

New report signals importance of environmental targets as Canada aims for agri-food leadership

Ottawa: Oct 29, 2020: Benchmarking environmental footprints of food production and supply is gaining traction across the global agri-food sector and presents Canada with the opportunity to better demonstrate its leadership in sustainable agri-food production, says a new report that examines agri-food industry practices, sector initiatives, food companies and government activities from Canada and abroad.

The report, *Agri-Food Sustainability Targets*, contributes to a dialogue being undertaken by a diverse group of partners in this country to frame-up a new *National Index on Agri-Food Performance*, aimed at developing a set of indicators of performance and progress that could catalyze the country's ambitious agri-food industry growth agenda, respond to changing food expectations and scrutiny and compete on a world stage in years to come.

The report found that many food companies and their supply chains, and some producer organizations, are setting specific targets to responsibly source or supply ingredients, reduce GHG emissions and minimize waste, among other goals. It noted that producers are taking greater interest in appropriate outcomes-based measures, building on an impressive record of on-farm continuous improvement that has significantly enhanced ecosystem benefits and improved economic sustainability. As well, countries are declaring targets to respond to the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Accord for greenhouse gas emissions (and more targets are expected with new global biodiversity goals later in 2020). Canada's competitors, such as the U.S. and the EU, and farm and food organizations abroad are declaring bold targets to improve their environmental performance.

Says David McInnes, who authored this report on behalf of a consortium of partners: "Expressing credible performance targets is clearly becoming a key tool here and worldwide to add economic value, compete and improve the environment".

This paper did not assess the impact of COVID-19 on the food system but at a time when the resilience and environmental sustainability of the food supply is of increasing concern, the report declares that Canada ought to be a global leader in demonstrating its leadership on these matters. Thanks to innovation-adoption and global leading practices and confidence in the regulatory process, Canada's food production system has one of the lowest environmental footprints anywhere. But the bar is rising here and abroad to back up these credentials and mark progress. A consolidated set of metrics is not readily available to show that Canada is among the most environmentally sustainable, safest and reliable global food leaders.

About this project: Over the course of 2020, a coalition of partners is advancing a dialogue on a *National Index on Agri-Food Performance*, a validated benchmark of environmental and other indicators that would be used by the agri-food sector and stakeholders to enable sector competitiveness, demonstrate societal benefits and improve policy. Partners include: Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada, Arrell Food Institute (U. of Guelph), Bayer Crop Science, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Canadian Produce Marketing Association, Canadian Wildlife Federation, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Enterprise Machine Intelligence & Learning Initiative, Environment & Climate Change Canada, Fertilizer Canada, Food, Health & Consumer Products of Canada, Global Institute for Food Security, Loblaw Companies Ltd., Maple Leaf Foods Inc., National Research Council, Nutrien, Protein Industries Canada, Pulse Canada, Standards Council of Canada, Statistics Canada, Syngenta, TrustBIX Inc.

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Selected partner quotes:

Arrell Food Institute (University of Guelph):

“The opportunity to be the global leader in safe and sustainable food is one that Canada should eagerly embrace. We’re uniquely equipped to do so, not only because of our abundant natural resources, but also because of our human resources, reflected in both education and research. This project, which aims to set a national framework for sustainability targets in food, is an important step along the way to the grand vision of Canada’s agri-food leadership,” says Evan Fraser, PhD, Director, Arrell Food Institute & Canada Research Chair, Dept. of Geography, Environment, and Geomatics, University of Guelph

Canadian Produce Marketing Association:

“Recent events, and the globalization of the food supply, underscore the need to demonstrate the sustainability of the food we produce; the opportunity to do so via a national index is foundational to the ongoing success of the sector”, says Ron Lemaire, President, Canadian Produce Marketing Association.

Canadian Wildlife Federation:

“Canada’s ace up its sleeve on agri-food sustainability targets is the millions of acres of native grassland, tame pasture and hay lands, forests, hedgerows, wetlands, lakes and streams that occur on our farmlands, which provide habitat for many thousands of wildlife species, from tiny pollinators to birds and large mammals. The stewardship of these lands by producers – and demonstrating this – should be part of our story,” says Carolyn Callaghan, Senior Conservation Biologist for Terrestrial Wildlife, Canadian Wildlife Federation.

Enterprise Machine Intelligence and Learning Initiative (EMILI):

“Canada is a global leader in agri-food. We produce and process some of the most safe, nutritious and reliable food in the world. Outcomes-based measures and benchmarking will further substantiate our brand claims around the world. The use of data in developing these benchmarks is an essential component and this work underscores the exponential value of agri-food data”, says Ray Bouchard, Board Chair, Enterprise Machine Intelligence and Learning Initiative (EMILI) Manitoba.

Food, Health & Consumer Products of Canada:

"This report is a key reminder of the continued importance of environmental considerations within Canada’s larger growth agenda for the agri-sector,” explains Food, Health & Consumer Products of Canada CEO Michael Graydon. “Canadian food production remains strong from an environmental perspective but this report confirms that successes must be measured and shown effective for us to effectively compete on a world stage. Combining these environmental efforts with steps to develop and diversify markets, investing in innovation and developing a modern regulatory and infrastructure network are critical to Canada fully achieving its stated economic goals.”

Global Institute for Food Security:

“Data and metrics play a significant role in tracking and improving environmental measures in the agriculture sector and can help enhance Canada’s reputation as a trusted, safe and sustainable food leader”, Global Institute for Food Security Chief Executive Officer Steven R. Webb says. “The recommendations in this report highlight the environmental, social and economic benefits of national index targets and deliberate resource

investments will provide to Canada’s food production systems, making them more competitive, creditworthy, innovative and responsive on both the domestic and international stage.”

Loblaw Companies Ltd.:

“Loblaw is committed to reducing its environmental impact and helping to build a resilient food sector. Through continuous improvements, setting measurable targets and investing in our communities, we strive to embed accountability and best practices across our company, brands and through our supply chains. We believe that a national benchmark for agri-food sustainability in Canada will help advance these efforts and continue to build trust in our food systems both locally and globally,” says Jennifer Lambert, Sr. Manager, Sustainability, Loblaw Companies Ltd.

Standards Council of Canada:

“Creating a consensus-based framework of performance indicators is an effective way to influence Canada’s sustainability ranking and demonstrate Canadian leadership. SCC supports the project and will look to leverage the established knowledge and tools of the national and international standardization network to help develop Canada’s National Agri-Food Index.” Chantal Guay, CEO, Standards Council of Canada.

Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada:

“The Government of Canada recognizes the Canadian agriculture and agri-food community for their innovation and commitment towards protecting the environment while ensuring food security for all Canadians, including supporting the development of a benchmark to help the sector demonstrate our global leadership in sustainable food production.” – The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food