



Fall Harvest 2020 Event Report *November 2-5, 2020*



FALL HARVEST MOISSON D'AUTOMNE

Produce and Politics
Fruits, légumes et politiques

Introduction

This year marked the ninth edition of CPMA and CHC's annual Fall Harvest event, which has become a political mainstay on Parliament Hill. As has been the case in a multitude of areas in 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic posed major challenges and changes for our organizations' advocacy work, particularly in planning the Fall Harvest event.

Throughout the pandemic, both Associations have been heavily involved in advocating for the industry's needs, to keep borders open and the supply chain moving, allow entry of temporary foreign workers, develop and promote safety protocols, urge government to establish funding to lessen financial burdens resulting from the pandemic, and much more.

Moving to a virtual format for the first time, CHC and CPMA strived to ensure Fall Harvest 2020 offered the elements attendees are accustomed to, including issue overviews, panel discussions, team gatherings, and networking, while also leveraging new opportunities to allow a broader membership group to participate and grow our Parliamentary audience. Over the course of the week, we met with 41 Parliamentarians and other key government officials to advocate for our industry's needs and priorities, including our efforts to move forward into post-COVID economic recovery.

Our organizations are proud and appreciative of the 69 registered industry representatives from seven provinces, including a significant number of first-time participants, who adapted to the circumstances of 2020 to ensure the voice of the Canadian fruit and vegetable sector was heard on the Hill.

This event would not have been successful without the contributions of our 2020 Fall Harvest sponsors. Both CPMA and CHC are grateful for this support during a tumultuous year which presented many unknowns leading into the event and the commitment of these companies made it possible for us to deliver an event which both Parliamentarians and industry are accustomed to.



Association des Emballeurs de Pommes du Québec, Horticulture Nova Scotia, and Peak of the Market



New format, new opportunities

The new format of this year's Fall Harvest event posed both challenges and opportunities in terms of maintaining and building on the reputation this event has garnered over the past number of years, both among industry and on Parliament Hill. As noted above, in planning our first-ever virtual event, CHC and CPMA sought ways to leverage this new format to find new opportunities to engage and expand our Fall Harvest audience, including the flexibility to extend timelines for industry to meet with Parliamentarians outside the traditional two days of in-person meetings.

A notable addition to this year's Fall Harvest schedule was a set of education panels for Parliamentarians, including [COVID-19 Challenges for Canadian Growers and the Produce Supply Chain](#) and [The Produce Supply Chain in Your Neighbourhood](#). Featuring dynamic industry leaders, these education panels allowed participants to hear the first-hand experiences of the Canadian supply chain, and suggestions for meaningful support that would make positive impacts in the Canadian fruit and vegetable industry. These lunchtime sessions were well received and drew an audience of 73 and 55 participants, respectively, which included Parliamentarians, staff and other government officials, as well as industry representatives.

In addition to the educational panels offered to Parliamentarians, our Day 1 training and preparation sessions included a special [Produce and Politics](#) panel for industry participants. On this panel, David Coletto of Abacus Data hosted a roundtable discussion with political pundits from the Liberal, Conservative and New Democratic perspectives to explore the political landscape of the new Parliamentary session and what it means for Canada's fresh produce industry.

The video recordings of these panel discussions are available at the links above. CPMA members can also access these videos on the [Webinar page of the CPMA Community](#).

Engaging on our issues

Fall Harvest 2020 kicked off with a special appearance from the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, in a virtual session that offered a rare opportunity for fresh produce industry representatives to engage directly with the Minister on the key priorities facing our sector, particularly as we navigate the COVID-19 environment. While participants expressed concern that the Minister's responses on certain issues, such as the need for a financial protection mechanism, did not indicate the desired level of support from the government, the discussion provided an opening for future dialogue moving forward.

After a busy first day, the remainder of the week was filled with meetings with elected and other government officials in key positions of influence over policies and programs impacting the Canadian fresh fruit and vegetable industry. Our Fall Harvest meeting schedule this year included members of both the House of Commons and the Senate, and reflected regional representation from across the country, with elected officials participating from constituencies in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.

Among the 41 officials who met with us over the course of the week, we were pleased to discuss our industry's priorities with several officials of key importance to our sector, including:

- MP Neil Ellis, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food;
- The Honourable Erin O'Toole, Leader of the Official Opposition;
- Senior policy officials from the office of the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food;
- Senior staff at Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA);
- Agriculture Critics for all three major opposition parties – the Conservatives, the NDP and the the Bloc Québécois;
- The Honourable Wayne Easter, Chair of the House of Commons Finance Committee; and
- Members of the House of Commons Standing Committees on Agriculture, Finance, Health, Industry, International Trade, and Citizenship and Immigration.

The fresh produce industry is facing many challenges across a variety of policy areas. Our [Produce Top 10](#) provided Parliamentarians with an overview of some of those priorities and how the government can help. We look forward to using this Top 10 list as a tool in supporting further dialogue with officials moving forward.

In order to promote clear, effective communication and make the most of our meeting time during Fall Harvest, we drew special attention to [four priority issues](#), including the ways in which they have been made more apparent by the COVID-19 pandemic, and recommended measures for government action to support the fresh produce industry:

- **Ensuring financial protection** for produce sellers in the case of buyer bankruptcy by implementing a deemed trust mechanism in Canada and restoring priority access to protection for Canadian produce sellers under the *Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act* in the United States;
- Supporting **sustainability** efforts in the fresh produce sector and working collaboratively to find evidence-based solutions to tackle environmental challenges, including in reducing the use of unnecessary and problematic plastics;
- Addressing short and long-term **labour** challenges to ensure food security and to maintain the integrity of the food supply chain in Canada;
- Improving **Business Risk Management (BRM)** programs to provide better coverage for growers, particularly through AgriStability and production insurance.

The current minority government situation in Canada provides different opportunities for engagement on our priority issues than under the previous two majority governments. In particular, the opposition parties each have the potential to impact the dynamics in the House of Commons and open new avenues for advancing our advocacy goals. We have been pleased with the level of engagement across parties in support of our issues.

Financial Protection

During our Fall Harvest meetings, we heard a significant level of interest in financial protection. This issue has consistently been among the top advocacy recommendations for both CPMA and CHC for several years. During the 2019 federal election, three of the four major political parties had committed their support for a deemed trust mechanism in their election platforms. Now, in a minority government context, members of these parties are looking for opportunities to push the issue forward in various

ways. Coming out of our Fall Harvest meetings, we heard offers of support from a number of Members of Parliament and Senators. Following the event, we are aware that some of these officials have sent letters of support to relevant cabinet ministers, and a joint letter from our organizations calling for the implementation of a deemed trust was distributed to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. Building off this momentum and looking ahead to 2021, our organizations are actively working with our members and partners to push for the inclusion of a financial protection mechanism in the next federal Budget Implementation Act.

Sustainability

Sustainability is also front of mind for many elected officials, particularly for those who represent urban ridings. Given the federal government's recent announcements about efforts to reduce plastic waste and to promote a "green recovery" from the COVID-19 pandemic, members of all political parties are working to position themselves and their parties on this file. This political landscape gave our Fall Harvest participants an opportunity to share their stories about what the fresh produce industry is doing to contribute to the fight against climate change and the transition to a circular economy, while also continuing to put safe, nutritious products on Canadians' tables and support communities across the country.

Labour and Business Risk Management

As with financial protection, the COVID-19 pandemic gave a new lens to our advocacy surrounding the challenges in accessing labour and necessary improvements to the government's suite of BRM programs, and seemed to help Parliamentarians and officials better understand the importance of these issues.

Accessing labour was one of the most challenging hurdles that growers and other businesses along the supply chain had to manage this year. And with the heightened attention given to international farm workers, the federal government has been pushing for reforms to housing requirements under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. During our meetings, CHC and CPMA pushed for more streamlined and clear processes to bring in the workers they need, better and more suitable income supports for workers, and the need to work with and support industry on any changes to housing requirements.

BRM was also on the agenda at the Federal-Provincial-Territorial (FPT) Agriculture meetings in November, which meant that those officials who were more knowledgeable and engaged on the agricultural file were focused on identifying our specific asks for those discussions. Some positive first steps were taken with regards to reforms to AgriStability in particular at the FPT meeting, with a commitment to examine removing the Reference Margin Limit, and advancing discussions on increasing the compensation rate – two key asks from our Fall Harvest advocacy. CHC and CPMA will continue to push for these reforms, as well as an increase to the AgriStability coverage trigger.

Reflecting back, looking forward

As noted in the introduction, transitioning our annual Fall Harvest event to a virtual format posed both challenges and opportunities for our advocacy work. In a survey of Fall Harvest 2020 industry participants, a full 80% of respondents rated their overall experience at Fall Harvest 2020 as "Excellent"

or “Very Good”, and 93% indicated they would participate in a future virtual advocacy event. A few examples of what we heard:

- *“It takes a lot of time out of your week, but it is worthwhile in helping to get our points to the federal government.”*
- *“I was pleasantly surprised by the level of engagement and interaction.”*
- *“As a first-time participant, I was inspired by the passion and warm reception from seasoned Fall Harvest members.”*
- *“It opened opportunities to meet our membership and to see how valuable they are to our industry.”*

Additional feedback, such as strengthening networking opportunities and flexibility in meeting focus depending on the Parliamentarian, will help guide future events.

As we move into 2021 and look ahead to our future advocacy events, there is a strong possibility that our next event may also need to take place in a virtual format due to ongoing COVID-19 protocols and travel restrictions, including on Parliament Hill. CPMA and CHC are committed to putting forward our best efforts to take the lessons learned from Fall Harvest 2020 and ensure our next event is even more successful, whether online or in-person.

About the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA):

Based in Ottawa, Ontario, CPMA is a not-for-profit organization that represents a diverse membership made up of every segment of the produce industry supply chain who are responsible for 90% of the fresh fruit and vegetable sales in Canada. CPMA is fortunate to represent a sector that is both a significant economic driver for communities and that also improves the health and productivity of Canadians.

About the Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC):

The Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) is an Ottawa-based voluntary, not-for-profit, national association that represents fruit and vegetable growers across Canada involved in the production of over 120 different types of crops on over 14,237 farms, with farm cash receipts of \$5.4 billion in 2019. Since 1922, CHC has advocated on important issues that impact Canada’s horticultural sector, promoting healthy, safe and sustainable food, and ensuring the continued success and growth of our industry.