



Building Public Trust in Agriculture

Agriculture is the foundation of opportunity in Saskatchewan. It drives the economy, provides more than 50,000 jobs, and produces healthy, affordable food for people at home and around the world.

The Saskatchewan Plan for Growth established ambitious targets to continue to grow the sector, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life for all Saskatchewan people. Maintaining the public's trust is key to this growth. It allows producers access to the tools and technologies they need to be sustainable and competitive. It allows access to domestic and international markets and helps attract investment, innovation and people in the sector. It also supports science-based policy and decision making.

The Ministry of Agriculture's Public Trust Strategy

Building public trust in the agriculture sector is a strategic priority for the Ministry of Agriculture. In 2019, the Public Trust Strategy was launched. It defines the Ministry's approach to, and role in, building public trust in agriculture.

Vision: A trusted agri-food sector that is competitive and sustainable.

Mission: Provide leadership and foster accountability to build public trust in agriculture.

The Ministry's Public Trust Strategy features three strategic pillars which reflect the 'public trust equation' developed through the Canadian Journey to Public Trust:



Strategic Pillar 1: Doing the Right Thing

Building public trust is more than a communications exercise. It requires government and industry to do the work to ensure it is *worthy* of the public's confidence – it requires stakeholders from the farm gate to food plate to do the right thing. The Ministry encourages and supports industry to adopt best practices by:

- Investing in research;
- Extending information and technology transfer; and
- Delivering effective programming.

Science-based research is fundamental to innovation and is essential for growth. The Ministry invests millions of dollars each year to improve understanding of what practices are best, environmentally, economically and socially. The Agriculture Development Fund invests in research projects that develop solutions for emerging problems, while the Strategic Research Program supports Strategic Research Chairs at the University of Saskatchewan who explore and developing innovative ideas and technologies.

The Ministry's extension team supports the transfer of new knowledge to Saskatchewan producers. Through 10 regional offices and the Agriculture Knowledge Centre, the Ministry offers training and technical services, and conducts demonstration research to accelerate the adoption of best practices.

Through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a \$388 million investment by federal and provincial governments in strategic initiatives for Saskatchewan agriculture, the Ministry offers programming to help address the financial barriers sometimes associated with making changes to practices. Programs such as the Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure Program, Farm Stewardship Program and Irrigation Program are all tools to support producers to do the right thing.

Outcome: Saskatchewan leads in the adoption of best practices.

Perception Indicators

- Percentage of Saskatchewan residents that believe Saskatchewan livestock are treated humanely.
- Percentage of Saskatchewan residents that believe farmers and ranchers take care of the environment.



Strategic Pillar 2: Effective Assurance

Effective assurance is the system – both regulatory and non-regulatory – that assures the public that agriculture is committed to doing the right thing. The public expects a back-stop and that standards and protections are in place. This pillar is about safeguarding the public interest, and proving our commitment to it through evidence.

The Ministry will protect food safety, animal health, and the environment by:

- Ensuring sound regulations and monitoring compliance;
- Increasing understanding of recognized assurance systems; and
- Collaborating on federal regulations.

Regulations are an important part of an effective assurance system, but this doesn't always mean additional regulations are needed to achieve a goal or standard. It is the role of government to constantly review and update regulations to ensure they are effective and outcome based. Compliance also needs to be monitored to ensure outliers are addressed. Government has several tools to encourage compliance, ranging from education and awareness, to penalties and fines.

Beyond government regulations, there are many industry assurance systems that are designed to encourage adoption of best practices while demonstrating agriculture's commitment to doing the right thing. Some of these assurance systems, such as Pro-Action in the dairy industry and Canadian Pork Excellence in the swine industry, are required by industry to market product. Others like Verified Beef Production Plus are voluntary industry standards. Each of these systems contain on-farm food safety components, animal care and biosecurity requirements, and most are adding environmental elements as well. The Ministry strives to improve producers' understanding of these assurance systems and enhance uptake.

The federal government is the lead on many regulations and assurance systems that help protect food safety, animal health, and the environment. The Ministry collaborates on the development and implementation of those regulations to ensure they meet the needs of Saskatchewan producers and public.

Outcome: A regulatory system that is trusted and verifiable.

Perception Indicators

- Percentage of Saskatchewan residents that trust government to protect food safety, animal health and the environment.



Strategic Pillar 3: Awareness & Engagement

Agriculture has an incredible story to tell – from its contributions to the economy, and its role in feeding a growing world, to its stewardship of the environment. However, the reality is people are less connected with agriculture than ever before. The public can't trust a sector it doesn't understand; thus, the Ministry will partner to build awareness about modern agriculture by:

- Empowering stakeholders to connect with consumers and youth;
- Building confidence in our regulatory framework; and
- Gauging public perception to inform future actions.

Farmers and ranchers are the most trusted voice when it comes to telling agriculture's story – more so than doctors, scientists, and government officials. That's why the Ministry works to empower producers to build awareness about what they do, and why they do it. The Agriculture Awareness Initiative Program funds industry projects that improve the public's understanding of modern food production. The Ministry also supports organizations who amplify agriculture's message to key audiences, such as Agriculture in the Classroom Saskatchewan who connects students and educators to agriculture and Farm and Food Care Saskatchewan who builds consumer confidence in the agri-food sector.

Empowering stakeholders also involves developing the capacity of Saskatchewan's young agricultural leaders. The Ministry proudly supports Saskatchewan 4-H as a key partner in this work, while also offering the NextGen Mentorship Program through Canadian Western Agribition.

The Ministry plays a role in telling agriculture's story by building confidence in the regulatory framework. This involves going beyond communications with the Ministry's primary clients – farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses – to communicate with the broader stakeholder group, including the public.

Two-way communication is crucial in building public trust. The Ministry is a member of the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity and monitors national trends in consumer perception. A public trust survey is also conducted by Inshtrix Research annually to get Saskatchewan-specific insights on consumer concerns.

Outcome: Government and industry prioritize public trust and take action to manage risks.

Perception Indicators

- Percentage of Saskatchewan residents with a positive perception of agriculture.
- Percentage of Canadians with a positive perception of agriculture.



Guiding Principles

Transparency

Practicing transparency both in what we do in agriculture, and how we do it will help us make strides towards our desired outcomes. It requires us to stay curious about what consumers are thinking and why, then be committed to addressing those concerns through further research, improving practices and/or more effective communications. As we open the barn doors, we must remain grounded in the values that we share with consumers, as there is more that unites than divides farmers and foodies.

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is key to progress, as what is right today, might not be right tomorrow. We aren't perfect, but every day we are advancing our understanding of how best to protect food safety, animal health, and the environment. The principle of continuous improvement also applies to how we endeavor to connect with the public – this is new domain and we will need to continue to try new and innovative approaches.

Evidence-Based

It is important that we trust science in determining the safety and efficacy of practices and that producers have continued access to tools and technologies that evidence deems as safe. However, nurturing trust does require an understanding of risk. Nothing we do in agriculture is in isolation and each choice has consequences. We all play a part in developing and adopting scientifically validated practices, standards and regulations.

Collaboration

We can't do this alone, nor should we. Every player in the value-chain must do their part, and that's more than talking the talk. We need to consider the risks of losing the public trust and prioritize the work it will take to mitigate that risk. Taking responsibility for our impact on public trust, and working through the evolving nature of what gains trust together, will create a culture of accountability across the sector.

Conclusion

Maintaining public trust is critical to agriculture's sustained growth. This Public Trust Strategy defines the Ministry of Agriculture's approach, but the entire agri-food sector has a role to play in each of the three pillars. By working together, we can ensure agriculture continues to be the foundation of opportunity in Saskatchewan and that the sector remains trusted, competitive and sustainable.