ORGANIC WEEK

SEPTEMBER 17-25, 2016

THE GLOBE AND MAIL FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2016 SECTION COTA

THE CANADIAN ORGANIC MARKET IS WORTH $4.7-BILLION PER YEAR

CANADIAN CONSUMERS ARE MAINTAINING THEIR SPENDING ON ORGANIC FOOD

86% expect to increase or maintain their organic spending in the near future

56% of Canadians (20 million) say they regularly buy

11% of total grocery purchases for the household comprise organic purchases

ORGANIC PURCHASE PRIORITIES

77% organic fruits and vegetables

23% organic milk/dairy product

22% organic meat and/or poultry

THE ORGANIC SHOPPER'S WEEKLY GROCERY BUDGET

+$26.70

On average, organic grocery shoppers spend $26.70 more per week for groceries compared to non-organic buyers. The organic shopper's weekly grocery basket was $132.70 four years ago compared to $143.40 today.

Source: COTA national consumer survey, summer 2016

GET INSPIRED!

National Organic Week events are happening all across the country. Visit **organicweek.ca** to find one in your area.

SPOT THE LOGO CONTEST
ONLINE
September 17-25
Spot the Canada Organic logo on your product purchase and, for a chance to win a prize basket, share your photo on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter with the hashtag #SpotCanadaOrganic (www.organicweek.ca/contest).

2ND CANADIAN ORGANIC SCIENCE CONFERENCE
Longueuil, QC
September 19-21, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Conference presentations (in English) about organic research and a field day of visits to Quebec organic farms. Hosted by the Institut de Recherche et de Développement en Agroenvironnement.

Online? Visit globeandmail.com/adv/organicweek for more information.

Canada Organic a brand consumers can trust

Designed to help consumers make informed choices, a great number of logos and descriptors adorn the goods available at retailers and markets across the country. Among them is the Canada Organic logo. Yet while Canadians increasingly choose the products bearing this mark of certification, they may not be all that familiar with the stringent standards supporting it, says Rochelle Eisen, president of Canadian Organic Growers (COG).

"The recognition of the Canada Organic logo is growing, but not as fast as consumer demand for organic products," she explains. "As the demand grows, more people want to know what organic – and therefore certified – actually means. The logo helps convey that information, and events like Organic Week create awareness about what the logo stands for."

Organized by the Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA), COG and the Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA), Organic Week – the largest annual celebration of organic food, farming and products – is an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the organic sector and what it has to offer.

"Canada has strict standards in place, overseen by our government, so you can trust that both domestic and imported foods with an organic logo have been produced using environmentally and animal-friendly methods every step of the way."

Helen Long
is CHFA president

A recent consumer survey conducted by COTA, which aimed to understand consumers' purchasing habits and determine the level of trust in organic claims, found that in addition to environmental and animal welfare concerns, Canadians are buying organics to avoid pesticides, chemicals and artificial ingredients.

"It's no secret that Canadians are becoming more health conscious," says Helen Long, CHFA president. She adds that Canada organic standards – which are widely recognized across the globe – place limits and prohibit the use of drugs, antibiotics, genetic engineering, irradiation, synthetic fertilizers and hormones, and toxic and persistent pesticides. "To ensure the food you bring home is made without harmful materials, simply look for the Canada Organic logo. It's really that easy."

But the recognition level of the organic logo fell short of the expectations of Tia Loftsgard, COTA's executive director. "According to the consumer survey, 57 per cent of Canadians are still unfamiliar with the organic logo in Canada, which was launched in 2009," she says.

Ms. Eisen has also noticed lingering "misconceptions around terminology, especially certified organic and local," she explains. "Both are important for consumers, but local does not equal certified organic. Certified organic means that it adheres to a rigorous set of procedures and requirements."

"Organic integrity begins at the farm and reaches all the way into your home," says Ms. Long. "Canada has strict standards in place, overseen by our government, so you can trust that both domestic and imported foods with an organic logo have been produced using environmentally and animal-friendly methods every step of the way."

Ms. Eisen adds, "Buying organic products is an easy way to say you care about the environment."

Ms. Long has seen "dramatic growth" within the organic industry in recent years as a result of increased awareness of the benefits of going organic. "People have the right to make informed choices about what they eat, and to know that choosing organic means choosing to support your body, the environment and the jobs of local farmers."

This trend is also reflected in the uptake of Organic Week, where the growing number of local partners is making it a truly national celebration, says Ms. Loftsgard. "That sends the message to the broader industry and the government that there is a strong national network of organic supporters, retailers and businesses teaming up for this celebration."

Ms. Long adds, "During Organic Week, we encourage you to take part in the special events, or take some time to enjoy food and drink tastings, farm tours, workshops and more, all across the country. We want everyone to see just how easy it is to go organic."

Organic Week continues to grow and get better every year, says Ms. Eisen. "This year is no exception. In 2016, we have over 2,000 retailers across Canada participating in Organic Week. That is fantastic exposure for the organic brand."

This content was produced by Randall Anthony Communications, in partnership with The Globe and Mail's advertising department. The Globe's editorial department was not involved in its creation.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The millennial generation – the new driving force for organics

Consumer demand is fuelling an expansion of Canadian organic products, with a growing array of retail options extending beyond the produce section into the traditional grocery aisles.

New research data from the Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA) identifies millennials as a key driving force in the organics marketplace.

According to COTA's national consumer survey in the summer of 2016, one in five shoppers (21 per cent) in the 18 to 34 demographic say they are buying more organic than in the past. By comparison, consumers in the older age groups are holding steady in their organic purchases.

"It really is revealing how millennials are very much the major converted purchaser of organic," says Tia Loftsgard, executive director of COTA. "This group is really choosing to spend according to their conscience and their values."

The survey also found that millennials spend proportionally more of their budget on organic food than other shoppers. One-quarter (25 per cent) in the 18 to 34 group spend 10 to 24 per cent on organic, compared to 19 per cent for those 35 to 54 and 12 per cent for people 55 and older. On average, this younger generation reports spending 23 per cent of their food budget on organic.

Loblaw Companies Ltd. has experienced the growing significance of young adults as the purchasers of organics and has responded to the evolving demands of these consumers by expanding and diversifying its PC Organics product line.

Millennials, Page COTA 3

BY THE NUMBERS

Millennials are shifting towards organic in Canada:

25% of millennials spend between 10 and 24% on organic compared to 19% for 35 to 54 and 12% for people 55+

Overall, on average, this younger generation indicates they spend

23% of their food budget on organic

Source: COTA national consumer survey, summer 2016

INSIDE

SOCIAL LICENCE. Gauging public trust in Canadian food systems and organics. **COTA 4**

PICKY EATERS. A dietician's perspective on school lunches and family meals. **COTA 5**

CONTAMINATION RISK. The organic community's response to GMO alfalfa. **COTA 6**

ORGANIC WEEK

JOIN IN
There are many more National Organic Week events to choose from – please see **organicweek.ca** for details.

ORGANIC FOOD BANK DONATIONS
Calgary, AB
September 17-25
Amaranth Whole Foods Markets and Amaranth Health in Calgary and St. Albert will donate a portion of every sale to local food banks.

REAP'S 7TH ANNUAL FOOD FOR THOUGHT
Calgary, AB
September 25, 1 to 4 p.m.
Enjoy 20+ local food and beverage sampling stations, live music and kids' activities. Each ticket sold will provide a meal to someone in need through Mealshare.

BRING YOUR OWN BAG FUNDRAISER
Calgary, AB
September
For every reusable bag that is used at Sunnyside Market, five cents will be donated to Organic Alberta in support of the organic community.

PROFILES

From farm to fork: a supply chain of organic integrity

Martin Le Moine and his family stopped using pesticides and other chemicals on their farm 20 years ago and now own the multimillion-dollar company Fruit d'Or. SUPPLIED

FRUIT D'OR

When Martin Le Moine and his family stopped using pesticides and other chemicals on their farm 20 years ago, they became the first grower of organic cranberries in Canada.

It was a big change with profound consequences, including five difficult years for the family business.

"Our yield dropped a lot and the first five years were not very profitable," recalls Mr. Le Moine, whose farms are located in central Quebec. "At the time, there really was no market for organic cranberries, but we made our decision to go organic based on our familial values, and we were determined to stick to it."

Their persistence paid off. Today, the Le Moines and their partners own and run Fruit d'Or Inc., a multimillion-dollar company that processes cranberries and blueberries for sale in Canada and around the world. Fruit d'Or has more than 200 employees and boasts several product lines: organic fruits including cranberries, blueberries and dried cherries; organic and conventional fruit juices; and fruit powders and oils for the nutraceuticals market. A year ago, they introduced a new line of organic fruit products under the Patience Fruit & Co. brand into the Canadian retail market.

"When we formed Fruit d'Or in 2000, we associated with other farmers, and together we formed an agronomist group focused on sustainable practices," says Mr. Le Moine. "This group continues to exist today to support cranberry farmers in Canada and produces at least 80 per cent of organic cranberries in the world."

Fruit d'Or's commitment to sustainable practices is evident in virtually all aspects of operation. As the organic fruits industry continues to grow and move towards the mainstream market, Mr. Le Moine can't help but feel proud of what his family and company have accomplished.

"We have worked hard to support organic production in Quebec to make Canada become the world leader in organic cranberries," he says. "It's a part of our history that I'm really proud of."

FORSTBAUER FARM

As a child, Natalie Forstbauer often accompanied her mother on trips to sell produce from the family farm. "The trunk and seats of the car would be filled with beans, cucumbers or carrots, and we'd be going from store to store," she recalls. "We'd often get turned away because the produce was organic or didn't look perfect. And when it was picked up, it often wouldn't get labelled as organic."

With time came acceptance and wide appreciation of organic produce. Now, the Forstbauer Farm offerings are sought after at local farmers market and stores, and Ms. Forstbauer says she also sees many young farmers choosing to enter the organic sector. "My parents went into organic farming because they believed in the values," she explains. "They paved the road for our and the next generation to be able to have the opportunities we have today."

Mary and Hans Forstbauer started their farm in British Columbia in 1977. They instilled their values of caring for the land and respecting the environment in their 12 children, five of whom have become farmers and the rest lend a hand when they can, supported by a tribe of over 30 grandchildren.

"We are really fortunate to have the family farm, a place where everyone is welcome to spend time or help out in the field," says Ms. Forstbauer. "Farming organically has challenges, but our family has a lot of passion for producing healthy food. We believe it's important to have and provide alternatives, especially at a time when GMOs and harmful chemicals like glyphosate are more and more prevalent."

Ms. Forstbauer adds that her mother passed away last year and will be remembered not only as the family's matriarch, but also as a strong pillar of the organic community.

MIKE & MIKE'S

Mike Fronte remembers a time when retailers who wanted to carry organic foods had to deal with multiple distributors to access a wide range of products. Determined to support an industry and philosophy he believed was the way of the future, Mr. Fronte launched a wholesale company focused entirely on bringing organic produce from farms to grocery shelves.

"I've always loved this industry and what it stands for," says Mr. Fronte, president and CEO of Mike & Mike's, which he co-founded 12 years ago with childhood friend Mike Dattoli. "I realized years ago that chemical fertilizers and pesticides were not a long-term solution to farming, and for those who want the choice, we need to make certified organic foods available to them."

Unlike many other wholesalers that tack on maybe half a dozen organic items to their lineup of conventionally grown produce, Mike & Mike's distributes only organics. The company carries about 300 fresh items a week and recently introduced a snack line with dried nuts and fruits sold under the Mike & Mike's brand. This new line is now available at numerous Ontario retailers, including a number of stores at Toronto Pearson International Airport.

"We facilitate and consolidate a broad range of organic products for retailers to purchase – no one else in the industry does what we do," says Mr. Fronte, whose journey as an organics entrepreneur began in 1998 when he founded Simply Organics, a distribution company he sold four years later. "If a product exists in organic – whether it's fresh fruit or vegetables – it's very likely we have it."

THE BIG CARROT

Ask about the best places to shop for organic foods in Toronto and a well-beloved name inevitably comes into the conversation. The Big Carrot Natural Food Market – often referred to simply as The Big Carrot – is an institution among those who love organics, as well as those who value great service and product selection.

Next year, The Big Carrot is opening its second store in a new condominium set in Toronto's fashionable Beaches neighbourhood, just east of downtown.

"We've been very successful in one store for a long time," says Sarah Dobec, who looks after marketing and public relations for The Big Carrot, a 33-year-old enterprise that holds the distinction of being Ontario's first retailer certified under the Canadian Organic Standard. "But it was time to expand, and we're looking forward to welcoming customers to our second location."

From the start, The Big Carrot made a commitment to focus on its core priorities: organic non-GMO products, and local whenever possible. Meat is sourced largely from small Ontario farms, while seafood purchase decisions are based on sustainable practices. The Big Carrot sells only shelled eggs from cage-free hens and bans from its shelves any products with artificial sweeteners, conventional beet sugar and high-fructose corn syrup.

Ms. Dobec says The Big Carrot's priorities and values have continued to evolve, and the company is constantly rolling out new programs.

"For example, we recently created a grant called Nature's Finest Fund to help expand the availability of local, organic food," she says. "The demand for organics is greater than what's currently available, so we're helping our farmers and producers grow their businesses."

Canada's organic community is made up of people who are passionate about producing healthy food and bringing it to consumers. Among them are the Forstbauer family, who operate an organic farm in British Columbia; Mike Fronte of the distributor Mike & Mike's; and the dedicated staff of The Big Carrot Natural Food Market in Toronto. SUPPLIED

Visit **globeandmail.com/adv/organicweek**

GLENLEA RESEARCH STATION TOUR
Glenlea, MB
September 23, 4 p.m.
Tour of 25-year-old organic plot. Plus local organic food and local craft beer, campfire, educational activities for kids and guest speakers. Reserve tickets in advance at the Farm & Food Discovery Centre or by phone at 204-883-2524.

13TH HARVESTING THE ARTS FESTIVAL
Saint John, NB
September 24, noon to 4 p.m.
Join fellow agriculturalists, locavores and green thumbs to peruse fresh end-of-summer produce and share passions and knowledge about local and organic practices in southern NB.

ORGANIC FOOD FAIR
Moncton, NB
September 16, noon to 5 p.m.
Information session at Sobeys concerning the specifics behind organic foods. Plus food demos, games and prizes.

OPINION

Social licence: public trust in Canada's organic food system

Tia Loftsgard
Executive Director, Canada Organic Trade Association

When I first joined the Canada Organic Trade Association as the incoming executive director earlier this year, I came across a term I was unfamiliar with even after my 20-year engagement in the fair trade and organic movement: social licence.

This term – together with 'public trust' – dominated conversations at national agriculture consultation meetings, and I wondered what COTA or the organic sector could contribute to the topic. Then I learned that 'social licence' simply means earning the public's acceptance. I also learned that trust in the Canadian agriculture and food system is at an all-time low. Yet at the same time, all indicators from the organic industry point to the opposite – organic production and sales have never been stronger, more in demand and more trusted in Canada.

So what is prompting conventional agriculture stakeholders to rally and team up for combating low public trust?

Independent research commissioned by the Centre for Food Integrity shows that 54 per cent of Canadians are very concerned about food safety, and 43 per cent are concerned about the humane treatment of animals (up 9 and 10 per cent respectively since 2012).

Organic food production, however, has not lost the trust of Canadian consumers nor its trade partners. Canada is now the fifth largest organic market in the world and has organic equivalency agreements in place with over 90 per cent of Canada's trading partners.

An Ipsos Reid poll conducted this June shows that 56 per cent of Canadians are purchasing organic weekly, and more farms are transitioning to organic production to keep up with local and international demand.

Is organic a more resilient way of doing business due to its transparency, oversight and standards that mesh well with the expectations of Canadians and demand for more sustainable practices? Despite rising food prices in Canada, 72 per cent of organic consumers continue to purchase the same amount of organic as last year, and 14 per cent are purchasing even more. This supports the assumption that consumers share the value system organic stands for and are choosing to invest in the welfare of animals and the environment, as well as their own health.

And how has the organic sector earned the trust it enjoys? Organic started as a voluntary standard, complete with annual and unannounced inspections and reporting to ensure compliance with traceability, the environment and animal-friendly elements that are part of the organic standards today. When the Canadian government's oversight came into play in 2009, verification bodies were put in place to oversee the certifiers' performance in conducting quality audits and having proper procedures in place. All these measures helped to ensure that international trading partners could accept our version of organic as equivalent to their standards.

In addition, all the hard work and dedication of farmers growing crops without pesticides and GMOs and ensuring humane treatment of animals and care for the soil has brought results in the form of the support of local consumers. The organic importers and processors' dedication to sourcing organic – which requires more time and effort – is being rewarded with robust consumer demand. Grassroots advocates and educators' passion to teach consumers about the triple bottom line benefits of organic have played a critical role to the success of Canada's organic sector.

The organic sector continues to evolve and grow in Canada. It is important to protect the social licence it has earned to date – to never take for granted the need to be open, transparent and participatory, and continue to build awareness of the Canada Organic logo and what it stands for. Organic Week is a celebration of these efforts as we collectively work together to maintain the trust in organic in Canada.

FROM PAGE 1

Millennials: shopping guided by values

"Organic food has been an ever-growing segment of our sales, especially in the past three to five years," says Kathlyne Ross, vice-president of product development and innovation for the company, which owns Loblaws, Fortinos, Provigo and other retail banners across Canada.

"And what has really driven our program forward in recent years is the millennial consumer because this is the organic consumer," says Ms. Ross.

"This is the generation that wants transparency – they want to know what goes into their food and where their food comes from," she says. "The rigorous process for organic certification inspires their trust and gives them the transparency they're looking for."

When Loblaw started its organic line 15 years ago, fresh fruits and vegetables dominated. Over the years the company expanded into other areas, such as organic baby food, dairy products, and meat and fish.

Today, PC Organics includes 350 products, and the company is making further expansion a strategic business priority.

"As millennials move into parenting roles, they are looking for a broad range of products to feed their young families," explains Ms. Ross, who says organic consumers want to be able to buy all the pantry staples available to the conventional consumer.

As millennials move into parenting roles, they are looking for a broad range of healthy products for their young families. ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

"A lot of these consumers want to make their own food at home and want natural, healthy ingredients across all categories," she says. For example, the company has steadily expanded options for organic flour, cereals and alternative grains high in protein and fibre. Recent additions include organic hemp hearts and quinoa.

At the same time, she says, millennial parents are "time-starved, like all of us" and looking for convenience products. To meet these needs, the retailer is expanding its line of frozen organic fruits and vegetables and is developing a line of complete meal options, which will launch next year.

ORGANIC WEEK

STAY INVOLVED

See **organicweek.ca** for initiatives in your area showcased during National Organic Week.

POWER FOODS 101: SEMINAR WITH DR. JOËL
Ottawa, ON
September 21, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Dr. Joël is at Rainbow Foods to talk about her new book Power Foods 101. Copies will be available for purchase with proceeds going to the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation. Pre-register at customer service.

ORGANIC - FROM SEED TO PLATE
Toronto, ON
September 22
Many people have a general idea that eating organic is good for their health and the environment, but what does certification in the organic food chain really entail? Come meet a member of The Big Carrot's very own standards team to learn about the organic advantage.

INTERVIEW

Combining organic food with a family meal routine

Q&A with Desiree Nielsen, Registered dietitian and nutrition consultant at Nature's Path Organics

What food considerations should parents be aware of?
Children's bodies are experiencing a rate of growth that makes them more susceptible to changes in nutrition and environmental exposures. Providing a healthy, whole foods diet will always be the first priority, and if parents are concerned about additives and pesticide exposure, organic is a good way to go. Choosing organic food helps to avoid additives like artificial preservatives and colours. And research shows that when children eat an organic diet, the amount of pesticide clearance in their body drops dramatically after just a few days.

Desiree Nielsen encourages her family to be curious about food, and firmly says no to packing dunking cookies for her son's lunch. SUPPLIED

Another benefit of eating organic food is that it helps kids appreciate natural variations in flavour and texture in their food. No day-glo colours or 'not possible in nature' flavours!

What advice do you have for parents whose kids are picky eaters?
Talking to your kids about the joy of eating a variety of different – a.k.a. 'not boring' – foods will be more effective than simply telling them to eat their broccoli because it's good for them. It's more fun to be curious than dismissive about food. In our house, we often talk about the whole world of foods and flavours available to us. Going deeper into the function of food can also help. One study famously found that serving kids 'laser vision carrots' as opposed to just 'carrots' helped them eat more.

And when introducing new foods, work them into favourite meals – such as adding spinach to lasagna or lentils to tacos – since this also increases acceptance.

Can you share some tips for packing nutritious lunches that have worked for you as a busy mother?
Our fridge and pantry are stocked with organic options that are approved by the kids (tasty), mom (organic) and school (peanut-free). It can be tough for parents when their kids see their peers' lunches and don't accept that they can't have those kinds of goodies and junk food too. As a dietitian, I have to navigate very carefully why I won't put dunking cookies in my son's lunch.

I will often ask my son to make choices based on options I provide. For example, would he like a wrap or a sandwich? An apple or a plum? Cheese or SunButter? I believe it's important kids get some things that they'll view as treats, but that you as a parent feel good about giving them. It could be their favourite fruit, trail mix or organic granola bar.

I also try to pack lunches when I make or clear up dinner since I find this task easier to navigate when I'm not under time pressure.

How do you build healthy routines and engage your kids in meal planning?
Having a routine is key since children respond well to structure around food, such as family meal times. We also know that getting kids involved in food preparation and selection helps to boost their intake. If you have a garden – or even just room for a pot – let your kids grow something. Take your kids grocery shopping and challenge them to select one new fruit or vegetable each week.

CHOICES

Healthy choices for people on the go

The growing awareness about the role that food and nutrition play in supporting overall health and wellness is influencing Canadians' food choices. When they go shopping, they take a close look at ingredient lists and want to know how their food is produced.

This interest is evident in the number of queries that reach organic dairy processor Organic Meadow, says Michelle Schmidt, the company's marketing manager. "On average, we receive about 15 to 20 questions from consumers per week, and a lot of them focus on what happens at the farm gate. We also receive a lot of feedback from parents who are concerned about pesticides and GMOs."

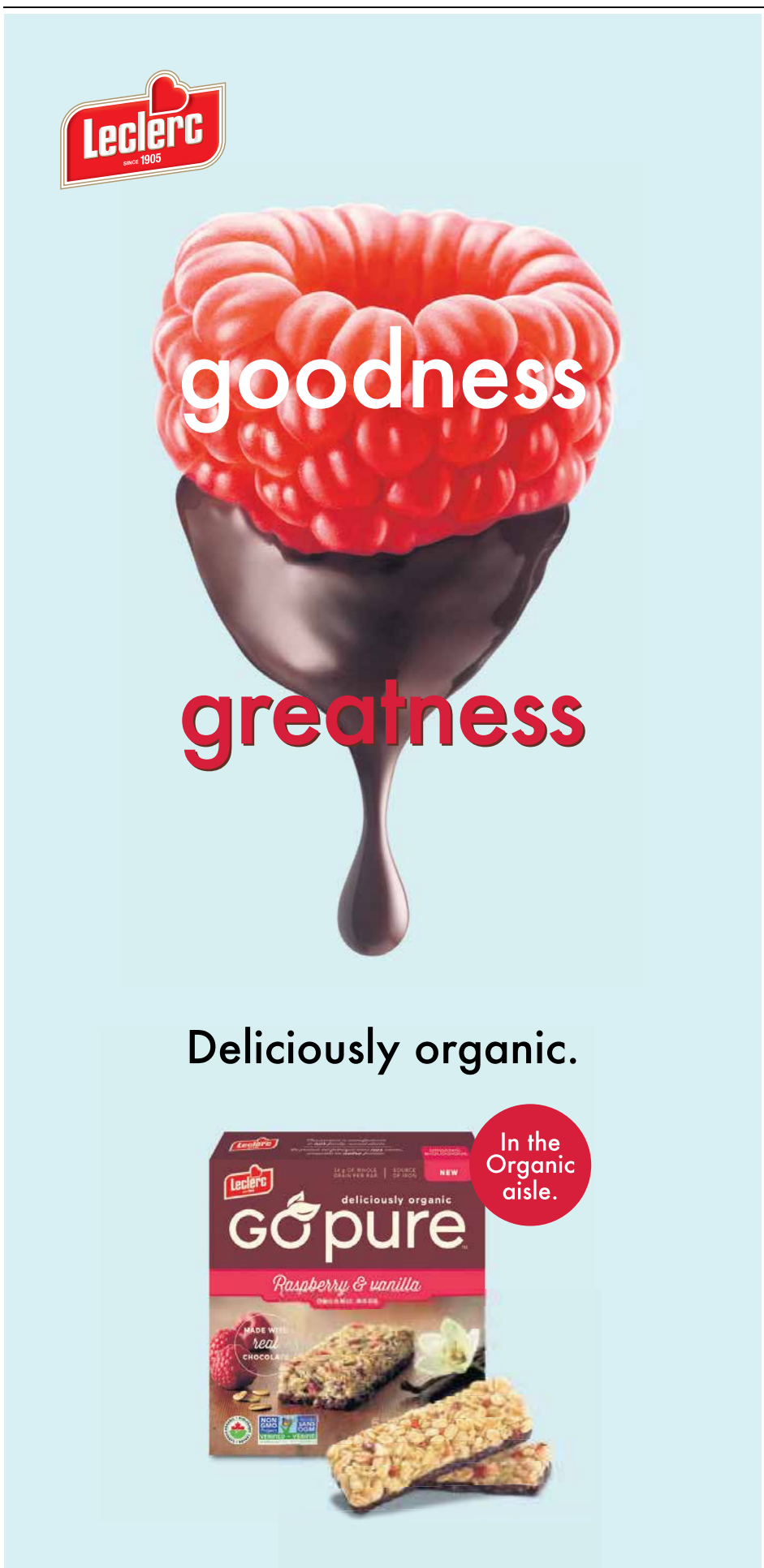
Ms. Schmidt welcomes this consumer engagement and is happy to report that according to the Canada Organic standards, all certified organic dairy products are non-GMO and free of artificial colours, flavours and preservatives. "This really impacts the ingredient selection and the processing methods we use," she explains. "In addition, we have a number of animal welfare-related requirements. The animals are pasture fed or grass fed, which means that the cows have access to pasture every day in season with a high percentage of their diet derived from organic forage."

According to Canada's organic standards, cows have to have access to pasture. ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Canadians value the rigorous, consistent and transparent standards of the organic food industry. They are, essentially, voting with their wallets, says Ms. Schmidt. Six in 10 Canadians purchase organic food on a weekly basis.

Yet this increasing market reach also brings higher consumer expectations, she adds. "Canadians want their favourite organic products, but they also expect convenient options that work for their busy lifestyles. They want something they can have on the go or put in their kids' lunchboxes."

Organic Meadow is responding to this consumer demand this fall with the launch of Canada's only single-serve organic shelf-stable milk that doesn't require refrigeration until opening. Ms. Schmidt welcomes this lunchbox-worthy product not only as a representative of her company, but also as the mother of a new kindergartner. "This makes it easier to integrate organic into our everyday life," she says.



Visit **globeandmail.com/adv/organicweek**

CARROTFEST AT THE EVERDALE ORGANIC FARM
Toronto, ON
September 18, noon to 6 p.m.
Trip from The Big Carrot to Everdale Organic Farm for Carrotfest. There are farm tours, animal tours, crafts, demonstrations and lunch. Sign up at The Big Carrot customer service ($20/adult; $10/child under 12). More info at everdale.org.

ORGANIC OKANAGAN FESTIVAL / PANEL ON TRANSITION
Summerhill Winery, Kelowna, BC
September 25, 1 p.m.
The theme of the festival's 11th year is Transition to an Organic Future, and COABC is hosting a discussion panel moderated by Bob McCoubrey. Join us for a day of delicious organic food and nourishing conversation about the future of BC's thriving organic sector.

POLICY

What introducing GMO crops means for Canadian farmers

While much of the consumer-facing discussion about genetically modified organism (GMO) crops focuses on potential health impacts, the organic community has additional urgent concerns about the risks GMOs pose for organic food production and the environment.

Tia Loftsgard, executive director of the Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA), says both organic and conventional farmers wishing to grow non-GMO crops face the threat of cross-contamination when GMOs are introduced. "We believe a moratorium on the use of GMOs in agriculture should be called while independent research and long-term studies are conducted in Canada," she adds.

> "We believe a moratorium on the use of GMOs in agriculture should be called while independent research and long-term studies are conducted in Canada."
>
> **Tia Loftsgard**
> is executive director of the Canada Organic Trade Association

Helen Long, president of the Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA), also cautions, "In addition to awareness about the environmental and potential long-term, unknown health risks of consuming GMOs, we need to pay attention to the economic risk posed to the small to mid-sized Canadian businesses and farms that are devoted to providing certified organic food across the country. We believe Canadians should understand that organic foods have been grown and handled according to strict procedures without the use of GMOs."

An issue of immediate concern is the release of GMO alfalfa earlier this year, says Ms. Loftsgard. "This definitely affects the largest dairy-producing provinces in Canada – Ontario and Quebec – which are producing 65 per cent of the Canadian organic milk supply and are home to 84 per cent of the organic dairy farms in the country, since alfalfa is commonly used in conventional and organic agriculture as feed for livestock.

"Contamination of organic crops is unavoidable due to the biological nature of this perennial plant," she says. Alfalfa's genetically altered traits are contained in the pollen, which is transported by bees to sometimes up to 12 kilometres. In addition to pollen-mediated gene flow, cross-contamination can occur through seed escape, and Ms. Loftsgard adds, "There is no coexistence possible between GMO, organic and conventional alfalfa."

Detecting GMOs at a certified organic operation has serious consequences, resulting in loss of certification and financial penalties, says Ms. Loftsgard. "The use of GMOs is prohibited during the production and processing of certified organic products," she explains. "Organic farmers cannot use genetically modified seed and must have procedures in place that prevent GMO drift from adjacent farms. Organic processors need to have practices in place to separate organic ingredients and products from non-organic – potentially GMO – farms during receiving, processing, storage and shipping."

The introduction of GMO crops can make organic farmers, conventional farmers opting for non-GMO crops and the natural environment vulnerable to the risk of contamination. ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

A limited quantity of GMO alfalfa was released this spring in Ontario and Quebec, and conventional and organic producers across the country are raising concerns about their crops and livelihood. In Alberta, for example, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) passed a resolution to work with different levels of government and companies "to prevent the introduction of [GMO] alfalfa to Alberta until there is a marketplace and consumer acceptance in Alberta's export markets, including China, Japan, the European Union and the Middle East."

The resolution recognizes that a number of Alberta's exports, including forage seed, hay, feed supplements and alfalfa sprouts for human consumption, are going to countries that forbid the import of GMO alfalfa products. Ms. Loftsgard says the AAMDC is calling the federal government to task for not doing "a quantified government economic impact assessment on the effects of GMO alfalfa on Canadian export markets."

COTA advocates for a robust regulatory framework for federal oversight – which takes economic, environmental and human health impacts into account, says Ms. Loftsgard, who believes it has to be based on "transparent, peer-reviewed risk assessment of long-term data."

It is not only the organic community harbouring concerns about GMOs, adds Ms. Loftsgard. "GMO crops are not easily contained once released into the environment. There is a deep concern for potential contamination of not only organic and non-GMO crops, but also of the natural environment."

Raising consumer awareness about the risks GMO crops pose for organic farmers and producers is important, says Ms. Long. "At CHFA, we are focused on educating Canadians on the importance of informed choice while raising awareness on the benefits of choosing organic."

GMO LABELLING

What is in our food?

The reach and prevalence of genetically modified organism (GMO) food is increasing across the globe, and more and more consumers are asking for a clear indication about which products contain GMOs.

In more than 60 countries around the world, including Australia, Japan and all the countries in the European Union, there are significant restrictions or outright bans on the production and sale of products containing GMO ingredients. The Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA) encourages the Canadian government to join the other leading countries in giving consumers the right to make an informed choice via mandatory labelling.

The definition of genetically modified organisms (GMO) or genetic engineering (GE) varies between government departments and from country to country, which creates domestic confusion and international trade concerns. Government standards of a broadly accepted definition – which does not include traditional selective breeding as genetic modification – can alleviate consumer, government and industry confusion, according to COTA.

"We support the consumer's right to know, and to choose foods, fibre and personal care products based on environmental, personal health, religious, dietary or other preferences," says Tia Loftsgard, COTA's executive director. "Labelling of GE seed, products grown from GE seed or stock, or made with ingredients and byproducts of GE crops is necessary for farmer, supply chain and consumer choice."

Go organic.

Live life to the fullest. The Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA) is a proud partner of Organic Week, helping to raise awareness and educate Canadians on the benefits of organics and the *Organic Products Regulations*.

Celebrate Organic Week
September 17 to 25

chfa®
Voice of the Natural Health Industry
La voix de l'industrie de la santé naturelle

Visit **chfa**.ca to learn more. #OrganicWeek

ORGANIC WEEK

GET CREATIVE
Think about starting your own National Organic Week event. Visit **organicweek.ca** for ideas.

13TH ANNUAL ORGANIC HARVEST MEAL
Charlottetown, PE
September 25, 6 p.m.
Join the PEI Certified Organic Producers Cooperative at the Confederation Centre of the Arts for this celebration, featuring local farmers, historian Alan Buchanan, music by the Salt Licks, chefs Ilona Daniel, Miguel Cervantes and Kathy Stewart.

TOMATO FEST
North Wiltshire, PE
September 18
Heart Beet Organics is hosting the second annual Tomato Fest, with fresh tomatoes, soups, salsas, salads (created by chef Morgan Palmer). Plus beer from Barnone Brewery and bread from Angel Wendt from Weedy Gardens.

AQUACULTURE

Raising seafood with minimal environmental impact

Imagine raising seafood in a way that is in harmony with nature and that supports coastal ecosystems rather than depleting them. That's the objective for organic farmed seafood, say Domenic Porporo and Robert Sloan, who travel around the world in search of the clean and tasty products their North American customers appreciate.

In organic shrimp farming, for example, the water that is discharged after the growing cycle is cleaner than the water at the start, since it gets enriched with nutrients and microorganisms that feed the shrimp and, at the same time, break down the shrimp's waste, explains Mr. Porporo, president and owner of DOM International Limited, an import/export company specializing in sustainable and organic seafood.

This minimal environmental impact differentiates organic operations from conventional ones, says Mr. Sloan, the company's vice-president of finance, sales and marketing. The product is also different, he adds. "In organic seafood, the flavour is cleaner, the flesh is firmer and lasts longer because it is of higher quality to begin with."

> "In organic seafood, the flavour is cleaner, the flesh is firmer and lasts longer because it is of higher quality to begin with."
>
> **Robert Sloan**
> is vice-president of finance, sales and marketing at DOM International Limited

Organically farmed salmon, for example, swim more than in conventional operations. Since there is no overcrowding, they are healthier with fewer issues like viruses and parasites.

And that means a healthier product for the consumer. "You can tell the difference in organic seafood," says Mr. Porporo. "Once you taste it and compare it to conventional [seafood], you know it's worth the premium."

DOM International Limited, which has been offering organic salmon for 15 years, has seen big changes since then. Originally, the company's typical customer was a high-end restaurant looking to distinguish itself from competitors. Today, even big-box retailers like Costco carry organic salmon. "Sales have grown tremendously because a lot of people want to make sure they give their family a clean and healthy product," says Mr. Porporo. "They see organic as a mark of quality. They know that things are done differently and include as many best practices as possible."

Among the organic products DOM International Limited offers are salmon, smoked salmon, shrimp and mussels. But do Canadian consumers have to look abroad for all organic seafood?

Justin Henry, spokesperson for the Pacific Organic Seafood Association and general manager of Northern Divine Aquafarms, says growing consumer demand is also driving local production. Canadian organic seafood products include salmon, trout, mussels and seaweed. And Mr. Henry's company produces certified organic sturgeon and caviar.

Organic seafood is in demand in the domestic as well as global markets, and he believes that Canadian producers are aware of the opportunities, and they are responding. "But organic seafood requires a long-term commitment," says Mr. Henry. He adds that Canadian producers have to conform to the Canadian Organic Aquaculture Standard that was released in 2012. "The standard was developed for equivalency with the Canadian Organic Agriculture Standard, the E.U. standard and the U.S. draft standard," he says. "It involves the general principles of protecting the environment and caring for the welfare of the fish, and producing the safest, most nutritious and highest quality food for the dinner table."

In organic salmon farms, the fish make up only a small percentage of the total volume, allowing for lots of room to swim. ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

FROZEN FOODS

Organic vegetables from Canadian fields

The rapid growth of the market for Canadian organic food – which has tripled in size to $4.7-billion a year – has made it hard for local growers and producers to keep pace.

"There are customers in Canada we can't supply because we just don't have the (domestic) product. Demand exceeds supply for the Canadian market," says Gary Lloyd, co-owner of Green Organic Vegetables Inc., one of Canada's largest frozen organic vegetable producers.

Green Organic started in 2000, initially supplying the Canadian market with frozen organic vegetables – peas, corn, broccoli, cauliflower and edamame among others – from its growers in China.

But Canadians have again and again expressed that they are looking for options of locally produced organic food, and they want to support Canadian farmers, he says. Green Organic heard the call and now proudly sources between 65 and 70 per cent of its vegetables from farmers in Ontario.

The company recognizes that obstacles remain to fully sourcing organic produce from Canada, he says. For conventional farmers, it's all about return per acre, and waiting three years for farmland to be certified pesticide-free can be costly. Green Organic has made progress by persuading some Ontario farmers that they are "doing the right thing" by supplying organic vegetables from Canadian fields.

Also persuasive is Green Organic's role in providing farmers with a steady, year-round income for pledging part of their production to frozen processing.

"We are proud of what we have done," says Mr. Lloyd, adding the company will build on its Canadian sourcing in the years to come. "With Green Organic frozen foods, Canadians are able to buy year-round at very steady, fair prices. And they know the quality they bought today will be the same tomorrow."

Visit **globeandmail.com/adv/organicweek**

CINÉ-BIO-VINO-GRANO
Rimouski, QC
September 23, 5 p.m.
Coop Alina in partnership with Sang Royal presents an open-air screening of the documentary Campesinos... la terre va nous rester.

INTERESTED IN ORGANIC FARMING?
Farmington, BC
September 24, 1:30 p.m.
An information meeting by the Peace River Organic Producers Association for anyone interested in learning more about organic grain, vegetable and livestock farming.

PLANTING SEEDS
Regina, SK
September 23, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Organic Connections hosts the Planting Seeds event with over 120 middle school students coming to the Saskatchewan Science Centre to learn about the importance of organic food.

Organic grains fetch higher prices than their non-organic counterparts, and Prairie farmers can now count on support from the Prairie Organic Grain Initiative if they are interested in switching to organic methods. ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

DEMAND

Market growth presents opportunities and challenges

The market for organic food in Canada has grown rapidly over the past decade, with 56 per cent of Canadians now buying organic products regularly, according to a recent consumer study. The growing appetite for organics directly impacts farmers and food producers: while there is potential for expanding the range of organic product options, the demand for locally grown organic ingredients can outstrip the supply.

Eating organic is more than a trend – it's a system of personal values that is progressively becoming a way of life for many around the planet, says Josianne Landry, brand manager for Leclerc. "As many retailers are increasing their product offerings, organic is becoming more accessible than ever. Eating organic is no longer a choice for only the wealthy or the flower child," she explains. "We are looking to being ahead of the curve on many global wellness movements, so offering an organic range of products like Go Pure to our consumers was just the natural next step for Leclerc."

Leclerc's Go Pure products come out of the conviction that consumers looking for organic options shouldn't have to compromise on taste, says Ms. Landry. She adds that the company's know-how – developed over the 111 years the family business has been in existence – came to bear on the R&D process for its organic offerings. "The products are quite indulgent. Plus, they happen to be organic.

"Ingredient supply is fully integrated into the R&D process: we have to make sure certified organic ingredients are available for the short- and long-term supply," Ms. Landry explains. "As the demand for organic product grows, the agricultural system will need to adapt to meet the demand. That is one of the biggest challenges facing the industry."

Increasing the potential for organic output among Canada's Prairie grain farmers is the objective of the Prairie Organic Grain Initiative, a coalition of organic grain buyers, processors, certification bodies and major organic brands led by Organic Alberta, SaskOrganics and Manitoba Organic Alliance.

Organic grains fetch higher prices than their non-organic counterparts, yet many risk-averse Canadian farmers have been reluctant to make the transition.

"The first thing the Prairie Organic Grain Initiative did was hire a marketing company that did a couple of focus groups of farmers and narrowed down the (target farmer) profile," said Laura Telford, Manitoba Agriculture's organic sector development specialist. "They decided to focus on young farmers or what we call the business man or woman farmer, who tended to be less than 40 years old, which is rare in Prairie farming circles."

After exploring farmers' hopes and fears – they fret about controlling weeds and the initial cost of cultivating pesticide-free fields – the coalition teamed up with the marketing company to work out messages that would prompt farmers to abandon bagged fertilizers in favour of "green manure" and environmentally friendly weed control.

"This was the first time this has been done in Canada, where it was actually figured out what messages would work for farmers," she says.

Messages such as 'You can do it,' 'You'll make money' and 'We'll guide you' form the kernel of a campaign that reaches out to farmers at agricultural conferences, employs traditional media like Western Producer to deliver the transition message, and encourages farmers to talk it up among themselves in a community where proven money-making techniques "spread like wildfire," says Ms. Telford.

To date, organic farmers have learned mainly through self-education and "a lot of luck," said Ms. Telford. Now, they can count on support such as agronomists who will come on site to test their farm soils and advise them how to use green manure and other methods to increase organic yields.

So far, the campaign is working, says Ms. Telford, who adds that increasing the number of organic farmers and their output will ultimately reduce the volatility of what is a notoriously cyclical sector.

FOOD SPOTLIGHT

In praise of pulses

It's time to spill the beans on pulses, which entered the limelight when the United Nations declared 2016 the "Year of the Pulse." And why do pulses, or beans, deserve such an honour?

They are economical and easy to grow, highly nutritious and easily available. The hundreds of types and many varieties of pulses are often considered affordable food for the less fortunate – they are also full of protein and fibre, low in fat, and contain important vitamins and minerals: folic acid, iron, potassium and zinc.

As a low-carbon source of protein, pulses are highly regarded in the organic community, including organic food manufacturer Eden Foods, which offers a wide range of pulse products.

Growing pulses is also considered beneficial to the environment as they have nitrogen-fixing properties, which contribute to increasing soil fertility. They can also be useful as transitional crops toward organic production.

ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

LIKE ANY HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP
ORGANIC GETS BETTER
THE MORE YOU GET TO KNOW IT
Now that's something to celebrate!

Organic Week
September 17-25
2016

Organic –it's more than just not using synthetic pesticides and genetic engineering (GMOs). It's building healthy soil, protecting the environment, treating animals well, and many other things you can't test.

Above all, organic is delicious, healthy food for you and your family.

CANADA ORGANIC • BIOLOGIQUE CANADA

organicweek.ca

ORGANIC WEEK WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR NATIONAL SPONSORS:

NATIONAL CHAMPION SPONSORS

NATIONAL LEADER SPONSORS

Organic Week is supported by regional partners, and organized by Canadian Organic Growers, the Canada Organic Trade Association, and the Canadian Health Food Association

Organics™

WHEN IT COMES TO ORGANICS, WE PRODUCE MORE THAN JUST PRODUCE.

From produce to the grocery aisles to the frozen section, see what you've been missing with over 300 unique PC® Organics products.

pc.ca/organics

CRAVE MORE®

®/™Loblaws Inc. ©2016 Loblaws Inc.