



OPINION

Canada's economic growth strategy should start in the field

The potato sector shows how innovation, investment, and timely access to technology can strengthen Canada's productivity, exports and economic growth.

Shaun Vey

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The federal government has rightly put investment, productivity, and economic growth at the centre of its agenda. Agriculture must be part of that plan.

Canadian agriculture has the resources, expertise, and export potential to contribute more to our economy. The potato sector offers a useful example of what can be achieved and what is at risk if innovation does not reach the farm quickly enough.

In 2025, Canadian farmers produced 5.7 million tonnes of potatoes, according to Statistics Canada. Potatoes generated nearly \$2.1-billion in farm cash receipts in 2024, while exports of potatoes and potato products exceeded \$3.7-billion in 2025. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada identify potatoes as this country's fifth-largest primary agricultural crop and its largest vegetable crop by value.

This is a national success story. Potatoes are grown from coast to coast, supporting farms, processors, rural communities, and exporters. Alberta (my adopted province) produced 27.1 per cent of Canada's potatoes in 2025, making it the country's largest



A harvest of potatoes from Nakamura Farms, one of the largest potato producers in Alberta. Photograph courtesy of Holly Nicoll

producer by volume. Its potato acreage has grown approximately 43 per cent since 2016, supported in part by technology and expanded processing capacity.

That growth reflects effort across the value chain from researchers and technology developers to farmers, processors, and governments. It also demonstrates the value created when we connect production with processing, infrastructure, and export markets. Farm Credit Canada estimates there is a \$12-billion opportunity to expand and diversify Canada's food and beverage trade, including \$9.4-billion in potential exports beyond the United States.

But potato production is demanding, and requires growers to take on substantial financial risk each season. Farmers must manage disease and insect pressures while meeting stringent

requirements for quality and storage. A strong crop at harvest can still lose value if storage conditions deteriorate or products cannot move efficiently to market. They also contend with factors beyond their control, including weather, markets, trade conditions and production costs.

These pressures are familiar across agriculture. My roots are on a Saskatchewan grain farm, and throughout my career at Syngenta I have connected with farmers across Canada. Whether they grow potatoes, canola, pulses, cereals, corn, soybeans, fruits or vegetables, they face the same challenge: creating more value while managing risk.

What Canada can control is whether farmers have timely access to the innovation that helps them respond. They need a range of tools, including improved seed and seed treat-

ments, crop protection products, biological solutions, precision agriculture and digital decision support. AI-enabled field imagery, predictive models, and real-time data can help identify disease or insect pressure earlier and focus scouting. These technologies do not replace farmers' judgment; they put better information in their hands.

Innovation has little value sitting in a research pipeline or awaiting regulatory approval, reducing the window of opportunity to benefit from its use. Canada needs predictable, science-based regulation that protects people and the environment while giving farmers timely access to advances available to their competitors.

There are good reasons for optimism. The federal government's National Food Security Strategy recognizes the need to

process more of what this country grows, strengthen domestic supply chains, and improve access to productivity-enhancing tools. Farm Credit Canada's new \$1-billion Agri-food Project Finance Fund will support processing capacity and critical infrastructure. The Productivity Mega Deduction could encourage investment in machinery, software, research and development, and infrastructure.

Federal, provincial and territorial governments have also

sent positive signals through the Halifax Statement for the Next Policy Framework. Its priorities of economic growth, trade, innovation and resilience are the right ones, as are its commitments to technology adoption, value-added processing, artificial intelligence, market diversification and reliable infrastructure.

Now comes the test: implementation. Funding must move efficiently to viable projects. Regulatory commitments must

produce predictable decisions and faster access to innovation. The National Food Security Strategy aims to eliminate federal approval backlogs by the end of 2026 and reduce average approval times by at least one-third. Delivering on those commitments will determine whether these signals create lasting value on Canadian farms.

The next time Canadians put potatoes on the dinner table, they should see more than a

familiar staple. They should see a Canadian success story, one that reflects innovation, investment, partnership and the everyday expertise of farmers. Agriculture is not simply another sector seeking a place in Canada's growth strategy. It is one of the strongest foundations on which that strategy can be built.

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