



Growing Forward 2
**SUCCESS STORIES FROM ONTARIO'S ORGANIZATIONS
& COLLABORATIONS**

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These projects were funded in part through *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. The Agricultural Adaptation Council assists in the delivery of *GF2* in Ontario.



GF2 SUCCESS STORIES FROM ONTARIO'S ORGANIZATIONS AND COLLABORATIONS

Growing Forward 2 (GF2) is a success story for Ontario organizations and collaborations. From 2013 to 2017, close to 400 projects received almost \$34 million in cost-share funding through *GF2*, all supporting initiatives to help drive innovation, growth and competitiveness for Ontario's agriculture, agri-food and agri-based products sector.

As a delivery partner, the Agricultural Adaptation Council (AAC) has approved projects under the *GF2* program's six focus areas. Here's a look at key focus area statistics as well as some standout projects under each area of focus that are featured in the pages ahead.

Environment and climate change adaptation—\$4.5 million in approved funding to 48 projects, including:

- Making crop management decisions easier for farmers through real-time weather data
- Protecting tender fruit crops from unpredictable weather events through a new alert system

Animal and plant health—\$7.1 million in approved funding to 60 projects, including:

- Identifying crops and forage management techniques specifically for Northern Ontario
- Creating a new biosecurity program to help Ontario's pork industry reduce and manage disease outbreaks

Assurance systems—\$5.2 million in approved funding to 48 projects, including:

- Increasing food safety of artisanal sausages without affecting taste or quality
- Developing a non-invasive scanning technology to identify the gender of day-old eggs before they're incubated

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Market development—\$11.4 million in approved funding to 142 projects, including:

- Expanding U.S. and Asian markets for Canadian greenhouse vegetables
- Helping tender fruit growers bring a new winter hardy Canadian pear variety to market

Labour productivity enhancement—\$2.3 million in approved funding to 21 projects, including:

- Developing a new safe-loading step for poultry catching crews
- Supporting a food business incubator to help new entrepreneurs launch their start-up food companies

Business and leadership development—\$3.4 million in approved funding to 79 projects, including:

- Establishing a Master Shepherd education program for Ontario's sheep industry
- Assessing the Ontario dairy sector's need for more trained cheesemakers

Growing Forward 2 encouraged project funding for collaborations, which are combinations of two or more farmers, for-profit businesses or organizations, to work together and bring projects forward to help address issues or maximize opportunities facing the industry.

And this approach proved successful: of the 398 funded projects, 106 were led by collaborations and 292 were spearheaded by not-for profit organizations.

The projects funded under *GF2* reflect the diversity of Ontario's agricultural sector, as well as the ongoing need for funding to support research and innovation. They also demonstrated a continual willingness by the industry to grow, improve and meet new challenges—all with a common goal of building a strong future for agriculture, agri-food and agri-based products in Ontario.



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MARKET DEVELOPMENT

***GROWING FORWARD 2* HELPS ONTARIO GREENHOUSE VEGGIES GO GLOBAL**

Ontario's greenhouse cucumbers have strengthened their presence in the United States and will soon be on the market in Asia. That's due to *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)* funding that the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG) was able to access for various market development initiatives.

OGVG represents 212 growers from southwestern Ontario to Ottawa and Niagara Region with over 3,000 acres of greenhouse pepper, cucumber and tomato production. Most of their North American markets are less than a day's drive away.

"With year over year growth in our sector averaging six per cent per year, we are consistently focused on new market development in the U.S. and overseas," explains Jacquie Trombley, OGVG's Marketer Liaison Officer.

Those efforts included programs to enter the Pan Pacific market and two projects focused on OGVG's valuable U.S. markets, as well as development of a strategic plan for entering the North American food service market that includes restaurants, hospitals, and educational institutions.

"We are heavily reliant on Canada and the United States for distribution so we wanted to explore the Pan-Pacific

region, setting our sights on Hong Kong and Shanghai specifically," Trombley says. "We had three projects funded through *GF2* that have significantly helped us open doors in that region."

OGVG representatives attended trade shows and meetings with qualified produce buyers, retailers and government officials in Hong Kong and Shanghai to sample product and gauge interest in fresh Ontario greenhouse cucumbers. Through those relationships, the organization also developed its own branding and packaging for direct-to-retail export into Shanghai.

There will soon be regular shipments of Ontario greenhouse vegetables into the Pan Pacific Region, and OGVG is continuing its own market development activities in Asia as well.

U.S. market development activities included an extensive two-year demo program aimed at getting consumers and

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retailers in the Midwestern and Northeastern U.S. to try Ontario grown greenhouse vegetables.

"The success of this demo program was phenomenal and OGVG has made the decision to continue it, funding it exclusively through our own budgets," Trombley says. "We have seen a significant increase in the number of participants and retailers and the overall reach of this program."

OGVG also ran a successful outreach program for about 1,500 retail locations in the Southeastern U.S. focused on merchandising techniques and proper storage temperatures for all three commodities to ensure produce is being displayed correctly, reduce shrink and enhance flavour profiles.

Greenhouse vegetable grower and marketer Pure Flavor had long been interested in shipping internationally as well as working more directly with its U.S. markets.

Director of Marketing Sarah Pau credits the OGVG initiatives with helping the company expand its markets and take advantage of new opportunities, as well as develop educational tools to reach consumers.

"The *Growing Forward 2* program has helped us explore market development opportunities. Expansion into international markets will help grow our business and requires a different strategy than working domestically. The *Growing Forward 2* program has really helped us better understand the Chinese market and related demographics," explains Pau.

"The product sampling opportunities really help with introducing Ontario grown vegetables to new markets. A positive first-hand experience can help us gain momentum organically with consumers which will strengthen relationships with our retailer partners," she added.



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MARKET DEVELOPMENT

ONTARIO CONSUMERS WARM UP TO NEW WINTER HARDY PEAR

Ontario's newest fruit crop, the Cold Snap™ pear, has gone from zero to zoom in record time and is now available through five major retail grocery chains. It's a great grassroots success story that checks all the boxes giving Canadian growers an exciting new profitable crop option, and offering consumers locally produced fruit throughout the winter.

Ontario researchers at Vineland Research Innovation Centre set out to develop a new winter hardy pear to provide a new opportunity for Ontario growers. The resulting new variety—trademarked Cold Snap pear—was licensed to Vineland Growers Cooperative, a 300-member fruit and vegetable growing and processing cooperative in Ontario's Niagara Region. When the new pear was ready for commercial orchards, 80,000 trees were planted in Ontario and the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia. After three years, the new trees began producing enough fruit to take to market. That's where some of the most interesting challenges began.

"The hardest part of launching a new product is customer awareness and buy in," says Matt Ecker, Sales and Business Development Manager with Vineland Growers Cooperative. "The *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)* funding we

received through the Agricultural Adaptation Council helped us develop and deliver messaging about the new pear directly to consumers through in-store demonstrations."

And the response has been very positive for the new variety. "Once people try our pears, they really liked them but we needed to make our brand pop to be able to change consumer behaviour about when they could buy fresh, local pears," says Ecker.

Sales are off to a strong start and customer feedback indicates that Ontario consumers are embracing the new fruit option and enjoying the taste and texture of the Cold Snap pear.

For growers who planted the new pear, the opportunities are as refreshing as the fruit. Cold Snap pears are grown

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in high density plantings. As the trees mature and grow into full production, growers can expect to yield up to 20 tonne/acre of fruit—or nearly double the yield of low density orchard plantings. Higher yields bring greater efficiencies and profitability for growers. And the consumer marketing efforts will continue to build demand and bring higher returns to growers for this high value food product.

"Most consumers don't realize they can buy Canadian pears into the winter season," says Ecker. "We're continuing our marketing and brand awareness push with consumers. We have marketing partners in Nova Scotia. And as we continue to grow consumer demand for our pear, we have plans to expand production with growers in British Columbia."

Cold Snap pears will be available in five retailers in Ontario and Quebec for the 2017 season—Loblaws, Sobeys, Metro, Wal-Mart and Costco.

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ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

REAL-TIME WEATHER DATA MAKE CROP MANAGEMENT DECISIONS EASIER

A need for accurate, current weather data was the reason behind the development of a new weather system that gives farmers access to real-time information.

The AGGrowth Daily Dashboard is powered by a network of 80 weather stations in southwestern Ontario that capture rain fall, relative humidity, and wind speed and direction data minute by minute and push it to a farmer-accessible website every 15 minutes.

Project collaborators AGRIS Co-operative, Wanstead Farmers' Co-op and Haggerty Creek realized a need among their customers for a web-based, field-specific risk management tool based on real-time weather data.

"We talk about weather so much in agriculture—both the forecast and the weather that just occurred play into management decisions," explains Dale Cowan, Senior Agronomist with AGRIS and Wanstead Cooperatives. "So we got together and decided to build this network to push real time weather data out to customers. We are trying to make extension advice real-time."

The dashboard lets farmers plot individual fields and remotely access wind and rainfall data from each station to help make decisions about spraying and nutrient management, as well as establishing crop maturity and insect or disease pressure.

"There's a lot of management advice that comes with the impacts of weather and the growth stages of the crop. We can predict when tasseling is going to occur, for example, and what management should be considered at that time for plant health and nutrition," Cowan says.

Interest in the subscription-based system has been high, with uptake varied by what farmers want to know. Rain fall and wind data have been big in 2017. Precipitation has been extremely spotty and then very intense in some regions and wind has made spraying a challenge.

Dave Gillespie grows corn, soybeans and wheat in the Thamesville area. His home farm is a weather station host

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and he is an avid user of the dashboard. This year, it was particularly helpful in managing spraying.

"Often times I need data when I'm out in the field making minute by minute management decisions and now, instead of just seeing what the predicted wind speed and direction is, I can actually login and see what conditions are being logged on the specific fields," he explains, adding this lets him react quickly to avoid unsuitable spraying conditions.

"We've always known there's a difference in conditions from here to Ridgetown, but now we know exactly how much the difference can be between two spots that are only 10 to 15 km apart," Gillespie says.

The collaborators accessed *Growing Forward 2* funding for both phases of the project—an investigation into feasibility and execution, as well as the actual implementation, which included establishing the weather stations and working with participating farmers to connect them to the network and get them working with the available data.

"If we didn't have the funding, we likely wouldn't have started with this venture at all. It was a great tool for de-risking the venture by having assistance up front to help get it developed," Cowan says.

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ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

NEW WEATHER ALERT SYSTEM HELPS SAVE ONTARIO'S TENDER FRUIT CROP

Ontario tender fruit farmers need the right mix of rain, sunshine and growing temperatures to produce juicy, fresh peaches, pears, cherries, apricots and nectarines. But when extreme weather hits during critical crop development, it can wreak havoc on an entire crop. And unpredictable weather events are becoming more and more common.

The Ontario Tender Fruit Growers association saw the need for a better way to work with whatever the weather sends their way. "We had no good data available to know the damage that would result to our fruit crops from extreme temperatures," says Phil Tregunno, Chair of Ontario Tender Fruit Growers.

With *Growing Forward 2* funding through the Agricultural Adaptation Council, the producer group was able to work with researchers to assess the bud hardiness of various tender fruit crops. Bud hardiness gives an indication of the temperature the dormant buds can withstand before there will be damage to the resulting crop.

"If we want to be able to provide Ontario and Canadian consumers with high quality, local fruit, we need to have better tools to manage extreme weather," says Tregunno.

Data gathered on the bud hardiness of tender fruit crops now feeds a new real-time, automated weather alert system to help Ontario tender fruit growers make decisions about how to manage extreme weather events.

Developed in partnership with Brock University, KCMS Inc., Weather Innovations Inc. and Ontario Tender Fruit Growers, the new system runs on regional temperatures that are updated every 15 minutes, and bud survival data. With 90% of tender fruit production in the Niagara region, the bulk of the weather information comes from that area of the province.

The new weather tool is available to growers at TenderFruitAlert.ca and is searchable by location, commodity and cultivar. The site provides information

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to help growers monitor bud cold hardiness through the fruits' dormant period and manage winter injury.

"Being prepared is half the battle when you farm with the weather," says Tregunno. "This new tool gives us accurate, local weather, and matches that with the susceptibility of the specific crops and cultivars to predict that temperature when a grower will start to see crop losses. With that information, growers can make management decisions about how to deal with extreme weather—including the use of wind machines to keep temperatures above the critical point for crop injury."

Ontario is home to more than 250 tender fruit growers, generating more than \$55 million in annual sales from fresh market and processing. Those growers all remember the devastating cold weather in the spring of 2012 that saw tender fruit losses of 31% to 89%. The new web-based cold hardiness database will help growers respond and prepare for potentially damaging weather events, and that will help protect the valuable fresh, local markets, Ontario's Niagara region is so well known for.

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BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT **SHEPHERDING NEW LEADERS IN ONTARIO'S SHEEP INDUSTRY**

What began as a grassroots education program for Ontario lamb producers quickly transformed into leadership development for the future of Ontario's sheep industry. And the future is looking good, according to Ontario Sheep Farmer's (OSF) General Manager, Jennifer MacTavish.

The 18-month Master Shepherd Education Program began as a classroom and industry tour training model for sheep farmers. This unique, hands-on program set out to provide professional development training and business planning, giving producers the tools and knowledge they need to expand their flocks, improve flock health and reduce production costs. It quickly spanned into solid friendships, an organic support network and the development of lasting leadership qualities.

"We're seeing a new injection of energy into Ontario's sheep industry," says MacTavish. "This is a direct result of the Master Shepherd Program. We've seen participants take on new leadership positions, diversify their sheep farms and expand their production. These farmers are shaping the future of our industry and leading by example."

The program was originally created to support lamb farmers who had been farming for roughly three to five years and were interested in expanding their operations or seeking professional development opportunities. Ontario Sheep Farmers first ran a similar program in the 1990s and some of the original graduates became predominant leaders in the sheep industry. The Master Shepherd Program ran through 2014 and 2015. "Farmers who have been in business for three to five years don't have the same support system that new entrants have access to. That's why we targeted the program to this group in an effort to provide the latest production training, business planning and connect them with farmers in similar situations," says MacTavish.

The program included industry tours and classroom modules on every aspect of lamb production including biosecurity, health, handling, reproduction, nutrition and genetics. Participants were required to present a business

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plan and some have already implemented changes to their farms as a result of the program.

"The program dialed me in to all the potential issues and opportunities for improvements in our farm and overall business," says Master Shepherd Program participant Sandi Brock. The program accommodated 22 participants per module and 18 farmers completed the full program and business plan requirement.

MacTavish says participants continue to be engaged in industry events and issues as a result of their new network and program completion.

"The Master Shepherd Program has created a lot of excitement in Ontario's sheep industry, and it's rewarding to see so many young farmers integrating the program into their own farm operations and becoming the next generation of industry leaders," says MacTavish.

Industry succession wasn't something MacTavish and her team considered when they began planning the program. But it's become clear that the program's influence will be

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reflected in participants staying in business, growing their farms and engaging more in the Ontario sheep industry overall.

Interested farmers are inquiring about the next program, and planning is underway for the next Master Shepherd Program that is expected to launch in 2018.



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BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

ONTARIO NEEDS MORE CHEESEMAKERS TO FILL GROWING DEMAND

Ontario consumers continue to crave all things local, including locally-made cheese. A survey of Ontario's cheese manufacturers uncovered an urgent need to train more cheesemakers to feed the growing interest and demand for Ontario cheese.

Ontario Dairy Council's (ODC) members process 97% of the milk produced in Ontario to manufacture a wide range of dairy products, including cheese. With funding support through the Agricultural Adaptation Council, the organization recently surveyed all cheese processors in the province to assess the growth needs of this sector that generates more than \$6 billion in annual sales.

Based on projected growth, turnover and retirement, Ontario dairy processors estimate that more than 200 new cheesemakers will be needed to serve this sector in the next decade. That's more than the number currently in the province. Training was identified as an urgent requirement to be able to supply the cheese manufacturing sector with skilled cheesemakers.

Identifying the needs for Ontario cheesemakers has attracted interest across Canada, and drawn attention to the greater need for skills development and training, according to Christina Lewis, President, with Ontario Dairy

Council. "We also collaborated with the Food Processing Human Resource Council, who recently completed the development of the National Occupational Standard for Cheesemaker (NOS).

In collaboration with Colleges Ontario and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, we shared our research with Ontario colleges and other industry stakeholders in the spring of 2017," says Lewis. "In late 2013, Canada entered into the Canada-European Union (EU) Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) Canada Economic and Trade Agreement which will allow for more than 17,000 tonnes of additional imported European cheeses to enter the Canadian market. It's increasingly urgent for cheese manufacturers to stay innovative and competitive to maintain and grow their markets."

Stepping up the skills training will ensure the next wave of Ontario cheesemakers is equipped to keep feeding consumers' endless appetite for local.



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ASSURANCE SYSTEMS (TRACEABILITY, ANIMAL WELFARE, FOOD SAFETY)

BOOSTING FOOD SAFETY IN ARTISANAL SAUSAGE WHILE MAINTAINING TASTE, QUALITY

A protocol developed at the University of Guelph is letting meat processors strengthen food safety in fermented sausages without using heat.

Since 2014, provincially licensed meat processing plants have been required to adopt one of the five interventions identified in Health Canada's Guideline 12 for the control of *E.coli* 0157:H7 and Salmonella in fermented sausages.

Traditional processes for making fermented sausage products like salami and summer sausage don't allow for the use of heat over 33C.

So meat processors had to find a way to be compliant - but without heat, which can change the taste and texture of the artisanal products.

That's when the Ontario Independent Meat Processors (OIMP) together with three processors used funding received through *Growing Forward 2* to approach the University of Guelph's Canadian Research Institute for Food Safety (CRIFS) to help find a solution.

OIMP wanted to find a way for the industry to control pathogens in fermented sausages outside of the interventions approved by Health Canada. They wanted their members to be able to continue offering artisanal

quality product without compromising food safety and regulatory compliance.

A CRIFS team developed a protocol that can decrease pathogens to Health Canada-approved levels by adding natural antimicrobials to the meat during the sausage-making process.

The products are shelf-ready in only three to four weeks from the first day of processing, with no change in appearance or palatability, and the protocol is applicable to production batches of all sizes.

The goal was to develop a solution that processors can immediately and easily apply. Previous work of this nature, called "challenge studies", had to be completed in the United States because there were no Canadian facilities with the required equipment and expertise available to industry for use.

Although the project was specific to fermented sausage, these principles of pathogen control could also be applicable to other ready-to-eat meat products, cheese, and even fruits and vegetables in the future.

The work completed through this project will help OIMP's members retain their current markets, as well as expand into new ones in the future.

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ASSURANCE SYSTEMS (TRACEABILITY, ANIMAL WELFARE, FOOD SAFETY)

NEW ID TECHNOLOGY WILL OPEN GLOBAL MARKETS FOR ONTARIO-BASED HATCHERY INNOVATION

Chicken hatcheries around the world will soon have access to a unique, new, made-in-Canada technology that holds the potential to revolutionize the business.

The non-invasive scanning technology—that will identify the gender of day-old eggs before they are incubated—is set to streamline the hatchery process, create new tech-sector jobs and redirect resources previously used to raise male chicks.

Research funded by the Egg Farmers of Ontario, through the Agricultural Adaptation Council, was conducted at the University of McGill, to bring the concept of gender identification of unhatched eggs to full-scale commercialization. The project is in its second phase. That's work to fine-tune the scanning system in preparation for a commercial application that would be available for sale to hatcheries in Canada and around the world.

"This is a very sophisticated technology that includes state-of-the-art visioning," says Tim Nelson, CEO of Livestock Research Innovation of Ontario. It's the group partnering with Egg Farmers of Ontario to bring the technology to market. "There is a tremendous amount of design work that goes into creating this new system that, at full capacity, could scan and identify male and female, and fertile and non-fertile eggs at 50,000 eggs per hour."

The knowledge that comes from being able to identify the gender of day-old eggs will give hatcheries new information. Female eggs can be incubated for hatching and infertile or male eggs can join the table or processing stream.

"This new technology will offer tremendous new opportunities to Ontario's hatchery industry," says Harry Pellisero, general manager of Egg Farmers of Ontario "Redirecting day-old male eggs opens new market opportunities, and focuses hatchery resources of energy, water and other resources to hatching female eggs. It's really going to be a game-changer."

Commercialization of the technology will involve working with established hatchery automation companies, as the new technology requires custom-fitting to each hatchery, and is expected to create up to 30 jobs in Ontario, including visioning system technicians.

"We've already had interest and requests from hatcheries around the world that are very excited about the potential of this new technology," says Pellisero. "We are now moving into testing prototypes in Ontario hatcheries to be sure the accuracy and speed we have in the lab can be achieved at the commercial level. We expect to go to market in 2018 with the first commercial hatchery application."



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ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH

***GROWING FORWARD 2* HELPS NORTHERN AGRICULTURE REALIZE WHAT'S POSSIBLE**

Innovation is an essential part of farming in northern Ontario. Distance, climate and infrastructure are different than in more southern parts of the province, leaving agriculture in the north to adapt to make the sector successful.

In support of that drive for innovation, the Agricultural Adaptation Council (AAC) has provided funding to a variety of projects led by the Rural Agri Innovation Network (RAIN) through *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

"Northern Ontario is a unique place to be, but we have to do a lot more with a lot fewer resources," explains David Thompson, RAIN Research Project Coordinator. "Support from *GF2* has really helped us generate research results specific to this area, which is in northern Ontario but also in the shadow of Lake Superior, so we're in a unique climatic area."

RAIN, located on the campus of Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie, is a project of the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre and the NORDIK Institute with a mandate to build a more resilient agriculture sector in northern Ontario.

The work with AAC has resulted in projects focused on managing forages and crop portfolio diversification that both demonstrate best practices and evaluate new methods from other parts of the world for applicability in the north.

A project using keyline subsoiling as a water management tool is under way to improve forage production. This involves using an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) to look



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at field's topography and then applying a contour-based pattern of subsoiling to ensure a more even flow of water and better pasture growth.

Through on-farm trials RAIN partners with select farmers to experiment with growing new crops in the region and showcase best practices like no-till, soil health amendments and rotational grazing. Experiences are shared at field days so other farmers in the region can see the tools in practice and learn from the experiences of their fellow growers.

A more recently launched project is looking at cross-seeding forages as an alternative way to seed crops, and evaluating this practice from New Zealand and the United Kingdom in the context of northern Ontario.

As well, work is underway to study the economics of sulphur fertilization to determine whether applying sulphur to brassica crops can be economical for beef, vegetable and canola producers in Algoma.

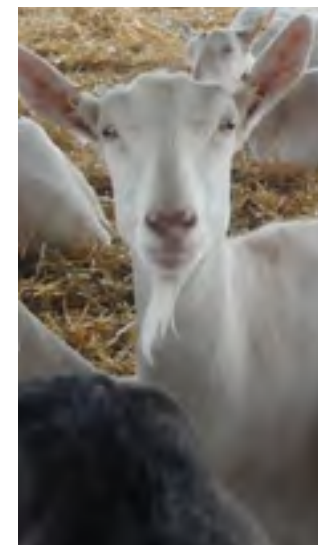
It's the local farm community that helps drive many of the research priorities in the region, but without the *GF2* support, the work either wouldn't be getting done at all or simply at a much reduced scale.



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“Northern Ontario is a unique place to be, but we have to do a lot more with a lot fewer resources,” explains David Thompson, RAIN Research Project Coordinator. “Support from *GF2* has really helped us generate research results specific to this area, which is in northern Ontario but also in the shadow of Lake Superior, so we’re in a unique climatic area.”

“We rely on a number of partners to put these projects together, but it’s the *GF2* funding that has let us leverage these bigger projects we just don’t have resources to do on our own,” Thompson says. “There is a lot of opportunity when we’re working together and it has really been a benefit to have this support for community-based innovative research like this.”



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ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH

KEEPING IN TOUCH HELPS ONTARIO PORK INDUSTRY KEEP A HANDLE ON KEY DISEASES

Reducing devastating disease outbreaks is priority number one for the Ontario Pork Industry Council.

The Council has seen diseases such as Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) and Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea virus (PEDv) strike Ontario's pork industry. That's why it created Area Regional Control and Elimination (ARC&E) programs to reduce and manage outbreaks of these threatening diseases. The new biosecurity program focuses on collaboration, communication and information-sharing across the industry to help prepare everyone to deal with outbreaks and manage disease transmission.

Both PRRS and PEDv spread quickly and can be devastating to a herd. Knowing where and when an outbreak happens can be an effective means to control and eliminate these diseases. That's the purpose behind an interactive map the Ontario Pork Industry Council developed to voluntarily identify hog farms across Ontario, including sites experiencing PEDv or PRRS cases. Sharing this information with everyone involved in the industry is key and hog producers and veterinarians can sign up to access the map.

The map is a definite success with 55 per cent of the 2,057 swine operations in Ontario voluntarily participating. The ARC&E project is unique because success is due to open

participation and collaboration between members of the pork industry in Ontario. This project has created a new level of voluntary disease status information-sharing and cooperation with participating producers, all in the interest of biosecurity and disease control and elimination.

"This program has helped control and eliminate PEDv in affected barns," says Karen Sanders, ARC&E lead. "Sharing information is so important and can be extremely helpful—even to the unfortunate producer that has an outbreak. We're all in this together, and when you get a bunch of producers troubleshooting, innovative solutions come out of the woodwork." The ARC&E program has also helped determine PRRS status of participating hog farm sites—a serious disease estimated to cost the Canadian pork industry \$130 million each year.

The interactive map improves communication and transparency between members of the pork industry. Participants can log in to view the map and PRRS site status and producer information. If there is a new case or outbreak of PRRS, all members will receive a notification with relevant information. In the case of PEDv outbreaks, information of infected sites, or farms, is also shared with high-impact service providers. These include transportation and feed providers so they can help reduce disease transmission.

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LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY ENHANCEMENT

NEW SAFE-LOADING STEP CATCHING ON WITH POULTRY CREWS

Catching crews on poultry farms have made do for years when they needed an extra step loading full crates from the barn onto transport trucks. Using the tools at hand, they improvised and turned empty crates on end to get where they needed to be. But there are two big problems with this practice—the obvious health and safety risks of standing on a slippery, uneven surface, and the damage done to the crate when used as a makeshift step.

The Poultry Service Association—that represents the vast majority of poultry-catching and live-haul poultry business in Ontario—set out to design, build and test a better way. With no commercially made loading steps available, the association engineered, fabricated and tested a lightweight, portable and safe poultry-loading step for the Ontario industry.

Developing a new, safe, loading step was approached as a sector initiative involving the main commercial poultry-catching companies in Ontario. This collaboration made it a much more economical and unified way to arrive at a solution that all companies could access.

Driving the need for a new safe step was two-fold—reducing slips and falls by crew, and reducing damage

done to crates. It's tough to calculate improved health and safety in dollars and cents. The savings in reduced crate damage is easier to estimate. At \$85 per crate, and an estimated 30 per cent discard rate of damaged crates, the annual savings to the industry with the new safe step is estimated at more than \$2.5 million.

The new safe portable step is now in use by 85 per cent of commercial poultry-catchers in Ontario, and the industry is noticing the difference. Trucking companies have seen a reduction in crate damage and appreciate the safety aspect of the new loading platforms.

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LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY ENHANCEMENT INCUBATOR USES *GROWING FORWARD 2* FUNDING TO GIVE LOCAL FOOD BUSINESSES A START

A not-for-profit food business incubator in Toronto is helping entrepreneurs get their fledgling food companies off the ground.

Food Starter offers food prep, processing, packaging and storage facilities to industry entrants at a reduced rate, as well as courses to teach entrepreneurs about key aspects of the food industry, like food safety, regulatory compliance, labelling, accounting, marketing, business management and human resources.

The Toronto Food Business Incubator partnered with the City of Toronto to access funding from *Growing Forward 2* to develop and launch Food Starter in November 2015.

"A lot of people here are good at recipes but don't know about all the other things needed to run a food business," explains Carlos Correia, Food Starter's Facility Manager. "We cover all aspects of business development to give them information they didn't know existed but would be road block to keep them from moving forward."

Food Starter's 24 incubator clients are new food entrepreneurs who access shared space by the hour on an

as-needed basis to develop or perfect new recipes, scale up production or get ready to launch their first product.

Esther Jiang has been using Food Starter's training courses and incubator space to launch Gryllies, a line of high protein pasta sauces using cricket flour from Norwood, Ontario's Entomo Farms.

"Food Starter has been paramount to setting us up for success. In food, there are a lot of boxes to check and this is building that foundation to launch us for the market place," she says. "Without Food Starter, everything would have taken 20 times longer and I don't know that I would still be doing this if it wasn't for their help."

Food Starter's seven accelerator units are available for longer-term use where clients can bring their own equipment into a dedicated space but still receive support and advice from Food Starter experts and fellow entrepreneurs.

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Jaswant's Kitchen is a family-run Indian spice blend company that co-owner Simi Kular says was ready for its own space to increase production and grow their business.

"Food Starter has taught us what a food production facility entails, from food safety to pest control and Good Manufacturing Practices," explains Simi. "And learning from the experts and the other businesses here is invaluable—the collaborative relationships make it fun to come to work every day."

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Food Starter is an amazing concept that gives a lot of benefit to new start-ups.

Correia says the ultimate goal is to have entrepreneurs outgrow their accelerator space and move into their own facilities.

According to Correia, Food Starter meets a critical need for early stage training and support for new food businesses in Toronto, and space in the incubator is in demand.

"Our main focus is to develop business. We create jobs and we've already seen some of those results as companies here at Food Starter are hiring staff as they grow," says Correia.

"We couldn't develop this without the funding we've received. Food Starter is an amazing concept that gives a lot of benefit to new start-ups, and this facility wouldn't be possible without that support," he adds.





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