and free monthly electronic newsletter. Linking organic knowledge requires both give and take. While OACC strives to provide information to organic stakeholders, we also have strong links to scientists involved in organic research across Canada. To meet the research needs of the country's organic community and to ensure that the research projects undertaken have meaningful impact, OACC regularly invites farmers across Canada to provide input on what research would be most meaningful for them. These research needs are then prioritized, to ensure that the projects with potential for the most impact are pursued.

**Canada's Organic Science Cluster**

Perhaps the most exciting developments for organic research in Canada have come in the past three years. In 2009, OACC, in collaboration with the Organic Federation of Canada, received groundbreaking federal government funding, supported by over 30 industry partners, to develop the Organic Science Cluster, which funnels over \$8 million in research funding into Canada's organic industry. With over 80 scientists at 36 research institutions participating in organic research projects, the Organic Science Cluster spans the country and engages all major agricultural universities in Canada, as well as federal scientists.

The funding for the Organic Science Cluster, awarded through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Growing Forward Program, is meant to support growth in the organic sector by strengthening the science behind organic agriculture in Canada, ultimately helping the country's organic farmers capture more of the domestic market, while also improving their ability to compete on a global scale. Most of this research, while directed toward organic agriculture, can also be applied to conventional production systems, thereby drawing interest to the cluster from producers across Canada.

*Certified organic field experiment in Nova Scotia, available for interested researchers to utilize for separate studies. From the front and backwards, we see oilseed pumpkins, buckwheat, barley and sunflowers. Photo by Joanna MacKenzie*



The Organic Science Cluster is helping to develop the science that underpins the ability of Canada's organic industry to increase the quality and quantity of products produced, while also characterizing and promoting the aspects of organic production that are important to Canadian consumers. Scientists are now working at setting the groundwork for significant improvements in phosphorus use efficiency in organic crop production, leading organic into an era of low-till production without herbicides, providing a landmark breakthrough in energy efficient organic greenhouse production, developing effective systems for management of organic horticultural crops, characterizing the contribution of organic production to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, establishing benchmarks for animal health and welfare in dairying, developing new meat preserving methods, and addressing barriers in high value fruit production. Results of the projects were presented at the first Canadian Organic Science Conference in

2012, with attendees from across Canada, the US and Europe. Additional conferences will be held in the future. For more information about the Organic Science Cluster, please visit [www.oacc.info](http://www.oacc.info).

While the first Organic Science Cluster is set to wrap up in March 2013, plans are well underway for Organic Science Cluster II. This new round of projects aims to build upon and expand the work already completed. Over 100 research projects were initially proposed for Organic Science Cluster II, with fifty moving on to the full proposal stage. These proposals span most of agriculture, including studies in soil management, crop breeding and production, pest control, environmental aspects, market analysis and development, social sciences, value adding and food processing research. New research initiatives in organic aquaculture and ornamental horticulture have also been proposed. Strong industry support has also been demonstrated, as the need, value and opportunity associated with organic research becomes recognized. Should Organic Science Cluster II receive funding, renewed work should be underway by the summer of 2013.

**Other Key Organic Research in Canada**

The Platform for Innovation in Organic Agriculture, a 200 hectare research site dedicated to organic

research, was created in 2012 in the Canadian province of Quebec. The platform’s mission is to provide the organically-managed land and infrastructure required to allow for research, development, training and public awareness activities related to organic crop production. Designed by Quebec’s Research and Development Institute for the Agri-Environment (IRDA), the launch of the platform was supported by a \$13 million funding allocation from the federal and provincial governments. Long term organically managed research sites can also be found at the Glenlea long term rotation and the Carman Organic Field Lab in the province of Manitoba, the Scott Research farm in the province of Saskatchewan, and OACC’s certified organic field site in Nova Scotia.

Organic agriculture is strengthening in Canada, with support for key research at a time when there is renewed emphasis on innovation, efficiency in energy, labour and economics, and capturing value-added markets. The future does, indeed, look bright. For more information about the OACC and Canada’s Organic Science Cluster, please visit [www.oacc.info](http://www.oacc.info).



OACC’s Director, Dr. Andy Hammermeister (to the left), and students examine a research plot. Photo by the Nova Scotia Agricultural College