



## Caring For TOMORROW

Provided by the University of Guelph's Ontario Agricultural College (OAC)  
Dr. Freeman McEwen, dean

## The apple industry goes under the microscope

Apple imports have skyrocketed almost 500 per cent over the past decade, stalling Canadian production and causing hardship for many apple farmers. University of Guelph researchers are trying to determine if the creation of a national apple marketing agency could reverse this trend.

Some producers from Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are spearheading a drive to establish such an agency.

But there is no factual basis to either support or refute their goal, says Prof. Larry Martin, acting director of the George Morris Centre for the Future of Agriculture, who is conducting the study with Prof. Ellen Goddard and research associate Christopher Gaston. And not all members of the industry want a marketing agency; it's imperative that the effort be measured very carefully.

Since 1980, Canadian apple production has stood at about 25 million bushels a year. But the cost of producing apples has exceeded their output value by 4.35 cents/kilogram. As a result, stabilization payments for the depleted industry have been as high as \$21.5 million. Clearly, there are significant reasons for establishing whether or not a marketing agency could ease the burden on producers, consumers and governments.

Central to the study is deter-

mining why the Canadian industry has failed to grow, despite increased consumer demand for apples and apple juice. The researchers say that if the problem is related to domestic overproduction, a marketing agency approach involving production regulations may be viable. But there's also the possibility that the industry is entrenched in the production of varieties that Canadians no longer want. In that case, nothing would be gained by restricting the supply in the hope that consumers would pay a high price, which is essentially the effect a marketing agency has.

So the researchers are also examining the potential effects of alternatives to a marketing agency. These include improved apple quality, greater efficiency in producing and storing existing varieties, improved marketing and testing of improved varieties to compete with Canadian demand for popular imported products, especially the Granny Smith apple, which now accounts for almost 30 per cent of the imports.

Although the industry in general is hurting, not all apple producers are in dire straits. The researchers are identifying the characteristics of successful operations to determine if other producers can adopt similar practices that might lower their cost of production or help them achieve higher revenues.

## Plastic recycled as insulating fibre

Old detergent bottles and other waste plastic could soon be helping Canadian homeowners in their battle against an unseen enemy—the cold.

A Toronto-based firm, Embrace Systems Canada Corp., has developed an insulation material, made from recycled plastic, that it says is as effective as glass fibre.

Called Puffibre, the material is made by heating waste plastic and spinning it into fibres. The company says it is pliable, non-toxic, not irritating to skin and comparable in energy efficiency to glass fibre insulation.

Aided by a grant from the Ontario government, the company has already tested the insulation on building sites that need to be heated in winter while construction workers are inside. It plans to make Puffibre available to homeowners by next spring.

Mark Meade, company founder and president, used to work in construction, where he saw the need for a more effective blanket to wrap around buildings' under

construction in winter. He found that glass fibres used in tarpaulins broke down quickly.

The new material is translucent white, allowing natural light through.

Meade said the material has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to insulate factory walls in refrigeration and cold storage installations.

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