



Putting Canada First

AN ARCHITECTURE FOR AGRICULTURAL
POLICY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

AGRICULTURE'S LONG-TERM VITALITY
AND PROSPERITY DEPEND ON ITS ABILITY
TO CO-EXIST SUSTAINABLY WITH THE
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.

Environment

The Government of Canada and the provincial and territorial governments are working with the agriculture and agri-food industry and interested Canadians to develop an architecture for agricultural policy for the 21st century. The objective is for Canada to be the world leader in food safety, innovation and environmentally-responsible production.

To realize this vision, governments have agreed in principle on an action plan for an agricultural policy framework composed of five elements: food safety and food quality, environment, science and innovation, renewal, and business risk management. The framework, which is based on the setting of common goals for each element, entails important benefits for the sector and ultimately the general public.

Accordingly, governments have launched a national dialogue about the policy direction with stakeholders and interested Canadians to develop the proposed policy approach. This **consultation** document is one of a series of publications dedicated to that end. To obtain additional information and contribute to this important dialogue, visit www.agr.gc.ca/puttingcanadafirst or call 1 800 O-Canada (1 800 622-6232).

Agriculture and the environment are closely linked

Agriculture's long-term vitality and prosperity depend on its ability to co-exist sustainably with the natural environment. Farmers understand this concept well.

Farming, however, has undergone significant changes in recent years. For example, producers are adapting to changing market demands, adopting new production technologies, and shifting towards larger, more intensive operations. While the full effects of these changes on the environment are not fully understood, recent studies show that some key pressures arising from agriculture, such as nutrient surpluses and emissions of greenhouse gases, have been increasing.

At the same time, public awareness and concern about these issues is growing. Canadians expect all economic sectors, including agriculture, to do their part to protect the environment. Canadian farmers recognize their responsibility as environmental stewards and are taking proactive measures.

The federal, provincial and territorial governments have been helping the sector meet its environmental goals for many years. There is an increasing need, however, for governments to work together with industry towards a comprehensive solution.

"Ministers, recognizing that environmental protection is a critical issue for citizens, as well as for the future viability of Canadian agriculture, agree to work towards a comprehensive plan for accelerated environmental action, fully covering all Canadian farms, that will help achieve measurable and meaningful environmental goals in the areas of water, air and soil quality, and biodiversity."

Federal–Provincial–Territorial Ministers of Agriculture Agreement in Principle on an Action Plan for an Agricultural Policy Framework, June 2001

Agriculture's interaction with the environment must be better understood

New investments in our ability to understand, measure and report on the status of the agricultural environment would pay dividends by addressing public concerns and ensuring the long-term sustainability of farm operations. These efforts would also help identify where progress is being made and where improvement is needed.

If this information were readily available, farmers could make significant progress towards sustainable agriculture by adopting cost-effective management practices, and other decision makers could make better land use decisions. Accordingly, as governments develop new programs for agricultural sustainability, they should make the delivery of this information a priority.



Environmental action must be comprehensive and coordinated

Coordinated action covering all farms in Canada would significantly improve the quality of the environment. Governments should provide tools for farmers to take advantage of new technologies and practices. They should also provide the tools for farmers to better understand the implications of their production decisions on the long-term sustainability of their farms. By providing effective, accessible programs, governments could assist farmers to make cost-effective investments in their farms.

Governments are already providing programs to the sector to varying extents. A consistent Canada-wide approach to agricultural sustainability, however, would demonstrate to buyers that Canadian agriculture and food products have been produced in an environmentally-responsible manner. Industry could use this advantage to capture new markets and seize a greater share of existing ones by improving the attractiveness of Canadian products. At the same time, a consistent approach would benefit all Canadians in all parts of the country with a cleaner, healthier environment.

An approach to improved environmental performance on farms

Because of the many benefits associated with a consistent approach, the Ministers of Agriculture have committed to work together and with industry towards a set of common goals for improving environmental performance on farms. These meaningful and measurable goals aim to achieve improvements in the quality of our water, soil and air, and in biodiversity. Specific areas where progress towards these goals could be demonstrated are:

- **Water:** Reduce agricultural risks to the health of water resources. Key priorities are nutrients, pathogens and pesticides.
- **Soil:** Reduce agricultural risks to the health of soils. Key priorities are soil erosion and soil organic matter.
- **Air:** Reduce agricultural risks to the health of air and the atmosphere. Key priorities are particulate emissions, odours, and greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Biodiversity:** To ensure compatibility between biodiversity and agriculture, which is the primary user of farm land. Key priorities are wildlife habitat, species at risk, and economic damage to agriculture from wildlife.



To ensure progress towards the common goals, Ministers of Agriculture propose the following:

- **Farm Planning:** an increase in the use of environmental farm planning, regional environmental management plans, or equivalent increase in the coverage of such environmental plans;
- **Nutrient Management:** an increase in the use of beneficial manure management practices and fertilizer management practices, nutrient management plans and the degree to which nutrient application is in balance with need;
- **Pest Management:** an increase in the use of beneficial pest and pesticide management practices;
- **Land and Water Management:** a decrease in the number of bare-soil days on farm land, an increase in no-till or conservation tillage, and improved management of riparian areas, grazing lands and water use; and
- **Nuisance Management:** the adoption of better management practices to reduce odours and particulate emissions.

Conclusion

Putting the Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector first requires a national vision and a national partnership. Governments and industry moving forward collectively to integrate all elements of the proposed APF would enable us to brand Canada as the world leader in:

- the production of safe food in an environmentally-responsible manner;
- meeting and exceeding diverse market specifications for quality; and
- innovation throughout the agri-food value chain so that investors and customers can be confident in Canada's ability to succeed today and into the future.

Branding Canada as the world leader in these areas will contribute to the continued growth and increased prosperity of the Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector by capturing new markets and customers.

To learn more about this Federal-Provincial-Territorial initiative, contact: www.agr.gc.ca/puttingcanadafirst or 1 800 O-Canada (1 800 622-6232).