

Agriculture in Canada

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Trends and highlights

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Agriculture is a major industry in Canada. Including the processing, wholesale and retail sectors, agriculture accounts for more than 25% of Canada's economic activity. Canada ranks seventh as an exporter of agricultural commodities following the United States, France, Netherlands, Brazil, Australia and the Federal Republic of Germany. In 1978 agricultural products accounted for 9.3% of Canada's export trade.

A meeting of importance to all Canadians, from the farmer to the urban consumer, was the national food strategy conference convened by the federal government in February 1978 and attended by delegates representing all segments of the food system. Subjects of discussion included trade policy, research, marketing, food aid, processing, distribution, retailing and consumer concerns. The conference was convened as part of the federal government's commitment to develop a national food strategy that will benefit every level of Canada's food system. An essential part of the strategy is a long-range plan for agricultural development. The plan has eight specific objectives, including those to increase production and marketing efficiency, to conserve and improve natural agricultural resources, and to protect farmers against income instability. The plan entails close co-ordination of federal and provincial activities in working to develop a comprehensive plan for the use of Canada's agricultural resources. Harmonization of federal and provincial agricultural stabilization programs has been given first priority in the development strategy.

Agriculture Canada was restructured to reflect the emphasis on the total food system concept and to broaden and strengthen marketing, market development, and food and nutrition services. The importance attached to federal-provincial relations was shown by the appointment by the department of a chief liaison officer in each province and by the establishment of an intergovernmental and international services branch.

Changes were implemented in the federal brucellosis-control program in 1978 and a stepped-up drive was launched to eradicate this disease from Canada's beef and dairy cattle. Within 12 months it produced dramatic results, with the number of quarantined herds dropping by 75%.

A new Canadian chicken marketing agency began operations in early 1979, the third national marketing body set up under the Farm Products Marketing Agencies Act — others were a Canadian egg marketing agency, established in 1972, and a Canadian turkey marketing agency in 1973. The new agency's first tasks were to set national production targets, and to develop a cost-of-production formula to guide the pricing practices of provincial chicken marketing boards.

As the result of federal budgetary cutbacks, the small farm development program and the related land transfer plan were terminated in early 1979. At the same time, operation of the Canfarm service agency, which provides computerized record-keeping services for farmers, was transferred from Agriculture Canada to Canfarm co-operative services, a group composed of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and a number of co-operatives.

In the area of research, studies have shown that an unfamiliar Japanese elm could become a familiar shade tree in Canada. Unlike the American elm, the Japanese species is highly resistant to Dutch elm disease. Three years of testing by Agriculture Canada and Canadian forestry service scientists have shown that the species is almost immune to present strains of the disease and is quite hardy and adaptable to most Canadian conditions. One selection of the elm has been released, under the cultivar name Jacan. Commercial nurseries are expected to have some stock by 1981.

At Kentville, NS, Agriculture Canada researchers claimed a world record for raising the heaviest broiler chicken in the shortest time — reaching a weight of 2.88