



Windsor-Essex, Ontario, Canada: All the Ingredients for a Thriving Food Processing Sector

Rakesh Naidu, CEO (Interim) of the Windsor-Essex Economic Development Corporation (WEEDC), discusses food processing and agri-business in the Windsor-Essex region.

Q: Windsor-Essex is known mostly for its automotive industry and advanced manufacturing. What makes it an important player in agriculture and food processing?

A: There are several reasons. The first is our climate. We're in Canada's "Deep South" - at roughly the same latitude as Northern California. Our weather is much better than most of Canada. In fact, our average temperature reaches above 50°F (10°C) 223 days of the year. We're also surrounded by the Great Lakes, which, combined with our climate, makes for ideal growing conditions. Our typical growing season is over 200 days per year.

The second reason is location. We're only a half mile from the border of the U.S., directly across from Detroit. We have a very significant cross-border logistics industry that facilitates access to U.S. and international markets. We have integrated, temperature-controlled distribution and transportation facilities that allow us to get fresh products to market quickly. Those assets, combined with Canada's duty-free access to the U.S. and Mexico, make Windsor-Essex an excellent center for agriculture and food processing.

The third reason is our research and development, and the integration of technology into the agribusiness sector.

Q: We hear a lot about your "cutting edge" manufacturing sector, but does that translate to other sectors in the

region by bolstering their technical abilities as well?

A: Absolutely! We have a history that is rich in innovation and making things. Our reputation for efficient operations that produce high quality goods has sustained the regional economy for 150 years. Today, leading-edge technology gives us competitive advantages across every sector we operate in. In agribusiness, we use technology to optimize yield, Brix count and grow times. We're using cutting-edge systems that lets plants "talk" to our farmers through automated sensors that monitor conditions and collect data, enabling decision-making based on real-time information. Technology is also helping our food processors automate quality control, ensuring that every food product sent to market is fully inspected - not only by skilled workers, but by robotic vision systems. This optimizes quality, efficiency and food safety.

Q: How big is the food processing industry in Windsor-Essex?

A: Food and beverage processing in Windsor-Essex is a \$2 billion industry. It is the second-largest manufacturing sector in our region and a major driver of our local economy. We have almost 100 food and beverage processing companies employing over 3,200 people, and over 2,000 acres dedicated to greenhouses and growing. In fact, our region has the largest cluster of vegetable greenhouse operations in North America, producing billions of dollars of fresh vegetables and other produce annually for export to global

markets. And we have a fast-growing viticulture and winery industry that is becoming an important part of our agribusiness sector.

Q: Who are the major food processing companies in Windsor-Essex?

A: A number of large national and international food processing companies have significant operations in Windsor-Essex - companies such as Diageo, Unico, Bonduelle, Hiram Walker and ADM. Many of them have called Windsor-Essex home for decades, some for over a century.

Q: How have economic conditions and the fluctuating Canadian dollar impacted the local agriculture and food processing industry?

A: Because it is primarily an export industry, a lower Canadian dollar actually helps our food processing companies. With one Canadian dollar trading in the 75 cent U.S. dollar range, we can offer food and beverage products at very attractive prices to our export markets.

Overall, we are a very business-friendly region. We have attractive serviced land costs. Our tax rate for manufacturers is lower than the U.S., and leasing and labor costs are lower than other North American centers. Housing is very affordable, a culturally-diverse community, a large workforce of skilled and unskilled labor with a similar work culture and business practices, low health care costs, and a very favorable lifestyle that makes Windsor-Essex a great place to work and live. In short, we've got all the ingredients for a thriving food processing sector. 🏡

Watch our video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtMV4jX3TKw>