

Organic Action Plan

Key Recommendations for a National Organic Action Plan for Canada

Canada requires a policy framework for organic to continue seeing the benefits of organic agriculture to global trade and consumer demand for sustainable, climate-friendly food.

The sector has developed an Organic Action Plan (OAP) to accelerate the growth of the Canadian organic sector while helping the government meet its policy objectives (including economic, trade, climate, sustainability, health, and animal welfare goals) and safeguarding our soils, waterways, climate, and food supply. The plan consists of four (4) key pillars that address actions for growth across the organic value chain.

While the sector can develop many aspects of the OAP by modifying existing Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP) programming, there is a lack of policy directive from the federal government that hinders realizing the comprehensive strategy and its full benefits to Canadian agriculture.

Specific policy frameworks, Acts and laws for organic exist for Canada's 44 organic equivalency trade competitors. We thus call upon the federal government to implement a policy framework which will drive results for organic in Canada.

4 Pillars for Organic Growth

PILLAR 1: Framework and Infrastructure for Growth

The industry plays a pivotal role in the continued growth and prosperity of the sector. It is essential to build capacity in organic institutions and associations at the federal and provincial levels and enshrine a sustainable framework for long-term sustainable growth. The result is a coordinated sector, a balanced supply and demand of organic products, and a self-sustaining financial model.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Recommendation 1.1: Develop and implement a new policy framework for Organic Agriculture Innovation and Growth (e.g Organic Action Plan). Implement ambitious national policies and set national targets for organic growth (increased farm area and operators, organic sales targets, including public procurement and organic export).

Recommendation 1.2: Conduct an interdepartmental ministerial review of national policies for biodiversity, water quality, animal welfare, and public procurement to identify options for inclusion of support measures for organic farming, research and market development in these policies. Also identify policies or programs with unintended negative impacts on organic farmers and organic farm practices or competitiveness.



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Recommendation 1.3: Leverage organic as a tool to meet policy objectives across multiple government departments (AAFC, ECCC, ISED, Health Canada, Global Affairs Canada and Rural Economic Development) with Canada's international commitments in mind (SDG, Biodiversity Protocols, Nationally Determined Contributions).

Recommendation 1.4: Include relevant organic goals and priority OAP policy initiatives for farm transition, innovation and research in Canada's Sustainable Agriculture Strategy.

Recommendation 1.5: Coordinate interdepartmental government task force to establish national targets with input from ECCC, AAFC, Health Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Statistics Canada and CFIA. Consult the Agriculture Federal-Provincial-Territorial (FPT) working group to ensure input and collaboration across provinces and territories.

Recommendation 1.6: Establish a Council for Organic Food and Farming with a direct, mandated advisory function for the Minister and Ministry of Agriculture. The council will assess and develop organic policy recommendations, advise ministries on the impact of policies on the organic sector, promote the integration of organic actions in broader policies, and monitor the implementation of the Organic Action Plan.

Recommendation 1.7: Amend Part 13 of the *Safe Food for Canadians Regulations* (organic chapter) to adopt changes to strengthen the organic brand, address fraud, enable an industry funding mechanism, harmonize organic regulations across all provinces and territories, ensure more transparency of organic operators, and ensure consistency in enforcement practices.

Recommendation 1.8: Provide permanent funding for the Organic Standards review and interpretation of the Canadian Organic Standards.

Recommendation 1.9: Invest in organic sector organizations to further build capacity in the sector to drive policy implementation in the markets and fields.

Recommendation 1.10: Invest in increasing organic-specific staff at AAFC.

Recommendation 1.11: Increase CFIA's organic-specific staff and enhance inspector training to ensure organic integrity and organic fraud are properly addressed to maintain public trust, remain competitive and protect Canada's reputation.

Recommendation 1.12: Increase organic production and market data collection and sharing within government departments and publicly.

PILLAR 2: Accelerate Growth and Innovation in Organic Production

Despite growing demand, Canada is losing ground in organic production. Domestic production (acreage and operators) must increase to meet the growing demand for organic products, reduce increasing reliance on organic imports and support Canada's climate, environmental and economic goals. Policy must address knowledge transfer, financial and technical risks that are barriers to organic farming, de-risk the transition, and invest in farm productivity and profitability.



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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Recommendation 2.1: Establish a fund for Organic Agriculture Innovation and Growth to support activities including “conversion checks (advice)” for farmers interested in organic farming; demonstration and education activities spreading best organic practices; farm-based innovation activities; and research.

Recommendation 2.2: Build the capacity of organic organizations to drive policy implementation and effectively deliver knowledge transfer and training services.

Recommendation 2.3: Dramatically increase access to organic extension for transitioning and organic farmers (e.g. Farm Mentorship Program, train-the-trainer programs, on-farm demonstration, peer-to-peer knowledge transfer).

Recommendation 2.4: Establish and fund new support measures for organic farmers to transition to organic (e.g. national organic transition program).

Recommendation 2.5: Establish a certification cost-share program.

Recommendation 2.6: Adapt existing SCAP programs to remove barriers to participation for farmers practicing organic agriculture (e.g. recognize early adopters, reward stacking of practices, support Indigenous producers).

Recommendation 2.7: Adapt provincial crop insurance and other business risk management programs to consider the unique risks of organic.

Recommendation 2.8: Provide financial recognition for the delivery of ecosystem services on organic land.

PILLAR 3: Stimulate Organic Market Development

Ensuring a stable market for the end-products of organic agriculture is crucial for the long-term sustainability of the sector. A broader strategy involving education, promotion and programs with processors, retailers, food service providers and consumers will increase market access and trade opportunities both domestically and internationally.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Recommendation 3.1: Establish a fund for Organic Market Development, supporting consumer awareness and events; improved market information; value-chain collaboration and the organic sector’s collaboration with retail and food service actors on market development.

Recommendation 3.2: Promote local and regional organic producers and markets to prioritize the growth of Canadian production over imports to meet local demand.

Recommendation 3.3: Promote organic exports.

Recommendation 3.4: Allocate annual funding to promote the Canada Organic Brand and raise consumer awareness on the benefits of organic farming for environment, climate, animal welfare, local economies, and food security. Until 2030, provide 100 percent financing for campaigns to enhance consumer awareness and build trust in the Canada Organic Brand.



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Recommendation 3.5: Launch a national strategy for Organic Public Procurement, to include national goals for 60% organic in public sector kitchens; and financing for educational activities for national and provincial procurement officers and kitchen staff for organic sourcing and transition to more plant-based organic meals.

PILLAR 4: Advance Research with Impact

Research in organic science drives innovation and productivity in sustainable and resilient food production systems, which is transferable to all of agriculture. Investing in organic research enhances a low-input model that contributes to climate change mitigation, promotes soil health and biodiversity, increases farm-gate revenue, and is backed by a certification system that is internationally recognized and regulated.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Recommendation 4.1: Increase funding specifically dedicated to organic research.

Recommendation 4.2: Reduce or waive industry cash matching contributions needed to leverage federal and provincial programs for research in the nascent organic sector for at least five years.

Recommendation 4.3: Mandate the integration of organic into AAFC research priorities.

Recommendation 4.4: Recognize and fund research on priorities identified through the Organic Science Clusters.

Recommendation 4.5: In conjunction with the organic sector, dedicate and certify more research land as organic.

Recommendation 4.6: Supply grants to universities and other research institutions for organic research.

Recommendation 4.7: Continue to invest in Living Labs related to organic farming. Support activities related to the transfer and communication of scientific outcomes to farmers, researchers, extension agents, etc.

Recommendation 4.8: Conduct a comprehensive scientific review of organic research related to improving environmental performance, increasing productivity and farm-gate revenue, and enhancing the resiliency of agriculture to inform policies and programs. Include public and private research, as well as research conducted in other jurisdictions.

