Quebec Farmers'
Advocate

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WHAT'S INSIDE

"There's no real advantage to it, it's irrelevant."

– Donald Trump, referring to the Canada-U.S.-Mexico trade deal on Jan. 13, 2026

"This landmark agreement will send cash and jobs pouring into the United States and into North America – good for Canada, good for Mexico.

– Donald Trump, referring to the Canada-U.S.-Mexico trade deal October 2018

RICHARD NANTAIS/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

There are currently 44 wind farms in Quebec with a combined capacity of 4,000 megawatts. By 2023, the province predicts more than 10,000 megawatts of wind power will be added – enough power to supply 2 million households.

Montérégie farmers call out Hydro's plan for more windmills

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

Farmers in the Montérégie region say Hydro-Québec's plan to upgrade its electrical grid will negatively affect the agricultural sector because the wind power stations the provincial utility wants to build will likely be located on fertile farmland.

In a tersely-written statement on Dec. 12, the Fédération de l'UPA de la Montérégie described Hydro-Québec's plan as "ill advised."

"We wish to express our serious concerns regarding Hydro-Québec's recent announcement concerning its new wind power tender and the update to its electrical grid capacity for the 2031-2035 period," said Jérémie Letellier, the president of the regional UPA federation, which represents more than 7,000 Quebec farmers in the Montérégie region.

The Montérégie region has been singled out by the Quebec government as having the greatest potential for wind power development in the province, with an estimated 2,775 megawatts, which could represent nearly 400 wind turbines, according to Hydro.

See WINDMILLS, Page 16.

Quebec crop insurance payouts hit $44.5M in 2025

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

Quebec's crop insurance program paid out $44.5 million to nearly 1,800 farms following a 2025 growing season marked by the weather whiplash of too much rain in spring, and not enough in summer.

La Financière agricole du Québec released its annual crop insurance (or ASREC, the *Programme d'assurance récolte*) assessment in late December, showing payments went to 1,779 farms that suffered losses due to weather conditions. The program covers $2.7 billion worth of insured crops across the province.

More than $21.5 million went to grain corn, cereal and pulse crop producers, while vegetable growers received $9.6 million. La Financière is still processing damage claims, with 7,750 filed as of Dec. 2 – considerably higher than the 4,301 submitted at the same point in 2024 and above the five-year average of 5,466.

Season of extremes

The 2025 growing season started rough. A late, wet spring combined with cold temperatures delayed fieldwork and seeding across the province. La Financière had to extend planting deadlines multiple times as farmers waited for conditions to improve.

"Frequent precipitation combined with cold temperatures delayed snow melt and the start of field work for seeding," the report states. The wet conditions created problems with disease, rot and insect pressure.

See INSURANCE, Page 16.

Just the facts

$6.4 billion

The amount generated by Quebec's forestry sector in 2023, representing 9.6 per cent of the province's exports by value, according to provincial government data.

Source: The Globe and Mail

$12.7 billion

The value of agricultural products generated in 2025 by specialized groups that make up the Union des producteurs agricoles.

Source: UPA

27%

That is the increase seen in food prices in the last five years.

Source: Canada's Food Price Report 2026 *by Dalhousie University issued Dec. 4, 2025*

1.3kg

The amount of CO_2 equivalent emitted to produce a dozen eggs in Quebec, which is less than the carbon footprint of 1.7 kg of CO_2 equivalent that is emitted to produce 12 eggs in the rest of Canada and less than half of the 3.4 kg of CO_2 equivalent emitted in the production of a dozen eggs on average in the rest of the world.

Sources: Report by the Conseil pour le développement de l'agriculture au Québec, a Poore and Nemecek study *and* La Presse

PERFECT CALENDAR PHOTO

MADELEINE LANGLOIS, THE ADVOCATE

This scene looks like the perfect shot to accompany the month of January in a 2026 Quebec calendar. The muted sun, the snow cover and that wind – you can almost feel it.

Mission

To defend the rights, provide information and advocate for the English-speaking agricultural community in Quebec.

Vision

The QFA's actions contribute to a sustainable future for both agriculture and the environment while providing a decent quality of life and financial return for the individuals and their families who have made agriculture and food production their chosen professions.

Shared Values

Members of the QFA believe in:
Maintaining family-owned and operated farms / Food sovereignty and self-determination by individuals and nations / Intergenerational involvement / Lifelong learning / Protection of the physical environment / Preserving land for agricultural production / Minimum government interference / Working alone and in partnership with others

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- voting privileges at the QFA Annual General Meeting

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Receipts are issued upon request. Memberships are valid for 12 months from month of purchase.

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News

When making green eggs and ham, Dr. Suess should source his eggs from Quebec

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

Quebec hens are world leaders when it comes to producing the greenest eggs on the planet, according to a report by the *Conseil pour le développement de l'agriculture du Québec*.

Indeed, Quebec eggs have the lowest carbon footprint in the world. According to the results of the report, released earlier this month by the Conseil – a non-profit organization whose mission is to support initiatives that promote the sustainable development of agriculture in Quebec – a dozen eggs produced in Quebec produce less than half the greenhouse gases (GHG) than the global average. The report is the first real global assessment of GHG emissions in the egg industry.

Details of the report, obtained by *La Presse*, examined emissions from 31 egg farms in Quebec in 2024. Combined, these farms produced nearly 270 million eggs, which represented approximately 15 per cent of the province's annual production.

Carbon assessments are nothing new to Quebec farms, especially those dedicated to beef, milk, pork, field crops and market gardeners. However, this is the first time an assessment has been done at the production level for eggs thanks to a representative sample of the different types of egg farms in Quebec.

Quebec hens "are all Formula 1 cars," said Sylvestre Delmotte, one of the authors of the report.

"The composition of their feed is managed down to the last amino acid," Delmotte explained. "This is a significant factor, as nearly 70 per cent of the sector's emissions are attributable to hen feed. Energy consumption follows, at 11 per cent, then GHG emissions from manure, at 10 per cent."

"Millers keep the best corn for laying hens because they know that as soon as there are small variables, the hens will feel it right away," said farmer Sylvain Lapierre, who is also president of the Quebec Egg Producers Federation, which collaborated in the study.

"Hen nutrition is really a science," Lapierre said.

The composition of Quebec hen feed is mainly made up of grains, such as corn and soybeans. What increases the carbon footprint of feed is the presence of animal by-products, like food produced from slaughterhouse waste.

"It's a circular economy. These are sources of fat and protein, and if we didn't use them, we would have to cultivate more land to produce protein," Delmotte said.

While many consumers are looking to make food choices that respect the environment, studies like this one help move from theory to practice by quantifying emissions in the Quebec agricultural context, Delmotte said.

The entire production chain was analyzed, starting from the production of hatching eggs to produce chicks, to the transfer of pullets to the laying house. The researchers then documented emissions during the laying period until the end of the hen's life.

In Quebec, the average total GHG emissions associated with egg production amount to 1.3 kilograms of CO_2 per dozen, according to the report.

By way of comparison, in 2022, the average carbon footprint in Canada was estimated at approximately 1.7 kilograms of CO_2 per dozen eggs.

Quebec compares favourably with Europe. In England, another study estimated the emissions of a dozen eggs at 2.1 kilograms CO_2, and another, conducted in Spain, at 2.6 kilograms CO_2. In Europe, hens eat protein from soybeans, but the soybeans are imported from Brazil, and deforestation is required to produce them.

"So when we calculate the carbon footprint of Brazilian soy, it is enormous compared to our carbon footprint for Quebec soy, which did not involve deforestation to produce it," Delmotte said.

Several other factors contribute to the low carbon footprint of eggs from La Belle Province: hydroelectricity and the energy efficiency of chicken coops influence the results.

"We operate at a tenth of a degree, with several probes distributed throughout the chicken coop to try to avoid having a small colder area," Lapierre said.

A new study will be conducted this year, with the analysis of 30 new farms.

"In particular, we will see whether the hypothesis that free-range hens have a higher carbon footprint is proven correct. Because the more they move, the more they eat," Delmotte said.

BAJINDA/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Dr. Suess might have perfected green eggs and ham, but Quebec producers have earned the title of delivering the greenest eggs on the planet, having the lowest carbon footprint of all eggs produced in the world.

"What consumers are increasingly demanding is free-range chickens, without cages, which reduce the animals' efficiency," he said, "because a caged animal expends very little energy in its movements."

The study will also test extending the life of hens by a few months, which will offset the greenhouse gases produced during the chick-to-pullet stage. Methods of reducing manure emissions will also be explored, Delmotte said.

"The results are very interesting," said Lapierre. "But for us, the goal of our participation is above all to find out where we can improve."

2025 second-best year for Quebec maple syrup production

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

Quebec maple syrup producers are on a streak, marking another record in 2025 – sort of.

Last year they produced 17 million gallons of syrup, which represents a drop of 5.9 per cent from the record-setting output of 18 million gallons seen in 2024, according to Statistic Canada. But despite the drop, 2025 will go down as the second-highest year of production.

The value of the province's 2025 harvest is estimated at $750 million, according to the Producteurs et productrices acéricoles du Québec.

Across all of Canada, 19 million gallons of syrup were produced last year, StatsCan reported last month. This includes 1.16 million gallons from New Brunswick, which represents a 3.8-per-cent decline from 2024 levels; and 690,000 gallons from Ontario, which was slightly more than in 2024.

Last year also saw the Quebec production capacity increase, with 7,000 new taps.

It is reported that Quebec producers had 55 million taps. In comparison, in 2005, the province's maple producers had 34 million taps, and 6 million gallons of syrup were produced.

But the number of taps is not the only reason why syrup production has increased in the last two decades. Part of the success is attributed to the efficiency of the harvest.

"The increase in maple syrup production is explained by the refinement of production techniques and by the increase in production capacities of the maple syrup industry," said Joël Vaudeville, spokesman for the province's maple producers.

Many producers have increased the amount of sap per tap harvested, with average levels doubling from two pounds in 2005 to four pounds in 2025.

News

MCGILL.CA

Mac Farm was named a regional milk quality champion for 2025, marking the 12th win since 2008 and the farm's seventh consecutive win in a row.

McGill's Mac Farm among finest milk producers in Quebec

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

If you're wondering why Santa Claus didn't drink your milk while delivering toys to your house this Christmas, it's probably because he was in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, enjoying some of the finest milk in Canada.

It's also because McGill University's Macdonald Campus Farm in Ste. Anne has once again captured the 2025 title of regional milk quality champion by dairy cooperative Agropur, totalling 12 wins since 2008 and the farm's seventh consecutive win in a row.

Agropur awards up to 14 Canadian farms with this recognition every year. Members are judged on milk quality and an on-site inspection of the milk house over a 12-month period. This year, 13 Canadian farms out of 2,700 – including 11 from Quebec – made the top list, Agropur announced on Dec. 15.

According to Agropur spokesperson Diep Truong, Macdonald's farm has consistently maintained standards of excellence for more than 100 years.

"Its herd of 80 cows are mainly Holsteins, rounded out with some Jerseys and Brown Swiss," Truong said. "This is the 12th time that the farm has received the title of regional champion. This year, the best milk comes from Ste. Anne de Bellevue!"

Macdonald remains one of Canada's top milk-producing farms for various reasons, Truong said. "Over the last year, the team at the farm has focused on rigour and prevention. Sustained efforts have been deployed to improve cleaning protocols and health monitoring, optimize the milking equipment, and reinforce student training in good practices."

"With these strategic adjustments, the farm has not only maintained high standards, but ensured a continuous supply of milk of exceptional quality," she said.

This year, Macdonald hosted the Agropur Delegates Summit, an opportunity for delegates to share their research projects, sustainable practices, and their essential roles in training the next generation of dairy producers.

"These valuable exchanges strengthen our ties with the cooperative and confirm our commitment toward responsible and collaborative agriculture," said Janice Pierson, director of Macdonald Campus Farm.

"Being part of a cooperative strengthens our commitment to fundamental values," Pierson said. "For us, that means working in a network with other farmers, sharing resources and knowledge, and meaningfully contributing to a fairer and more resilient economy. By embracing programs like the Club of Excellence and Sustainable Farms, we have been able to apply very high standards while ensuring we train the next generation of dairy producers."

Created 37 years ago, the Club of Excellence has since been celebrating the know-how of more than 500 Agropur member farms.

"Our dairy producer members are the heart of our cooperative," said Agropur president Roger Massicotte. "Their remarkable work deserves to be highlighted and recognized. Because, at the end of the day, the strength of each of our members builds the strength of the entire cooperative. Our regional champions embody this excellence, and we are proud to have them among us."

The 13 regional champions will soon be vying for the ultimate title of Grand Champion, Milk Quality Award. The verdict will be delivered in February at Agropur's general meeting.

Agropur is Canada's largest dairy cooperative and one of the leading suppliers of dairy products to the retail, food service, and industrial sectors in North America. Founded in 1938, the cooperative is a source of pride to its nearly 2,700 members in Quebec, Ontario and the Atlantic provinces, and its 7,000 employees.

The 13 winning Canadian farms

- Ferme Montplaisir – St. Jean sur Richelieu, Que.
- Ferme Karl Breu – Lotbinière, Que.
- Ferme Alexandre Martineau – St. Jean sur Richelieu, Que.
- Ferme M.P. Morissette – Cacouna, Que.
- Macdonald Farm – Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Que.
- Ferme Gagnonval – Ste. Hénédine, Que.
- Ferme Turcotte – Lac St. Jean, Que.
- Ferme De La Carrière – Upton, Que.
- Ferme E. Fankhauser – St. Sébastien, Que.
- Ferme Pierlie – St. Adelphe de Champlain, Que.
- Dairy Creek Farm – Wards Creek, N.B.
- Ferme Dalmarke – Ste. Marie, Que.
- A & J Bent Farms – Lawrencetown, N.S.

News

Dairy sector gets boost with unique-to-Quebec partnership

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

Quebec's dairy industry has gained a new ally as two of the province's leading agricultural institutions announced they are joining forces to strengthen the competitiveness of the dairy sector.

The *Institut de technologie agroalimentaire du Québec* (ITAQ), the only French-language college in the province specializing in the agri-food sector, and the *Centre d'expertise fromagère du Québec* (CEFQ), a non-profit organization that supports small and medium-sized cheese-makers, unveiled a strategic partnership in late December that will combine their technical, educational and industrial expertise to deliver an integrated range of services, from training to innovation.

"This partnership perfectly illustrates the complementary nature of our missions," said Karine Mercier, director-general of ITAQ. "Together, we can offer dairy sector stakeholders solutions that are even better adapted to their needs and contribute directly to their success."

The collaboration brings together ITAQ's strengths in continuing education, college-level training and research with CEFQ's expertise in outreach, advisory services and technological innovation.

The partnership is built on four concrete pillars of collaboration. The first focuses on training and pooling expertise to enhance existing programs and develop specialized courses in dairy and cheese production.

The second helps the two organizations to share facilities and spaces to support training, research and experimentation activities.

The third aims to develop structural programs and technical-economic studies jointly.

Finally, the partnership includes promotional activities through joint creation and distribution of educational and scientific content, along with organizing events to showcase Quebec's expertise.

"By combining our strengths, we are creating a true hub of expertise serving innovation and sustainable development in Quebec's dairy sector," said Estelle Thériault, director-general of CEFQ. "This is great news for our businesses and for the next generation."

The partnership is expected to deliver greater operational and financial efficiency for projects, improved development of new talent and the advancement of industry professionals, along with the completion of structural projects that benefit the entire dairy sector.

ARTEM OLESHKO/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Quebec cheese producers will benefit from a new partnership between the *Institut de technologie agroalimentaire du Québec* and the *Centre d'expertise fromagère du Québec*. The collaboration will combine training, research facilities and technical expertise to support the province's cheese-making sector.

ITAQ, with two campuses in St. Hyacinthe and La Pocatière, has been the only specialized agri-food institution at the college level in Quebec for more than 60 years. It stands out for its teaching laboratories, animal farms and processing facilities for dairy, bakery, meat and vegetables, in addition to its unique and exclusive programs in equine techniques, agro-mechanical engineering technology and animal production technology.

CEFQ, also located in St. Hyacinthe, has been actively contributing to the development and sustainability of Quebec's cheese industry for nearly 15 years, and is separate from other research and centres of dairy expertise, like Lactanet and Novalait.

As the only centre of its kind in Canada, the non-profit association supports cheese dairies through a team of advisers and cheese-makers. It offers a complete range of technical and professional services, including training, quality support, technical advice and data digitization solutions.

Man convicted of fraud over farm equipment rental denied early release

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

A Kamouraska man who defrauded a farmer to the tune of $30,000 and who tried to convince the Quebec parole board last month to release him early from jail has been sent back to prison.

In its December ruling, the *Commission québécoise des libérations conditionnelles* told Yves Gagné that despite his conviction for fraud and imprisonment in 2019, he has not changed his ways and continues to mock the criminal justice system.

"Despite the help and support you have received, you are struggling to change your delinquent behaviour," ruled the commission, ordering Gagné, 37, to remain in custody.

In 2019, a farmer from Kamouraska posted an offer to rent his tractors on Marketplace. Gagné responded to the ad, claiming to be someone named Maxime Talbot. The following month, the parties agreed to a 10-year lease and the farmer handed over two tractors to Gagné.

"The contracts were made in the name of two farms," states the board's decision. An initial payment was to be made upon receipt of the machinery, but Gagné said he did not have the necessary funds at that time, but that he would pay shortly.

The farmer waited three months until he received two cheques from Gagné for $4,000 and $1,500, but both bounced due to insufficient funds.

"The lessor made several attempts to get paid, but found himself the victim of various subterfuges and empty promises from 'Mr. Talbot' in order to delay payment," stated the board's ruling.

Realizing he would never be paid, the farmer tried to retrieve his tractors, only to drive to Gagné's farm and saw that they were in such poor condition, they required more than $2,000 in repairs.

Gagné, for his part, was no longer answering his phone. In total, the farmer suffered losses of $30,000.

Appearing before a Quebec Court judge in Quebec City in June 2023, Gagné was sentenced to nine months in prison, as well as additional months related to another case. He was granted early release two months later, but once in a halfway house, vanished and did not report to his probation officer.

"You remained at large for over a year, until your arrest," stated the commission.

Gagné justified his actions by saying he "panicked," while swearing that he never intended to defraud the farmer. He was heavily in debt, partly due to unpaid fines, he told the commission members.

Gagné said he hoped to be granted parole again, adding that he had "thought long and hard" since then.

However, this was not enough in the eyes of the commission members, who described the risk he would pose to society if he were released again as "unacceptable."

A Beauce farmer who says he has known Gagné for the past decade and who followed the latest developments applauded the commission's decision to deny him parole.

"He is a long-time repeat offender," the farmer, who asked not to be identified, told *The Advocate.* "He has defrauded hundreds of individuals and businesses over the past several decades."

QFA Editorial

KUCHERAV /SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Farmers should take advantage of these cold wintery days to take in a few of the many courses and seminars that are offered, either online or in person. It never hurts to learn a new trick to bolster production in any sector – maple syrup production, grain production, dairy, beef or grazing.

Why not start the new year with a solid plan?

John McCart
QFA President

As we welcome 2026, these cold wintery days are the perfect time to reflect on the challenges and successes of the past and start planning for the coming year.

I have attended enough conferences to be able to share with farmers that a sound business plan should be a priority.

After last years' crops were harvested, the visits from seed dealers started, followed by visits of representatives of other crop inputs, like fertilizers and those providing weed-control plans. Given the climate events that we all experience, now is also the time to look at production insurance. Everything that is produced on a farm is of such high value, the need to ensure input costs are covered is huge. And, unfortunately, the larger the farm, the larger the risk. But even smaller farms with higher value crops, like fruit and vegetables, must have a backup plan.

Last December I wrote about a conference in Winnipeg put on by Farm Management Canada, which I had attended. A lot of different practices were highlighted at this event, and there is surely a plan to suit every farm. Agricultural producers, both young and old, must be prepared for everything that politics, Mother Nature, even the farms' family dynamics can throw at it. Margins are so small these days, everyone must be super efficient.

Online courses

I encourage everyone to take advantage on these cold wintery days to take in a few of the many courses and seminars that are offered, either online or in person. There is always a new trick to be learned in maple syrup production, grain production, dairy, beef, grazing and marketing. Seminars on almost every topic is available. For any topics you can't find, but are interested in, ask around.

As many of you are well aware, I have sat on numerous boards – the Quebec Farmers' Association, the Union des producteurs agricoles, soil clubs, forestry groups. I want to be informed, and not ask why after the fact. By doing this, I am able to share my experiences with the English-speaking farming community so that everyone can learn or at least raise their curiosity.

Policies and practices change so fast that we all must be one step ahead or end up two steps behind. I understand that it would have been a lot easier to let someone else sit on a board or committee and wait for changes to be made, but I want to know first hand.

In 2026 we are more than just farmers tilling the soil and taking care of livestock. Every one of our farms is a legitimate business and should be treated that way. Sometimes the easiest way to make more money is proper planning. There are many different ways to grow the farm that does not always involve more land, but fine-tuning the resources that are already available on your farm.

When the reader of this newspaper looks on page 2, both the mission and the vision of the Quebec Farmers' Association is clearly explained. For almost 70 years, the QFA has been at the head of English information to help farmers become more successful. Now, more than ever, given the market fluctuations, tariffs, political unrest everywhere, knowledge is the key.

I would like to wish all *Advocate* readers a very happy and prosperous new year.

Climate of change

ELENA ELISSEEVA/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Potato farmers in P.E.I. have shown they could reduce emissions by 50 to 150 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per hectare, while saving $50 to $120 per hectare on inputs.

Eco benefits in farming sector must be viewed as assets

New report urges accounting for true value of forests, wetlands and cropland

Christopher Bonasia
The Advocate

The environmental value of Canada's agriculture sector offers opportunities for attracting investment and sustaining economic growth, but it must first be measured and treated like an asset, according to a new report by the Royal Bank of Canada.

"Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. are looking to build back their economies, but the nature base their economies rely on for long-term growth is depleting, and its true value is not accounted," says RBC in it report *Unearthing Value: How nature can play a critical role in pro-growth agendas*, released in mid-December.

RBC's report explores how accounting for natural capital, or environmental assets that provide value to people, can help capture the economic value of forests, wetlands and croplands. Currently, the economic value of the services performed by their ecosystems – like maintaining water and air quality, or providing fertile soils for crop growth – is only reflected by how they support production of resources that can be more directly sold or traded.

Natural capital part of GDP

But Canada's economy depends strongly on natural capital, especially from its agriculture, mining and forestry sectors. The bank maintains that failing to measure its value is a lost opportunity for attracting investment and driving economic growth. Without having done so, the growth of those three nature-based sectors has been 0.3-per-cent slower than the rest of the economy over the past 15 years.

Canada, along with 90 other countries, has already adopted frameworks for accounting for natural capital that align with the United Nation's System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA). But although that part is already in place, RBC says "a gap remains in fully integrating natural capital into national GDP accounts and using natural capital accounting to guide large-scale investments."

This could offer opportunities for new revenue streams for farmers, as shown in several case studies outlined by the report.

For example, potato farmers in Prince Edward Island have used automated data collection and processing to measure the climate benefits of implementing precision agriculture, as part of a pilot project to strategize how farmers can sell carbon credits linked to those practices. The pilot project showed that farms could reduce emissions by between 50 kilograms and 150 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per hectare, with a co-benefit of saving $50 to $120 per hectare on inputs.

And in Manitoba, a partnership of farmers and companies is testing incentive models that could help fund farmers to adopt water stewardship plans in an effort to improve water quality in Lake Winnipeg. In that case study, farmers were able to generate $6,900 per acre of value for the public on average through ecosystem services – like supporting pollinator habitats, soil health and water regulation – and received a value of about $33 per acre in return.

Underused economic engine

RBC's report calls natural capital "an underused economic engine" and outlines better accounting for natural capital can allow that capital to be leveraged for economic growth, especially for the agriculture industry. Farmers could find opportunities for new revenues linked to adopting environmentally supportive practices. Whether that pays off, will vary on a farm-to-farm basis.

RBC's pro-growth approach is fundamentally different than that suggested by other organizations, like the National Farmers' Union, which instead push for economic systems to shift away from relying on constant growth. But settling that disagreement requires a longer discussion.

Trends in agriculture

There's a difference between whether you *can't* or *shouldn't* do something

Chris Judd
The Advocate

MIGUEL PERFECTTI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Just because Americans want to eliminate our supply-managed dairy sector does not mean Canada should get rid of it.

When a young Canadian, J.A.D. McCurdy, was told "You can't build something that can fly," it just made the challenge even greater.

McCurdy went on to be an aviation pioneer, piloting the Silver Dart, the first powered aircraft to fly in Canada. He proved that some things are more difficult than others, but not impossible.

When Christopher Columbus began to prepare for the "first trip across the ocean" in search of India, most people said: "You can't because the Earth is flat and you will only sail off the edge, never to return."

We all know how that went. Columbus didn't get to India, even though he called the first inhabitants Indians, but he did discover America, and proved that the Earth was not flat.

From thousands of years B.C., we have records and structures – like the pyramids that, I'm sure, many said: "It can't be done," but after many years, lives lost in construction and untold monies spent, they were built and are perfectly aligned with the stars.

How and why the pyramids were aligned is still not known. But we do know that the "astronomer" was the most highly regarded person in the kingdom.

We also know that the first huge colosseums were built for sports activities like "chariot racing," fights between gladiators and fights between wild animals and prisoners. Thousands of people filled those colosseums to watch bloody events with the king in attendance making the final "thumbs up" or "down" (usually cheered on by the crowd).

Today, many of our stadiums also hold thousands of spectators and there is usually an "enforcer" or "goon" on many teams to "egg on" or finish disputes among players. Players are not killed today, but often their lives are shortened by severe knocks and charges to their bodies. Most sports games were not that violent in years past, but many of today's fans like to see more violence in games.

Many sports players today make higher wages than the leaders of our countries, but many players in local sports teams play just as hard in small-town arenas and on fields as those pros do. Some sports fans can pay more to see a final game in person than a small wage-earner would spend buying a small TV that shows a re-play of every goal if you missed it.

More money is spent today "betting" on sports than it would cost to supply the cupboards of the nations' food banks.

More than 25 years ago, a famous sports figure was paid more to allow his picture to appear on a cereal box than the farmer was paid to grew the grain used to make the cereal inside the box. Is our food really too expensive?

For more than 40 years I represented farmers at the local, regional and provincial level to improve "food security" for Canadians because consumers thought that anything that was on the shelves of the grocery store was safe. Our farmers wanted to assure consumers that it was.

For more than 40 years, all our farm animals have been tagged with electronic ear tags to allow farmers and government to track an animal so we know every farm or area is has lived. If any disease outbreak is found, we know what it has been in contact with.

Canada has used the Canadian Quality Milk program on dairy farms for more than 20 years to not only assure that every animal is recorded, every vaccination, every treatment, every calving, every sickness, every time the animal was moved, bought, sold, or died. All those things are recorded in the on-farm computer and a copy of the activity is stored in a second place (the house). Each farm is inspected for animal conditions, adequate feed and quality, drug storage, cleanliness, air quality, temperature of milk, and the proper washing of milking equipment, the condition of barn and milking equipment, water quality, and records are kept.

In the '60s it was noticed that a steady supply of milk was not being followed by all farmers and at some times the federal government had to buy surplus dairy products, while at other times source milk when Canada was short. In response, Canadian dairy farmers, the federal government, processors, retailer and consumers developed the supply management system to manage a steady supply. The federal government promised to keep other countries from "dumping" their surplus dairy products into the Canadian market when they had too much.

The average cost to produce milk was monitored in all Canada and any dairy farm that could produce milk at a cost below the average made a profit. The others either reduced their costs or quit!

After watching this cost-of-production method for many years it was noticed that not all the big farms were the best. Every farm could make improvements. This system insures that what the consumer pays for the dairy products at the check-out is all they pay. Even the cost of quota is not included in the Canadian cost of production.

The last U.S. farm bill provided $1.4 trillion more than what American consumers pays for their food. Yes, there is a difference when it comes to "can" and "should."

Young Farmers

Young farmer invests in management skills to sustain family legacy

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

COURTESTY PHILIPPE GUINOIS

The Guinois family who run Guinois & Frères Ltée. – Philippe Guinois (LEFT TO RIGHT), Isabel Riendeau, Joël Guinois, Gaston Guinois, Sylvain Guinois and Jean-Luc Guinois.

Today's young farmers are a different breed than those of yesteryear. Gone are the days when a family could make a living with a few dozen head of cattle. But when it comes to the case of a young farmer like 21-year-old Philippe Guinois, it's inspiring to see just how invested the next generation is in taking up the challenge.

A graduate of the Farm Management and Technology program at McGill University's Macdonald Campus, Guinois grew up on the farm his great-grandfather started in St. Isidore de Laprairie, south of Montreal. His first memory of agriculture is of feeling left out when his older sister got to work on the farm.

"I remember being 10 years old and home alone while my sister was working in the fields," Guinois said. "I told my dad that I didn't want to stay home alone, so I started working instead. That was my first day on the job, and I've been working ever since."

The Guinois family definitely needed the extra hands. They originally lived in the St. Michel area of Montreal. But as the city expanded in the 1950s, they were forced to leave the island. Philippe's great-grandfather moved production to St. Isidore de Laprairie. And from there, the farm got big.

"In 1964, my grandfather Gaston Guinois and his brothers Raymond, Paul and Yvon bought out their father and founded Guinois & Frères Ltée," Philippe explained. "They produced green onions, celery and iceberg lettuce."

In the 1990s, Philippe's father, Jean-Luc Guinois, and uncle, Sylvain Guinois, bought out their uncle Raymond and became partners alongside their father. During that period, the farm shifted production to romaine lettuce, curly lettuce, iceberg lettuce and celery. Since then, Guinois & Frères Ltée has become particularly well known across Quebec for being a major celery supplier.

The family does it all on 200 hectares of muck soil and produces crops on more than 242 hectares. A farm that size needs labourers, and today boasts 112 employees. Young Philippe found a particular connection with the many Mexican and Guatemalan workers the family brought over, working alongside them in the fields during the summers.

"That's what allowed me to learn Spanish," the trilingual Guinois said. "It sparked my curiosity about their lives, including their sacrifices, respect and strong family values."

Growing up on such a large-scale operation made Guinois realize the importance of farm management, spurring his choice to attend Mac, and forming his opinions on what really matters about running a farm.

"I believe it's more profitable for my farm to have a manager/entrepreneur rather than an agronomist," he said. "That's the main reason I chose to pursue agricultural marketing and production. I've always believed that I should 'invest' in the farm's weaknesses and work to improve them little by little. And the fact that I'm constantly working on something different is what makes me love my job."

But Guinois is realistic about the challenges facing modern agriculture. Climate change tops his list of concerns.

"Growing sensitive crops like lettuce and celery makes it especially difficult to maintain stability under changing climate conditions," Guinois said. "In recent years, we've experienced severe droughts followed by excessive rainfall."

When it comes to the future of young farmers, Guinois offers a sobering assessment. He believes breaking into the industry requires either offering a niche product or coming from an established farming background. Large farms are increasingly buying out smaller operations that can't compete on price.

"I don't have much hope for start-ups," he said. "I believe you need to be highly skilled and very hardworking to succeed. I do have slightly more hope for the new generation, but it will not be an easy path."

As for his own future, Guinois isn't rushing back to full-time farm work just yet. He's pursuing three management certificates at UQAM before joining his cousin, Joël Guinois, on the farm full time, representing the fifth generation of Guinois farmers.

Despite these challenges – and the demands of study and farm life – Guinois remains passionate about educating the public. He recently created a video showcasing farm operations that reached thousands of views on Facebook, revealing how little most people know about food production.

"Agriculture is often taken for granted," he said. "We consume agricultural products every day, yet very few people truly understand the amount of work behind them. I'm sure they would complain less about prices and enjoy their celery a little more."

Editorial

PATRICKLAUZON PHOTOGRAPHE/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

From the planned renegotiation of the free-trade deal with the U.S. to the upcoming provincial election, the agricultural sector's issues will be in focus and under pressure.

Martin Caron
UPA President

Two major showdowns in store for 2026

Each year brings its share of unpredictability. In 2025, Donald Trump's return to the White House sowed chaos all over the globe. In 2026, that process will undoubtedly continue – just look at the news.

In Quebec, we can already see two major showdowns on the horizon related directly or indirectly to the 47th American president: the future of the Canada–United States–Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) and the provincial election.

Prime Minister Mark Carney confirmed that Canada would be entering into formal discussions with our southern neighbours this month regarding the mandatory CUSMA review. U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer stated at a congressional committee meeting that Americans have "concerns" about access to Canada's dairy market. This criticism echoes the repeated – and worrisome – recriminations from the U.S. president himself.

In parallel to this, nearly 100 agri-food organizations in Canada, including the Union des producteurs agricoles, recently expressed strong support for a full renewal of CUSMA. And in a letter to Greer's office, 124 American agri-food organizations also stood behind CUSMA. So, the consensus is strong – but what will Trump have to say about it?

Turning now to the provincial election, let's keep in mind that the Quebec government is running out of time to address the concerns of our farmers and forestry producers. The National Assembly doesn't return to session until next month, and activities wind down in June. There is only one budget speech left. And from the summer onwards, the October election can be expected to overshadow everything else.

In this context of limited time and money, the sheer volume of files that need attention is staggering. As we pointed out at our General Congress in December, the agricultural community is asking for more investment in the sector and stronger supports for established and next-generation farmers, remote regions, local agriculture and organics.

We also need concrete solutions to enable long-term debt in the sector to be refinanced more affordably, along with increased protection for farmland and agricultural activities, including our sugar bushes in public forests. On this note, the bill to fast-track major projects allows the government to override the act respecting the preservation of agricultural land and agricultural activities. This poses a direct threat to the fundamental principles of land-use planning.

Meanwhile, carbon pricing continues to erode the competitiveness of our businesses considerably.

It is also important to defend our agri-food priorities in trade, support further diversification of our export markets, and pick up the pace on administrative and regulatory relief. The lifting of the moratorium on expanding cropland is indeed a leap forward, but more action is needed, especially when it comes to water management.

There is plenty on the docket for 2026. On behalf of the UPA's management, the executive council, the general council, and all our directors, I want to wish you a year filled with success and solidarity.

News

Beekeepers clash with CFIA over packaged bee imports

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

CHRIS SEVERN/CREATIVE COMMONS

"Packaged bees" contain approximately 10,000 bees sourced from multiple colonies, making individual inspection unfeasible. Canada currently imports these packages only from Chile, Australia, New Zealand and Italy, while beekeepers argue U.S. bees from approved zones would pose lower risks.

Call it a regulatory stalemate, but Canadian beekeepers and the country's food inspection agency remain at loggerheads over which bees pose the greatest threat to the industry.

A long-simmering dispute between beekeepers and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) over packaged bee imports erupted onto Parliament Hill in late November when Alberta MP Arnold Viersen stood alongside industry representatives to challenge the CFIA's 38-year ban on U.S. bee packages.

The beekeepers' message was pointed: the agency's ban on American bees makes no sense when imports from distant countries pose far greater risks.

"They want to say the U.S. is dangerous, yet they are allowing them from places that are easily 10 times, if not 100 times, more dangerous," said Peter Awram, director of the Canadian Beekeeping Federation.

A hive of trouble

The CFIA has maintained its ban on U.S. packaged bees since 1987, citing concerns about varroa mites, Africanized genetics and small hive beetles. The agency currently permits packaged bee imports only from Chile, Australia, New Zealand and Italy.

Viersen's parliamentary motion calls on the CFIA to restore free trade of honeybee packages from safe zones in the United States, develop clearer assessment methodology, review biosecurity standards and create an emergency plan for tropilaelaps mites.

Beekeepers point out they're already permitted to import queen bees from approved U.S. zones, suggesting proper risk management is feasible. But the CFIA maintains the distinction matters significantly.

According to the agency, hand-picked queens undergo individual inspection for pests and overall health. Packaged bees present different challenges entirely.

"They consist of approximately 10,000 bees sourced from multiple colonies," the CFIA explained. "As a result, individual inspection of these bees is not feasible. This significantly increases the risk of them harbouring mites, parasites and harmful bacteria that would otherwise go undetected compared to importing a single caged queen."

Questions about approved countries

Industry groups have raised concerns about the CFIA's current approved source list. Australia, which supplies 16.4 per cent of Canada's imported packaged bees, sits just 93 kilometres from Papua New Guinea at the closest point between the two countries. Papua New Guinea has confirmed cases of tropilaelaps mite, a potentially devastating parasite that has spread westward from Asia.

When asked about risks from currently approved countries, the agency said it takes importation risks seriously and follows a structured process based on World Organization for Animal Health recommendations. The CFIA says its decisions are grounded in scientific evidence and science-based risk assessments.

"The CFIA is in continuous communication with counterpart authorities in trading countries," the agency stated. "If, after CFIA assessment and official communication with an exporting country, it is confirmed that there is a change in its status, the CFIA will take appropriate actions accordingly."

Awram has documented varroa mite levels in New Zealand packages ranging from four to 20 per cent – well above the one-per-cent threshold set by CFIA regulations. He also noted problems with genetics and the toll that long-distance shipping takes on bees from the Southern Hemisphere.

"The danger from outside of North America is far greater than any benefit we get," he said. "Mismatched seasons and 16-hour flights take their toll on the bees, killing many of them before reaching Canadian shores."

Rejected proposals

Earlier in 2024, the CFIA invited industry submissions on potential risk mitigation measures for U.S. packaged bee imports. Suggestions included transport inspections at the border, pilot projects from Northern California, and applying current queen bee import conditions to packages.

But after that invitation, CFIA rejected all proposals, stating in its summary document that no feasible, scientifically supported mitigation measures could reduce identified risks to acceptable levels.

"The CFIA does not have a duty of care to protect the economic interests of stakeholders," the agency's summary noted. "The CFIA's regulatory mandate under the *Health of Animals Act* and regulations is to help protect Canadian animal health, which includes the health of the Canadian honey bee population."

The agency's risk assessment concluded that the probability of entry, exposure and establishment of any identified hazards on at least one receiving hive in Canada would be 100 per cent, with moderate overall national-scale impact.

Industry considers restrictions

Following the agency's rejection of their proposals, some beekeepers are now suggesting they may need to halt imports from CFIA-approved countries themselves to highlight what they see as regulatory inconsistency and address emerging pest threats.

However, Ian Steppler, chair of the Manitoba Beekeepers Association, noted the industry remains divided on this approach. Not every beekeeper wants to stop importing under current protocols, particularly given the replacement stock these packages provide after difficult winters.

"There's also a lot of beekeepers who will say, 'Well, we utilize these packages from overseas to make up replacement losses, which is important to our industry, and if they're following all the surveillance protocols and preventative measures to ensure the pest doesn't get in their country, then that should be enough to mitigate the risk,'" Steppler said.

Any industry-wide decision on reducing imports from approved countries will depend on outcomes at various beekeeping organizations' annual meetings, with the Manitoba group addressing the question at its March gathering.

The Quebec Farmers' Association is only as strong as its **membership**

It's time to renew your membership. Reminder cards will not be mailed out. So we are asking that you clip out the form below. Fill it out and send your cheque in the amount indicated and mail it in. **We are counting on your support.** Show your pride in being part of Quebec's English-speaking community. **It only cost $68.99**.

As soon as we receive your cheque, we will send you:

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Receipts are issued upon request. Memberships are valid for 12 months from month of purchase.

The Quebec Farmers' Association would like to thank English-speaking farmers who have opted to renew their membership.

By supporting the QFA, you ensure that *The Advocate* arrives in your mailbox every month.

Here are just a few of members who recently renewed. Your support makes a difference.

Glenn Switzman, Rigaud
Stewart Abby, Ste. Anne de Bellevue
Stephanie Baker, La Pêche
James Laidlaw, Pontiac
Charles Allan, Kinnear Mills
George Pibus, West Bolton
Ben Hammond, Lachute

News

JULIE CARON PHOTOGRAPHE/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

It is estimated that more than $50 billion in farm assets are set to change hands over the next decade in Canada.

Future of agriculture hinges on unpre

Bethany Lipka
Business intelligence analyst
and
Isaac Kwarteng
Senior economist
Farm Credit Canada

Canadian agriculture is facing a major challenge, as sweeping demographic changes drive a generational transfer of farm assets that will define the sector's future. The makeup of the farming population is shifting. In 2026, more than half of Canada's farm operators will be over the age of 60, while the number of young farmers under 40 is projected to remain stagnant.

The average age of farm operators continues to rise – from 55 in 2016 to a projected 57 in 2026. Farm exits are outpacing new entries, with an average of 3,500 farm exits through closure or consolidation into corporate family farms each year between 1996 and 2021.

The industry faces an unprecedented transfer of farm ownership, with more than $50 billion in farm assets set to change hands over the next decade. This assumes that farm exit rates remain similar to the most recent census trend (2016 to 2021) of 2 per cent, or 0.4 per cent per year. This translates into an estimated $40 billion in farmland (approximately 5.4 million acres) and $10 billion in current assets, which includes machinery, buildings and other non-land assets by the end of 2035.

Note that an unlikely return to the higher long-term average exit rate of 0.8 per cent annually would generate much larger asset transfers. The rise of family corporation farms partly explains the recent lower exit rates and impacts how asset transfers occur. The proportion of farm assets shifting to the next generation within these family corporation farms will remain strong. This observation combined with 1 to 3 per cent of farmland changing hands each year supports a higher level of asset transfers over the next decade than the estimated $50 billion. As such, the latter estimate is a lower bound to overall asset transfers; and there's a much higher upper bound for asset transfers that is difficult to estimate.

How to bridge the gap

Given the demographic trend and required farm asset transfers, a critical question arises: How can Canadian agriculture successfully bridge the generational gap and secure a promising future of farming?

The answer lies with a new generation of farmers – young, diverse, highly educated, ambitious and ready to lead. But their path is anything but easy. Elevated land prices, limited access to capital and complex succession planning are all barriers that must be overcome.

Overcoming hurdles to farming

Inherent production risks in agriculture and financial risks are considerable barriers for young farmers. For those without family farming backgrounds or industry connections, these challenges can be acute.

The rising value of farmland is a significant financial barrier because farm income trends have lagged asset values in the last 10 years, making farmland ownership increasingly difficult.

New entrants can access farmland through cash rental arrangements or crop-sharing arrangements. The cost to rent farmland is generally lower than financing a purchase, and can also alleviate cash-flow constraints and help managing financial risk.

Young farmers can also have knowledge and skills gaps. Modern farming demands expertise in areas like advanced farm management skills (advanced agronomics, precision agriculture, smart farming, vertical farming, biotechnology etc.), financial management, regulatory compliance, and sustainability – which can be daunting to acquire, especially for those without prior exposure to agriculture.

The one-cycle-per-year nature of farming also means that learning through experience can be costly. Young farmers often lack access to

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cedented transfer of farm ownership

established networks and mentorship, leaving them isolated and without industry insights and support.

Opportunities to empower young farmers

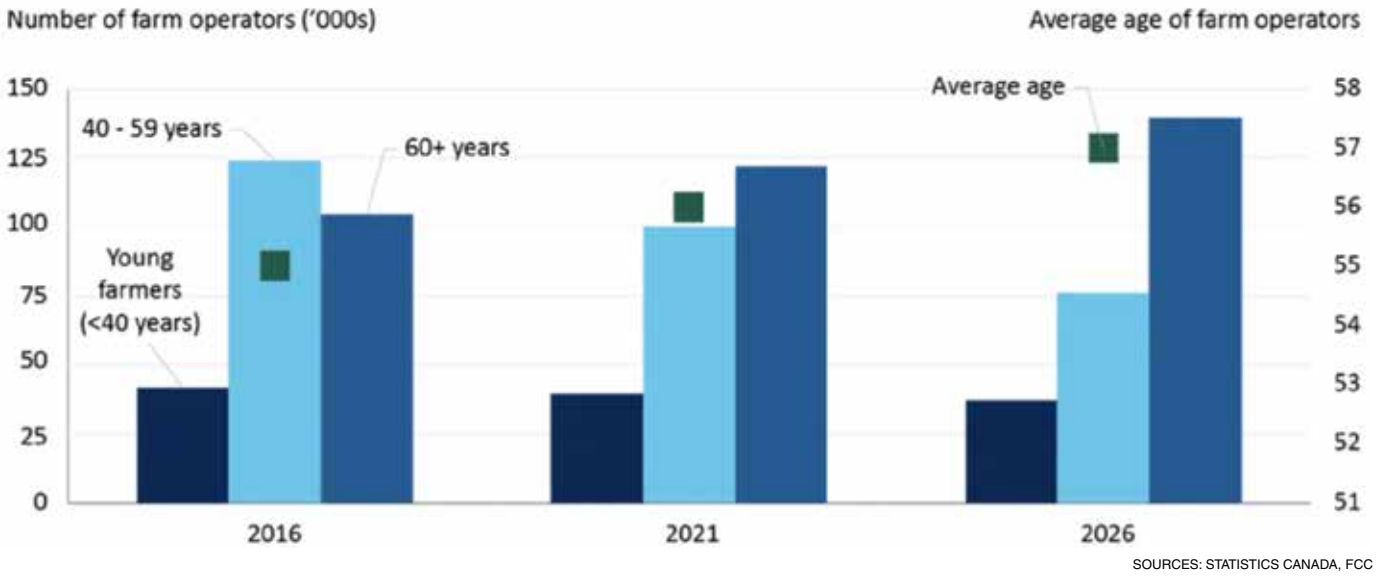
To build a vibrant future and attract young farmers we must:

- Expand access to capital and land. Support tailored loans, grants and land-matching programs to help young farmers to secure financing and farmland.
- Recognize succession planning resources are essential.
- Leverage needed dedicated capital solutions.
- Invest in education and mentorship, and youth programs (e.g., 4H and Agriculture in the Classroom), scholarships, hands-on training, advisory services and peer networks are required to build skills and facilitate knowledge transfer.
- Promote the sector. Public campaigns can modernize agriculture's image and attract diverse talent.

Rural communities must be strengthened. Investment in rural infrastructure and services is needed to make rural communities more appealing and inclusive, especially for underserved groups.

Bottom line

The future of Canadian agriculture depends on empowering the next generation by breaking down barriers and building more inclusive pathways into the sector. Canada can ensure that its farms, food supply and rural communities thrive for generations by harnessing the energy, creativity and diversity of young farmers.



Age demographics of Canadian farm operators – 2016, 2021 and FCC 2026 projections

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WINDMILLS: CPTAQ already has voiced opposition to Hydro's plan

From Page 1

"These projects, which will be put out to tender in 2026, are very likely to be located on agricultural land with high agronomic potential," Letellier warned.

"In a context where Quebecers are increasingly aware of the importance of ensuring our food security, recently prompting the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation to update its agri-food policy, sacrificing a portion of the agricultural land with the best agronomic characteristics in Quebec to accommodate wind turbines that can be installed almost anywhere else is very ill-advised," Letellier said.

Letellier said it is worth noting that the province's own *Commission de Protection du Territoire Agricole* is currently studying two proposed wind farm projects in the Montérégie region, and on Dec. 8 released its report, saying it will likely turn down the projects because "there is no other area where the protection of agricultural land and activities deserves to be expressed so forcefully."

"We welcome this direction from the commission," Letellier said. "Hydro-Québec must take careful note of this important message from the commissioners, namely that Quebec's best land should be used for agricultural production, and not for electricity production."

Quebec currently has 44 wind farms operating in the province, with a capacity of about 4,000 megawatts (MW), and with increased development of wind power technology, the province predicts that by 2035, more than 10,000 MW of wind power will be added – enough electricity to supply more than 2 million households throughout the province.

The first wind farm was established in 2022 in St. Rémi and St. Michel, through a partnership between Kruger Energy and Kahnawàke Sustainable Energies (KSE), which received the green light from Hydro-Québec to start operations.

INSURANCE: Montérégie saw largest share of payments

From Page 1

However, by July that scenario had flipped. A lack of rain hit crops without irrigation particularly hard, and second and third hay cuts came in below normal yields in many regions. Annual crop yields ended up at or below normal in most areas.

Stéphane Labrie, *La Financière*'s president and CEO, said the payouts help farms recover from Quebec's climate risks and keep operating.

"The amounts paid under the ASREC will allow affected businesses to continue their activities," he said, noting the program supports the province's food policy goals around competitiveness, sustainability and food autonomy.

FENG YU/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

A total of 1,779 farms across the province received $44.5 million in crop insurance payments from *La Financière agricole* in 2025 to cover losses due to poor weather conditions.

Regional breakdown

The Montérégie region saw the largest share of payments, with $15 million going to 566 farms. More than $5.5 million of that went to vegetable operations, with grain and pulse crops receiving nearly $4.9 million.

The Chaudière-Appalaches area had 366 farms collect more than $6.2 million, with grain, corn and pulse crops accounting for more than $5.2 million. Farms in the Centre-du-Québec received nearly $4.5 million, distributed to 210 operations, including $2.8 million for cereals and grains.

Lanaudière's vegetable sector took a hit, receiving nearly $1.7 million of the region's $4.1 million total. Apple growers in the Estrie region collected close to $436,000, part of a regional payout exceeding $3.3 million.

The season did have some bright spots. Maple syrup production ran longer than normal with good yields and quality. Beekeepers had mixed results, with winter survival ranging from poor to average depending on location. Small fruit crops, like strawberries and blueberries, generally hit normal yields and quality in most regions, despite the challenging conditions.

The fall harvest faced its own challenges. Heavy rain at the end of October and snow in early November delayed operations, and early frosts in several regions forced farmers to rush corn silage harvest ahead of schedule.

A detailed report on the 2025 growing season can be read at La Financière*'s website (in French only), but going to https://www.fadq.qc.ca and scrolling down to "ASREC : bilan de l'état des cultures – saison 2025" in the right-hand column.*

The Resourceful Naturalist

Paul J. Hetzler
ISA Certified Arborist

Ever wonder why animals find their way without checking their phones?

NICKY1841/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Homing pigeons have an uncanny ability to find their way back to their owners over long distances, which is attributed to iron-containing sensory dendrites in the inner lining of the upper beak.

As the title of the animated TV series *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!* suggests, getting lost was a common theme. From 1969 onward, a cadre of teen detectives spent a lot of their time looking for young Shaggy, who often slipped away from the group, perhaps to smoke a little something, as he always had a case of raging munchies when he showed up again. His dog Scooby-Doo, of course, tagged along for the food. I recall one episode where Shaggy attempted to navigate a forest by looking for moss at the bases of trees to orient himself, remarking that moss was often thicker on the shaded north sides of trees. He should've just asked Scooby which way was north.

A 2013 paper published in the journal *Frontiers in Zoology* suggests dogs tend to line up with Earth's north-south axis when they defecate, and actively avoid an east-west pose. I guess in that regard, all dogs are pointers. After they spent two years logging 1,893 poop events, while taking into account a range of variables, like the weather, researchers found the Number 1 thing that influenced how dogs did a Number 2 was Earth's magnetic field. Maybe the hound-winding pre-poop, turning-about dance that dogs typically perform is to calibrate their internal compass.

We know that most non-human animals can find their way around without asking directions or checking their phones, but science has proven that we have innate homing abilities as well. The mechanisms are not as yet fully understood, but one thing that may be helping humans to navigate is the fact we have metal in our heads.

That's right. Some people have more brain-iron than others, and most of us know at least one individual we suspect of having rust between their ears. The truth is that we all have ferrous-rich cells located in our cerebellums and brain stems that can help us orient to north.

Without question, other animals are better at non-GPS navigation than humans. When we talk about critters that can expertly find their way around, the homing pigeon probably comes to mind. These birds have an uncanny ability to find their way back to their owners over long distances.

And they've done so while under fire. Homing pigeons were used extensively in the First World War to carry messages, often during active combat, and are credited with saving many lives. Homing pigeons were also vital leading up to the 1944 Normandy invasion when radio silence was essential.

And in New Zealand, a "Pigeongram" mail service ran from 1898 to 1908. They even had special stamps, though I'm not sure on what pigeon-part one would have affixed them.

Though bird navigation has been well-studied, much remains a mystery. We know that some of the tricks that birds use to find their way around the planet include landmark recognition and solar orientation, but many species migrate only at night, when terrain and solar position can't help. This is why sensitivity to Earth's magnetic field is also critical.

Luckily for us, Earth is a self-generating electromagnet, thanks to its rotating outer core of molten iron. If it weren't a giant magnet, we'd all be fried to a crisp by cosmic radiation. Recently, it has come to light that animals utilize a protein molecule called a cryptochrome to sense the planetary magnetic field. This involves being attuned to light wavelengths between 400 and 480 nanometres, which is in the blue-violet to blue-turquoise range. In case you wondered.

Birds, it turns out, are serious metal-heads, having, as one paper elegantly put it, "iron-containing sensory dendrites in the inner dermal lining of the upper beak." Ferrous-rich nerve cells were first detected in homing pigeons, but all bird species are thought to have them.

Long-distance migratory species need them the most, but even poultry and resident birds are endowed with an iron-based inner compass. We now know that the same complex dendritic system in the beaks of homing pigeons is a common feature in all birds. Many biologists think this is the basis of some, if not most, kinds of animal behaviour guided, or at least influenced, by magnetic fields.

But heavy metal is not just for the birds. Amphibians, sea slugs, lobsters, bacteria and other life forms are unconscious collectors of iron as well. Real-time brain scans have showed that most humans respond to magnetic fields as well. In a lab setting, some people could even detect when the magnetic polarity was reversed during the study. And in a 2019 study published in the journal eNeuro, lead author Dr. Connie Wang said her team found a very clear human brain response to Earth's natural magnetic field.

What really caught my attention is a report out of South Korea. In an April 2019 PLOS One research paper, researchers found that male subjects homed in on food. Males who had fasted for an entire day seemed to orient themselves in a direction they strongly correlated with food, even when blindfolded and wearing ear plugs, something Shaggy and Scooby-Doo excelled at.

Paul Hetzler is an ISA Certified Arborist, and a former Cornell Extension educator.

Canadian Foodgrains Bank

New program aims to help Philippines farmers protect against climate disasters

Canadian Foodgrains Bank

ADRA CANADA/FACEBOOK.COM

The program will support local growers improve resilience to changing climate patterns.

For the first time, Canadian Foodgrains Bank launched an agriculture and livelihoods program in the Philippines. This seven-year $9.1-million program will help increase resiliency to future climate crises in the Philippines, with funding from the Government of Canada.

The Philippines is consistently identified as among the world's most disaster-vulnerable countries, typically experiencing up to 20 tropical storms in a year. In 2025 alone, eight typhoons claimed hundreds of lives, triggered mass flooding and displaced millions of people across the country.

"Every dollar invested in disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation helps to protect lives in the event of erratic weather and minimizes the long-term costs of these crises," said Foodgrains Bank executive director Andy Harrington. "By strengthening the resilience of rural communities that are highly vulnerable to disasters, this program will help support faster recovery and improve the livelihoods of local farming communities."

Through this new program, three Foodgrains Bank members will work with their local partner organizations in the Philippines to enhance climate-resilient and climate-adaptive programming for 15,000 rural farming households in northern Luzon and eastern Visayas.

In these areas, increasing temperatures and changing rainfall patterns exacerbate agricultural vulnerability and food insecurity, with a disproportionate impact on women, girls and other marginalized groups. Sea level rise threatens coastal communities, forcing families to relocate and taking away their livelihoods.

This program will support communities by improving resiliency to changing climate patterns and strengthening agri-food systems, through initiatives like climate-smart innovations, improving market access, implementing savings groups, and fostering stronger collaboration in disaster preparedness with local authorities.

Projects will be implemented by ADRA Philippines (partner of ADRA Canada), Convoy of Hope (partner of Emergency Relief and Development Overseas) and E-CARE (partner of Alongside Hope).

"This initiative is about partnership – which is at the heart of the Foodgrains Bank mission – and brings together the deep local knowledge of Filipino partners and the technical expertise of Canadian organizations, along with the support of the Canadian government, to create sustainable solutions for generations to come," Harrington said. "Together, we're tackling the disaster risks that threaten food security and agri-food systems."

The program is funded by Global Affairs Canada as part of its Disaster Risk Reduction initiative under the Indo-Pacific Strategy, with a five per cent match from Foodgrains Bank.

Foodgrains Bank recognized as a top 10 charity

Canadian Foodgrains Bank has once again earned a spot on Charity Intelligence's prestigious list of Canada's Top 10 Impact Charities – marking the eighth consecutive year of recognition for its high-impact programs around the world.

The annual ranking, released by Charity Intelligence, an independent, non-profit research organization that provides transparent, objective ratings and reports on Canadian charities to help donors make informed giving decisions, evaluates how effectively charities translate donations into measurable outcomes. The Foodgrains Bank's consistent presence on the list highlights the unwavering commitment of its 15 member agencies and their local partners to transparency, efficiency and meaningful change.

Foodgrains Bank executive director Andy Harrington says the recognition is especially significant at a time when the effectiveness of international aid is under scrutiny.

"In an era where the effectiveness of global assistance is increasingly questioned, this acknowledgment reinforces that well-executed humanitarian work truly makes a difference," Harrington said. "It's a testament to the commitment of our members, their partners and our staff, as well as the compassionate Canadian supporters who continue to stand with communities facing hunger around the world – delivering real impact with compassion and integrity."

With the announcement of Canada's Top 10 Impact Charities landing on the same day in November as the release of the 2026 federal budget, Harrington emphasized that funding for Official Development Assistance (ODA) should not be seen as an act of charity, but as a strategic investment in shared global stability, prosperity and human dignity.

"We're not just extending a helping hand to those in need, we're shaping a safer, more prosperous world for everyone, including Canadians … investing in others is, and always will be, an investment in ourselves."

Foodgrains Bank members and their partners operate with a dual focus: responding to urgent food needs during crises and disasters, and supporting long-term solutions through agricultural training, nutrition projects and sustainable food systems.

Grains

Grain growers briefed on transfers and political threats

The issues, opportunities and realities affecting the next generation of growers in the grain sector were in focus at the Producteurs de grains du Québec's Sector Sustainability Day in Drummondville on Dec. 16.

This networking event was geared towards young people ready to get started as well as established producers reaching the stage where they need to transfer their operations to the next generation.

The day's program included several presentations.

First, Éric Dufour, the regional vice-president and management consulting partner at Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton, gave a speech entitled "The Perfect Storm: Stay, Retreat, Save Myself or Prepare for My Succession?"

This was followed by a presentation on the implications of the trade war in 2026 on land ownership and leasing issues, given by Krishen Rangasamy, director of economics and senior economist at Farm Credit Canada.

Representatives of the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec and L'ARTERRE then took turns introducing their respective organizations. The evening ended with a special recording of the Fond'rang podcast.

The 2025 edition of the PGQ's Provincial Day for its affiliated syndicates was also held in Drummondville on Dec. 17. This annual member involvement event began with Francis Girard, executive director of the Grain Research Centre (CÉROM), who discussed joint projects between CÉROM and the PGQ.

The morning wound up with a talk by Marlène Thiboutot, coordinator for Concertation Grains Québec. In the afternoon, Yasmine Abdelfadel, host, political analyst and entrepreneur, took the floor to speak about "Understanding Turbulence on the Political Scene, Between Threats and Opportunities," which was followed by a talk by Francis Goulet, vice-president of isurance and income protection at the Financière agricole du Québec (FADQ).

Agrinome and adviser Sylvie Thibaudeau, with the *Club agroenvironnemental du Bassin La Guerre* and for *Terre à Terre agronomes conseils*, wrapped up the day with her talk entitled "Cover Crops Without a Hitch."

In all, nearly 100 grain producers from across Quebec attended these two major networking and member-involvement events.

Market webinar

The PGQ's Market Information Service (SIM) will offer a free webinar in French on Jan. 29, starting at 7:30 p.m. The latest Statistics Canada estimates for the 2025 harvest will be discussed. The speakers will be senior market analyst Ramzy Yelda and market information officer Étienne Lafrance.

For details, see pgq.ca/calendrier-des-evenements/webinaire-des-marches.

Farm start-ups grants and transfers

The PGQ offers grants to help pay professional fees related to farm start-ups and transfers. These grants – valued at up to $1,000 – are specifically intended to cover professional fees associated with human relations, an aspect that is often underestimated and neglected in such projects.

Eligible projects must also be involved in a funding application for farm start-up or transfer advisory services under MAPAQ's Advisory Services Program (PSC). For full details, see pgq.ca/actualites/lancement-de-la-nouvelle-bourse-des-pgq-pour-la-releve.

PRODUCTEURS DE GRAINS DU QUÉBEC

The **Producteurs de grains du Québec** *(PGQ) represent the interests of about 11,000 Quebec grain farmers. In addition to liaising with farmers, the PGQ engages in monitoring, analysis, collaboration and communication with industry and government. The PGQ is responsible for acting on various economic and political levels, specifically in the following domains: market information, commerce and market development, research, technology transfer and consulting, financial protection, and risk management.*

News

Founder of Quinn Farm fondly remembered

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

Elwood Quinn died Saturday, Jan. 3, at the age of 78.

Eight months ago, Elwood and son Phil Quinn and their staff were credited with saving the life of one of a co-worker at the Quinn Farm who had suffered a heart attack while working in a field. Performing CPR and using a defibrillator, the Quinns' actions were widely celebrated for bringing the man back from the brink.

Sadly, Elwood Quinn himself was felled by a fatal heart attack on the morning of Jan. 3 at the farm in the tiny community of Notre Dame de l'Île Perrot, located 50 minutes west of Montreal. The founder of the popular Quinn Farm was 78.

"He left us after feeding his animals, driving his tractor and sharing breakfast with his dear friends. He passed away from a heart attack, an almost perfect passing for a farmer," said Phil Quinn in a statement posted to social media.

Quinn described his father as "a passionate man who passed on to us his love of agriculture – knowledge inherited from our ancestors and deepened by years spent in the fields, enjoying the fruits of his hard labour."

Tributes from fellow farmers, clients and even journalists began pouring in on the morning of Jan. 4, after the Quinn family announced the death.

"On behalf of the employees and campers at Fatima, we offer our deepest sympathies to the Quinn family and farm employees on the passing of Mr. Elwood Quinn," said a spokesperson for the Centre de plein air Notre Dame de Fatima. "For nearly 30 years, our proximity to your land has allowed us and our campers to get to know a man who was deeply passionate about his farm, his animals and agriculture. We will cherish fond memories of him and have deep respect for the legacy he leaves behind."

Phil Quinn said the hardships of his father's past "made him a tough man, but at times he could be so tender. For some things, he was incredibly patient, while he could also have a short fuse. He loved his farm so deeply and was immensely proud of it."

"More than almost anyone, he was proud that his family worked this same land, and that every year, tens of thousands of people gathered there with joy," said Quinn. "All the trees he planted more recently, he would say, 'I'll never see the shade these trees will cast, but the grandchildren will be able to sit in it.'"

Quinn Farm began in 1982 when Elwood and Marie Quinn bought 110 acres and immediately began removing small trees and shrubs in order to work the land. They installed drainage and planted berries and sweet corn. Over the next two years, their efforts were concentrated on expanding crops to include the first pumpkins, asparagus and more berries. They even installed a drip irrigation system to help conserve water, one of the first systems in the province to re-circulate tile drainage water for irrigation.

By 1987, an orchard was planted with more than 18 varieties of apples and a total of 3,800 trees. A ravine was dammed in order to form a man-made irrigation pond with 1,500 loads of soil and two weeks of bulldozing, resulting in a 35-million-litre reservoir.

In 1990, the farm had its first major use of compost, and approximately 300 tonnes were applied to improve the condition of the soil.

In the mid-1990s the first Christmas trees were planted with 1,600 Balsam fir trees and, over the years, the Quinns continued to plant thousands more and different varieties. In 2006, a second barn raising took place. All of the wood in this barn was harvested from the forest on the farm and handmade as an old fashioned timber frame building. The barn now houses a variety of animals, including chickens, pigs and sheep, and is host to many rare breed animals.

In 2019, the 100-acre land next door was bought, which helped double the acreage of Quinn Farm. Over the past years, the Quinns and their team have worked hard at planting additional crops, to bring even more variety to their customers.

Today, Quinn Farm sits on more than 200 acres and hosts around 100,000 visitors a year.

"We're forever grateful for our history and how it has led us to where we are today," said Phil Quinn. "I thank my dad for having brought us here."

A celebration of Elwood Quinn's life will be held in early May.

The Miner Report

The Five Qs to set calves up for success

Daniel de Oliveira
William H. Miner
Agricultural Research Institute

Colostrum management is the most critical nutritional and management event in a calf's life, yet it's also one of the most variable practices on dairy farms.

The success or failure of passive immune transfer is determined mainly within the first hours after birth, and minor inconsistencies in colostrum handling, timing or delivery can have long-lasting effects on calf health, growth and survival.

While consistency of nutrient intake through milk and milk replacer is also a key component of calf performance, colostrum represents the first opportunity to establish consistency in calf care. Getting colostrum management right from the start makes subsequent feeding programs more effective and predictable.

A practical way to evaluate and improve colostrum management is through the Five Qs framework: Quality, Quantity, Quickness, sQueaky clean and Quantification.

This approach emphasizes not only the importance of colostrum itself, but also the need to deliver it consistently across calves, shifts and personnel. Variation in any of these components can undermine the success of passive transfer, even when overall colostrum availability appears adequate.

Colostrum **quality** refers primarily to immunoglobulin concentration, which varies widely among cows and cannot be reliably assessed by appearance alone.

Objective measurement using a Brix refractometer allows farms to consistently evaluate colostrum quality at collection and make informed decisions about its use. Establishing clear Brix cutoffs for feeding fresh colostrum, freezing for later use or discarding low-quality product helps standardize decision-making and reduces reliance on assumptions, like cow parity or udder appearance. Consistent quality assessment increases the likelihood that calves receive colostrum capable of delivering adequate immunoglobulin mass.

Quantity is closely tied to quality because the total mass of immunoglobulins delivered to the calf determines the likelihood of successful passive transfer. Feeding a consistent target volume based on calf size is more effective than allowing intake to vary based on appetite or convenience.

Most recommendations support feeding approximately 10 to 12 per cent of birth body weight in the first feeding, which for most Holstein calves corresponds to roughly 3 to 4 litres of colostrum.

Using a standard volume for every calf reduces variability and helps ensure smaller or slower-to-drink calves are not underfed. While farms may differ in preferred feeding methods, a preferred approach is the use of an esophageal feeder to ensure delivery of the full target volume. However, there's no difference between nipple or tube feeding, so if the calf is willing to drink on its own within a certain time, that would be appropriate.

Each farm should use the method that best fits its system and staff, but when calves don't voluntarily consume the full amount, use of an esophageal feeder is strongly recommended over partial intake.

Another critical aspect of colostrum is that it should be fed warm, at body temperature (about 100–104°F), to encourage intake and support digestion. The best way to warm colostrum is in a warm water bath with gentle mixing to heat it evenly. Microwaves should be avoided because they create hot spots that can damage immunoglobulins even when colostrum doesn't feel overly hot. Improper heating can reduce IgG availability and undermine passive transfer, making careful warming an important part of colostrum consistency.

Quickness refers to how soon colostrum is delivered after birth. The calf's ability to absorb immunoglobulins declines rapidly due to gut closure, making early feeding essential. Even when adequate volume and quality are provided, delays in colostrum delivery reduce absorption efficiency and increases the risk of failure of passive transfer. Protocols that prioritize feeding colostrum within the first two to four hours after birth require coordination among calving, maternity and calf care staff. Clear assignment of responsibility and routine checks help ensure timing goals are met consistently, even during busy periods.

sQueaky clean emphasizes hygiene during colostrum collection, storage and feeding. Colostrum is an excellent growth medium for bacteria, and contamination can interfere with immunoglobulin absorption and increase the risk of disease.

Cleaning and sanitizing collection buckets, bottles, nipples and esophageal feeders after every use are essential components of colostrum management. Farms that apply hygiene standards similar to those used in the milking parlour tend to achieve better passive transfer outcomes. Consistent sanitation practices also reduce early exposure to pathogens, supporting calf health during the transition to regular feeding programs.

Quantification closes the loop by measuring outcomes to confirm that colostrum protocols are working as intended.

Monitoring serum total protein, Brix or IgG concentrations (which must be sent off for analysis) in a subset or all calves provides valuable feedback on the effectiveness of colostrum management.

For routine monitoring, testing approximately 10 per cent of calves born, or at least 12 calves per month, provides a reasonable balance between confidence and practicality, with larger sample sizes improving reliability. On-farm tools like digital or optical refractometers allow rapid, practical assessment of serum total protein or Brix using only a few drops of serum, making routine monitoring feasible without specialized laboratory equipment, though a centrifuge is required for serum separation.

Sampling is ideally performed at 24 to 48 hours of age, but in practice can be conducted from one day (24 hours after colostrum) to seven days of age and still provide a reliable measure for herd-level monitoring.

Results should be reviewed monthly, with more frequent monitoring recommended when management changes occur, new staff are trained or health concerns arise. Establishing farm-specific targets for passive transfer success and regularly reviewing results helps identify system weaknesses and supports continuous improvement.

In addition to colostrum management, consistent access to water is an important supporting component of early calf care. Water should be offered at all ages and available at all times, including during the pre-weaning period. Milk doesn't replace the calf's need for free water, as water intake is required to support hydration, starter intake and rumen microbial activity.

During cold or extreme winter conditions when freezing is a concern, maintaining water availability requires additional management, but remains essential. Practical approaches include offering warm water multiple times per day, using insulated or heated water pails where feasible, and refreshing water shortly after milk feedings when calves are most likely to drink. Water pails shouldn't be removed for extended periods, as inconsistent access can reduce intake and disrupt feeding behaviour. Providing continuous or frequently refreshed access to clean, unfrozen water helps ensure that gains achieved through good colostrum management are not limited later in early life.

In short, getting colostrum management right comes down to doing the basics well, every time. Consistently focusing on the Five Qs – checking quality, feeding enough colostrum quickly, keeping equipment clean, and routinely confirming passive transfer – goes a long way toward improving calf health and growth. Pairing strong colostrum practices with consistency in feeding milk and reliable access to clean water at all ages, even during challenging winter conditions, helps calves get the most out of early-life nutrition. These are practical steps that can be implemented on any farm and, when done consistently, can make a noticeable difference in calf performance and long-term success.

The Miner Institute, based in Chazy, N.Y., conducts practical research on the dairy-crop interface, equine reproduction and management, and environmental conservation. Its research activities combine a global perspective with a regional application.

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The success or failure of passive immune transfer is determined within the first hours of a calf's life.

Cookin' with the Advocate

Rediscover the flavour of the mighty sesame seed

Cynthia Gunn
QFA's Food Writer

Sesame seeds can be the tiny heroes of the kitchen.

Seems we humans figured that out a long time ago, about 5,500 years ago to be somewhat imprecise. Historically, sesame was favoured for its ability to grow in areas that do not support the growth of other crops. It is a robust crop that subsistence farmers can grow in drought conditions, in high heat or even when rains are excessive. Commercial sesame farming, not surprisingly, occurs under more favourable conditions.

Sesame seeds were also favoured, of course, because they taste amazing, contain lots of oil and, while humans couldn't scientifically analyze its properties, we can guess that they understood that sesame was a pretty good nutritional addition to the diet.

Well here's something I didn't know until after I served a lemon–tahini dip at a birthday dinner recently for a few friends, among who there was one with a nut allergy. Sesame can trigger the same allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis, as seen with other food allergens. A cross-reactivity exists between sesame and peanuts, hazelnuts and almonds. Cross-reactivity meaning that when the proteins in one substance are like the proteins in another, the immune system sees them as the same. Twenty-five per cent of people with a peanut allergy will react to sesame. The friend was, luckily, not among the 25 per cent. Forewarned.

As many seeds do, whole sesame seeds contain a significant amount of phytic acid, which is considered an anti-nutrient, in that it binds to certain nutritional elements consumed at the same time, especially minerals, and prevents their absorption. Heating and cooking reduce the amount of the acid in the seeds. Good, the label on the tahini jar says dry-roasted sesame seeds.

A different friend at a different dinner brought a lemon-tahini dressing, which inspired me to dig out my old recipe to compare with hers and join forces, so to speak. It was similar, but the nutritional yeast was an additional ingredient. As an aside, there are those among us popcorn fanatics who swear by a handful of nutritional yeast sprinkled over a bowl of buttered popcorn. It adds a rich, almost cheesy-buttery flavour. In this dressing, it adds an added depth of flavour, not to mention it's darn good for you. My old recipe has maple syrup in it, which is optional, depending what you're using it for. I also like to add water, as the tahini creates a fairly thick consistency.

Incidentally, tahini, or sesame paste, is pretty widely available now. While raw seeds go rancid easily at room temperature, tahini has a long shelf life and just needs to be kept in a dark, cool place. Once made into dressing, however, it should be refrigerated and used within a week or so. As always, I'm going to try freezing some.

Play around with the recipe and make it your own. It can be served as anything between an accompaniment to a raw veggie plate, to a salad dressing or a topping on fish or steamed broccoli. I simply had a dish of it on the table and people scooped it onto their plate of pork tenderloin, rice and butter roasted carrots until literally, the dish was scraped clean.

A former caterer, Cynthia Gunn now runs a window-restoration business. She restores pre-1950s wood windows, preserving their beauty and inherently durable old-growth wood, and creating superior energy-efficiency with high-end weather-stripping. She still cooks and bakes for her family in West Quebec.

Lemon-Tahini Dressing or Dip

CYNTHIA GUNN, THE ADVOCATE

This lemon-tahini recipe can be used as a dressing or a dip.

Ingredients

1 large clove garlic
¼ cup tahini (sesame paste)
⅓ cup fresh lemon juice (about 2 lemons)
⅓ cup olive oil
2-3 tablespoons nutritional yeast
½ teaspoon sea salt
2-4 tablespoons water
1 teaspoon maple syrup (optional)

Preparation

Blend all ingredients in a food processor until smooth. If you don't have one, or can't be bothered to get it out, simply get out a whisk and, if your garlic has been minced fine, you can whisk it in a bowl, using a little elbow grease.

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