

A made-in Ontario solution for organic labeling

Written By SYLVIA JONES

I was very pleased to see my colleague, MPP Jim McDonnell introduce Bill 54, Organic Products Act, 2018, on November 12th. This Private Members Bill (PMB), if passed, would prohibit the marketing and labelling of products as organic unless the products have been certified as organic. In the previous session of the Legislature, I co-sponsored a similar piece of Legislation that targeted consumer confidence in organic products because we needed a 'made-in-Ontario' solution to the practice of organic labelling. Bill 54 reintroduces the organic debate in this session of the Legislature and I am happy to support this important change to protect consumers and agricultural producers.

The Federal government adopted the Canada Organic Standard in 2009, for products labelled organic with the Canada Organic Logo for product sold across provincial borders. However, for products sold within the borders of Ontario, anyone is free to use the term 'organic'. This inconsistency needs to be addressed because it creates confusion for consumers and could potentially lead to an erosion in consumer confidence. When that happens, businesses, hard working farmers and organic producers are hurt. Other provinces, including; British Columbia, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have already enacted regulations on organic products to address the gap.

The organics industry is growing. Canada is now the fifth largest organic market in the world and is expanding by over 10 percent annually. Ontario is the largest organic market in Canada with over \$1.4 billion in sales. Yet, the Canada Organic Trade Association currently rates Ontario lowest amongst all provinces for regulation, support and development of organic products.

Bill 54 is a 'made-in-Ontario' solution that, if passed, includes a certification program more appropriate for small-scale and direct market producers. The goal is to work with farmers and producers about how the certification will ensure consumers have the confidence they require when making a purchase of organic products.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), the National Farmers Union (NFA), and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) all agree that Ontario needs organic certification to improve consumer confidence. If passed, Bill 54 will ensure that the quality of organic products offered across Ontario will be at a high standard. Consumers deserve to know that when they purchase something labelled organic, that it has met the provincial conditions of being certified as organic.

If you would like to read Bill 54, visit my website www.sylviajonesmpp.ca. If you have any questions about this bill or another provincial matter, I encourage you to contact my office at 519-941-7751 or by email at sylvia.jonesco@pc.ola.org.