

**Report champions a new sustainability index for Canada's agri-food sector,
a key tool to help compete, add value and improve societal outcomes**

Ottawa: January 28, 2021: A national sustainability index for the agri-food sector would help demonstrate Canada's rightful place as a leader of sustainable, safe and responsibly-produced food to a more demanding domestic and global marketplace and be a catalyst to add value sector-wide, declares a report released today by a diverse group of twenty-two private and public partners.

Worldwide, benchmarking agriculture and food practices against a host of environmental, social and health priorities is becoming essential to operate and compete, as well as to meet global sustainable development and net-zero emissions goals. Canada has the opportunity to build on its existing metrics to develop a more integrated picture of its sustainability and quality credentials from farm to retail. The report *Benchmarking Canada's Agri-Food Sustainability Leadership – a Roadmap* addresses this gap and outlines a blueprint to create such an index, a Canadian first.

The index would be comprised of selected indicators spanning the environment, health and food safety, well-being and economic viability. Development would be co-led by producers and companies in collaboration with non-industry and government stakeholders. The index intends to link-up with sectoral benchmarking initiatives and Canada's statistics-gathering capacity. It will also need to be informed by Canada's sustainability commitments and by global requirements and metrics.

Benchmarking performance would portray the sector's strengths to consumers, supply chain customers, regulators and investors. (Canada's agricultural environmental footprint is among the lowest in the world.) Being science-based and externally validated, the index will also be expected to show areas for improvement and shortcomings. The need for a national and consistent picture of sustainability is pressing, the report emphasizes.

Canada risks being left behind, shut out of markets, or unable to differentiate as other countries position their respective food systems as being the most sustainable or include sustainable production as part of their trade requirements. Although there are differences in approach, New Zealand and Ireland have developed sustainability dashboards for their export-dependent agri-food sectors. Based on its vision of food sustainability, the European Commission is proposing tighter market access rules and is embarking on *green deal diplomacy* to influence global trade. American producers have announced a sustainable development strategy that includes being carbon positive by 2035. Meanwhile disclosure requirements are rising for all. Investors worldwide are expecting companies (and their supply chains) to fully disclose climate, environmental and social risks and reveal how such insight creates business opportunities.

"There's an urgency to get better aligned and present Canada's leading agri-food credentials," says David McInnes, the coalition's coordinator. "A sustainability index is now vital to ensure confidence in how Canadian food is produced and supplied and to drive competitiveness. A more relevant set of performance metrics are needed to enable market access, validate food claims and inform policy choices."

Case studies tested the adequacy of current metrics and related policy issues for greenhouse gases/carbon sequestration and biodiversity. The cases showed Canada is leaving value off the table when it comes to presenting its sustainability record. Better metrics can demonstrate, for instance, the progress being made on farms to further reduce emissions and sequester carbon in agricultural soil. Drawing down more carbon could be realized with financial incentives for producers and accelerating soil research and innovation-adoption. This outcome could deliver broad benefits, such as helping producers to offset the carbon tax, contribute to Canada's Paris commitments, and meet food company emissions targets.

A new coalition of organizations (including a number from the list below) is already initiating the next phase of work. By reaching out to more stakeholders and refining the index concept as needed, benchmark development is expected to begin later in 2021. A webinar on the findings of this report will be held on February 2nd (refer to contact for details).

About this project: A coalition of partners advanced a multi-stakeholder national dialogue and research in 2020 to develop a validated benchmark of environmental and other indicators to be used across the food system to enable sector competitiveness, demonstrate societal benefits and improve policy.

Partners: 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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