



WHAT WE HEARD

Results from National Interviews
November 2021



CASI
Canadian Agri-food
Sustainability Initiative

IDAC
Initiative de durabilité
agroalimentaire canadienne

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

The global marketplace is increasingly looking for evidence of sustainable production practices. For example, in 2020, 100% of General Mills' top ten priority ingredients were sustainably sourced and by 2030, Unilever will follow responsible and sustainable sourcing principles for 100% of all their key crops (e.g., soy and sugar).^{i,ii} Canadian agriculture and agri-food products are known to be some of the most safe, sustainable and affordable globally, demonstrated by great commodity-based efforts. However, no whole-farm solution exists, and the Canadian agri-food sector must be better enabled to respond to requests for evidence.

The Canadian Agri-food Sustainability Initiative is developing an online platform for Canadian producers to demonstrate participation in programs that provide evidence of sustainable production practices. In short, CASI will be a place for Canadian farm businesses to communicate the good work taking place on-farm.

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report summarizes what we heard from 129 agri-food sector stakeholders from across Canada and provides clear, actionable next steps for the Canadian Agri-food Sustainability Initiative platform development and engagement activities from Fall 2021 to Spring of 2023.

KEY QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What does sustainability mean to stakeholders today?

- The three pillars of sustainability are recognized as equally important and interconnected
- Canada's current approach to demonstrating evidence of sustainable production practices is responsive to public demands, and there is a need to transition to a more proactive approach
- While individual commodity and program efforts are recognized as impressive, interviewees feel that the current approach puts the Canadian sector at risk of losing or missing out on market access opportunities
- Demands for sustainability indicators and reporting measures are constantly evolving, and so too, must the eventual CASI platform

What are the drivers for measuring and improving sustainability in Canadian agriculture?

- Along the supply chain it is especially important to measure and improve sustainability to demonstrate progress on corporate social responsibility targets and to meet consumer demands.
- At the farm-level there is pressure to improve on sustainability for the next generation, and to remain competitive in markets where there is a growing demand to measure sustainability progress.
- Government sees an increasing need for sustainability data to understand and improve program delivery and outcomes, and to justify new investments and interventions
- Sustainability is also driven through internal pressures in the sector across all three pillars. For example, environmental sustainability issues such as soil health, fish stocks and biodiversity are all important to maintain the sectors' capacity to continue to be productive.

What is the value proposition of CASI?

- CASI presents an opportunity to pull together a more complete view of the agricultural sector's sustainability status. Stakeholders hope to use CASI to put different sources of information together to tell coherent stories about sustainability in agriculture and agri-food.

CASI'S VALUE PROPOSITION FOR EACH SUBGROUP:

PRODUCERS AND PRODUCER GROUPS

- **Streamline reporting programs and reduce duplication across sustainability standards to alleviate administrative burden**
- **Potentially improve market access to supply chains requiring proof of sustainability**

GOVERNMENTS

- **Help inform program design**
- **Demonstrate value and outcomes of programs**
- **Enable provinces and different levels of government to “speak the same language”**

SUPPLY CHAINS

- **Improve access to data that can better inform communication on sustainability within supply chains and with consumers**
- **Aggregated sustainability data can be a useful resource to help measure company performance, better understand supply chains, and grow market access**

SUSTAINABILITY ENABLERS

- **CASI can organize the spectrum of sustainability initiatives**
- **Facilitate collaboration between sustainability enablers and initiatives**

What do stakeholders want to see with respect to collecting and sharing agri-food data?

- For wide acceptance, interviewees suggested that data needs to be transparently collected, objective and verified.
- The platform will need to strategically focus on certain types of data, such as those which support market access, or helps to drive improvements.

- The platform will also need to have the capacity to integrate information between different sustainability initiatives and share aggregated data between actors to maximize value.

FOR PRODUCERS TO INTERACT WITH THE PLATFORM, CASI WILL NEED TO:



Enable producers to feel comfortable about consenting to data sharing



Minimize time and administrative commitments to data collection and reporting



Provide an accessible interface that is usable by all producers



Ensure data and broadband demands from the platform are minimal



Enable producers to see who is using aggregated sustainability data and why

What topics should CASI incorporate into future research?

- Social sustainability is a priority for stakeholders, especially for building thriving rural communities, attracting and retaining talent and youth in the sector, and ensuring working conditions are safe and equitable. These topics are critical to explore to address social sustainability data gaps in Canada.
- There are complex animal care and husbandry topics that can be better communicated through a sustainability lens. Moving forward, CASI can work to ensure that animal care practices are incorporated into sustainability reporting and aggregate reports.
- Carbon markets and industry-led carbon programs are being developed at an unprecedented rate. One potential option is for CASI to better present the different carbon opportunities available to producers and their requirements

NEXT STEPS

To develop a CASI that is well informed and positioned to succeed, we plan to build upon the fulsome and informative interview process with further engagement steps. The next steps in the engagement process are to conduct two pilot projects and host 4-6 workshops with stakeholder groups across Canada.

- The two pilot projects will be conducted by [Provision Coalition](#) and [Anthesis](#)
- Potential workshop topics include:
 - Presenting the outcomes from the pilot projects
 - Showcasing a Canadian Brand: CASI and the National Index on Agri-food Performance
 - Integrating Sustainability Programs: Environmental Farm Plan and Opportunities for National Aggregation



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The global marketplace is increasingly looking for evidence of sustainable production practices. For example, in 2020 100% of General Mills' top ten priority ingredients were sustainably sourced and by 2030 Unilever will follow responsible and sustainable sourcing principles for 100% of all their key crops (e.g., soy and sugar).^{iii iv} Canadian agriculture and agri-food products are known to be some of the safest, sustainable, and affordable globally, demonstrated by great commodity-based efforts. This leadership is reflected by the many current initiatives across the sector to enhance environmental, social and economic outcomes from Canadian farm businesses. However, no whole-farm solution exists, and the Canadian agri-food sector must be better enabled to respond to requests for evidence.

Global brands are increasingly seeking farm-level performance assurance, governments want a higher level of public trust, and consumers are looking for signals of environmental, social and economic sustainability. In response to these demands, the Canadian Agri-food Sustainability Initiative (CASI) aims to meet global and future sustainability needs for the Canadian agricultural sector. The objectives of CASI include increasing transparency, reducing duplication, developing sustainability competencies, and developing a forum for knowledge exchange and collaboration.

With so much information available on sustainable production practices often at the individual commodity level, there is an opportunity to create synergies between programs in order to reduce duplication of efforts and enable agricultural producers to provide evidence of sustainable production practices. CASI will develop an online portal for Canadian producers to demonstrate sustainable production practices. CASI will be a place for Canadian farm businesses to communicate the good work taking place on-farm and enable stakeholders to access aggregated sustainability data from the Canadian agricultural sector that can drive continuous improvements in the sector.

CASI is funded through the AgriAssurance program under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (the Partnership), a five-year federal-provincial-territorial initiative. The development of CASI is led by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA).

Interviews were conducted with agri-food sector stakeholders across Canada between January and April 2021. The purpose of the interviews were to:

- Understand the current landscape of agri-food sustainability programming, including data collection and information sharing.
- Understand current agri-food sustainability reporting strengths, gaps, and opportunities across Canada.
- Determine the value proposition of the CASI platform for key stakeholders.

This report summarizes what we heard from agri-food sector stakeholders from across Canada and provides clear next steps for CASI based on feedback from this national engagement.

2.0 CONTEXT

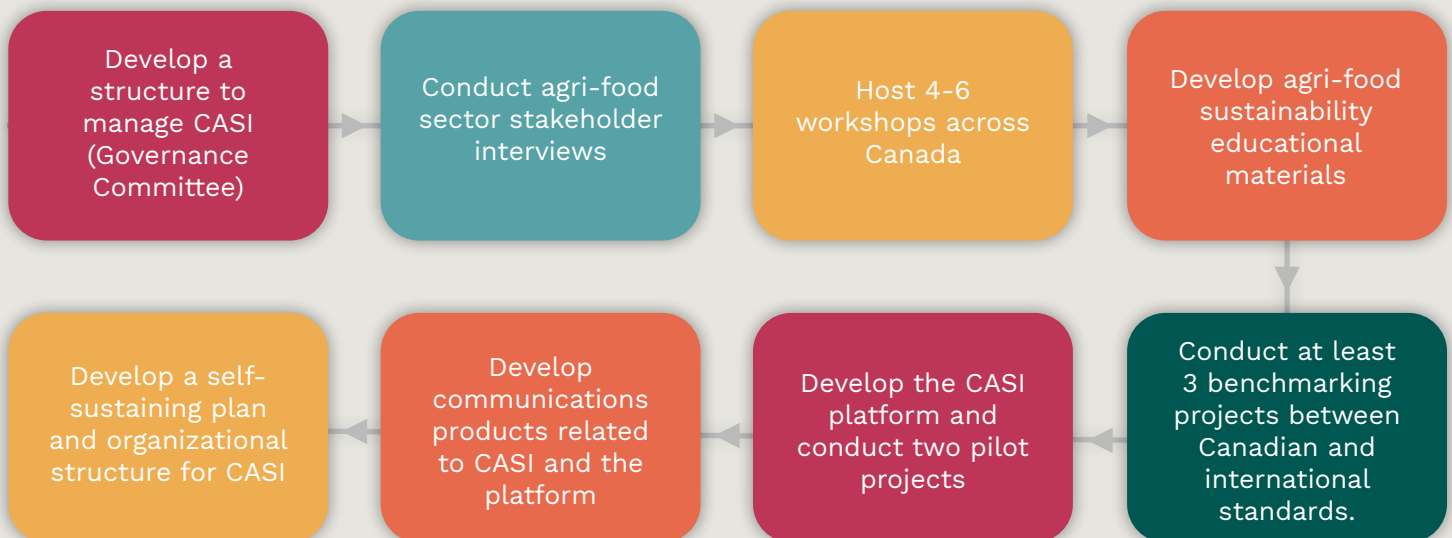
The visioning for CASI began in 2017, originally as a project to explore the concept of a system that will simplify the process of meeting sustainability requirements in Ontario. The goal was to develop a framework, or platform, that would facilitate communication and reporting across various commodity-specific programs and create a “whole farm” approach based on a common set of practices, allowing for sustainability actions implemented on farms to be recognized throughout the value chain. Through the Ontario project, it became clear that there is a desire to explore this approach at a national scale.^v

In February 2020, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada officially announced it will provide three years of funding for the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to develop CASI.^{vi} The objective is to develop a national online sustainability platform to proactively meet the growing demand for evidence of sustainable production practices. The overall goal is to develop the capacity of the Canadian agriculture sector in communicating and interacting with different sustainability standards.

The purpose of CASI is three-fold:

- To engage with stakeholders and industry groups through the development of a structure to manage the initiative,
- To develop and test a data-sharing platform through the implementation of pilot projects, and
- To communicate with stakeholders and the public throughout the duration of the project on topics in agri-food sustainability and broader knowledge sharing about CASI.

The CASI project involves a series of agri-food sector research and engagement activities from 2020-2023.



This ‘*What We Heard*’ report details the results from national stakeholder interviews. The key findings from the interviews will inform the development of the platform for the first pilot project and topics/strategy for the 4-6 workshops across Canada.

3.0 INTERVIEW METHODS

The interview process was collaborative. Input was sought from both the Governance Committee as a whole as well as from a sub-committee dedicated to providing research and engagement support for CASI. The Governance Committee provided high-level feedback, while the sub-committee offered more in-depth insights on the development of the interview process.

IDENTIFIED KEY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS (NOV. - DEC. 2020)

- Developed key stakeholder groups
- Refined key stakeholder groups in collaboration with the Governance Committee

DEVELOPED INTERVIEW GUIDE (DEC. 2020)

- Developed and refined interview guide in collaboration with the research sub-committee
- The interview guide contained a series of questions for all interviewees, as well as group-specific questions (see Appendix A)

COMPILED LIST OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS (JAN. 2021)

- Developed list of key stakeholders in collaboration with the Governance Committee
- Refined and finalized key stakeholder list with research sub-committee

TARGETED OUTREACH AND SCHEDULING (FEB. 2021)

- Began targeted outreach and scheduling interviews (see Appendix B: Interview Invitation Letter)
- Stakeholders also requested interviews through engagement with the CASI website “contact us” page

CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS (MAR. - APR. 2021)

- Completed 129 stakeholder interviews

3.1 WHO WE HEARD FROM

In total, 129 individuals were interviewed from four key stakeholder groups across Canada. The four key stakeholder groups are:

1. **Producers and Producer Groups:** Farmers or organizations which represent the interests of farmers.¹
2. **Supply Chain:** Includes buyers, processors, transportation, retail, and inputs.
3. **Government:** Includes federal and provincial government stakeholders.
4. **Sustainability Enablers:** A catch-all term for groups that influence sustainability outcomes such as not-for-profit advocacy groups in wildlife, conservation and the environment, and domestic and international agri-food sustainability program service-providers.

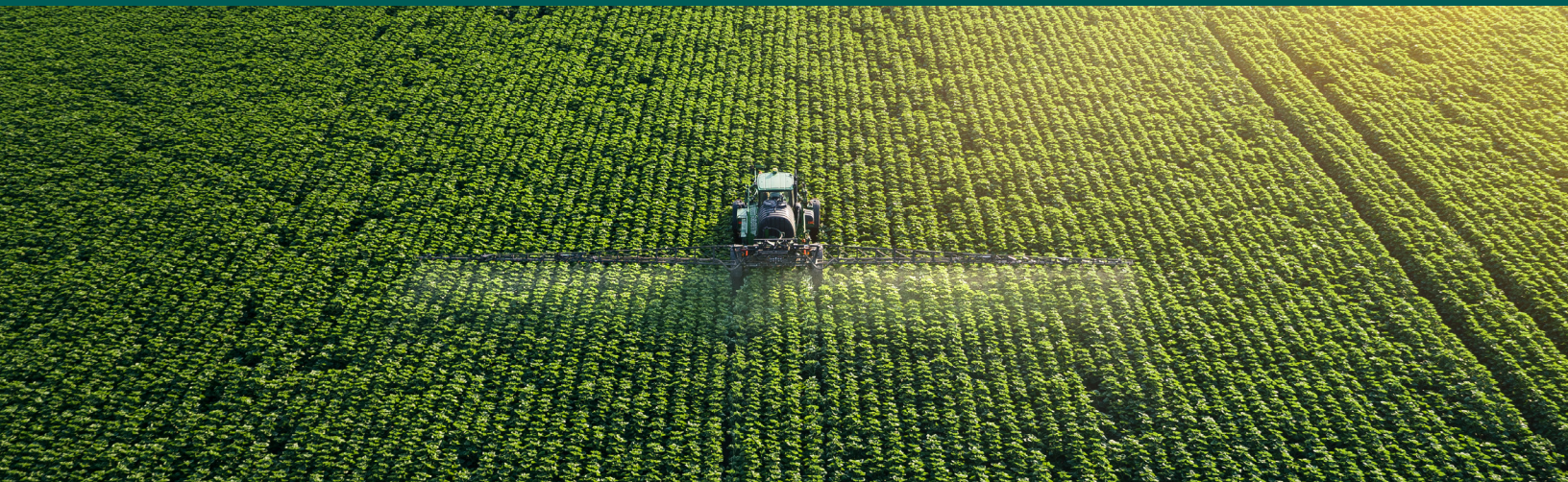


Table 1. Interviews by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	Number of Interviewees	Percentage of Total
Producer Groups	54	42%
Government	29	22%
Sustainability Enablers	24	19%
Supply Chain	22	17%
TOTAL	129	100%

¹ The largest sub-group of interviewees were farm organizations that represent the interest of producers. It was identified through the interviews that targeted engagement with farmers “on the ground” will be critical for developing and refining the CASI platform.

Producer Groups and Government stakeholders were selected to ensure geographic representation across Canada. Many interviewees represent organizations with national representation. Regional groupings include:

- **Western Canada (BC, AB)**
- **Central Canada (SK, MB)**
- **Eastern Canada (ON, QC)**
- **Atlantic Canada (NV, NS, PEI, NL)**
- **Territories (YK, NWT, NV)**

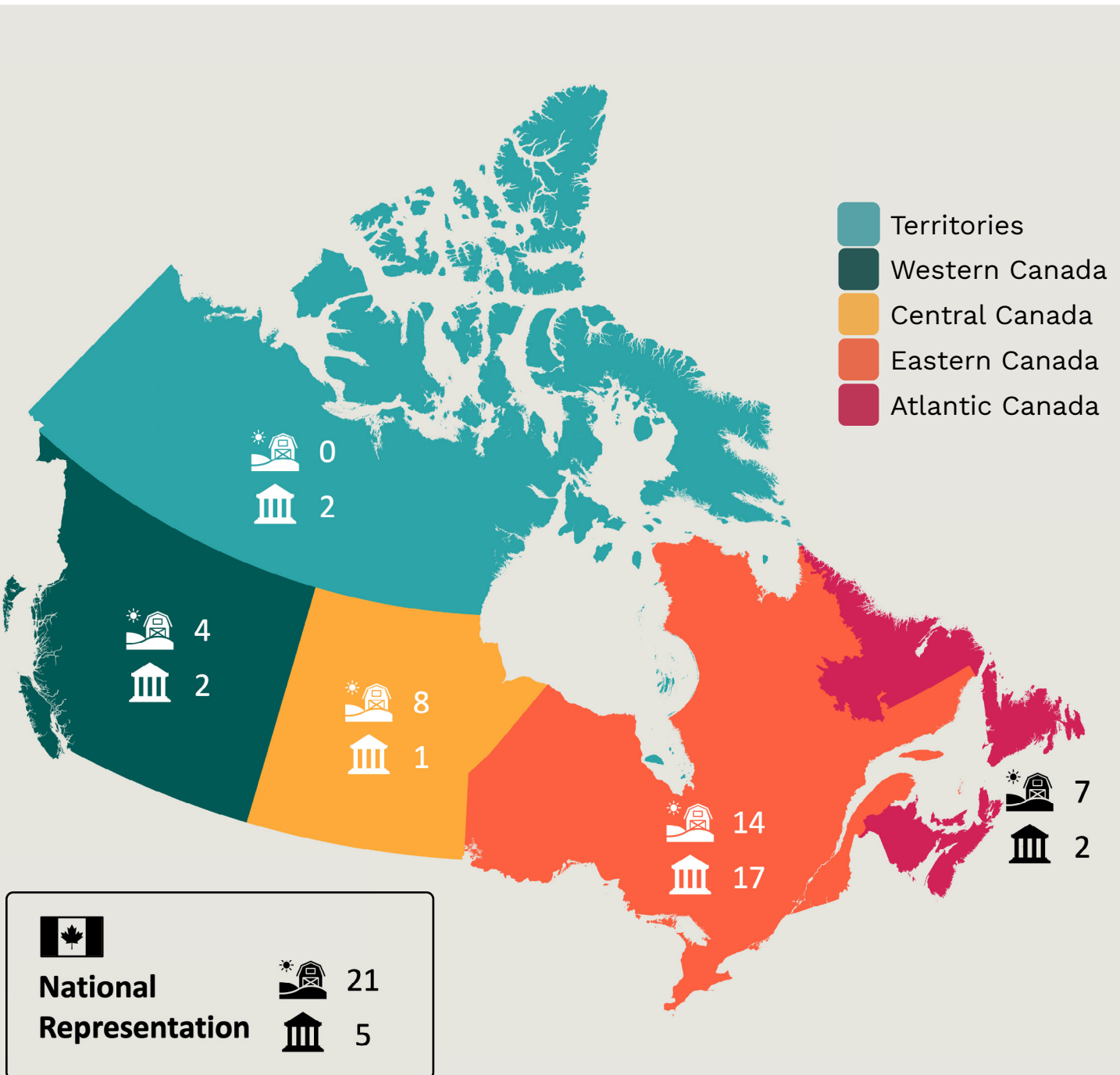


Figure 1. Regional breakdown of Producer Group (🏡) and Government (🏛️) interviewees.



Farm group stakeholders were selected to ensure representation across the many commodities grown in Canada. The majority of farm groups that were interviewed are not attached to one particular commodity and typically represent a geographic area (e.g. Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec).

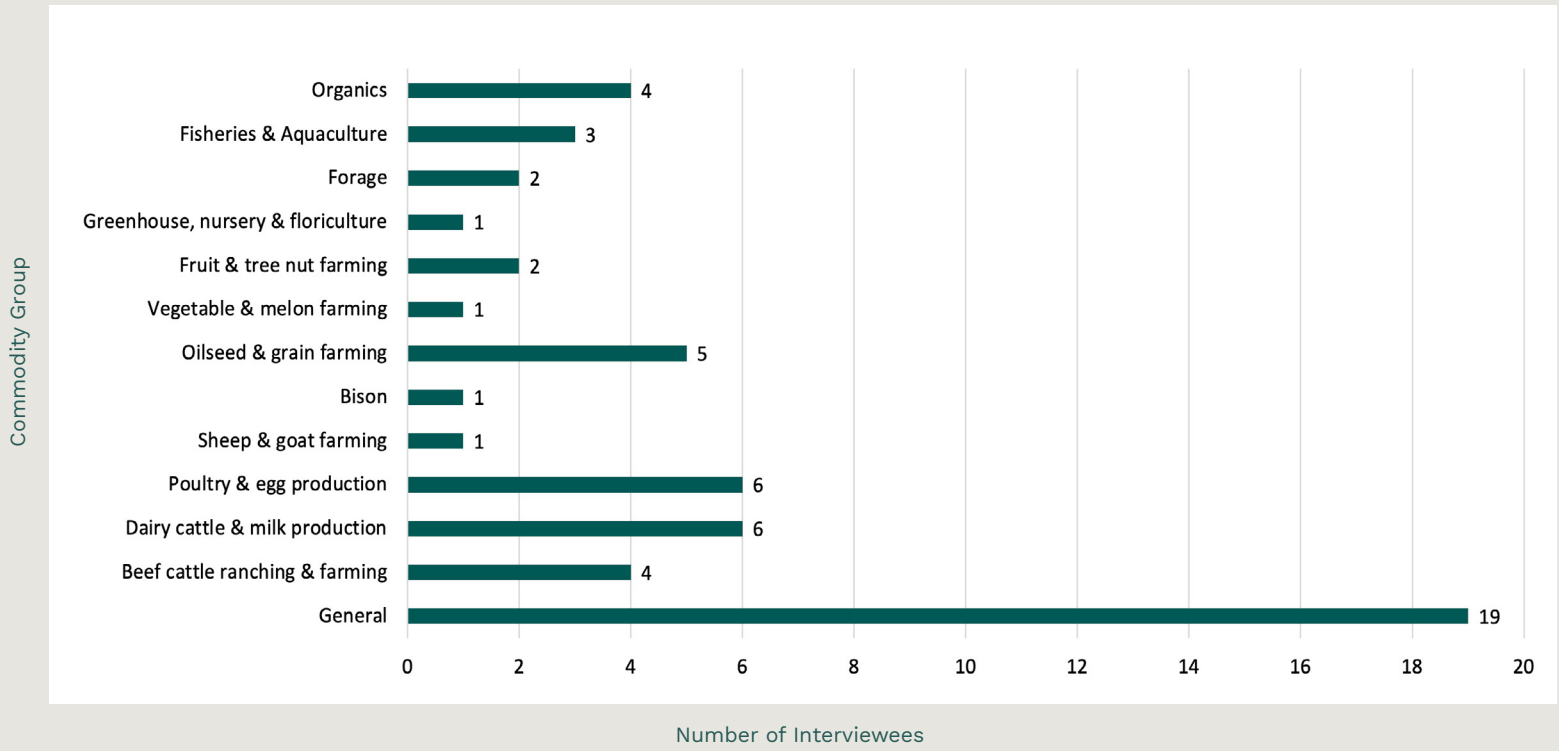


Figure 2. Farm Group stakeholders interviewed by commodity group.

3.2 LIMITATIONS

The interview process was fulsome and captured a diverse group of stakeholders across the Canadian agri-food sector. However, farm group representatives can only anticipate how the CASI platform will be perceived and adopted by their farmer membership. Perception and adoption of the platform can be measured through pilot projects and user-tests.

4.0 ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

4.1 WHAT DOES SUSTAINABILITY MEAN TO STAKEHOLDERS TODAY?

For the purpose of the interviews, the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainability was used: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."^{vii} Questions were also framed by the concept of the three pillars of sustainability – social, environmental and economic.

Sustainability is a driver for progress and an opportunity to position Canada as a leader in agriculture on the international stage. Along supply chains, sustainability is an approach to drive efficiencies and improvements in operations and a key topic that consumers want to know more about. At the farm-level, improvements in long-term decision-making are framed through the three sustainability pillars to ensure farm operations and rural communities remain viable today and for future generations.

4.1.1 STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN THE THREE PILLARS AND WITHIN BUSINESSES

Sustainability should be approached through an integration of the three pillars. However, there was a mixture of responses in how interviewees currently approach sustainability and value its role in agriculture and agri-food. In many cases current sustainability efforts focus on one pillar, with limited engagement with the other pillars. This approach is, in part, due to capacity constraints and gaps in data, limiting a holistic view of sustainability. For example, many government officials note that programs are designed to prioritize either environmental or economic outcomes with the assumption that the other pillars will be advanced by the private or non-profit sectors.

"We need more integration - from more of just an economic profitability model to a model that integrates the value of economic and societal outcomes."

- Government Interviewee

Supply chain stakeholders, especially key players in agri-food processing and agri-inputs, describe sustainability as a core component of their day-to-day operations and strategic growth plans. Other supply chain stakeholders, including some commodity groups and smaller supply chain actors, describe sustainability as a 'nice to have' component that is driven by individual programs and initiatives but is not intentionally integrated into businesses. Overall, many supply chain and producer stakeholders suggest that integrating sustainability within their business models and prioritizing it in strategic development is a smart and increasingly necessary business decision.

"All three pillars of sustainability are very important. Sustainability programs often started with a one pillar focus but have evolved to include all three pillars. You cannot drive one pillar in one direction and leave the others behind. (E.g., you can't pursue an environmental objective that puts farmers out of business.)"

- Supply Chain Stakeholder

4.1.2 A PROACTIVE APPROACH IS NEEDED

Government interviewees describe Canada's current approach to sustainability in agriculture as responsive to public demands.

Government interviewees describe Canada's current approach to sustainability in agriculture as responsive to public demands. This approach results from capacity constraints and a lack of coordination in developing a coherent, proactive approach to sustainability. For example, government interviewees find that sustainability gets compartmentalized within government branches, making it challenging to integrate the three pillars and enable

coordination. This uncoordinated approach to sustainability is a potential barrier for Canada to be competitive internationally as sustainability increasingly becomes a requirement for market access. In addition, the different definitions for sustainability in agriculture have created an uneven playing field for all actors to thrive in. In particular, sustainability enablers observe that companies and organizations mould their own definitions of sustainability to make claims that they are doing good work. The multitude of sustainability definitions makes it difficult to effectively evaluate claims and compare between different companies.

"I think the greatest challenge we face is misconceptions around what sustainability actually means, and what sustainability actually looks like. Do we even have a definition for a sustainable farm? Do we have an example of one? I don't think so...so how can farmers embrace this concept and strive for sustainability if there's no model to follow?"

- Sustainability Enabler

Emerging sustainability trends and indicators such as regenerative agriculture, animal care and soil health evolve rapidly, which has implications for data collection and reporting in agriculture. Sustainability trends in agriculture can be challenging to keep up with and it is not always clear what information is being requested at the farm-level. This signals a need to develop a coherent overarching platform that can adapt to emerging and evolving trends, while also capturing a long-term and consistent understanding of sustainability in agriculture and agri-food over time.

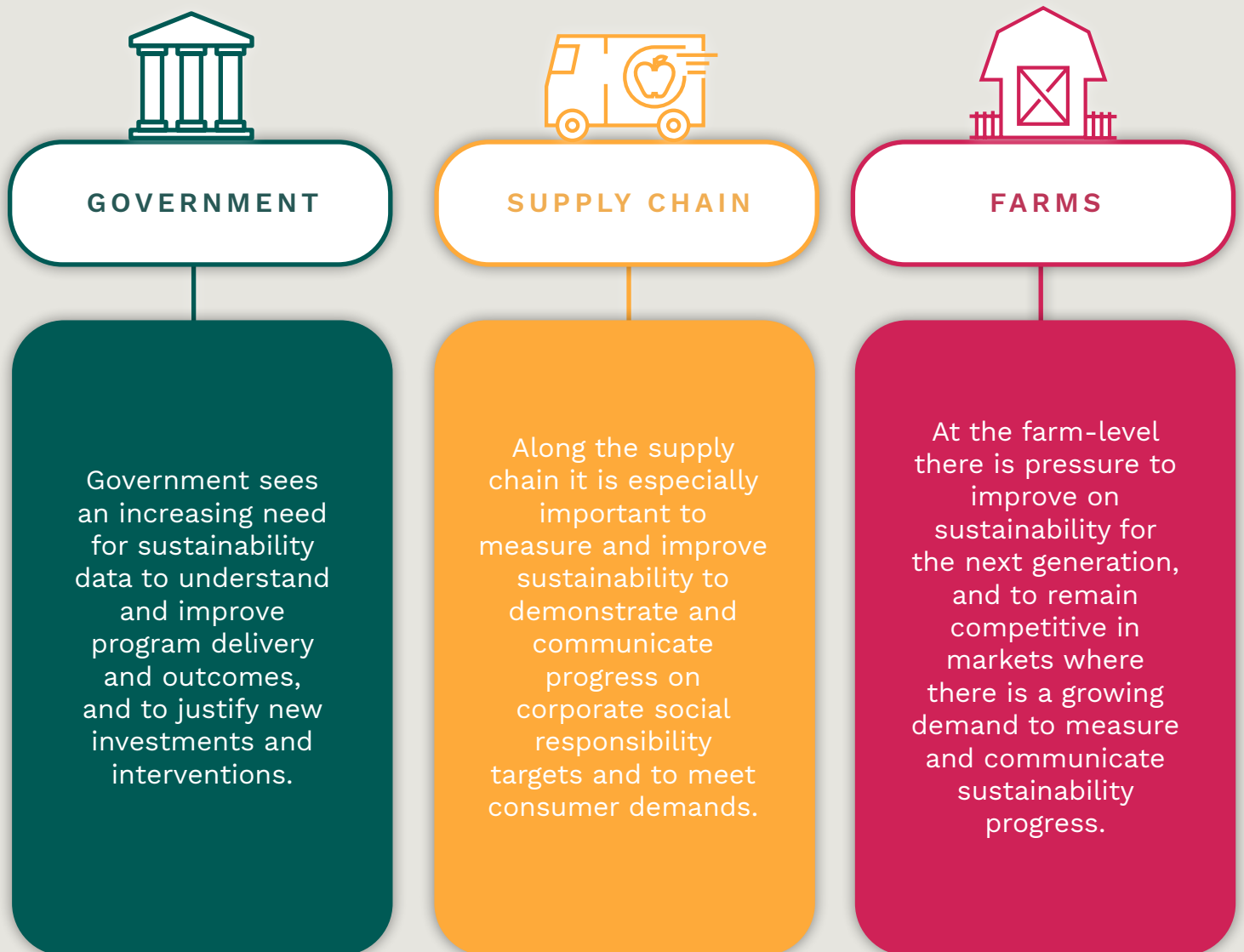
There is a need to develop a coherent overarching platform that can adapt to emerging and evolving trends, while also capturing long-term and consistent understanding of sustainability in agriculture and agri-food over time.

"The message is simple – [evidence of sustainability] is now a requirement to do business. For us, we've positioned it this way. We can see consumers in the future being willing to pay more for 100% Canadian sustainably produced [products]. We don't know if it will ever happen, but we are ready. It's about doing it ourselves before someone else tells us what to do and how."

- Producer Group

4.2 WHAT ARE THE DRIVERS FOR MEASURING AND IMPROVING SUSTAINABILITY IN CANADIAN AGRICULTURE?

The drivers for measuring and improving sustainability, as well as the specific aspects of sustainability, differ between regions and between commodity groups. However, a few key drivers emerged across stakeholder groups.



“The biggest challenge in Canada will be to demonstrate what improvements are actually being made. We need to better communicate progress, rather than just saying look what we’ve done.”

- Sustainability Enabler

4.2.1 INTERNAL PRESSURES

Sustainability is partially driven through internal pressures in the sector across the three pillars. For example, environmental sustainability issues such as soil health, fish stocks and biodiversity are all important to maintain the respective sectors' capacity to continue to be productive. Aspects of social sustainability such as producer and farm worker wellbeing and community integration are important to attract new talent and ensure people want to pursue careers in the sector. Finally, interviewees underlined that there are also internal drivers for economic sustainability as companies and farms need to ensure that they can maintain long-term growth and profitability.

“Sustainability is a win-win for all stakeholders - all stakeholders stand to gain something from enhancing sustainability outcomes. And this is true from socio-cultural, economic and environment aspects. (In the short term it may not look like it, but in medium-long term, definitely). Sustainable production practices can increase profit, increase brand loyalty, and reduce the impacts of climate change.”

- Sustainability Enabler

4.2.2 DRIVE EVIDENCE-BASED INVESTMENTS AND INTERVENTIONS

Governments are interested in collecting data to drive policy direction, outreach, budget allocation, and to measure performance. Governments are expressing pressure to improve on evidence-based policy and program design. Yet, many government interviewees describe ongoing challenges such as data gaps and capacity constraints that limit their ability to compile the evidence needed to fully justify activities. With improved access to aggregated data on sustainability, governments would be better positioned to be more proactive in developing policy and programs that enhance sustainability in the agricultural sector. In particular, with improved access to data, government officials can measure the impacts of funding programs and indicate how programs could be adapted to maximize their uptake and outcomes.

“I think we need to understand our “hot spots” better. We need to know where our risks and liabilities are. This is true for environment, social and economic hotspots.”

- Government Interviewee

Many producers are concerned that more data collection on sustainability will lead to more regulations. However, some believe that improved data collection will have the opposite effect. For example, if data analysis suggests that the sector is performing well on specific indicators without regulation, governments might not see a need to introduce new regulations.

Company sustainability targets and ESG reporting have led to greater demand for on-farm sustainability data collection.

4.2.3 STEER CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Many agri-food companies and agribusinesses are setting ambitious sustainability targets and launching sustainability initiatives (e.g., Danone’s One Planet, One Health initiative).^{viii} This trend is a result of the growing demand for companies to produce Environmental Social Governance (ESG) reports that demonstrate quantifiable progress. The demand is in part from investors that target investments towards companies that contribute to addressing sustainability goals. Investors use ESG indicators to inform their investment decisions and identify which companies have demonstrated progress on issues they value such as climate action.^{ix} Company sustainability targets and ESG reporting has led to greater demand for sustainability data collection throughout the value chain, including producers at the on-farm level.

“I see it as an increased demand for a verified or certified outcome. Field to Market and Cool Farm Alliance started before verification of sustainability outcomes was big, now there is a need to make these programs connected to a verified outcome. This is the direction of change; companies need to know claims are true to give credibility to ESG reporting.”

- Supply Chain Interviewee

Companies need data to measure and drive improvements in sustainability initiatives, and to substantiate claims of sustainability. Stakeholders see this demand for sustainability as the emerging, ‘new norm’ for producers to access specific supply chains. For example, McCain Foods expects to see proof of a producer’s completed Environmental Farm Plan for all Canadian sourced potatoes.^x

“I see marketplace pressures. We need to be able to support efficiency but also diversification as an expectation from consumers. Consumers want to know more about where their food comes from and how it was produced - I don’t see this going away...We need a system that drives more transparency so that the right practices are recognized as right - as opposed to checking a box.”

- Supply Chain Interviewee

Consumer preference for sustainably sourced products is increasingly placing pressure on retailers to supply sustainable products. In general, pressure to improve data collection on sustainability indicators is working its way through the value chain to producers. Producers who sell directly to consumers are at the forefront of public relations and are experiencing direct pressure to improve sustainability practices. This is especially true in foods that are typically sold whole and do not require processing (e.g., an apple versus the grain that gets processed into bread). Some agri-food sector stakeholders remain skeptical and make the case that consumer decisions are primarily driven by price and aesthetics, rather than sustainability.

4.2.4 ENHANCE LOCAL INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Producers are integral members of their local communities, creating employment opportunities and producing food for local consumption. Canadian producers want to ensure they can continue to produce healthy food for many generations to come. This goal is driving farm-level demands for sustainability measurement and reporting. Ultimately, producers want to be sustainable because they want to ensure their farms continue to be economically viable within healthy environments and thriving communities.

“Sustainability starts at the farm level. We need to sustain the business so future generations can succeed, we need to sustain the environment because its important, and we need to sustain public trust and our social license. I think agriculture is behind the curve with respect to the social aspects of sustainability - we have to get ahead of the curve.”

- Producer Group



4.3 WHAT IS THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF CASI?

CASI presents an opportunity to pull together a more complete view of the agricultural sector's sustainability efforts. CASI can be used to bring different sources of information together to tell fulsome stories about sustainability in agriculture and agri-food. Importantly, CASI can reduce the duplication within sustainability program reporting and effectively identify where data gaps exist.

There are three key value propositions for the CASI platform across all stakeholder groups. CASI can:

BUILD A CANADIAN BRAND

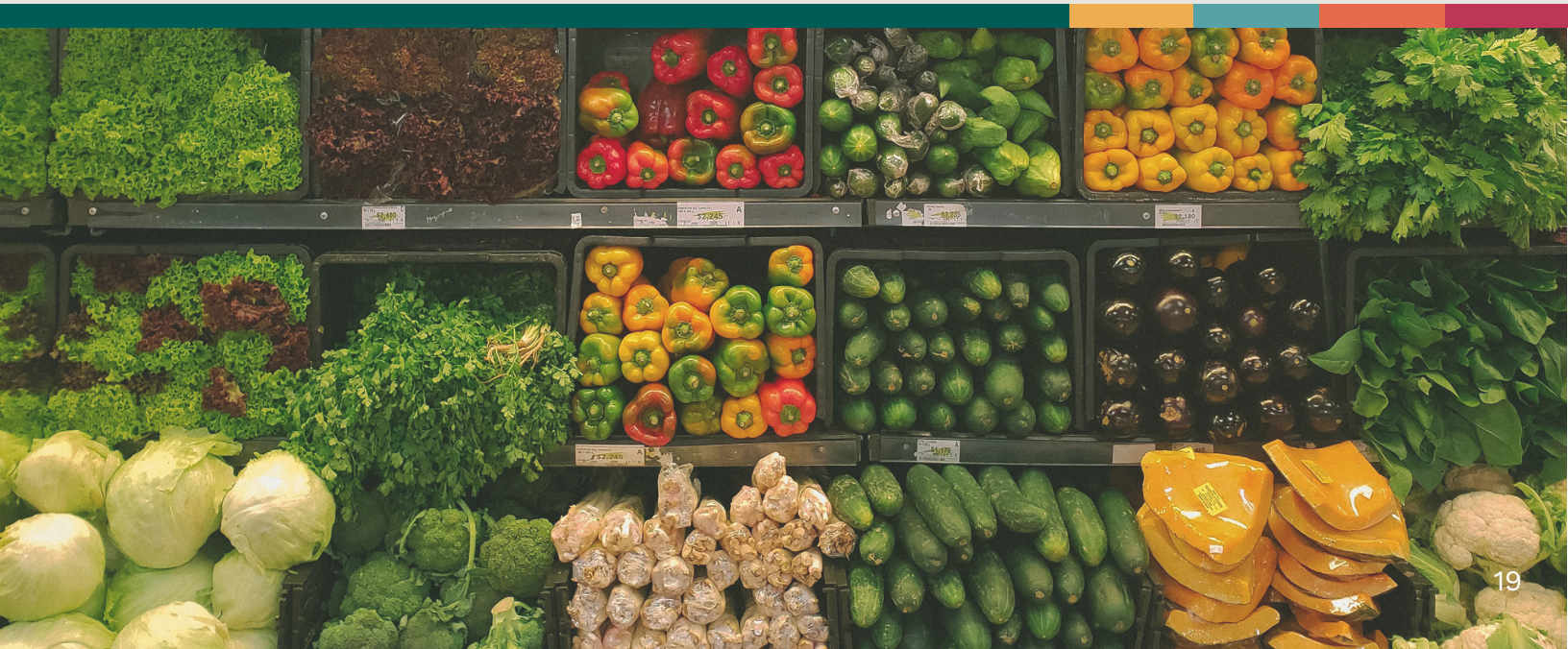
- Can help “tell the story” of Canadian agriculture
- Three main audiences; Canadian public, private agri-food industry, international markets

ENABLE PEER-TO-PEER BENCHMARKING

- Build understanding of sustainable practices relative to other Canadian producers
- Build evidence of competitive advantage for Canadian agriculture internationally

SUPPORT CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY OUTCOMES

- Can enable Canadian producers to access markets and value chains that are increasingly requiring demonstrated progress on sustainability



4.3.1 VALUE PROPOSITION FOR PRODUCERS AND PRODUCER GROUPS

CASI can enable the sector to better understand Canada's sustainability competitive advantage.

CASI can enable Canadian producers to access markets and value chains that are increasingly requiring demonstrated evidence of sustainable production practices. Benchmarking Canadian sustainability programs with international standards can enable Canadian producers to access new international markets or maintain access to existing markets by leveraging existing programs. Benchmarking

will also enable Canadian producers to remain competitive domestically. CASI can enable the sector to better understand Canada's sustainability competitive advantage – influencing domestic and international buyers choices to source Canadian agri-food products. CASI can do this by benchmarking domestic programs and standards to international programs or standards to identify where Canadian practices outperform international competitors.

“Benchmark against foreign competitors. We need to know if others are closing the gap on us or if they are passing us... substantiating our claims will be very important.”
- Producer Group

WHY IS BENCHMARKING IMPORTANT?

Benchmarking is to judge the quality of something in relation to that of other similar things.^{xi}

The number of sustainability standards the agri-food sector is expected to meet is increasing. The growing number of sustainability standards in the agri-food sector has led many sector stakeholders to benchmark these standards against each other in an effort to reduce duplication and understand equivalencies between standards. However, benchmarking practices and methods can differ across private sector, public sector, and not-for-profit initiatives.^{xii}



Smaller commodity groups expressed that they have capacity constraints to gather sustainability data. In particular, smaller commodity groups want to use agricultural sustainability data to:

1. demonstrate the sustainability of their products; and
2. support their membership with making on-farm management decisions related to sustainable production practices.

“Would be useful to help tell the sustainability story of our producers. Anything we can point to – there is a lack of info about current practices; need something that can be easily distributed. Can direct policy makers and regulators to it. Info is powerful; a lack of info hurts public trust.”

- Producer Group

On the other hand, supply managed commodity groups were unsure if they would benefit from CASI. In particular, groups representing egg producers and dairy producers were sceptical about the value-add for their producers, in part, due to the existing standards for sustainability data collection and reporting that already exist within their respective supply managed commodities.

However, producers engaged in a number of different commodities can use CASI to help show the connectivity between each production streams to help identify farm-level gaps and opportunities.

Ensuring that sustainability data collection meets farm-level interests along with supply chain demands will be critical in fostering uptake by producers.

CASI presents an opportunity to develop continuity in sustainability data collection and reporting. Robust systems are in place for larger businesses or commodity groups with more plentiful human and financial resources – but this leaves a critical gaps across Canada’s diverse agri-food sector comprised of hundreds of different commodities. Streamlining existing reporting programs and reducing duplication across sustainability standards to alleviate administrative burden will be a benefit for producers, especially for those with multiple commodities.

“There is confusion on sustainability initiatives among farmers on how sustainability initiatives align and how they qualify for them and how they can benefit from each initiative.”

- Producer Group

There is also an opportunity to benchmark the efforts of individual producers against aggregated data from other producers with similar production systems. Measuring sustainability performance can enable producers to have a better idea of the current sustainability status of their operation and to identify opportunities to make improvements that will benefit them today and in the future. Ensuring that sustainability data collection meets these farm-level interests along with the supply chain demands will be critical in fostering uptake by producers.

4.3.2 VALUE PROPOSITION FOR SUPPLY CHAIN STAKEHOLDERS

The benefits of CASI for supply chain stakeholders are two-fold:

- CASI can advance the Canadian brand internationally and provide evidence of the Canadian agriculture sector’s sustainability claims, opening up doors to new market opportunities.
- CASI can help ensure Canadian companies maintain market access when evidence of sustainable production practices is requested from buyers.

CASI can provide a sustainability “line of sight” throughout supply chains. CASI offers an opportunity for greater aggregated connectivity to producers, which can help agri-food companies and agribusinesses identify opportunities to offer more targeted support to improve farm-level sustainability from a systems perspective. For example, a potato producer who reports on the sustainability of their potato production to the potato processor may not be reporting on their practices when other crops are in rotation, therefore missing an opportunity to enable producers to share the full picture of sustainability on the farm. Furthermore, enabling companies to effectively support other on-farm improvements can support their efforts in achieving ESG goals that are focused on sustainable sourcing.

CASI can provide a sustainability “line of sight” throughout supply chains.

“Aggregate-level data from a sales standpoint, any industry data we could gather to measure our performance and trends would benefit us. Mainly rely on Stats Canada, OMAFRA and Agricorp at this stage...Any industry data we could rely on more generally would benefit us.”
- Supply Chain Stakeholder

CASI is not intended to become a label on food products. However, having a tool that can verify answers to questions around sustainability can play a key role in fostering public trust.

Supply chain stakeholders want to be able to better address consumers’ questions about food production in Canada and be able share more about the sector in a way that will develop public trust. They envision the CASI platform clearly outlining what practices Canadian producers do and do not do, and why to better inform communications with their consumers. Having multiple sustainability certifications on food packaging can be confusing to consumers and does not always get at the broader question of, ‘was my food produced sustainably?’. CASI is not intended to become a label on food products. However, having a tool that can verify answers to questions around sustainability can play a key role in fostering public trust.

“Using a tool to more broadly engage and communicate. Making the story public and using it as an educational tool would provide a lot of value. Education can enable better decision making, improved perceptions, and improvements to the supply chain. Educating not only the sector but consumers too.”
- Supply Chain Stakeholder

4.3.3 VALUE PROPOSITION FOR GOVERNMENTS

Government interviewees view CASI as an opportunity to contribute to efforts on developing a robust pool of evidence that will enable the sector to confidently showcase sustainable production practices adopted by each commodity and region. CASI can help to provide this evidence and inform activities that are moving the needle on sustainable practices being novel or untested, to being the best practice, to being the common practice. Furthermore, there are challenges that arise from different levels of understanding of sustainability among different provinces, departments, and branches. CASI can help enable different levels of government to “speak the same language” when it comes to sustainable production practices.

“To have an over-arching umbrella. Information sharing, making comparisons. Sharing information about the programming available across Canada. CASI can help us compare how we each deliver our programs. It is important to compare. Some provinces work at lower levels, others higher levels. A way of measuring the programs so we can work together to reach common goals.”

- Government Stakeholder

Governments envision CASI as a tool that will provide two key benefits - enable them to benchmark domestically and internationally on key sustainability indicators, and better understand the uptake of management practices. This is an attractive capability for governments to drive improvements and enable targeted program and policy support (see table 2). Through CASI, Government stakeholders envision having tailored access portals to access this information.

Table 2. Summary of data and associated benefits envisioned being available through CASI, identified by government stakeholders.

Types of aggregated data envisioned being available through CASI	Purpose and benefit for government stakeholders
Uptake of management practices related to environmental, social and economic sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve program delivery to encourage uptake of undersubscribed management practices • Identify opportunities for targeted support (i.e., by commodity group, region, practice, etc.)
Performance of domestic agri-food programs and standards compared to international or brand-specific programs and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify competitive advantage and market opportunities • Identify opportunities for targeted support based on industry needs

“If CASI can help with the lack of data challenge and identify gaps that we need to address in data collection, that would be very useful. This can also help inform new training, programs and interventions on sustainability.”

- Government Stakeholder

4.3.4 VALUE PROPOSITION FOR SUSTAINABILITY ENABLERS

In general, sustainability enablers emphasize that there is an opportunity for CASI to align existing Canadian programs and to house aggregated data from producers. Both sustainability enablers and supply chain stakeholders view aggregated sustainability data as a resource to:

- measure and improve company performance,
- better understand supply chain demands and challenges,
- and grow market access.

CASI can be a forum to share information about sustainability initiatives and facilitate collaboration and sound benchmarking between sustainability initiatives.

Sustainability enablers envision CASI as a forum to share information about the spectrum of sustainability initiatives and facilitate collaboration and sound benchmarking activities between sustainability initiatives. Sustainability enablers that represent sustainability standards or programs can collaborate with CASI to benchmark their programs against their Canadian counterparts.

The benefit for sustainability enablers in engaging with CASI is two-fold:

1. **For sustainability enablers:** Engagement with other leading agri-food sector programs and Canadian agri-food stakeholders.
2. **For society:** Benchmarking between standards and programs encourages continuous improvement.





4.4 WHAT DO STAKEHOLDERS WANT TO SEE WITH RESPECT TO COLLECTING AND SHARING AGRI-FOOD SUSTAINABILITY DATA?

If CASI is to be the leading source of sustainability information in Canadian agriculture and enable stakeholders to leverage the CASI platform for market access, data collection and sharing will need to be:

OBJECTIVE:

The data should not be presented in a way that identifies good practices from bad practices. Rather, data should be shared and collected for the purpose of continuous improvement and developing a strong understanding of Canadian agricultural practices.

COLLECTED IN A TRANSPARENT MANNER:

Farmers should know why data is being collected, where it will be shared and how CASI platform users will see their aggregated sector data.

VERIFIED:

In order to showcase the Canadian brand and identify our collective competitive advantage, data should be backed up by sound verification processes. Not all domestic programs are verified. CASI will continue to explore what this means for supporting initiatives such as the [National Index on Agri-food Performance](#).

4.4.1 DATA COLLECTION

The CASI platform will need to be strategic in terms of the type of data collected. Data collected may include information that supports market access, helps drive improvements and enables effective communications around national agri-food sustainability. The platform will also need to have the capacity to integrate information between different sustainability initiatives and share aggregated data between actors to maximize value. Lastly, stakeholders want the data that is fed into CASI to be held separately from government to avoid issues of producers and supply chain stakeholders not using it because of privacy concerns.

Key challenges for the CASI platform in data collection will be to integrate information between different sustainability programs and develop an Application Program Interface (API) which reduces duplication among programs and streamlines the reporting process. API's can facilitate interactions between different software applications, acting as a "highway" of information between two systems. Reducing duplication and streamlining the reporting process may be difficult given the variation of environment, social and economic sustainability indicators between jurisdictions and programs. Interviewees also point to a lack of available social sustainability data as a challenge. This pillar is extremely important, but interviewees acknowledge that it is a current gap in Canadian programming and data collection.

CASI will need to have the capacity to integrate information between different sustainability initiatives and share aggregated data between actors to maximize value.

4.4.2 INTEGRATING EXISTING PROGRAM DATA

There is a general appetite to better use environmental farm plan data to showcase sustainable production practices. There is a perception that environmental farm plan data is "tightly held", but that it could be leveraged to provide market value for farmers in addition to its current voluntary and educational structure. Stakeholders do not want to lose the voluntary and educational aspects

CASI will need to have the capacity to integrate information between different sustainability initiatives and share aggregated data between actors to maximize value.

of environmental farm plan programming, though. The use of environmental farm plan data to highlight sustainable production practices (even at an aggregated level) outside of governments would be a significant shift from the current approach.

Stakeholders would like to see an exploration of ways that Environmental Farm Plan data can link to the CASI platform without compromising confidential or sensitive information such as farm business numbers.

An example of where this has been done is in Manitoba where Roquette has partnered with Manitoba Agriculture to develop a provincial certification that indicates Manitoba peas are produced sustainably. Roquette is a protein and pharmaceutical company, who recently built the world's largest pea protein plant in Manitoba. Roquette and Manitoba Agriculture benchmarked some of the environmental farm plan indicators with other sustainability standards they were hoping to meet. The result is now a requirement for any producer selling peas to Roquette to complete the second chapter of the Manitoba environmental farm plan.

There are numerous sustainability programs across Canadian agriculture crossing environmental, social and economic pillars of sustainability. There is an opportunity to better leverage existing program data to provide a more fulsome picture of Canadian agriculture. A sample of domestic national sustainability programs is presented below (Table 3).

Table 3. Examples of Canadian National Sustainability Programs.

Type of Agricultural Product	Examples of Sustainability Programs
Dairy Cattle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>ProAction</u>
Beef Cattle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef – Certified Sustainable Beef Framework</u>
Pork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Canadian Pork Excellence Program</u>
Poultry and Eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Raised by a Canadian Farmer Animal Care Program</u> • <u>Raised by a Canadian Farmer On-Farm Food Safety Program</u> • <u>Egg Quality Assurance</u> • <u>On-Farm Food Safety Program & Flock Care Program</u>
Grains and Oilseeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Canadian Grain Farmers Code of Practice (draft)</u> • <u>Field to Market Canada</u> • <u>Farm Sustainability Readiness Tool</u>
Horticulture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Canada GAP</u> • <u>Potato Sustainability Alliance Sustainability Assessment Tool</u>
All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>AgriShield</u> • Environmental Farm Plan (province specific) • <u>Canadian Organic Regime</u> • <u>Farm Sustainability Assessment</u> • <u>4R Nutrient Stewardship</u>

4.4.3 VERIFICATION AND AUDITING

Stakeholders, especially government and supply chain actors would like to see data collection to be third party verified in order to showcase the Canadian brand and identify our collective competitive advantage. Not all domestic programs are verified. CASI will continue to explore what this means for supporting initiatives such as the [National Index on Agri-food Performance](#).

The question becomes - who pays for and administers the auditing? In some cases, producer groups partially or fully cover the costs of auditing for their members. For example, Beef Farmers of Ontario ran a short-term incentive program in 2020 for beef producers to help offset the costs associated with Verified Beef Production Plus (VBP+) enrollment. The purpose of the incentive program was to increase the number of Quality Assurance verified cattle in the province and to ensure producers were well equipped to take advantage of sustainability programs in the marketplace. The organization refreshed this program for 2021-22 (L. Wurmli, personal communication, June 8, 2021). In the case of the sugarbeet industry, the Canadian Sugarbeet Producers Association fully funds the audits for its members (M. Garner-Skiba, personal communication, June 1, 2021).

“Government data is necessary because it makes a statement stronger to back up claims so a third part verifier may be an important option to explore that is done at a standard that is acceptable by government.”
- Government

Interviewees see the potential of CASI having a portal that is organized based on key sustainability indicators such as soil health or animal care. This organization could allow for a deeper dive on the key indicators that are of interest to the user, while also allowing for viewing across all indicators.



“Making connections between initiatives is really important. We need to understand the level of data needed and appreciate nuances among the partners that are there. We can turn that data into insight and wisdom that guides a series of activities for all of us.”
- Sustainability Enabler

Sustainability enablers can play a key role in verifying sustainability claims

There is currently a spectrum of the types of sustainability standards in Canadian agriculture including certification schemes (i.e., certified organic), voluntary educational programming (i.e., environmental farm plans), and combinations of the two. Each of these standards can use different methods of verifying sustainability claims (Table 3).

Table 4. Summary of verification schemes and examples.

Verification Scheme	Description	Example
Self-assessment	The party completing the program self-identifies practices. There is no additional verification of claims.	Ontario Environmental Farm Plan
2nd Party Verification	The practices or claims are verified by an actor within the supply chain of the party completing the program.	Nestlé Responsible Sourcing Standard
3rd Party Verification	The practices or claims are verified by an external party (usually accredited to complete the verification audit).	Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef's Certified Sustainable Beef Framework .
Certification	A formal program where production practices are verified against a standard. Certification programs can use 2nd party or 3rd party verification schemes.	Certified Organic Standard

CASI can facilitate collaboration between sustainability enablers and initiatives. This would also help producers to see how their operation aligns with existing programs and certifications, and what they need to do be verified for other programs and certifications. While other stakeholders such as buyers can see which programs, producers are participating in and how it aligns with other market requirements.

“The only way this is all going to work is if everyone cooperates. Right now, I see a lot of kingdom building and not a lot of collaboration. I think there’s one or two [sustainability initiatives] at every level – in different sectors in the stakeholder groups, there is always someone who is trying to push that their initiative is the initiative. [CASI] is only going to be reached with all cooperating.”

- Sustainability Enabler

4.4.4 SHARING DATA

With regards to data sharing, interviewees discuss how powerful aggregated data can be, but that it can also communicate inaccuracies. The platform will need to strategically present data at different resolutions for different purposes based on requests from stakeholders. For example, stakeholders could request data by commodity, by region. [Alberta Data Partnerships](#) was cited as a good example of a public-private partnership that brings together various datasets to presents different levels of resolution for different purposes via requests from stakeholders. Importantly, data should not be inadvertently used to unfairly compare different provinces or pit commodities against each other. Therefore, data presentation will require significant care to mitigate such risks.

“We’re supportive of a whole-farm approach I think there is value to that. One of the concerns we see with CASI is that the aggregate data doesn’t really tell the story...if we don’t use the appropriate data we won’t be telling the true story. If we’re looking too far away or zoomed out, then we won’t get the real story.”

- Sustainability Enabler

CASI will need to strategically present data at different resolutions for different purposes based on requests from stakeholders. For example, stakeholders could request data by commodity, or by region.



“Our members would be very concerned about their personal info in the cloud. [They are] not keen on personal data sharing. People want to know more about how their food is grown but we aren’t seeing clearly articulated asks within that sentiment.”

- Producer Group

4.5 WHAT TOPICS SHOULD CASI INCORPORATE INTO FUTURE RESEARCH?

Certain programs often focus on one or two of the three pillars of sustainability. CASI has been identified as a tool that can help integrate information about the three pillars of sustainability into sustainability reporting. Lessons could be learned from Farm Management Canada’s approach to Agri-Shield.

AGRI-SHIELD

Farm Management Canada, a national organization that champions farm business management, developed Agri-Shield as a risk assessment and mitigation platform for producers.^{xiii} Producers can use the platform to assess six families of risk that may affect their operations:

PEOPLE

FINANCE

MARKETS

MANAGEMENT

BUSINESS
ENVIRONMENT

PRODUCTION

Each family includes subcategories, enabling farmers to dig deeper into potential risks. In the finance family, for example, producers can assess their money management and investments. In the production family, farmers can review risks related to environment and climate, animal health and welfare, nutrient management, pest management, and soil, water and biodiversity management.

Sustainability indicators are constantly evolving, as such, initiatives are continuously improving to demonstrating value to their stakeholders. As CASI evolves, the ways in which the platform and governance structure of the organization can adapt to changes in sustainability trends will be a key topic to explore.

“Pace of changes - sustainability standards are constantly evolving - how do you keep your data relevant to benchmarks that are constantly change. Data gaps need to be address to keep up with this.”

- Supply Chain Stakeholder

4.5.1 COMMUNITIES

Social sustainability is a priority in the context of building thriving rural communities, attracting and retaining talent and youth in the sector, and ensuring working conditions are safe and equitable. The coronavirus pandemic highlighted that improvements can be made to ensure temporary foreign workers are well cared for and have safe and inclusive work environments. Producer mental health is also an issue that interviewees see as a key challenge that should be addressed to improve the sustainability of the sector. These topics are critical to explore to address social sustainability data gaps in Canada.

4.5.2 ANIMAL CARE

There are complex animal care and husbandry topics that can be better communicated through a sustainability lens. Animal care is referred to among stakeholders as a key indicator that requires more evidence. Evidence of improved animal care practices is being driven by consumer demand and a heightened awareness of risks from virus and disease spread. However, stakeholders view livestock production practices as challenging to effectively communicate to consumers due, in part, to diverging perspectives in the public domain. Moving forward, CASI can work to ensure that animal care practices are incorporated into sustainability reporting and aggregate reports.

4.5.3 CLIMATE CHANGE

There is a lot of interest in discussing the opportunities from carbon incentives and the impacts of carbon taxes, but limited clarity among stakeholders on what the landscape of activities are in this space. Carbon markets and industry-led carbon programs are being developed at an unprecedented rate. Yet, their implications for the Canadian agricultural sector are still in their infancy. This presents the question of where CASI could fit within the emerging field of carbon initiatives. One potential option is for CASI to better present the different carbon opportunities available to producers and their requirements so that they can effectively navigate the carbon markets and programs.

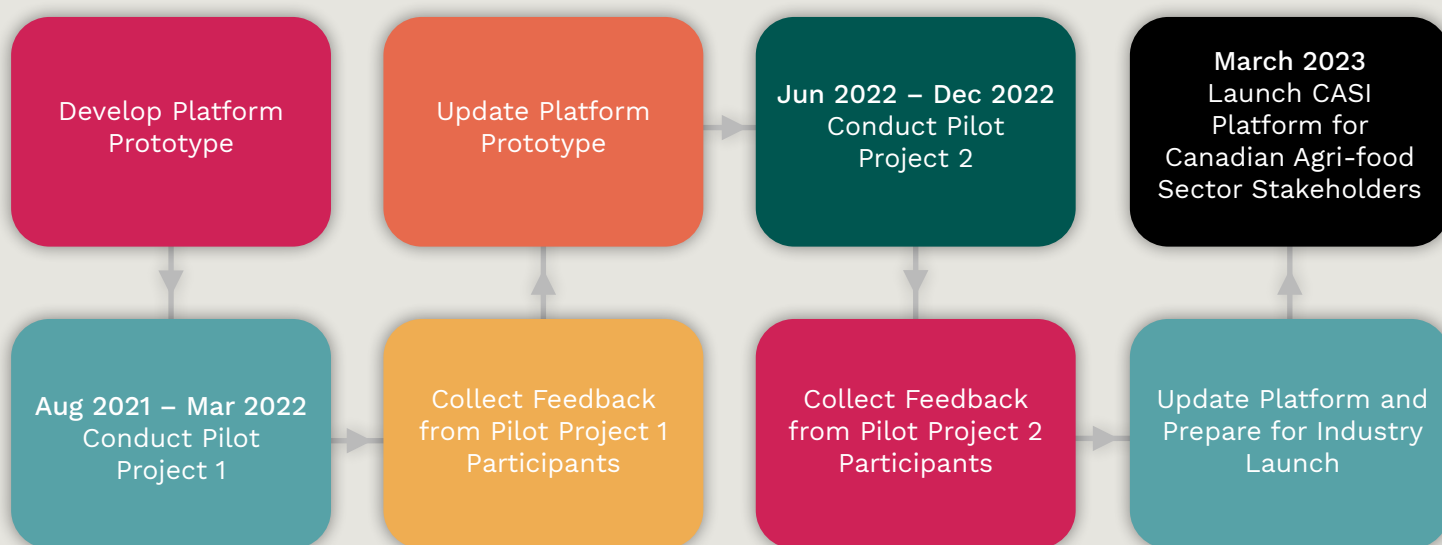


5.0 NEXT STEPS

To develop a CASI that is well informed and positioned to succeed, we plan to build upon the fulsome and informative interview process with further engagement steps. The next steps in the engagement process are to conduct two pilot projects and host 4-6 workshops with stakeholder groups across Canada.

5.1 CASI PILOT PROJECTS

The two pilot projects will be conducted by Provision Coalition and Anthesis. One of the pilot projects will focus on a horticultural commodity, while the other will focus on a livestock commodity. The final details of the pilot projects will be confirmed in consultation with the Governance Committee and agri-food sector stakeholders. The process of the pilot projects will be as follows:



At the end of each pilot project, Provision Coalition expects to better understand content, functionality, and user demands of the CASI platform. After the feedback stages, Provision Coalition will integrate feedback, lessons learned and necessary adjustments into the CASI Platform. We recognize that challenges will likely arise during pilot projects and in translating participant experiences into constructive feedback. Provision Coalition is committed to working closely with project teams to mitigate barriers to progress and to enable an effective troubleshooting process.

Based on the results from the national interviews, a number of key takeaways of importance for the pilot projects emerge:

1. All three pillars of sustainability should be incorporated into the platform.
2. The purpose of collecting the sustainability information for users should be clearly articulated. This should include the associated end uses.
3. The process of data collection should not be administratively burdensome for producers.
4. Users should be able to provide evidence of their claims (for example, through documentation of their completion of the Environmental Farm Plan or certification of achieving the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) Sustainable Beef Production Standard).
5. Aggregate reports could be developed during the pilot projects and tested for usability amongst different stakeholder groups.

5.2 CASI WORKSHOPS

Based on the interview results and the expected outcomes from the pilot projects, a number of opportunities for workshop topics are presented below:

WORKSHOP #1

DEMONSTRATING VALUE: OUTCOMES OF PILOT PROJECT 1*



WORKSHOP #2

DEMONSTRATING VALUE: OUTCOMES OF PILOT PROJECT 2*



* These pilot projects will be those focused on horticultural and livestock production and will aim to take an integrated approach to sustainability. The pilot projects will also be an opportunity to highlight options for data collection on key sustainability indicators that historically have data gaps. In particular, animal care and social sustainability data gaps were emphasized during the interviews. The livestock pilot project workshop can highlight how animal care practices/programs will be integrated into the platform. While the horticulture pilot project workshop can highlight how human resource sustainability standards will be integrated in the platform.



WORKSHOP #3

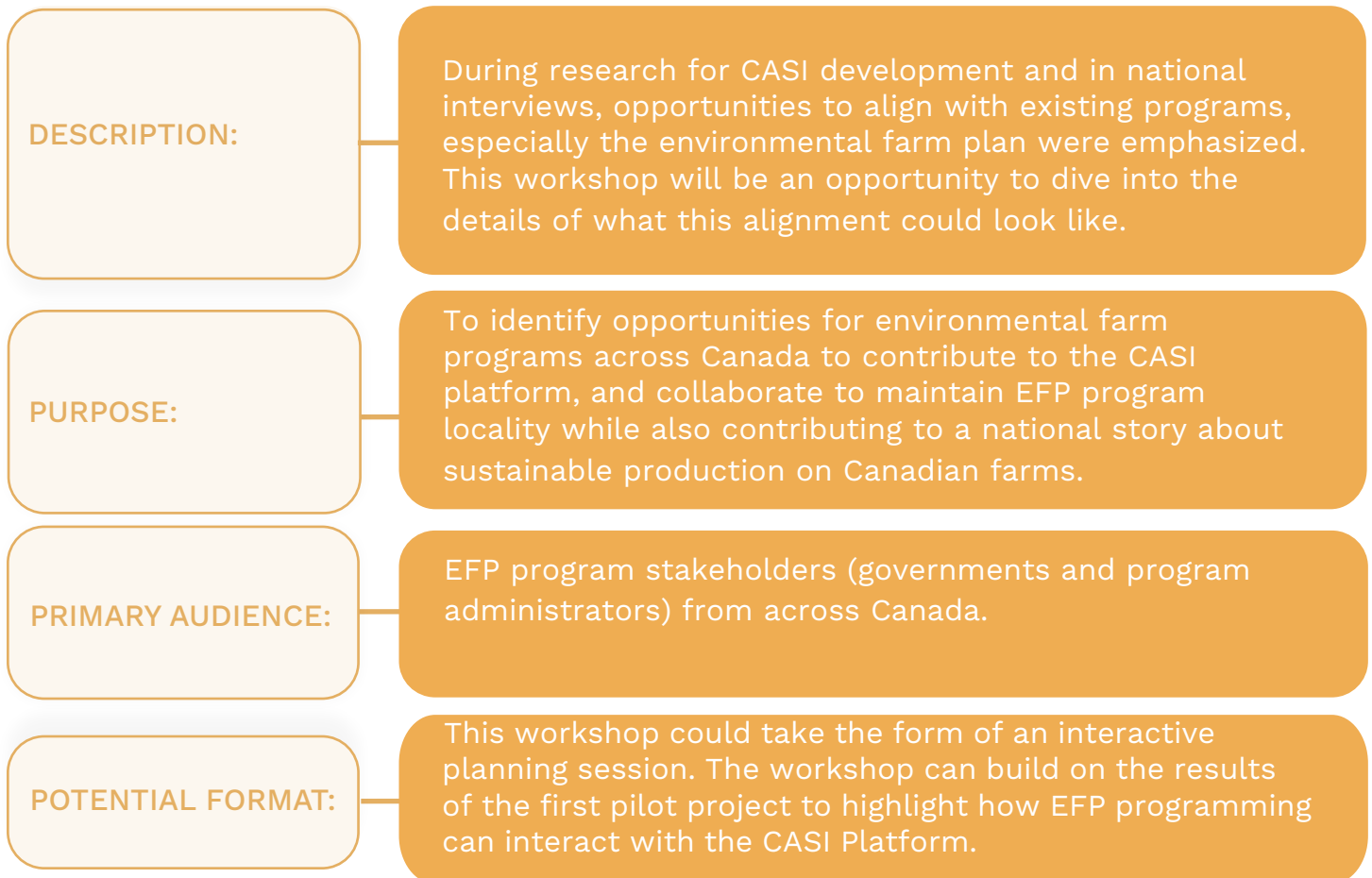
SHOWCASING A CANADIAN BRAND: CASI AND THE NATIONAL INDEX ON AGRI-FOOD PERFORMANCE

DESCRIPTION:	CASI and the National Index on Agri-food Performance are being developed simultaneously, and collectively present an opportunity to drive coherency in the sector on sustainability. This workshop will share the current status, purpose, and pathways forward for both initiatives, and outline ways for them to be complementary.
PURPOSE:	To identify specific opportunities for the two initiatives to collaborate.
PRIMARY AUDIENCE:	National Index partners and CASI Governance Committee and Sub-Committee members.
POTENTIAL FORMAT:	This workshop could take the form of an interactive planning session where participants collectively engage in mapping out the two initiatives' opportunities and challenges. Breakout groups and other larger group sessions can encourage dialogue and participation between members.



WORKSHOP #4

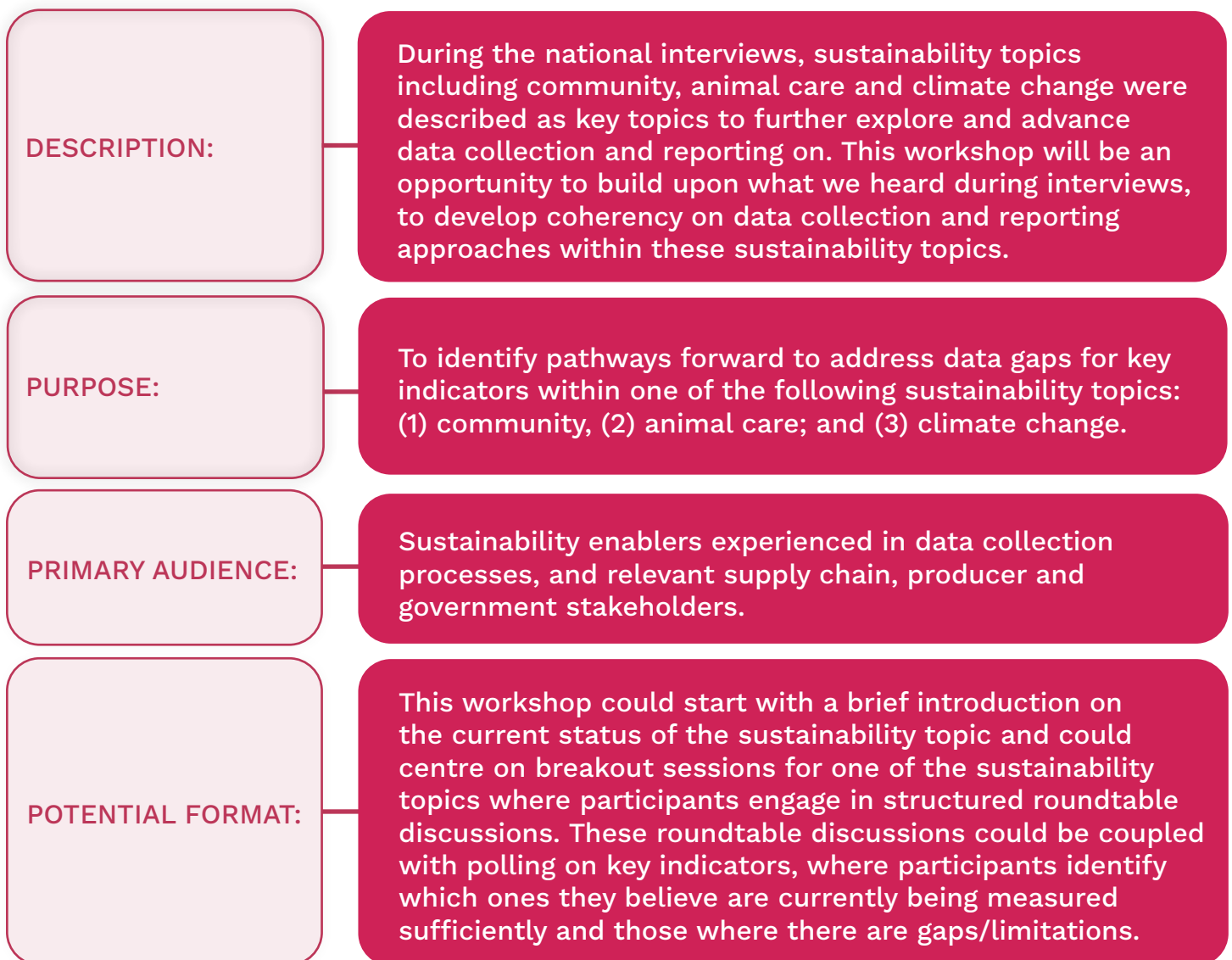
INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMS: ENVIRONMENTAL FARM PLAN AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIONAL AGGREGATION





WORKSHOP #5

DELVING INTO INDICATOR DEVELOPMENT: COMMUNITY, ANIMAL CARE OR CLIMATE CHANGE





WORKSHOP #6

SUSTAINABILITY – COMPETITIVE AND PRE-COMPETITIVE

PURPOSE:

Brainstorm how CASI fits in to the broader network of agri-food sustainability initiatives. Specifically, this workshop could focus on how CASI can be a pre-competitive platform for the Canadian agri-food sector to demonstrate improvements in production practices.

PRIMARY AUDIENCE:

All agri-food stakeholders will be open to attend this workshop. Invitations will focus on those engaged in the CASI Governance Committee and key agri-food sector organizations that represent the interests of farmers and agri-food industry.

POTENTIAL FORMAT:

Webinar-style format with opportunities for Q&A

6.0 APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: CASI INTERVIEW GUIDE

Preamble

Thank you for taking part in the Canadian Agri-Food Sustainability Initiative (CASI). CASI aims to meet global and future sustainability needs. Global brands seek farm-level performance assurance, governments want a higher level of public trust and environmental sustainability, and consumers are looking for signals of environmental and social sustainability. With so much information available on sustainable production practices often at the individual commodity level, there is an opportunity to create synergies between programs in order to reduce duplication of efforts and enable farmers to provide evidence of sustainable production practices.

These interviews are intended to shape the development of a CASI platform that will provide a one-stop-shop for producers to indicate sustainable production practices. The objectives of CASI include increasing transparency, reducing duplication, developing sustainability competencies and capacity building, and developing a forum for knowledge exchange and networking. It is important that CASI reflects the entire Canadian agri-food sector value chain; from what producers need to implement sustainability practices at the farm level, to what processors and manufacturers use to meet their business sustainability goals.

The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges to streamline this process for the Canadian agri-food sector. For CASI, sustainability includes environmental, social, and economic considerations. This interview will be confidential and anonymous. Interview results will be synthesized into key themes. The interview is expected to take approximately 45 minutes.



GENERAL QUESTIONS

What we want to learn:

- How CASI as a platform could be useful for the organization
- What is the organization's/group's interest and/or need in using a platform like CASI?

Initial Questions:

1. On a scale of 1-10, how important is sustainability to your organization? Please explain.
2. Can you tell me how your organization defines agri-food sustainability? How does this relate to any initiatives or projects in your organization?
Prompt: Social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainability
3. How does your organization currently measure and track sustainability data?
4. Do you see an increased need/interest in being able to share data and metrics on sustainability practices in your area of business?
5. If yes, what are the challenges your organization faces with reporting on sustainability practices?
6. Of the following four functions, which one seems the most beneficial to your organization and/or to the Canadian agri-food sector? [internal WCG note to make sure you can select more than one option]
 - ability to report on farm-level sustainability practices through the supply chain (including aggregated information and personalized farm reports, for example)
 - ability to streamline sustainability reporting via an online platform
 - ability to benchmark Canadian agri-food sustainability practices and performance against international standards
 - ability to use data to drive improvements for environmental, social, and economic outcomes

Final Questions:

7. Do you foresee one central place for agri-food sustainability data being a useful tool for your organization? Why or why not?
8. How would you envision your organization using a tool like CASI?
9. Would you like to add to our conversation regarding sustainability more broadly in the Canadian agri-food sector?
10. Are there any up-and-coming trends that should be considered for the CASI Platform?
11. Is there anyone else you think we should speak with?

SUPPLY CHAIN (INCLUDES BUYERS, PROCESSORS, TRANSPORTATION, RETAIL AND INPUTS)

What we want to learn:

- What buyers are looking for in their procurement policies
- Expectations around verification and auditing for Canadian market

Questions:

1. What factors, internal and/or external, are driving your sustainability direction?
2. What standards/criteria/codes does your organization currently use (if any)?
 - a) Who is the main driver of the sustainability agenda for your organization?
ie. Market? Community? Consumers? Other? [if they have a sustainability agenda]
3. Is evidence of sustainable production practices an important consideration for market access? If not currently, do you envision it will become more important in the future?
4. If evidence of sustainable production practices is important, what aspects are the most critical for your supply chain?
 - a) Environmental stewardship (soil health, water quality, biodiversity, etc.)
 - b) Climate change (carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions, etc.)
 - c) Animal care
 - d) Community engagement
 - e) Farm business management (profitability, succession planning, etc.)
 - f) Human Resources (e.g. wage policies, health and safety, training, etc.)
 - g) Market access and competitive advantage
 - h) Other?
5. What scale of information is your market wanting to know? For example, is it farm-level compliance? Or at the entire industry level?
6. How do they want this information to be shared? What are the limitations you face in this regard? E.g. farm-level data aggregated? Group level (i.e. by commodity following certain production practices)? Individual farm level? Other?

FARMERS AND FARM GROUPS (FARMERS OR ORGANIZATIONS WHICH REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF FARMERS)

What we want to learn:

1. How to make sustainability reporting streamlined for farmers and organization members
2. Expectations around verification and auditing for Canadian market

Questions

1. What factors, internal and/or external, are driving the sustainability directions for your members?
2. Is evidence of sustainable production practices an important consideration for market access? If not currently, do you envision it will become more important in the future
3. If evidence of sustainable production practices is important, what aspects are the most critical for your supply chain?
 - a) Environmental stewardship (soil health, water quality, biodiversity, etc.)
 - b) Climate change (carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions, etc.)
 - c) Animal care
 - d) Community engagement
 - e) Farm business management (profitability, succession planning, etc.)
 - f) Human Resources (e.g. wage policies, health and safety, training, etc.)
 - g) Market access and competitive advantage
 - h) Other?
4. Does your organization encourage participation in any existing sustainability standards/criteria/codes of practice? (e.g. FSA from SAI Platform, ISCC, etc.) Why?
5. Are you currently participating in any industry initiatives aimed at streamlining the number of different standards/criteria/codes, perhaps through benchmarking and equivalency? (If so, are there other standards/criteria/codes that you accept than the ones noted in the point above?)

6. Are your (members/growers/producers/etc.) currently required to share data related to sustainable farming practices on a regular basis into an online database or reporting tool? Or do they voluntarily share sustainability data through any other program or system?
 - a) If yes, what types of sustainability data do they currently share and with whom? What benefit is there for sharing this information? (Market access? Benchmarking for performance? Other?)
 - b) If not, do you think your members would benefit from sharing all sustainability data in one online reporting tool or platform?
 - i) If yes, what do you think your members would like to see in return for sharing sustainability data?
 - (1) Prompts: Benchmarking against industry standards? Information for performance improvements? Assurance that 'buyers' will trust the data? Aggregated industry reports?
 - ii) If no, why? What would encourage participation?
7. Is your organization involved in helping value chain participants to improve their practices so they can achieve the minimum level required by the standard/criteria/code you recognize? If so, what type of resources do you provide?

GOVERNMENT (FEDERAL)

What we want to learn:

- Trade implications of CASI. What are the risks and opportunities?
- How can these programs drive growth as well as sustainable outcomes?
- What best practices can we better communicate via CASI and how?
- Tariffs/free trade agreements etc. (Export Development Canada)

Questions:

1. Is evidence of sustainable production practices an important consideration for market access? Do you envision it will become more important in the future? Near future? Coming in the future but not as urgent as other issues? Other?
2. Do you see communicating sustainable production practices in existing export products as well as emerging products?
3. Based on your experience, what types of agri-food sustainability indicators are of importance for international markets?
4. With regards to international trade, do you believe one central place for agri-food sustainability data can provide access to new markets? How about increase market share in existing markets? Please explain.
5. Is there risk in continuing to share progress on sustainability outcomes on an individual commodity basis?
6. Are you aware of any equivalent programs or standards for agri-food sustainability data or indicators used in other countries (e.g. Soy Sustainability Assurance Protocol)? Please describe including any comments on the successes or challenges related to these programs.

GOVERNMENT (PROVINCIAL)

What we want to learn:

- What programs exist already?
- How can CASI support new/existing iterations of programming?
- What best practices can we better communicate via CASI and how?

Questions:

1. What are the existing sustainability indicator programs that are run at the provincial level? Can you provide examples as they relate to the environment, economy and society?
 - a) Prompt: The EFP is a widely accepted program for example. What are the challenges and opportunities to share existing data through this program?
2. How can CASI support new/existing iterations of provincial programming?
3. What best management practices can we better communicate to the marketplace?
4. How do you anticipate CASI will impact trade of agricultural goods? What are the risks or opportunities?
5. Is there risk in continuing to share progress on sustainability outcomes on an individual commodity basis?

SUSTAINABILITY ENABLERS (LENDERS)

What we want to learn:

- Whether sustainability plays into whether loans are granted
- Do lenders foresee sustainability becoming more important for businesses trying to secure capital?

Questions:

1. Is sustainability currently a factor your organization considers when financing agri-food projects or businesses?
 - a) If so, which indicators of sustainability does your organization typically look at and how do you access those indicators?
 - b) If not, do you anticipate sustainability to be a factor in granting loans for agri-food ventures in the future?
 - i) If so, what kind of indicators would be important for your organization to see? Are they commodity specific, or broad across all agri-food applicants?
2. Are you aware of any equivalent programs or standards for agri-food sustainability data or indicators used in other countries (e.g. Soy Sustainability Assurance Protocol)? Please describe including any comments on the successes or challenges related to these programs.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW INVITATION LETTER

Hello,

As part of development of a national platform for agricultural sustainability program information, the Canadian Agri-Food Sustainability Initiative (CASI) would like to invite you to take part in 30- to 45-minute interview. CASI aims to meet global and future sustainability needs for the Canadian agricultural sector. Global brands are increasingly seeking farm-level performance assurance, governments want a higher level of public trust, and consumers are looking for signals of environmental, social and economic sustainability. With so much information available on sustainable production practices often at the individual commodity level, there is an opportunity to create synergies between programs in order to reduce duplication of efforts and enable farmers to provide evidence of sustainable production practices.

These interviews are intended to shape the development of CASI as a whole-farm and whole value chain sustainability metrics platform. The objectives of CASI include increasing transparency, reducing duplication, developing sustainability competencies, and developing a forum for knowledge exchange and collaboration. It is important that CASI reflects the entire Canadian agri-food sector value chain; from what producers need to implement sustainability practices at the farm level, to what processors and manufacturers use to meet their business sustainability goals. As such, your insights are critical to the success of this initiative.

If you are willing to participate in a 30- to 45-minute interview, please contact research@wiltongroup.ca to arrange a date and time. Group interviews are welcome. We look forward to hearing from you, and please do not hesitate to reach out should you have any questions or would like to learn about other ways to get involved.

Sincerely,

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