Submission on Food Security in Canada

Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry (AGFO)

Study on the role of the agriculture and agri-food sector with regard to food security in Canada

Submitted by

the Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC)

FRUIT & VEGETABLE GROWERS OF CANADA | PRODUCTEURS DE FRUITS ET LÉGUMES DU CANADA

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OVERVIEW: Strong domestic production is essential to food security

The Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada (FVGC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry (AGFO) for its current study on the role of the agriculture and agri-food sector regarding food security in Canada.

FVGC recommends the Committee make the long-term viability of domestic fruit and vegetable production a central priority of its food security study. Canadians need reliable access to safe, nutritious and affordable food, and that requirement means growers must be supported by domestic retail and processors, and governments, in a manner that helps them remain profitable, invest in their operations and continue supplying Canadian markets through climate, labour and trade disruptions.

FVGC welcomed the June 2026 National Food Security Strategy and its focus on domestic horticultural production, processing, distribution and regulatory efficiency. We are also supportive of the Prime Minister's Plan for a Stronger Canada, and we look forward to our ongoing engagement with the Senate and with Parliament as we work to implement a national agenda to improve Canadian sovereignty. We thank the Government of Canada and Parliamentarians for their work supporting our sector during these uncertain times.

FVGC represents growers producing more than 120 commodities, including apples, tender fruit, grapes, berries, field vegetables, potatoes and greenhouse vegetables. This submission draws directly on the September 3, 2026, joint pre-budget submission of FVGC and the Canadian Potato Council (CPC) and builds on FVGC's previous remarks to this Committee and to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Summary of recommendations

1. Embed a food lens across federal decision-making, including the Cabinet Directive on Regulation, and ensure this food lens includes economic support for primary production;

2. Deliver timely access to effective crop protection tools and restore the Minor Use Pesticide Program's capacity;

3. Modernize business risk management and invest in prevention through a dedicated horticulture capital fund;

4. Maintain CUSMA's benefits for primary production, protect perishable produce during trade disruptions and strengthen domestic processing and distribution;

5. Preserve reliable agricultural labour programs and invest in worker well-being and rural infrastructure; and

6. Make agricultural water security an explicit priority in the developing National Water Security Strategy and align it with food security objectives.

Recommendation 1: Apply a food lens across federal decision making

The National Food Security Strategy aims to increase the domestically produced share of healthy food available to Canadians from 75 per cent to 85 per cent by 2032. It also recognizes that regulatory delays and unnecessary costs can discourage investment and increase reliance on imported food. Achieving its objectives requires decisions throughout government, and levels of government, to support Canada's capacity to grow food.

FVGC recommends the Committee call for a food lens in federal policy, regulatory and program decisions, including an amendment to the Cabinet Directive on Regulation. Departments should assess effects of legislative and regulatory directives on domestic production, grower competitiveness, farm viability, access to nutritious food, avoidable food waste and lost market access. Assessments should consider cumulative impacts across departments and explain how any adverse effects will be addressed.

The Strategy's commitment to incorporate food security and food costs into Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and pesticide regulatory decision-making is an important step, and we appreciated the Government of Canada's understanding of these foundational requirements. We recommend that implementation include clear guidance, transparent assessments and adequate resources, and we remain eager to help government draft appropriate and effective plans for moving forward.

We understand and appreciate the government's commitment to food security, and we know government appreciates the urgency to take steps before production capacity is lost. FVGC and its members are equally committed to protecting human health and the environment as a core requirement.

We also appreciate the National Food Security Strategy's commitment of $750 million, over seven years, to the Controlled Environment Agriculture Growth Pathway. FVGC appreciates the government's investment plan, and the technology adoption and local production streams provide an important opportunity to improve efficiency and expand production. The proposed horticulture fund would address complementary needs across field, orchard and greenhouse operations. Together, these investments should reduce exposure to future losses and support commercially viable Canadian production.

Recommendation 2: Ensure growers have effective crop protection tools

Timely access to effective crop protection tools is directly relevant to the quantity, quality and cost of Canadian-grown food, because pests, diseases, weeds and invasive species can reduce marketable yields and cause food losses. As Marcus Janzen, FVGC President, underscored in his June 9, 2026, Agriculture and Agrifood Committee testimony, growers need science-based decisions that reflect actual farm conditions while maintaining health and environmental protection.

We were pleased to see the Strategy set targets to eliminate CFIA and Pesticides Regulatory Directorate (PRD) approval backlogs by the end of 2026, and we appreciate the commitment to reduce average future approval times by at least one third. We look forward to working with Parliament on reporting that progress has been achieved for the sector.

To continue the positive momentum from the government's actions, FVGC recommends the Committee call on the federal government to:

- Increase the Minor Use Pesticide Program budget by $7 million annually to restore capacity to Growing Forward 2008–2013 levels, as requested in our September pre-budget submission to Finance Canada;
- Prioritize PRD resources for registration applications, including minor uses, and publish performance against service standards and the Strategy's approval targets;
- Use real-world evidence, including actual use patterns, residue data and grower input, in risk-based assessments;
- Support scientific cooperation with trusted jurisdictions, and
- Provide adequate regulatory and scientific capacity without relying on increased cost recovery to fund the food security commitment.

Recommendation 3: Protect production through improvements to risk management and investment funding

Food security depends on farms being able to recover from losses and prepare for future risks. Our September pre-budget submission describes sustained pressure from production costs, labour constraints, farm-gate prices, extreme weather and market uncertainty. Repeated losses can weaken the financial capacity needed to plant the next crop, retain workers or invest in resilience.

In FVGC's testimony to this Committee on March 12, 2026, Mike Chromczak, Vice-Chair of FVGC Business Risk Management Working Group, emphasized the importance of predictable operating credit and stronger risk management. Catherine Lessard, Chair of FVGC's Business Risk Management Working Group, highlighted the role of research and innovative practices in adapting to extreme weather.

We recommend that federal programs address horticulture's perishability, regional differences and production systems, including greenhouses. As such, FVGC recommends the Committee call for federal action, in cooperation with provinces and territories where appropriate, to:

- Permanently restore the AgriStability trigger to 85% of the reference margin, and review reference margin calculations to account for increasingly frequent extreme weather;
- Permanently increase the advance payment percentage to 75%, the compensation rate to 90%, and the maximum payment limit to $6 million;
- Expand affordable AgriInsurance coverage to all fruit and vegetable producers, including greenhouse production, with coverage adapted to horticulture;
- Replace AgriRecovery with a more flexible and effective disaster loss model that delivers timely support;
- Permanently increase the interest-free portion of the Advance Payments Program to $350,000, with extended repayment terms, while also examining low-cost financing alternatives, such as providing direct support through improved AgriInvest account top-ups, and
- Give provinces and territories greater flexibility to tailor delivery to regional production, climate and marketing conditions.

Invest before losses occur

FVGC also recommends a dedicated horticulture capital fund for proactive investment in water management, storage and processing, food safety, climate adaptation, applied research and innovation, and plant pest and disease preparedness. This would complement, rather than replace, effective income protection and disaster assistance.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen trade resilience and domestic market options

Canada's food sovereignty depends on retaining the capacity to produce food and make choices about its food system. Predictable trade supports that capacity by providing markets, inputs and complementary supplies. We understand trade uncertainty is not something Canada has chosen, and we appreciate the government's ongoing efforts to stabilize our trading relationship with our largest trading partner while expanding opportunities around the world. For our sector, the US market is responsible for more than 98 per cent of the international trade we undertake, largely because of the perishable nature of our products.

FVGC therefore seeks increased investment to help increase domestic production alongside stable trading relationships. Perishable fruit and vegetables require particular attention because market-ready crops will spoil if held at the border waiting for market disruptions to be resolved.

FVGC supports the government's efforts to maintain the Canada–United States–Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) and the predictable market access it provides. We appreciate the inclusion of horticulture's specific requirements in trade negotiations and diversification initiatives, and we ask Canada to continue monitoring of import surges, including any potential dumping and non-compliant imports, and we ask Canada to continue to pursue regulatory alignment or equivalent import standards to support fair competition.

FVGC is also calling for:

- A planned, targeted relief for border closures, tariffs and inspection delays;
- A market stabilization fund for affected growers, and
- Competitiveness supports for efficiency, digital agriculture and greenhouse modernization.

Federal capacity for phytosanitary inspections, export certification, pest surveillance and import oversight must be protected. We continue to call on government to reverse the decision to end the Destination Inspection Service, as our sector needs to preserve its contribution to fair trading and dispute resolution.

Connect growers to processing and distribution investments

The National Food Security Strategy identifies gaps in domestic fruit and vegetable processing and dependence on imported preserved produce, and the recent announcement of a 10-year, $1 billion Food-Link Fund, as well as initiatives to increase investments in processing, and an Agri-food Project Finance Fund delivered by Farm Credit Canada, are all welcome initiatives to move forward on FVGC's call to expand domestic processing, storage and market options.

We encourage the Committee to recommend implementation efforts explicitly address horticulture: processing capacity suited to Canadian crops; accessible cold storage and

distribution; and food terminals and hubs that give growers more buyers and independent retailers more supply options.

Project selection should assess credible grower supply, commercial demand, operating viability and the potential to reduce spoilage. Expanded processing must be matched to suitable crops, varieties and production arrangements.

In our view, it's critical competition and affordability objectives reinforce viable farm-gate returns. Lower consumer prices cannot sustainably depend on growers absorbing costs that make continued production unsustainable. The Strategy's focus on wholesale alternatives, food hubs and public procurement can create more direct routes from Canadian farms to consumers and institutions, and we trust the Committee will seek evidence these investments are expanding market access for growers, including smaller producers, and that they are improving consumer access.

Recommendation 5: Secure agricultural labour and improve access to food

Reliable labour is a condition of food production. Many fruit and vegetable crops require planting, harvesting and packing within narrow seasonal windows; greenhouse operations also depend on workers throughout continuous production cycles. Delays in worker arrivals or uncertainty in program administration can translate directly into lost crops and reduced supply.

Catherine Lessard's remarks to this Committee described losses of asparagus and lettuce in Quebec during the pandemic when workers were unavailable to harvest them. This illustrates why agricultural labour policy must be considered through a food security lens. Automation and research can improve productivity, but growers also need predictable access to the workers required by their production systems.

FVGC recommends that the Committee call on the government to:

- Preserve and strengthen the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Agricultural Stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, including greater flexibility in worker transfers;
- Improve transparency, communication and service standards across the federal departments administering agricultural labour programs; reduce delays, red tape and uncertainty;
- Remove the Job Bank advertising requirement for agricultural labour;
- Ensure compliance inspections protect workers while providing fair, timely and consistent treatment for compliant employers, and
- Invest in worker housing, access to health services, transportation and other rural infrastructure that support recruitment, retention and worker well-being.

Link a stronger food supply to household and community access

The National Food Security Strategy addresses household affordability, community food infrastructure and Indigenous food sovereignty, alongside domestic production. Its food hubs and rural and northern production stream offer opportunities to improve access to fresh produce where conventional supply chains are costly or unreliable.

Our view is the Committee can be an important voice in ensuring these initiatives are designed for the communities they serve, including measures to respect Indigenous rights and self-determination, and with commitment to assess ongoing operating costs, energy, water, skills and transport needs. If properly conceived, locally appropriate production should complement reliable supply from Canadian growers elsewhere.

Additionally, public procurement – especially for programs such as school lunch programs or other nutritional programming – can help connect producers with schools and other institutions through practical aggregation and distribution arrangements. Measures of success the committee could seek include affordability and reliable access, as well as production and infrastructure outputs.

Recommendation 6: Make water security a foundation of food security

Reliable access to water of suitable quality is indispensable to fruit and vegetable production. Drought, flooding and deteriorating water quality can compromise crops, interrupt operations and undermine investment. Strengthening Canada's capacity to feed itself therefore requires sustained attention to agricultural water needs and the freshwater ecosystems on which production depends.

The Canada Water Agency's Public Engagement Toward a National Water Security Strategy explicitly connects water security with food security and identifies irrigation innovation as an opportunity to improve crop resilience. We're pleased the government recognizes the importance of this issue and that it also recognizes water quantity, quality, ecosystem health and the management of both shortages and excess water. The engagement document identifies the critical links between water security and food security, and we are eager to work with government on these issues as part of the National Food Security Strategy, among related federal initiatives.

We look forward to ongoing engagement on the National Water Security Strategy, and our recommendations are intended to inform its development around the vital need for agricultural production's protection in the strategy.

FVGC recommends the Committee call on the Canada Water Agency and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, with relevant partners, to:

- Explicitly recognize reliable, sustainable water supplies for food production as a national water security priority, and align the developing strategy with domestic food production and food sovereignty objectives;
- Include fruit and vegetable growers in identifying regional water risks, investment needs and practical implementation measures;
- Support investments in efficient irrigation, water storage, drainage and flood resilience, water quality protection, and appropriate treatment and reuse technologies, and connect this work to the dedicated horticulture capital fund proposed;
- Improve accessible monitoring and forecasting of surface water, groundwater, drought and flood risks so growers can make informed production and investment decisions, and

- Support applied research and extension on water efficiency and climate adaptation across field, orchard and greenhouse systems, with outcomes measured in both water stewardship and reliable food production.

Water management is a shared responsibility, and partnership with provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments will be critical. Locally informed, watershed-based approaches can help safeguard agricultural production while sustaining freshwater ecosystems and the needs of communities.

For FVGC, we ask the committee to encourage water investments, as farmers and growers consider these investments as national food security investments. Reducing the risk of crop losses and production interruptions would support the National Food Security Strategy's objectives and help protect the domestic capacity on which Canada's food sovereignty depends.

Implementation and accountability

FVGC recommends the Committee call for a coordinated implementation plan for the National Food Security Strategy, with clear departmental responsibilities, timelines and public reporting. Reporting should distinguish announced funding from delivered investments and measure whether growers can access programs and whether domestic production and food access improve.

In addition to the Strategy's existing targets, we would encourage the committee to recommend implementation track regulatory service performance, access to crop protection tools, timeliness of risk management payments, labour processing reliability, horticultural investment and reduced exposure to water-related losses.

Food availability indicators, once available, will help distinguish domestic production from the portion reaching Canadian consumers, while recognizing the role of viable export markets. And, any assistance the committee can provide to ensure coordination with the developing water strategy will be appreciated.

The Committee can strengthen food security by recommending policies that keep Canadian farms viable, enable investment before disasters occur and connect growers with dependable markets. Canadians' access to Canadian-grown fruits and vegetables depends on the decisions governments make about production today.

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