



Building Canadian Food Sovereignty

National Farmers Union Backgrounder

Canada needs to build capacity to protect farmers from the devastating effects of U.S. tariffs on exports, and to shield farmers, farm workers and consumers from potential impacts of retaliatory tariffs on U.S. imports. **We need a long-term strategy** that increases our resilience and reduces our dependence on trade with the USA. **No matter what happens, Canadian farmers, workers, and consumers would be well served by initiatives that strengthen our food sovereignty** and reduce our vulnerability to supply chain disruption, income loss, price increases and food shortages.

Strengthening food sovereignty—the democratic control of important decisions about food and agriculture—is a key strategy to withstand President Trump’s economic pressure tactics, AND build the resilience needed to better weather any coming storms.

Top priorities for action are:

1. **Defend Supply Management:** Supply management ensures that Canadian farmers who produce the high-quality dairy, chicken, eggs and turkey Canadians consume, are paid enough to cover their cost of production and do not have their market flooded by imports. This stable, reliable system is not exposed to tariff threats. Supply Management provides environmental, health, animal welfare and climate friendly benefits as well. Farmers and consumers alike are counting on the federal government to stand firmly in support of supply management.

Learn more about Supply Management - *Fact Check: Supply Management is a solid anchor in the tariff storm* <https://nfu.ca/fact-check-supply-management-is-a-solid-anchor-in-the-tariff-storm/>

2. **Diversify export markets:** Canada’s export-focused agricultural policy has created a high degree of dependency on the U.S. market, particularly for the beef and pork sectors. In the short term, AgriStability provides some support to participating farmers, but it doesn’t work for nearly two-thirds of Canadian farmers, including many who are exposed to U.S. tariffs. These farmers also need effective support during this crisis. In the longer term, we need a multifunctionality ag policy framework, structural changes to diversify both our markets and the crops grown for export, as well as measures that support the long-term viability of these farms. Single-desk hog marketing and single-desk beef marketing for commodity scale farms; re-establishing the single desk and expanding the Canadian Wheat Board to cover all commodity grains; support programs to increase the proportion of production using certified organic and other ecologically sound and climate mitigating practices are ways to do this.

Learn more about *The Canadian Wheat Board* <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/in-defence-of-the-canadian-wheat-board> and NFU’s proposal for a *Canadian Farm Resilience Agency* <https://nfu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CFRA-two-page-summary-2nd-Edn-2024-EN.pdf>

3. **Promote & build regional and local markets:** Local markets are critical to food sovereignty. Local and direct sales keep dollars in communities and food production where the eaters are. As retailers seek to replace US imports, demand for many Canadian foods will outstrip existing supply. We need to reduce our dependence on imported food by rebuilding our local and regional food production, processing, storage and distribution infrastructure to create reliable, long-term capacity to feed our population.

Learn more – NFU's *A Food Policy for Canada* <https://nfu.ca/policy/nfu-brief-on-a-food-policy-for-canada/>

4. **Protect Agricultural Workers:** Building a more resilient and robust Canadian food system means ensuring agriculture workers' jobs in both fields and food processing plants are good jobs, with fair wages, safe working conditions, and for migrant workers, full labour rights, open work permits, and a pathway to citizenship. An agricultural labour strategy that recognizes the seasonality of Canadian farming, and which provides livable incomes for farm workers year-round are needed to build a long term, resident labour force.

Learn more – NFU brief, *Towards a National Agricultural Labour Strategy that works for Farmers and Farm Workers* <https://nfu.ca/policy/towards-a-national-agricultural-labour-strategy-that-works-for-farmers-and-farm-workers/>

5. **Manufacture farm equipment:** Canada once manufactured a full line of farm machinery. We now have the opportunity to re-tool and expand our capacity to produce equipment designed for Canadian farms of all sizes and production types. A green industrial strategy for Canada that includes farm machinery would have benefits that extend beyond the agriculture sector.

Learn more - CCPA report: *Canada needs a green industrial strategy to combat climate change:* <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/canada-needs-a-green-industrial-strategy-to-combat-climate-change-report/>

6. **Prevent Corporate Profiteering:** During the pandemic and Ukraine war we saw that large corporations across the supply chain are willing to use their out-sized market power to increase their own profits at the expense of farmers, workers, and consumers alike. The federal government must prevent corporations from using the U.S. tariffs as a cover for price gouging, wage suppression and discounting of farm product prices. Canada also needs to address the excessive concentration of ownership in the agriculture and food sector, where monopolistic behaviour has become the rule rather than the exception. If Canada is unable or unwilling to break up monopolistic companies, other methods of regulating and limiting their market power must be put in place or these corporate giants will be in charge of our food supply.

Learn more - *A tale of two canola tariffs: China's tariffs are on a small portion of Canada's canola production* <https://nfu.ca/a-tale-of-two-canola-tariffs/> and NFU brief *From Fragile Supply Chains to Resilient Interdependent Networks* <https://nfu.ca/policy/from-fragile-supply-chains-to-resilient-interdependent-networks/>

Canadians' determination to stand together provides the resolve to not only weather the current storm, but to build a strong foundation of food sovereignty for a more secure, resilient future. With the support of our federal, provincial and municipal governments we can move swiftly toward this goal.