



ANNUAL REPORT

2023

2024

Canada
Organic
trade association 
Association pour le commerce
Biologique
du Canada

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Dear COTA Members,

As I reflect on this year's achievements, I am filled with pride for the strides we have made together in advancing our mission and reaching new milestones. 2024 marked an exciting moment in history for the Canadian organic industry as we celebrated the 15-year anniversary of the Canadian Organic Regime (COR). Organic products are more popular than ever, with the global organic market surpassing \$204.62 billion dollars annually. Impressively, Canada now holds more than 10% of that market, experiencing the highest growth rate of any country at 9.6% in 2022, now the 5th largest organic market in the world worth more than \$9 billion dollars and growing.

This tremendous growth would not be possible without the tireless work of COTA, our members and our extensive network of strategic partners. Through vital initiatives focused on organic market development, organic-first policy advocacy, core data & research, and continued consumer education, our team works tirelessly to create an environment where organic businesses can thrive.

As an industry, we're now bringing organic into the mainstream & showcasing organic systems as a key solution to solve the tremendous challenges faced by our planet and our species. Many countries have launched National Organic Action Plans or similar policies to promote organic farming, recognizing its wide benefits for both human & environmental health.

In kind, COTA has led the charge on the development of a ground-breaking National Organic Action Plan for Canada, recognizing the crucial role of organic farming in the future of sustainable agriculture. This plan aims to secure government policy & funding support, innovation, and market development within the organic sector.

Continuous improvement is essential to the success of organic as we grow & adapt as an industry, and we are at the forefront. Alongside the Organic Federation of Canada, we are deep into the 5-year review of the Canada Organic Standards to strengthen the standards that build trust in the organic label.

Looking ahead, we envision an organic industry that upholds the core principles of our movement – health, ecology, fairness & care – to take cooperative action to make organic accessible to all and transform our global food system to support thriving, resilient communities and ecosystems.

Having been part of the COTA Board since the fall of 2022, I have had the privilege of collaborating with our dedicated staff and fellow board members. Reflecting on the past few years, I am deeply grateful for the tireless dedication and ingenuity with which COTA has championed & uplifted the organic sector.

As we look to the years to come, I am confident that together we will navigate the challenges & the opportunities that come our way, ensuring a prosperous future for the organic community across Canada.

Warm regards,

Carrie-Anne Palmeri

Carrie-Anne Palmeri, President of the Board of Directors



Dear Members, Partners, and Organic Advocates,

As I reflect on another remarkable year at the Canada Organic Trade Association, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude. What we've accomplished together is truly inspiring. Our journey, driven by a shared commitment to nurturing the health of our planet, our people, and future generations, has brought us closer to creating a more sustainable and resilient world.

The organic sector continues to be a beacon of hope in an increasingly complex global landscape. From farmers cultivating the soil with care, to businesses innovating for a better tomorrow, each of you plays a pivotal role in pushing the boundaries of what's possible. This year, we've seen the fruits of our collective efforts not only in the growing demand for organic products but in the deepened understanding of the value of regenerative and organic farming practices. Canadians are more engaged than ever in choosing healthier, more sustainable options, and the organic movement is at the forefront of this shift.

As we look ahead, it's clear that the road we travel is not without its challenges, but it is one filled with opportunity. We are tackling climate change, advocating for strong organic standards, and ensuring the growth of the organic marketplace — all while fostering collaboration across sectors. The dedication and passion of each member of this community inspires me every day. Together, we are building not just a thriving industry, but a movement for change.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment. Let us continue to lead with purpose, innovate with courage, and cultivate a future where organic is the foundation of a healthier planet.

In solidarity and with deep gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tia Loftsgard".

Tia Loftsgard, Executive Director

FUNDING DRIVES VALUE TO MEMBERS' BOTTOM LINES

COTA develops organic market access and growth programs to stimulate consumer demand and drive domestic and global sales for Canadian organics. Through the Agri-Marketing Program grant, over \$300,000 annually is invested in initiatives that benefit our members and enhance the organic sector. Key activities achieved in the last year included hosting an incoming buyer mission at CHFA Toronto 2023, where we welcomed three buyers from Taiwan and one from Mexico and facilitated meetings with ten of our members. To further support member growth, the Organic Export Support Program helped offset costs for 13 members, funding sample shipments to expand their international business. Trade show exhibitor funding, a core member need, also led to an estimated \$6.88 million in sales.

A milestone for COTA, the newly launched, domestically focused Organic Promotion Fund quickly gained popularity, with 30 subsidies awarded to members. Our Organic Promotion Fund subsidized impactful sales promotions, including in-store activations with signage, demos, giveaways, advertising and educational training, strengthening consumer engagement and retailer partnerships.

By maintaining a presence at key food service and industry events, we advocated for organic and shared research that underscored the business case for sourcing and purchasing organic products. Taking a collaborative approach, COTA introduced a new member benefit through a partnership with Social Nature, a shopper marketing firm, helping manufacturing members enhance their in-store shelf presence. COTA also delivered ongoing business value through continuous learning opportunities, hosting 11 webinars and networking events, including our annual Business Builders' Breakfast at Natural Products Expo West.

Knowing that data is crucial, we also released the 2024 Organic Market Report, Canada's 2024 production statistics and contributed to the global publication FiBL/IFOAM "The World of Organic Agriculture" book to benchmark Canada's organic sector within a global context.

At COTA, our core mission – from trade and equivalency work to regulatory efforts and market research – is to expand the organic market and drive value for our members, fostering the organic sector's growth across Canada and abroad.



SALES

\$9.01 billion

Canadians' Annual Spend on Organic

FOOD & BEVERAGE

Valued at **\$7.18 billion**

3.4% Total Mainstream Organic Market Share

MARKET SHARE OF:

5.7% Fresh Vegetables

4.9% Fresh Fruit

3.4% Pre-Packaged Grocery Products

0.5% Fresh Meat, Poultry & Seafood

A FEW ORGANIC FACTS



Eating organic fruits and vegetables could increase your antioxidants by 20-40%



Mounting evidence show that food grown organically has a higher concentration of nutrients



Organic reduces health risks by minimizing exposure to toxic and persistent chemicals and pesticides



The same strict organic standards apply to small, medium and large organic farmers and food makers



Research shows that organic farming methods can mitigate climate change by sequestering carbon in the soil and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions



When you buy organic, you're paying for sustainable and healthy crop production, humane animal treatment practices, traceability from farm to table and a stringent certification process



Of the 7558 certified Canadian organic operators, 6902 are COR certified and 656 are certified to a Provincial organic standard. In addition, there are 1315 certified to COR internationally, mostly in New Zealand, Mexico, India, Thailand and Colombia.



SPOTLIGHT ON MAPLE

441,328

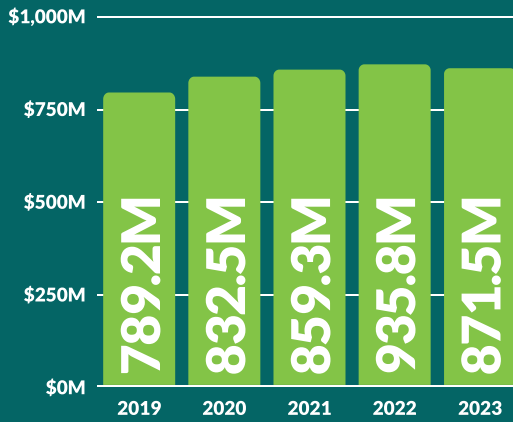
Certified Acres

39% increase since 2019

<https://ota.com/resources/organic-myth-busting-resources>

TRADE

2023 HS Code Statistics Canada Data



EXPORTS*

\$684.6M

23% increase since 2022

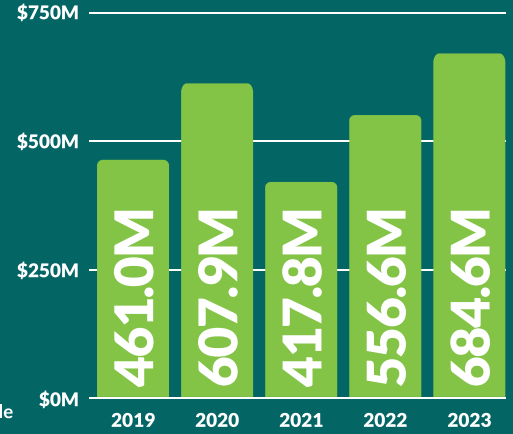
IMPORTS*

\$871.5M

6.8% decrease since 2022

\$344.8M are imports from the USA alone

*Limited to available Harmonized Sales (HS) code data available



CERTIFIED OPERATORS



7558

Certified Organic Operations

3.7% decrease since 2022
Decline of 144 operators



5965

Certified Producers

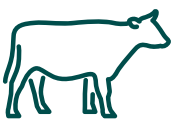
2% decrease since 2022
Decline of 104 producers



1953

Certified Processors

1% decrease since 2022
Decline of 20 processors



694

Certified Livestock Producers

11% decrease since 2022
Decline of 83 producers



92

Certified Aquaculture Operators

96% increase since 2022
45 new operators

63%

of organic farmers earn over \$100K versus 46% of non-organic farmers

Source: 2021 Census Data



Organic Food Operators by Province

3625	1312	836	787	624	186	186	2
Quebec	Ontario	Sask.	B.C.	Alberta	Atlantic	Manitoba	Territories

Organic Producers by Province

2951	882	780	549	521	150	130	2
Quebec	Ontario	Sask.	Alberta	B.C.	Manitoba	Atlantic	Territories

Organic Food Processors by Province

845	473	337	96	88	62	52	0
Quebec	Ontario	B.C.	Alberta	Sask.	Atlantic	Manitoba	Territories

Organic Livestock Producers by Province

252	239	101	41	19	21	21	0
Quebec	Ontario	B.C.	Alberta	Manitoba	Sask.	Atlantic	Territories

Organic Aquaculture Operators by Province

43	32	10	6	1	0	0	0
Quebec	Atlantic	B.C.	Ontario	Territories	Sask.	Alberta	Manitoba

CERTIFIED ACRES



3.18M

Certified Acres

0.8% increase since 2022

Organic Certified Acres by Province
(Thousand acres)

1001	687	485	328	328	243	108	0.1
Sask.	Quebec	Alberta	Atlantic	Ontario	B.C.	Manitoba	Territories

EMPOWERING CONSUMERS THROUGH EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

CONSUMER ACTIVATIONS

We engaged deeply with organic supporters who oppose threats to organic as issues arose this year around increased permitted residue levels of glyphosate on certain food crops and genetic engineering being allowed into Canada without mandatory disclosure. It is through engaging on key issues that consumers care about and by informing them of risks to organic food that we continue to build a food system that we desire and trust throughout the organic community.

CELEBRATING ORGANIC MONTH 2024

This year, COTA expanded Organic Week into Organic Month, while also celebrating the 15th anniversary of the Canada Organic Regime. Throughout September, we united the nation with engaging webinars, contests, events, and a powerful digital toolkit. The campaign's reach grew with a 47% increase in webinar registrants and over 3,400 website visits. Social media engagement also flourished, attracting over 41,000 followers.

Retail participation rose as well, with expanded support from English and French retailers and nine organic distributors, driving in-store awareness. A special thanks to our nine sponsors whose support made Organic Month a remarkable success!

GROWING ORGANIC LEADERSHIP ON CAMPUS

COTA's Organic Campus program continues to inspire students to choose organic, with the program expanding to George Brown College – School of Hospitality & Culinary Arts in 2023. Awarded the Gold-level designation, the college now sources over 5,000 pounds of organic produce annually, integrating it into more than 300 culinary classes each week. Led by Dr. Lori Stahlbrand, students collaborated with procurement teams and local vendors,

increasing organic offerings on campus. This success earned Dr. Stahlbrand the Innovation (Teaching and Learning) Award and her class the Leadership Award from Student Life at George Brown College.



ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIPS: STRENGTHENING OUR VOICE IN POLICY

To enhance our influence, COTA formed a partnership in 2022 with the Organic Federation of Canada (OFC) and the Canadian Organic Growers (COG), collectively known as the “*Canadian Organic Alliance*”, or the COA. This alliance aims to advocate for improved policies and programs that support organic agriculture and trade at both the federal and provincial levels. With enhanced capacity and influence, the Canadian Organic Alliance (COA) held numerous meetings in 2023 with senior government officials to discuss the Organic Action Plan. This collaborative effort among the three associations aims to develop a strategic plan for the long-term growth of the organic sector, with input from our members and the organic community.

COTA’s Parliament Day and Parliamentary reception continues to be our flagship event in which our members speak directly to Members of Parliament (MP), Senators and their staffers. Our reception was well attended and proudly co-hosted by every political party. During our advocacy day in November, members met with over 20 MPs and Senators in one-on-one meetings to hear from their constituents the needs of organic businesses. COTA also penned e-petition 4909 in the House of Commons that garnered 1599 signatures in support of organic. MP Alistair MacGregor put forth motion M-117 ORGANIC AGRICULTURE during the 44th Parliamentary session in support of Canada developing an organic policy framework.

This year, we had the opportunity to present our perspectives on organic agriculture to the House of Commons on two occasions. In December, we provided testimony at the Senate Agricultural Committee’s study on Soil Health, and in May, we contributed to the Agricultural and Agri-Food Standing Committee’s Horticulture Study.

The year was extremely busy not only with our advocacy but also in engaging in government roundtables in which COTA holds a seat – the

Agile Regulations Roundtable and Consumer Demand and Market Trends Roundtable. COTA also sits on the Pesticide Management Regulatory Authority (PMRA) Modernization Council because of our advocacy around the MRLs of glyphosate. We also participated in the Seed Regulatory Modernization consultations to ensure organic voices were heard. We continued our advocacy efforts on pushing for mandatory transparency of genetically engineered seed and feed entering Canada and wrote a [GE position paper](#) to make our position clear.



NAVIGATING POLICY: ENSURING COMPLIANCE AND ADVOCACY

COTA oversees the Technical Committee for Organic Equivalency Arrangements, where we focused on several key initiatives this year. Notable achievements include the successful revision of the organic equivalency arrangement with Japan to incorporate alcoholic beverages and the signing of a new Canada-South Korea equivalency arrangement in October 2023. Additionally, we engaged in the Canada-European Union equivalency standards assessment and participated in consultations aimed at transitioning our current arrangement into a trade agreement. Our involvement also included attending the Canada-EU Agriculture Dialogue Sessions in Brussels. Furthermore, the Canada-Mexico equivalency arrangement was extended for several more years in February 2024.

In response to the USDA's new organic import requirements as part of the National Organic Program's Strengthening Organic Enforcement, COTA took proactive steps to assist Canadian companies in navigating these changes. We provided comprehensive webinars and held industry consultations to help businesses understand the new regulations and ensure compliance. Our team facilitated meetings with the USDA's National Organic Program and the Agricultural Marketing Services to facilitate the transition. Through our one-on-one consultations and tailored support to address specific concerns and challenges faced by the industry, COTA showcased our commitment to empowering our members to adapt seamlessly to the evolving landscape of organic trade and maintain their access to international markets.



ORGANIC SUMMIT 2023: ADVANCING ORGANIC TOGETHER

The 2023 Organic Summit, hosted by the Canada Organic Trade Association, brought together thought leaders, industry experts, and passionate advocates for an inspiring day of discussions, workshops, and networking. Focused on the theme “Greenovation for the Next Generation”, the Summit drew a record number of attendees from across Canada and beyond, showcasing the strength and unity of our organic community.

Key sessions featured expert panels on organic policy advancements, emerging market trends, and the latest in organic research. Highlights included a keynote from Paul Holmbeck, member of the board of IFOAM International, addressing scaling organic through policy levers, and the infamous Rodale Institute, providing an overview of their 40-year organic systems trial.



EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITY: MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT AND RELATIONS

As a member-driven association, our members are at the heart of everything we do. Over the past year, we welcomed 33 new members from diverse sectors across the organic value chain. Whether we're creating funding programs, advocating for regulatory change, or representing organic interests on Parliament Hill, we amplify our members' voices in all our efforts. The achievements highlighted here underscore both COTA's essential role within the business community and the vast potential for growth in the organic market.

A key focus this year was to deepen member engagement by enhancing outreach and increasing awareness of COTA's benefits. Through this strengthened connection, we encouraged members to take advantage of our funding, to attend events, participate in webinars, and respond to calls for action. COTA remains a responsive and resilient association, dedicated to building strong relationships, listening closely to our members, and working collaboratively to advance organic growth.



CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE: ORGANIC GALA & LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Our annual Organic Gala & Leadership Awards held in Vancouver, BC celebrated outstanding achievements in organic with our annual awards, honouring those who are leading the way in organic innovation. The event's success underscored COTA's commitment to fostering collaboration and driving positive change within the organic sector. We extend our thanks to our sponsors, partners, and participants who helped make the Organic Gala an unforgettable milestone to celebrate the future of organic in Canada.



2024 AWARD WINNERS



ORGANIC CHAMPION OF THE YEAR
Salt Spring Coffee



LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIC SCIENCE
Derek Lynch, PhD, PAg



ORGANIC RETAILER OF THE YEAR
Healthy Planet



ORGANIC SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR
Barentz



ORGANIC INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR
Greenhouse



ORGANIC FARMER OF THE YEAR
Alex and Janet Galarneau
(Prairie Heritage Seeds Organics, Inc.)



DISTINGUISHED SUPPORTER OF THE YEAR
Alistair MacGregor, MP



**ORGANIC JUSTICE, EQUITY,
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (JEDI)
LEADER OF THE YEAR**
Nuts for Cheese

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP AND GROWTH

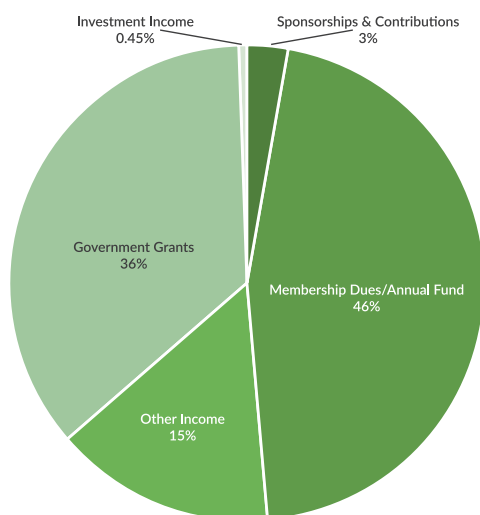
COTA is proud to report another year of strong support from its members who enables us to continue to work on the issues for their sector. As we look ahead towards growth and expansion, we remain committed to financial foresight to ensure sustainability and high-quality support to our industry we serve.

At the end of Q4 COTA landed at \$8,355 for year-end. On an annual basis, we had budgeted \$1.407M revenue, and COTA achieved \$1.209M, the shortfall was nearly entirely related to not receiving what we anticipated from the Agri-Marketing Program Grant (AMP). The 2023-2026 three-year AMP was confirmed in late December 2023 and for the FY2023-2024 the AMP budget was confirmed at a lower dollar value than was budgeted. Organic Week sponsorship was under budget as we lost most of the big sponsors from the prior year due to their own budget cutbacks. COTA had made up on revenue by overperforming on memberships and annual fund, membership revenue was exceeded by \$25K and Annual Fund exceeded budget by \$31K.

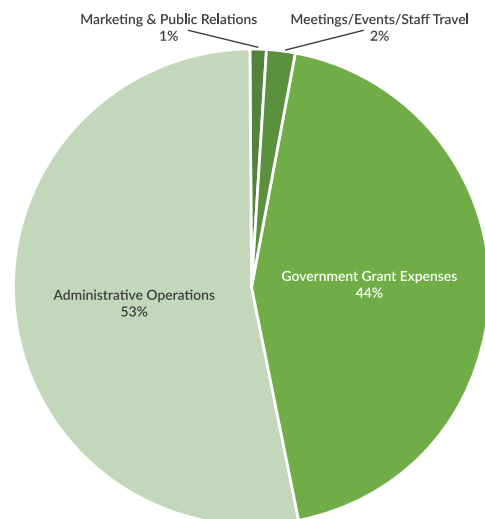
Compared to FY2022-2023, COTA experienced a small 5.16% increase in revenue and expenses decrease 2.51% from the prior year. We are glad to report that for COTA's participation on the "On Farm Climate Action Fund" ECOCERT Canada was approved for another 3-year grant for the program and COTA again successfully secured two labour grants totalling \$26,000 from the *Youth Employment and Skills Program* and *Canada Summer Jobs* program to fund additional staff. The expenses fell short of the annual budget expenses due to the AMP contract and timing by \$198K, approximately 56% of the 2023-2024 expenses being related to the AMP activities.

On a final note, what we have achieved wouldn't be possible without the generous support from our members. We know that the road ahead is long and will be filled with many challenges. We also know that there is not a single force on earth stronger than the power of people coming together.

2023-2024 REVENUE



2023-2024 EXPENSES



A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We extend our deepest gratitude to our Board of Directors, a dedicated team of organic leaders who volunteer their time, insight, and passion to guide our organization. Your commitment to our mission strengthens our impact, providing invaluable expertise and perspective as we navigate both challenges and opportunities. The time and effort you devote, often beyond the call of duty, are what enable us to continue advancing our goals and building a more sustainable future.

Thank you for your unwavering support, leadership, and generosity.



PRESIDENT
Carrie-Anne Palmeri
Organic Program
Manager at
Nature's Path Foods



VICE PRESIDENT
Tim Rundle
General Manager
at Creative Salmon
Company Ltd.



TREASURER
Nima Fotovat
Co-founder &
President at
Riverside Natural
Foods Ltd.



SECRETARY
Travis Heide
Organics Canada



Emma Barrett
Head of Marketing
at Mill Street
Brewery



Ian Walker
CEO, Left Coast
Organics and Left
Coast Naturals



Ali Davies
Vice President of
Sales at UNFI



Viren Malik
Chief Sales
Officer at
Salt Spring Coffee

MEET OUR DEDICATED TEAM

The staff of the Canada Organic Trade Association (COTA) is the driving force behind our mission to promote and protect organic trade in Canada. With a blend of expertise, innovation, and dedication, our team works tirelessly to advance the organic sector, support our members, and uphold the integrity of organic standards. Their passion and commitment are at the heart of everything we do, ensuring that we stay at the forefront of the organic movement, advocating for policies that foster growth and sustainability. Together, we are proud to represent and serve the vibrant organic community across Canada.



(left to right) **Sophie Marvell**, Senior Communications Coordinator;
My-Lien Bosch, Government Relations & Regulatory Affairs Manager;
Ann Fisbein, Finance Manager;
Tia Loftsgard, Executive Director;
Kim De Lallo, Member Relations & Business Development Manager;
Zahraa Al Haj Hasan, Data Specialist

COTA AT WORK



OUR SINCERE THANKS TO OUR ANNUAL FUND DONORS

To our generous donors, thank you for believing in our mission and for standing with us on the journey to grow and strengthen the organic movement. Your contributions to our annual fund make an extraordinary difference, enabling us to expand our initiatives, support our members, and advocate for meaningful change in the organic sector. It is your support that empowers us to push boundaries, innovate, and create a sustainable future for organic trade in Canada.

We are deeply grateful for your trust and commitment. Thank you for being an essential part of our work.



BARENTZ HORIZON GROUP LEFT COAST NATURALS

ASH STREET ORGANICS

CHA'S ORGANICS

CREATIVE SALMON

DIANNE GOWLING

ECOCERT CANADA

FLOATING LEAF

KEHO LAKE FARMS

LEBEAU EXCEL

MILL STREET BREWERY

PFENNING'S ORGANIC VEGETABLES

PRAIRIE HERITAGE SEEDS

ONE DEGREE ORGANICS

RENEWAL PARTNERS

SPARK STRATEGIES

THE BIG CARROT

YORK REGION ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE



Canada
Organic
trade association 
Association pour le commerce
Biologique
du Canada