

# Organic expansion hits a barrier

There is a growing demand for organic food but supply has not been keeping up

BY COURTNEY DENARD  
Ontario Farmer

The Organic Council of Ontario (OCO) has announced a new project that will look at reasons why Ontario's organic sector is having difficulty expanding production and more.

The yearlong project, which received funding from Growing Forward 2, seeks to understand the barriers to growth for different organic value chains and to develop ways to overcome those barriers.

Carolyn Young, former director of Sustain Ontario, has been contracted to conduct the study.

She says the project will begin with an environmental scan, literature review of programs and policies that support organic in other regions, and interviews with key stakeholders.

A survey of both organic and conventional businesses wishing to transition to certified

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organic will be completed later in October.

"We want to know what are the barriers to join the industry or to scale up," says Young. "Are there missing inputs, missing ingredients, missing processing capacity or is there confusion around what organic means?"

In Canada, organic makes up four per cent of total retail sales but only 1.3 per cent of total production area.

Ontario has the largest market in the country for organic goods representing \$1 billion in value and 30 per cent of all Canadian sales.

There is enough demand for 10-20 per cent growth in organic sales, Young says, but the province doesn't have the supply to meet that.

This means a lot of the

organic goods sold in Ontario are imported in from places like Quebec and the United States.

"Supply is the bottleneck in organic value chains," Simon Jacques, organic grain grower and OCO board member, says in an OCO news release.

"If we can help producers overcome barriers to scaling up and scaling out production, the whole sector will benefit."

Ontario is not the first province to investigate and promote the organic sector.

Quebec recently announced a strategy for organic business management programs and New Brunswick has programs that support transitioning into the sector.

Young says there is a whole process around becoming an organic farmer and hopefully the new project will shed some light on that by identifying the economic benefits and risks associated with the industry, as well as the support systems that are in place.

OCO's almost \$36,000 project officially launched the first week of June and is slated to wrap up in March 2017 with a report on the findings.

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