

**“IS CANADA’S FOOD REPUTATION A STRATEGIC PRIORITY OR NOT?”**

Many people across Canada’s agri-food system passionately believe that the country can generate economic opportunities and deliver societal benefits from aspiring to be the planet’s most trusted and sustainable food leader.<sup>i</sup> Deciding **how** to achieve this ambition is the issue. Over the past 12 months, Canada 2020 reached out to nearly 600 agri-food stakeholders (see p. 2) to discern what could be done to enable this and why this is so vital. We started with the premise that collectively protecting Canada’s food brand is a conduit to embrace the changes needed to put this vision within reach. Since many ideas shared during our outreach have been well-articulated in other studies, we distilled here what we heard into **one over-arching concept** and **three connected enabling priorities**:

**A NEW “COMPACT”** – based on explicit accountabilities – is required among the agri-food sector, governments (all levels) and adjacent sectors. Food issues are too complex and the opportunity for success is too great to do otherwise. For many, decoupling economics from social and environmental performance is no longer possible or desirable. Validating win-win outcomes is becoming a priority (e.g., by improving soil health even more, agriculture can unleash productivity gains and become a greater *carbon sequestering machine*). While the sector is displaying a new collaborative discipline to improve care and sustainability that is pre-competitive<sup>ii</sup> and more accountable, more is expected from industry to improve practices (e.g., on biodiversity) and transparency. The marketplace is signalling to all that ensuring confidence in Canada’s food supply carries new obligations. In return, governments must be more strategic about a *super sector* that consistently generates jobs and wealth across the country, is a lynchpin for caring for eco-systems and a partner in reducing food insecurity. Governments must be more accountable for ensuring policy coherence across jurisdictions/departments and accelerate regulatory processes to attract and retain investment. Enablers:

**1. PEOPLE – Accelerate diversity & systems-thinking [Action: for all]**

- a. **Improving governance and perspectives** require association boards and government roundtables to devote 20% of their seats to, e.g., Indigenous, civil society, social scientists, health, environment, investment, technology sectors; producers should be included on processor and retailer boards.
- b. Canadian agri-food thought leaders need to be part of **global dialogues** about transforming the food system (which can influence global standards and goals); e.g., the next emerging issue is “true cost accounting” (i.e., understanding and pricing-in the externalized cost of producing food).

**2. METRICS – Leverage stewardship to confer financial & societal benefits [Action: industry led]**

- a. Industry can leverage value from **backing up and stewarding food claims** (i.e., *safe, sustainable, reliably supplied, nutritious*) across every value chain. The metrics gleaned from doing so, often enabled by advanced technologies, is key to boosting on-farm/company productivity and profitability (e.g., optimizing inputs, reducing GHGs) and for creating value-added opportunities and new IP. As a performance-driven and global leading sector, Canada requires a new **national data strategy** to support such proprietary actions, advance pre-collaborative initiatives and satisfy public reporting.
- b. Industry needs to roll up data (above) to link and benchmark responsible practices for investors, the public and for export markets: (1) The wide variety of existing sector sustainability/care programs need a **consolidated picture** and identify where there are gaps. (2) This is a basis for developing a **national index of agri-food performance**, verified against globally-accepted ESG principles<sup>iii</sup> with outcome-based targets aligned with the SDGs. Industry to lead this in collaboration with government, NGOs and academia. This tool can also be used to proactively set joint priorities, e.g., with shippers, researchers.

**3. POLICY – Ensure predictability & reliability to protect reputation & attract investment in an uncertain global economy [Action: government led]**

- a. Government needs to build a wider understanding among stakeholders of what **science-based regulations** means and to assess changing science. In doing so and by recognizing industry progress on ESG (above), accelerating regulatory change and ensuring balanced policy decisions should be justified.
- b. Mitigating longer-term trade risk demands a broader view of national interest. Market access is not the only metric of success however appealing in the short-term. As a middle power, a holistic trade strategy can reflect a major advantage: many 21<sup>st</sup> century global agri-food business risks (climate change) are Canada’s agri-food opportunities. Canada’s food brand can be enhanced by demonstrating how Canada is mitigating such risks and maintaining the **right regulatory system**. In doing so, government can better position Canada as a **safe harbour** for agri-food investors.

## Canada Food Brand Project

**NEXT STEPS** – Based on what Canada 2020 heard, Canada’s food reputation should be a strategic priority. Protecting Canada’s trusted food brand is a catalyst for change but Canada is not the only country seeking to differentiate its food system on the basis of reputation. At the cusp of the next policy agenda, it is up to agri-food stakeholders to decide whether this is important enough to take the necessary steps to, indeed, become one of the world’s most trusted and sustainable food suppliers.

**BACKGROUND** – By working with its partners, Canada 2020’s dialogues included several labs held across the country since December 2018 and culminated in the National Forum on Agri-Food: Competing in a New World Order on November 6-7, 2019, in Ottawa, where some 40 diverse speakers sparked further discussions. This final report is to be read in conjunction with the *Synthesis Report, What We Heard, Dec. 2018 – Sept 2019: Backing-up the Canada food brand to enable the country’s food ambition* (cover image) which summarizes the lab dialogues. Agendas and other information on the project is found at: <http://canada2020.ca/canadafoodbrand>.

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Canada 2020 also appreciates the collaboration with other organizations in holding its food labs, including the Margaret A. Gilliam Institute for Global Food Security (McGill University) and Port of Halifax, and in moderating at the national forum, including: Canada West Foundation, Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute, Chamber of Digital Commerce Canada, Dalhousie University, Glacier FarmMedia, HEC Montréal, Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce/Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Council of the Great Lakes Region, Loblaw Companies Ltd., McConnell Foundation, Scale AI.

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*This document does not imply endorsement by partners or participants*

<sup>i</sup> As informed by The Advisory Council on Economic Growth (2017), Canada's Economic Strategy Tables: Agri-Food (2018) and the National Food Policy Report (2018).

<sup>ii</sup> The Canada 2020 Synthesis Report noted that Canada is a global leader in some areas (e.g., certified sustainable beef; 4-R fertilizer program), is a top-tier performer in others (e.g., pork has the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest carbon footprint; food-grade soy traceability; sustainable wild caught seafood) and is conforming to global best practices in others (e.g., certified sustainable canola; horticultural food safety).

<sup>iii</sup> Investors are linking long-term yield to a holistic view of risk by assessing environment, social, governance (ESG) factors. SDGs: UN Sustainable Development Goals.