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Policy Matters: How to Grow Canada's Agriculture and Agri-Food Industry -Canadian Chamber of Commerce



Policy Matters

Quick insights to help your business succeed

Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector, which spans farms, nurseries, and greenhouses, as well as food and beverage processors, food retailers and wholesalers, and foodservice providers, supplied 1 in 9 jobs in Canada, generated around 7% of Canada's GDP, and exported nearly \$100 billion worth of goods in 2023. These numbers prove that the ag and agri-food sector is a cornerstone of Canada's economy and enormously important to Canadian prosperity. And it has even more to offer.

However, the ag and agri-food sector is currently caught in a storm of uncertainty. Geopolitical turbulence has disrupted farmers' and producers' access to some of our most vital markets and is threatening the competitiveness of this sector. And this is an addition to other long-standing challenges that are holding the sector back from reaching its full potential, like outdated regulations and trade infrastructure limitations.



Growing the Sector

Canada is one of the few net exporters of ag and agri-food products. That makes our pork, canola, seafood, lentils and all other products not only vital to Canada's economic and food security, but to that of our global partners too.

So, the question is: How can the private and public sectors work together to ensure this economic superpower not only makes it through this geopolitical shakeup but becomes stronger and bigger than ever?



Our Recommendations to Government

a) Support Canadian farmers, producers and industry during geopolitical turbulence

The rapidly increasing global demand for food is creating a generational opportunity for Canada to emerge as an agriculture powerhouse. Unfortunately, our agri-food industry is in a trade war on two fronts — there is still the blanket 25% U.S. tariff (with USCMA exemption) on Canadian imports, and in March, China put 100% tariffs on Canadian exports of canola oil, canola meal and peas, and 25% duties on pork, fish and seafood products. The ag and agri-food sector cannot sustain this fight without concerted government support.

Recommendations:

- Provide financial support to Canadian farmers, producers and industry who are affected by loss of access to the Chinese market and work towards quick resolutions of ongoing trade disputes. Supports should be provided outside the traditional business risk management programs.
- Work with partners for the removal of non-tariff trade barriers that are not science-based and unfairly discriminate against Canadian producers and industry.
- Encourage increased investment in domestic processing and manufacturing to increase our value-added production and exports, including opportunities in the domestic biofuels industry.

b) Help Canadian farmers and producers expand into new markets

Maintaining and deepening our commercial relationships with emerging markets is vital to the ag and agri-food sector's success. Canada should focus on regions that offer the most untapped potential, like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. These nations' citizens increasingly want the kind of high-quality, high-protein food that Canada produces.

Recommendations:

- Prioritize the conclusion of a free trade agreement with vital growth markets, while defending the interests of Canada's domestic producers and industry.
- Better leverage existing trade agreements by providing additional resources to navigate unfamiliar markets and mitigate risks.
- Provide additional funding for industry-specific market maintenance and diversification programs such as AgriMarketing.

c) Commit to predictable and science-based regulation

Innovations in plant science and crop protection can drive significant productivity gains while reducing waste and environmental impact. But too often producers are delayed or denied access to these innovations because of political pressure and unfounded claims about safety — even when these products are available in peer countries. Our agri-food sector is already one of the most sustainable in the world, which means we can afford to reduce red-tape without adding risk to the environment or human health. Overregulation can worsen food security — a risk that must also be considered by regulators.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that regulations consider the sector's competitiveness as well as Canada's food security.
- Ensure that all departments are mandated to consider any research and/or evidence that meets transparent and objective criteria, regardless of the funding source.
- Ensure that the mandates of the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) reflect science-based decision-making and timely service standards.

d) Expand existing transportation infrastructure capacity

Much of Canada's ag and agri-food sector is in landlocked regions with products transported by road or rail to ports for export overseas. Regular bottlenecks in our transportation infrastructure, whether from labour disruptions, extreme weather events, or geopolitical disruptions have hindered the growth of Canadian agri-food exports. To increase our exports, we must increase the capacity of our transportation infrastructure. The federal government's \$5 billion Trade Diversification Corridor Fund is an important start but it's not nearly enough considering our annual \$21 billion transportation investment already has us trailing our peers.

Recommendations:

- Commit to a long-term transportation infrastructure strategy, like the Canada Trade Infrastructure Plan, and invest in ports, rail, inland terminals, roads, airports and highways.

e) Encourage technological adoption

Technological innovation is driving significant productivity gains in Canadian ag and agri-food production, while also mitigating environmental impacts. By collecting and analyzing vast quantities of data — sometimes using artificial intelligence — agricultural tech (agtech) is helping producers make better decisions to maximize yields and be more efficient in their use of inputs and resources, like water and energy.

Recommendations:

- Continue to expand rural access to high-speed internet through the Universal Broadband Fund, ensuring that all Canadian farmers can leverage new technologies to boost productivity.
- Ensure producers, farmers, and the broader agri-food value chain are included in the government's efforts to boost AI adoption.
- Make digital agriculture a national priority and establish a 10-year digital action plan for the Canadian ag and agri-food sector.
- Implement a comprehensive national data strategy to make it easier for agtech tools to integrate with the broader digital economy.

The ag and agri-food sector is a critical component of Canada's economic and food security. Helping it grow and thrive is in our economic best interest, in Canadians' best interest, and in our trade partners' best interest too.

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The 31st BBEX nominations and applications process is now complete for 2025. By Labour Day, the official list of finalists for this year's awards will be made public. Watch for that. The BBEX Awards ceremony is Thursday, November 6th, 2025.