



Grow Ontario

a provincial
agri-food
strategy





A Message from the Minister

Ontario is fortunate to have a rich and diverse agri-food sector. It ranges from the grain fields of Huron and Bruce counties to pork farmers in Perth and Wellington, poultry farmers across southwestern Ontario, beef and dairy producers in northern and eastern Ontario, and to fruit and vegetable growers in Essex, the Holland Marsh and Niagara.

We have the capability and economic might to support the good things grown and made in Ontario – which is why I am proud to present **Grow Ontario**, a provincial agri-food strategy.

Over the past few years, external challenges have tested the supply chains that we depended on and broadened everyone’s understanding of how our food gets from farm to fork. From supply managed sectors like dairy and poultry, to the bread baked with grains grown on the rich and fertile lands across the province, to a variety of protein sources, our food supply system is bountiful and complex.

Grow Ontario includes our vision for the future of the province’s food supply chain and we do not take its strength and stability for granted.

This strategy is based on our government’s belief in the importance of:

- promoting Ontario products, food and technology, supporting our agri-food sector,
- taking action to be a world leader in research and innovation, and
- celebrating all the hardworking people who have secured great jobs throughout the supply chain.

Grow Ontario was informed by the insights of dedicated farmers, Indigenous representatives, food sector leaders and businesses, including those who attended the Ontario Food Summit, as well as research roundtables and the Innovation Summit.

To ensure that our food supply system continues to be responsible and trusted, competitive on the world stage as well as a driver for economic growth in Ontario, it is important that we have an overarching plan that guides our actions in the years ahead.

Our strategy presents ambitious, tangible actions and measurable targets that will help us to monitor our progress on our commitment to ensure that our province’s powerhouse agri-food sector continues to help **Grow Ontario**.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa M. Thompson".

Lisa M. Thompson
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

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Grow Ontario – a provincial agri-food strategy

Ontario's agri-food sector is and always will be a cornerstone of our thriving economy. Ontario's farmers, food processors, grocers, transporters, and every partner along the agri-food supply chain generate \$47 billion in provincial gross domestic product (GDP), and employed one in ten Ontarians in 2021. It is critical that we maintain and grow this sector to ensure a stable, safe, high-quality, food supply and fuel sustainable economic growth.

Grow Ontario is our plan to strengthen the agri-food sector, fuel economic growth, ensure an efficient, reliable, and responsive food supply and address ongoing agri-food sector vulnerabilities through new innovations.

This strategy outlines actions to build consumer confidence, support farmers and processors, increase yields, promote Ontario-grown food, grow the agri-food talent pool, and strengthen the food supply chain – while increasing the commercialization and adoption of innovative new technologies and practices that enhance competitiveness, add productivity, create economic growth, and strengthen the sector.

Grow Ontario outlines three key priorities:

1.

**Strengthen Agri-food
Supply Chain Stability**

2.

**Increase Agri-food
Technology and Adoption**

3.

**Attract and Grow Ontario's
Agri-food Talent**

Grow Ontario provides a plan to enhance Ontario's food supply chain and address vulnerabilities, with research and adoption of innovative new technologies and practices that enhance competitiveness. These actions will help to build consumer confidence and reinforce Ontario's position as the food leader in Canada.

Our Vision: Together, as a Comprehensive Food Supply Chain

We will instill pride and trust in the quality and quantity of food and agricultural products produced in Ontario, grown on the foundation of a competitive and innovative agri-food industry that serves the needs of Ontarians, Canadians and the world.

Ontario's Agri-Food Sector – Facts and Figures

Ontario's agri-food sector is the largest and most diverse in Canada. It is an important economic driver for the province and Canada, and a significant jurisdiction internationally. Ontario accounts for \$14.5 billion, or 41.9% of Canada's contribution to the national food and beverage GDP, and also represents the third largest contributor of farm cash receipts in the country in 2021.

750,000+

ONTARIANS

or 1-in-10 of the province's labour force, are employed throughout the agri-food supply chain.



48,346

ONTARIO FARMS

Producing over 200 commodities.



Ontario's agri-food sector comprises primary agriculture, food and beverage processing and manufacturing, wholesale, retail and food services.

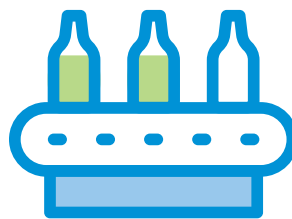
Agri-food contributes

\$47 billion

TO ONTARIO GDP

(6.4% of the province's total GDP)

\$14.5 billion
IN FOOD PROCESSING



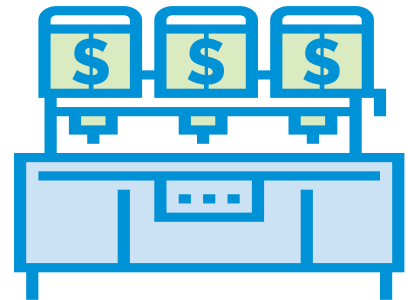
\$19.6 billion
IN AGRI-FOOD EXPORTS



\$52 billion

IN MANUFACTURING SALES

Ontario's food and beverage manufacturing sector is one of the largest in North America, comprising 4,675 businesses.



Source: 2021 OMAFRA calculations and Statistics Canada

Good Things Grow in Ontario: Did You Know?

3,793

Dairy farmers

2,437

Pork farmers

1,562

Field vegetable farms

2,763

Chicken farmers

2,792

Sheep farmers

18,194

Grain and oilseed farms

6,466

Egg farmers

250

Dairy goat farmers

1,672

Greenhouse vegetables, nursery and floriculture farms

721

Turkey farmers

1,211

Fruit and tree-nut farms

12,730

Beef farmers



Source: 2021 OMAFRA calculations and Statistics Canada



Chapter One: Strengthen Agri-food Supply Chain Stability

Ontario farmers are the root of a strong and successful food supply chain. Without their passion, commitment, and stewardship, we would not have nutritious food grown and processed close to home throughout Ontario. From grains and oilseeds – to proteins – to VQA wines, to organics, Ontario products are trusted and recognized around the world for their quality and freshness. You can find Ontario products at the grocery store, in farmers markets, at general stores, and on farms, reaffirming that good food is grown in Ontario.

The government recognizes the significant economic benefits of increasing the consumption of made-in-Ontario food, and aims to increase Ontario food consumption and build capacity for increased primary and processing production, while ensuring that the growth has local expertise as well as access to technology and equipment.

Goals

By 2032, Ontario's goal is to increase:

- the consumption of food grown and prepared in Ontario by 30%.
- the production of food grown and prepared in Ontario by 30%.
- Ontario's food and beverage manufacturing GDP by 10%.
- Ontario's agri-food exports 8% annually.

Ontario is committed to addressing processing capacity shortages through the \$25 million [Strategic Agri-Food Processing Fund](#), enabling farmers and processors to grow their businesses.

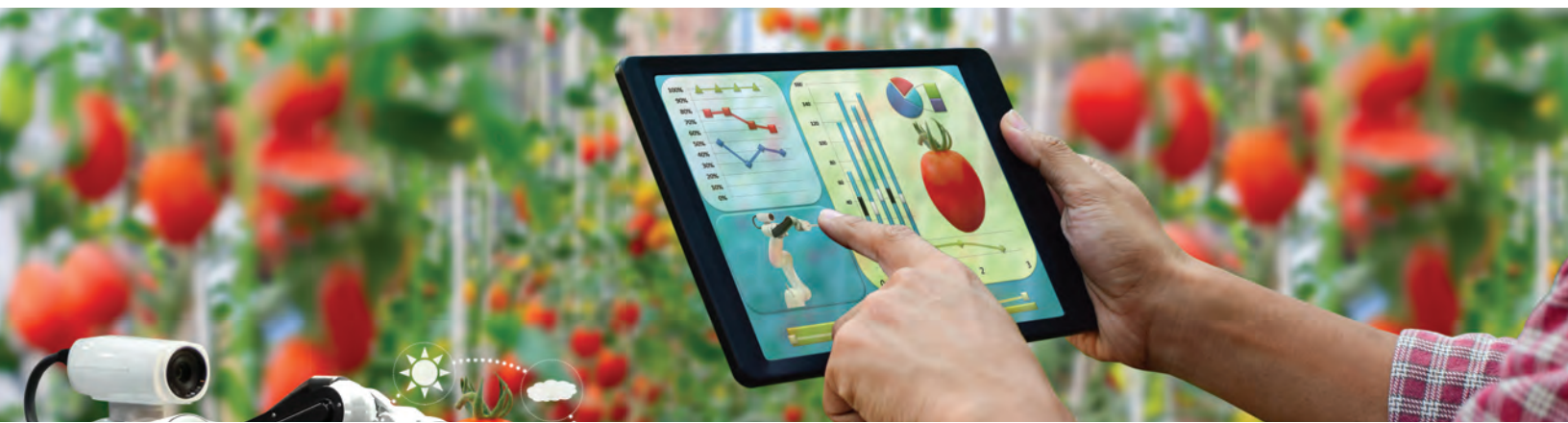


Actions

- Partner with Supply Ontario to promote, track and report Ontario agri-food procurement by Broader Public Sector (BPS) Institutions.
- Increase Foodland Ontario promotion to support Ontario production and food available for Ontarians.
- Continue to improve service standards and reduce red tape for agri-food businesses by modernizing licensing processes with accessible, online application forms and electronic payments, such as the new portal at Ontario.ca that makes it easier for farmers and businesses to obtain licences, certifications and permits to do business in Ontario.
- Through the Food Security and Supply Chain Fund (FSSCF), work with industry and invest \$10 million in measures to help strengthen the agri-food supply chain such as risk assessments, increasing warehousing capacity and upgrading inventory software.
- Support organizations and communities undertaking food supply chain initiatives to increase Ontario-grown food for Ontarians.
- Host an annual Food Summit of sector representatives from the agri-food supply chain and formally recognize innovative efforts by organizations in the agri-food sector and rural communities.
- Work with industry and build on the success of the \$25 million Strategic Agri-food Processing Fund to enhance processing capacity in Ontario through investments in major expansions and modernization of food processing facilities.
- Use technology mapping for enhanced analytics integration to better predict and respond to supply chain vulnerabilities.
- Expand investment and create the right economic conditions to expand private investment in food processing.
- Improve drainage infrastructure across the province to ensure farmers have the tools they need to support increased productive capacity and be more resilient to drought and higher intensity rainfall events.
- Promote open trade efforts, increase international and interprovincial market access for Ontario products.
- Partner with commodity groups to strengthen their supply chains through stakeholder proposed solutions.
- Support sector strategy development to address and resolve supply chain challenges.
- Partner with other ministries to expand/target appropriate rural community economic and social infrastructure such as schools, broadband, housing, and transportation to help support strong rural communities and agri-food businesses.
- Establish food inspection excellence for processing in partnership with regulated industries to ensure a safe food supply that supports a growing and diverse population.

Ontario committed \$14.4 million to construct a [new swine centre](#) and \$1.3 million for cutting-edge equipment for the [beef research centre](#) to foster innovation in Ontario's livestock industry.





Chapter Two: Increase Agri-food Innovation and Adoption

Research and innovation are critical to the success of Ontario's agri-food sector. It is through this research and innovation that Ontario's farmers have become the best stewards of the land and the environment and will continue to demonstrate leadership in sustainability. **Grow Ontario** aims to increase the creation and adoption of precision agriculture and innovative technologies to enhance competitiveness, grow market opportunities and strengthen the sector against future disruptions, including environmental.

Goals

- Build and maintain world-class research infrastructure to encourage the use of innovation and enhance the sustainability and profitability of the agri-food sectors.
- Over 250 patents and licences granted through Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs-funded research by 2030.
- Develop innovative technologies to advance uptake of new innovations.
- Ensure the translation and transfer of research into practical solutions for Ontario's agri-food sector, getting the research from the lab onto the farm.
- Grow the market for Ontario innovative technologies domestically and globally.
- Grow the use of data to support business decisions and increase efficiencies within the agri-food sector and value chain.
- Work with sectors to better measure data driven solutions.

Through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, the [Ontario Agri-food Research Initiative](#) program invested \$2.76 million that resulted in new innovative technologies, practices, and solutions to make the sector more competitive and resilient.



Ontario has invested \$22 million through the Agri-Tech Innovation Program to help farmers and processors adopt new and innovative technologies.



- Expand Ontario's Soil Resource Inventory, soil mapping and the Ontario Agricultural Soil Information System (OASIS), enabling farmers to innovate and leverage technology to improve economic and environmental returns.
- Enable opportunities to support and move innovations out of the lab and into the field, process plant and marketplace, such as sponsorship of the Innovation Pavilion at 2022 Canada's Outdoor Farm Show.
- Develop programming to support commercialization, piloting and demonstrations of new technologies and to apply new innovations on farm, in processing facilities and throughout the broader supply chain.
- Conduct inter-ministerial engagement with the Ministry of Infrastructure to advance increased access to broadband in rural and remote areas.
- Utilize agri-food technology adoption working groups to generate input on priority adoption areas for the sector, such as robotics, data digitization/utilization, energy, and labour.

Actions

- Work with the sector to maintain the modern research corridor in Elora at the Ontario Beef Research Centre, the Ontario Dairy Research Centre, and the Ontario Swine Research Centre, and build the new Poultry Research Centre of Excellence, in collaboration with the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario and the University of Guelph.
- Review the *Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act* and bring forward legislative amendments to meet the needs of today's farmer, including innovation and technology as a key area of focus.
- Strengthen the ongoing research program management and, working with Intellectual Property Ontario, increase agricultural intellectual property generation.
- Increase research partnerships and joint investments with the private sector.
- Enhance On Farm Applied Research and Monitoring (ONFARM), improving the efficacy of best management practices for increased productivity, soil health and water quality.
- Modernize and strengthen the agreement between the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the University of Guelph to meet the research and innovation needs of today's agri-food sector.

Ontario is helping to address fertilizer supply challenges by investing \$2 million through the Fertilizer Accelerating Solutions and Technology Challenge, to fast-track made-in-Ontario fertilizer solutions.





Chapter Three: Attract and Grow Ontario's Agri-food Talent

In Ontario, there are over 750,000 workers, both domestic and international, who engage in all aspects of the agri-food supply chain – from farm to fork.

Workforce availability is one of the most pressing barriers facing the sector – it is a significant constraint for both growth and competitiveness and requires direct action. This strategy addresses the critical challenges facing the agri-food sector pertaining to the retention of domestic and international talent and barriers to talent attraction.

Goals

- Increase total agri-food sector employment by 10% by 2032.
- Increase the total number of large animal veterinarians practicing in Ontario.
- Attract and grow Ontario's academic and technical expertise, ensuring flexibility in education and multidisciplinary experiential learning so that students gain the high-tech skills required – including robotics, automation and genomics – to meet the needs of the modern agri-food sector.
- Recruit new talent to undertake world-class research and innovation to meet challenges of the agri-food sector and capitalize on opportunities.
- Make Ontario the destination of choice for International Agri-food Workers.

Ontario is investing \$46 million in agri-food workers, through the Enhanced Agri-Food Workplace Protection Program, to support additional measures to increase the health and safety of workers.



Actions

- Launch an initiative to increase awareness of modern agri-food careers and occupations, expanding target groups by educating, attracting, growing, and retaining agri-food talent, while increasing access to the agri-food sector for equity deserving groups.
- Increase hands-on agri-food sector job training opportunities to attract and equip prospective agri-food job seekers, including mentorship opportunities, recruitment pilot, review current programs and establish responsive training, as well as opportunities for new experiential learning in the areas of innovation advanced technologies in support of the agri-food sector.
- Work with government to leverage existing programming to develop an agri-food labour campaign to increase job entry pathways to the agri-food sector.
- Build on the success of the International Agricultural Worker Welcome Centre and provide continuing information, co-ordination and supports to assist IAWs in Ontario.
- Support efforts to increase veterinary capacity in underserved areas of the province.
- Review the *Veterinarians Act* and bring forward legislative amendments to reflect today's needs of farmers and animal owners.

Through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, the governments of Canada and Ontario have invested [\\$4 million to increase farmers' access to veterinary services](#) when and where they need it.





Summary

Through **Grow Ontario**, we are working to ensure that consumers have access to safe, nutritious, homegrown food, now and in the future, and to ensure long-term, sustainable economic development of the agri-food sector. Informed by agri-food sector leaders and experts, this strategy outlines actions that will strengthen our food supply chain from farm to fork – building a more competitive agri-food sector that can withstand future disruptions and meet changing market needs.

By supporting agri-food research, new technologies and a progressive, technologically savvy labour force, we're enhancing our global competitiveness, creating new growth opportunities, and forging a strong supply chain that will help to bring food to store shelves and farmers markets across the province.

Ontario thanks the entire agri-food sector for its ongoing dedication and commitment to strengthening food supply chain stability and ensuring Ontarians have access to homegrown food and agricultural products every day.

We are listening and we look forward to continuing to work with you.



