



Agriculture and Agri-food Canada's Sustainable Agriculture Strategy (SAS): Recommendations from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA)

The following excerpts are taken from AAFC's discussion document, framing a consultation held early in 2023. This document is available [here](#).¹ Further information on the guiding principles, focal areas and key considerations in the development of the strategy can be found in that discussion document.

“The Government of Canada is proposing to develop a Sustainable Agriculture Strategy, in collaboration with a diversity of partners, to provide an integrated and coordinated approach to improving the agriculture sector's environmental performance and supporting its long-term vitality. A strategy would build on the environmental and innovation successes achieved to date in the sector, leverage opportunities related to increased market focus on sustainable food products, and focus resources to support an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable sector... The development of a Sustainable Agriculture Strategy will focus on the environmental pillar of sustainability of Canada's food system, within the broader context of social and economic challenges and opportunities in the sector. With an integrated strategy that sets a clear path forward for collaborative action, Canada will be well positioned to be a world leader in sustainable agriculture while maintaining its role as a global food provider and contributing to global food security. Such a strategy is intended to guide long-term decision-making on policies, programs, and initiatives that advance Canada's commitment towards a net-zero 2050 future.”

In response to this consultation, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) brought forward a series of recommendations to ensure the SAS is developed and implemented successfully, in a manner that supports ambitious progress while supporting triple-bottom-line sustainability. A selection of key recommendations to this effect are included below:

- 1. Producer Engagement:** Ongoing producer engagement is critical to the success of the Sustainable Agriculture Strategy. As such, we recommend that AAFC continue to involve farmers in the development and implementation of the strategy.
- 2. Triple-bottom-line Sustainability:** The SAS must approach sustainability through an environmental, economic and social lens to ensure decisions around environmental sustainability are not made at the expense of the long-term viability and resilience of Canadian agriculture, the livelihood of producers, or the associated cost of agricultural products for consumers in Canada and abroad. This requires a greater focus on incorporating the value chain into the SAS as potential drivers and key actors within such an enabling environment.
- 3. Productivity and Global Context:** Productivity growth and global context must be central to all facets of the SAS as efficiency in resource use and growing global food demand reflect core drivers of business decision-making and inherently reflect triple-bottom line sustainability.

¹ [Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Sustainable Agriculture Strategy: Discussion Document](#)

4. **De-risking Adoption of BMPs:** The SAS must look to de-risk adoption of climate change mitigation and adaptation practices by creating incentives that fully reflect the value of associated ecosystem services and environmental co-benefits as well as the costs, burdens and potential return on investment, or lack thereof, which accompany their adoption. Such incentives cannot be limited to covering the upfront costs of adoption, as the financial consequences of such investments can span multiple years.
5. **On-Farm Renewable Energy:** The SAS must ensure federal policies and programs adequately support innovation and adoption of on-farm renewable energy sources, placing them on a level footing with other emergent technologies such as hydrogen. By 2050, the SAS should establish clear pathways for Canadian agricultural operations to be an integral part of the national energy system, providing no or low-carbon energy solutions.
6. **Adaptation:** Climate change adaptation at the farm-level is an essential foundation for future progress, and is only possible if all producers have equitable access to risk management supports that evolve to confront climate change through a greater focus on preventing and mitigating the damages of extreme weather events, including infrastructure development.
7. **Extension Services:** Extension services are critical to facilitate the adoption of environmental practices. Adaptation requires research and dissemination of best practices specifically tailored to different climate regions throughout Canada, supported through improved access to trained agronomists.
8. **Biodiversity:** The SAS must recognize the disconnect between public and private benefits associated with many conservation practices and thus tie into frameworks that economically value ecosystem services, such as the work of the Canadian Wetlands Roundtable (CWR). This requires clear focus on creating an enabling environment where incentives, research infrastructure, and Knowledge Transfer and Translation (KTT) are coordinated to align private and public good associated with business decision-making.
9. **Data Strategy:** Data is critical to ensuring evidence-based policy and the SAS must incorporate a clear data governance strategy, developed collaboratively with key stakeholders across government and the private sector, enabling stakeholders to identify gaps and explore the most expedient and effective approaches to addressing those gaps in the future. This strategy should aim to foster a clear and commonly agreed set of definitions, baselines and targets.
10. **Increase funding for research and development. Review regulatory pathways to support innovation and competitiveness:** Increased environmental gains on farm will come through the adoption of new technologies and inputs that are affordable and support productivity. Increased public funds in research and development, coupled with a review of regulatory pathways for these products to be commercialized, will help accelerate the adoption of more sustainable technologies on farm.

Fundamentally, the SAS must create a policy framework that empowers provinces and territories in their efforts to support producers through a flexible cost-sharing framework around which regional



sustainability priorities can be targeted with cost-shared investments, extending beyond SCAP programming agreements and their existing funding envelopes. Many federal programs are not led by AAFC, with ECCC programming requiring similar engagement and support from provincial governments.

This framework should not be limited to government supports but must also look to foster the development of tools to make market-based systems accessible by helping reduce administrative burden that would otherwise impose new and untenable management responsibilities and costs on Canadian producers. For more information on these recommendations, or to discuss these matters further, please contact Scott Ross, Executive Director of the CFA and Co-chair of SAS Advisory Committee at scott@canadian-farmers.ca.