

BC Fruit Growers' Association Presentation to



Hon. Harjit Sajjan, Minister of Defense, Canada

Peter Simonsen, Vice-President

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Introduction

We appreciate meeting with you today to discuss the future of agriculture in BC and Canada. The agriculture sector has increased its productivity for many years - hundreds of years - with the newly available pool of workers that were released from agriculture fueling the industrial revolution. The youth from farm families also played an important role for Canada in the world wars. Over time, our industry has automated and our labour force has dropped from 1 in 2 Canadians a Century ago, to less than 1 in 50 Canadians today. Our future contribution to Canada will be in terms of food security and further gains in productivity when we adopt new technology.

Tree Fruit Industry Requests

Federal policies and programs which could be changed and improved:

- Improving turnaround times for the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program.
 - Service Canada processing time has slowed notably in the past 2 years.
 - Industry is adding further protections for workers, including improved housing requirements and cooperation with inspections from many regulators, including Integrity Division of Service Canada.
 - All of industry is suffering slow-downs and increased costs due to some 'bad actors', who are subject of more intensive audits.
 - We would like streamlining for employers who have had no issues - implementing a 'trusted employer' program will refocus the program on problem growers.
 - Additionally, staff of Integrity Division need to be trained and familiar with farming practices before attending the farm. We are very concerned that unannounced Integrity Division visits could lead to accidents on farm. Other branches of government let us know a general timeframe, so that we can alert growers to be aware that strangers may be entering their farm premises.

- Federal Tree Fruit Rejuvenation Program (Bare land planting and infrastructure funding).
 - Canadian Horticultural Council has proposed this national ‘no interest for five years’ program. It will help growers invest and expand tree fruit production and packing.
- Re-introduction of the PFRA and its water supply programs.
 - The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Agency was a reaction to the drought of the 1930’s and proved useful right up until it was cut by the previous government. This agency helped improve and secure water supplies and enhance water use efficiency. With climate change impacts on agriculture, the need for PFRA is as great as in the 1930’s, as the PFRA will help growers adjust to new climate conditions and extreme weather.
- Support for the National Plant and Animal Health Strategy.
 - The National Plant and Animal Health Strategy was adopted by Agriculture Ministers in July 2017. The plan is the result of extensive consultation with industry and has been very well received. Unfortunately, there are no government resources identified for the new work that is included in the Strategy. Funding, especially for invasive pests and for alternatives to conventional pest control is required.

We appreciate the government’s recent policy and investments for

- Changing the income tax proposals to avoid negative impact on farmers.
- Investment in research, through agricultural science clusters and a possible national Centre for PLant Health in Saanich BC, funded by the Large-Scale Research Program (LSARP is focused on agriculture and agri-food in 2018).
- Investment in climate change, including improvements to water supplies in the Okanagan and investments in Environmental Farm Plans, though additional funding is needed as climate change accelerates, or weather extremes increase.

Conclusion

Thank you for meeting with us today. We look forward to working with you, MP Stephen Fuhr and the federal Minister of Agriculture, in making tree fruit industry strong and capable.