



Possibility grows here.

# Opportunities for Growth: Ontario Apples

**Ontario's apple season marks the beginning of fall.** Throughout September and October, the abundance of pick-your-own farms in and around the Greenbelt open their doors for guests to participate in a beloved autumn activity: apple picking.

Every year, Ontarians consume a lot of apples—around 250,000 tonnes, either fresh or in processed products like apple juice, with about half of the supply coming from Ontario farms. Luckily for Ontario apple lovers, there is an opportunity to expand local fresh apple production.

## APPLE PRODUCTION IN ONTARIO



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There are 13,988 acres of fruit-bearing orchards, mostly located along the shores of Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake Huron, and Georgian Bay. Grey County is the largest apple growing area with 2,951 acres, followed by Norfolk County with 2,074 acres.

The weather can have a significant impact on apple orchards, which is why some years we have more Ontario apples than others. In the 2015-2016 crop year, for instance, only 68,318 tonnes of fresh Ontario apples made it to market as a result of poor weather conditions. Apple growers are busy finding ways to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change on their farms as weather conditions become more unpredictable.

## APPLE EXPANSION OPPORTUNITY

There is an opportunity to increase Ontario's fresh apple production to supply on average **83 per cent of annual provincial consumption**. Apple acreage could be increased by at least **700 acres**, which with more high-density trees would result in an additional production of **15,700 tonnes** of fresh apples.

**This opportunity represents an additional \$20 million in farm gate revenue.**



## WHAT WILL ENABLE EXPANSION?

Expanding Ontario apple production will come up against a few challenges. There are high costs associated with establishing new orchards: it costs between \$80,000 and \$85,000 per acre, and growers don't see any revenue for approximately five years before the trees bear fruit. These large upfront investments are even riskier considering that the weather can significantly impact the success of apple production year-by-year.

### **The following actions would enable expansion:**

- Investing in apple varieties that can compete with apples from the United States, such as Honeycrisp, Fuji, and Gala.
- Replacing lower valued apple varieties in orchards with higher valued apple varieties, including the same varieties mentioned above.
- Transitioning to higher-density orchards when older orchards stop producing apples. Growers with high-density orchards can achieve yields of over 60,000 lbs per acre. As more growers begin to plant high-density orchards, we are seeing higher yields every year.
- Undertaking research and development in support of technologies that enable a longer storage season and investing in additional storage capacity to increase apple volumes stored in the post-harvest season. Many apple varieties can be stored for at least six months and up to 10 months in proper controlled atmosphere storage.
- Increased access to land with long-term leases that would cover the multi-decade lifespan of an apple orchard.
- Ongoing promotion and support by retailers throughout the harvest and storage seasons.

Read the full report by JRG Consulting Group: [www.greenbelt.ca/planting\\_seeds](http://www.greenbelt.ca/planting_seeds)