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What you should know about Agriculture Canada

Agriculture is Canada's most basic industry; without it Canadians would be totally dependent on other countries for food and survival. From the days of the earliest settlers agriculture has played a vital role in the development of the nation.

Agriculture Canada was established by an act of Parliament in 1868, one year after Confederation. The main concern of farmers then was to protect the health of their livestock, so in 1869 a veterinary branch was created. It later became the Health of Animals Directorate and assumed the additional responsibilities of meat inspection and research on animal diseases.

The development of the west hinged on agriculture. The vast areas of rich prairie farmland attracted immigrants by the thousands in the latter half of the 19th century. However, their agricultural experience did not prepare them for farming in a new country with unfamiliar soils, short growing seasons and a rigorous climate. To overcome their problems and those of farmers elsewhere in Canada, federal legislation was passed in 1886 for the establishment of five experimental farms. Their mandate was to find the best farming methods, livestock breeds and plant varieties for the different regions of Canada. The central farm, at Ottawa, was to serve Ontario and Quebec. The others were later located at Nappan, N.S., Brandon, Man., Agassiz, B.C., and Indian Head, Sask. The Experimental Farms Service was the forerunner of the Research Branch, which today operates 53 establishments across Canada.

Agriculture, the 'pioneer' Canadian industry, continues to be an essential part of our economy. Export sales of agricultural products contribute impressively to our economic health. In 1984, for example, their total value was \$10 billion. Of this, wheat accounted for \$4.3 billion, flaxseed and rapeseed (canola) for \$620 million, and meat for \$550 million.

Agriculture Canada has grown and been reorganized over the years to meet the needs of the agriculture and food industry. One indication of this is the number of acts of Parliament that regulate departmental activities. In 1869, there was only one; today there are over 40.

The department's basic aim today is to cooperate with provincial governments in developing and helping the agriculture and food system serve the needs of Canadians, export markets and international aid. As well as the Canadian Forestry Service and branches such as Research, Food Production and Inspection, Marketing and Economics, Regional Development, and Communications, there are

several closely associated agencies responsible to the Minister of Agriculture. These include the Agricultural Products Board, Agricultural Stabilization Board, Canadian Dairy Commission, Canadian Wheat Board, Canadian Grain Commission, Canadian Livestock Feed Board, Farm Credit Corporation and the National Farm Products Marketing Council.

Inspection and grading

Agriculture Canada's inspection and grading services cover most agricultural products sold in Canada.

Fresh and processed fruits and vegetables produced in Canada are inspected to make sure they meet grade, packaging and marking regulations for shipment to other provinces or for export. Imported produce is also inspected and must meet similar requirements.

The high quality of manufactured dairy products is maintained by another group of departmental inspectors. They inspect wholesale and manufacturing plants; dairy products (for composition, weight and labeling); exports and imports. They also make certain grade standards for creamery butter, cheddar cheese and skim milk powder are uniformly applied.

The meat inspection service ensures that Canadian meat and poultry products are wholesome, suitable for human consumption, and produced under hygienic conditions. Federal law requires all meat slaughtering and processing plants dealing in interprovincial or export trade operate under federal veterinary inspection. Others participate in the program voluntarily. In 1984, 541 packing plants, meat storages and rendering plants were registered.

In addition to veterinary inspection, the department is responsible for quality (grade) and labeling standards for beef, pork, veal, mutton, eggs, egg products and eviscerated poultry.

Other quality control measures include agricultural seed inspection, sampling, analysis and registration of fertilizers, pesticides and animal feeds. The sampling and grading of grain delivered to or shipped from licensed terminal elevators is handled by the Canadian Grain Commission.

Crop and livestock protection

Insect pests and diseases of plants and livestock, if left unchecked, could severely cripple or even wipe out Canada's agricultural production. Therefore, Agriculture Canada has

several safeguards not only to help protect farmers from losses, but to help keep the doors of foreign customers open to healthy plant material and livestock from Canada.

Tight security measures govern the importation of livestock and livestock products to prevent 'exotic' diseases (those not established in Canada, such as foot-and-mouth) from being introduced here. Permits are needed to import livestock from any country other than the United States, and imports are allowed only from countries where serious livestock diseases are adequately controlled. Animals must have their health certified before they are shipped, and when they arrive they can enter only through Canadian ports equipped for inspection and quarantine. Programs to control or eradicate diseases already existing in Canada may involve quarantine and treatment, or slaughter of infected livestock. Owners are compensated for livestock slaughtered in eradication programs for tuberculosis, brucellosis and other diseases.

Import permits, inspection and quarantine are also used to protect our agricultural crops and forests from harmful insects and plant diseases. Plant material from abroad can be imported only under permit and it must be inspected on arrival. If it is infested it may be fumigated, destroyed or returned to the country of origin. Imports are not allowed from countries known to have problems with plant pests not found in Canada. The importation of soil or plants with soil adhering to them is generally not permitted. Domestic quarantines prevent the spread of insect pests and plant diseases not widely distributed within Canada. If possible, eradication programs are undertaken.

Agricultural stabilization

The federal government supports the prices of agricultural commodities so farmers receive a fair return on their investments of labor and capital. Moreover, price stabilization programs keep farmers in business when prices are depressed. This assures stable food supplies for both urban and rural consumers.

The Agricultural Stabilization Act makes price support mandatory for cattle, hogs, sheep, milk and cream used for making butter and other dairy products, corn, soybeans, and oats and barley grown outside the Prairie Provinces and the Peace River district of British Columbia (oats and barley grown in these two areas are covered by the Canadian Wheat Board). The support price for each of these commodities is at least 90% of its average market price for the previous 5 years, indexed for changes in the cash cost of production. Price support is not limited to the nine commodities; it can be, and often is, extended to others. The Western Grain Stabilization Program protects the net returns of grain growers served by the Canadian Wheat Board. The program applies to those growing wheat, oats, barley, rye, flax, rapeseed (canola) and mustardseed.

The agencies involved in price support operations are the Agricultural Stabilization Board, Agricultural Products Board, Canadian Dairy Commission, and Agriculture Canada's Farm Income Services Branch, which administers the Western Grain Stabilization Program.

Crop insurance

Although any industry will feel the pinch of a depressed market, agriculture alone faces an additional risk each year

– crop losses caused by perils such as hail, drought, insects, wind, frost and disease. The federal government contributes to provincial crop insurance programs which help farmers protect themselves from severe financial setbacks. The premium cost to farmers is modest. In 1982-83, the federal contribution was \$142 million.

Livestock improvement

Agriculture Canada administers several livestock improvement programs for producers. These include the Record of Performance (ROP) program for dairy cattle and, in cooperation with the provinces, ROP programs for beef cattle, sheep and swine. The objective of these programs is to select genetically superior breeding stock. Other improvement programs include a sire loan plan which gives farmer groups access to good sires to improve their beef cattle, swine or sheep herds. For poultry, there is a national program of pedigree selection.

Animal health diagnostic services

Free diagnostic services are available to veterinarians and livestock owners through the department's animal pathology laboratories. These services help identify and control disease. They apply to both wildlife and domestic animal diseases.

A cattle blood-typing service is also available, for a fee, to help verify breeding records.

Markets and merchandising

Many of the department's activities are concerned with marketing and merchandising. It administers public stockyards across Canada. It also maintains the 'showcase' herds of beef and dairy cattle, swine and sheep on the Central Experimental Farm at Ottawa to show prospective buyers from abroad examples of the good livestock found on Canadian farms.

Market information is important to producers, processors and others involved in the agri-food industry. The department collects data on livestock, fruits and vegetables, and dairy and poultry products, and publishes it in statistical market reports for the industry.

Economists play an important role in the development of marketing policies. Their work covers all areas of agricultural economics. They forecast supply, demand and prices of commodities, services and inputs (fertilizer, feed, etc.). They also help identify market opportunities at home and abroad for Canadian farm products, and review and evaluate Canadian and foreign trade policies relating to tariff and nontariff barriers.

Consumer information

Food and nutrition specialists give consumers, educators and people in the foodservice industry information on buying, preparing and preserving food as well as its nutritive value. They study ways to improve cooking and preserving, and offer guidance on federal grading and inspection regulations.

Public information

The Communications Branch informs you about the policies, programs and activities of the department. Public-

ations; press, radio and television services; exhibits; films; tours and seminars are all ways the work of Agriculture Canada is publicized. You can also get information directly by telephone, letter or in person. More than 3 million copies of departmental publications are distributed annually.

Insect and plant identification

Identification of insects, plants and fungi is an important service provided by departmental scientists. In 1983, they looked at more than 85 thousand zoological, plant and fungal species. Identifications were made for agricultural scientists, government agencies and the general public. An important part of the work of these specialists is identifying mushrooms involved in poisoning cases.

Racetrack supervision

Responsibility for the supervision of racetracks and pari-mutuel betting rests with Agriculture Canada. It assigns pari-mutuel race dates, approves betting systems and supervises and audits all pari-mutuel betting. It also provides drug-testing, race patrol and photo finish services. The cost of these services is met by a levy on betting.

Financial assistance

The department gives financial assistance to support a variety of agriculture-related programs. These include grants to agricultural exhibitions and fairs to help meet operating or improvement costs; grants to universities, provincial agencies and producer groups for development of new crops and plant varieties; and financial support to 4-H clubs for their work in providing leadership training for young people, especially those living in rural areas. In addition, it pays part of the cost of moving feed grains from the prairies to British Columbia and some parts of eastern Canada and it provides financial incentives to increase feed grain storage capacity and feed production in Ontario and Quebec.

Loans

Long-term mortgage loans are available through the Farm Credit Corporation (FCC) to help farmers establish profitable enterprises. Loans made under the Farm Credit Act may be used for a variety of purposes, but most are used either to buy a farm or buy land to enlarge an existing one. The FCC also administers the Farm Syndicates Credit Act. It permits groups (syndicates) of three or more farmers to borrow money to buy machinery, buildings and equipment that they will share.

Research

Agriculture has played a dominant role in Canada's development and, in a very large measure, this was made possible by research.

The importance of research was recognized with the establishment of the Experimental Farms Service in 1886 and results were not long in appearing. One of the notable, early contributions of departmental research was Marquis wheat. It is early ripening so it greatly extended the area where wheat could be grown. Initiated from a cross made in 1896,

Marquis was introduced shortly after the turn of the century. By 1917 it accounted for 90% of the area used for growing wheat in Canada.

Research Branch scientists have been creating new and improved varieties of wheat, oats and other cereals ever since. Each one offers some particular benefit – earlier ripening to push back agricultural frontiers, bigger yields, or better resistance to drought, insect damage and plant disease.

Canola is another outstanding example of the value of research. Canadian farmers grew rapeseed during the Second World War as a source of lubricating oil, but in the following years production was limited. In the 1960s, departmental scientists began a research program which in 1973 achieved a major breakthrough with the introduction of Midas, a canola variety which produced a high-quality vegetable oil for human consumption. (Canola is the name given to modern rapeseed varieties which have low erucic acid and glucosinolate content, making them suitable for use in food products.) Today, canola varieties are being developed to give increased yields, better quality vegetable oil and improved rapeseed meal for livestock feed. This research keeps Canadian oilseed crops competitive in domestic export markets. Often referred to as the 'Cinderella' crop, canola today ranks third after wheat and barley as Canada's most valuable export crop. It also meets 50% of Canadian requirements for vegetable oil.

Research on livestock has contributed to breed improvement, better livestock nutrition and improved methods of husbandry. Horticultural research has produced many new varieties of fruits and vegetables suitable for specific regions or for broader production. Examples of these are the Spartan apple, a variety developed at Summerland, B.C., and now widely grown in that province and elsewhere, and the strawberry variety Redcoat, which was developed at Ottawa and now dominates strawberry production in eastern Canada.

The work of the Research Branch touches all aspects of agricultural production, including soil fertility; irrigation techniques; weed, insect and disease control; and food processing and storage technology.

The branch's 53 research establishments are located across Canada, from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island. At Ottawa national work is done by the Animal Research Centre, the Biosystematics Research, Chemistry and Biology Research, Engineering and Statistical Research, Food Research, and Land Resource Research Institutes and the Ottawa Research Station. Across the country research is largely directed toward solving the problems of local farmers, although in many cases the findings have had much broader application. Among the branch's specialists are representatives of all the biological, chemical and agricultural sciences, as well as physicists, mathematicians and engineers.

Research on animal diseases began in 1902 when a biological laboratory was established at Ottawa. Today the Health of Animals Directorate operates nine laboratories across Canada. Their work is directed at diseases that cause serious economic losses in livestock, as well as those that can be transmitted to humans, such as tuberculosis, brucellosis and rabies. The work includes studies of the organisms that cause animal diseases and their transmission, the development and improvement of tests for detecting diseases, and the creation of disease-control programs.

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