

Promote Agribusiness Growth Opportunities by Reducing Barriers to Interprovincial and International Trade (2023)

Issue

Current federal legislation does not allow for meat, poultry, eggs, dairy products, fruits and vegetables to cross provincial/territorial borders, or to be exported out of Canada unless these products are processed in a federally licensed facility. The new Safe Food for Canadians Act will expand this to include all foods shipped out of province/territory. The Canadian government claims that this is required to ensure that Canada fulfils its commitments under current world trade agreements.

Background

Currently, implementation of Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) regulations and licensing requirements is cost prohibitive to many small to mid-sized processors and constitute a major barrier to interprovincial and international trade. The processor's share of these costs is excessive when compared to costs incurred by their competitors for similar services in other jurisdictions, notably in the USA. This places Canadian processors at a disadvantage to many competitors.

SMEs advise that current CFIA food safety regulations are outdated and need to be revised to remove unnecessary regulations that lack adequate scientific validation of enhancing food safety outcomes while creating a significant impediment to business interests. There is also a need to minimize duplication of administration costs between provincial/territorial and federal regulators.

Facility construction requirements, along with steep inspection, licensing and testing fees all constitute major obstacles for processors that want to trade interprovincially or internationally. Unified provincial/territorial standards and regulations, with increased accessibility to federal licensing would be of significant financial benefit to small and medium sized processors that want to increase their business through interprovincial or international trade. Easy to implement, cost-competitive, and uniform food safety standards and regulations, for both interprovincial and export markets, are required, without compromising food safety standards.

With the current CFIA modernization in progress, it is important to the competitiveness of Canadian businesses to reduce barriers to trade and enhance business growth opportunities. This is especially important with the impending impact of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).

Canadian processors trading interprovincially or internationally operate at a disadvantage to international competitors. For example, the United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA FSIS) does not levy licensing and inspection fees on their food processing plants (up to the first 40 hours per week). As a comparison, the Province of Alberta charges \$4 per hour for the first 7.25 hours per day. CFIA inspection stations cost from

\$9,855 per year for one red meat station to \$16,218 per year for a poultry station. If an abattoir is processing more than 25 cattle/hogs per hour or 28 birds per minute, they must purchase an additional table. There is also the requirement to pay for inspection fees and various tests for *Listeria*, *Salmonella*, and *E. coli*.

Before food products are imported into Canada, the CFIA conducts an initial inspection of the processing plant from which these products originated, and then conducts random inspections of the imported products. This same oversight and outcome-based approach should be applied to all interprovincial and international trade.

Interprovincial trade of agriculture and food products comprises a major portion of the Canadian agri-food business. “From 2000 to 2005, interprovincial exports of agricultural and food products were higher than Canada’s agri-food exports to the United States. Interprovincial exports of agri-food products rose by 20% during this period, increasing from \$21 billion to \$25 billion in value. During this period, the value of agri-food exports to the United States was between \$16 billion and \$20 billion.”

While the exact cost of interprovincial trade barriers caused by differing food regulations is not known, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce estimates that internal barriers to trade cost the Canadian economy up to \$14 billion each year. While much of this loss can be attributed to the limited potential customer base, there is also a 55% overlap of administrative and regulatory service between Canada and Alberta.

Despite numerous efforts to reduce interprovincial trade barriers such as the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) and regional trade agreements such as the New West Partnership Trade Agreement (NWPTA), the Atlantic Procurement Agreement (APA), the British Columbia – Alberta Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA), and the Agreement on the Opening of Public Procurement for Ontario and Quebec (AOPPOQ), the problems persist and are an obstacle to the growth and profitability of Canadian businesses.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends the Government of Canada:

1. Works collaboratively with provincial/territorial and federal inspection agencies to effect positive changes to food safety outcome inspections, enabling processors to compete more efficiently in both domestic and international markets:
 - a) To support a single industry outcome that can be implemented with consistency and cost-effectiveness across Canada by the provinces/territories, with each provincial/territorial regulator subject to Canadian Food Inspection Agency oversight;
 - b) The food safety regulations need to be reviewed for relevancy and modified/broadened if current criteria are unnecessarily restrictive and insensitive to sound business interests; and
 - c) The implementation must be consistent and cost-effective throughout the food distribution chain, without compromising Canada’s reputation for high food safety standards; and
2. Reassess inspection and regulatory costs and how they are allocated, to enable processors to trade across provincial or national borders, without being at a competitive disadvantage.