

## Need for Coordinated Action

We need coordinated action to make the transition to sustainable farming and food systems that support the livelihoods of farmers and their communities.

### The climate crisis

The world is in the throes of the climate change emergency, arguably the most crucial issue of our time. Agriculture is directly affected by climate change, but is also a major greenhouse gas emitter. Canadian farmers need to change practices to adapt and reduce emissions.

The task is daunting, especially as harvests become less certain and incomes are increasingly precarious and inequitable. There is a clear need for coordinated action that supports a transition to a sustainable farming and food system that supports the livelihoods of farmers and their communities.

### Learning from the past

Canada was also faced with major economic, environmental and social upheaval nearly 100 years ago, during the Great Depression. Today, we can look to the success of recovery efforts then to inform a similar bold response today.

The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) was established in 1935 in response to crisis conditions in the southern Prairie Provinces due to prolonged drought, economic depression and farming practices ill-suited to the land. It was a spiralling ecological crisis and economic crisis that created poverty and desperation for rural and urban people alike. Thousands abandoned their farms, and dust storms blackened the skies.

Inspired by Roosevelt's New Deal in the USA, Canada's federal government passed the *Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act* in 1935 to "provide for the rehabilitation of drought and soil drifting areas in the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta." This simple Act founded an important institution that brought

together agricultural researchers, engineers and extension staff who worked with farmers and rural communities to rehabilitate the damaged land and develop ways to make farming and ranching more sustainable and to improve farmers' incomes and quality of life.

For 77 years, the PFRA helped farmers deal with water supply problems, developed drought-proofing and flood protection strategies, promoted crop diversification and encouraged sustainable farming practices. It set up successful irrigation systems, created a system of community pastures which returned failed farmland to productive grasslands and operated the Shelterbelt Centre that provided free seedlings to farmers as well as agroforestry extension. PFRA staff became an important source of specialized knowledge about prairie lands and waters and their stewardship. Through its work the PFRA also developed new technologies and research tools.

The PFRA ceased to exist as an independent institution in 2009, when its responsibilities were transferred to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. In 2012, the remaining responsibilities of the PFRA ended when the Shelterbelt Centre and the Community Pastures were shut down.

### The Canadian Farm Resilience Administration (CFRA)

Today we face an even greater challenge: the climate crisis. Economic and social emergencies are accelerating. Farmers require a large-scale, coordinated support system to help Canada's agriculture system with both mitigation and adaptation. We must mobilize with near-wartime like intensity.

To support provincial governments and farmers to protect farms, fields, soils, waterways, water supplies, trees, wetlands, and food-production capacities against the impacts of climate change, it is necessary to create a *Canadian Farm Resilience Administration* that would operate across Canada and coordinate emission reductions and adaptation and preparation for climate change.

The CFRA would be engaged in action and research to help farmers reduce agricultural emissions, adapt to climate change impacts and improve their incomes and quality of life. The CFRA would also be the vehicle for testing and implementing recommendations from consultations and expert processes such as the House of Commons Climate Report, the Sparrow Report, and the Prairie Agricultural Landscapes review.

CFRA initiatives would include:

- ⇒ Tree nurseries to provide each ecoregion with native trees and shrubs for afforestation efforts;
- ⇒ Research and extension work with farmers to help transition to low-input, low emissions production methods;
- ⇒ Testing and promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy adaptations for farm homes, buildings and equipment;
- ⇒ Research and extension to help farmers manage water challenges, including groundwater supply and wetland protection, flood/drought prevention and management strategies;
- ⇒ Monitoring agricultural GHG emissions and evaluating measures to reduce those emissions;
- ⇒ A Permanent Cover program, providing funding to farmers in exchange for seeding marginal lands to forages and grasses for extended periods;
- ⇒ Establishing (or re-establishing) community pastures to promote best practices in range management and provide access to grazing lands for small/medium, new and young farmers;
- ⇒ Expertise and management assistance to provincial, municipal and First Nations governments testing new/local ideas and methods for reducing agricultural GHGs;

⇒ Dissemination of knowledge created by other public institutions working on climate change solutions, such as AAFC, ECCCC, etc., and to provide them with feedback from the field;

⇒ A framework for dialogue and participatory research among farmers and researchers to advance climate change solutions based on farmers' challenges and successes.

The CFRA would be created by an Act of Parliament, with a mandate to "secure the resilience of Canada's farms and food system during the climate emergency by supporting adoption of effective emissions reduction, mitigation and adaptation measures, and to develop and promote within those systems of farm practice, tree culture, water supply, land utilization and land settlement that will afford greater economic security to farmers and rural communities in every region of Canada." The CFRA would report to Parliament annually, and be funded by a core allocation from the federal budget. The CFRA would have regional, district and local offices to ensure personnel and resources are located in every eco-region and/or major watershed where farming is practiced.

As a publicly funded, public interest institution, a key element of the CFRA's function would be to promote climate change-related action that builds a strong social, ecological and economic foundation for future generations. Its legitimacy and mandate would make the CFRA an important safeguard against private industry pressures to "monetize" the climate crisis as a new arena of wealth extraction. By making tangible, visible and valuable investments in rural areas, the CFRA would ease Canada's rural-urban tensions by providing meaningful and effective measures to address rural depopulation, community decline, intergenerational farm succession, the farm income crisis and rural quality of life.

Canadian farmers, like most Canadians, are reaching the limits of what they can do about the climate crisis as individuals. A dedicated public institution modelled after the widely-admired and respected former PFRA would provide the capacity to coordinate efforts urgently needed to reduce emissions in the agriculture sector and contribute to meeting Canada's economy-wide emissions reduction targets. The CFRA would promote Canada's prosperity through emissions reduction that supports sustainable production and farmer empowerment.