



Possibility grows here.

Opportunities for Growth: Ontario Strawberries

Ontarians love strawberries: between July 2018 and June 2019, we consumed approximately 50,000 tonnes (110.2 million lbs.) of strawberries. Luckily, there is an opportunity to expand local strawberry production so that we can access more delicious Ontario-grown strawberries.

STRAWBERRY PRODUCTION IN ONTARIO



675 farms across Ontario grow strawberries, with production concentrated largely along the northeast shore of Lake Erie.



Ontario growers produce between 6,000 and 7,000 tonnes of strawberries each year, which represents 14-16% of the province's annual consumption.

Traditionally, strawberries were harvested in June and July, but with the introduction of day-neutral strawberry varieties, strawberry season now runs until October. Traditional perennial varieties are called June strawberries, named after the month they start to have harvestable fruit. Fruit buds are set in August of the previous year when day-length shortens and become the harvested fruit the following June and July.



Day-neutral strawberries are an annual variety planted in the spring with berries ready to pick about 12 weeks later. Day-neutral plants bear fruit through to the onset of cold weather and into October.

STRAWBERRY EXPANSION OPPORTUNITY

There is an opportunity to expand strawberry production in southern Ontario to **supply 37.5% of annual consumption**. This would be a 150% increase of field-grown strawberries. Another 2,850 acres of strawberries could be grown in the region to make this happen. Day-neutral strawberries offer higher yields per acre, meaning that the acreage base increase could be closer to 1,500 acres.

This higher level of production would generate a 130% increase, or \$45.5 million, in farm gate revenue.





And that's just considering field-grown strawberries: greenhouse strawberries in the province are grown through October to mid-June. Additional greenhouse strawberry production could provide 50% of Ontarians' annual consumption of strawberries. Greenhouse strawberries are an opportunity to supply Ontario strawberries to retailers all year-round.

WHAT WILL ENABLE EXPANSION?

Ontario strawberry growers face some challenges – in particular, they have to compete with strawberries from large multinational suppliers like Driscoll, Naturipe, and Dole, which come in at lower prices. Growers, marketers, retailers, research and development institutions, and governments all have a role to play in expanding strawberry production.

The following actions would enable expansion:

- Growers and marketers should have a critical mass of day-neutral strawberries that compete with California strawberries available to supply major retailers from July to October.
- Field strawberry growers and greenhouse strawberry growers could collaborate to offer a critical mass of strawberries year-round.
- Retailers should feature Ontario strawberries in-store beyond the traditional June strawberry period, when consumers already expect to buy fresh Ontario-grown strawberries. Retailers typically do not feature Ontario-grown day-neutral strawberries, which are available in other months, leaving them to be outcompeted by California strawberries.
- Research and development institutions could restore a strawberry breeding program focused on developing day-neutral cultivars more suitable to Ontario growing conditions.

Read the full report by JRG Consulting Group: www.greenbelt.ca/planting_seeds

