

# The Forum on Canada's Agri-Food Future 2015



Shaw Centre, Ottawa | November 3 – 4, 2015

## Shaping Canada's Destiny: What is possible?



### PART 1

## OVERVIEW OF THE FORUM AND THE PROCESS



## Shaping Canada's Destiny: What is possible?

In the 21st century, the possibilities for Canada's agri-food sector are increasingly clear, and could be much more significant than anyone imagined. It is all about food and the benefits we can accrue.

We have what consumers and supply chains want most: supply reliability, and safe, nutritious and responsibly produced food. But we face a choice between staying in our current position or reshaping the sector. This choice could be game-changing.

We can continue along the same course, which has historically contributed to Canada's prosperity. Some might be satisfied with this. Or we could set our sights on a bigger prize: becoming the world's most trusted food system.

We believe the second option is the surest route to differentiate ourselves from competitors in both our export markets and from imports at home. This view is driven by two emerging realities.

First is the current state of our competitiveness and where we will expand in the future. Commodities will continue to be at the whim of global price swings. Our primary processed food sector is a robust global supplier but only in a handful of segments (particularly canola oil). On the other hand, our secondary processed food sector – Canada’s largest manufacturing segment – continues to face rising trade deficits. The local food movement is growing but new trade agreements may result in more imports and, as a northern country, we depend on food imports. Business as usual may provide incremental growth or it may be insufficient to meet our growth expectations.

Second is an impending transition facing global agriculture, one in which only those who join the effort to deal with global environmental challenges will succeed. Canada could play a distinctively positive role here. Many other countries will have no choice but to cap or curtail some unsustainable agricultural practices. Canada has the capacity to produce more while still removing carbon from the atmosphere, improving water quality and enhancing the well-being of its people. We have to decide how to use this opportunity.





These trends mean that earning and keeping a reputation as the “most trusted” food producer cannot be merely a brand slogan. Granted, Canada benefits from a reputation for clean water, blue skies and vast spaces. But “trust” is what consumers and supply chains are really buying into. Trust will dictate the standard for food quality in the future – and we need to declare our place on this measurement. (A companion document, Part 2: Discussion Paper, elaborates on the issue of trust.)

We have certain advantages that speak to changing consumer expectations about how food is produced. Our food has generally fewer chemical residues. We have plenty of good soil and water. We are not producing our food at the expense of our ecosystems, although there are some stresses. And Canada has sound governance practices. Our collective challenge is harnessing these advantages so Canadian food can command premium prices in the best markets here and abroad for all those involved in food production and supply.

We need to reflect on the comparative advantages of the future, and how we will act on them, so we can respond to these realities. Taking action will require being highly collaborative and better aligned. Capitalizing on our advantages will also take new ideas, skilled people, investment, data, science, technology, infrastructure and the right regulations.

The Forum on Canada’s Agri-Food Future is the place to further this thinking. If these concepts resonate with you, then join us to define what needs to be done to make possible a new reality.

## A three-step process to help shape our future:

### ① UNTIL NOVEMBER 2015

**“So, what is possible?”** We invite fresh ideas. To prompt them, we will pose some initial questions. We want to isolate the underlying principles that can link the food system to a common cause and enable change. We will share the feedback.

#### Questions:

1. Should Canada aim to become *the most trusted food system in the world*?
2. Can we produce all our food in a way that enhances water quality and removes carbon?
3. Will Canada’s food future be largely determined by those outside food supply chains?

### ② THE FORUM NOVEMBER 3 - 4, 2015

**“I can see the possibility.”** By coming together in Ottawa November 3 - 4, 2015, we will hear stories of success, bring compelling ideas forward, and exchange views.

New global and Canadian voices are introduced to inspire dialogue and challenge thinking. New ideas and other perspectives are shared. The principles are tested, refined or reaffirmed. The building blocks for a “change agenda” become evident.

#### Principles:

- Actions build on our comparative advantages. Canada needs to differentiate itself by fully leveraging “natural capital”, “nutrient quality” and “trust”.
- Actions are integrated. Canada needs to embrace intense collaboration across the food system (among supply chains, support sectors and governments).
- Actions are measured. Canada needs good data, shared goals and the right metrics.

### ③ JANUARY 2016

**“I will help make it possible.”** By January 2016, a succinct note is produced that many stakeholders across Canada’s food system could – and will – embrace.

For many, the principles are becoming unassailable: it is vital to the next policy agenda and future sector strategies that we consider these ideas. The status quo is challenged. To resolve: who takes ownership of expressed actions. We avoid “vision statements” and present ideas for a “destination” for Canada – a clearer path and initial objectives.

## About us

The Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute (CAPI) is Canada's national, non-government, independent agri-food policy institute. To enable future success, CAPI provides a neutral place to examine emerging issues facing Canada's food system. We bring leaders together. We provide balanced perspectives. We present strategic choices.



Canada 2020 is Canada's leading independent progressive think tank. Globalization and the digital revolution have changed the policy environment. Today, policy issues are increasingly complex and often highly interdependent. As a result, policymaking requires a high level of collaboration between governments and stakeholders. Canada 2020 seeks to inform and influence debate, and to help redefine federal policymaking from a progressive and collaborative perspective.



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