

AAFC's Sustainable Agriculture Strategy: Eight things you should know

National Farmers Union, February 9, 2023

1. The Sustainable Agriculture Strategy process is a big deal—a historic opportunity

The [Sustainable Agriculture Strategy \(SAS\)](#) will codify a “long-term vision” and an “integrated and coordinated approach” (p. 2) for Canadian agriculture. The SAS process represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to chart a more sustainable course for our farms and food systems. One gov't doc. refers to a “25 year” Sustainable Agriculture Strategy.

2. The government has released an initial Discussion Document

On December 12, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) released a 29-page [Sustainable Agriculture Strategy Discussion Document](#).

3. The SAS Discussion Document is a mixed bag

The Discussion Document contains a range of statements that, at one extreme, make ambitious commitments to authentic sustainability, but, on the other, reaffirm a business-as-usual focus on increased production, exports, and “competitiveness.”

An example of the former, positive focus, includes a commitment to the principle of “circularity: applying circular economy principles towards an agriculture and food system that is regenerative, resilient, [and] turns waste into a resource... (p. 5).” In a similar vein, the Discussion Doc tells us that an SAS “is intended to guide long-term decision-making on policies, programs, and initiatives that advance Canada's commitment towards a net-zero 2050 future” (p.2).

On the other hand, the Discussion Doc reaffirms the need for Canada to “maintain and increase its share of the global market” and to “contribute to growing domestic and global food demands.” Indeed, a cynical reader might worry that the SAS process is more focused on marketing and market access than on true sustainability; passages such as the following give that impression:

In order for Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector to maintain and increase its share of the global market, Canada must consider the competitiveness of the sector. Increasingly, competitive advantage is going to countries that can produce more, with less energy, water, and environmental impacts. International competitors have been placing larger emphasis on agri-environment priorities, as well as consumer and investor interest in sustainability and environmental stewardship. ... It is increasingly important for Canada to demonstrate alignment with these shifting market dynamics that reflect a growing global focus on the environment and sustainable food. A Sustainable Agriculture Strategy will need to support efforts to position Canada as a key producer of in-demand sustainable food and agricultural products (p. 4).

Please consider reading the 29-page [Sustainable Agriculture Strategy Discussion Document](#).

4. The Discussion Document proposes five goals

The Document proposes the following goals for a Sustainable Agriculture Strategy (p. 21):

1. The agriculture sector is resilient to short and long-term climate impacts while growing productive capacity, and has adapted to changing contexts due to climate change.
2. Environmental performance is improved in Canada's agriculture sector, contributing to the environmental, economic, and social benefit of all Canadians.
3. The agriculture sector plays an important role in contributing to Canada's national 2030 GHG emission reduction and net-zero by 2050 targets while remaining competitive and supporting farmers.
4. A more comprehensive and integrated approach is taken in addressing agri-environmental issues in the agriculture sector, across policy, programming, and partners in the value chain.....
5. Canada has addressed data gaps and improved capacity to measure, report on, and track the environmental performance of the agriculture and agri-food sector.

5. AAFC has convened an Advisory Committee (SAS-AC)

The SAS-AC will include representatives from 20 organizations including Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS), the National Farmers Union (NFU), and Canadian Organic Growers (COG). Also on the Committee are the Canadian Canola Growers, Grain Growers of Canada, and Fertilizer Canada. Environmental organizations on the SAS-AC include Nature United and the Canadian Wildlife Federation. AAFC and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) will co-chair. Meetings will take place every two weeks.

6. The SAS-AC has an important, but limited, role

NFU, FCS, COG, and others will do important work on the SAS-AC, but that body will not have decision-making power, nor does it appear that SAS-AC members will be close to those who “hold the pen” when the final SAS gets written. The SAS-AC Terms of Reference (ToR) state that “members will provide input, recommendations and advice into the development of shared outcomes, potential targets, measures to support those targets, and other components....” The final SAS report will be written by AAFC staff based on input via multiple consultation channels.

7. There is an initial written consultation process ending March 31st

The SAS process includes two timelines. The work of the SAS-AC will extend over all of 2023. But there is a shorter, near-term deadline for initial public input and consultation: March 31st. Individuals and organizations can provide input by that time by writing emails, letters, or reports and submitting them to aafc.sas-sad.aac@agr.gc.ca or by answering AAFC's [online questionnaire](#). *Farmers and others are encouraged to provide input before March 31st.*

8. Several virtual and in-person consultation meetings are planned

Though dates are not finalized, there are a dozen virtual and in-person “engagement sessions” planned for January through March. Tentatively, open invitation “Virtual Producer Outreach” sessions will occur Feb 24 (Western Canada); Mar 10 (Central Canada); Mar 20 (Eastern); and Mar 24 (National).