

Greenhouse, sod and nursery industries, 2020

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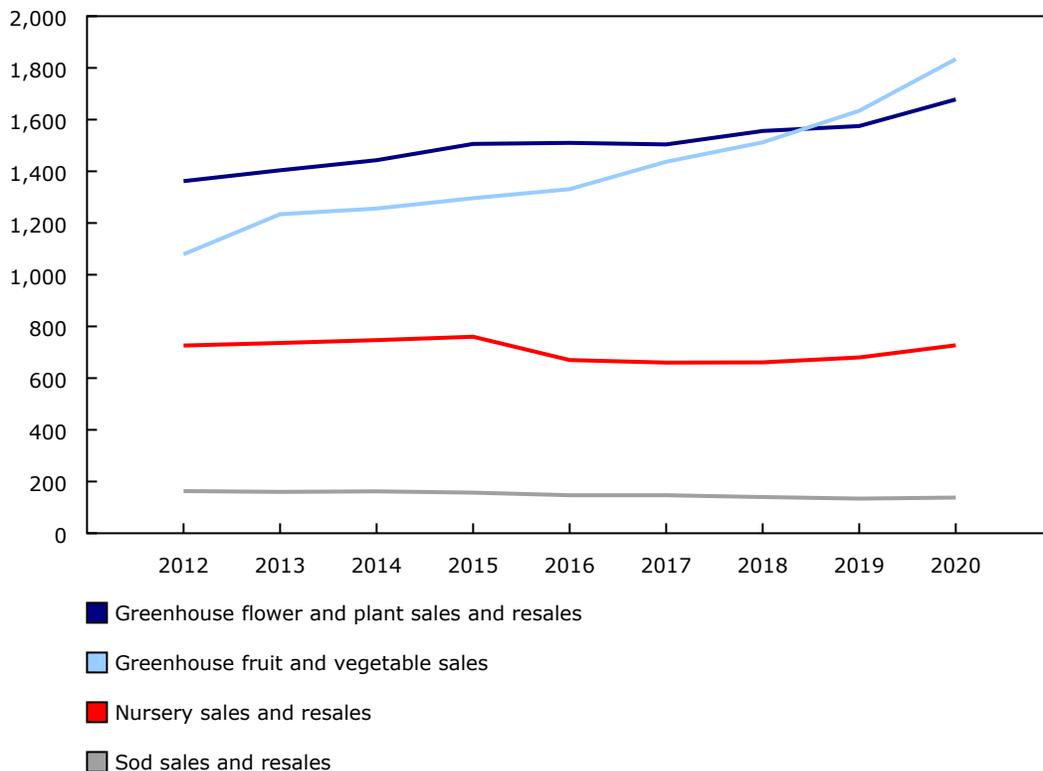
It was a year of challenges for the greenhouse, nursery, field-cut flowers and sod industries in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges ranged from uncertainty about opening during the first lockdown to the possibility of labour shortages in the wake of travel restrictions to slow the spread of COVID-19. Nevertheless, sales rose at their fastest pace since 2012, up 9.0% to \$4.4 billion in 2020, as operators successfully adapted to the pandemic by offering online shopping, u-pick, curbside pick-up and home delivery, as well as physically distanced on-site sales.

Over half of the sales in 2020 were in Ontario (54.7%), with one-third in British Columbia (22.1%) and Quebec (12.3%).

Greenhouse sales rose 9.4% from a year earlier to \$3.5 billion, largely attributable to a 12.3% increase in fruit and vegetable plant sales.

Chart 1
Sales of greenhouse, nursery and sod products

millions of dollars



Source(s): Tables [32-10-0023-01](#), [32-10-0032-01](#) and [32-10-0034-01](#).



Yards, patios and balconies were greener in 2020

Canadians spent 6.5% more on greenhouse flowers and plants in 2020, totalling \$1.7 billion, over half of which went towards potted plants (+3.8% to \$885.6 million).

The number of potted plants sold increased 1.9% to 214.6 million pots, led by higher sales of hanging pots (+65.5%), cyclamen (+35.8%), potted vegetable plants (+22.5%) and rudbeckia (+15.6%).

Vegetable bedding plant sales rose 15.9% to \$172.9 million, while sales of ornamental bedding plants increased 12.1% to \$232.7 million. Most bedding plants are sold to other farm or greenhouse operators to produce vegetables or finished plants.

Spring is the busiest time for nurseries, and the beginning of the previous gardening season coincided with the first lockdown. In late April 2020, Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and Quebec announced the reopening of garden centres. Despite a slow start to the season, sales and resales of nursery products grew 6.9% to \$727.0 million at the end of the year. Ontario accounted for the largest share of total nursery sales (41.8%), followed by British Columbia (32.0%) and Quebec (14.5%).

Greenhouse fruit and vegetable production continues to rise

Sales in the greenhouse fruit and vegetable plant sector increased for the eighth consecutive year, rising 12.3% to \$1.8 billion in 2020. Ontario accounted for two-thirds of total sales, with British Columbia (17.9%), Quebec (8.7%) and Alberta (6.5%) accounting for the other third. Since 2015, the capacity to produce greenhouse fruit and vegetables has increased by 23.9%, to 1,809 hectares in 2020.

Tomato (+12.1%), cucumber (+9.4%) and pepper (+7.3%) sales were all up sharply from a year earlier, accounting for the majority (92.5%) of greenhouse vegetables and fruit sold in 2020. Greenhouse operations supply more than domestic markets; they are increasingly supplying export markets as well. Total exports of greenhouse tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers, combined, increased 10.4% to 386.1 million kg in 2020 compared with 2019.

Alberta has become an emerging player in greenhouse fruit and vegetable plant production over the past five years. In 2020, greenhouse fruit and vegetable sales in the province rose by almost one-quarter (+23.3%) to \$119 million. Cucumbers (\$54.5 million), tomatoes (\$29.9 million) and lettuce (\$26.3 million) were the top sellers.

More permanent employees, fewer seasonal workers

A potential labour shortage was one of the most pressing concerns facing the horticulture sector in 2020. Many greenhouses had to contend with COVID-19 outbreaks among employees, while travel restrictions limited the availability of foreign workers.

The agriculture sector depends on temporary foreign workers. In 2018, for example, [54,734 temporary foreign workers](#) were employed in the agriculture sector, with one-third working at greenhouses, in nurseries and in floriculture (18,389).

Greenhouse operators employed 32,868 people in 2020, up slightly (+219) from a year earlier. The number of permanent employees rose 0.5% to 14,784, while seasonal employees decreased 2.1% to 18,084. Greenhouse operations were actively recruiting for both short-term and permanent positions, since horticulture's peak spring season was approaching amid the first lockdown.

Nursery operations reported 5.8% fewer employees, at 8,920 in 2020, mainly as a result of fewer seasonal employees (-7.9%). The number of permanent employees decreased 1.4%. Just over one-third of nursery employees had permanent jobs in 2020, up slightly from 2019.

Expenses rise at fastest pace in past 10 years

Greenhouse operating expenses rose 7.5% to \$2.9 billion in 2020, which is 22.9% above the 10-year average. Average greenhouse costs grew 6.2% to \$110.7 per square metre.

Other operating expenses (+10.6%), electricity (+10.2%), other crop expenses (+8.5%) and payroll (+7.5%) rose at the fastest pace in 2020. The replacement of seasonal workers with permanent employees may have contributed to the increase in payroll expenses, which rose 6.8% to \$25,856 per employee.

Nationally, greenhouses spent 0.9% less on natural gas, at \$191.3 million. In Ontario, natural gas prices were the lowest in five years.

Nursery operating expenses edged up 0.6% to \$592.9 million, while payroll increased 1.1% to \$197.5 million. The average payroll grew 7.3% to \$22,144 per employee.

Sod area continues to decline, but sales rise

The total sod area decreased nationwide for the sixth consecutive year, down 2.4% to 18,215 hectares in 2020; it has fallen by one-quarter in a decade.

Nevertheless, total sales rose 2.6% to \$137.5 million. Expenses increased 3.0% to \$108.0 million.

Sod sales rose at the fastest pace in Eastern Canada, led by Nova Scotia (+16.6%), Prince Edward Island (+12.3%) and Quebec (+11.3%).

Note to readers

The Annual Greenhouse, Sod and Nursery Survey does not collect data on greenhouse cannabis production.

Find out more about [agriculture and food statistics](#). Data users can also visualize survey data results with the interactive "[Crop production](#)" visualization tool.

Please support the [2021 Census of Agriculture](#).

Available tables: [32-10-0018-01](#), [32-10-0019-01](#), [32-10-0021-01](#) to [32-10-0023-01](#) , [32-10-0025-01](#), [32-10-0026-01](#), [32-10-0028-01](#), [32-10-0029-01](#), [32-10-0031-01](#) to [32-10-0034-01](#) , [32-10-0245-01](#), [32-10-0246-01](#), [32-10-0452-01](#), [32-10-0454-01](#) and [32-10-0456-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3416](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).