# Table of Contents

A Message from the Honourable Jeff Leal 4
A Message from the Honourable Michael Gravelle 5
A High Potential Sector 6
Strategy Derived from Consultation 7
Principles that Underpin the Strategy Framework 8

Five Strategic Directions to Drive Growth 10
1: Foster a Culture of Innovation 10
2: Strengthen Northern Primary Agriculture and Aquaculture Production 13
3: Strengthen Northern Food Processing 17
4. Increase Northern Consumption of Food Produced in the North 19
5: Increase Opportunities for Indigenous People and Communities to Participate in Economic Development in the Agri-Food Sector in Northern Ontario 22

How to Get Started or Grow Your Business 25
Looking Ahead 25
Appendix 1: Tables, Graphs and Maps 26
A Message from the Honourable Jeff Leal

I am pleased to introduce you to the Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy.

The agriculture, aquaculture and food processing sector in Northern Ontario provides more than 4,000 jobs and drives more than $230 million in revenue from the primary agriculture and aquaculture sectors. I anticipate an even greater contribution from this region going forward.

The strategy includes inspiring success stories, ideas and sources of information on starting and expanding a business. It also contains strategic directions for driving growth such as fostering innovation and promoting increased sector participation by Indigenous people and communities.

This document builds on several previous initiatives such as the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario (2011) which is a 25-year outlook for social and economic growth. This new strategy aligns strongly with this growth plan, especially in its focus on building economic resiliency and increased employment.

I graciously salute everyone involved in the agri-food sector. Let’s work together to ensure a thriving and prosperous sector in Northern Ontario.

Sincerely,

Jeff Leal
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Minister Responsible for Small Business
A Message from the Honourable Michael Gravelle

The Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM) and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs have worked as partners with stakeholders to harness the unique economic development potential for the agriculture, aquaculture and food processing sector in Northern Ontario.

MNDM is pleased to have been part of the development of the Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy, and I am confident our collaborative efforts will foster long-term economic growth and opportunity for this priority sector.

Through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, the province supports strategic initiatives that strengthen communities in the North. Specific investments are helping to bolster Northern Ontario’s agri-food sector, and ensuring this is achieved in an environmentally sustainable, socially responsible and economically feasible manner.

A significant part of the strategy relies on our spirit of collaboration to explore locally led solutions to enhance the sector’s unique, competitive advantages.

Moving forward, I know we can count on all of you to contribute your knowledge and experience to position the North for long-term economic prosperity.

Sincerely,

Michael Gravelle
Minister of Northern Development and Mines
Chair, Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation
Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy

A High Potential Sector

Ontario boasts Canada’s largest agri-food industry – encompassing farmers, processors, grocery stores, restaurants and others in the value chain. The industry generates $37.6 billion in annual output, exports $14.8 billion in products each year and employs more than 807,000 people, or 11.5 per cent of the province’s labour force. While most of this economic activity occurs in Southern Ontario, the North has the potential to play a bigger role in this dynamic industry and reap the resulting economic benefits.

Northern Ontario is home to well-established dairy, beef, grain and oilseed, potato, fruit and vegetable, and rainbow trout industries. The 2016 census showed that 2,237 farms generated $209 million in gross farm cash receipts – up 9 per cent since the 2011 census. While aquaculture production is not captured in the census of agriculture, in 2016 northern lake-based rainbow trout generated an additional $23 million in cash receipts. And food and beverage processors in Northern Ontario employ more than 1,000 people in 129 locations producing baked goods, beverages, meat and dairy products.

As of the 2016 census Northern Ontario had approximately 884,000 acres of farmland, with about 624,000 acres in production in the northern districts of Kenora, Rainy River, Thunder Bay, Algoma, Manitoulin Island, Cochrane, Timiskaming, Sudbury, Nipissing and Parry Sound. Agriculture, aquaculture and food processing in the North may be overshadowed by the scale of Southern Ontario’s diverse agri-food sector but it has a beef industry that is comparable in size to that of New Brunswick, the biggest maple syrup producer in Ontario and is the site of more rainbow trout production than the rest of Canada combined. The spin-off from agri-food activities like these contributes to the economic health of many northern communities.

Globally, demand for food is rising with population growth and an expanding middle class. A warming climate as well as new technologies and crop varieties can increase the range of crops that can be grown in the North and improve crop yields. Northern Ontario also has the capacity to increase production of fish and livestock to serve growing domestic and export markets for protein. More opportunities for value-added processing are also anticipated as primary agricultural output expands.
Strategy Derived from Consultation

The story begins with the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario (Growth Plan), launched by the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines in 2011. Thousands of northerners participated in formulating the Growth Plan, so it is founded on shared northern priorities, challenges, and opportunities.

A key goal under the Growth Plan is a stronger, more diversified and resilient northern economy that offers a variety of employment opportunities for the people of Northern Ontario. It named 11 existing and emerging priority economic sectors, including agriculture, aquaculture and food processing, which can contribute to the growth of Northern Ontario.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) undertook a lead role in developing the Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy with its partner ministries and agencies. OMAFRA posted a discussion paper on agriculture, aquaculture and food processing sector growth and development in the North in May 2016, and invited partners and stakeholders to comment on it. As well, OMAFRA engaged with representatives of agri-food businesses and associations, local food and economic development groups, agriculture research organizations, municipalities, First Nations and Métis communities, the federal government and others with an interest in the sector. This resulted in commentary on all aspects of growth of this sector in the North – feedback that OMAFRA incorporated into the strategy outlined in the following pages.
Principles that Underpin the Strategy Framework

The discussion paper presented a draft strategy framework for the Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy. This strategy framework drew extensive comment that is reflected in the final version on the next page. The proposed goal of strengthening the role of the sector in the economy of Northern Ontario was strongly endorsed. And it was generally agreed that the strategy should be based on four key principles. Action to promote growth should be:

**Proponent-driven, government-enabled:** Proponent-driven initiatives will be essential to the successful implementation of the Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy with government playing an enabling role. This strategy seeks proponent driven growth that is economically viable and environmentally sustainable. And it identifies existing and new growth opportunities that proponents can pursue and ways that governments can align their efforts to enable growth with supports such as advisory services, research, funding and appropriate policy and regulations.

**Responsive to regional challenges and opportunities:** Northern Ontario is a diverse land, so flexibility is required to respond to differing regional conditions, needs and priorities.

**Outcome-oriented:** Opportunities that align with the strategy are based on sound economics and realistic growth potential. Success will be assessed by impact on growth and employment, with supports adjusted if necessary, based on results.

**Enabled by a coordinated, whole-of-government collaborative approach by Indigenous, municipal, provincial and federal governments:** A whole-of-government approach, with collaboration and coordination of activities across ministries and levels of government, is critical for optimizing support for development of the agri-food sector in Northern Ontario. Governments will enable growth of the sector by providing supports and investments drawn from existing programs and initiatives. These include advisory services, soil mapping data, funding, policy development, regulatory development and modernization. The alignment of these supports to achieving the strategy framework goal of strengthening the role of the agriculture, aquaculture and food processing sector in the economy of Northern Ontario will be guided by the underpinning principles of the strategy framework.
GOAL: Strengthen the role of agriculture, aquaculture and food processing in the economy of Northern Ontario

PRINCIPLES – Sector Growth to be:
- Proponent-driven, government enabled
- Responsive to regional challenges and opportunities
- Outcome oriented
- Enabled by coordinated whole-of-government collaborative approach (Indigenous, municipal, provincial and federal governments)

OBJECTIVES:
- Identify and act upon sector opportunities balancing growth with environmental and community considerations
- Diversify regional economies and build resilient northern food systems
- Align with the intent of the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario
- Expand opportunities with First Nations and Metis people and communities

Advisory Services, Research, Funding Programs, Policy and Regulatory Support

GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS
Five Strategic Directions to Drive Growth

Based on feedback from the consultations as well as further research and analysis, five strategic directions have been established for nurturing growth in Northern Ontario’s agriculture, aquaculture and food processing sector. They are directions to:

1. Foster a Culture of Innovation
2. Strengthen Northern Primary Agriculture and Aquaculture Production
3. Strengthen Northern Food Processing
4. Increase Northern Consumption of Food Produced in the North
5. Increase Opportunities for Indigenous People and Communities to Participate in Economic Development in the Agri-Food Sector in Northern Ontario

The sections below highlight the main findings of the consultation process, review the current situation, and outline what the government is doing and can do to help moving forward.

1: Foster a Culture of Innovation

Where the Opportunities Are
Consultation participants sent a strong message that innovation is critical to success in today’s competitive agri-food marketplace. On-farm demonstrations, applied research and technology transfer projects show how innovative technologies can be applied to livestock and aquaculture production and how new crops can be adapted for use in the various northern regions. Much of the agricultural production in the rest of Canada occurs at similar latitudes to Northern Ontario and research on crops for those areas can often be adapted for production in Northern Ontario.

What’s Happening Now
The Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario (ARIO) owns two research stations in Northern Ontario: the New Liskeard Agricultural Research Station in the Northeast and the Emo Agricultural Research Station in the Northwest. Both are operated and managed by the University of Guelph through a partnership agreement with OMAFRA.
The New Liskeard and Emo stations are research nodes in the ARIO network of 15 stations across the province. The two stations have built up a body of intelligence on applied research about crop, forage, horticulture and beef production. They develop research solutions for local producers and also participate in and inform research of provincial significance, including the work of other ARIO research stations. For example, the beef, dairy and aquaculture research stations near Guelph generate research that is directly applicable to northern livestock and aquaculture production.

In addition, the Lakehead University Agricultural Research Station (LUARS) in Thunder Bay, undertakes research at the local level benefitting regional producers in Northwestern Ontario as well as contributing important data and knowledge which benefits the entire province.

OMAFRA’s agricultural development advisors in the North consult with producers, processors and entrepreneurs on ways to innovate and grow their businesses. The advisors bring specialized knowledge and technical expertise to projects supporting expansion of the sector. They also facilitate access to OMAFRA specialists – such as field crop, horticulture, business management and livestock experts – and to government programs that can help. In addition, the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, the federal government organization FedNor, Aboriginal Financial Institutions and local economic development organizations offer support services, funding and loans to businesses in the sector.

### Mobilizing Research and Technology Transfer Efforts

Research has long been a priority for several northern agricultural organizations such as the Rural Agri-Innovation Network (RAIN) in Algoma, the Northeastern Community Network (NeCN) and Lakehead University Agricultural Research Station (LUARS). More recently, new groups have come on the scene. Coordination of these groups is a pressing need. For example, the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA) was established in 2013 to speak for and provide leadership for agri-food research in the North. Its aim is to coordinate research work, leverage funding to maximize scarce resources and help drive growth of the agri-food sector in Northern Ontario.

NOFIA also promotes technology transfer and has developed the FarmNorth.com website as a tool to share information among northern producers and showcase the North outside the region. FarmNorth provides easy access to an array of resources, from research findings on specific crops grown in specific locales to profiles of various agricultural areas – all at your fingertips!
Keeping Aquaculture Safe from Storms

Mike Meeker has run an aquaculture operation off Manitoulin Island since 1984 and currently produces a million pounds of rainbow trout a year. In 2016 he won a Premier’s Award for Agri-Food Innovation Excellence with his new submersible aquaculture cage.

Severe weather regularly hits Ontario’s lakes and aquaculture cages can be damaged by strong waves, storms and ice floes in exposed locations. To avoid these conditions, producers seek more sheltered waterways, such as bays, but the warmer water there is not ideal for rainbow trout to grow. Meeker has invented a new cage that can rapidly submerge below the water surface, allowing their placement in areas that are more exposed to weather events and further from shore. This and a number of other novel features – such as the larger size of the cages – have created interest from around the world for use in both lake and ocean environments. The submersible aquaculture cages are an innovation that will reduce risks, improve efficiency and ensure production of a high quality product.

How the Ontario Government Can Help:

- Through its existing programs, the Ontario government will make targeted, strategic investments that focus and leverage its provincial agri-food research to benefit Northern Ontario agri-food partners.

- OMAFRA will work collaboratively with partners such as NOFIA, RAIN, NeCN, LUARS and others to focus on applied research, knowledge and technology transfer and ensure that Northern Ontario’s agricultural research needs are addressed.

To foster a culture of innovation and carry out these commitments, governments are working with research partners and investing in research activities in Northern Ontario. For example:

- With Growing Forward 2 funding, NOFIA will coordinate and lead a suite of agriculture and agri-food research projects relevant to Northern Ontario with some of the research in partnership with Emo Agricultural Research Station (EARS), New Liskeard Agricultural Research Station (NLARS) and Lakehead University Agricultural Research Station (LUARS).
2: Strengthen Northern Primary Agriculture and Aquaculture Production

Where the Opportunities Are
A large supply of quality agricultural land at reasonable prices was consistently cited as a major competitive advantage for the North. Up-to-date, accurate, user-friendly soil maps were identified as essential to evaluating the potential of northern lands for agriculture and assembling larger acreages for new or expanding farms.

New crop varieties, technologies and production practices – for example, precision agriculture – together with a warming climate – can create opportunities for increased and more diversified crop and livestock production in the North. Growing domestic and export demand for agriculture products like maple syrup and soybeans, and aquaculture products such as rainbow trout and shrimp are also fueling optimism.

Consultation participants suggested that improved transportation networks and expansion of broadband internet to counter long distances to services, suppliers, processors and markets and related costs, and attracting new people who want to own an agri-food business and providing them with training, education and advice are all important for growing the sector.

There is also a consensus that expansion of the sector must not come at the expense of the environment. Addressing environmental issues was seen as a prerequisite for growth. Agriculture and aquaculture should expand in an environmentally responsible manner that balances growth objectives with protection of wildlife habitats, watersheds, lakes, rivers, aquifers and soil health.

What’s Happening Now
While all Northern Ontario districts have areas of primary agricultural production and some have aquaculture production, the extent and intensity of activity varies greatly. Some areas such as the Timiskaming District have highly developed agricultural sectors and agri-food value chains.
while elsewhere farm land is underutilized. Farming occurs in close proximity to roads and highways, which provide access to markets, supplies and services. Farms located closer to larger cities like Thunder Bay and Sudbury can more readily sell into local markets and enjoy better access to labour and services.

Areas in both the Northwest and Northeast have less acreage in production now than in the past. However, in some areas private land is being brought back into production. The growth of the agri-food sector in areas where it exists now can create critical mass, drive growth of full value chains and provide jobs. Development of all elements of a fully functioning value chain is often a challenge in Northern Ontario. As an example, livestock production depends on both supply and service providers to support production. And while every value chain element is important the lack of crucial elements, such as meat processing, can severely limit development of full livestock value chains.

The Ministry of Transportation (MTO) is working in partnership with MNDM to develop a Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy (NOMTS). Development of NOMTS supports the implementation of the Growth Plan and is looking at all modes of travel – road, rail, air, and marine – as a single, sustainable transportation system. The agri-food industry uses mainly road and truck transportation but growth of crop production in Northern Ontario could drive a need for rail and marine transportation. MTO released a draft strategy in July 2017 for public input, and the release of a final NOMTS and first action plan is expected early in 2018.

People are essential to the sector’s future prospects. OMAFRA and its partners are looking at ways to help individuals, communities and organizations learn about opportunities to start or expand an agri-food business – and how to take advantage of them. These initiatives may include education, training and advisory support. For example, individuals who are looking for opportunities in the sector can be encouraged to enroll in agricultural diploma or degree programs in fields that have a high demand for graduates.

Soil Mapping Underway

The Canada Land Inventory system classifies agricultural land within classes 1 to 7 – with class 1 ranking as the best land for agricultural production. Classes 1 to 3 are considered prime agricultural land while classes 4 and 5 may also be suitable for agriculture but can have limitations such as stones, slopes or poor drainage. Previous and current soil mapping work in Northern Ontario suggest sizeable acres of prime agricultural land as well as land classed 4 or 5. Some limitations of lower classed land can be addressed by making improvements. For instance, tile drainage can be installed to remove excess water from soils that are poorly drained, making the land more suitable for farming.

The province recently released a series of 32 updated soil maps in the Cochrane to Hearst corridor and this will be followed by additional updates to legacy soil maps in Timiskaming District. While more field work is required to identify and classify agricultural land, all 10 northern districts are thought to hold areas that can support agriculture.

Government Provides Crucial Support

The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) is an Ontario government agency overseen by MNDM. Its mandate is to support the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario through strategic economic development initiatives. The agency has supported agricultural development in Northern Ontario through several programs, and OMAFRA and MNDM staff based in Northern Ontario work closely with the NOHFC.

Since 2013, the NOHFC has invested $27 million to improve over 50,000 acres of land in Northern Ontario to encourage agricultural production. The funding has assisted farmers to clear land and install tile drainage. The NOHFC also provided northern agri-food industries with a further $24 million in funding for business start-ups and expansions.
Opportunities for Crops

More crop production options can provide northern producers with increased crop rotation and income choices. Generally, grain crops such as oats, barley and spring wheat thrive in Northern Ontario’s cooler temperatures. Malting barley, milling oats, buckwheat, flax, quinoa, soybeans and pulse crops all have growth potential.

Soybean production is taking off in Northern Ontario, more than doubling between 2011 and 2016. Cold tolerant varieties developed for Western Canada mature earlier are and are being adapted to Northern Ontario conditions. Production of pulse crops such as dry beans, peas, lentils and chick peas doubled in Canada between 2011 and 2016, largely driven by growing export demand. Producers in Northern Ontario have begun to seize this opportunity by growing dry beans, a further choice for crop rotations and income.

The effects of a warmer climate are making production of other crops feasible in the North. For example, crop heat units increased by 26 per cent in the Kapuskasing area from an average of 1762 Crop Heat Units (CHU) in 1961–1970 to an average of 2226 CHU in 2001–2010. One example of the effect of higher CHU is the increase in production of corn for silage – a high energy roughage feed for cattle and other ruminants. The 2016 census found a 51 per cent increase in acreage for this crop since 2011. And CHUs are expected to continue to increase.

Northern Ontario farmers may also be able to diversify their crop rotations and revenue sources by realizing opportunities presented by the bioeconomy. Crops such as camelina, carinata, Russian dandelion, Jerusalem artichoke, hemp, switch grass, miscanthus, and cup-plant can have industrial uses such as bioenergy and biomass.
Livestock Industry Primed for Growth
An expanding global middle class, as well as renewed interest in local food, is driving demand for livestock products such as beef and lamb. Northern Ontario is well positioned to take advantage of these opportunities.

The Northern Livestock Pilot, a project under this strategy, is focussed on an area of the Great Clay Belt along Highway 11 between Hearst and Cochrane in Northeastern Ontario (see map below). Based on input from Indigenous communities, municipalities and livestock organizations, OMAFRA is developing an Action Plan which is expected to include initiatives, such as:

- Beef Farmers of Ontario support of information resources, training, education, and research on beef production.
- Municipal encouragement of livestock expansion through identification of suitable private land, strategies to address infrastructure gaps, labour force capacity building, and steps to improve relationships with Indigenous communities.
- An Ontario government focus on:
  - New research to understand the social, environmental and economic aspects of northern livestock expansion.
  - Establishment of pilot sites to demonstrate economically feasible livestock operations.
  - Development of educational and other resources to help those starting a livestock farm business in Northern Ontario.

The Ontario government will continue to engage and work together with Indigenous communities, industry and municipalities as the pilot progresses. The expectation is that lessons learned from the pilot project can be applied more broadly to the development of other agriculture businesses in Northern Ontario.

Chicken Farmers Target Local Markets
The Chicken Farmers of Ontario (CFO) are expanding production in smaller markets – including farmers’ markets and northern communities. After engaging with stakeholders in Northern Ontario and across the province, CFO developed a series of new and revised programs, including the Artisanal Chicken Program launched in 2015. The Artisanal Program enables small-scale producers to raise 600 to 3,000 chickens annually. So far, 23 farms in Northern Ontario have taken part in the program. OMAFRA and CFO staff delivered workshops for new artisanal producers in Northern Ontario on such topics as best management and production practices, direct-to-consumer sales, marketing and branding.

The new production is also creating opportunities for local processing. For example, a new small-scale poultry processor in Powassan (near North Bay) opened in spring 2017. Overall, the new CFO programs are enabling more local food production and strengthening regional food systems.
Aquaculture Gearing Up to Expand

Freshwater aquaculture is fueled by local and global demand for farmed fish. In 2016, the Ontario industry increased rainbow trout production to 5.1 million kilograms valued at $26.8 million, up 12 per cent from the previous year. More than 85 per cent of this output occurred in Northern Ontario through open water cage aquaculture. Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs are important contributors to the aquaculture industry in Northern Ontario.

The government is supporting industry-led efforts to take advantage of growing opportunities. Since 2013, OMAFRA has committed about $1 million to the aquaculture industry through programs like the Local Food Fund and Growing Forward 2 for work in such areas as sustainable growth, marketing and awareness.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) and the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) posted draft policy documents respecting cage aquaculture operations on the Environmental Registry for public comment. The documents outlined how the province intends to ensure that cage aquaculture operations are situated, sized and managed for long-term environmental sustainability.

In fall 2017 MNRF posted the final Application Guidelines for Cage Aquaculture Facilities. MOECC’s cage aquaculture policy paper is in the process of being finalized. Greater clarity around requirements is a key prerequisite for aquaculture expansion.

How the Ontario Government Can Help:

OMAFRA will support agriculture and aquaculture business and economic development initiatives in collaboration with MNDM and other partner ministries in the following ways:

- OMAFRA will work collaboratively with Indigenous communities, the livestock industry and municipalities to implement a Northern Livestock Pilot Project along the Highway 11 corridor of the Great Clay Belt to help chart a path for expanding livestock production in Northern Ontario.
- OMAFRA will work to update the legacy northern agricultural soil maps and information under the Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy.
OMAFRA will consider the needs of the Northern Ontario agriculture and aquaculture industries when reviewing and designing policies, programs and regulations.

In follow up to the Ontario government bringing greater clarity on the requirements related to expanding and establishing cage aquaculture operations, OMAFRA will support aquaculture business and economic development in collaboration with MNDM, MNRF and other partner ministries.

To strengthen northern primary agriculture and aquaculture production and carry out these commitment governments are helping industries and communities that want to grow production in their areas and people who want to start or expand businesses. For example:

- There is considerable interest from municipalities and Indigenous communities in establishing open water cage aquaculture in Lake Superior. Low summer surface temperatures in this lake are ideal for rainbow trout. OMAFRA and MNDM staff recently met with communities in the area to discuss opportunities for aquaculture production. Some communities are proceeding with feasibility and environmental studies.
- Ontario’s Northern Livestock Pilot is an opportunity to test ways agricultural production can be sustainably extended in Northern Ontario. Lessons learned from this pilot can be utilized by other industries and northern regions. The Action Plan for this project will chart the course for the pilot planned for release in winter 2018.

### Soil Mapping

OMAFRA recently released 32 updated soil maps for the Cochrane District that covered an area of over seven million acres. As part of this work, in 2016 OMAFRA soil specialists and geoscientists from the Ontario Geological Society and MNDM completed field investigations and collected soil samples at 250 sites to validate existing soil map information. Data from the sample analyses will help develop baseline soil data and information to inform future mapping, soil health, soil fertility and potential agriculture development initiatives.

In 2017, samples were collected at an additional 200 sites and submitted for analysis. In addition, OMAFRA has invested in capturing new LiDAR (light detection and ranging) data by flying over the Cochrane to Hearst corridor. The resulting data and information can be used to develop detailed topography models which in turn can be utilized in applications such as soil mapping, flood risk mapping, drainage planning and land use management.

OMAFRA is also currently working on updating an additional series of 33 soil maps covering the Timmins to Timiskaming Shores area, to be completed in 2018.
3: Strengthen Northern Food Processing

Where the Opportunities Are

The future of food processing in the North is tied to the future of agriculture and aquaculture as Ontario food processors purchase about 65 per cent of the province’s primary agricultural production. In Northern Ontario, food and beverage processing businesses are clustered largely in areas where agricultural activity occurs which suggests that expansion of agricultural production is likely to lead to increased food processing and jobs. (see map below.) The growth of aquaculture production in the North could also create further opportunities for aquaculture processing.

Processing opportunities suggested during the consultations include abattoirs (for poultry or beef), small-scale dairy (for making cheese or yogurt) and vegetable and fruit processing. Expanded production of grain, oilseed, hops and other crops can drive growth of processing facilities for livestock feed, food and beverage products like quinoa or craft beer and industrial products such as fuels and lubricants. Increased maple sap collection will spur more local production of maple syrup and other maple products.

Like primary producers, northern processors face challenges arising from the scale of Northern Ontario. Growth prospects will improve if gaps in infrastructure and services in the North – including suppliers, transportation networks and storage, packing, processing and distribution facilities – can be closed.

In general, the processing industry has indicated it would benefit from government initiatives to reduce regulatory burden. The high costs of doing business in the North were frequently discussed, such as those for transportation and energy. Greater access to funding and capital through programs better tailored to northern conditions could strengthen northern businesses.
What’s Happening Now
Northern Ontario’s 129 food and beverage processing establishments employ more than 1,000 northerners and add significant value in the agri-food supply chain. However, the profile of food and beverage processing businesses and related employment in Northern Ontario is changing. Trends show growth is occurring in areas such as bakeries, fruit and vegetable preserving, specialty food manufacturing, and grain and oilseed milling. In fact, bakeries currently account for the largest share of food processing employment in Northern Ontario.

Some larger processors have closed, resulting in a decrease in food and beverage manufacturing jobs. At the same time, local food opportunities have increased the viability of small scale processing that serve regional markets. For example, closure of large dairy processors coupled with the demand for local food has led small-scale processors like Slate River Dairy in Thunder Bay to open new businesses. More generally, with funding from the NOHFC, FedNor and input from OMAFRA, the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance has developed a Strategic Plan for the Northern Ontario Dairy Processing Sector. The aim is to identify opportunities to build production capacity and markets for processed dairy products from cattle, sheep, goats and other livestock.

How the Ontario Government Can Help:
• OMAFRA will collaborate with the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines to assist food entrepreneurs through advisory services and other support, so that they are ready and able to grow their businesses in Northern Ontario.
• OMAFRA will consider the needs of the Northern Ontario food processing industry when reviewing and designing policies and programs.
• OMAFRA will work with partners including the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines to raise awareness among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Northern Ontario of supports for exporting products to other countries, including the Ontario Food Exports Program.

Maple Syrup Producers on Growth Curve
The Ontario Maple Syrup Producers’ Association (OMSPA), which represents more than 600 maple syrup producers across the province, is delivering on a five-year plan to increase Ontario maple syrup production by 20 per cent by 2018 to serve both domestic and international markets. In the 2016 census year, Northern Ontario had 11 per cent more maple syrup producers and 3 per cent more maple taps than in the 2011 census year.

The majority of Ontario’s maple syrup is produced in Southern Ontario. Northern Ontario has significant maple forest potential that could be used for expansion of the maple syrup industry. OMPSA is working with the government on ways to access northern maple forests. In northern areas with birch forests, some entrepreneurs are tapping birch trees and are marketing birch syrup.
To strengthen northern food processing and carry out these commitments, governments are working with people and industries that want to grow their food processing businesses and expand their markets. For example:

- Ontario’s Food Exports (OFEX) program supports Ontario’s food processing industry in the export of top-quality food and beverage products and helps businesses to increase sales by identifying and maximizing export opportunities. OFEX has specialists in all major food processing sectors, links to trade advisors and overseas embassies and consulates, valuable market intelligence, and provides matchmaking services for Ontario suppliers and international buyers.

- In addition to working with the government on accessing northern maple forests, OMSPA is looking for ways to aggregate sap and/or syrup from multiple producers as a means of expanding Northern Ontario production.

4. Increase Northern Consumption of Food Produced in the North

Where the Opportunities Are

Food security is a priority for northerners, who can often face high food prices due to transportation costs. Expanding primary production and food processing to serve local markets could help improve access to food. While the geographic size of Northern Ontario creates challenges for food producers and processors, demand for local food presents opportunities for northern entrepreneurs.

During the consultations, cooperatives and food hubs were suggested as a way to collaborate and overcome some of the challenges. Creation of regional brands or even a “from the North” brand was proposed to market and build demand for local products. Small-scale agri-food production – for example, community gardens, greenhouses...
or aquaponics operations – could enable remote communities to produce more of their own food. In general, those consulted underlined the need for local solutions, local cooperation and the involvement of local government, both municipalities and Indigenous communities, in agri-food development.

**What’s Happening Now**

In 2013, the government launched a Local Food Strategy to increase consumer awareness and consumption of food grown or made in Ontario. The strategy encourages consumers to choose local food and calls on the agri-food industry to produce more of the products Ontarians demand. It includes action to increase awareness of, access to, and supplies of local food. In Northern Ontario, the priority is to boost northern consumption of food grown or made in the North.

Consumer preferences in the North coupled with high transportation costs are driving demand for more local and regional foods, including value-added products such as cheese, jam and wine. Consumers in urban areas like Thunder Bay with access to major transportation routes experience less food insecurity but still strongly support local agri-food businesses. Consumers in rural and remote communities disproportionately experience food insecurity. Both types of consumers want fresh, healthy foods.

High demand for fresh local produce is driving an increase in northern fruit and vegetable production. Producers are extending seasonal production with technologies such as plastic mulch and protective structures like low or high tunnels. The use of technologies like LED lighting, hydroponics, and vertical growing make it possible to design efficient, small-scale greenhouses and enclosed growing systems that meet the year-round demand for local produce.

Indigenous entrepreneurs, businesses and communities with traditional knowledge have opportunities to meet the demand and to strengthen and diversify long-term sustainable production and distribution to rural and remote consumers.

The 2016 census asked producers if they sold agricultural products directly to consumers. This was the first time this question was asked in the

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**Local Food Co-op Goes Online**

Cloverbelt Local Food Co-op in Dryden is deploying the latest technology to link producers and consumers. The group has created an online farmers’ market where consumers click their choices from an online list and pick up their orders at the nearest food hub. Launched in late December 2013, the system gives consumers, institutions and event organizers convenient access to fresh local food while participating farmers and food processors benefit from a critical mass of customers.

More recently, the co-op has created a GIS-powered online map to help consumers in small northern communities locate the closest producers, retailers and restaurants that feature local food. This is another tool to help get more local food on northern plates.
Census of Agriculture. The results show Ontario leads the country with almost 7,500 farms reporting direct-to-consumer sales. Nearly all of these farms (97 per cent) are selling unprocessed agricultural products. Only a small percentage sell value-added products, pointing to a potential growth area. Direct-to-consumer sales are clearly a valuable marketing channel for areas of Northern Ontario since about 40 per cent of farms in each of the districts of Thunder Bay, Kenora, Algoma and Parry Sound sell directly to consumers.

Tourism is a strong force in economic development across Northern Ontario and visitors are increasingly interested in local food and culinary tourism. Visitors spent almost $2 billion in Northern Ontario in 2014. Farm tours, on-farm accommodation, supplying local restaurants and tours of craft breweries and distilleries are all ways to increase the viability of the agri-food sector in Northern Ontario. Tourism Northern Ontario can help regions and municipalities develop food experiences. As well, the Culinary Tourism Alliance provides on-line resources and has hosted six agri-tourism workshops across Northern Ontario during 2016-17. There is also an opportunity for restaurants in Northern Ontario to participate in Feast On, a program to help showcase restaurants that feature Ontario foods on their menus.

How the Ontario Government Can Help:

- The Ontario government will provide support to help strengthen and diversify local food production and distribution in Northern Ontario and to improve capacity-building, marketing and communication efforts within the agriculture, aquaculture and food processing sector.

To increase the northern consumption of food produced in the North, the Ontario government works with people, businesses, organizations and communities that want to increase production and distribution of local food.
The Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario (IAPO)

IAPO, an Aboriginal Financial Institution, specializes in agriculture, including farm and agribusiness financing, as well as business advisory and agricultural extension services. A First Nations-controlled non-profit corporation formed in 1984, IAPO addresses barriers to financing and services encountered by First Nations farmers in Ontario.

IAPO offers farm and agri-business financing for producers on and off reserve. It employs proven technology transfer techniques such as meetings, workshops, one on one farm visits, newsletters, electronic media, and production updates to assist clients and new entrepreneurs, with OMAFRA staff collaborating in some of these activities. The corporation is active in a variety of agricultural sectors including beef, swine, poultry, maple syrup, apiculture, field crops, horticulture, farm retail and agri-forestry. IAPO also delivers a beginning farmer program featuring workshops and training as well as start-up financing through the Business and Community Fund of MIRR’s Indigenous Economic Development Fund.

For example:

- The Greenbelt Fund is a not-for-profit organization that undertakes activities to increase local food production and consumption throughout Ontario. In October 2017, with funding from OMAFRA, Greenbelt Fund staff organized a Northern Food Distribution Workshop in Thunder Bay where a varied group of participants including representatives from northern communities, organizations, food producers, processors, marketers, distributors and governments discussed ideas to improve the northern food distribution system. The group pledged to continue this work in 2018.

- Ontario products may be eligible to use the Foodland Ontario symbol, free of charge. The Foodland Ontario symbol is widely recognized by 93 per cent of Ontario consumers. Producers and processors may apply to use the symbol to leverage Foodland Ontario’s brand awareness to market their product by helping consumers to identify that their product is from Ontario.

- The Northern School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, run by the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association (OFVGA) with funding from the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, provides about 36,000 students in 191 schools with two servings of fruits and vegetables per week over the 20 week program. The OFVGA also partners with the Dietitians of Canada to deliver Fresh from the Farm, a school fundraising program that allows students to sell Ontario root vegetables and apples to fundraise for their schools and promote healthy eating to families.
5: Increase Opportunities for Indigenous People and Communities to Participate in Economic Development in the Agri-Food Sector in Northern Ontario

Where the Opportunities Are

Representatives from Indigenous communities expressed keen interest in the expansion of agriculture, aquaculture and food processing as a way to grow their economies and create jobs. At the same time, it will be essential to address the possible environmental impact of an expanding sector, including its potential impact on water.

Indigenous communities see opportunities in production of fish and maple syrup and want to learn more about other options such as livestock, crops and horticulture. They suggested that development of the sector could enable them to produce more of their own food and improve food security.

It was stressed that capacity-building initiatives could equip Indigenous communities to identify opportunities in the sector while partnerships and funding could help communities take advantage of the opportunities uncovered. Traditional knowledge of the land, its resources and sustainable development were seen as important for identifying opportunities and developing them in ways that protect Indigenous interests. Improved education was viewed as the key to employment in the sector, particularly for youth.

What’s Happening Now

The Ontario government has made a commitment to work with Indigenous leaders and their communities to build trust and respect into the relationship and build opportunity and security into the lives of Indigenous people. The Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR) promotes collaboration and coordination across ministries on Indigenous policies and programs.

OMAFRA has programs and tools such as the Environmental Farm Plan that can help Indigenous producers develop a plan for their farms and then carry out their plans.
MIRR has created an Indigenous Economic Development Fund that can be accessed by Indigenous agri-food businesses through the fund’s Business and Community Fund Program (BCF). It is delivered by several Aboriginal Financial Institutions: the Nishnawbe-Aski Development Fund, Waubetek Business Development Corporation, Tecumseh Community Development Corporation, Two Rivers Community Development Centre, Indian Agriculture Program of Ontario and Métis Voyageur Development Fund. Financing provided must contribute to the development of new products, services and products, or expansion into new markets in the support of greater productivity, increased innovation and more jobs.

**How the Ontario Government Can Help:**

- Ontario will build on earlier outreach to Indigenous communities, businesses and organizations to explore and assess economic development opportunities.

- Ontario will engage with Indigenous communities, businesses and organizations to understand how to support a growing interest in agriculture, aquaculture and food processing operations in Northern Ontario.

OMAFRA continues to work with Indigenous businesses and communities to increase opportunities for participation in agri-food economic development in Northern Ontario. Under this strategy governments will build on this by sharing knowledge and supporting implementation of economic development opportunities and jobs in the agri-food sector.

For example:

- OMAFRA is reviewing its Growing Forward 2 programs on business planning and management, including the Growing Your Farm Profits workshop. The review is aimed at determining if modifications are needed to the workshop and cost-share funding activities (e.g. developing a business plan) to better serve people from Indigenous communities who are interested in starting or expanding an agri-food business.

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**Beef Farmers of Ontario Northern Livestock Training**

The Beef Farmers of Ontario launched a new course, Introduction to Beef Cattle Farming, a training program for Indigenous People, delivered by Collège Boréal in Kapuskasing in summer 2017. The course covered the key principles of beef production, giving participants skills that will help them work at existing beef operations or consider the possibility of starting their own farm. Seven members of Kashechewan First Nation participated in the first course and a second course begins in late January 2018. This project was funded in part through Growing Forward 2 (GF2), a federal-provincial territorial initiative.
How to Get Started or Grow Your Business

To aspiring agri-food entrepreneurs the Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy sends a message: look to Northern Ontario. It is a land rich in potential. Whether you are a young person taking over a family farm, a recent graduate, or someone seeking a new career, it could be worth your while to check out the promising opportunities in the North.

If you are thinking of starting or expanding an agri-food business, OMAFRA offers a how-to publication that will show you where to begin. Starting a Farm in Ontario is a concise guide to help you make a decision and take the first steps. It provides insight on things to consider before investing in a property. It also contains an overview of common farm practices and useful information and resources to help with your farm business. In addition, an online course called Starting a Farm in Northern Ontario has been developed for those interested in starting their own farm in the north. The course was developed by the collaborative partnership of Beef Farmers of Ontario, College Boreal and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.
Looking Ahead

OMAFRA has created a website page devoted to this Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy. Here visitors can find updates as the strategy rolls out and the government announces action steps.

As noted above, this strategy has been developed under the umbrella of the government’s Growth Plan for Northern Ontario which is guiding decision-making and economic growth in Northern Ontario to 2036. Reviews of the Growth Plan take place at least every 10 years, with the next one scheduled for 2021. This strategy is expected to be reviewed and renewed in line with any review of the Growth Plan.

Contact information

Agricultural Information Contact Centre:
1-877-424-1300
ontario.ca/northagrifood
## Northern Agriculture at a Glance – 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Northern Ontario</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Farms</td>
<td>2,237</td>
<td>49,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Farm Area (acres)</td>
<td>883,559</td>
<td>12,348,463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Greenhouse Area (square feet)</td>
<td>1,422,610</td>
<td>158,511,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Gross Farm Cash Receipts</td>
<td>$209 Million</td>
<td>$15 Billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Farm Operators</td>
<td>3,255</td>
<td>70,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age of Farm Operators</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Ontario Aquaculture Industry Snapshot, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Species Produced</th>
<th>Rainbow Trout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minor Species Produced</td>
<td>Tilapia, Arctic Char, Brook Trout, Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass, Walleye, Cyprinid Baitfish and Shrimp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Rainbow Trout Production</td>
<td>5,060 tonnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Other Fish Production</td>
<td>500 tonnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm-gate Value of Rainbow Trout</td>
<td>$26.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm-gate Value of Other Fish</td>
<td>$3.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Contribution</td>
<td>$100 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Creation</td>
<td>190 person-years direct and 150 person-years indirect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected Rainbow Trout Production</td>
<td>approx. 5,700 tonnes in 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Number of Farms, Gross Farm Cash Receipts, and Acres by District, 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Census Farms</th>
<th>Gross Farm Cash Receipts ($M)</th>
<th>Farmland (acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rainy River</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>160,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenora</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>26,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thunder Bay</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>49,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudbury</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>65,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timiskaming</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>176,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cochrane</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>54,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nipissing</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>68,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parry Sound</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>66,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoulin</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>141,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algoma</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>74,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,237</strong></td>
<td><strong>209</strong></td>
<td><strong>883,559</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Comparison of 2011 to 2016 Estimated Farm Cash Receipts, Northern Ontario

*Aquaculture is not included in census gross farm receipts; regardless, approximately 85 per cent of Ontario’s rainbow trout is raised in Northern Ontario making it the estimated third highest source of primary agricultural income.*
Agricultural Activity and Estimated Farm Cash Receipts, Northern Ontario, 2016

Legend

Agricultural Activity

0 50 100 200 Kilometers

Kenora
1: Beef: $1.16
2: Hay and Clover: $1.07
3: Other Crops and Livestock: $0.46

Thunder Bay
1: Dairy: $15.03
2: Floriculture & Nursery: $6.21
3: Other Crops and Livestock: $2.83

Cochrane
1: Beef: $2.33
2: Dairy: $2.30
3: Other Crops and Livestock: $0.76

Algoma
1: Beef: $3.65
2: Dairy: $3.56
3: Maple Products: $1.92

Timiskaming
1: Dairy: $22.25
2: Soybeans: $10.66
3: Other Crops and Livestock: $5.83

Nipissing
1: Canola: $2.00
2: Soybeans: $1.78
3: Beef: $1.31

Rainy River
1: Beef: $8.73
2: Hay and Clover: $3.06
3: Dairy: $2.76

Sudbury
1: Potatoes: $4.11
2: Other Crops and Livestock: $2.02
3: Floriculture & Nursery: $1.86

Manitoulin
1: Beef: $10.33
2: Hay and Clover: $1.92
3: Other Crops and Livestock: $1.60

Parry Sound
1: Maple Products: $1.20
2: Floriculture and Nursery: $0.91
3: Beef: $0.73
Comparison of 2011 and 2016 Farmland, Northern Ontario

Regional Average Price of Farmland (per acre), Ontario, 2016
Comparison of 2011 and 2016 Farm Capital Values, Northern Ontario