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FARM

Edition

Fall 2026



Agricultural drones take flight after Health Canada pesticide approval

AMANDA NELSON

Grant Haven Media Reporter

A Health Canada approval allowing pesticide application by remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS), commonly known as drones, was granted in June, allowing farmers and small businesses across Southwestern Ontario to spray pesticides in accordance with the Pest Control Products Act and the Pest Control Products Regulations.

While Canadian farmers have been able to use drones for mapping, scouting and crop monitoring, the major regulatory hurdle has been using them to apply pesticides.

Now that new approvals have opened the door for drone-based pesticide applications, small business owners, such as Justin Shieck, owner and operator of Norfolk Drone Services, say they believe farmers can now utilize the technology for greater efficiency.

Shieck was initially taken off guard when he read the report stating that pesticide spraying via drone technology was approved back in June, something he thought he wouldn't see until next year.

"There weren't even signs that this was going to happen by the fall... we were taken completely off guard about the approval."

Shieck says that countries like China, the United States and Australia have been using drone technology in the agricultural sector for around 15 years, and yet Canada is just starting to see the value after getting feedback from competing countries.

"In the States, drones are treated as another aircraft," he said. "What got me into this business was really watching how fast it expanded across the States and seeing YouTube video after YouTube video and news article after news article showing small businesses booming, with young 20-year-olds and different age groups of farmers enjoying what they're doing and bringing a cheaper solution for farming."

Shieck says he believes farmers throughout Canada will soon own and operate drones, similar to the



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Justin Shieck, owner and operator of Norfolk Drone Services, demonstrates agricultural drone technology. The June Health Canada approval allowing pesticide applications by remotely piloted aircraft systems opens new opportunities for farmers and agricultural businesses.

way they own tractors, combines or other farming equipment. He says in farming, timing is everything when it comes to spraying pesticides or fertilizers.

"Do I see every farmer owning one, like a Swiss Army knife in their toolbox? One hundred per cent,

because farming comes down to timing," said Shieck. "Especially if you're deploying it out of the back of your barn, you can hit timing windows when you really need to."

Compared to small conventional tractors, drones can cover more ground in less time, at about 40 acres per hour; however, large self-propelled sprayers can cover more than 80 acres per hour. These large sprayers are often hard on fields and don't allow for the same mobility as a drone.

The Health Canada report noted that drone application is often the most practical option when fields are soft, wet or too difficult for ground application equipment; when pest outbreaks occur late in crop growth; or for areas that are either too large or inaccessible for ground application.

"If it's been raining a lot, I don't think anyone's pulling a rig through a field," said Shieck. "Then once a canopy gets high, you can't really spray beans or corn because it's too tall. In the fall, I really see drones tackling the heavy canopies where you're not getting that 25 per cent loss from driving over your beans."

Although Canada is behind in its approval, Shieck says it's not all bad news, and being able to track and assess what's happening in other countries before the Health Canada approval has benefited the budget.

"Canada is cautious," he said. "We take a more science-based regulatory approach than most places, and they do it for safety reasons. I would say it's not a horrible thing that we were behind. Watching and allowing other countries to spend a lot of money on research while we sat back and collected data was valuable. Now we have some brands approved, and we're not wasting that time or money on the trial and error they've already gone through."

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Agricultural drones take flight after Health Canada pesticide approval

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The report notes that the approval also aligns Canada with other countries like the United States and Australia, helping Canadian agriculture stay competitive internationally during times when competitive prices are key.

"Using RPAS to apply pesticides can make farming more efficient by helping farmers protect crops while using fewer inputs — such as pesticides and other resources needed for crop production, including labour, fuel and equipment use," read the report.

"This will support food security and help keep food affordable."

Drone operation is regulated by Transport Canada, whereas the regulation of pesticides is under the jurisdiction of Health Canada. Transport Canada considers aerial drones to be aircraft, and all pilots must understand and follow Canadian Aviation Regulations.

The data show that the risks of applying pesticides by RPAS are generally similar to those of conventional aerial application. However, drones

also have the potential to apply pesticides very precisely, similar to some ground-based spot treatments.

Health Canada also concluded that pesticide residues on food crops resulting from RPAS applications are not higher than those resulting from conventional application methods, making foods as safe as with conventional applications.

Shieck's company, Norfolk Drone Services, offers agricultural drone services focused on precision spraying, spreading and mapping. Its main agriculture-related services include aerial spraying, granular spreading, mapping and aerial imagery, as well as drone sales, support and training.

The cost of a drone package varies, but Shieck says it is generally around \$40,000 to \$50,000 and includes multiple batteries and packages, including spray equipment that can be used for pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides and biological products.

Shieck encourages anyone interested to visit his website or reach out to him directly at www.norfolkdrone-services.ca

The foundations of sustainable farming

The agricultural sector is built on plants and animal life, but the industry can still affect the environment in ways that contribute to the ill effects of climate change. According to data published in a 2022 report from McKinsey & Company, agriculture accounts for nearly one-quarter of global emissions, and was identified as the industry that contributes the most to exceeding planetary boundaries. Sustainable farming practices can help reduce that impact.

Even though there is growing consumer demand for more environmentally friendly products, farmers in the United States are lagging behind when it comes to adopting sustainable practices, even though they are aware of them. McKinsey reports that 90 percent of U.S. farmers have an understanding of sustainable farming, but adoption of these practices remains low. Here's a look at some of the sustainable farming practices and what the agricultural sector can do to foster a better planet.

Regenerative techniques

Healthy soil often equates to a healthy planet. The cornerstone of sustainability lies in the soil. The soil serves as a carbon sink and a water filtration system. By avoiding traditional "tilling"-farming, farmers can maintain the soil structure. This will reduce erosion and keep carbon sequestered in the ground. Farmers can plant cover crops like rye or clover in the offseason to prevent soil erosion, suppress weeds and increase the organic matter of the soil. Diversifying species planted in fields will break pest cycles and naturally replenish soil nutrients over time. This can reduce the need for chemical fer-

tilizers and pesticides.

Efficient irrigation

Global water scarcity continues to be a concern, and sustainable farms will prioritize water stewardship. In utilizing drip irrigation, which delivers water directly to a plant's roots, farmers can reduce evaporation and runoff when compared to overhead sprinklers. Collecting and storing rainwater runoff for use during drought can minimize the strain on local aquifers.

Biological pest controls

Farmers can rely on the use of integrated pest management strategies to offset chemical pesticide use. By introducing natural predators, farmers can control certain pest populations. For example, ladybugs can reduce aphids on plants. Relying on traps to collect pests also can slow pest outbreaks and reduce reliance on chemicals.

Creating fertilizers

Farmers can use the waste produced on their farms by turning it into valuable fertilizer. According to the USDA, biochar is a black carbon produced from biomass sources like wood chips, plant residues, manure, and other agricultural waste in a low-oxygen environment through a process known as pyrolysis. This material can be used as a soil amendment to improve water retention, nutrient uptake and fertility. Chicken litter, bone meal, blood meal, and compost tea are examples of farm waste-derived products that can be used as fertilizers.

Sustainable farming is a step toward the future that protects the land without compromising output.





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Oxford MP pays tribute to area farmers and ag industry as uncertainty continues

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

Oxford County's Member of Parliament wants farmers to know just how much he appreciates the work they do to keep us fed.

"Our farmers feed our families, and we owe them a debt of gratitude for what they do," said Arpan Khanna.

"Waking up early before sunrise and working the fields to make sure Canadians and the rest of the world get good, nutritious food. That is something we should always be thankful for. They work extremely hard, they are very talented, and Oxford has some of the best soil in the country," he added.

One of the MP's concerns when it comes to agriculture is what he said is the government's punishment of farmers through taxes and red tape.

"Canada should be a place where we can make more, grow more, harvest more, and become a self-reliant country. I think we have the potential, the foundation, the people, the farmers, and the land. It's time we get behind them and support them so we grow more locally and compete with the rest of the world."

Khanna said Canada is the only country in the G7 with a 30 per cent fertilizer tax, which comes from the federal government's carbon pricing. He added the cost raises the price of Canadian-produced food significantly.

"We have one of the highest levels of food inflation in the G7, something that doesn't make any sense

since we have some of the best farmers. We need to support our farmers so they can produce food at a reasonable price to feed our families."

Another Conservative concern comes from the cost of Canadian-made food compared to other countries we import it from. Khanna pointed to a local pricing example to explain why many consumers are choosing foreign-supplied groceries.

"You can't blame those families. For example, I was at an asparagus farm and they told me it costs \$5 per pound to produce here in Oxford County, yet it costs \$1.50 to produce in Mexico and have it shipped over 3,000 kilometres away. It makes absolutely no sense to me why we are punishing our farmers with rising costs and red tape."

Khanna said increasing taxes on farmers, truckers and retailers results in higher prices at the checkout.

"We are hearing about a lot of farmers who are selling their land because it no longer pays to be in the business. Putting all the work in and making sacrifices should mean something, and that's what we are fighting for."

One cloud hanging over the heads of many Canadian industries is the ongoing trade and tariff battle with our neighbours to the south, something he said is having a crippling effect on our agriculture industry.

"Even the farm equipment being tariffed is going to push costs higher for our producers. There are talks about supply management and what the US wants to do with our dairy, and Oxford has a strong sector, which raises some concerns. We also need to ensure

we can offer our goods to the rest of the world."

Khanna added uncertainty surrounding our relationship with the USA is one of the reasons why the official opposition has asked for Parliament to be reconvened early in the interest of transparency.

"We want to make sure our farmers, workers and businesses are fully aware of what's going on so they can have a predictable future. Whether it's for agriculture, automotive or any other industry, we should be back at the table negotiating with our largest trade partner."

Khanna recently attended Canada's Outdoor Farm Show in Woodstock where he hosted federal Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre. The event highlights the industry as a whole, including new technologies. He said Canadian companies are true innovators.

"There's a lot of AI being used these days for smart, efficient farming. Different tools and technology are making it less labour-intensive and more cost-effective. It's good to see those advances happening, and what blows my mind is seeing Canadian innovation now leading the world and attracting investments and exporting products all over the world."

He also thanked Oxford County farmers for putting in the hard work to feed families locally, across the country and the world.

"We are forever grateful and hold on – I know there is a lot of red tape and barriers that challenge you every day, but Conservatives will continue to be by your side, championing the issue that matter to you. We will get through these uncertain times and unleash Canada's potential."

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Breaking the silence: Agriculture Wellness Ontario works to prevent suicide in farming communities

GALEN SIMMONS

Echo Contributor

For farmers, the pressures of work and home are often impossible to separate.

Weather, commodity prices, livestock health and finances can all weigh heavily on a farm family, while long hours and geographic isolation can make it difficult to connect with others or seek help when those pressures become overwhelming.

Agriculture Wellness Ontario (AgWO) is working to change that by providing mental-health education, counselling and community support designed specifically for Ontario's agricultural community.

"Our programs and services are not only ag-informed, they've been co-constructed with actual farmers and industry partners to ensure that we're actually providing mental-health education and support that is accessible, relevant and applicable to those who we are aiming to serve," said Avery Dixon, program outreach coordinator for AgWO's Guardian Network.

That agricultural focus is particularly important when it comes to suicide prevention.

Dixon said research shows farmers are twice as likely as the general, non-farming population to experience suicidal thoughts or die by suicide. At the same time, stigma can prevent people from acknowledging they are struggling or asking for help.

According to Dixon, the 2021 National Survey of Farmer Mental Health

out of the University of Guelph found 40 per cent of Canadian farmers and producers would not be comfortable seeking professional help, largely because of concerns about judgement from others.

"I think there's often this perception in farming that your worth as a person is tied to the productivity of your farm," Dixon said. "So, it's a really vulnerable thing to say to someone, 'Hey, I'm not doing well. I'm struggling to keep up with chores, I'm struggling financially, I'm going through family difficulties,' whatever that situation might be."

Instead of inviting others in, Dixon said farmers may keep those struggles to themselves, compounding feelings of isolation and burdensomeness.

Through the Guardian Network, AgWO is attempting to build supports directly into agricultural communities. More than 500 Guardians have been trained across Ontario through a full-day, farmer-focused suicide-prevention program.

Those volunteers learn to recognize signs someone may be struggling, start difficult conversations and encourage that person to seek professional support.

"Guardians are the bridge between a farmer or an ag community member who is struggling and professional support," Dixon said.

One place that bridge can lead is AgWO's Farmer Wellness Initiative, which provides farmers, farm workers and their families – including international agricultural workers living in

Ontario – with free, unlimited counselling 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Counselling is available in English, French and Spanish by phone, virtually and, when available, in person. The professionals providing the service receive specialized training to understand the pressures and realities of agriculture.

That means a farmer doesn't necessarily have to sacrifice several hours during a busy planting or harvest season to travel to and from an appointment.

"It's about meeting farmers where they're at," Dixon said. "Most farmers don't have that potentially up to two hours a day to drive to an appointment, attend the appointment and drive back. So, calling from your tractor can make all the difference in the world for some people."

AgWO also offers education through In the Know, a four-hour mental-health literacy workshop developed specifically for agriculture, and shorter Growth Workshops covering subjects including mental health and agriculture, preparing for uncertainty and navigating stress.

While those programs can give farmers tools to look after their own mental health, Dixon said education can also

prepare neighbours, friends, relatives and other members of agricultural communities to recognize when somebody else needs support.

"If you notice a community member doesn't seem like themselves for whatever reason, don't shy away from having those hard conversations," Dixon said. "For a lot of people, it can be lifesaving."

Sometimes that support can be as simple as checking in or stopping by to lend a hand with chores.

For AgWO, breaking down stigma means making conversations about mental health as acceptable in agriculture as conversations about weather, crops, livestock or equipment.

"Normalizing that experiencing a mental-health concern doesn't make you weak, it doesn't make you a bad farmer, and teaching people what supports are available to them is so important," Dixon said. "The better we get at understanding, as a community, mental health, having candid, open conversations about it and recognizing when someone needs support, I think the healthier and more prosperous our industry will become as a whole."

More information on AgWO, its Farmer Wellness Initiative and upcoming workshops is available through the organization's website.



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Canada's Outdoor Farm Show ready to showcase local innovation and technology

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

From locally developed agtech to automation and precision agriculture, organizers of the 2026 Canada's Outdoor Farm Show say this year's edition will be packed with innovations for Canadian producers.

The event takes place September 15 to 17 and brings together farmers, industry leaders and technology innovators for three days of agricultural discovery.

"Ontario is home to an incredible network of innovators who are helping shape the future of agriculture," said Show Director Rob O'Connor. "Canada's Outdoor Farm Show connects those companies with farmers to have conversations about upcoming technology that will make a difference on the farm."

O'Connor points to several areas of the show where visitors can experience the latest advancements first-hand, including the Dairy Innovation Centre which will highlight technologies to help dairy producers meet evolving challenges and opportunities. Visitors can explore on-farm innovations that support animal care.

The AgTech Breakfast returns on Sept. 16, bringing farmers, startups and industry leaders together for a morning focused on the future of agriculture. Participants will hear from emerging companies and innovators sharing fresh perspectives on technology adoption, farm management and the next generation of agricultural solutions.

Field demonstrations will continue to be a cornerstone of the show experience, providing farmers with the chance to see equipment and technology operating in real-world conditions and side by side comparisons.

Farmers can see how crops perform in real-world conditions and stay informed about the latest agronomic advancements. Canada's Outdoor Farm Show features 10 companies crop plots showing a variety of crops, plant health and crop protection products. Featured crops in 2026 include corn, soybeans, forages



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

There will be a number of events at this year's edition of Canada's Outdoor Farm Show including equipment demonstrations.

and more.

Livestock Central brings livestock exhibits and demonstrations together in one area and features companies with products for livestock producers.

Located in the area between 7th Street and Doug Wagner Way, participants will find the latest advancements in livestock management for dairy, beef, sheep or goats. Industry experts will be available to talk about cutting-edge practices or watch live demonstrations for low-stress animal handling and pasture grazing.

There will also be live demonstrations showcase effective and low-stress livestock handling, an important

factor for both animal and their handlers. Additionally, the Rural Pavillion will showcase exhibitors selling rural living products for the farm and items of interest to farm families.

Across the show grounds, visitors can connect with Canadian manufacturers, local entrepreneurs and established agtech companies demonstrating equipment and technologies designed specifically for Ontario growing conditions. Visitors can explore practical innovations that help farm businesses locally and on a global scale.

For more information visit www.outdoorfarmshow.com.



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Fall is loaded with opportunities to have fun

It can be bittersweet to say farewell to summer. Months of warm weather and sunshine are hard to beat and provide plenty of opportunities to rest and relax.

Just because summer has come and gone doesn't mean the opportunity to enjoy recreation is in the rear-view mirror. Fall is awash in opportunities to enjoy the fresh, inviting air and take part in the various activities that go hand-in-hand with this time of year.

Apple and pumpkin picking

Heading to a nearby orchard or farm and choosing fresh fruit is a hallmark of fall. In fact, these are some of the most popular places to visit on the weekends, as crowds of people clamber to grab their Granny Smith or Cortland apples. Call ahead to learn which varieties are ripe and plan to arrive early before the trees are picked clean.

Apple orchards and pumpkin patches can be dusty, muddy or messy, so dress accordingly for the environment, including closed-toe shoes you don't mind getting dirty. Keep in mind that many of these establishments are cash-only. Bring cash and expect to have your bounty weighed upon checkout.

Wine tasting

September and October are prime months for grape harvesting, which means local vineyards may host special tours and events to take advantage of their growing season.

Fall also is a great time to visit a vineyard that offers tastings, as you can sit out in the sun and cool weather and enjoy a glass or two of the latest vintage. Follow local vineyards on social media or get on their email lists to stay on top of upcoming events.

Leaf peeping

The gradual depletion of chlorophyll in tree leaves is responsible for the amazing and colorful display Mother Nature puts on each fall. Everyone is treated to vivid panoramas of reds, oranges, purples, and yellows, making them ideal all-natural photo backdrops.

Plenty of people travel to more rural areas to witness leaves change color, and that means that country areas can get crowded. It always pays to plan a leaf-peeping excursion for early in the day to account for the possibility of traffic along the route. Make an entire day of it by seeing the sights, grabbing lunch, and hitting a farmer's market while out and about.



Fall fair

Many towns hold off on their annual fairs and carnivals until the cooler months of the year. These are entertaining and boisterous events that can include everything from food and livestock contests to rides and amusements to musical performances.

As these fairs tend to last a couple of days to a week, it could be fruitful to look into whether they sell multi-day passes at a discount, particularly if you plan to attend a few times and maximize the fun.

Opportunities for fun abound each fall. With inviting weather and calendars full of seasonal offerings, now is an ideal time to enjoy the great outdoors.



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More than 100 Ontario-based farms and makers featured in Udderly Ridiculous Farm Market



(CHERYL HASKETT PHOTO)

The Alpaca and Donkey Picnics at Udderly Ridiculous Farm Life offer a picnic basket full of Ontario-made food to enjoy.

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

Udderly Ridiculous Farm Life's Farm Market Store is a one-stop shop for Ontario-made food and gifts.

The store, part of the agri-business in Bright, carries preserves, cheeses, meats, snacks, and gift items like scrunchies and woodworking from more than 100 Ontario businesses, including many in Oxford County. Products from Hope Eco Farm Store in Aylmer, St. Marys' Stonetown Artisan Cheese, Barrie's Asparagus in Cambridge, Majestic Water Buffalo in Erin, and Oxford County's White Oak Design are also stocked.

"The closest local maker is about 10 minutes away. The furthest away would be about three hours, approximately," said founder Cheryl Haskett.

The Farm Market Store gives businesses all across Ontario a chance to sell their product and expand their consumer base. Haskett was inspired by her own experience selling Udderly Ridiculous Farm Life products.

"We really learned the ins and outs of how difficult it is to get a consumer-packaged product out into the marketplace, and so one of the things we really wanted to do is highlight these amazing makers both as locally as possible, like our neighbours, but also specifically Ontario-based."

She added as the business went through COVID, there was a lot more emphasis on people starting to understand where their food was coming from.

"We wanted to make sure we were having that conversation with our guests, and we just continued that on so every year, we try to find more and more makers to add on."

Supporting businesses across the province is also essential to keep the Ontario agriculture sector thriving.

"It takes a lot of farms to make our food system," Haskett said. "It takes a lot of us to build our economy and being able to support Ontario farms and Ontario makers is a really cool thing and of course people are understanding that now with the trade war in the US, but it's not something that should go away if something evens out in the States, you know, people understanding how to support locally is critically important to the future of farming in Canada."

Udderly Ridiculous Farm Life also curates picnic baskets full of goodies for guests to enjoy as they have a picnic with the alpacas and donkeys on the property.

"That's been a really great way to taste test maybe some cheeses or meats or jellies or snacks that they may or may not have tried before, so things like nuts or the water buffalo summer sausage is one that people really, really love," Haskett said.

As Udderly Ridiculous Farm Life is on the Oxford County Cheese Trail, there are many people looking for artisan cheese at the shop.

"People are coming and finding some cheeses they may not find anywhere else, like River's Edge Dairy," she explained. "That's been fun to introduce people that way where they're able to have an experience, taste Ontario foods, and then pick up some to go home with."

Udderly Ridiculous Farm Life is located at 906200 Township Rd 12 in Bright and is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday and on Mondays and Tuesdays by appointment only until October. More information can be found online by visiting <https://udderlyridiculousfarmlife.com>.

Green farming is growing

Farmers have been pressured to increase production to meet the demand of a growing population. This may require employing more efficient measures to ensure maximum output. Unfortunately, efficiency doesn't always mesh with sustainability, so commercial operations have had to make some modifications to find a balance between serving the public and protecting the planet.

Green farming utilizes different technology and practices in order to decrease detrimental impact on the environment. According to the farming resource NuFarming, agricultural operations have a significant impact on climate change. Simply adopting some new practices can lessen that impact.

Solar power

Growing plants are not the only thing on a farm that can benefit from the sun. Farmers can convert a portion or all of their power needs to solar. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, there are benefits when solar companies and farmers work together. Solar developers reduce installation costs and upfront risk by placing solar modules on previously tilled agricultural land. Vegetation under modules also can contribute to lower soil temperatures and increased solar performance. Agricultural land managers can reduce energy costs and diversify their revenue streams with solar. Plus, they can market products to sustainability-minded

customers.

Solar is not the only renewable energy option. Farmers can incorporate wind and hydroelectric power as well.

Crop rotation

This farming technique has been used for thousands of years and involves growing different crops in different seasons over a period of time. Farmers reduce the chances for pests and diseases becoming problems in the soil because frequent crop changes prevent invaders from gaining a foothold. Farmers use fewer fertilizers and pesticides as a result.

Hydroponic and aquaponic strategies

Farmers can improve productivity while also reducing environmental impact with these two growing methods. NuEnergy states that hydroponic systems grow plants in mineral solutions or in materials like perlite or gravel. Aquaponics involves raising aquatic animals in addition to growing crops. The waste from the fish and other marine life is used to offer nutrients to the plants by growing them in this nutrient-rich water. Both methods remove the need for soil.

Drip irrigation

Drip irrigation methods deliver water to the roots of plants through a series of pipes or tubes. Because water is not being sprayed into the air through sprinklers and other methods, less is lost to evaporation, and less water overall may be needed to provide for



crops.

Plasticulture

Plastic seems like it may not have a purpose on the farm, but recycled plastic, which is used in plastic mulch, can help produce plentiful crops with less water. Plastic

mulches raise soil temperatures and insulate against evaporation so plants can grow faster and mature sooner. Invasive weeds also may be less likely to take root in plastic mulch or when crops are grown on black plastic.

Natural pesticides

Farmers can introduce plants that pests tend not to like to reduce reliance on chemical pesticides. For example, interspersing crops with natural bug repellants, such as basil, lavender and lem-

ongrass, may keep insects at bay. Alliums, chrysanthemums, marigolds, and other flowers planted nearby also may deter bugs.

Green farming is something more agricultural operations may want to adopt.



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Area farmers show off ag skills for charity

The Oxford Tractor Skill Games successfully held its 2026 community event on Saturday, Sept. 5, drawing families, farmers, youth participants, and agricultural enthusiasts from across Oxford County. The annual gathering delivered a full day of hands on tractor challenges that celebrated rural skill, safety awareness, and community pride. This year's event took place at the Open Farm Field, 293679 Culloden Line, Ingersoll, marking a well received shift in location that provided expanded space for course layouts, family attractions, and vendor participation. Attendees enjoyed warm weather, strong turnout, and a full schedule of activities supporting the Children's Health Foundation, continuing the event's longstanding commitment to pediatric care initiatives across Southwestern Ontario. The day featured a line-

up of precision driving courses, obstacle challenges, trailer backup competitions, and youth tractor safety demonstrations. Organizers introduced several new family friendly additions, including a 40 foot inflatable obstacle course, a toddler bouncy castle, horse rides, a barrel train ride, and a corn kernel pit. These attractions helped broaden the event's appeal and kept younger visitors engaged throughout the day. Volunteers, agricultural partners, and sponsors across Oxford County were instrumental in delivering the event, and their efforts ensured smooth operations, safe course management, and an enjoyable experience for both competitors and spectators. The day highlighted Oxford County's agricultural heritage while promoting safe equipment operation and strengthening community involvement.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



The Vanderweerd family browsed the many farm tractors on display.



The children got a kick out of rides around the grounds on this barrel train.



Members from Transitions offered rides to youngsters and collected donations.

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The link between agriculture and food security

The world faces many unique challenges in the decades to come, including a rapidly expanding global population. The United Nations estimates that the global population will reach 9.71 billion in 2050. That's an increase of more than 1.7 billion people between 2023 and 2050.

Food security is among the more significant challenges the world will face as the population increases. The United States Agency for International Development notes that food security means all individuals, regardless of their physical or economic circumstances, have access to sufficient food to meet the dietary needs for a productive, healthy life. Food security is a more significant issue than people may recognize, even in first world, fully developed countries. For example, the United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service indicates that slightly more than 10 percent of U.S. households were food insecure at some point during 2021. In fact, estimates suggest more than 800 million people across the globe go to bed hungry every night, which underscores the seriousness of the issue.

Agriculture and food security

Food security and the agricultural industry are inextricably linked. The USAID indicates that most of the people who go to bed hungry at night are smallholder farmers who depend on agriculture to make a living and feed themselves and their families. Supporting efforts to strengthen the agricultural industry can help to combat food security, as the USAID reports that growth within that sector has been found to be at least twice as effective at reducing poverty as growth in other sectors. Much of that can be traced to the disproportionate percentage of poor people who live in rural rather than urban areas. For example, the USAID reports that 75 percent of poor people in developing nations live in rural areas.

But the poverty rate is higher in rural areas than urban areas in the United States as well. Data from the 2019



American Community Survey indicates the poverty rate in rural areas was 15.4 percent in 2019 compared to 11.9 percent in urban areas. Though recent data regarding rural poverty rates in Canada is unavailable, a 2013 discussion paper on the topic from the Government of Canada noted that the country's rural residents earned less and had lower levels of education than residents in urban areas, suggesting that poverty is likely more prevalent in the Canadian countryside than in the country's cities.

What can be done

Though food security poses a significant global challenge, lack of access to healthy foods is preventable. Individuals in rural and urban communities can voice their support for efforts

to strengthen the agricultural sector. A thriving agricultural sector can ensure fewer people go to bed hungry each

night and bolster the economies of rural communities that are disproportionately affected by poverty.

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Think you know what grows in Ontario? Think again

From peanuts to watermelon and ginseng, Ontario farms have a few surprises

HOME GROWN OFA

Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Peaches, apples, sweet corn and tomatoes might come to mind when you think of Ontario-grown food. But peanuts? Watermelon? Sweet potatoes? Ginseng?

Ontario farms produce a much wider range of crops than many consumers might realize, and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture is encouraging Ontarians to discover some of the more unexpected foods growing close to home.

“One of the great things about agriculture in Ontario is just how diverse it is,” says Tracey Arts, farmer and director with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. “Our climate, soils and growing regions let farmers produce an incredible variety of crops, including quite a few that might surprise people who assume they have to come from somewhere warmer.”

Watermelon is a perfect example. A fruit that might conjure up images of much warmer climates is grown commercially right here in Ontario, with locally grown watermelon available through the summer and into September.

Peanuts might be an even bigger surprise. Although they’re usually associated with the southern United States, peanuts

are commercially grown in Ontario. They need plenty of heat and light, well-drained sandy soil and a long growing season, and early-maturing Valencia varieties are particularly suited to Ontario conditions.

Sweet potatoes are another warm-weather crop with an Ontario connection. Ontario growers also produce bitter melon, fuzzy squash, bok choy, daikon radish, edible amaranth and other vegetables that consumers may not immediately associate with Canadian agriculture.

Then there’s ginseng. Ontario is the leading producer of ginseng in North America, with most production concentrated in Norfolk, Brant and Oxford counties. It’s a crop that’s particularly interesting because it takes patience: cultivated ginseng roots generally aren’t harvested until three to five years after seeding, and much of North America’s production is destined for Asian markets.

And Ontario’s unexpected local foods don’t end there. Cranberries, haskap berries, artichokes and Asian vegetables are all included in Foodland Ontario’s seasonal availability listings.

“Whether you’re shopping at a grocery store, farmers’ market or farm stand, take a closer look at where your food comes from. You might be surprised by just how

diverse Ontario-grown food is,” says Arts. “This is why it is so incredibly important that we protect our farmland and our ability to grow and raise as much food as we possibly can right here at home.”

The OFA’s Home Grown campaign raises awareness of why it’s important to preserve Ontario farmland to produce local food, fuel, flowers and fibre. Learn more and sign up for regular updates on products grown and raised in Ontario at homegrownofa.ca.

Fun facts about Ontario’s unusual crops

Watermelon: Ontario watermelon is available from July through September.

Peanuts: Peanuts aren’t actually nuts — they’re legumes related to beans and peas. After the plant flowers, a “peg” grows downward into the soil, where the peanut pod develops underground.

Sweet potatoes: Despite their tropical origins, sweet potatoes are grown commercially in Ontario; farmers are using varieties that were developed specifically for our local climate.

Ginseng: Ontario is North America’s leading ginseng-producing region.

Cranberries: Ontario has commercial cranberry farms in Muskoka, and during wet harvest, ripe cranberries can be collected by flooding the growing area so the berries float to the surface.

Haskap berries: Also known as honeyberries, these elongated blue berries are part of Ontario’s seasonal fruit harvest.

Asian vegetables: Ontario farms grow everything from bok choy and daikon radish to Chinese broccoli, snow pea shoots, edible amaranth and water spinach.

About the Ontario Federation of Agriculture

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) represents 38,000 farm families across the province and serves as the leading advocate and strongest voice of Ontario’s farmers. As a dynamic farmer-led organization, the OFA represents and champions the interests of Ontario farmers through advocacy and government relations, research and farm policy recommendations, media and public relations, community representation, and more.

Join the conversation on X @OntarioFarms, Instagram @ontariofarms and Facebook /ontariofarms.

About Home Grown

A public awareness initiative of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Home Grown’s objective is to raise awareness about the importance of protecting and preserving Ontario farmland. Learn more about the key role of Ontario farms as a source of food, fuel, fibre and flowers and get regular updates on products grown and raised in Ontario by joining Home Grown Ontario.

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How rising food demand is affecting farming

The population is growing and so is its demand for food to fuel those extra bodies. Harvard Business Review reports the global population has quadrupled over the last century. It's predicted that, by 2050, the population will exceed nine billion people.

The world is not able to feed all of its inhabitants, according to Penn State. There are more than one billion people who are estimated to lack sufficient food, and two billion who do not receive adequate nutrition. Researchers from the Institute on the Environment at the University of Minnesota concluded that, to feed the world by 2030, yields on maize, rice, wheat, and soybeans will have to rise by 60 to 110 percent. At the start of 2023, projections show them only increasing by 45 to 60 percent. There are a few reasons why food supply may not meet up with demand.

• Climate change: Climate change is predicted



to cause issues to crop yields, especially in portions of the world where the population is growing the fastest. For example, a recent NASA study published in the journal Nature predicts that high greenhouse gas emissions may cause corn output to decline as early as 2030, but wheat output

would increase. Farmers may need to roll with the punches and shift operations to cope with the environmental changes.

• Decreased commercial farming interest: Fewer people are working in farming. Land prices for expansion, new government mandates and regulations, and the im-

pact of immigration and trade policies have made farming less attractive than it once was. Fewer commercial operations result in a diminished food commodity output.

• Consumer waste: Food loss and waste (FLW) is a widespread issue, posing a challenge to food security. The World Bank

estimates 30 percent of all food across the globe is wasted, amounting to 1.3 billion tons of food per year. The average global household wastes 74 kg of food each year, according to the United Nations Environment Programme's 2021 Food Waste Index. Food waste is an issue that needs

a solution as the world looks for ways to feed an expanding population in the decades to come.

In order to improve output, farmers have to make some changes. These can include investment in tools and technologies that enable farmers to apply nutrients more precisely and at lower cost, advises the Environmental Defense Fund. Seeds that need less water and fewer nutrients, as well as new fertilizers that are less likely to be lost to air and water, are some additional ideas. Farmers also may want to employ green practices, such as hydroponics and drip irrigation, if they haven't already, to improve efficiency and cut costs. The public also may need to petition their lawmakers to make it easier for farm workers arriving on working visas to man the fields.

Food demand continues to rise, and it has become challenging for agricultural operations to keep up.



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4 careers in modern ag

Farming and ranching may be the first roles people think of when they envision jobs in agriculture. But the modern agricultural sector offers a much wider range of career paths as well. As technology, sustainability and consumer demand impacts the industry, a greater number of unique and innovative career paths have emerged and opened doors for people with a wide range of skills.

According to the United States government and industry projections, the agricultural and food sectors supported about 22.1 million jobs in 2022, and growth is expected. Those exploring agriculture as a possible career field can look to these unique roles.

Precision agriculture specialist

A precision agriculture specialist is an emerging and dynamic role in the field. These professionals apply data analytics, GPS, sensor technology, and drone usage to optimize crop yields and input use. According to data reported by Zipdo, use of digital devices, AI and other tools in farming has surged. Digital tool use has risen by roughly 50 percent in the last five years, and drone technology adoption grew by 48 percent between 2019 and 2023. Estimates suggest that precision agriculture will expand robustly through the latter half of the decade, and individuals guiding this expansion will be in demand.

Sustainability consultants

Agriculture sustainability consultants also are important to modern farming. These professionals are responsible for advising farms and agribusinesses on eco-friendly practices. These may include soil conservation, water management, carbon sequestration, and regenerative agriculture. In addition, animal welfare and livestock technology specialists improve animal health and support ethical and sustainable farming practices. The Bureau of Labor Statistics says agriculture and food scientists working in science and sustainability are projected to see employment opportunities grow by about 6 percent between 2024 and 2034, which is faster than the average for all U.S. occupations.

Digital marketing

Careers in digital marketing and agricultural communications also are gaining traction, with consumers increasingly being interested in where their food comes from. Agricultural businesses need storytellers, social media managers and content creators to share engaging and transparent narratives about the innovative efforts taking place on their farms.

Agricultural entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs, known as agri-



preneurs within the industry, are the go-getters who are helping to redefine the agricultural sector. These people develop plant-based products or ag-tech startups, combining creativity with agricultural knowledge and business development. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce says the agriculture and

food industries contributed \$1.53 trillion to the U.S. economy in 2023, and agripreneurs are a rising part of that equation who are fueling innovation.

Careers in agriculture are diverse and profitable. There are many paths individuals can take to contribute to this vital industry.

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OFA member survey shows satisfaction, clear priorities for advocacy

Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) members continue to put a high value on advocacy and representation, while identifying taxation, red tape and trade uncertainty among the issues they most want their farm organization focused on.

Those are among the key findings of OFA's 2026 General Membership Survey, which was completed earlier this year.

Overall satisfaction with OFA remains strong, with 81 per cent of respondents reporting high or very high satisfaction. Members gave positive ratings to OFA's communications, advocacy and lobbying efforts, leadership and collaboration within agriculture, public awareness initiatives such as Home Grown, and participation at farm and trade shows.

"Advocacy is at the heart of what we do at OFA, so it's encouraging to see

that our members continue to value having a strong voice representing Ontario agriculture," said OFA Vice President Sara Wood. "Just as importantly, the survey gives us clear direction on where members want us to focus and how we can demonstrate the value of their membership."

Advocacy on agriculture and rural issues remains the top reason respondents say they choose OFA as their general farm organization, followed by confidence that OFA speaks for Ontario farmers. Tools, resources and information are also an important part of the value members see in their membership.

The survey also reconfirmed the top issues on the minds of farmers. Taxation topped the list, rated very important by 70 per cent of respondents and important by more than 90 per cent. Red tape and regulation, tariffs and trade uncer-

tainty, energy costs and access, and rural infrastructure were also identified as leading priorities.

"We hear regularly from farmers about the pressures they are facing, whether that's rising costs, regulatory burden, uncertainty in international markets or the infrastructure their farms and rural communities depend on," Wood explained. "These survey results reinforce the importance of continuing to bring those issues forward with governments and decision-makers at all levels."

Members also value the practical benefits of their membership, such as the OFA benefit program. Just under 50 per cent of respondents used a member benefit in the past year, compared to 34 per cent in 2025.

Other opportunities identified through member feedback include stronger local and on-farm engagement and more sup-

port for small, emerging and first-generation farmers.

OFA will be at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show in Woodstock next week and encourages members and non-members alike to drop by Federation House to talk about issues affecting their farm businesses, what is happening in their communities, and learn about what OFA does on behalf of Ontario agriculture.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) represents 38,000 farm families across the province and serves as the leading advocate and strongest voice of Ontario's farmers. As a dynamic farmer-led organization, the OFA represents and champions the interests of Ontario farmers through advocacy and government relations, research and farm policy recommendations, media and public relations, community representation, and more.

The various approaches to farm waste management

Waste is a byproduct of every industry, even those that produce food. Crops and animals may feed the masses, but there are items on the farm that require disposal or recycling. Farm waste management is a practice that endeavors to remove waste in ways that are affordable, sustainable and effective.

Substantial waste is produced in agricultural operations. This can include manure, animal bedding, leaves, clippings, and even scraps from the kitchen. According to the University of Massachusetts Amherst, without proper mitigation methods, farm waste can be detrimental to the environment simply due to its volume. Farm waste may be natural, chemical-, animal-, medical-, and/or plant-based. If it is not managed, the waste can pollute water and air, and also disrupt the process of farming. That can make it beneficial to take a deep look at some of the ways to manage farm waste.

Composting

Kitchen waste or crop wastage can be turned into fertilizer and bioenergy through composting. Composting uses natural bacteria and other microorganisms to naturally break down refuse into a safer, more usable form. Compost can be spread over fields and used to feed plants without the need to supplement much with chemical fertilizers.

Food recycling

Feeding livestock animals directly with kitchen leftovers is one way to cut down on waste. Pigs do well with this, as they are omnivorous animals who tend to eat anything. The United States Environmental Protection Agency urges anyone who wants to participate in recycling food waste for animal feed to contact a local solid waste public health agency or county agricultural extension agency for more information. This way the food waste can be easily handled and safely controlled.

Manure management

Cow and horse manure can be added to traditional compost piles, but swine and other omnivores' waste may contain bacteria not suited to such composting. According to the resource ManureToFertilizer.com, pig manure stored in a cesspool needs to be pumped into a solid liquid separator to remove extra water. Solids can be mixed with straw or sawdust to adjust the carbon-to-nitrogen ratio and spread out in rows to dry. Farmers also can look to products like MICROBE-LIFT, which breaks down waste and reduces toxic gases to enhance manure management.

Other recycling

Waste from farms can be turned into other products. For example, corn cobs, bagasse, rice straw, and husks can be

turned into silica, a nonmetallic element that is great for the skin, hair, nails, and bones. Fats from animals can be made into soaps, as can cocoa pods.

Non-organic material, such as chemical waste, will need to be managed according

to local regulations. Broken equipment can be taken to recycling facilities to ensure it does not end up in landfills.

Farm waste management is just another cog in the agricultural production machine.



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