



Infommat

A Weekly Review

Friday, April 28, 2000

OVERVIEW

◆ International trade declines

In February, exports fell 2.6% and imports were down 1.2%. Most of the decline occurred in the auto sector, which saw temporary slowdowns at some Canadian plants. The merchandise trade surplus remained close to \$4.0 billion.

◆ Energy increases not lifting prices of many consumer items

Higher energy costs have not translated into general price increases for the other items included in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In March, for example, the all-items CPI climbed 3.0%, whereas the CPI excluding energy rose from a year earlier by 1.4%.

◆ Shipments decline after three consecutive strong increases

In February, following three months of healthy growth, manufacturers' shipments declined 1.8%. Mainly, the decline occurred in the motor vehicle, fabricated metal products and electrical and electronic products industries.

◆ Wholesale sales fall for first time in five months

Wholesale sales fell 1.1% in February. This followed four consecutive monthly increases. The decline was led by wholesalers of lumber and building materials and by those who sell farm machinery, equipment and supplies.

◆ Waste disposal per person remains unchanged

In 1998, governments and businesses disposed of 21 million metric tonnes of municipal, construction and demolition wastes. This represented 690 kilograms of waste for each Canadian, unchanged from 1996.

International trade declines

International trade declined in February. Exports fell 2.6% to \$32.3 billion and imports were down 1.2% to \$28.4 billion. Most of the decline was in the auto sector. Nevertheless, the merchandise trade surplus remained close to \$4.0 billion, mainly because of lower imports.

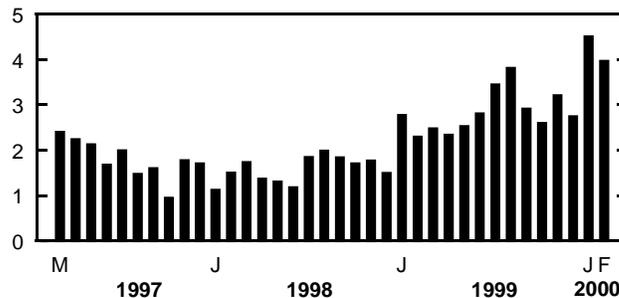
For exports, February marked the first decline in five months. Nevertheless, the level of exports was still 12.9% higher than in February 1999. Automotive exports tumbled 14.1% because of temporary slowdowns at some Canadian plants. Hardest hit were car exports (-22.1% to \$3.9 billion) and truck exports (-5.8% to \$1.5 billion). Car exports were at a record high in January, reaching the \$5 billion mark.

After three months of increases, exports of forest products declined. All sub-sectors contributed to the decline, but wood-fabricated materials and lumber posted the biggest drops. Although exports of oriented strandboard also declined, the amount shipped to the United States remained high.

Lower exports of wheat to Iran and Iraq and of canola to Japan, China and Mexico, pulled exports of agricultural and fishing products down 2.8%. A surplus of wheat on world markets put downward pressure on wheat export prices, which dropped 5.1%. Canola exports also fell because of oversupply.

Merchandise trade balance

\$ billions, seasonally adjusted



... International trade declines

Industrial product exports rose 2.1%. Iron ore exports spiked 104.4% due to the early reopening of northern ports after winter. As well, exports of organic chemical products increased to China, Taiwan and the United States. Exports of energy products continued their upward trend for a fourth consecutive month. Crude oil exports made the highest jump, mainly due to higher export prices, which were up 13.3%. February's level of energy exports was more than triple that of February 1999, because export prices increased over those 12 months by 158.2%.

Imports were down overall for a second consecutive month in February. The month also marked a second consecutive drop in imports of telephone and telecommunications equipment after a strong December. Imports of compressors slowed, as did imports of aircraft (major contracts ending). Increased gas production capacity in Alberta boosted imports of drilling machinery, up 114.6% in February compared with February 1999.

The temporary slowdown in auto production at some plants in February caused a decline in imports of auto parts (-6.7%). However, the continued vitality of new vehicle sales in Canada pushed car and truck imports up (+5.3% and +10.1% respectively), partially offsetting the overall decline of imports in the auto sector.

A second consecutive decrease in imports of prescription drugs, particularly from Ireland, exerted downward pressure on overall imports of consumer goods. The prescription drug market is volatile and fluctuates according to North American demand. Imports of industrial commodities stabilised somewhat in February, after three months of strong fluctuations. Imports rose for gold, electricity and the active ingredients for antibiotics and herbicides. Significant decreases were seen in imports of ores and automotive hardware. After two months of slow decline, imports of energy products surged 12.7%. Large volumes of kerosene were imported. The strong price increases for crude oil also played a part.

The February 2000 issue of Canadian international merchandise trade (print: 65-001-XPB, \$19/\$188; online at www.statcan.ca: 65-001-XIB, \$14/\$141) includes tables by commodity and country. Current account data are available quarterly in Canada's balance of international payments (print: 67-001-XPB, \$38/\$124; online at www.statcan.ca: 67-001-XIB, \$29/\$93). For further information, contact Jocelyne Elibani (613-951-9647 or 1 800 294-5583), International Trade Division. See also "Current trends" on page 6.

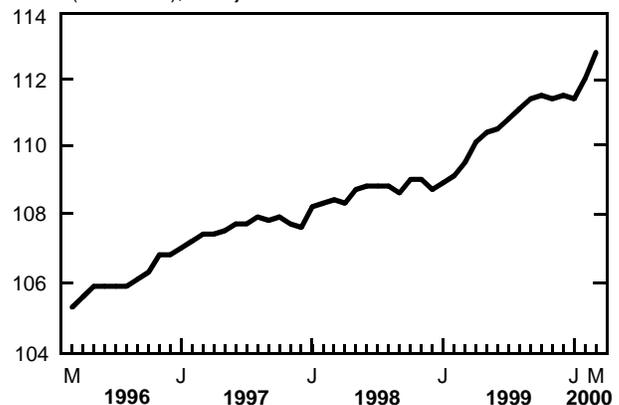
Energy increases not lifting prices of many consumer items

The strong increases in crude oil prices between March 1999 and March 2000 led to higher energy costs. However, these have not translated into generalized inflation in the other items included in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In March, for example, the all-items CPI climbed 3.0%, whereas the CPI excluding energy rose from a year earlier by 1.4%. March marked the largest annual increase in the all-items index since May 1995. The annual increase in the CPI excluding energy has ranged between 1.1% and 1.6% since April 1999.

Gasoline and fuel oil were the two energy commodities that had the most influence on the annual inflation rate in March. Gasoline prices were up 38.0% from a year earlier, marking the

Consumer Price Index

Index (1992=100), unadjusted data



Consumer Price Index, March 2000

% change, previous year, not seasonally adjusted

	All items	Food	Shelter	Transportation	Energy
Canada	3.0	0.4	2.9	8.1	22.4
Newfoundland	3.5	-1.2	8.1	9.1	27.7
Prince Edward Island	3.5	-1.5	8.2	8.8	31.8
Nova Scotia	4.4	1.6	8.9	9.4	32.8
New Brunswick	4.2	1.5	6.0	10.1	25.4
Quebec	2.4	-0.2	2.9	7.6	19.9
Ontario	3.4	0.8	2.8	8.3	23.3
Manitoba	3.2	2.6	2.2	7.3	16.6
Saskatchewan	2.4	0.3	3.4	6.8	17.8
Alberta	3.5	1.1	3.4	9.1	20.8
British Columbia	1.8	-1.0	0.6	7.2	23.7
Whitehorse	2.0	-1.9	3.5	4.9	16.9
Yellowknife	1.9	0.2	3.4	0.9	18.1

eighth consecutive month of double-digit annual increases. Fuel oil prices, meanwhile, climbed 59.8%, a bit less than the record 63.6% increase seen in February. The large successive advances in gasoline and fuel oil prices reflect persistently high global prices for crude oil and dwindling inventories. Natural gas, another important energy component, showed an annual price rise of 8.4% in March.

To a much lesser extent, the other items that contributed to the annual increase in consumer prices in March were mortgage interest, food purchased from restaurants and tuition fees. Mortgage interest has shown successively larger increases in each of the past five months. Some items that declined in price on an annual basis were computer equipment and supplies, fresh fruit and fresh vegetables.

(continued on page 3)

... Energy increases not lifting prices of many consumer items

From February to March, the CPI rose 0.7%—the largest monthly increase since January 1991. That was the month when the Goods and Services Tax was introduced and the Federal Sales Tax was eliminated. Gasoline prices jumped 8.8%—the largest monthly increase since June 1983 (+19.1%)—and accounted for about 57% of the CPI's increase in March. Among the provinces and territories, the monthly increases in the CPI ranged from 2.2% in Whitehorse to 11.7% in British Columbia.

Prices for women's clothing increased 2.3% in March. Prices rose for new summer stock but returned to normal for several clothing items following discounts in February. Travel tour prices increased 5.8%, in keeping with the price hikes observed in previous years in February and March. Primarily, this is due to

the seasonal trend towards higher rates for Florida destinations, which are in great demand in March.

Offsetting the monthly increases, fuel oil prices fell 4.9% in March—the first decrease since March 1999. On average, fuel oil prices fell in all the provinces east of Manitoba except Prince Edward Island. Fresh fruit prices dropped 2.5% in March. Supplies were strong because of favourable growing conditions in producing areas.

*The March 2000 issue of **The consumer price index** (62-001-XPB, \$11/\$103) is now available. For further information, contact Client Services (613-951-9606; fax: 613-951-1539; infounit@statcan.ca), Prices Division. See also "Current trends" on page 6.*

Shipments decline after three consecutive strong increases

In February, following three months of healthy growth, manufacturers' shipments declined 1.8% to \$43.0 billion. This was the first decline in shipments since October 1999 and only the second in 12 months. The upward trend in manufacturers' shipments that began in August 1998 has now slowed to a more moderate pace.

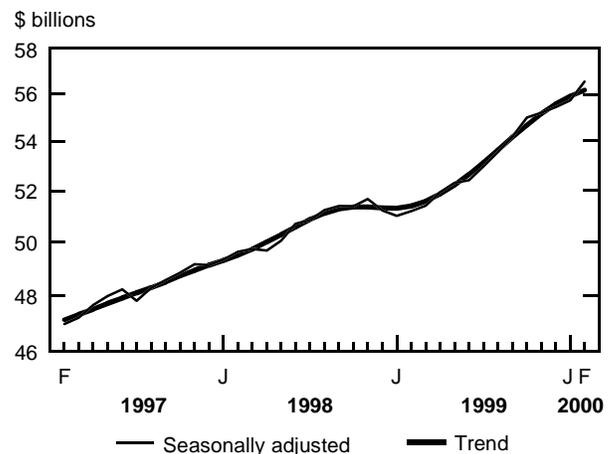
Manufacturers' shipments dwindled in February in 16 of the 22 major industry groups, representing 67.2% of the total value of shipments. Most of the decrease occurred in the motor vehicle (-6.1%), fabricated metal products (-7.7%) and electrical and electronic products (-3.1%) industries. In the motor vehicle industry, shipments fell to \$5.7 billion. Higher results were posted in both December and January. February's total was consistent with the shipment levels seen in the first seven months of 1999. After robust gains in January, shipments in both of the other industries mentioned returned to levels seen in the final quarter of 1999.

February's largest shipment increases occurred in the refined petroleum and coal products (+10.3) and chemical products (+1.3%) industries. In the former, the rise was mainly attributed to price increases. In the latter, expanded markets contributed to the increase in shipments.

Manufacturers' shipments, February 2000 Seasonally adjusted

	\$ millions	% change, previous month
Canada	43,003	-1.8
Newfoundland	173	0.8
Prince Edward Island	81	3.5
Nova Scotia	781	10.2
New Brunswick	874	6.9
Quebec	10,194	-2.9
Ontario	22,861	-2.9
Manitoba	878	0.0
Saskatchewan	575	3.3
Alberta	3,307	2.6
British Columbia	3,339	-0.2
Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut	4	-0.3

Manufacturers' inventories



The value of the backlog of unfilled orders fell 0.7% in February to \$54.1 billion. The value rose in December and slipped in January. Manufacturers' unfilled orders have been in the \$54 billion range for five months now. February's decline was mainly ascribed to the transportation equipment industry (-1.8%).

Manufacturers' inventories continued to swell in February (+1.5% to \$56.5 billion) for a 13th consecutive month. Mainly, February's buildup took place in the aircraft and parts (+5.9%), electrical and electronic products (+3.1%) and machinery (+3.1%) industries. Manufacturers in these industries replenished inventories that were reduced by the strong shipments in January. The biggest offsetting decrease in inventories was in paper and allied products (-1.7%), where shipments had been strong for the prior four months. Accordingly, finished-product inventories have been declining over the same period.

The inventory-shipments ratio increased in February to 1.31, a level last seen in October 1999.

*The February 2000 issue of **Monthly survey of manufacturing** (31-001-XPB, \$20/\$196) presents the full report. Detailed data on shipments by province are available on request. For further information, contact Craig Kuntz (613-951-7092; kuncrai@statcan.ca), Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division. See also "Current trends" on page 6.*

Wholesale sales fall for first time in five months

Wholesale sales fell 1.1% in February. This followed four consecutive monthly increases. Generally, wholesale sales have been growing for the past several years. In recent months, the pace of that sales growth has slowed, however. Even so, sales in February were 7.7% higher than February 1999.

Wholesalers of lumber and building materials led February's decline. Their sales fell \$160 million. Wholesalers of farm machinery, equipment and supplies posted a decline of \$105 million. The dollar-value declines in these two groups also made up the largest percentage drops, 6.2% and 17.8% respectively.

The largest sales growth in percentage terms was posted by wholesalers in the other products group (+0.8%), which includes paper and paper products, waste materials and a variety of chemicals. Sales by this group have been on the rise since the fall of 1998. Accordingly, their inventory-to-sales ratio has fallen from 1.37 in February 1999 to 1.17 this February.

The lumber wholesalers' 6.2% sales decline in February was the first in four months. This group's sales have been generally rising since mid-1998, but the rate of growth has slowed in recent months. At the end of February, the value of their inventories was 1.7% higher than at the end of January. Also, February saw a 2.4% decrease in shipments from Canadian manufacturers of lumber products and a 6.1% drop in lumber exports. It is likely that some firms reached their quotas on exports to the United States. Orders from builders may also have fallen, because the monthly value of building permits was down 14.5% in February in Canada and down 7.9% in the United States.

Metal, hardware and plumbing equipment wholesalers—also closely tied to the construction industry—saw their sales drop as well in February (-3.8%), following four months of gains. Similar to wholesale lumber, sales of metal, hardware and plumbing equipment have generally been on the rise since mid-1998.

Farm machinery, equipment and supply wholesalers continued to struggle as sales dropped for a third time in four months, sliding 17.8% in February. Sales in this group have been generally eroding since the fall of 1997. As well, the value of inventories held by this group has been shrinking since the fall of 1998.

In British Columbia, wholesalers felt the effect of depressed sales of lumber and building materials. An additional factor may

Wholesale sales, February 2000 Seasonally adjusted

	\$ millions	% change, previous month	% change, previous year
Canada	30,933	-1.1	7.4
Newfoundland	225	0.7	9.9
Prince Edward Island	53	4.6	10.4
Nova Scotia	561	5.5	4.3
New Brunswick	401	-0.7	12.8
Quebec	6,119	-3.5	2.9
Ontario	15,516	-0.3	8.2
Manitoba	891	-0.7	1.4
Saskatchewan	959	5.0	11.8
Alberta	2,945	-1.2	12.7
British Columbia	3,230	-3.8	8.2
Yukon	10	3.7	13.7
Northwest Territories	19	52.8	36.7
Nunavut	3	-6.9	21.0

have been the recent poor economic indicators and weak consumer confidence in Japan, one of British Columbia's major trading partners. Wholesalers in the province had seen sales generally expand since late 1998, but that expansion has shown some weakness in recent months.

In Quebec, wholesale sales dropped for a second consecutive month, but their general level is still rising slightly. Wholesale sales in Saskatchewan were buoyed by large sales of chemical fertilisers. Results in both Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia benefited from strong sales in the food products group. Wholesalers in the Northwest Territories got a boost from sales linked to the development of mining sites.

The value of inventories held by wholesalers nudged up 0.5% in February to \$42.2 billion. The inventory-to-sales ratio rose from 1.34 in January to 1.36. It has not been that high since April 1999. The ratio measures the duration in months that current inventories will last.

The February 2000 issue of Wholesale trade (online at www.statcan.ca: 63-008-XIB, \$14/\$140) presents the full report. To order data, or for general information, contact Client Services (1 877 421-3067 or 613-951-3549; wholesaleinfo@statcan.ca). For further analytical information, contact Greg Parsons (613-951-0062; parsons@statcan.ca), Distributive Trades Division.

Waste disposal per person remains unchanged

In 1998, governments and businesses disposed of 21 million metric tonnes of municipal, construction and demolition wastes. This represented 690 kilograms of waste for each Canadian, unchanged from 1996.

Operating expenditures of the municipalities and other government bodies that provide waste management services totalled \$1.3 billion in 1998. About 59% of those expenditures were payments to contracted waste management firms. That year, governments employed 7,225 people in waste management services.

Operating revenues of the businesses involved in waste management totalled \$2.9 billion in 1998. Their operating expenditures reached \$2.5 billion. These firms invested more than \$321 million in capital expenditures. More than 20,000 people were employed by this industry across Canada in 1998.

Tables regarding waste management industry (business and government sectors) expenditure, revenue and employment characteristics are available upon request. Information on the preparation of materials for recycling or re-use, operation statistics for disposal facilities (such as landfills and incinerators), and data on hazardous waste volumes and types will all be covered in a detailed final report due later this spring. For more information, contact Client Information (613-951-0297; fax: 613-951-0634), Environment Accounts and Statistics Division.

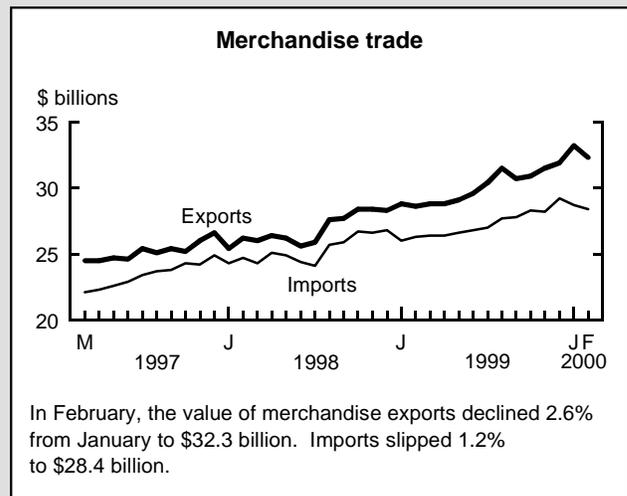
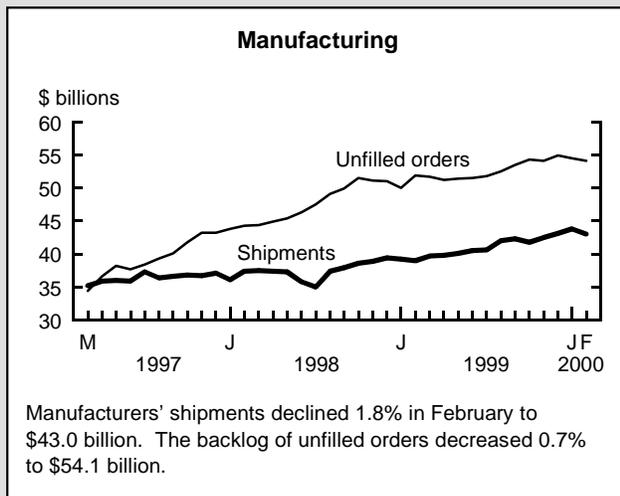
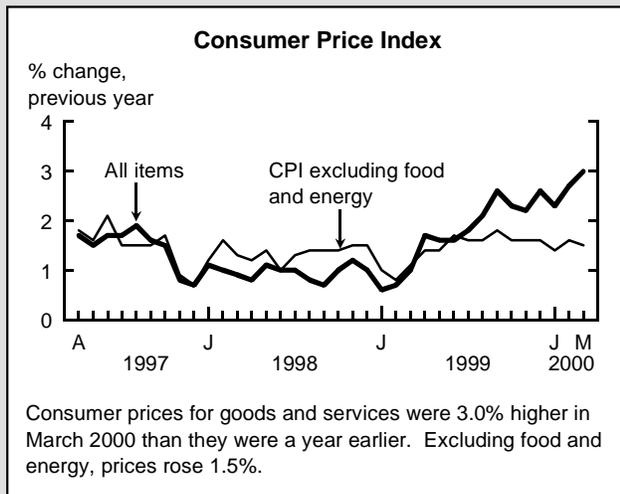
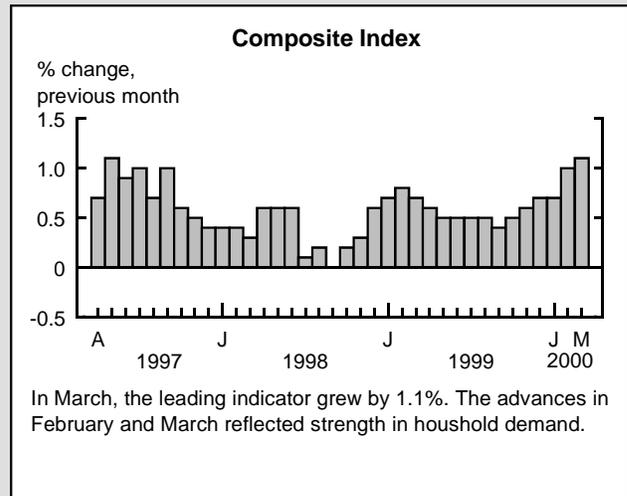
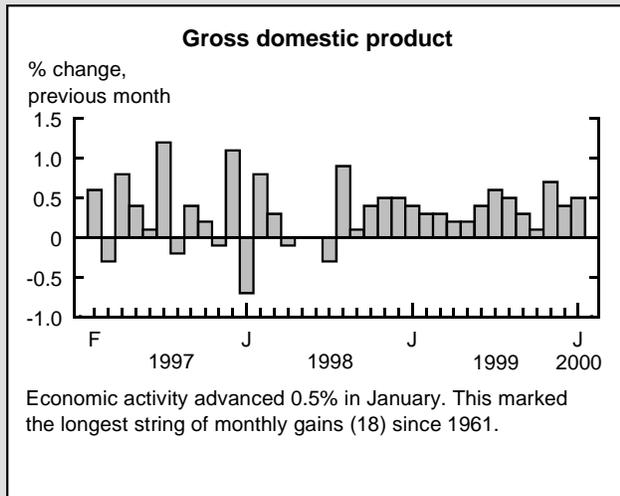
Disposal of waste¹

	1994	1996	1998
	Metric tonnes disposed per capita		
Canada	0.73	0.69	0.69
Newfoundland	0.84	0.67	0.67
Prince Edward Island	x	x	x
Nova Scotia	0.76	0.59	0.54
New Brunswick	0.76	0.67	0.62
Quebec	0.71	0.75	0.75
Ontario	0.67	0.62	0.61
Manitoba	0.84	0.84	0.85
Saskatchewan	0.91	0.88	0.83
Alberta	0.86	0.88	0.87
British Columbia	0.76	0.62	0.61
Yukon	x	x	x
Northwest Territories and Nunavut	x	x	x

¹ Waste disposed of in public and private disposal facilities. Does not include wastes disposed in hazardous waste disposal facilities or wastes managed by the waste generator on site.

x Confidential to meet secrecy requirements of the Statistics Act.

Current trends



Note: All series are seasonally adjusted except the Consumer Price Index.

Latest statistics

	Period	Level	Change, previous period	Change, previous year
GENERAL				
Gross domestic product (\$ billion, 1992)	January	770.1	0.5%	4.7%
Composite Index (1992=100)	March	160.1	1.1%	7.9%
Operating profits of enterprises (\$ billion)	Q4 1999	43.9	7.8%	27.1%
Capacity utilization (%)	Q4 1999	86.8	1.3†	4.0†
DOMESTIC DEMAND				
Retail trade (\$ billion)	February*	22.3	-1.1%	4.9%
Department store sales (\$ billions)	February	1.49	-2.5%	1.5%
New motor vehicle sales (thousand of units)	February	126.6	-4.4%	6.5%
Wholesale trade (\$ billion)	February*	30.9	-1.1%	7.4%
LABOUR				
Employment (millions)	March	14.86	0.2%	3.2%
Unemployment rate (%)	March	6.8	0.0†	-1.1†
Participation rate (%)	March	65.9	0.1†	0.4†
Average weekly earnings (\$)	January	618.85	0.3%	2.0%
Help-wanted Index (1996=100)	March	171	0.6%	11.8%
INTERNATIONAL TRADE				
Merchandise exports (\$ billion)	February*	32.3	-2.6%	12.9%
Merchandise imports (\$ billion)	February*	28.4	-1.2%	7.7%
Merchandise trade balance (all figures in \$ billion)	February*	4.0	-0.5	1.7
MANUFACTURING				
Shipments (\$ billion)	February	43.0	-1.8%	10.3%
New orders (\$ billion)	February	42.6	-1.7%	4.2%
Unfilled orders (\$ billion)	February	54.1	-0.7%	4.2%
Inventory/shipments ratio	February	1.31	0.04	0.00
PRICES				
Consumer Price Index (1992=100)	March	112.8	0.7%	3.0%
Industrial Product Price Index (1992=100)	February	125.8	0.9%	5.9%
Raw Materials Price Index (1992=100)	February	139.7	3.2%	37.1%
New Housing Price Index (1992=100)	February	102.4	0.4%	2.1%

Note: All series are seasonally adjusted with the exception of the price indexes.

* new this week

† percentage point

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Published by the Communications Division, Statistics Canada, 10th floor, R.H. Coats Bldg., Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0T6.

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Price per issue: paper, \$4; online at www.statcan.ca, \$3. Annual subscription: paper, \$145; online, \$109. All prices are in Canadian dollars and exclude applicable sales taxes. Shipping charges will be added for delivery outside Canada.

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Publications released from April 20 to 26, 2000

Division/Title of publication	Period	Catalogue number	Price (\$) (issue/subscription)
AGRICULTURE			
Field crop reporting series, vol. 79, no. 2:			
March intentions of principal field crop areas, Canada	2000		
Internet		22-002-XIB	11/66
Paper		22-002-XPB	15/88
CULTURE, TOURISM AND THE CENTRE FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS			
Focus on culture	Winter 1999	87-004-XPB	9/27
CURRENT ECONOMIC ANALYSIS			
Canadian economic observer	April 2000	11-010-XPB	23/227
DISTRIBUTIVE TRADES			
Wholesale trade	February 2000	63-008-XIB	14/140
INTERNATIONAL TRADE			
Imports by commodity	February 2000		
Microfiche		65-007-XMB	37/361
Paper		65-007-XPB	78/773
LABOUR STATISTICS			
Employment, earnings and hours	January 2000	72-002-XPB	32/320
MANUFACTURING, CONSTRUCTION AND ENERGY			
Construction-type plywood	February 2000	35-001-XIB	5/47
Electric lamps, light bulbs and tubes	March 2000	43-009-XIB	5/47
Monthly survey of manufacturing	February 2000	31-001-XPB	20/196
Pulpwood and wood residue statistics	February 2000	25-001-XIB	6/55

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Calendar of key releases: May 2000				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
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Note: Except for the releases marked with an asterisk, all the release dates in this calendar are fixed. A more detailed calendar of fixed release dates for the entire year is available from Statistics Canada's Web site at www.statcan.ca.