

AGRICULTURE SECTOR



Northern Ontario boasts well-established dairy and beef industries and strong growth opportunities in value-added production, cold weather crops, varieties suited for northern production and consumer niche markets. Within the large areas of agricultural land not under production there is tremendous potential to expand the region's agricultural industry.

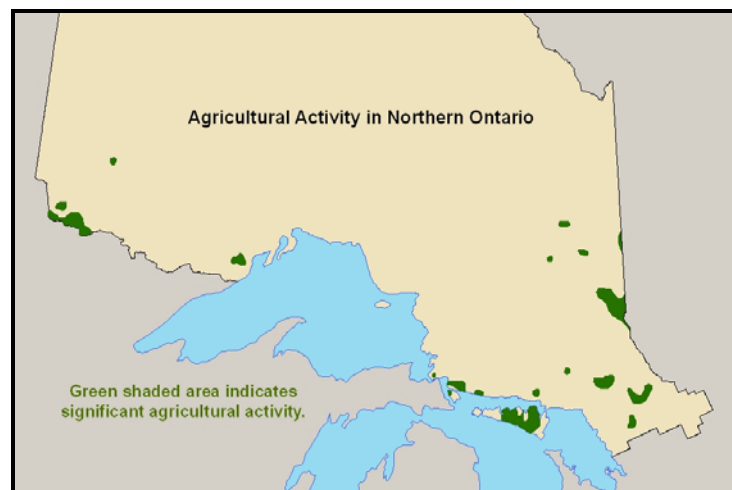
Profile

Northern Ontario is home to a \$190-million agricultural industry with strong dairy and beef industries and close to 2,500 farms. It is estimated that 6,200 people are employed in the northern agriculture and food processing industry. Most of the food processing businesses are bakeries, along with a substantial number of dairies, meat processing plants, and beverage manufacturing or bottling plants. In addition to these sectors, there are farm input supply activities that help stimulate the local economy in many rural communities.

Agricultural activity occurs in each of the Districts in Northern Ontario with production concentrated in the Districts of Rainy River, Thunder Bay, St. Joseph Island/Echo Bay/Bruce Mines area (Algoma District), Manitoulin, Warren/Noelville/St. Charles (Sudbury District), New Liskeard and area (Timiskaming District), and Verner and Powassan (Nipissing District).

Although the North's agricultural sector is small in size compared to other parts of the province (the region's 2,500 farms represent five percent of farms in Ontario), the North's beef industry is larger than that of any Atlantic province and the North's dairy industry is comparable in size to New Brunswick's. The North's dairy and beef industries account for more than 80 percent of agricultural activity in the North.

The region also supports poultry, ratite (ostrich/emu), venison, goat, sheep, quail, swine, and rabbit as well as market gardening, cranberries, potatoes, maple syrup, sod, greenhouse, aquaculture, and pick-your-own operations.



Source: Census of Agriculture, Statistics Canada, 2001

Cool weather crops (e.g. cauliflower and cabbage) and varieties suited for northern production (e.g. canola, soybeans, and durum wheat) are especially successful. Northern farmers have also begun production of specialty crops such as sunflowers, buckwheat, industrial hemp (for oil), and organic crops. Climate change and technology are also playing a role in Northern Cropping systems with the introduction of feed corn to the cropping mix.

Opportunities

Agriculture represents a significant renewable resource for Northern Ontario and an industry with significant potential. Increased revenue in this sector provides significant economic benefits for the broader local community.

New production

Within the large areas of agricultural land not under production, there is enormous potential for new or expanded agricultural activities in Northern Ontario. The domestic market for agricultural products is expanding driven by population growth in southern Ontario and export markets.

Expansion opportunities include:

- horticulture crops especially cool weather crops such as cabbage and cauliflower;
- organic farming including vegetables, meat/meat by-products, and grain crops;
- new varieties suited for northern production such as canola, soybeans, corn and durum wheat (some winter wheat varieties);
- industrial hemp (oil production); and
- pick-your-own operations such as strawberries, raspberries, and vegetables.
- renewable energy (bio gas and bio diesel opportunities)
- value added processing of livestock
- value added products non food related. (bio based polymers and plastics)
- aquaculture production and processing.

Value-added Agricultural Production

Value-added production such as the production of cheddar and Gouda cheese, aquaculture production and processing, and renewable fuels production on farm are key growth areas. This value-added production has been supported with investments in infrastructure such as the Thunder Bay Agricultural Research Station, on farm bio diesel/bio gas production, the Verner dryer-elevator facility and a fertiliser blending plant in Thunder Bay.

New technologies

Research on farm utilization of forest and mining by-products such as wood ash, lime and sawdust is underway and could provide opportunities for the agricultural sector to capitalise upon the North's resource industry strengths.

Renewable energy production on farms is emerging as a viable option for Northern farmers. Technologies that convert farm waste to bio gas and bio diesel are presenting new opportunities for northern farms to minimize their environmental foot print through the replacement of fossil fuels and add to the stability of Ontario's power supply by producing green energy.

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