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"The connection between food security and national security is huge. And the connection between food security and global security, it's clear."

—Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, the executive managing director of the world's largest publicly funded agricultural research network, CGIAR, who was in Ottawa earlier this month to urge Canadian officials to continue investing in agriculture, warning that the continued Iranian blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has upended supply chains

QFA VIDEOCONFERENCES

Wednesday, May 27
at 7:30 p.m.

Pastured Lamb for Meat and Fibre

See page 16 for details.



LUCE MORIN/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Maple producers say the sap flow in the first few days of April has been excellent, bolstering their production this season.

Maple season saw slow start but producers cautiously hopeful

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

At the beginning of April, the sweet smell of boiling sap was rising from maple productions across Quebec, but the 2026 maple syrup season is testing producers' patience before delivering its first real rewards. But for many of the province's maple producers, an uneven start followed by a sudden sap run left farmers cautiously optimistic.

For Morgan Arthur of Hinchinbrooke in the Châteauguay Valley, the season has been anything but slow. Operating 28,000 taps in partnership with his nephew Elgin Macfarlane, Arthur describes an opening run that was intense.

"It started with a bang," said Arthur. "We got 10 days of production in five days."

Arthur and Macfarlane's operation was sitting roughly 70 barrels short of what they would call a truly excellent crop – and at a pace of about 27 barrels a day when interviewed by

The Advocate on April 6, that gap was closing fast. The sap has been running at around four gallons per tap, well above the two-gallon benchmark that most producers consider a solid flow.

That sheer volume has meant round-the-clock logistics.

"I have a dump truck with a 3,200-gallon tank and I did nine trips yesterday," said Arthur. "And I have two more to do after this interview!"

At one point he had 34,000 gallons of sap sitting in holding tanks waiting to be processed. And the work doesn't end there. Beyond his own taps, Arthur and Macfarlane also custom-boil for other producers – representing roughly another 10,000 taps, adding further pressure on his production schedule.

"It's been better here than in most places," said Arthur, making a comparison to other regions in the province. "And if we get another run after the frost that's coming in the next three days, we'll have a great year."

See MAPLE SEASON, Page 4.

Hikes in farmland prices slowing in Quebec

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The price of farmland continued to rise across the country last year, extending what is being described as a "more than three-decades long upward trend." But the rate of increase showed signs of slowing in Quebec, where the cost rose again in 2025, however, the provincial increase was well below the national average for the second year in a row.

In fact, Quebec saw the average price of an acre of agricultural land rise by 4.8 per cent in 2025, less than the national average of 9.3 per cent, marking the fourth-lowest provincial rate of increase in the country, behind Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, according to data released by Farm Credit Canada last month.

"The Canadian farmland market remained resilient, defying expectations as producers continued to expand their land base and make strategic acquisitions, supporting values across cultivated land, irrigated land and pastureland nationwide," stated the FCC report. "The market remained supported by farmland's long-term investment appeal, tight supply and strong competition among expansion-focused producers."

"Persisting succession challenges supported demand, while proximity to urban centres added pressure and further strengthened land values," the report outlined. "The ongoing uncertainties related to trade and tariffs, high input costs and low commodity prices didn't deter buyers' interest in farmland, although these issues continue to be relevant risks to assess going forward."

The FCC's latest report marks the 42nd year the agricultural agency has produced an analysis of farmland values.

For an overview of farmland price increases, see Pages 12 and 13.



Just the facts

\$350

The average cost of producing a tonne of grass silage in 2025, which represents a 34-per-cent increase from the \$260-per-tonne cost in 2021.

Source: Lactanet

162,900

The number of woodlot owners in Quebec.

Source: Fédération des producteurs forestiers du Québec (FPFQ)

10

The number of new cellular towers in the Centre-du-Québec region to improve wireless services with poor coverage in that region. Announced in March, this is the latest phase of improving wireless service in the province promised by the provincial government in 2022, which began with the installation of 84 towers at that time financed by the federal government. Then, in 2024, 118 additional cell sites in 11 regions in Quebec were added to the network, representing an investment of \$186.4 million.

Source: Quebec government

4,215

The number of dairy farms in Quebec. These operations are run by 9,501 operators.

Source: Les Producteurs de lait du Québec

83%

The percentage of Quebec woodlot owners who harvested wood on their properties in the last five years.

Source: Fédération des producteurs forestiers du Québec (FPFQ)

OFFERING A SWEET TREAT



MADELEINE LANGLOIS, THE ADVOCATE

The outdoor snack bar at Érablière St-Henri in Ste. Marthe, west of Montreal, is always a popular stop. The snack bar is just one feature on the grounds of the sugar shack operation that attracts thousands of visitors, including school tours, at this time of year. They make their way to the farm for a traditional Québécois meal that features all the maple-infused specialities and tour the grounds to see how maple syrup is made.



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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Signature

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- voting privileges at the QFA Annual General Meeting

Quebec Farmers' Association

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



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As Hydro launches largest wind power expansion project, critics line up

UPA joins growing chorus of critics opposed to plan to be built on farmland

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

The Union des producteurs agricoles has joined elected officials and community groups across the province in calling on Hydro-Québec to halt its wind power expansion project before it moves ahead with its campaign this month.

The UPA is also urging the Quebec government to hold meaningful public discussions about wind power development in the province.

Fresh off its annual general meeting in March, the UPA adopted a resolution calling on the CAQ government to mandate the *Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement* (BAPE) to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the wind energy sector. The UPA is also demanding that no installations be permitted in key agricultural zones or in maple groves.

Hydro-Québec plans to add 10,000 megawatts (MW) of new wind power capacity by 2035. The 2026 call for tenders, taking place this month, targets a potential 5,000 MW, almost entirely in agricultural areas.

"The pressure on agricultural land is significant and constant," said UPA president Martin Caron. "Over the past 10 years, more than 17,000 hectares of farmland have been sacrificed to urban sprawl, financial and real estate speculators, industrial projects and infrastructure construction."

Caron argues that all branches of the Quebec government, including Hydro-Québec, "must at all costs avoid exacerbating this problem."

According to the UPA, Quebec farmers have access to only 2 per cent of the land needed to ensure food security compared with 58 per cent in France and 45 per cent in the United States.

Meanwhile, the UPA; the Canadian Union of Public Employees – Quebec (CUPE-Quebec); *Vent d'élus*, a group of former elected officials from across the province who advocate for protection of farmland and a variety of municipal issues; and the *Regroupement vigilance énergie Québec* (RVÉQ), a citizen-based group; are "joining forces to denounce the imminent installation of several hundred wind turbines in the heart of productive agricultural areas, which are the true pillars of our collective food supply," said Caron.

Premier François Legault, however,



AWANA JF/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Hydro-Québec plans to add 10,000 megawatts of new wind power capacity by 2035. The 2026 call for tenders, taking place this month, targets a potential 5,000 MW, almost entirely in agricultural areas.

says Hydro's wind power expansion is going ahead. On March 26, Legault officially launched the construction of two phases of a wind farm in Charlevoix that could eventually become the largest in Canada, with an investment of \$3 billion.

"If we act intelligently, the next century could be Quebec's century from an economic standpoint," Legault said.

"Energy is the most important global issue. Every country, including Donald Trump's country, is looking for energy. It's a race going on right now around the world."

The two phases of the Des Neiges wind farms – the southern sector and the Charlevoix sector – which make up a total of 114 wind turbines on land owned by the Séminaire de Québec, could power 140,000 homes by generating 800 megawatts (MW), Legault said.

Hydro will pay developer Boralex and its partners less than the average wind power rate from its latest 2023 call for tenders – that is, less than 7.8 cents per kilowatt-hour – but Legault declined to disclose the exact figure.

Ultimately, with the third phase, the project could reach 1,200 MW and contribute to Hydro's goal of adding 10,000 MW of wind energy to its current portfolio of 4,000 MW by 2035.

Preparatory work for both phases is already well under way – including clearing and road construction – the

state-owned utility confirmed, but "this is the moment when we're taking concrete action," said Hydro-Québec president Claudine Bouchard.

The Des Neiges South project is scheduled to come online by the end of 2027, while the Des Neiges Charlevoix project is targeted for late 2028.

The third phase, further west, would include between 57 and 67 wind turbines and is still subject to approvals and review by the BAPE.

About a dozen wind farms are currently under development across Quebec, said Bouchard.

The social pact established with Hydro was intended to channel the profits generated by energy production toward the benefit of Quebec society, said Patrick Gloutney, president of CUPE-Québec, which represents 140,000 members, including 16,000 who work at Hydro-Québec. The union is critical of Hydro's approach to contract the expansion out to private developers. In this context, it is inconceivable to proceed with privatized wind energy production, he said.

"We pointed out last year that Bill 69 on energy resource governance opened the door wide to prioritizing private-sector interests at the expense of those of the community," said Gloutney, who argues that Hydro-Québec's expansion project is putting Quebec farmers in danger of losing their farms.

Janie Vachon-Robillard, coordinator

responsible for wind energy issues at the non-profit group, Regroupement Vigilance Énergie Québec, says the government and Hydro are being negligent by entrusting the private sector with assessing social and environmental impacts, allowing the pursuit of profit to take precedence over risks.

"New findings regarding the impacts of wind turbines on health and ecosystems require a revision of standards, and only community consent through a referendum can guarantee the social acceptability of these projects," she said.

"For our organizations, protecting agricultural land is a societal priority just as important as current and future energy development," she added. "Hence the importance of holding a public inquiry into the wind energy sector and putting an end to its accelerated expansion."

Caron says the UPA and other supporting organizations reaffirm that the wind energy call for tenders about to be launched must be suspended.

"Given the sector's rapid expansion, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of its impacts. A moratorium on wind energy development is therefore necessary until the government mandates the BAPE to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the wind energy sector," he said.

Local Journalism Initiative

Maple Syrup



MAPLE SEASON: Early April flow has been good, producers say

From Page 1

Similarly, for David Hall in Lac Brome, sap flow by early April was giving every indication that the 2026 harvest would be a great year.

"It ran like hell yesterday," said Hall, whose family sugarbush boasts 12,000 taps as well as another stand of trees with a quota of 9,000. "The sap is beautiful. It's clean; it boils easy."

As regional president of the Montérégie-Est sector of the *Producteurs et productrices acéricoles du Québec*, and the fifth generation to work Ferme Hallacres Farm – a property whose history stretches back to 1860 – Hall has seen enough seasons to take the long view.

"Currently, we're running about half a pound per tap behind last year's pace, which was itself a good year," said Hall on April 4. "We've had three monster runs. That brought up our overall numbers."

Given his position with the provincial sirop producers' group, Hall is frequently in touch with other producers in Quebec, Maine and Vermont. He noted that producers in warmer sugarbushes had been leading the way, while those in colder, higher-elevation stands were beginning to catch up.

"I tend to have a colder sugarbush," said Hall. "Around this time of year, the colder bushes are starting to pick up, and the warmer bushes are starting to get tired around now."

Hall pointed to 2021 as the last genuinely difficult year – though even then, crop insurance softened the blow for larger operations.

"The people who take crop insurance tend to be the larger producers," he said. "When your butt is on the line, you tend to hedge your bets carefully."

The difference between hitting the 80-per-cent and 85-per-cent production thresholds, he explained, is financially significant enough to shape decision-making for the whole season.

"As long as it keeps going, we're good," Hall said optimistically. "But you never know till it's over because freak weather even right at the end can give you a crappy season."

Quebec's maple industry enters the final stretch of 2026 with considerable momentum. The province produces nearly three-quarters of the world's maple syrup supply, and with the bulk of its taps concentrated in Estrie, Chaudière-Appalaches and Bas-Saint-Laurent having enjoyed strong flows, the strategic reserve – which acts as a global supply buffer – appears to be in reasonable health.

Arthur put it simply: "If it keeps going, we'll be in a very good position."

For Quebec's maple farmers, that's quite enough to be going on with.

Local Journalism Initiative

St. Chrysostome producer accused of diluting syrup with cane sugar

While this year's maple harvest draws attention to the province's prized industry, a hidden-camera investigation by CBC/Radio-Canada's *Enquête* television program has exposed a producer who sells directly to retailers of allegedly diluted syrup with cane sugar.

According to *Enquête*, Steve Bourdeau, a maple producer from St. Chrysostome in the Montérégie region, has been selling diluted syrup to major grocery chains – including IGA and Metro in Quebec and Farm Boy in Ontario – in cans labelled 100-per-cent pure maple syrup.

Laboratory tests commissioned by *Enquête* conducted at Centre ACER – the provincial maple research and expertise centre in St. Hyacinthe – on five randomly purchased cans from different lots found that all five containing about 50 per cent cane sugar.

In addition to his own production, Bourdeau purchases large quantities of bulk syrup from producers in Ontario and New Brunswick – roughly three times his own output. He acknowledged to *Enquête's* collaborators that the quality of that outside syrup is inconsistent, and that barrels with flavour defects are blended together. Syrup imported from outside Quebec is not subject to the same inspection regime as Quebec-produced bulk syrup, meaning large volumes can be purchased, canned and sold in grocery

stores without any testing.

Quebec's inspection system covers nearly 90 per cent of the province's bulk syrup production. But it does not extend to cans sold directly by producers to retailers.

Isabelle Lapointe, director-general of the *Producteurs et productrices acéricoles du Québec* (PPAQ), acknowledged the limits of the federation's oversight.

"A producer can have a business relationship with another producer in Ontario. We have no control over that," Lapointe told Radio-Canada.

"The producer has the responsibility to ensure that he complies with the standards applicable in Quebec," including those governing the purity and authenticity of any product he or she puts up for sale.

The federation's relationship with Bourdeau has not been a rosy one. In 2023, he was fined \$346,000 by the PPAQ for purchasing bulk syrup in Quebec and reselling it without authorization.

When confronted with the laboratory results, Bourdeau blamed a supplier and showed little urgency to pull the product from shelves.

Metro stores in Quebec have since pulled Bourdeau's cans from its shelves and offered to refund customers who return unopened cans.

– Andrew McClelland

Top dairy producers in Montérégie honoured

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

Les Producteurs de lait du Québec – the province's largest milk producing organization – has just announced the winners of the 2025 Lait'Xcellent Contest, which recognizes dairy farms that achieve the highest quality standards in the province.

For the Montérégie region, winners from all three sectors were announced on March 24 by *Les Producteurs de lait de la Montérégie* during their annual general meeting.

The competition "recognizes milk producers who achieved the best results over the course of the year in terms of the quality of milk delivered to processing plants," the group stated in a press release.

In Montérégie west

Ferme E. Fankhauser of St. Sébastien captured first place honours for the Montérégie west region, as owners Ernest, Simon and Samuel Fankhauser, as well as Barbara Strahm, received the gold medal.

"Ferme E. Fankhauser is a regular in the competition," organizers said. "It has won the gold medal six times – in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 – and took home the silver medal in 2018 and 2019. This string of accolades reflects the farm's unwavering commitment to producing milk of exceptional quality."

"These distinguished producers stand out thanks to regular milk testing, milk analysis when the SCC (somatic cell count) is high, regular maintenance of milking equipment, and the cleanliness of their stalls."

The second place went to Fermes Meganck of Godmanchester, and to its owners, Denise Brodeur, and Wim and Claudia Meganck.

Recognized for their herd of 60 lactating cows, with a quota of 92 kg per day, Fermes Meganck began implementing a rigorous milking protocol in 2000 that uses a free-stall milking parlour. The farm also conducts microbiological testing to ensure top-quality milk.

Third place honours went to Ferme Drogue de Mont St. Grégoire, owned by Marc and Claudia Drogue.

"The quality of their milk lies in the small daily actions," said Ana Maria Martin, president of *Les Producteurs de lait de Montérégie Ouest*. "The farm has a herd of 90 lactating cows that produce 135 kg of milk per day. The hygiene of their facilities and the well-being of their cows are essential for producing top-quality milk."

"For us, it is a source of pride to highlight the achievements of these three winners, who produce milk of exceptional quality," Martin said. "Their passion for their profession, their commitment, and their attention to detail have enabled our winners to achieve a remarkable level of quality. They thus

demonstrate that dairy farmers place quality at the heart of their priorities, while adhering to the demanding standards of the Quebec dairy industry."

In Montérégie east

The first place award for the Montérégie east region went to farm 9488-8237 Québec, located in St. Marc sur Richelieu, a first-generation dairy farm with 75 lactating cows. The owners, Raphaël Lavallée and Isabelle Marcoux, were recognized for "providing the best possible environment for their herd. The hygiene of their milking system is paramount to producing superior-quality milk. The future looks promising, as the owners plan to continue expanding the business."

Meanwhile, Lucien and Olivier Chagnon, owners of Ferme Dubosson, in St. Théodore-d'Acton, captured the second prize for "having redoubled their efforts over the years to produce milk of exceptional quality. The first-generation operators of this farm ensure the cleanliness of their facilities and their cows, in addition to following a rigorous and consistent milking procedure."

Third place went to Ferme Dominic et Marie Choquette and owners Marie Ménard and Dominic Choquette, who are celebrating the 40th anniversary of their Béthanie farm.

"The secret to the quality of their milk lies in their efforts to ensure the comfort

of their herd, while focusing in particular on rigorous milking procedures and high-quality care for their animals," said a contest spokesperson.

Vincent Rainville, president of *Les Producteurs de lait de la Montérégie-Est*, said the organization's annual general meeting was the ideal event to honour excellence in dairy farming.

"(The winners') exceptional commitment to producing high-quality milk, backed by their remarkable performance throughout the year, is a true source of pride for our community. Their results perfectly embody the excellence we strive for and the high standards we maintain within our industry," said Rainville.

The Montérégie west region represent 315 family-owned farms located in Haut-Saint-Laurent, Vaudreuil-Soulanges, Beauharnois-Salaberry, Roussillon, Jardins-de-Napierville, and Haut-Richelieu, while Montérégie east represents 445 family-owned farms in Brome-Missisquoi, Haute-Yamaska, Rouville, Acton, Maskoutains, Vallée-du-Richelieu, Marguerite-D'Youville/Longueuil, and Pierre-De Saurel.

The Lait'Xcellent Contest was launched in 1987. Each year, it recognizes the dairy farms that achieve the highest quality standards in each region, as well as the three overall winners at the provincial level.

Local Journalism Initiative

Teaching kids about where food comes from

Frederic Serre
The Advocate

The Quebec government says it wants to create greater awareness of the importance of farming and how food gets to the dinner table among school-age children across Quebec by injecting almost \$1.6 million into a program at 45 elementary schools, while adding nine new schools to the initiative.

Quebec Agriculture Minister Donald Martel made the announcement March 24, saying the government's AgrÉcoles program is successfully integrating agriculture and food-related topics into elementary school curriculum, and is raising awareness, starting at a very young age.

"With this announcement, we are following through on our 2022 election

pledge and reaffirming that preparing the next generation for the agri-food sector is a priority for our government," Martel said.

"Without the next generation, there is no agriculture. We want young people to understand early on that behind a simple glass of milk or the eggs they eat for breakfast lies the essential work of an entire chain of producers and processors."

According to Martel, AgrÉcoles will allow more students, in both urban and rural areas, to gain a concrete understanding of the reality of the journey from farm to table, and to become aware of the importance of local food and food self-sufficiency.

Martel boasted the initiative is part of his government's commitment to raising awareness of the sector's professions

and realities, as well as fostering the emergence of a strong new generation of professionals throughout Quebec.

"The government has supported this initiative since 2019," he said. "This support now makes it possible to assist 45 Quebec elementary schools, including the nine new schools, and to roll out more than 80 ready-to-use educational activities. In total, more than 9,500 students will benefit from the activities developed through the AgrÉcoles program."

The government is also adding nine schools to the program. They include: École Chanoine-Joseph-Théorêt and École Saint-Gabriel-Lalemant, both in Montreal; École des Trois-Sources in St. Basile; École internationale de Saint-Sacrement in Quebec City; École du Boisé-des-Prés in Rimouski; École

Saint-Jean in Granby; École primaire de Mansonville in the Eastern Townships; École de Sutton in Sutton; and École de la Récolte in the town of St. Jacques, near Rawdon.

Education Minister Sonia LeBel says the program is a simple way to teach young people about where food comes from and how it gets to the dinner table.

"By learning where the food they eat comes from and understanding the work required to bring it to our tables, students discover the world of agriculture and apply several concepts learned in class in a practical way," LeBel said. "It is a simple and effective way to give meaning to young people's learning and to spark their interest in the world around them."

Local Journalism Initiative



ANDREI ANTIPOV/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

New environmental rules outlined by Quebec's Environment Ministry are being met with pushback from the province's grain producers.



John McCart
QFA President

During the winter months, most farmers look forward to the arrival of spring, which usually means renewed growth in the fields, a new crop of calves being born, warmer temperatures and that much needed extra sunlight.

The spring of 2026, however, has finally arrived with a few nasty surprises in tow.

But first, let's go back to last fall when, to great fanfare, the Quebec Environment Ministry announced concessions concerning the spreading of manure in the fall. Mainly, the ministry dropped the requirement for an authorization from an agronomist to permit spreading manure after Oct. 1. The rule against applying manure on frozen or snow-covered ground still remains.

The other big news was the lifting of the ban on creating new agricultural

With a new spring comes new challenges

land in areas within a degraded drainage basin as long as half the area of the land was maintained with a cover crop. These were restrictions covered by the *Règlement sur les exploitations agricoles*, also known as the REA.

But then came the bad news

We all know what the government is capable of. While they listened to the demands of Quebec producers and made these changes, it also imposed a whole new set of rules for the future called the RPAE, or the *Règlements sur les Pratiques AgroEnvironnementales*. An overview of the changes within the new rules was provided by the UPA at the last general council meeting. It covered 23 pages.

Although too much to cover here, they can be accessed at revisio.rea@environment.gouv.qc.ca.

The changes that will have the most impact include maintenance of the banks along watercourses. This includes

not mowing the weeds along these waterways until Aug. 15. The slope of the land is also implicated. If the slope along a watercourse is more than 10 per cent and 50 metres long, the land must be continually covered by vegetation. It is also prohibited to plow these areas more than once every five years.

The Environment Ministry also wants to see more cover crops. The goal is to eventually always have a crop covering soil throughout the year – completely covering the soil. The ministry would like to see a 10-per-cent increase in cover crops per year to ensure that there is at least 50-per-cent coverage by 2032. Inter row crops do not count. The aim is to have complete green coverage, with the goal of capturing carbon and reducing erosion.

New rules face pushback

The other aspects in the new RPAE include the monitoring of manure handling facilities, which call for

inspections after 25 years; new rules for the *Plan Agroenvironnemental de Fertilisation*, or PAEF; regulations on how to handle the water used for washing fruits and vegetables and the waste water from maple syrup production.

I attended the annual meeting of the Quebec Grain Producers at the end of March, and there was quite a bit of opposition to these changes. The bureaucracy never seems to end.

All of this brings us to this spring, where we face another challenge – the fallout of that senseless war in Iran.

Farmers and, ultimately, consumers will pay the price of higher diesel and fertilizer. I don't know how much more can people pay for food. Producers cannot lose our farms to geopolitics, but our industry cannot survive given this type of pressure with no help from governments.

I hope we have excellent weather this year to make up for so much that is now out of control.



NAME/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The maker of Babybel and Laughing Cow cheeses has invested \$3.7 million to support farms to adopt new practices with the goal of gutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Quebec cheese-maker commits to reducing on-farm emissions

Christopher Bonasia
The Advocate

A partnership of Châteauguay-based consulting firm Logiag and Groupe Bel Canada aims to support farmers to reduce emissions in the cheese-company's supply chain.

Groupe Bel Canada, headquartered in Sorel-Tracy, is the food processing company that produces the Babybel and The Laughing Cow cheese snacks, among other things. The company has joined forces with Logiag to find ways to reduce its scope 3 emissions, or those emissions that are produced indirectly by a company's operations. This includes greenhouse gases produced by supplier and customers activities. In this case, that means cutting emissions generated at the farm level.

"Groupe Bel, like any other milk processor, depends on scope 3 reductions to achieve its GHG reduction objectives," said Jacques Nault, Logiag co-owner and vice president of agronomy.

Logiag has developed an inset program that is unique in Canada called

Dedicated Dairy Farms, which, as Nault describes it, "allows and facilitates scope 3 accounting for food processors and distributors."

Cut GHG from dairy suppliers

Groupe Bel's climate transition plan notes that methane from livestock farming accounted for 20.4 per cent of its scope 3 emissions in 2024. The company aims to reduce total emissions from its dairy suppliers by 26.1 per cent from 2017 levels by 2030. These reductions are measured in carbon dioxide equivalents.

The partnership is backed by a \$3.7-million investment from Groupe Bel that will be used over five years to support farms to adopt the new practices suggested by Logiag.

Nault explained that Logiag's process relies on their own validated methodology to advise farms "as they move through their climate transition."

Logiag collects data from the farms to track methane released from cows, or other emissions from farm inputs like fertilizers, and estimates emissions

based on emissions factors. The firm accounts for changes over time using its own Measure-Monitor-Report-Valorize (MMRV) platform called Carbone+, which is based on Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Holos model. Results are then submitted to an international, independent registry – SustainCert – to validate and certify reductions achieved.

Notably, for this partnership the analysis does not track full life-cycle emissions at the farm and is focused on the greenhouse gas emissions tied to the milk supplied to Groupe Bel.

Reporting by Sustainable Biz also pointed out that Quebec's dairy supply management system means milk from participating farmers will not necessarily end up at its Sorel-Tracy facility, but the project's protocol allows emissions reductions from the milk pool to be counted if the milk is being sourced from the area included in the project.

Farmers to be trained

The partnership also offers farmers access to training and workshops.

Nault indicated that some of the likely changes that will be suggested to farmers from the assessment will include diversifying crops, maximizing perennial hay in cow rations and in crop rotations, reducing tillage, keeping soil covered, managing liquid manure to reduce storage in summer, optimizing manure use and enlarging permanent buffer strips along waterways.

Farmers can also improve the longevity of their cows and reduce the number of heifers raised, Nault said.

In an interview with Sustainable Biz, he explained that if cows stay healthier for longer, they can produce more milk per lactation. This allows farmers to meet their quotas with fewer cows, which means fewer methane emissions.

"The decarbonization of food chains is basically sitting on farmers' shoulders and Logiag is committed to work with farmers to succeed and have their efforts and results be recognized and valorized by the stakeholders downstream," Nault said.

Local Journalism Initiative

Trends in agriculture



VESNAART/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

It is always comforting when you see friends and neighbours come together to help one and other.



Chris Judd
The Advocate

If only world leaders could learn to invest in their neighbours

Recent developments around the world and at home have reminded us of the importance of good friends and neighbours.

I once wrote a series of articles explaining the “seven bank accounts of a farmer.” Although it focused on farmers, it can apply to everyone. It extolled about the wealth that comes from aiming to keep a healthy balance in each of the seven accounts. And these accounts were labelled: Neighbours, soil, seed, continuous education, the team, politics and money.

You may have noticed that “money” was the last. If the first six accounts are in good shape, the money will be there. But, even if you are a millionaire and the other six accounts are not tended to, you will not be a millionaire forever.

Before I go farther, let me just say a religious adviser is included in “the team.”

There is an old saying that “a stranger is just a friend who you have not met yet.” With that attitude, we meet lots of great friends. Neighbours are the same.

Good neighbours have lots of good neighbours. Sometimes, good friends and neighbours move away. Eventually, you will find out which category the new ones fit into.

U.S. proving to be untrustworthy

The leader of the country just south of us who claimed that he would end all wars, seems to have started many more than he has ended. Many of the previous trading partners of that country have reduced or quit trading with that country since the new leader arrived. Some of the countries that Canada didn't trust to trade with now have new leaders, too, and now seem to be more reliable than our neighbour to the south.

No, Canada doesn't need to pick a fight with our old friendly neighbour, but maybe look for a few new friends to trade with.

There is an old religious saying: “It is easier for a rich person to pass through the eye of a needle than to get to heaven.”

It makes us think of some very rich people who have used religion as an excuse to take over another country that has oil, precious metals or other riches.

Poor people don't start wars

I cannot think of one poor person who has started a war. It is usually rich people who send thousands of poorer soldiers to their death. Some of those rich leaders spend billions sending bombers into cities and kill untold numbers of children, people in hospitals and apartment buildings, while millions of poor people have no medicare or even food to eat.

Some of the recent trade policies and wars have left farmers who grow the food without access to fertilizer to grow the crop or fuel for the tractors to plant or harvest it.

There were times in Europe centuries ago when rich kings sent their armies into the countryside to take food from the poor “serf” farmers to ensure the castles and armies were well stocked and fed, leaving those in the countryside to starved to death.

Our ancestors came to America to get away from that tyranny.

Rich getting richer

But now we are seeing the rich get richer, while the poor get poorer – just like it happened in the “old country.”

I have never seen a Brinks truck follow the hearse to a burial in a

graveyard, but I have often read of neighbours and friends having organized benefits for people who need surgery or help to rebuild after a barn fire.

It is a relief for me to watch as many countries refuse to send troops, guns or ships to help one country's rich leader attack another country just so those rich leaders can become richer.

Maybe it's just the part of the world that we live in, but it is very comforting to come together when friends lose loved ones or are in distress to stand with them regardless of their religion, race, colour, occupation, rich, or not. There is no shortage of food to feed the world (only half of what we produce gets eaten) and there is enough money for everyone to have a safe, warm place to rest if our wealth was distributed a little bit better.

Look after your neighbour and you will get it back a hundred times over. Often, a phone call or a few minutes to visit can be a life-saver to someone. And you might get as much satisfaction from that small act of kindness yourself. Tell your elected officials what is important in your life.



Being the start of a new farming legacy

Young producer dreams of launching operation to pass down to his kids

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

When Owen Brunette was a kid growing up near Metcalfe, Ont., his idea of a perfect summer day was picking rocks in a neighbour's field. Not because he loved the work – he'll be the first to tell you he didn't. It was because it put him close to farms, and close to the animals he would spend the rest of his life trying to get back to.

"I had so much fun picking rocks I thought it would be fun to do it for the rest of my life," Brunette deadpans. "I'm just kidding. This is why I prefer being with cattle compared to working in the fields."

Brunette, now in his third and final year of the Farm Management and Technology program at Macdonald Campus, has made it his mission to build the one thing that has eluded his family for generations: a farm of his own.

His great-grandparents once milked a Jersey herd in a tie-stall barn near Mille-Isles in the MRC d'Argenteuil – a modest but honest operation, as Brunette describes it. Three generations old by the time it had to be sold, the farm slipped away before he was born.

"It was enough to make a living but not a very rich life," the 21-year-old explained. "That's why they were forced to sell it."

Legacy lapsed

That lost legacy hasn't discouraged Brunette. If anything, it's sharpened his resolve.

"It's become a dream of mine to create a farm from scratch to be able to offer to my children someday," he said. "More specifically, I'd like to start a beef cow farm."

His real introduction to cattle came not in a pasture, but in the chaos of calving season, at the beef operation where he would eventually spend time halter-training show cattle for local fairs.

On his very first day, someone asked if he had ever put a jacket on a newborn calf while outrunning an angry Angus cow.

"I had said yes just so they would let me do it," Brunette said with a grin. "That was the day I figured out how mad and how fast angry mothers can really run. Ever since that day I can't get enough of working with cattle."

Now at Mac Campus

Brunette enrolled at Mac in the fall of 2023, drawn to the FMT program's hands-on approach to farm business. While he has never had a family operation to return to between semesters, he has stayed connected to agriculture through work at a local co-op in the crop division, custom-spreading fertilizer for area producers.

"There are many farmers now doing this to create off-farm income to combine with their own operations, which helps provide stability," he explained. It's a model he intends to use himself as he saves toward his goal of building a beef herd from scratch.

Brunette understands that road will be long. Beef prices may be at historic highs right now – good news for established producers, but a double-edged sword for a young man trying to get into the industry.

"When my dream first came across my mind, beef prices were a lot lower," Brunette said. "Obviously, beef prices now are the best they've ever been in history, which is good for beef producers now, but not good for young farmers like me looking to get in or expand our herds."

Clear about challenges

Brunette speaks with unusual candor about the structural difficulties facing anyone who wants to start farming without inherited land or capital. Rising input costs, limited land availability, and the sheer price of getting established have made it harder than ever to build something from nothing.

"Starting a farm from scratch or expanding a small operation is much more challenging than in the past," he said. "Land availability is limited and prices are extremely high, making it difficult to get established without significant starting capital or family support."

Brunette is also attuned to the broader pressures bearing down on agriculture globally: climate volatility, soil health, a growing population to feed, and a public that often misunderstands where its food comes from.

"A lot of people are exposed to misinformation, especially online, which can paint farmers in a negative light," he said. "Most are following strict standards and constantly improving their practices. Better education and communication between farmers and the public would help build trust and



COURTESY OWEN BRUNETTE

Macdonald FMT student Owen Brunette didn't grow up on a family farm, but that hasn't stopped him from taking a sober look at how to break into the beef industry. "It's become a dream of mine to create a farm from scratch to be able to offer to my children someday," he said.

lead to more informed decisions at both the consumer and policy level."

Work and save

For now, Brunette's plan after graduation is simple: get back to work, keep saving and keep moving toward the herd that is waiting for him somewhere down the road. He's under no illusions about what lies ahead.

"It will take a long time and a lot of work, but good things don't come easy," he said. "There will be different challenges for me to go through and different economic and world issues that will come. But there is no such

thing as a perfect world."

What keeps Brunette going is something harder to quantify than land prices or cattle markets. It's the same pull that drew him out to those rocky fields as a boy, the same instinct that made him lie about his calf-jacketing experience just to get a chance to prove himself.

"I will always continue to work in the agriculture world because there is nothing else like this," Brunette said. "It's the most honourable and most important sector to work in, and I'm proud to be a part of it."

Local Journalism Initiative



PATRICKLAUZON PHOTOGRAPHE/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Agricultural land is being eliminated, under significant pressure from urban sprawl, financial and real estate speculation, industrial projects and infrastructure construction. Allowing wind turbines will only make it worse, UPA argues.



Martin Caron
UPA President

Wind energy sector: unchecked expansion must stop

The protection of agricultural land and activities is once again in the public eye following our joint statement with the *Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique* (SCFP-Québec), *Vent d'élus* and the *Regroupement vigilance énergie Québec* (RVÉQ).

The group SCFP-Québec, which is affiliated with the *Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec*, is the province's largest union organization, representing more than 141,000 members. *Vent d'élus* is an association of current and former elected officials from across Quebec united by a shared commitment to protect agricultural land and municipal democracy. The RVÉQ is a network of citizen groups that monitor fossil fuel issues and the energy transition.

Our three organizations have asked Hydro-Québec to suspend its upcoming

call for wind power tenders, scheduled for the next few weeks. We have also requested a standard generic *Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement* (BAPE) hearing of this sector to halt its fast-tracked development.

Hydro is targeting farmland

Hydro-Québec plans to add 10,000 megawatts (MW) of new wind capacity by 2035. The 2026 call for tenders targets a potential of 5,000 MW, almost entirely on agricultural land. This is highly problematic for several reasons.

First, agricultural land is already under significant pressure from urban sprawl, financial and real estate speculation, industrial projects, infrastructure construction and more. All levels of the provincial government, including Hydro-Québec, must avoid worsening this situation at all costs.

Pledge needs to be honoured

In its 2024 Wind Power Development Strategy, Charting the Course

toward Collective Success, Hydro-Québec itself acknowledges that "protecting biodiversity and agricultural land is an important consideration that must be integrated in planning." This commitment must be upheld.

Second, to date, the *Commission de protection du territoire agricole du Québec* has approved nearly all requests for special permission to install wind turbines. These approvals have been granted individually, on a case-by-case basis, without considering their cumulative impact on the integrity of our food supply. For reasons of food security and social acceptability, these uncontrolled developments must be halted immediately – particularly in productive agricultural zones and sugar bushes.

For our organizations, protecting agricultural land is as important to society as current and future energy development. Our land should not systematically pay the price for the government's ambitions, haste or poor planning.

Non-agricultural uses are increasing rapidly. Bill 5, covering projects designated as "priority and national-scale," makes it possible to bypass the Act respecting the preservation of agricultural land and agricultural activities. A draft regulation makes it easier to approve certain uses – municipal or public utility purposes, biomethanization, recreational tourism and more – without any monitoring.

Government response to the proliferation of residences, businesses, industries, quarries, mines, water sources, and road, energy and telecommunications infrastructure in recent years has been inadequate. The result is a widespread and excessive impact on agricultural land.

Our governments have 98 per cent of the territory at their disposal for non-agricultural projects. The remaining 2 per cent – whose purpose is to feed our citizens – must be protected at all costs.



Paul J. Hetzler
ISA Certified Arborist

According to French mathematician Émile Borel, if a monkey could bang on a typewriter forever (give or take a few hours), eventually it would replicate all of Shakespeare's works.

My issue with Borel's probability theorem is that when a monkey is bored, it screeches and throws its poop around, which would surely gum-up the typewriter and bring the poor simian's writing career to a screeching halt.

I'm sure a frustrated writer or two has pounded their keyboards, but humans are the only animal that purposefully pokes them. For now, at least. Because we've recently found that a number of species, including some primates and birds, can learn to read. Well, not like we can, but it's still impressive.

While this ability is found in a minority of animals, all creatures great and small share information among their peers as well as with other species through auditory, visual, chemical and other cues.

Depending where in the country you live, spring has either just sprung or soon will, heralded by a flurry of feathered migrants back from their winter digs and eager to nestle in with a mate for the breeding season. Birdsong, which by the way has been proven to makes us feel happier, is at its peak right now, whether it's the "cheerily, cheer-up" of American robins, the chicken-like cackle of bald eagles, or the ethereal melody of hermit thrushes.

Birds chat

Exactly what they're saying is another matter, as we're still learning to decode birds' complex language. In addition to males' songs used to claim territory and attract mates, birds have calls to warn of danger, for parents and offspring to stay in contact – even for navigation help. We just learned that our native songbirds "chat" with other flocks they encounter during migrations to give and get directions.

Whistling goes beyond the avian world, as it's also how dolphins communicate. They "name" themselves through a particular sequence of whistles, and within a pod of up to 30 members, dolphins know every individual by their unique set of whistles. There are endless ways animals that

convey meaning through sound, from the warning slap of a beaver's tail on water to a humpback whale's song that can travel up to 10,000 miles.

Bees draw maps

Body language plays a role as well. A honey bee's intricate "waggle dance" is basically an agricultural map in dance form that lays out the precise location, quality and quantity of nectar-bearing flowers it saw on its foray. The human waggle dance also sends a message that might or might not pertain to honey, but that's a different story.

Speaking of tail-wagging, dogs flag their happiness with a wag. With skunks it's the reverse. When a skunk turns and shows you its tail, it's time to turn tail and run to avoid getting sprayed. And though I've never encountered one, the squid-like cuttlefish signals for mates through rapid, flickering changes in its skin patterns and colours.

Sending signals

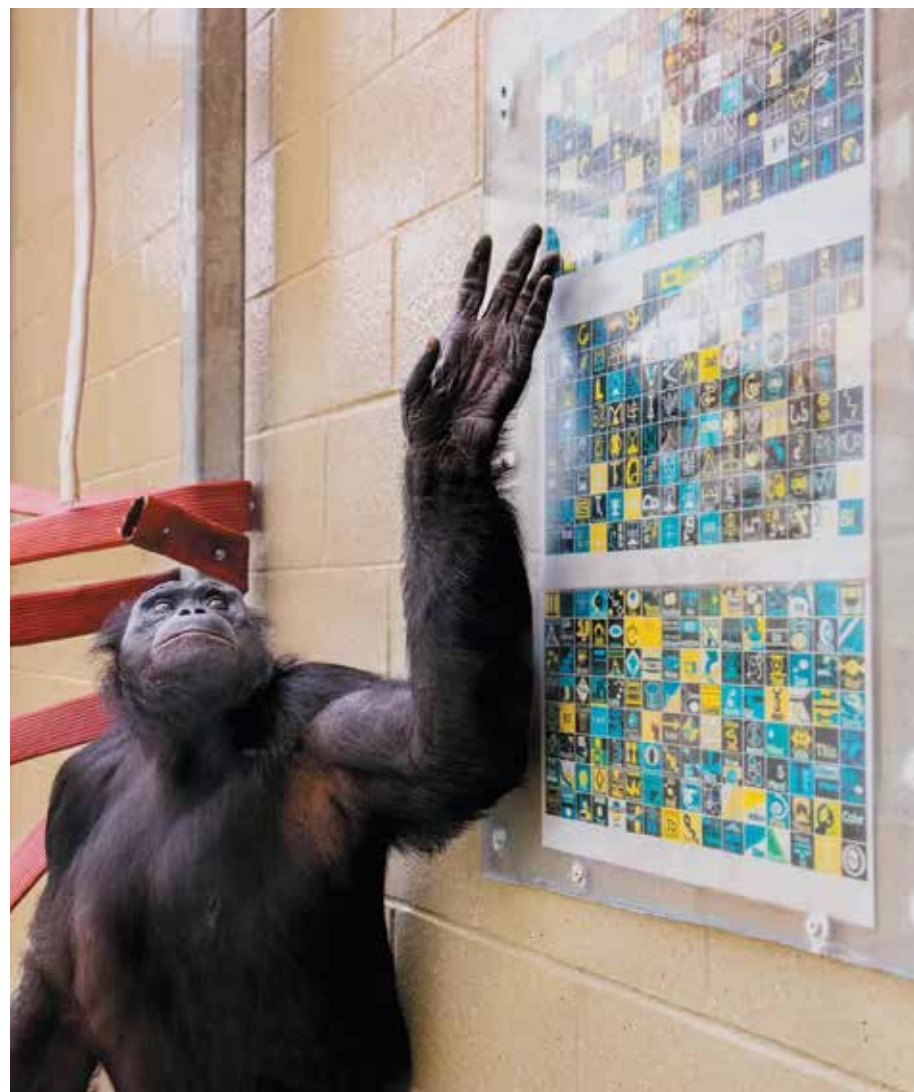
Some critical messages can't be heard or seen. When a relationship feels compatible, people often speak of chemistry, which is apt in the poetic and literal senses. Like most animals, we give off trace amounts of chemicals called pheromones that signal things like sexual interest or lack thereof. And certain honey bee tasks, like the production of new queens and the drones (males) to mate with them, is pheromone-driven. Tip: their alarm pheromone is banana-scented, so never eat one near a beehive. You're welcome.

My kids introduced me to Wallace and Gromit, a series of hilarious clay-mation films about a nerdy inventor and his non-verbal dog, Gromit, who is often shown reading a newspaper. Alas, dogs don't read, but some clearly understand the meaning of words, with one in particular able to find and retrieve about a thousand different items that were out of sight, based on verbal command alone. And a study published in January 2026 found some highly intelligent dogs tested on par with 18-month-old toddlers in their capacity to learn new words simply through context.

Reading images

The claim that some animals can read is based partly on work done on bonobos apes in the U.S. in Des Moines, Iowa,

Humans write, but reading is for the birds – and other species



KEVIN MIYAZAKI/SMITHSONIANMAG.COM

Researchers have taught bonobos apes to communicate with lexigrams, symbols that stand for everything from objects to abstract ideas.

at the Ape Cognition and Conservation Initiative. This is where researchers taught bonobos to communicate with lexigrams, symbols that stand for everything from objects to abstract ideas. The bonobos understood meaning well enough to create new "words" from known lexigrams, like when one used symbols for water and gorilla together to describe a beaver.

In addition, a researcher at Boston's Northeastern University taught a cockatoo to peck icons on a tablet to communicate. Like bonobos, it was able to combine symbols creatively to indicate new things. And biologists in New Zealand who taught pigeons to recognize written words found that the birds could tell actual words from similar nonsensical ones. Even chickens can be literate. In a CBC documentary on chickens called "Cluck," trainers showed that the birds could be taught

to recognize letters of the alphabet in a fairly short time.

Telling symbols apart may not sound impressive, but many ancient cultures like the Maya, Aztecs, Hittites and Minoans used pictorial writing to express ideas. Perhaps the best-know are the Egyptians, who used a picture-writing technique called hieroglyphs. Though not considered a language, hieroglyphs got the point across. Maybe it's like texting with emojis, except you had to chisel them into stone, which took a long time and undoubtedly cut down on regrets.

We know that reading is one of the keys to becoming a good writer. While it's a long shot, perhaps Émile Borel's hypothetical monkey will have a chance to write its own story after all, ushering in a new animal-authored writing genre. Move over, Chick Lit and Grit Lit – make way for "Crit Lit."

Special Report



Quebec farmland values jump 4.8% in 2025: FCC

Rate of increase in province drops below national average for second year in a row

Brenda O'Farrell
The Advocate

The value of agricultural land in Canada continued its upward trend again last year in what has become a rhythmic and constant march upward, but the rate of increase in Quebec skipped a beat – dropping below the national average for the second year in a row.

The value of farmland in Quebec jumped by an average of 4.8 per cent in 2025, well below the national average of 9.3 per cent, according to the latest figures compiled by Farm Credit Canada.

The rate of increase in Quebec was the sixth highest in the country, behind Manitoba, where prices increased by 12.2 per cent; Alberta, which saw values jump 11.4 per cent; Saskatchewan, where prices jumped by 9.4 per cent; New Brunswick, where the increase was 9.1 per cent; and Prince Edward Island, where the hike was 8.5 per cent.

Only two provinces in the country saw farmland values lower than what was witnessed in Quebec: Ontario, where land prices increased by only 2.2 per cent; and Nova Scotia, where values edged up by only 1.6 per cent. British Columbia bucked the trend, with land prices there dipping slightly by 1.7 per cent. There were no results from Newfoundland and Labrador, as too few transactions were recorded to provide statistical results.

Overall, the upward trend in farmland values across the country in 2025 matched the pace set in 2024 – at 9.3 per cent. This national rate of increase these past two years fell below the hikes seen in 2022 and 2023, when the cost of agricultural land saw hikes of 12.8 and 11.5 per cent, respectively.

“Demand for farmland remained robust, supported by long-term confidence in Canadian agriculture, lower borrowing costs, strong livestock prices and the limited supply of land available for sale,” said J.P. Gervais, executive vice-president for

agriculture production at FCC.

“The ongoing uncertainties related to trade and tariffs, high input costs and low commodity prices did not deter buyers’ interest in farmland. These factors combined with varying local market conditions will influence future trends in farmland affordability.”

Gervais, however, pointed to the fact that the overall national rate of increase in farmland values of 9.3 per cent stands out this year with a marked split, with several provinces seeing jumps in values above that average, while several saw hikes that were muted in comparison. He said that pointed to a variety of local conditions that had a dynamic impact on how producers viewed the market.

“Buyers are a lot more cautious,” Gervais said in a media briefing. “Farmland is expensive in relation to farm income.”

And he pointed to the developing situation in the Middle East since U.S. armed forces began bombing Iran in February, putting additional upward pressure on fuel and fertilizer costs, having an impact on how farmers will view the affordability of additional land acquisitions in the near future.

“We’re expecting profitability is going to be further challenged given this,” he said, referring to rising tensions given U.S. military action in the Mideast.

In Quebec, farmland values have seen consistent year-over-year increases for the last 40 years, with the most pronounced hikes recorded from 2011 to 2015. Last year’s 4.8-per-cent hike comes following a 7.7-per-cent jump in 2024, a 13.3-per-cent increase in 2023, an 11-per-cent hike in 2022, a 10-per-cent increase in 2021 and a 7.3-per-cent improvement in 2020.

Quebec outpaced Ontario

In Ontario, farmland prices only saw a 2.2-per-cent hike last year, but the overall average dollar figure per acre in Ontario remained higher compared with Quebec. The average price of an acre of farmland in

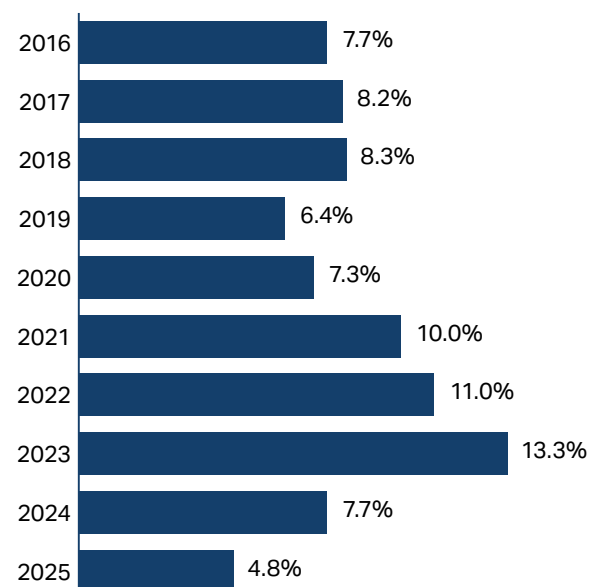
Ontario ranged from a low of \$5,400 in the northern area of the province to a high of \$33,700 in the central west region. In Quebec, the average price of an acre of farmland ranged from \$1,800 in Abitibi-Témiscamingue to a high of \$24,000 in Laurentides-Lanaudière.

Looking across Quebec, the highest prices in the Laurentides-Lanaudière region, north of Montreal, saw selling prices take a 6.7-per-cent hike last year. This region has nudged the Montérégie area out of the top position in the price rankings of farmland for the first time.

“The Laurentides-Lanaudière region continued to gain momentum, with a 6.7-per-cent increase in cultivated farmland values in 2025,” the FCC report states.

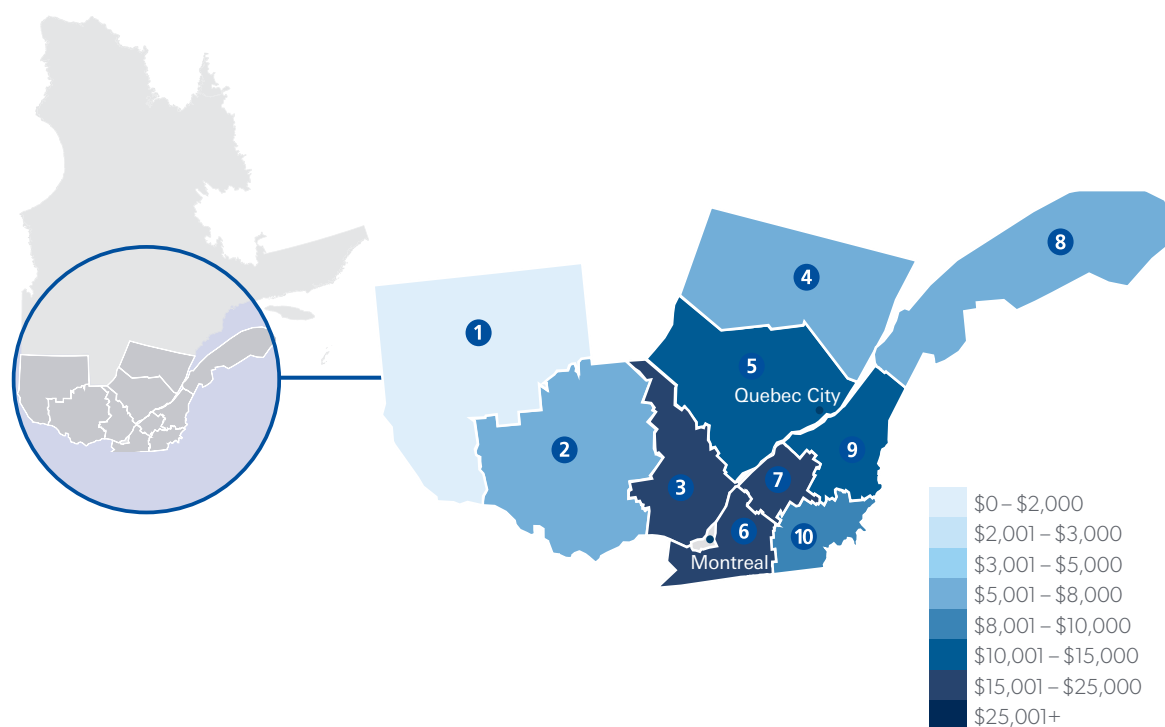
Quebec

Annual % change in cultivated farmland values





GILLES RIVEST/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



“The region’s diverse agricultural base helps sustain land demand even when one sector faces challenges. This diversity supports consistently strong market activity and ongoing value growth.”

The Outaouais region recorded a notable 14.9-per-cent increase in land prices.

Meanwhile, farmland values in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region increased by 7.7 per cent. The FCC attributed this jump to “strong cattle market conditions and favourable margins.” The price-per-acre in this region, however, is the lowest in the province, where the remoteness of the region limits the buyer pool, according to the report.

Demand for farmland in the Chaudière-Appalaches region remained strong last year pushing price gains up 7.5 per cent.

In the Estrie region, where the quality of the farmland varies widely, prices jumped 4.3 per cent.

“Listings were limited,” the FCC stated of this area. “So opportunities to purchase were perhaps fewer, but overall demand remained strong.”

The FCC’s latest findings are based on prices of land sold between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2025.

Cultivated Land Quebec farmland regions 2025

	% change	Value \$/acre*	Value range**
1 Abitibi-Témiscamingue	7.7%	\$1,800	\$600 – \$2,800
2 Outaouais	14.9%	\$5,300	\$2,700 – \$9,200
3 Laurentides-Lanaudière	6.7%	\$24,000	\$12,100 – \$35,900
4 Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean	4.5%	\$6,400	\$2,900 – \$7,700
5 Mauricie-Portneuf	5.5%	\$11,900	\$4,700 – \$18,000
6 Montérégie	1.7%	\$23,200	\$13,200 – \$31,200
7 Centre-du-Québec	5.0%	\$15,200	\$6,700 – \$23,400
8 Bas-Saint-Laurent – Gaspésie	4.2%	\$6,000	\$1,200 – \$13,300
9 Chaudière-Appalaches	7.5%	\$10,400	\$4,000 – \$16,000
10 Estrie	4.3%	\$8,600	\$2,400 – \$16,400

*FCC reference value \$/acre.

**The value range represents 90% of the sales in each area and excludes the top and bottom 5%.

Local Journalism Initiative

Cultivated Land Quebec farmland regions 2024

	% change	Value \$/acre*	Value range**
1 Abitibi-Témiscamingue	0.0%	\$1,700	\$800 – \$3,000
2 Outaouais	2.9%	\$4,600	\$2,100 – \$8,900
3 Laurentides-Lanaudière	14.8%	\$22,500	\$14,700 – \$35,500
4 Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean	0.0%	\$6,100	\$2,100 – \$7,600
5 Mauricie-Portneuf	7.8%	\$11,300	\$4,500 – \$19,000
6 Montérégie	3.2%	\$22,800	\$14,400 – \$30,300
7 Centre-du-Québec	8.2%	\$14,500	\$6,500 – \$20,700
8 Bas-Saint-Laurent – Gaspésie	14.1%	\$5,800	\$1,500 – \$9,800
9 Chaudière-Appalaches	14.0%	\$9,700	\$3,900 – \$16,400
10 Estrie	11.9%	\$8,200	\$4,800 – \$14,400

*FCC reference value \$/acre.

**The value range represents 90% of the sales in each area and excludes the top and bottom 5%.

Quebec farmland regions 2023

	% change	Value \$/acre*	Value range**
1 Abitibi-Témiscamingue	10.9%	\$1,700	\$700 – \$3,100
2 Outaouais	0.0%	\$4,500	\$1,600 – \$7,300
3 Laurentides-Lanaudière	6.9%	\$19,600	\$7,100 – \$31,900
4 Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean	24.0%	\$6,100	\$2,900 – \$7,400
5 Mauricie-Portneuf	7.2%	\$10,500	\$5,400 – \$16,700
6 Montérégie	12.0%	\$22,100	\$12,900 – \$29,300
7 Centre-du-Québec	13.5%	\$13,400	\$6,700 – \$19,200
8 Bas-Saint-Laurent – Gaspésie	15.0%	\$5,100	\$1,000 – \$9,400
9 Chaudière-Appalaches	22.7%	\$8,500	\$2,600 – \$14,800
10 Estrie	10.6%	\$7,300	\$2,700 – \$10,000

*FCC reference value \$/acre.

**The value range represents 90% of the sales in each area and excludes the top and bottom 5%.



The latest winners of QFA Warren Grape scholarships

The Quebec Farmers' Association awarded its annual Warren Grapes Educational scholarships to deserving students pursuing post-secondary studies at its annual Information Day event at Macdonald Campus on March 30.

This year, five \$1,000 scholarships were awarded to:

SONIA AUGER: Graduating from the Farm Management and Technology program in April at Macdonald Campus, Sonia Auger is the 2026 class president. During her time at Mac she has done an internship in Switzerland, working on a Swiss farm, in what she described as an "incredible experience." She has also participated in several U.S. dairy challenge events. She plans to become an agronomist and eventually take over her family farm in Ste. Françoise de Lotbinière, a dairy operation run by her parents, which was first established by great-grandparents.

ALICE CHARLEBOIS: A third-year FMT student from Coteau du Lac, Alice Charlebois never attended an English school before enrolling at Mac. She did not grow up on a farm, but rather in a farming milieu. Upon graduation from FMT she plans to attend l'Université de Laval, where she will enrol in the four-year agronomy program. She says she is particularly motivated by the idea of using data and analytical tools and new technology to improve farm efficiency and establish measurable improvements for agricultural businesses before one day starting her own farm.

FLORENCE BOLDUC: A soon-to-be graduate from the FMT program, Florence Bolduc is another example of a non-farm kid who has taken a keen interest in agriculture, working for several years now on a large dairy farm in St. Stanislas-De-Kostka, where she has obtained first-hand experience working with a large herd. She plans to continue her studies in agronomy and agricultural finance. Although she did not grow up on a farm, she says agriculture has given her purpose, confidence and a community. And she believes that agriculture is a place for women.

GRACE TANNAHILL: A second-year FMT student, Grace Tannahill comes from a dairy family in Ormstown, Que., where she worked on her grandfather's farm and where she was introduced to 4-H, becoming a director of her local branch. She has developed a strong interest in dairy nutrition and young



THE ADVOCATE

QFA president John McCart handed out the Warren Grapes scholarships on March 30 to the winners: Madison Peddie (LEFT TO RIGHT), Grace Tannahill, Florence Bolduc, Alice Charlebois and Sonia Auger.

herd development. She believes the future of any dairy farm starts with raising strong, healthy calves. She hopes to work closely with dairy producers as a nutritionist or herd management specialist.

MADISON PEDDIE: A member of the latest generation in a long line of dairy farmers, Madison Peddie plans to take over her family farm in Howick, Que., where she will be the seventh generation to farm the land – and the first female to run the operation. She has been active in 4-H, where she has shown livestock across Quebec, at the TD Classic in Toronto, the World Dairy Expo, The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair numerous times and The Big E, The Easter States Exposition, in Massachusetts. These competitions have focused her family's interest in improving their herd genetics. She also has a keen interest in promoting and improving mental health services available for farmers. Farms that produce high-quality food need farmers who are in good physical and mental health, she says. That is what makes strong agricultural communities and keeps farms in business.



The **Warren Grapes Agricultural Education Fund** was created in 1998 with the aim to promote agricultural education among the English-speaking community in Quebec.

The fund was named after Warren Grapes, who was a past president of the Quebec Farmers' Association. He grew up on a farm in Sawyerville, in the Eastern Townships. And for a time was the president of the Townshippers' Association. He was also a graduate of Macdonald College.

He became a teacher, offering a course in agriculture at Champlain Regional College in Lennoxville. And taught for many years.

The fund was named in his honour after his death to highlight his dedication to agricultural education in Quebec.

Since the first winners were announced in 1999, 166 scholarships have been awarded.

The scholarships are funded by the generous donations made by QFA members.

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.**

Bevin Boyd, Arundel

Duncan Larocque, Zion, New Brunswick

George Robb, Godmanchester

Jeffrey Fairbairn, Wakefield

Margaret Blake, Compton

Marilyn Jones, Magog





QFA videoconferences



Save the date!

Pastured Lamb for Meat and Fibre

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 2026 7:30 P.M.

Brenda Hsueh, Black Sheep Farm

Black Sheep Farm in Ontario isn't trying to save the world.

But the practices of owner/operators Brenda Hsueh and Skyler Radojkovic could go a long way toward maximizing the positive soil carbon capture benefits of ruminants – all while producing food and fibre.

Black Sheep Farm keeps its flocks on pasture and sells its lamb meat, on-the-farm-made yarn and even tanned lambskins. Hsueh and Radojkovic want to see farming become the climate crisis saviour it should be.

In this videoconference, Brenda Hsueh will walk us through Black Sheep's agriculture philosophy and sales practices for a glimpse into a different kind of sheep production.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85348710338?pwd=ic5AVbXLktoty3fHW8C7opPhCkaJCD.1>

Meeting ID: 853 4871 0338

Passcode: 748242

If you have missed an online forum, recordings are now available at the QFA website: quebecfarmers.org

The best place to find news, links and passcodes regarding QFA's Zoom meetings is at our Facebook Group: facebook.com/groups/306871089363565

To be added to our email list so you never miss a videoconference, write to qfa_advocate@yahoo.ca



Renfrew County forester transforms derelict farm into hub for agritourism

Andrew McClelland
The Advocate

For Marshall Buchanan, regenerative agriculture isn't just about restoring soil fertility – it's about regenerating the entire farm, from its century-old buildings to its connection with the community.

"Regenerative agriculture is about regenerating the farm from every angle, from a community level," Buchanan said. "We're not just growing food. We're trying to grow everyone else along with us."

Buchanan's journey into agriculture – and agritourism – has been a meandering one, but always led by his deep interest in land conservation and community.

Starting as a forester with a master's degree who never thought he could afford farmland, the Ontario native took a leap during the 1999-2000 recession when farms in Renfrew County, west of Ottawa, were cheap and available. What he found was a 50-acre property in the hamlet of Scotch Bush that had been essentially abandoned. All the equipment had been sold off at auction, the property's infrastructure neglected, and the house was under a work order from the Ministry Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Started small

That property made Buchanan quickly realize the potential of small-scale farming combined with value-added products and direct marketing. Just as quickly, he became a leading voice for agritourism in Eastern Ontario. At first he sold produce at Ottawa farmers' markets and then built a farm-to-table dinner venue.

Farming with his wife Kathleen Lindhorst – a graduate of Macdonald College – Buchanan has expanded to 175 acres through strategic purchases, hosted crowds of up to 100 people for events, and received volunteers from as far away as Tokyo and Germany.

"When we first bought our farm, we only had 50 acres," Buchanan told the participants in a videoconference on March 25 hosted by the Quebec Farmers' Association. "And it was essentially abandoned."

"Being only 50 acres, you couldn't grow enough hay to feed your own animals and have enough pasture. So one of the ideas we had was, well, if

we make value-added products, you can take 15 pounds of potatoes, which you can sell for \$15 at the right farmers' market. But if you turn them into perogies, then you can get \$250 from the same 15 pounds of potatoes."

Expanded operations

In 2018, Buchanan and Lindhorst became among the first producers in the county to host a farm-to-table dinner. The program featured a hired coach that brought 50 guests from Ottawa's Westboro Market (120 kilometres east) for a full evening of farm tours, dinner, stand-up comedy and music in his renovated 1860s log barn.

"It was a big success. And we just about broke even!" Buchanan said with a dash of humour.

But the flagship event opened his eyes to the possibilities of agritourism – and a great way to reinvent his property.

The 100-foot log barn, built in the 1860s from cedar logs harvested on the property, became the centrepiece of Buchanan's vision. Featuring a vaulted cathedral ceiling and red pine floors that are one-and-a-half inches thick, the barn now serves multiple purposes: an event hall for bridal showers and fundraisers, a solar power generator, and a community meeting space.

But Buchanan's path to agritourism wasn't linear. In 2014, he was diagnosed with a pituitary tumour that led to three neurosurgeries and early arthritis requiring hip resurfacing on both hips. By 2017, he was "very broken" and couldn't do much physical work. Yet, that same year, an inheritance from his father allowed him to purchase additional land parcels that would transform the farm's viability.

Bought more land

The first expansion came when he was approached by a neighbour who was facing financial difficulty and asked if he wanted to buy some of her land.

"We went for it. We needed more pasture and wanted to protect our business from urban encroachment," he explained.

Over time, Buchanan assembled a "constellation of properties" totalling 175 acres through strategic purchases in 2008, 2014, 2018 and 2019. The parcels form an island of Class 1 farmland on a hill between the Bonnechere and Madawaska River valleys, surrounded by forest, wetlands and rocky terrain.



COURTESY OF MARSHALL BUCHANAN

Marshall Buchanan's 1860s log barn in Scotch Bush, Ont., serves multiple purposes in his agritourism operation. It's an event hall, solar power generator and community meeting space. The 100-foot barn, built from cedar logs harvested on the property, features a vaulted cathedral ceiling and now hosts farm-to-table dinners, bridal showers, comedy nights and farm safety workshops.

"All of our land purchases came from invitations from our neighbours and never went for sale on the open market," Buchanan said. "Those kind of opportunities only came our way because we stayed in farming long enough to be part of the community."

Upgraded facilities

The transformation required significant investment. A new 80-foot barn and parking lot cost more than \$100,000. Solar panels were installed on the heritage barn roof. A 1950s farmhouse on one parcel was converted into a farmstay for agritourism guests. A trailer home on another parcel became a commercial kitchen inspected by health authorities, allowing retail sales beyond farmers markets.

"I really think you need to do your own marketing," Buchanan said. "Even though most farmers are price takers, if you can cultivate the right clients, you can help to set your prices. And you're sharing the land. You have to love people if you're going to grow food."

That philosophy attracted not just customers, but also exceptional employees. By incorporating agritourism into the farm operation, Buchanan found he could hire culinary arts graduates and top high school students who saw themselves as more than just farm labourers.

"They didn't see themselves as just farm labourers and they'd be scared if their job was just to drive a tractor," Buchanan explained. "But if they know they're going to be helping to run events and meeting with customers

and cooking in the kitchen, that's when it became a lot easier to hire qualified people."

Adopted broader vision

The farm also participates in the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms program, known as WWOOF, and began hosting international volunteers who contribute skills ranging from carpentry to cooking. One German cabinet-maker built an entire bathroom vanity using just Buchanan's table saw and tools.

Over the course of his career on the farm, he's influenced his community and developed a customer base that has evolved from Ottawa farmers' market shoppers to local food security programs. Last year, the Eganville Seniors Needs program called to buy vegetables for food-insecure seniors, purchasing 20 baskets every two weeks – a connection that "saved our whole payroll for last summer."

But for Buchanan, the first rule of farming is to observe and adapt, asking deceptively simple questions about what farming can be in the modern economy.

"I never thought I would be a farmer, actually," he admitted. "But I realized that my interest in environmental stewardship could be fulfilled by pursuing sustainable farming. And I started to realize that some methods of farming had a huge environmental footprint, and I wanted to tackle some of that problem."



Calf market continues to offer opportunities to dairy farms

Rodrigo Molano

Dairy Production Expert, Lactanet and

Simon Jetté-Nantel

Economist, Lactanet

Strong demand for beef-on-dairy cross calves, combined with better herd management, continues to create real opportunities to improve the profitability of dairy farms.

To meet growing demand for dairy protein, producers are currently evaluating and implementing a range of strategies. But milk markets are not the only force driving change on farms. For several years, many dairy producers have increasingly targeted beef-on-dairy cross calves, supported by prices that have kept climbing and now exceed \$20 per pound.

Higher calf values reflect stronger demand from North American feedlots. That demand is expected to remain firm for at least the next few years, driven by strong beef consumption, historically low beef-cattle inventories, and a temporary disruption of cattle exports from Mexico to the United States due to a screwworm outbreak.

Producers have been able to leverage beef-market conditions to increase revenue from animal sales. In 2024, those sales accounted for 9 per cent of total revenues on Quebec dairy farms, and the average is expected to exceed 10 per cent in 2025 and 2026.

At the same time, higher calf values have also pushed heifer rearing costs upward. Based on an analysis of Agritel-ViaPole data, average rearing

cost exceeded \$6,000 per heifer produced in 2024 – nearly 45-per-cent higher than in 2021 (Figure 1).

Rearing-cost estimates from the Agritel-ViaPole database include the calf's value as well as all other expenses (variable and fixed) incurred from birth until the pre-calving period (about one month before calving). While most costs have increased since 2021, the largest jump was seen in the calf value (up 400 per cent, averaging \$850 per calf in 2024). Feed and primarily forages have also contributed substantially. The average cost of producing grass silage rose from \$260/tonne in 2021 to \$350 in 2025, an increase of about 34 per cent.

Given this reality, selling a one-week-old beef-on-dairy cross calf for more than \$1,500 versus investing more than \$4,000 over two years to raise one additional replacement heifer, the choice has been straightforward for many farms. Most producers have increased their use of beef semen and reduced the use of dairy semen. This shift has had a measurable impact on the dairy heifer population in North America.

In Quebec, the inventory of dairy heifers relative to cows has fallen by nearly 20 per cent since 2010, according to the Lactanet database.

As shown in Figure 2, in 2010 about 85 heifers were raised per 100 cows (all breeds combined), compared with fewer than 70 in 2024.

Overall, a lower heifer inventory relative to cow numbers reflects efficiency gains for the dairy sector. For some herds, however, it could create challenges in maintaining enough

replacements, unless additional measures are adopted.

With that in mind, we highlight a few key areas where dairy producers can fine-tune their management to fully capture the added income from calf sales, while still producing enough high-quality heifers to meet the needs of their operation.

Promote cow longevity. Keeping mature cows at all costs is not the goal, but retaining productive, healthy cows longer reduces replacement needs. Review culling reasons and identify ways to improve cow comfort and health.

Assess replacement needs and adapt your breeding strategy to ensure enough heifers, achieve genetic progress, and optimize sales of beef-on-dairy cross calves.

Reduce calf losses. Given average perinatal (0–24 hours) and pre-weaning (24 hours to 2 months) mortality rates, many herds could produce 5- to 10-per-cent more calves for sale. This might require putting adequate resources and protocols in place for maternity management, newborn care, and the first weeks of life.

Raise fewer, but better heifers. Improve your heifer-rearing management to reduce costs while ensuring healthy, well-grown replacements. With tighter inventories, one can't afford to lose heifers along the way. And given the high cost of rearing, one can't afford to raise heifers that won't generate an adequate return. Careful selection of the heifers to keep, both after the first months of life and after the first months



LACTANET

The shift among dairy producers to opt for beef-on-dairy cross calves to improve profitability has had a measurable impact on the dairy heifer population in North America.

of lactation, is an essential strategy to consider.

Improve reproductive efficiency. Better reproduction helps reduce involuntary culling, lower age at first calving, and increase the number of pregnancies that can be bred to produce crossbred calves.

Focus on the transition period. Comfort and proper nutrition during this stage are essential not only for milk yield and reproductive performance, but also for calf survival and health.

Consider collaborative approaches. Depending on available resources and the herd's health status, raising heifers for other herds, using custom heifer raising, or purchasing high-quality heifers may be cost-effective options.

Lactanet offers tools and resources to help producers and advisers make informed decisions and take practical action in these key management areas. Feel free to make use of them.

Figure 1. Progression of total rearing cost per heifer produced in Quebec from 2016 to 2024.

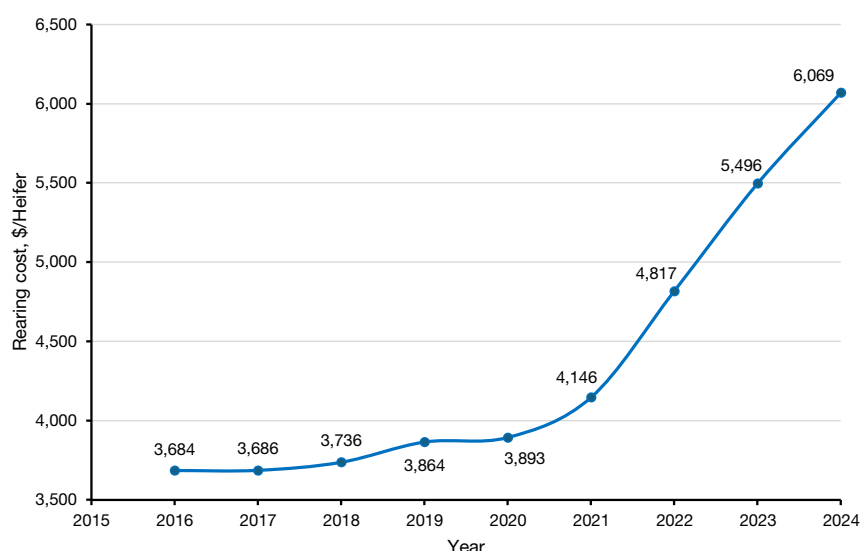
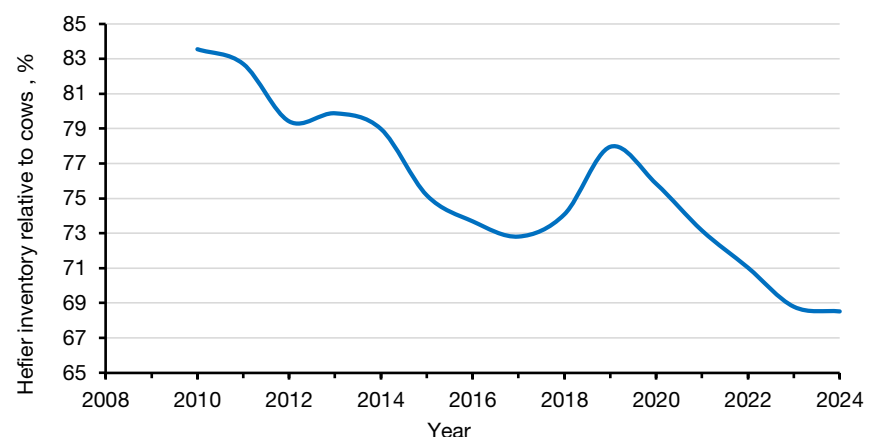


Figure 2. Change in the inventory of dairy heifers relative to cows in Quebec from 2010 to 2024 (all breeds combined).



Source: Agritel-ViaPole data; Lactanet calculations.

Grain producers honour outstanding young farmer

In 2025, the Producteurs de grains du Québec launched the Réal Fredette Award in conjunction with the organization's 50th anniversary celebrations to highlight excellence within the sector and among its members. The award was named in honour of the PGQ's founding president, and each year a different theme is chosen.

In 2026, the award highlighted an outstanding new generation of producers. The PGQ wanted to spotlight young farmers who seize opportunities or even create them, empower themselves and make full use of the resources at their disposal, think outside the box, and have an impact on the community or the industry.

Six candidates were nominated by their respective affiliated syndicates.

The winner is William Overbeek, nominated by the Montérégie Nord grain producers' syndicate.

Alongside his brother David, William is running the family business, which was founded in the late 1960s.

In addition to holding a bachelor's degree in agronomy, a master's degree in plant science and soon a doctorate in environmental sciences, William also has had training in grain grading.

When the two brothers joined the business, they diversified its operations by offering grain storage and custom spraying services by drone. The area under cultivation also increased to about 530 hectares. William wants to make production practices more sustainable. His ambitious goal is to maintain living plant cover on 100 per cent of the soil, at all times.

William has also been involved in various associations throughout his academic career. He is currently a director with the Association de la relève agricole de Saint-Hyacinthe and the Montérégie Nord grain producers' syndicate (representing young farmers). He is also a speaker and involved in various committees and projects. Thanks to William's scientific knowledge and vision for sustainability, the farm is firmly committed to innovative, ecologically friendly production.



William Overbeek is this year's winner of the Réal Fredette Award honouring an outstanding member of the new generation of producers.

For a prosperous and sustainable agriculture sector: a real action plan

The Producteurs de grains du Québec's annual general meeting last month in Drummondville was an opportunity to welcome Quebec Agriculture Minister Donald Martel.

Talks and presentations on various topics were also on the agenda, including "What a world! Understanding the major geopolitical trends and issues of our time" given by Guillaume Lavoie, an associate member of the Raoul-Dandurand Chair, international observer and public policy expert. The participants also had the opportunity to hear from some members of the PGQ permanent staff, who covered more specific topics.

Communications officers Maryanne Dupuis and France-Lynn Lejeune began by presenting the main communication actions planned for 2026 in preparation for the fall provincial election. Salah Zoghalmi, director of Agronomic Affairs, gave two presentations. The first was "From the Agricultural Operations Regulation to the Agri-Environmental Practices Regulation – Implications and Major Changes." The second was a summary of the results of the PGQ survey on pesticide-coated seeds with respect to the new regulations.

Market information officer Étienne Lafrance gave a presentation, "The New Reality in the Grain Market – Navigating Between Political Crises and Fundamentals," while economist Yolène Lavalade and Marie-Hélène Parent, a senior adviser with the support team, summarized the main points of the production-cost study for cereals and canola, as well as the impacts and key changes to be considered for each crop.

Training new directors, leaders of PGQ affiliated syndicates

A training day for new directors and leaders of the PGQ's affiliated syndicates will be held on Thursday, April 16, 2026, at the Maison de l'UPA in Longueuil. This annual training for newcomers to the organization is intended to familiarize them with the main issues and challenges in the sector.

In-person participation is strongly encouraged, and registration is mandatory.



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

Are your emotions running your decisions?

Farm Credit Canada

For Hayden Woodley, assistant professor of organizational behaviour at Western University's Ivey Business School, attempting to completely remove emotion from decision-making is folly. Emotions are integral to being human, especially when business choices are tied to identity.

Stronger emotions tend to surface when you're tired, under pressure or facing uncertainty, all typical conditions in agriculture. Emotions flag what matters. When you're exhausted or overwhelmed, though, they can distort thinking.

Instead of eliminating emotion, the goal is to build emotional awareness by recognizing and managing feelings to make clearer decisions.

"You need to recognize you have a certain feeling and ask, 'Why do I feel that way?'" Woodley says.

Pause before you proceed

What ultimately shapes decision-making isn't the presence of emotion, but your ability to notice it and respond wisely. When emotions run high, whether it's excitement, anxiety or something in between, they can affect your ability to process information.

"In those moments, it's best to step away and let things settle before moving forward so the emotion doesn't bias your decision," Woodley says.

On the flip side, pushing emotion out of the picture entirely can create its own blind spots, particularly in people-focused businesses like farming, where empathy and interpersonal understanding are essential.

"Effective decision-making happens when we're aware of our emotions," he says. "That helps us recognize our own biases, understand what's driving us or others, and ultimately make choices that are not just logical, but human."

Build self-awareness

Recognizing when your emotions are heightened helps you know when to act – or wait. It's not always easy to notice when you're worked up, so Woodley advises slowing down when you feel agitated or just 'off.'

"What's really tough in agriculture is the unpredictability, like when the weather doesn't cooperate. Being able to manage that unpredictability is key to getting ahead of your emotions," Woodley says.

"Take a breath break. Even a minute can help. Everyone I've spoken to who



NICOLETA IONESCU/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Farming is emotional work. While feelings can cloud objectivity, understanding how the brain works can support grounded decisions.

How to keep your head clear when business gets personal

Recognize the signs. Feeling overwhelmed, frustrated or stuck in your thoughts? That's your cue to take a pause.

Ask yourself why. When a strong emotion comes up, stop and ask: "Why am I feeling this way?"

Buy time. When things feel tense or uncertain, take a step back to reset before making a significant decision.

Watch for shortcuts. Be cautious

builds in those moments gets better at it over time."

Challenge your biases

Anxiety isn't the only factor that can lead people into poor decision-making. A career in agronomy has shown Jeremy Boychyn, director of research at Alberta Grains, that most people feel loss more deeply than gain, which affects choices.

"Farm operators often stick to what's worked in the past – and for good reason," Boychyn says.

Changing familiar practices introduces risk. While new approaches might work better, many are hesitant to jeopardize

of leaning only on what has worked in the past or ignoring information that doesn't fit your gut feeling.

Challenge your thinking. If you're certain you're right, look for something that could prove you wrong. It might help you make a better decision.

Keep emotion in the room. Don't try to shut emotions out. Use them as one tool in your decision-making toolbox.

what's already been successful.

"That's an emotional response. We want to avoid loss, which may restrict our desire to adopt new things."

Conversely, it's also easy to make business decisions based on limited or anecdotal information.

You may notice the facts that support what you already believe, like which equipment brand to choose or whether to try a new input – and brush off the ones that don't. But this can cause you to miss better options or early warning signs.

Emotion a cue, not a compass

Farming "probably wouldn't be

what it is" if emotions were removed from business management entirely, Boychyn says. At the same time, strong decision-making structures can still be put in place. Success can be achieved by being aware of how easily your thinking can twist itself into believing what you want to believe.

"When you see contradictory data and dismiss it, that's your brain trying to remove the discomfort based on what you already feel is right. That should be a red flag for you to dig deeper. As an agronomist, my goal wasn't to prove something right; it was to prove myself wrong on something," Boychyn says.

"Assuming past things will continue to work as the best course of action, that should be challenged regularly. And if you find yourself in an echo chamber and no one is ever indicating any contradictory concept, there's likely some lost opportunity."

In a business as personal as farming, the strongest decisions come not from suppressing emotion, but from recognizing its role. Learn to work with it, not against it.

Paying attention to emotions means using them as signals, not instructions. Step back, check your mindset, and stay open to new information for more thoughtful, balanced decisions and long-term success.

Physically effective fibre: How much is enough?

Daniel de Oliveira

William H. Miner

Agricultural Research Institute

On many dairies, fibre adequacy is judged by the Neutral Detergent Fibre percentage, or NDF percentage on the ration sheet. A diet containing 28-32-per-cent NDF may appear to be adequate, but some farms experience milk fat depression, declining rumination, intake variability and signs of sub-acute ruminal acidosis even when total NDF appears adequate. Often the issue isn't how much fibre is in the ration, but whether that fibre is physically effective in the rumen.

Physically effective fibre, commonly referred to as peNDF, represents the portion of fibre that stimulates chewing activity, including both eating and rumination, and thereby promotes saliva production. Saliva is the cow's primary rumen buffer. When total chewing activity increases, saliva flow rises, rumen acidity is moderated, and fermentation remains more stable. When fibre lacks sufficient particle size or structure, chewing time declines, buffering decreases and rumen pH becomes more variable. Total NDF may remain unchanged, but the rumen's biological response is very different.

The concept of physically effective fibre was formalized in 1997 by Dr. David Mertens, who proposed that fibre must not only be chemically present, but physically capable of stimulating chewing to support rumen health. Subsequent research demonstrated that particle size distribution strongly influences rumination time, rumen pH and milk fat synthesis. In practical terms, fibre that is too short, too fine or heavily sorted against does not provide the same structural function as longer particles, even if laboratory NDF values remain constant.

Practices can limit effective fibre

On commercial dairies peNDF often becomes limiting in subtle ways. Corn silage may be chopped shorter to improve packing density. Forage processing may improve kernel breakage, while inadvertently reducing fibre length. Highly digestible forages may increase overall fermentability without corresponding adjustments in physical structure.



PAVLO BALIUKH/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The amount of effective fibre in a cow's diet can affect milk fat and rumination.

In each of these cases, the ration on paper can remain balanced, yet cows exhibit reduced rumination and greater milk fat variability. The issue is not necessarily excessive starch, but inadequate physical structure relative to fermentability.

At the Miner Institute the on-farm evaluation of physically effective fibre uses the Penn State Particle Separator with a 4-millimetre screen added. Under this system peNDF is defined as the total proportion of feed retained on the 4-, 8- and 19-mm screens.

In practical lactation diets, total peNDF typically falls in the 21- to 23-per-cent range of dry matter, depending on dietary starch concentration and forage digestibility. These values are not rigid rules, but represent practical structural targets associated with stable rumen function.

Intake can vary

Herd-level signals begin to appear when peNDF is insufficient. Pen-average rumination declines first, often within several days of a ration or forage change. Intake variability may increase, even if average dry matter intake appears stable. Milk fat percentage may gradually decline over the following one to two weeks. These

responses reflect reduced buffering and altered rumen fermentation patterns rather than simple energy deficiency. If left uncorrected, prolonged rumen instability can reduce production persistence and increase the risk of SARA.

It is equally important to recognize that more peNDF isn't always better. Excessively high physically effective fibre can limit intake and reduce energy density, particularly in high-producing cows. The goal is balance.

The physical structure of the diet must match its fermentability. As starch digestibility increases, structural fibre must provide sufficient rumination stimulus to maintain rumen pH stability. Conversely, when fermentability is moderate, excessive structural fibre may unnecessarily restrict intake.

Size matters

For producers, routine evaluation of particle size distribution is one of the most practical tools for managing peNDF. The Penn State Particle Separator, including the 19-mm, 8-mm and 4-mm screens, allows on-farm assessment of physically effective fibre. Monitoring these fractions monthly, and especially when new silage is introduced, provides early warning of structural shifts.

For nutritionists, peNDF targets should always be interpreted in the context of starch level, starch digestibility, forage quality and feeding management. When fermentability increases, small structural adjustments are often more effective than large changes in starch concentration. Slight increases in chop length, modest improvements in forage particle retention or adjustments in TMR moisture can restore rumen stability without sacrificing production.

Physically effective fibre is not simply a formulation parameter; it's a functional property of the ration. Total NDF does not guarantee rumen health if particle size is inadequate. The practical question for every herd is not only how much fibre is being fed, but whether that fibre is physically effective enough for the level of fermentability present in the diet. Balancing these two factors allows herds to maintain rumen stability, consistent intake and milk component performance while minimizing unnecessary ration swings.

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.



Just because something is difficult doesn't mean it can't be done

Cynthia Gunn
QFA's Food Writer

Let's get straight to the point. This recipe has three distinct parts. These parts are then put together to make the goal – Praline Maple Buttercream Puffs. This is the name given by a bakery that, for a brief span, produced these delectable treats. I would splurge when I could, and buy myself one. No sharing with kids. It was my treat, eaten all by my happy lonesome.

One day it happened: no more Praline Maple Buttercream Puffs. They were

discontinued because they were simply not profitable due to the amount of time it took to make them. That meant only one thing. I would have to figure out how to make them myself. And I did. And then, as happens, the little scraps of paper I wrote my notes on got pushed to the back of the recipe rack. Truth be told, these are time-consuming to make and so the recipe also languished for the same reason they were discontinued.

That doesn't mean that they should never be made, however. On the contrary, all the more reason to make them on occasion, and embrace their

richness with enthusiasm.

The original praline recipe has vanished. No legible note exists that directs me to what praline recipe I used in 2017, when the bakery forced me to make my own way to these treats. I found this one online, and made just half the recipe, which is more than plenty. It even leaves extra for nibbling, if you so desire. They are too sweet for my tastes, but if you are a fudge lover, these should be right up your alley. I followed the recipe as is, though I'm not sure my thermometer is very good. I knew I needed hard praline and it

didn't seem to thicken enough, so after stirring for 3 minutes (Step 4), I put it back on the stove, brought it to the boil again, and simmered for 2 more minutes, then beat an additional 2 minutes. This seemed to do the job.

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.

Praline Pecans

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup (207g) sugar
- 1 cup (225g) packed light brown sugar
- ¾ cup (180ml) heavy whipping cream
- 4 tbsp (56g) unsalted butter, cut into cubes
- ⅛ tsp baking soda
- 2 ¼ cups (212g) pecan halves
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

PREPARATION

1. First, lay out parchment paper and have a tablespoon-sized scoop ready to go. Once your mixture is ready, it can firm up quickly, so you want to be prepared.
2. Add everything to a sturdy pot except for the pecans, salt and vanilla extract. Heat it all over medium heat, stirring regularly. It will melt and seem like it's taking its time getting going, but it will finally begin to boil.
3. When the mixture foams up and begins to boil, stir constantly until it reaches 236° F. You will want to have a candy thermometer or something similar handy. Candy is sensitive to temperature.
4. Once it's at the right temperature, remove the pot from the stove and add the pecans, salt and vanilla extract. Stir vigorously for 3½ minutes.
5. Finally, drop heaping tablespoons of the mixture onto the parchment paper and let them cool and firm up. You can spoon a praline or two and see if you like the amount they spread. If they spread too much, just stir them for a little longer.
6. They will be firm enough to handle within an hour, but they do firm up more as they sit overnight.

Maple Butter Cream

INGREDIENTS

- ¼ cup maple syrup
- ¼ cup whipping cream, 35%
- 2 egg yolks, beaten
- ⅓ cup cold butter, cut in 6 chunks

PREPARATION

Place the maple syrup and whipping cream in a metal bowl over a medium pot of boiling water. When the mixture becomes very warm, beat in the egg yolks.

Let cool, then beat in the cold butter one chunk at a time. When butter is all incorporated, beat another 2 minutes until a bit fluffy.

Choux Pastry

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup water
- ½ cup butter
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 cup sifted flour
- 4 eggs

PREPARATION

Bring the water, butter and salt to a boil. Remove from the heat and then add the flour all at once. Stir vigorously until it resembles a thick paste. Let cool for at least 10 minutes (you do not want eggs to cook).

With an electric hand mixer, add eggs one at a time and beat until fully incorporated.

Scoop dough in rounds onto a greased cookie sheet or onto parchment paper. Makes 12-24 rounds.

Bake at 375° F for 20-35 minutes, depending on the size. If they are just a little bit brown,

they are not ready, and will collapse when cooled. Leave a few minutes longer. They should sound hollow when you tap them.

When perfectly cool slit them open and fill with the praline and maple butter cream. You may simply leave the tops plain or dust with icing sugar. These should be eaten the same day they are filled.

Here's a handy thing though: you can freeze the unbaked scoops and bake then another time. Simply let defrost slightly in the fridge and then proceed with the baking.

Putting it all together

Chop fine, or grind in a food processor, enough praline to make ¾ cup. Mix into maple butter cream. Spread in between the sliced pastries. Keep chilled until serving.

Sources: Praline Pecans: Life, Love and Sugar www.lifeloveandsugar.com/best-southern-pecan-pralines-recipe/#tasty-recipes-40502-jump-target. Choux pastry: Bon Appetit, May 2001, p. 199, the Delicious Paris Special Collector's Edition.



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When making the pralines, use a candy thermometer to gauge the temperature when the mixture foams up and begins to boil. You will need to stir constantly until it reaches 236° F.

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