



## Policy Statement

### Organic Agriculture: A Foundation for Food Security in Canada

September 30, 2017

The objectives of Canadian Organic Growers (COG) and the Organic Federation of Canada (OFC), support the work of this government and of Food Secure Canada to lead the development of a National Food Policy that will address food insecurity in Canada. Every Canadian has the right to access culturally appropriate and nutritious food so they may live with dignity.

COG and OFC believe the priority areas within this policy: *Accessing Affordable Food; Conserving Air, Land and Water; Health and Safety; and Growing More High Quality Crops*, are appropriate and should be equally weighted.

**Organic food and farming span all of these priority areas and enhance food security in Canada because the core principle of organic agriculture is healthy soil<sup>1</sup>.** Through organic management practices, organic producers are enhancing the health of soils across the country, ensuring that these lands retain the capacity to produce food for future generations of Canadians<sup>2,3</sup>. Healthy soils enhance yields and the quality of what is produced. Healthy soils are climate resilient. When we don't look after our soils, we turn to inputs, which increase the cost of production for farmers, cutting profitability and making it harder to make a living growing food for Canadians and the world. Farm profitability and food security in Canada are inherently linked.

**Organic agriculture contributes to a low carbon economy by enhancing soil carbon sequestration<sup>4,5</sup>.** Organic standards prohibit the use of risky, energy intensive nitrogen

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<sup>1</sup> IFOAM - Organics International. N.D. [http://www.ifoam.bio/sites/default/files/oa\\_and\\_soils\\_web.pdf](http://www.ifoam.bio/sites/default/files/oa_and_soils_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Lynch, D.H. 2014. Sustaining soil organic carbon, soil quality and soil health in organic field crop management systems. Pp 107-132 *In* Martin, R.C and MacRae, R. [Eds] *Managing Energy, Nutrients and Pests in Organic Field Crops*. CRC Press.

<sup>3</sup> Rodale Institute (2011) *The Farming Systems Trial: Celebrating 30 years*. Retrieved from: <http://rodaleinstitute.org/assets/FSTbookletFINAL.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Lynch, D.H. 2014. Sustaining soil organic carbon, soil quality and soil health in organic field crop management systems. Pp 107-132 *In* Martin, R.C and MacRae, R. [Eds] *Managing Energy, Nutrients and Pests in Organic Field Crops*.

fertilizers, which are responsible for over 70% of Canada's total nitrous-oxide greenhouse gas emissions<sup>6</sup> and the extensive pollution of waterways<sup>7</sup>. Research demonstrates that proper use of leguminous cover crops could fix enough nitrogen to replace nitrogen fertilizers currently in use<sup>8</sup>.

**Organic agriculture is a welcomed venture for new and existing farmers** who are looking to not only adopt more sustainable agricultural practices but who want to access new markets and respond to consumer demand. Rural communities have benefitted from a growing number of organic operations, with research showing that economic hot spots of prosperity correlate with higher concentrations of organic farms<sup>9</sup>.

**Organic agriculture also embodies an environmental pricing mechanism.** Organic producers internalize the cost of negative environmental externalities typically seen in intensive agricultural production which include such things as; soil degradation, biodiversity loss, pesticide and fertilizer misuse, water contamination, etc. Consumers concerned about these environmental externalities, understand that purchasing organic products is a way to mitigate these externalities<sup>10</sup> and by doing so, they compensate farmers for their responsible environmental stewardship.

**Consumer demand for organic products continues to climb and is outpacing both domestic and global supply.** Significant gains in market share and acreage under organic management have been achieved and as of 2015, Canada had the 5<sup>th</sup> largest organic market in the world valued at \$4.7B<sup>11</sup> with the majority of Canadians regularly purchasing organic products<sup>10</sup>. However, despite a 16% annual growth rate in demand for organics in Canada<sup>10</sup>, between 2004 and 2014, the number of organic producers in Canada grew by a mere 2%, compared to the US, which saw a 65% increase in that same time<sup>12</sup>. This dramatic difference is attributed to the strength of US agricultural policy

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<sup>5</sup> Ghabbour, E.A., Davies, G., Misiewicz, T., Alami, R.A., Askounis, E.M., Cuzzo, N.P., Filice, A.J, Haskell, J.M., Moy, A.K., Roach, A.C., Shade, J. 2017. National Comparison of the Total and Sequestered Organic Matter Contents of Conventional and Organic Farm Soils. *Advances in Agronomy*. 146: 1-35.

<sup>6</sup> The Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. 2017. News Release: Senators probe effects of climate change on agriculture, agri-food and forestry sectors.

<sup>7</sup> Battye, W. 2017. Is Nitrogen the Next Carbon? *Earth's Future*. DOI: 10.1002/2017EF000592

<sup>8</sup> Badgley, C., Moghtader, J., Quintero, E., Zakem, E., Chappell, M., Avilés-Vázquez, K., Perfecto, I. (2007). Organic agriculture and the global food supply. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 22(2), 86-108.

<sup>9</sup> Organic Trade Association. (2016). U.S. Organic Hotspots and Their Benefit to Local Economies.

<sup>10</sup> Canada Organic Trade Association. (2016). Consumer Ipsos Poll.

<sup>11</sup> International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. (2017). *The World of Organic Agriculture: Statistics and Emerging Trends 2017*.

<sup>12</sup> COG/COTA Organic Production Statistics and USDA Production Statistics.

and programming that both incentivizes and supports organic production and serves to reduce the negative stigma around organic production.

**As policy makers develop Canada's National Food Policy,  
we urge them to recognize that a balance be struck between  
the productivity of our crops and environmental degradation.**

Achieving ambitious agricultural export goals of \$75B by 2025 should not come at a cost to the environmental health of our agricultural lands as this would only further exacerbate food insecurity in Canada. Organics is an industry that has always championed this balance and continues to be an agricultural leader in sustainability. Consumers from all walks of life support our industry every day when they purchase organic products and their desire to access sustainably and locally produced, that bears the government regulated, Canada Organic Logo, should be backed by this policy and by a commitment from the government to permanently fund the Canadian Organic Standards.

**The Canadian Organic Standards connect agriculture with environment;  
they outline good agricultural practices that target productivity,  
profitability and preservation of our environment.**

Decades ago, producers from across the country came together because they wanted to change the way they farmed – they wanted to reduce their environmental footprint and become more sustainable. The Standards provide an organic framework and allow organic farmers to define what they do as organic agriculture. The Standards are not only a measure to ensure public trust in organic but are also an industry benchmark for achieving and standardizing environmental sustainability on a farm. The Standards are a public good and all Canadians benefit from organic land use practices.

The federal Organic Products Regulations (OPRs), enforced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), require mandatory certification to the Canadian Organic Standards (COS or Standards) for agricultural products labelled as “organic” in import,

export and inter-provincial trade and bearing the Canada Organic Logo.

The OPRs were established in 2009 under the Agricultural Products Act through an industry-government partnership. All provincial organic regulations reference the Canadian Organic Standards for organic products sold intra-provincially.

Canadian organic operators pay certification fees to be able to call their products organic and to be able to use the Canada Organic logo owned by the government of Canada. Organic certificates describes where organic products have been grown or prepared, validating that the cultivation/preparation processes are compliant with the Standards.

- The Standards enforce traceability through strict record keeping. Organic certificates are necessary for organic agricultural ingredients used in the preparation of multi-ingredient food. Operators must also prevent commingling with non-organic products and exposure of organic products to prohibited substances.
- The Standards and the Regulations protect consumers against misleading claims and ensure food safety, and are the backbone of a growing domestic and export-oriented industry.

Both Standards (CAN/CGSB 32.310 and CAN/CGSB 32.311) are overseen by the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB), a standardization agency accredited by the Standards Council of Canada (SCC). The SCC mandates that the Standards undergo a technical committee review every five years. The penalty for failing to do so is non-compliance and Standards that may potentially be unenforceable. The last review was published on November 25, 2015. The next full review must be completed by November 25, 2020. The cost of this review, which takes place every five years, is approximately \$1,000,000<sup>13</sup>.

### **The maintenance of the Canadian Organic Standards – a sustainable food policy**

In Canada, industry stakeholders are actively involved in the review of Standards, contributing over \$500,000 of in-kind expertise, time, and travel expenses to participate in Standards' Working Groups. The Canadian Organic Sector carries its fair share of the cost of maintaining the Standards and is asking the Government of Canada to fund its

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<sup>13</sup> Of this amount, the CGSB collects \$600,000 in services fees (daily rate of \$1400). There is an additional cost of \$400,000 for organizing industry consultations and conducting environmental impact assessments of the agricultural practices that can modernize organic agriculture.

portion, which is the cost of the Standards review framework (\$1,000,000) that it currently imposes on the organic industry. The 2020 review needs to be underway in 2018 to meet the 2020 deadline.

Should the Standards not be revised by November 2020, they will be deemed non-compliant by the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) and Canada will not be able to maintain equivalency arrangements with our international trading partners.

The Canadian organic industry is already at a disadvantage with our largest international competitors. The United States Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program invests \$500,000 per year for the maintenance of the US organic standards. The EU also accepts the complete financial responsibility for the maintenance of the organic European standards.

**The Standards deliver a public good, contributing to the Government of Canada's objectives regarding environmental sustainability and the economy.**

Organic agriculture is an example of a successful clean-growth industry that offers a model for promoting climate-friendly food production and can contribute substantially to domestic and global food supply, while reducing the detrimental environmental impacts of intensive agriculture. As the Government of Canada develops this National Food Policy, we hope that it builds a policy that both incentivizes and rewards sustainable, organic agricultural production, which we know contributes to food security in Canada, and also look for opportunities to eliminate competitive disadvantages for organic producers – permanently funding the Canadian Organic Standards would be the way to start.

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**Canadian Organic Growers**

Canadian Organic Growers (COG) is a registered national charity (13014 0494) and organic farm membership organization with over 1000 members and supporters. Since 1975 COG has engaged in farmer education, policy work and sector development and offered a united voice for producers who practice organic agriculture. COG's educational services help farmers and gardeners produce fresh, nutritious food using the organic approach which is environmentally sound and commercially viable.

**Organic Federation of Canada**

The Organic Federation of Canada (OFC) was created in 2007. It is a national association composed of 10 provincial/territorial associations: Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia (COABC), Organic Alberta, SaskOrganics, Manitoba Organic Alliance, Organic Council of Ontario, Union des producteurs agricoles, Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN) and their Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Working Groups, Prince-Edward-Island Certified Organic Producers Cooperative, Growers of Organic Food in the Yukon (GOOFY).

Members support the operations and mandate of OFC , which include:

- Maintenance of the Canadian Organic Standards under the supervision of the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB);
- Management of the Canadian Standards Interpretation Committee (SIC);
- Management of the Organic Science Cluster (OSC), an industry-supported research and development endeavor in cooperation with the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada at Dalhousie University;