

**Submission from the Vancouver Humane Society (VHS)
to the consultation on the
Next Agricultural Policy Framework**

The Vancouver Humane Society (VHS) is a registered charity dedicated to the humane treatment of animals. Since 1984, VHS has been encouraging individuals, organizations, and governments to take responsibility for the welfare and rights of domestic animals and wildlife influenced by human activities.

VHS has reviewed the *Calgary Statement – Towards the Next Policy Framework* and would like to submit the following comments regarding the Next Policy Framework (NPF). These comments focus on animal agriculture in Canada and relate to each of the Priority Areas listed in the Calgary Statement.

Overview

Canadians, as consumers and citizens, have serious concerns about the direction of animal agriculture. Over recent decades, the impact of the meat and livestock industry on animal welfare, the environment, food safety and dietary health has attracted substantial public attention and concern. In all these areas, the production of animal protein has demonstrated inherent risk, to the point where its sustainability must be questioned.

While VHS believes much can be done to improve current animal agriculture practices – such as introducing mandatory, enforceable animal welfare standards – we also believe an examination of more benign alternatives to the meat and livestock sector needs to be part of any review of the future of Canadian agriculture. It is fortunate that as the problems of meat production have emerged, so have new plant-based food innovations, which have sparked an embryonic, non-animal-based protein industry. This new industry should be encouraged and supported, with resources being shifted away from the problematic meat and livestock sector to this more sustainable and socially desirable new industry.

Markets and Trade

The development of overseas markets and trade opportunities for Canadian beef, pork and poultry necessarily means expanding production in those industries within Canada, with consequent environmental impacts, increases in land use, water and energy consumption and likely rises in the numbers of animals raised in intensive confinement systems. These “externalized” costs are therefore borne by Canada, not the countries where these export markets are developed.

Canada should prioritize developing markets for plant-based protein over animal-based protein. In particular, more should be done to grow markets for Canada’s pulse industry, including crops

and processed, valued-added products. Pulses, which have been shown to be an excellent source of protein, environmentally benign, beneficial to human health and in high demand globally, are a logical alternative to animal protein, which contributes to environmental degradation, is resource-intensive and is dependent on inhumane confinement systems. More needs to be done to develop the domestic market for pulse products and other plant-based foods by supporting promotion, consumer education and other marketing efforts to encourage domestic consumption.

Science, research and innovation

Canada should invest in research and development of plant-based protein, especially the production and processing of pulse crops. In contrast to animal protein production, pulses have been shown to be environmentally beneficial (requiring relatively little water and fertilizer), healthy and sustainable.

The emerging plant-based food sector (meat and dairy alternatives) should be supported and encouraged through scientific research (e.g. crops science, nutritional benefits) and innovation incentives designed to help develop new products and enhance existing ones.

An example of successful plant-based product development is the use of pea protein in a range of foods, especially meat alternatives. Advances in improving the taste (i.e. removing bitterness) and other qualities of pea protein have helped create markets for Canadian pea crops. This should serve as a model for the development and processing options for other pulse crops.

A number of innovative plant-based industries have emerged in Canada and elsewhere in recent years, attracting investment and consumer interest. Canadian start-ups and entrepreneurs in this field should be supported.

Risk management

The livestock sector has a number of [inherent risks](#), including:

- negative environmental impacts (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions)
- zoonotic disease outbreaks (e.g. avian flu)
- consumer rejection of inhumane, intensive confinement systems (e.g. battery cages for laying hens) and other animal welfare concerns
- consumer health concerns over meat consumption (e.g. cancer risk of red and processed meats)
- rise of antibiotic resistance due to overuse of antibiotics in livestock

A plant-based food industry would be free of these risks and the consequent costs of addressing them, which often require considerable public expenditure.

Environmental sustainability and climate change

Globally, the meat and livestock sector contributes 14.5% of all greenhouse gases, which is more than the transportation sector. It is also resource-intensive — it is the world's largest user of agricultural land, through grazing and the use of feed crops. The sector is also a [major contributor](#) to water pollution and loss of biodiversity.

In Canada, agriculture contributes about 8% of GHGs, with livestock being responsible for 62% of total agricultural emissions. (Canada's Sixth National Report on Climate Change, 2014 states that: "The main drivers of the emission trend in the Agriculture Sector are the expansion of the beef cattle and swine populations, and increases in the application of synthetic nitrogen fertilizers in the Prairies of western Canada.")

While Best Management Practices (BMPs) and efforts to decrease GHG *intensity* in the livestock sector go some way to mitigating emissions, only decreases in livestock populations will substantially reduce emissions. Transitioning Canada's agriculture sector to focus more on plant-based protein production and away from animal-based agriculture would accomplish this.

Value-added agriculture and agri-food processing

Canada is well-positioned to take advantage of the emerging plant-based food industry, especially plant-based protein production, due to its position as a global leader in pulse production. Investment in research and development, the pulse processing sector (e.g. flours) and in the food ingredient sector (e.g. increasing protein content of food products) could broaden opportunities for Canadian food industries and open up domestic and international markets for new food products. These products could be marketed not only on quality but also on their health, environmental and ethical benefits (e.g. no animal-based ingredients).

Public Trust

Canadian consumers have many concerns about animal agriculture.

Currently, animal agriculture in Canada involves the [confinement and suffering](#) of millions of animals. Animal welfare should be a top priority in the development of agricultural policy. Currently, there are no mandatory animal welfare standards in Canada, only voluntary Codes of Practice. These should be replaced with mandatory standards enforced by independent, third-party inspections.

The meat and livestock sector is dependent on intensive confinement systems (factory farms) that compromise animal welfare and degrade the [environment](#). In addition, the overconsumption of meat has been shown to be [harmful](#) to human health. Consequently, this sector is unsustainable. Consumers will continue to lose faith in agriculture if these problems persist.

Resources should be shifted to the development of a [plant-based protein](#) sector, including more support for Canada's production, processing and marketing of pulses. Plant-based diets should be promoted through public information programs and support for initiatives like [Meatless Monday](#).

Such initiatives would earn public trust, as they benefit the environment, public health and animal welfare.

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