

The Resilience of Canadian Agri-food Supply Chains

Undeniably, the current COVID-19 pandemic challenges the continuity and resiliency of Canada's food supply chains. The Canadian Agri-food Policy Institute (CAPI), along with primary producers, processors, food transporters, food retailers and food service providers, is collaborating towards policies and best practice recommendations which will help buttress the sector, ensuring it is up to the challenge of helping feed our country.

Many Canadians, now having their first experience of food stockpiling, have a better appreciation of how agri-food supply chains extend beyond full (or now occasionally less-than-full) retail store fronts. Before COVID-19, Canadians' thoughts about agriculture focused primarily on food safety and choice. But now, we more clearly realize that our food be readily available and accessible, as well as being safe and varied.

In recent days, executives of large Canadian retailers have signaled that our food system is well-supplied, and that shortages should not be a concern in the current context. But whether this reality will continue is significantly complicated by the variety and length of Canadian agri-food supply chains. There are many critical points along this chain, and if one link becomes broken, the chain is likely to break down which could result in food shortages.

At CAPI, we realize that generating thoughtful, forward-looking public policy requires a deep understanding of Canada's supply chains, and the various pressures that come to bear on the system when operations are normal, or in times of crisis. Foremost among the policy considerations to keep Canada's agriculture-food systems operating are:

- Maintaining labour availability in spite of sickness, fear or lockdowns affecting processing facilities, transportation, warehousing and farming
- Prioritizing continuity of inspection services and other critical infrastructure
- Aligning transportation services with societal needs, in order to prioritize food over other goods movement
- Keeping borders open for the movement of goods and migrant workers, with fallback plans to become more self-sufficient should the need arise
- Maintaining consumer confidence that the Canadian food system is robust and remains safe

CAPI also continues to focus on the longer-term public policy implications of two important challenges facing Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector:

- Resilience of agri-food systems in a multi-polar global context
- Sustainability of agri-food systems in light of climate change

Our work will continue to demonstrate how the sector provides robust, strategic solutions to the challenges of maintaining safe and reliable food supplies, growing wealth and employment, and providing important environmental goods and services for all Canadians.