



APG RECENTLY EXPERIENCED NOTICEABLE INCREASE IN NUMBER OF ORGANIC GROWERS

ORGANIC AND CONVENTIONAL PULSE GROWERS SHARE MANY OF THE SAME CHALLENGES

Alberta Pulse Growers (APG) has experienced a significant increase in the number of organic pulse farmers becoming members of the organization by paying the service fee.

APG's membership currently includes 126 organic growers who paid \$138,844 in levies last year on 23,530 tonnes of pulses sold, which were primarily peas. Those numbers may not seem very big considering that APG has about 6,500 grower members, but it is noteworthy considering that there were only a handful of organic growers paying levy to APG in recent years. There are more than 20 organic buyers listed on APG's online Dealer List to accommodate these growers.

"We are pleased to see an increase in Alberta's organic growers becoming recognized APG members," said APG Executive Director Leanne Fischbuch. "Organic pulse growers benefit from the same membership advantages as conventional growers through trade and market access, and we are working to identify future research projects that would benefit both the organic and conventional systems, such as identification and attraction of beneficial insects."

APG and Organic Alberta are working in partnership to help conventional and organic pulse producers.

"Organic Alberta is excited to



Forage pea in a cover crop blend on an organic farm near Coaldale. Pulses play an important role in building soil microbiota and organic matter.

participate with Alberta Pulse Growers in research projects that are beneficial to both," said Organic Alberta Executive Director Marilyn Boehm, adding that her organization is the voice of organics in the province and represents 590 organic producers and processors in Alberta.

More information about the research collaboration between APG and Organic Alberta will be featured in future issues of *Pulse Crop News*.

"The potential for more acres appears to be high because pulses have a fit in organic production and

the consumer demand for pulses, and in some cases organic pulses, is growing,” Boehm continued. “With more processors coming on board in the Prairies, I think that with the right support, we can expect to see production growth. While we have a growing body of knowledge, we still need to see more research and more organically trained agronomists to support farmers in the field. Questions remain on best weed management, inter-cropping, rotation planning, and disease/pest management.”

Organic Alberta has experienced a steady overall increase in its membership over the last few years, with part of the growth taking place in pulse production.

“There are probably a mix of reasons for this, including good prices related to a growing demand in organics from consumers,” Boehm said. “Farmers are interested in diversifying. We also have a growing body of scientific research and information that is going out to growers, helping with management decisions on the farm. A lot of the growth also comes from the Mackenzie County area of northern Alberta which is land that hadn’t been farmed before and is a good opportunity to be organic.”

Organic production in Alberta dates back to the late 1970s. On April 1, 2019, provincial government legislation passed under the *Supporting Alberta’s Local Food Sector Act* stating that anyone who uses the term “organic” must be certified in accordance with the federally regulated Canadian Organic Standards.

Peas are the most popular crop for organic pulse production and show the most growth in Alberta, which is the same as for conventional farmers. While peas are the most popular, other pulse crops that growers have in rotation include faba beans and, in the south,



Photo credit: Melisa Zapisocky

Faba beans growing on an organic farm in Mackenzie County.

there are more lentils, dry beans, and some chickpeas being grown organically.

Boehm added that legumes have always been an important part of an organic rotation. They show up in different ways including as perennials, green manures, cover crops and cash crops. Since organic farmers do not put down synthetic nitrogen, having nitrogen-fixing legumes in rotation is very important.

A report on 2018 data called *Organic Agriculture in the Prairies* (www.scribd.com/document/416788983/Organic-Agriculture-in-the-Prairies-2018-Data) noted that

pulses are a top Canadian organic export with 97% of Canada’s organic pulse acreage grown in the Prairies. This included 98% of organic lentils and 95% of organic dried peas. Organic pulse acres have increased significantly from under 90,000 acres in 2015 to more than 192,000 in 2018.

The report stated that peas have the most acreage in the Prairies with over 124,000 acres and have seen a steady increase since 2015, with Alberta having the most acreage. The report pointed out that certifiers do not provide details about the end use of crops, so all peas except those designated as fresh peas are included in this number.