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# COTA Annual Report **2015-2016**

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Dag Falck

# Letter from the President

Dear COTA members,

This has been a busy year for COTA with the departure of our long standing Executive Director and friend, Matthew Holmes (we miss you!), and the welcoming of our new Executive Director, Tia Loftsgard, who is already digging deeply into organic soil (not dirt:) with us (more on the transition in the report).

Throughout this, COTA has remained active on all fronts; Think Organic campaign, OVCRT participation, Organic Standards review, amongst many other initiatives.

I've noticed the increased public and media interest in organic and I think we must safeguard our organic movement as a whole, and our work together. We cannot leave the dreams of the pioneers that started this movement behind. Organic today is a fast growing segment of our national economy, and we need to find ways to enshrine their vision for a better world through organic practices. Organic today is both a mission driven endeavor, and a profit opportunity. We must work towards protecting the harmony between these two realities and ensure that an emphasis on one does not

outweigh or overtake the other. Wouldn't it be cool if the financial success of organic trade is used to further build a better world where farmers, workers, environments and eaters are healthier and all contributing towards a world free of dead zones and man-made climate change? These are our goals and our work at COTA.

My personal mission is to help permanently transition more acres to organic, protecting it from the use of toxic persistent agrichemicals, and leaving it fertile for generations to come. To accomplish this I need the help of COTA and all its members. Let's continue to build a thriving and growing organic world by being successful and profitable businesses.

Keep on doing your great work and produce more organic products so more land will have to be organic! COTA is here to facilitate the coming together of the organic value chain and help all of us achieve our collective goals in building a better organic world.

Organically,  
Dag Falck





Tia Loftsgard

# Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

With pleasure and excitement, I joined COTA mid-March, knowing I had large boots to fill, yet endless enthusiasm and similar work experience needed to lead the path forward in this new role. There was already a great team in place for me to work with. The Board oversaw the hiring process and transition plan with Matthew to ensure that COTA continued to achieve results while the hiring process took place and I transitioned into my new role. It's been a great first few months in my new role with Canada Organic Trade Association, getting to know the members. As a prior COTA member, I am completely astounded by the plethora of achievements that have been undertaken in recent years as well as the breadth of stakeholders and audiences that we interact with. I look forward to moving COTA forward, branching out and doing things COTA has never done before and becoming a lot more interactive with our members in the years to come through task forces, webinars, consultations, events and continued one on one engagements. It will be my pleasure to get to know each one of our member's unique stories and receive guidance on what is important for us to work on in the coming years from our member's perspectives.

As we commenced the new fiscal year for COTA in July, the popularity and uptake of Organic Week activities scheduled for September 17-25th has exploded beyond our wildest dreams. We thought 2015 was incredible and are so enthusiastic about the

support from sponsors, organic brands, regional organic partners and retailers to raise awareness during this pivotal annual campaign.

COTA has plans to increase our staff this fall to include a Member Relations and Fundraiser on our full-time staff. We plan to streamline our communications to ensure that our messaging is clear, that a COTA specific website (separate from our US affiliates website) is developed in the coming months and that we run Task Forces and regular webinars to rally together the organic community and create informed positions for COTA's regulatory work. We will spend more of our time and energy engaging with our stakeholders and members in Canada with a plan to attend all of the Provincial conferences and ensure a coherent action plan for Provincial-Federal activities. Our role in trade missions and the international aspect of our work will continue to hum along nicely after years of developing this strategy. And of course, our work on the regulatory and standards side of things will continue to move the needle forward with events such as Parliament Day and our Policy Conference in October.

I look forward to an exciting year ahead with your support of COTA's important work!

All the best,  
Tia

## Best Wishes to Matthew



Like all things organic, natural evolutions must happen. This was the year that a major evolution occurred at the Canada Organic Trade Association. As Matthew Holmes tenure leading the organization for 9 amazing years of service wrapped up mid-January 2016, we had to bid a hearty farewell. It was obvious that Matt had done a phenomenal job of laying an excellent foundation for the organization setting up the path for the next generation of leadership. Matt had cultivated many relationships with key stakeholders in the industry, whether they be government officials, the Canadian Standards Board, regulators of the standards, farmers, provincial associations or you, our valued organic members whom we serve. Matthew always had an inherent ability to respond and meet a multitude of needs across a wide sector of actors. He could balance running a not-for-profit with a marginal budget and come out shining in the media and government relations on the other side. He was savvy in lobbying and articulate on the needs of the organic sector, he achieved great results and built relationships that continue to payoff. Matthew was a well-rounded individual who we all came to love and appreciate with his diverse skills and fun spirit, yet also driven, determined and outspoken to ensure that the organic industry had a voice. We hold highest regard to Matt for his years of service and great contributions to the Canada Organic Trade Association. Our little hidden secret is that we know where he lives and how to reach him....!

Best Wishes to Matthew from all of us at COTA!







“After many inquiries and attempts to start selling in Japan, the COTA mission really accelerated our plan and added very important market knowledge. We were able to meet with our importer and solidify that relationship; our business with them has been steady and growing. The trade commissioners we met during the mission were incredible. They helped introduce our products to Costco Japan and we have a test listing starting this month at 25 warehouses.”

*Viren Malik, COO of Ethical Bean Coffee*



# Canadian Activities and Presence

Our staff have been present in key organic and food-related events across the country, notably at ACORN's annual conference, Guelph Organic Conference, CHFA East & West, COABC Conference, Okanagan Organic Festival, Colloque Bio pour tous, and the UNFI Table Top Events. COTA also funded two organic experts to attend the Prairie Organics Conference last February. COTA's participation in these Canadian organic conferences and trade shows is at the heart of our commitment to our membership; ensuring that we are getting to know our members personally, and taking the stage to present the latest industry updates.

COTA's mandate to promote organic goes beyond our own sector. This is why our association started to collaborate with mainstream events in 2014, such as SIAL, the North American Innovation Exhibition. Marie-Eve Levert has been representing the organic industry at the SIAL Expert Hub for the past two years; giving one-on-one consulting time to exhibitors and attendees that want to learn more about organic. So far COTA has organized four conference sessions at this trade show on organic best practices, organic market trends and international opportunities.

## COTA's Export Program

COTA export program is built to help organic companies access new markets abroad. COTA has been focusing its efforts on countries that fall under our three major equivalency arrangements; United States, European Union and Japan. Our export program is comprised of two streams: trade mission and trade show. COTA's efforts in the export program has resulted in more than \$12 million in export sales since 2014.

## Trade Missions: Switzerland and Japan

COTA's trade mission's advances attendees' knowledge

on the export market and offers unique business opportunities. In 2015-2016, seven members benefited from two missions. COTA organized the first organic mission in Japan in October 2015. The five-day program included one-on-one meeting with buyers in Osaka and Tokyo, a series of interviews with local media and retailer's tours in both cities.

## COTA's presence at Industry Trade Shows

COTA supported 34 companies to attend three major trade shows last year: NatExpo, Biofach and Natural Products Expo West. COTA organized the first Canadian delegation at NatExpo in Paris in October 2015. This bi-annual trade show is the rendez-vous of the Organic industry in France. Main organic distributors, buyers and importers attended. All the participating companies made business deals on the trade show floor. Due to the success of the delegation, COTA plans to increase its presence at the 2017 edition. Biofach generated almost \$3 million in direct sales on the trade show floor for COTA members. 6 new companies joined the delegation, making the 2016 Biofach edition one of the most dynamic since the beginning of our export program.

## Business Builder Breakfast

For the past 3 years, COTA, in collaboration with provincial partners, have been hosting the Business Builder Breakfast. An educational and networking opportunity for Canadian companies.

Last year, 100% of the participants agreed that the educational session was relevant to their business and 100% would recommend this event to other companies. This is a flagship event for COTA. Stay tuned for the 2017 edition.





# Government Relations

COTA staff take an active role on Parliament Hill and on representing the organic industry in various committees for federal government and agencies. COTA is an important organic entity for government consultation on the new national policy framework, the new Safe Food for Canadian Act, international market access, import-export issues for organic, and organic equivalencies.

## Plant Breeders' Rights Advisory Committee

The Minister of Agriculture appointed COTA's Executive Director to the Plant Breeders' Rights (PBRs) Advisory Committee in September 2015 for a three-year term. COTA is the only organic industry representative on that committee which advises the PBR Commissioner at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

## The Organic Value Chain Roundtable (OVCRT)

COTA staff are also active members of the OVCRT, which is a forum for government and the organic value chain to collaborate on broad public and private sector policies. COTA's International and Regulatory Affairs Manager, is leading the OVCRT Data Task Force. The mandate is to evaluate the current data resources available to the

organic sector, work on best practices to disseminate available organic data, and to identify the next priorities for national data collection.

## Government Relations Highlights

With the transition to the Liberal government, COTA doubled its outreach efforts. Since Tia's appointment in March 2016, COTA's Executive Director has met with a dozen MPs to ensure that they are aware of the organic industries needs and to highlight that their constituency host a plethora of important organic businesses. Meetings were also arranged with both official agriculture critics, Ruth Ellen Brosseau and Chris Warkentin, and with the President of the Treasury Board, Scott Brisson.

## Testimony in front of the Senate Committee

Last February, COTA's International and Regulatory Affairs Manager, Marie-Eve Levert, testified in front of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. The testimony was an opportunity for COTA to highlight the discrepancies between provincial organic standards, to discuss key markets for organic export and some of the challenges related to organic equivalencies.







# Regulator Affairs

## Canadian Organic Standards

The first fully revised Canadian Organic Standards was published in November 2015. Thanks to the hard work of dozens of stakeholders in the organic sector who volunteered their time over the three-year process, the revised standards include many improvements and clarifications over the previous version. As always, COTA was highly involved in the working groups and voting on amendments to protect the integrity of the organic claim and our members' businesses. COTA was also asked to lead the research and sensitive process of reviewing possible new language on GMO contamination. The revised standard includes easier-to-understand language; clarifications on ambiguous standards, changes to the Permitted Substances List (PSL) and updates to ensure the standards remain true to organic principles. Operators have until November 2016 to meet any new requirements. This fall, a CGSB consultation is planned to address required amendments to the 2015 standard. These amendments are required due to a gap in the implementation of the regulation and standard, and modification to the greenhouse section that better

reflects the needs of those stakeholders. A review of CAN/CGSB-32.312, Organic Aquaculture Standards, is also slated for review as it has been five years since its creation.

## Genetically Modified Alfalfa

With the announcement in March 2016 that a limited quantity of genetically modified alfalfa seeds would be released in Canada's eastern provinces, COTA took action to raise awareness on this issue and continue to call for a moratorium on GMOs in Canada. COTA joined a coalition of 15 non-organic and organic agricultural associations that called upon the Federal Minister of Agriculture to remove variety registration for all GM alfalfa until a full economic impact assessment is conducted, and to establish a protocol for testing all imports of alfalfa seed grown in the US. COTA will pursue its efforts in 2016-2017 to stop the sale of GE alfalfa seed in Canada, and to protect this key crop commonly used by the organic industry in crop rotation and as the main livestock feed.

# Market Development

## Organic Week 2015

Canada's sixth National Organic Week took place September 19-27, 2015. It has become Canada's largest promotional and educational campaign for organic, with hundreds of events from coast-to-coast-to-coast, and 300+ events across Canada involving the entire Canadian organic supply-chain, community groups and retail sector.

Last year's Organic Week was the most successful yet: supported directly by over 30 sponsors and organized by COTA with the Canadian Organic Growers and Canadian Health Food Association. Organic Week also partnered with regional groups and associations as well as retailers across the country to mobilize community participation and promote organic sales. Several provincial governments, including British Columbia and Nova Scotia, also made announcements and public declarations in support of Organic Week 2015.

Hundreds of events were held in every province of the country: from harvest festivals and farm tours, to film screenings, community demonstration kitchens and special organic tasting menus at progressive restaurants. Meanwhile, consumers encountered major organic promotions and point-of-sales displays at independent, regional and mass channel retailers across the country.

Organic Week's public relations and marketing efforts are designed to raise awareness of organic food, farming and products in Canada. All stakeholders in the Canadian organic sector are welcome to participate. Organic Week emphasize marketing efforts in print media, guerrilla marketing and social media to reach both conventional and organic consumers.

Another purpose of Organic Week is to facilitate the unity and collaboration of the Canadian organic business and non-profit communities. In fact, about 30 percent of Organic Week sponsors are business-to-business organizations including certifiers, associations, distributors and producers. Organic Week also drew strong national media coverage last year, including a stand-alone feature section in the national Globe and Mail newspaper as well as extensive editorial coverage

on television, radio and online media. The strong national presence of Organic Week saw organic businesses utilizing this space to introduce new promotions and launch product lines.

Building off the break-through success of Organic Week 2015, the seventh National Organic Week will take place September 17-25, 2016, and it's promising to be the best one yet.

## COTA Develops BC Campaign

With the support of the BC Ministry of Agriculture, COTA has led the development and execution of a British Columbia (BC) Organic Brand Strategy. Building from the national Think Canada Organic campaign, and as a part of the preparation for mandatory organic certification to be implemented in BC by fall 2018.

COTA developed new print materials specific to the BC organic sector to initiate consumer education and better awareness of the BC Organic Checkmark and Canada Organic logo. A series of postcards and posters were released in September 2015 to coincide with national Organic Week. These put consumers of organic front and centre and became the foundation of the Think BC Organic campaign.

Along with the release of the print materials we began to profile BC organic farmers on the national website for the Think Canada Organic campaign – ThinkCanadaOrganic.ca. Based on an analysis of consumer research and the early success of the farmer profiles on social media, we developed a full social media campaign based on the stories of BC organic farmers running under the hashtags #FarmerFriday #ThinkBCOrganic.

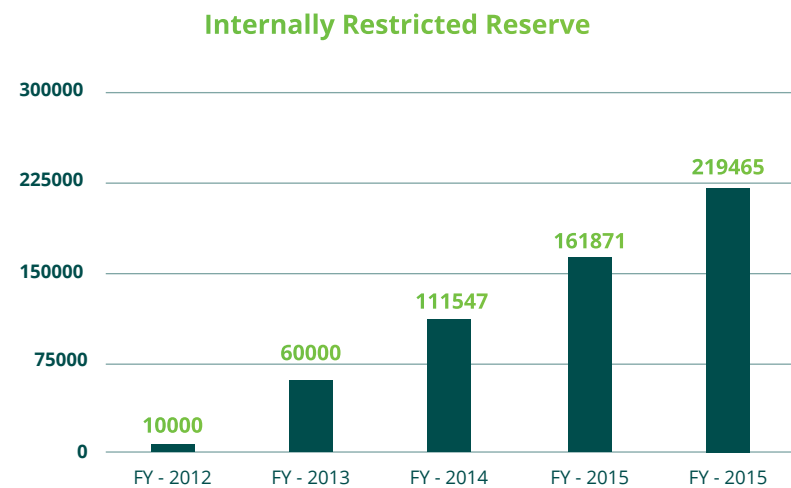
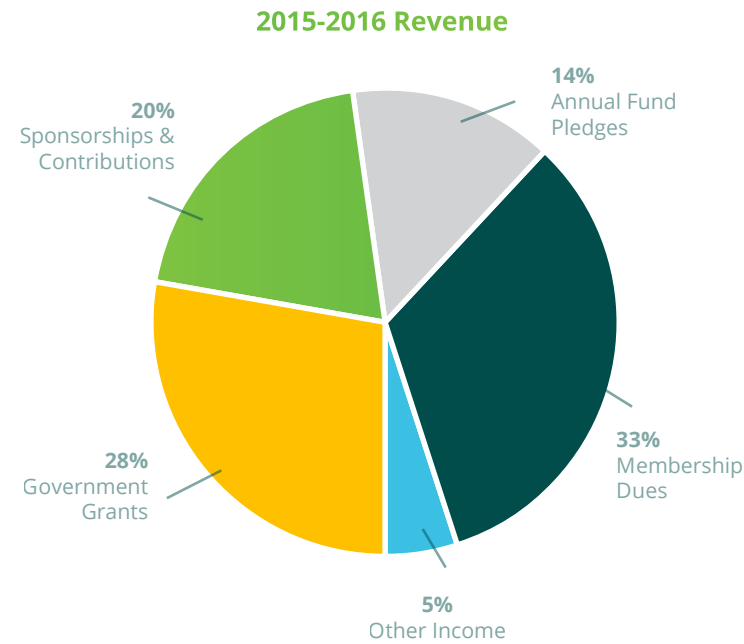
In phase 1 and 2 of the campaign, nearly 1,000 posters, 8,000 brochures and 10,000 postcards were distributed to retailers, distributors, natural health stores, farmers' markets and consumers. A FAQ on organic certification and the new regulation were developed and circulated to BC farmers' markets managers, staff and vendors. The #FarmerFriday social media campaign have a combined reach of over 250,000 users on Facebook.



# Finance Report

COTA achieved over 25% growth in revenues over the prior year, despite it being a year with leadership transition. This growth was due to new members joining COTA, securing successful government contracts, consulting services and a record year for sponsorship towards Organic Week. Annual Fund pledges resulted in over \$100,000 in donations to support the important work of COTA, lobbying on the Hill, building market opportunities locally and globally for the organic industry, protecting and communicating on behalf of the sector to various audiences, whether they be media, MPs, farmers, processors, retailers and our fellow organic associations working tirelessly for the sector at a regional level.

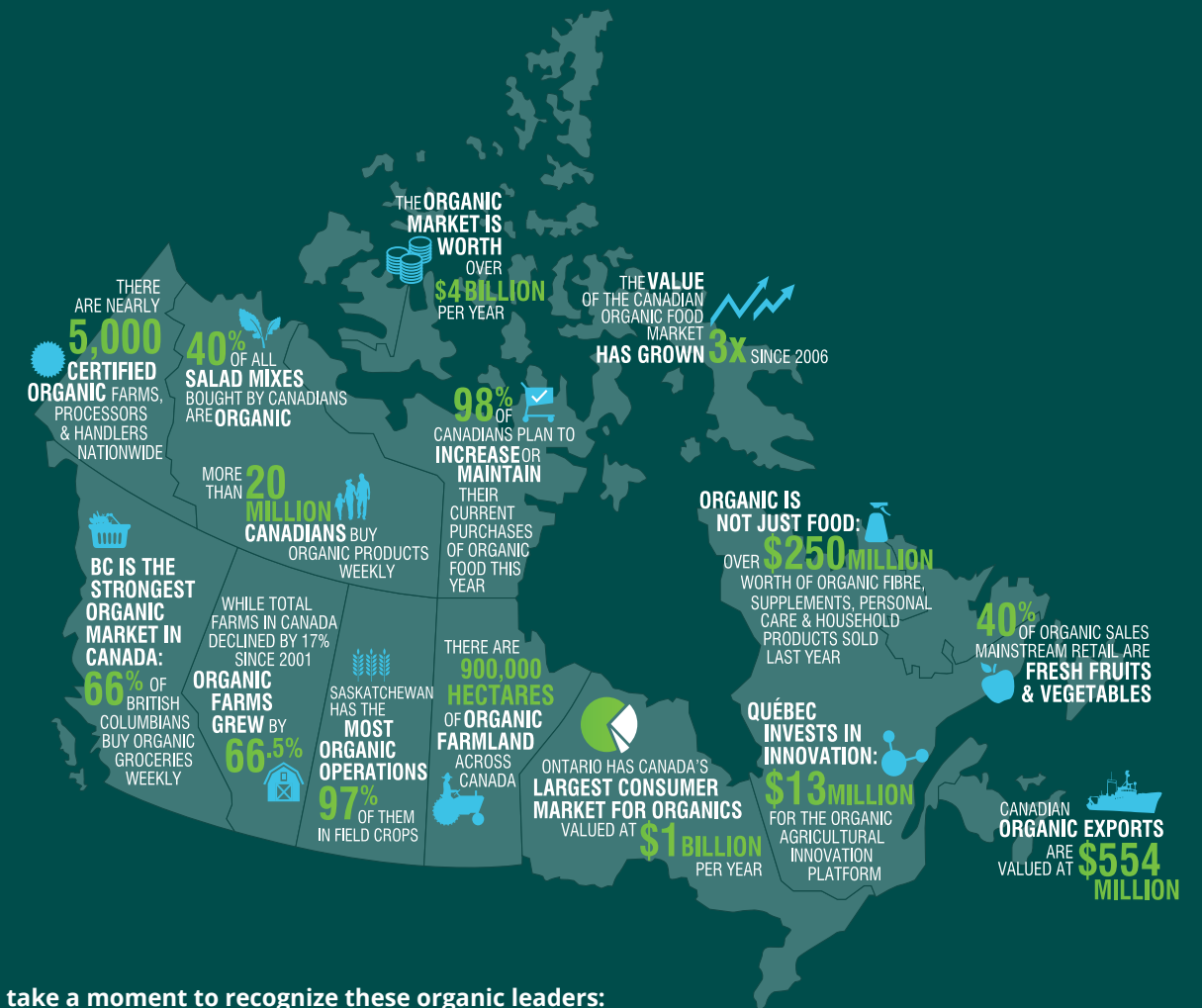
With fresh leadership comes fresh eyes to look over the operations and ensure everything was accounted properly on the books for our fiscal year ending June 31, 2016. Despite this year being one without a surplus to proudly hang our hat on, we can feel proud that COTA had made a smart decision five years ago to allocate a portion of its unrestricted revenue to weather any storms that may challenge the stability of the organization. COTA's Sustainability Fund reached \$219,000 this year and upon completion of the final audited statements, COTA will have to borrow against the surplus account in order to address the deficit from this year of transition. All things considered, revenue is up, the books are nice and clean and 2016/2017 fiscal year is starting off on the right foot with a targeted plan to increase the Sustainability Fund back to prior levels.



# A Record-breaking year

Thanks to the generosity of our members, COTA's Annual Fund raised over \$130,000 toward our work to promote and protect organic in Canada. As the voice for Canada's organic business community—from farmers to retailers—this support means we can call on Ottawa and

the provinces for programs that encourage a sustainable organic future in Canada, we can correct misinformation in the media, and we can seed important education programs for consumers, like Organic Week and the Think Before You Eat campaign.



Please take a moment to recognize these organic leaders:

<p><b>\$12,000 +</b></p>	<p><b>\$8,000 +</b></p> <p><b>alive</b> PUBLISHING GROUP INC</p>	<p><b>\$6,000 +</b></p> <p>Crofter's Food Ltd. Horizon Distributors UNFI Canada</p>	<p><b>\$4,000 +</b></p> <p>Left Coast Naturals Green Organic Vegetables Hemp Oil Canada Swiss Water Decaf Windmill Farms</p>
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## Where in the World will COTA be in 2016-2017?

### INTERNATIONAL

<b>September 21-24, 2016</b>	Expo East, Baltimore, MA, USA
<b>November 14-19, 2016</b>	Organic Expo Lifestyle and Canada Table Top, Tokyo, Japan
<b>January 20-22, 2017</b>	Sustainable Food Summit, San Francisco, CA, USA
<b>February 15-18, 2017</b>	BioFach Tradeshow and Conference, Nuremburg, Germany
<b>February 23-25, 2017</b>	MOSES Organic Conference, La Crosse, WI
<b>March 8-12, 2017</b>	Expo West, Anaheim, CA, USA
<b>April 2-3, 2017</b>	Natural & Organic Products Europe, London, UK

### NATIONAL

<b>September 17-25, 2016</b>	National Organic Week
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### BRITISH COLUMBIA

<b>February 24-26, 2017</b>	COABC Conference, Nanaimo, BC
<b>April 6-9, 2017</b>	CHFA West, Vancouver, BC

### NEW BRUNSWICK

<b>November 28-30, 2016</b>	ACORN Conference, Moncton, NB
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### ONTARIO

<b>September 15, 2016</b>	COTA's Annual General Meeting, Toronto, ON
<b>September 16, 2016</b>	CHFA/COTA Breakfast at CHFA East Tradeshow, Toronto, ON
<b>September 16-19, 2016</b>	CHFA Tradeshow Booth Exhibition and Trade Mission, Toronto, ON
<b>September 18, 2016</b>	UNFI/COTA Kick Off Party for Organic Week, Toronto
<b>September 20-21, 2016</b>	OFEX Trade Mission welcoming International Buyers, Toronto, ON
<b>October 6, 2016</b>	Organic Value Chain Roundtable Meeting, Ottawa, ON
<b>October 14-16, 2016</b>	Food Secure Conference, Toronto, ON
<b>October 25-26, 2016</b>	Parliament Day Reception, Policy Conference & Lobby day, Ottawa, ON
<b>January 26-29, 2017</b>	Guelph Organic Conference, Guelph, ON

### QUEBEC

<b>September 19-20, 2016</b>	2nd Canadian Organic Science Conference, Longueuil, QU
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### SASKATCHEWAN

<b>November 3-5, 2016</b>	Organic Connections Conference, Regina, SK
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## Meet COTA



### Staff

**Tia Loftsgard**, Executive Director, **Ann Fisbein**, Executive Office Manager, **Marie-Eve Levert**, International & Regulatory Affairs Manager, **Henry Chen**, Campaigns and Marketing Manager



### Board of Directors

**Ryan Benn**, Teldon Communications, **Dag Falck**, Nature's Path Foods, **Mike Fata**, Manitoba Harvest, **Maureen Kirkpatrick**, The Big Carrot, **Martin LeMoine**, Fruit d'Or, **Kelly Monaghan**, Ash Street Organics, **Lisa Mumm**, Mumm's Sprouting Seeds, **Dwayne Smith**, Grainworks





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