

## BACKGROUND

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**Organic agriculture in brief.** Organic agriculture is much more just farming without pesticides or chemical fertilizers. It's a mode of production that employs cropping and animal husbandry techniques that help contribute to a balanced environment by preserving the health of the soil, of animals, and of ecosystems. It is based on the following basic principles:

- Protecting the environment, minimizing soil degradation and erosion, reducing pollution and optimizing biological productivity
- Maintaining long-term soil fertility by fostering the conditions that promote biological activity
- Maintaining biodiversity within the ecosystem
- Recycling materials and resources as much as possible within the farm system
- As in other forms of production, caring appropriately for farm animals in order to promote their health and meet their behavioural needs
- Using renewable resources within locally organized farming systems
- Québec.

**Agricultural production in Quebec.** Nearly 1,040 Quebec farmers have chosen to specialize in organic agriculture and meet this niche market demand. They complement the 39,000 farmers who supply the more conventional markets. While organic farmers offer a wide variety of products, Quebec is most noted for its production of milk and other dairy products (yogurts and cheeses),<sup>i</sup> maple products,<sup>ii</sup> grains and cereals, and produce.

**Production is increasing, but still modest.** Quebec organic agriculture has seen significant growth over the last few years. However, organic agriculture is still modest, representing only 2 to 3% of food production in Quebec and Canada.

**A growing presence.** Only a few years ago, organic products were only available at fine grocers, butcher shops, and specialty stores. Today, the major grocery chains offer organic products at almost all their locations. Today, Équiterre's network of family farmers provides consumers with baskets of fresh, local products—an increasingly popular distribution model that is more supportive of local agriculture

**A rigorous standard.** The organic standard prohibits the use of all forms of synthetic products, such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and pesticides, and limits the use of antibiotics. The standard also controls various aspects of livestock and plant production. Organic farmers are also required to have an organic plan, which involves keeping many records to document their activities. In Quebec, every organic farm is inspected annually by an accredited organic certifying body.

**Well-managed certification.** Organic certification guarantees that any food labelled "organic" has been produced in compliance with the standards of Canadian organic agriculture. The words "certified by" along with the certifier's name must also appear on every organic product label. In Quebec, only six certifying bodies, accredited by the Conseil des appellations réservées et des termes valorisants (CARTV)—the sole competent provincial organic certification authority—are authorized to validate and issue certifications: Ecocert Canada, Québec Vrai, the Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) International, Pro-Cert Organic Systems, Quality Assurance International (QAI), and LETIS.

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**Look for the logos.** Consumers wishing to clearly identify and choose Quebec organic products can look for the *Aliments du Québec Bio* and *Aliments préparés au Québec Bio* logos. When you buy foods with these logos, you are doing two things: choosing an authentic organic product that meets exacting standards and supporting Quebec's economy and businesses.



Looking for organic products made in Quebec?

<http://www.produitsbioquebec.info/interroGrandPublicEn.do>

## CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

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**Taking its place on the shelf.** While the organic sector has seen major growth year after year, 70% of organic products consumed in Quebec are imported, with only 30% coming from local producers. This means that one of the major challenges for organic agriculture in Quebec is to scale up production in order to meet the demands of the Quebec market. Remember, when Quebecers consume local organic products, they are helping the sector grow.

**Supporting the development of organics.** . In order for the Quebec organic sector to take its place on the market and realize its full potential, all stakeholders (government, producers, processors, distributors) must work together to develop the sector and focus on the following priorities:

- Supporting producers through farm income security programs adapted for organic production
- Increasing research and developing expertise and consulting in order to improve yield and offer consumers an even more affordable product
- Improving how product marketing is organized
- Encouraging new farmers to go into organic production

**Organic or conventional?** Consumers need to understand that organic and conventional agriculture are not enemies; they are complementary modes of production, and together they meet the diverse needs of the market. With both types of farming, people can rest assured that they have access to healthy, quality foods that have been produced with sustainable development in mind.

**For further information:**

<http://www.cartv.gouv.qc.ca/en/organic-designation>

<http://www.filierebio.qc.ca/Accueil>

<http://www.equiterre.org/en/proiect/family-farmers-network>

<http://www.extenso.org/article/un-produit-bio-c-est-quoi/>

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<sup>i</sup> 40% of the organic milk produced in Canada comes from Quebec.

<sup>ii</sup> 21% of Quebec maple syrup is organic.