

## SWEET NEWS



### A pungent resurgence

#### Ontario garlic acreage up

After the Ontario garlic acreage was nearly wiped out by the impact of cheap Chinese imports, the crop is seeing a resurgence.

Interest in local garlic has grown along with the local food movement, says Garlic Growers Association of Ontario Vice President, Peter McClusky. "Garlic has been swept up in the local food movement," says the author of *Ontario Garlic: The Story from Farm to Festival*. "And besides people are discovering Ontario garlic tastes better."

McClusky's observations are borne out by the numbers. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs estimates the acres of garlic grown in Ontario increased from just 300 acres in 2014 to 750 acres in 2016 (the last year for which there are numbers available).

Dan Hemstock, Farm and Production Manager at August's Harvest near Stratford, Ontario, and a Director with the Garlic Growers Association of Ontario has seen a similar trend. He says sales of seed garlic are up at August's Harvest and they are getting more calls from growers who want to sell their first crop.

The majority of garlic growers are small scale with a handful of larger growers, says Hemstock. Most of the growers have less than an acre of garlic and are targeting farmers markets, CSAs and farm gate sales. There are a few large commercial growers like August's Harvest which have more than 50 acres and sell to grocery stores. Some like August's Harvest also buy garlic from other growers, make garlic products and sell seed garlic.

Farmers are looking for an alternative crop, says Hemstock, but unfortunately the ones who jump into the industry with little research on the labour and investment involved usually only last one season.

Hemstock is optimistic about the future for garlic growers but is also cautious. "There is room in the industry for more garlic to be

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grown in Ontario but with higher supply volumes the prices will settle," he says. In his opinion, growers will need to concentrate on mechanization of equipment to increase efficiency as well as focus on storage to keep garlic quality longer into the off-season to provide a steady supply year-round and not just flood the market at harvest. "Marketing and value-added products will become key to finding new sales outlets," he adds.

~Helen Lammers-Helps

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