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Trans-Pacific Partnership Negotiations

Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry is one of the most trade-dependent agricultural sectors in the world. Well over half of everything we produce, worth over \$50 billion yearly, is exported, which means that over 90 per cent of Canadian farmers are reliant on trade.

It is with these facts in mind that we look favourably towards the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Successful completion of TPP negotiations is vital to ensuring the long term prosperity of the agricultural sector. Setting higher standards for trade by eliminating tariffs and non-tariff barriers, the TPP has the potential to strengthen existing markets, while opening strategic markets in the region and resulting in a more *stable and transparent trading environment* for Canadian products. Considering that one in eight Canadian jobs are in agriculture and agri-food, we are talking about a significant proportion of our population at risk of being put at a disadvantage if we are on the outside looking in.

The 12 countries included in the TPP represent 40 per cent of the world's gross domestic product, the 11 countries around the table with Canada representing over 65 per cent of our agriculture and agri-food exports, making it the biggest trade deal for Canada since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). These players, especially in Asia, represent high-value markets for our quality grain, oilseed and pulse products, and we simply cannot afford to be left behind. In fact, given Canada's reliance on trade, it is imperative that we play a central role in agreements that affect global terms of trade.

Canada has been at the TPP table since 2012 so that our negotiators can shape what the final agreement looks like. The negotiations have been driven by the U.S. and they have recently started the process to enable them to complete the agreement. One thing is certain: with the largest economy in the world the U.S. can negotiate an agreement that will serve their interests. Some have suggested that Canada could just join a concluded TPP sometime in the future if talking trade during an election campaign proved too inconvenient.

This could not be more wrong. We're a small country in the world and the best deal for Canada will come when we're at the table when things come together – and from what we know this could be very soon.

Furthermore, out of the TPP context, New Zealand and Australia are well ahead of Canada in terms of negotiating bilateral free-trade agreements in the Asia market. While it is important to note that although trade agreements do not guarantee sales in foreign markets, they are indispensable prerequisites to allowing competitive sales. As such, we need to ensure that we are not only part of the conversation, but a key voice.

Put simply, participating in the TPP is vital to our economy. If we remain in status quo, there is much to lose, while our competitors reap the benefits of preferential market access. This means that Canadian farmers will be at a competitive disadvantage to other countries and we simply cannot afford to let that happen. We owe our farmers a chance to compete freely and on equal footing with our international competitors. If we do not take action, it leaves the agricultural industry vulnerable, as we stand to be virtually excluded from this monumental trade opportunity.

We need our elected officials to stand up for the future of the Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector, as well as for the millions of jobs it directly and indirectly supports in our country. This moment will demonstrate whether the federal government's trade agenda is actually serving the interests of Canadians or not. Canada depends on trade and the implications that would result from being left behind in these crucial negotiations cannot be understated. As President Eisenhower once said, "*Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from the corn field*". We need Canada's leaders to push forward on economic leadership and this is how it will be done. The time to act is now.

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