

Promoting Canada's Agriculture Industry

Issue: With greater attention around food sustainability and the environmental foot print of agriculture, there is a need to raise awareness and provide fact-based education focused on where our food comes from, recognizing the sustainability of agribusiness and its vitally important role in our economy as a natural resource.

Background

Greater awareness around food sustainability and the environmental foot print of agriculture has become progressively more important. As a result, there is an ever-increasing need to provide fact based education in order to bridge the information gap between agriculture producers and consumers. Educating Canadians about the agriculture industry ensures citizens of all ages are informed about where food comes from, the importance of agriculture to our economy and the future sustainability of our food.

The 2016 Census of Agriculture found less than 1% of Canadians are farm operators, yet all Canadians participate in the agri-food sector when they go grocery shopping and make food choices¹. The disconnect between the producers who grow the food we eat and consumers is widening due to urbanization², growing misperceptions and a lack of factual information around this vitally important industry.

Farmers and ranchers feel increasingly under attack because of the public scrutiny and misinformation around the industry. In a report from the Next Agriculture Policy Framework (NAPF), there is strong support from the agriculture industry to enhance public perceptions about the quality, safety, and sustainability of the agriculture sector.³

Even though the agriculture industry plays a critical role in our eco-system, there is no requirement to educate the public about the role the industry plays in our economy or give the facts and information around the sustainability of our agri-food sector. A Canada-wide public education campaign can ensure that Canadians not only understand the industry's practice of environmental stewardship resulting in reliable, sustainable and high-quality agri-food but also recognize the economic impact of the agriculture industry.

'Canada's Economic Strategy Tables' on Agri-food reports that Canada has the opportunity to be "recognized as the most trusted, competitive and reliable supplier of safe, sustainable, high-quality agri-food products and an innovator in value-added products to feed the dynamic global consumer" but requires a unified campaign focused on marketing the agri-food industry both domestically and internationally.⁴ With the agri-food industry target set to increase by over 27% to \$225 billion dollars in 2025⁵, all sectors must be given the opportunity to reach their full potential through a unified public education campaign.

One mechanism that can be used to educate Canadians of the agriculture industry's role in sustainable and high-quality agri-food products is Country of Origin labelling (COOL). COOL is a critical mechanism to help ensure consumers can correctly connect with products, enable producers to adapt production to meet consumer demands and expectations and promote social or political economic objectives.⁶ Informing consumers of the origin of food products via labelling recognizes that geography is correlated with a product's overall quality⁷ and would reinforce that the superior ethical and environmental standards of the

¹ Canadian Agriculture at a Glance, Statistics Canada: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/96-325-x/96-325-x2019001-eng.htm>

² Demand for Convenience, Government of Alberta: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/b5d936eb-2127-424e-b1b8-818c486d12aa/resource/5d7a504d-ab10-4f1c-843c-79801cf0d412/download/af-consumer-corner-54-demand-for-convenience-2019-11.pdf>

³ Next Agricultural Policy Framework: What We Heard Report – 2 <https://cap.alberta.ca/CAP/download/AGUCMINT-4795873>

⁴ Canada's Economic Strategy Table: Agri-food': 2 [https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/098.nsf/vwapi/ISED_C Agri-Food_E.pdf/\\$file/ISED_C Agri-Food_E.pdf](https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/098.nsf/vwapi/ISED_C Agri-Food_E.pdf/$file/ISED_C Agri-Food_E.pdf)

⁵ Canada's Economic Strategy Table: Agri-food': 3 [https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/098.nsf/vwapi/ISED_C Agri-Food_E.pdf/\\$file/ISED_C Agri-Food_E.pdf](https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/098.nsf/vwapi/ISED_C Agri-Food_E.pdf/$file/ISED_C Agri-Food_E.pdf)

⁶ Consumers' Preferences for Geographical Origin Labels: Evidence from the Canadian Olive Oil Market

⁷ (Barham, 2003; Josling, 2006). In consumers preference

Canadian agriculture industry often results in better quality agri-food. Additionally, products with a regulated COOL can command between 21% - 39% higher price premiums compared with non-regulated labels.⁸ Championing a 'Canada Brand' will increase value and provide a marketing link between the agriculture industry and the strong Canadian standards for food safety and environmental stewardship.

The 'Canada Brand' program provides a good start for the agriculture industry to market their products and practices but is not yet widely used. A unified label, logo, image, and theme, will show Canadian consumers the depth of the role of the agriculture industry in the food we consume and the products we use. Additionally, it can educate the public through larger media networks such as television and radio with factual information from a distinct, recognizable and unified source. Finally, it provides the opportunity to expand the domestic market, increase awareness among the public of the high standards in the agri-food industry, and signify products that are 100% Canadian.

However, a public education campaign would also be incomplete without informing the next generation of the importance of the agriculture industry and their role in our Canadian ecosystem. Many studies have highlighted the looming skills and labour crisis in Canada's agriculture and food industry.⁹ Therefore in order for Canada to remain competitive, and to lead the way globally, we need to ensure that the next generation's best and brightest minds are knowledgeable about agri-food.

We recognize the Federal government does not have jurisdiction over education. But through grants and programming, the Federal government can influence the direction and opportunities of agriculture education for students. By educating the next generation with current fact based information, we can further educate the public by embedding this into our everyday conversations at school and at home.

In the world of misinformation, a factual public education campaign can help to dispel incorrect beliefs and inform Canadians about an industry that passes the highest ethical and sustainable standards. Now, more than ever, it is important that the education gap between producers and consumers is bridged so that the agriculture industry can continue to champion reliable, sustainable, and high-quality practices.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce recommends the Government of Canada:

1. Develop a unified public education strategy showcasing the agriculture industry's practice of environmental stewardship resulting in reliable, sustainable and high-quality agri-food and value added products.
2. Expand on the "Canada Brand" program to create a single unified label, logo, image, and theme
3. Ensure the next Agricultural Policy Framework works to develop branding skills, knowledge and awareness of opportunities within the agriculture industry.
4. Facilitate fact-based agriculture education learning opportunities, resources and connections through grant programming, such as the Canadian Agriculture Partnership.

⁸ A Meta-Analysis of Geographical Indication Food Valuation Studies - 214

⁹Canada's farm labour shortage is costing billions and expected to rise: report

<https://business.financialpost.com/commodities/agriculture/canadas-farm-labor-shortage-is-costing-billions-and-expected-to-rise-report>