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# “OUR AGRICULTURE IS IN CRISIS”

**Cross-Perspectives on the Challenges and  
Opportunities in Canada’s Farming Sector**



# Acknowledgements

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# Executive summary

## What did this study do?

In 2022, we conducted a study showing that Canadian farmers earned three to eight times more income by selling their fresh and minimally processed foods to the market, rather than to the food processing industry as ingredients for processed or ultra-processed foods. However, despite this advantage, many farmers continue to prefer the latter. In this context, this qualitative study aims to understand these dynamics and assess the extent to which the current food system favors the production and marketing of fresh, minimally processed foods. To do so, we conducted interviews in Quebec and Ontario with 20 farmers, 14 representatives of organizations working in the agricultural sector and 2 policymakers. The data were analyzed using a deductive and inductive approach, based on a conceptual framework inspired by a study on conversion to organic farming.

## What did the study find?

Overall, the results reveal the systemic nature of the challenges faced by small and medium-sized producers. Although farmers acknowledge the economic benefits of selling fresh and minimally processed foods to the processing industry, many resort to this model as a pragmatic solution to an agro-industrial and economic system that inadequately supports the sale of fresh, local produce. In this context, the main challenges cited include a lack of coherence in public policies, regulatory constraints that are ill-adapted to their realities, high production costs and limited access to labor and land. Issues of mental health and climatic constraints were also raised. While most representatives confirmed these observations, decision-makers, acknowledged these constraints, but stressed that agricultural policies are not structured around public health objectives, and that their effectiveness is measured by economic performance indicators. Despite these challenges, several levers for action have been identified, including support from certain government programs, growing consumer interest in buying local, the development of agritourism in the regions, community initiatives and promising cooperative models.

## What do the findings mean?

In the current context, it is essential to rethink the vision of agriculture and to acknowledge the central role of farmers in addressing public health challenges, environmental sustainability and territorial resilience. To this end, it is necessary to develop more coherent public policies based on a shared vision that involves the active participation of farmers, food security stakeholders, and local authorities. These policies should support strategies tailored to the specificities of each territory. Promoting diversified, sustainable and localized food system is essential, by giving more room to alternative models and implementing appropriate economic and market tools such as shared infrastructures, a guaranteed minimum income or an agricultural exception in free-trade agreements.