



ELECTION 2025: CULTIVATING RESILIENCY

ELECTION PRIORITIES OF CANADA'S FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS

MARCH 2025

ABOUT THE FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS OF CANADA

The Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC), formerly the Canadian Horticultural Council, is a national, Ottawa-based, not-for-profit association representing growers through its member associations. Together, these growers produce over 120 types of crops on more than 14,000 farms, with a farm gate value of \$8 billion. Since 1922, FVGC has advocated for Canada's fresh produce sector—promoting healthy, sustainable food and supporting the sector's long-term success and growth.

A TIPPING POINT: MAKING FOOD SECURITY A NATIONAL PRIORITY

As sweeping US tariffs and threats of annexation push Canada to a tipping point, the fruit and vegetable sector – deeply reliant on cross-border trade – stands among the most vulnerable.

The Canadian fruit and vegetable sector is essential to domestic food security and to Canada's agricultural economy. With 97 percent of farms being family-owned and operated, the sector is a driving force for both economic growth and the stability of rural communities.

However, with **47.5 percent of Canada's fruit and vegetable production**, and **91.5 percent of total exports** destined for the United States, our sector is vulnerable to cross-border trade disruptions and irritants.

Unlike other agricultural sectors, fruit and vegetable production is particularly vulnerable to trade disruptions due to the perishability of its products, labour-intensive requirements, and complex supply chains that depend on stable relationships and consistent market access.

With one in five Canadian households struggling with food insecurity, food bank use at record highs, and US tariffs threatening to upend Canada's fruit and vegetable sector, protecting and growing our ability to feed Canadians and help feed the world must be a clearly articulated priority of all parties vying for support in this election.

Between now and April 28, when Canadians head to the polls, all federal parties and their leaders must articulate their vision and plans for growing our resilience and competitiveness -- we believe that it must start with a clear acknowledgement of the need to make food security a national priority.

These are our recommendations.

1. APPLYING A FOOD LENS TO POLICYMAKING

THE ISSUE

In today's complex policy and political landscape, marked by climate change, global trade disruptions, and rising production costs, government policies on issues like taxation, labour, climate action, or infrastructure can directly or indirectly impact Canadian agriculture.

From gender analysis to equity and climate change, the Government of Canada is no stranger to the development of public policy through dedicated policy prisms. These tools aim to ensure policies consider the full range of social, environmental, and economic effects across different populations. While each of these speaks to important policy considerations, few things are more fundamental to the well-being of individuals, families, communities, and nations than food security.

But without a food lens, well-intended policies can exacerbate food insecurity, limit farm profitability, or hinder innovation. By integrating food security into decision-making, Canada can better balance environmental goals, economic growth, and food system resilience, ensuring that policies support, rather than undermine, farmers and the broader agri-food sector. A structured, transparent, evidence-based approach, such as requiring an annual report to Parliament, would strengthen due diligence and accountability across departments and help prevent unintended impacts on food production and supply chains.

Applying a food lens to policy development would mean having the Government of Canada – and ultimately all governments -- elevate food security as a national priority.

KEY FACTS

- **Food Security Lacks a Dedicated Policy Lens:** While tools like Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) are used across government to assess social impacts, there is no equivalent framework for agriculture or food security, despite its national importance.
- **Policy Impacts Are Not Neutral:** Decisions on issues such as transportation rules and immigration policies directly affect fruit and vegetable producers, often with unintended negative consequences.

- **Sector Vulnerability Is Increasing:** With climate disruptions, rising input costs, and tight labour markets, the margin for error in agriculture is shrinking—yet policies are still developed without sector-specific analysis.
- **The Public Expects Action on Food Security:** Canadians care about access to affordable, fresh, domestically grown produce. But without policies that support growers, food security goals are harder to achieve.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A food lens would ensure that cost-benefit analysis of policy initiatives examined their impact on agricultural production and that any trade-offs were transparent. For example, revisiting current Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) practices and policies through a food lens would ensure that regulations considered and measured their impact on food production, quality and diversity against other policy objectives.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **The Government of Canada should apply a food lens to all key policies to ensure food security, sector sustainability, and public health.** A yearly report on its application should be tabled before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food to enhance transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making on agriculture and food-related issues nationwide.

2. FIXING A FRAYED SAFETY NET

As the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food noted in its 2024 report, *Improving the Resilience of Canada's Horticultural Sector*, the current suite of Business Risk Management (BRM) programs needs an urgent overhaul.

Extreme weather events—including droughts, floods, wildfires, hailstorms, and early frosts—have increasingly threatened Canada's fruit and vegetable growers. These climate-related challenges disrupt production cycles, reduce yields, and cause significant financial strain for producers. The extraordinary disruption to Canada's trade relationship with the United States has made these vulnerabilities even more acute.

THE ISSUE

Canada's five BRM programs were designed to provide a safety net for farmers facing different risks. However, these programs have proven inadequate for the unique needs and challenges of the fruit and vegetable sector, particularly in the face of sudden,

unpredictable trade disruptions such as the new tariffs that the United States government threatens to impose.

As each day passes without addressing the gaps in Canada's safety net system, more agri-businesses face financial uncertainty. This uncertainty compounds the negative impact of tariff-related market loss by putting investments on hold and causing supply chains to unravel.

The current crisis should not result only in stopgap measures; rather, it must also invite a strategic and in-depth review and re-think of programs whose time has passed. In the current context, there is an opportunity to not only improve the suite of BRM safety net programs but also expand them to mitigate risk exposure.

Specifically, we view the current crisis as an opportunity to modernize our thinking and move from a BRM paradigm to Business Risk Management and Mitigation (BRMM) one. Enhancing programs with a range of robust risk mitigation measures, such as enhanced funding for pest management programs, weather-indexed insurance, investments in proactive on-farm risk reduction approaches and infrastructure, and market diversification would reduce risks associated with fruit and vegetable production, perishability, and grow sector resiliency.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The need for immediate action cannot be overstated. While BRM programs are slated for review in 2028, their demonstrated unsuitability calls for an accelerated timeline, including immediate steps to support Canada's fruit and vegetable growers navigate the market uncertainty caused by the imposition of US tariffs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- FVGC is releasing an in-depth report and recommendations on tariff-related adaptation measures and BRM modernization on April 1.

3. SECURING TRADE COMPETITIVENESS FOR CANADA'S FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SECTOR

Canada's fruit and vegetable growers produce over \$8 billion in farm-gate value annually and contribute nearly \$15 billion to Canada's GDP through direct, indirect, and induced activity. With 97% of farms family-owned, the sector is a key driver of rural economic development and food security. But this engine of economic activity is now at risk.

As input costs rise and global trade tensions escalate, Canadian growers are increasingly vulnerable. With 46% of production—and 92% of exports—destined for the United States,

even modest trade disruptions can destabilize farm businesses and limit access to international markets. The recent resurgence of U.S. tariff threats has underscored how exposed the sector is to geo-political and economic shocks beyond its control. Eliminating the threat of tariffs and establishing clear, sector-specific support in the event of future trade actions must be top priorities.

Unlike other agricultural sectors, the fruit and vegetable industry has limited tools to manage volatility, due to the perishability of products, intensive labour requirements, and just-in-time supply chains.

THE ISSUE

Canada's fruit and vegetable sector is uniquely exposed to trade disruptions. Perishable goods can't sit indefinitely in warehouses or be rerouted through alternative markets. When delays or tariffs occur, crops spoil and markets are lost—sometimes permanently.

Trade agreements and regulatory regimes often overlook the unique needs of horticulture. At the same time, Canadian growers must compete against imports produced under different regulatory, labour, and environmental conditions—often at lower cost—while bearing rising domestic compliance costs.

Without targeted policy support to improve competitiveness and safeguard market access, growers risk losing both export opportunities and domestic shelf space.

KEY FACTS

- **Canada's Produce Exports Are Concentrated and Exposed:** With 97% of exports going to the U.S., the sector is highly sensitive to even short-term trade tensions. Growers have limited access to alternative markets when disruptions occur.
- **The Sector Lacks Equivalent Trade Safeguards:** Unlike some other agricultural industries, fruit and vegetable producers do not have regulatory compensation mechanisms for emergency pests/diseases that have major trade implications, nor strong import controls or supply management tools to shield them from sudden market shocks.
- **Tariff Threats Are Real and Growing:** Ongoing U.S. protectionist policies and current and past tariff actions (e.g., steel/aluminum retaliation) highlight the sector's vulnerability to being caught in broader trade disputes.
- **Horticulture Faces Asymmetrical Competition:** Imported produce can arrive from jurisdictions with lower labour standards, lower minimum wage, environmental

regulations, or production costs—placing Canadian growers at a competitive disadvantage.

- **No Quick Fixes for Disruption:** Because of perishability, growers start with a limited negotiating power and just-in-time delivery models, even minor trade delays can result in lost markets, spoiled products, and significant financial loss.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To protect competitiveness and ensure long-term food security, the federal government must act in three key areas:

1. **Ensure Horticulture Is Reflected in Trade Policy.** Canada’s trade agreements and enforcement tools must recognize the unique challenges of horticulture, including perishability, seasonality, and export concentration. The sector must have a dedicated voice in trade negotiation consultative mechanisms and more responsive processes to address non-tariff barriers as these arise. Safeguarding Canada’s status as a sovereign trading nation, relies on Canadian agriculture policy and negotiations that do not permanently entrench one group’s rights over another.
2. **Improve Monitoring and Safeguards for Import Surges.** Canada should implement a fair and responsive framework for tracking import pressures and providing support to growers when they face unfair competition or market shocks.
3. **Offset Rising Domestic Costs Through Targeted Competitiveness Programs.** Horticulture producers face increasing cost pressures from domestic regulations, including requirements related to labour, transportation, and packaging. These costs directly affect growers’ ability to compete with imports from jurisdictions with lower standards. Targeted federal programs are needed to help offset these rising expenses and ensure Canadian-grown fruits and vegetables remain viable and affordable in both domestic and export markets.

WHY THESE SOLUTIONS MATTER

Canadian growers compete globally but operate locally. They produce safe, high-quality food, support rural economies, and contribute billions to the national economy. But without strong trade protections and competitiveness policies, we risk ceding more market share to imports—reducing Canada’s ability to feed itself, limiting rural economic opportunity, and threatening the long-term viability of our domestic food system.

4. ENSURING LABOUR STABILITY FOR CANADA'S FRESH PRODUCE SECTOR

Labour shortages are one of the most urgent threats to the availability, affordability, and diversity of Canadian-grown fruits and vegetables. Without urgent improvements to international worker programs, growers will be unable to secure the workforce they need to harvest perishable crops—leading to higher food prices, more waste, and increased reliance on imports.

THE ISSUE

Horticulture is the most intensive labour sector in agriculture. Wages and related employment costs make up over 40 percent of total production expenses for fruit and vegetable operations. Despite continued efforts to recruit domestic workers, nearly 29 percent of jobs on fruit and vegetable farms went unfilled in 2023, resulting in \$3.5 billion in lost sales (Source: Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, 2024).

When growers can't access sufficient labour, they face financial strain, reduced crop yields, and disrupted supply chains. These pressures not only hurt growers' businesses but also reduce the amount of fresh, Canadian-grown produce available to consumers, leading to higher prices and fewer choices at the grocery store.

KEY FACTS

- **Labour Shortages Are Growing:** Even with continued access to international workers, the sector is projected to face a shortfall of 30,000 workers by 2030.
- **Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) Are Essential:** Over 60,000 seasonal and temporary workers from other countries support Canadian fruit and vegetable farms annually through four Primary Agriculture streams of the TFW Program—including the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Ag Stream—filling positions left vacant despite domestic hiring efforts.
- **Processing Delays Hurt Growers:** Approval processes for work permits and employment authorizations (known as Labour Market Impact Assessments) can take 6 to 8 weeks or longer, causing late worker arrivals, missed harvest windows, and preventable crop losses.

Without a reliable workforce, Canada risks losing domestic production capacity—undermining food security, rural economic development, and trade opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Streamline Work Permit Processing

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) must establish clear service

standards for processing work permits related to food production. Delays and administrative errors are currently holding up worker arrivals, which results in serious consequences for growers and food supply.

2. Preserve and Strengthen the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP)

SAWP has operated for more than 50 years through bilateral agreements with participating countries. It is a proven model that includes annual reviews and strong accountability mechanisms. Canada should build on this success when making reforms to other temporary worker programs, instead of creating new or duplicative processes.

3. Recalibrate Oversight and Enforcement Practices

Recent shifts in how employment inspections are conducted—by both Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)—have led to a “guilty-until-proven-innocent” approach. For growers who are following all the rules and are long-standing participants, this causes unnecessary delays and costs. Oversight must protect workers’ rights while ensuring fair, timely treatment for employers acting in good faith.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Growers cannot produce fresh fruits and vegetables without reliable access to workers. Streamlining processes, protecting proven programs like SAWP, and restoring balance in enforcement will help ensure timely access to labour—while protecting both workers and employers. The result: more Canadian-grown food on store shelves, stronger farm businesses, and more stable food prices for Canadian families.

5. PROVIDING ACCESS TO A RANGE OF EFFECTIVE CROP PROTECTION TOOLS

Fruit and vegetable growers require effective crop protection tools to tackle pest pressures from the environment (weeds, insects, and diseases). Without such tools, our sector would not be able to supply plentiful, nutritious, and affordable produce to Canadians, which in turn would lead to higher food prices, increased reliance on imports, and ultimately greater food insecurity.

THE ISSUE

There is an urgent need for access to an increased range of modern and innovative crop protection tools as many of the products once relied upon have been cancelled or have lost / reduced effectiveness in the field. This urgency is underscored by the unprecedented demand for the emergency use registration program – a program that was created to address crisis pest outbreaks when existing tools are insufficient.

Canadian growers rely on two government agencies to access crop protection tools.

- **Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Pest Management Centre (PMC)** plays a critical role in ensuring Canadian growers are equipped with effective and safe pest management tools by supporting product registrations through research. Since PMC's inception, FVGC estimates that over 3,000 new uses have been registered in Canada for fruit and vegetable crops.
- **Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA)** is the federal body responsible for science-based regulation of crop protection tools in Canada. Core activities of the PMRA include issuance of product registrations and re-evaluating a registered product's risk profile every 15 years.

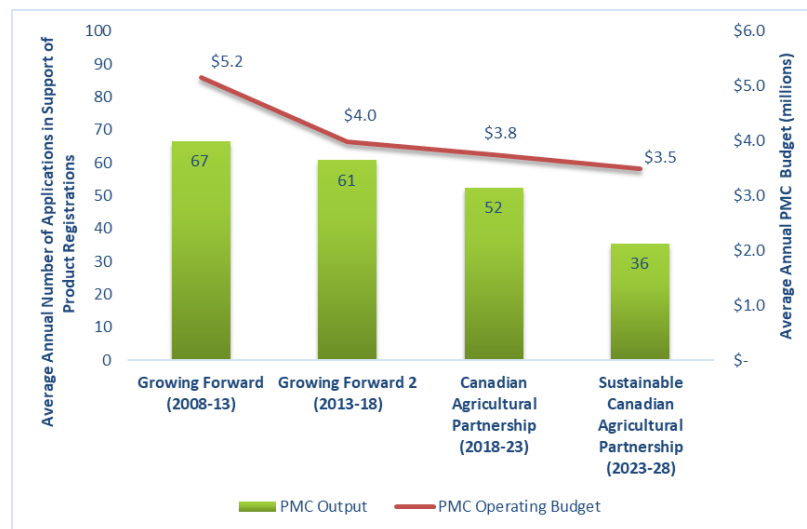
As pest management becomes increasingly complex from increased pest pressures and economic impacts from the pandemic (e.g. inflation), it is essential that the government ensures the PMRA and PMC are equipped and empowered to be engaged partners in developing practical solutions for growers. Otherwise, the ability of our sector to safeguard the domestic supply chain will suffer.

KEY FACTS

Fruit and vegetable growers are facing reduced access to crop protection tools for a number of reasons including:

- **Significant delays in bringing new products to market.** In Canada, all crop protection products are reviewed by Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) to ensure they pose minimal risk to human health and the environment. Given their complexity, reviews can be time consuming, however registration timelines are now commonly not meeting performance standards set by the PMRA. For example, applications for new products (Cat. A) are taking 3 to 4 years to complete instead of the standard of two years.
- **Removal without suitable alternatives being identified.** Unfavourable regulatory decisions coupled with product withdrawals have created a significant deficit in the crop protection toolbox of fruit and vegetable growers. When such decisions are made, there has been little consideration to identify suitable alternatives for the fruit and vegetable sector. Instead, growers have been left to fend for themselves with fewer and fewer tools at their disposal.

- Lack of investment from the private sector.** The Canadian market for crop protection tools is small, representing just 3.7% of the world market. Yet the cost to do business in Canada is more cumbersome in comparison to the United States or other trading partners. Additionally, due to their smaller scale of production, fruit and vegetable crops lack financial interest from the private sector to register new products.
- Prolonged underfunding to government programs that support registration and adoption of new tools.** To address the unique challenges facing the fruit and vegetable sector, the federal government created the Pest Management Centre (PMC) Minor Use Pesticide Program within Agriculture and Agri-food Canada in 2003. Through this program, researchers located across Canada have supported the registration of crop protection tools by studying their effectiveness, integrative use and residue profiles. Unfortunately, this program is now producing about half the output from a decade ago due to funding limitations.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase capacity and output of the Minor Use Pesticide Program by:
 - ✓ Restoring research capacity at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Pest Management Centre.
 - ✓ Provide additional resources at Health Canada’s Pest Management Regulatory Agency to process minor use label expansions.
- Incentivize companies to bring their technologies to Canada by:
 - ✓ Reducing red-tape and costs to conduct business.

- ✓ Creating efficiencies through collaboration with international partners and common standards.
3. Allocation and prioritization of resources at Health Canada’s PMRA for activities which directly support the timely delivery of new crop protection tools to growers.
- ✓ New registrations
 - ✓ Collection of real-world data
 - ✓ Re-evaluations and special reviews

WHY THIS MATTERS?

Crop protection is about reducing food waste, and improving access, affordability, and reliability of safe, nutritious and sustainably grown fresh fruit and vegetables along the supply chain from farmers to consumers. Canadian fruit and vegetable growers rely on crop protection products to help control diseases, insect pests, weeds, and invasive species. Without timely access to crop protection tools, the quality, value and yield of our crops will fall, leading to more imports and weakened food security.

CULTIVATING RESILIENCY, PROTECTING FOOD SECURITY

Canada’s fruit and vegetable growers are at a crossroads. Amid rising costs, shifting climate conditions, labour shortages, and new trade barriers, the foundation of Canada’s fresh produce sector, and with it, our national food security, is under pressure like never before.

We cannot afford to treat food production as an afterthought. Every policy decision, from taxation and labour regulations to trade and infrastructure, has the power to strengthen or weaken our food system. We need federal leaders who understand this reality and are ready to act.

This election is a critical moment to reaffirm our shared commitment to growing more of what we eat, here at home. Canada can build a more resilient, competitive, and sustainable fruit and vegetable sector by prioritizing food security, strengthening our agricultural safety nets, and ensuring that growers can access the labour and tools they need.

Now is the time for bold leadership. The Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada urge all parties and candidates to commit to practical, forward-looking solutions that will protect our ability to feed Canadians—today and for generations to come.



Contact Us

We welcome your feedback, questions, and engagement as we work together to shape the future of Canada's fruit and vegetable sector. If you would like more information on our 2025 federal election platform, or if you have any questions about FVGC's work and advocacy, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

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