As you embark on your term as Minister of Agriculture and Food, your top policy priorities should include the following:

- The new food policy’s focus for our country needs to be strengthened. The current policy presented this past June does not provide a vision or focus for our agrifood sector to make it a driver for our economy. For one, Canada’s new Food Guide recommends a dietary regimen that is out of reach for Canada’s agriculture sector. Growth is essential in some areas like horticulture and pulses to fill requirements generated by the food guide, yet no specific provisions are made for these sectors. With the new policy, food processing appears to be hardly on the department’s radar. Value chains are used to guide high-impact and sustainable initiatives focused on improving productivity, competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and the growth of small and medium food processors in the sector. This is where most innovation and economic growth is typically generated, in rural communities most importantly. Processing is not only relevant when applied to growth, but also to the equity dimension of the modernization of agrifood systems to reach a higher level of food security.

- Domestic food security and the branding of Canada also remain priorities. The current food policy does outline some important initiatives related to our role on the global stage. A comprehensive Feeding the North program, along with the development of a Made in Canada brand for Canadians, is long overdue. Work on the current Canada Brand project should be supported and executed. Food security in northern communities has been a challenge for decades and this policy should pave the way for more investments in localized production facilities in that region. Labelling products that are made in Canada will also be critical. These initiatives will need to be coupled with an enhanced effort to nurture a culture that values data and analytics.

- As such, we also need to build a more data-focused industry. Without sound data, it will be difficult to monitor Canada’s performance as a food provider to Canadians and the rest of the world. Our goal to become a global leader in agrifood cannot be achieved unless we benchmark and look at how we can do better. As part of this process, we also need to address the issue of technological connectivity and literacy across the value chain. In turn, this could make the sector more attractive to global investors.

- Human capital will need support in the sector. Labor retention and recruitment are challenges facing the entire farming sector. Our temporary worker program needs to be extended as soon as possible. We also need to make the agrifood sector more attractive to Canadians.

- Environmental initiatives and supporting all economic sectors to become more sustainable will be key moving forward. In agrifood, farmers are known to be among Canada’s best environmental stewards. But our current carbon tax policy is unjust for farming. Agriculture is not considered a source of carbon sequestration and should be. Farmers should get credit for the carbon they sequester.

- Rather than subjecting farms to more fiscal penalties to maintain current production, government policy should focus on making farmers more efficient with the necessary inputs they use. Your department should work with the Department of Environment and Climate Change to incentivize practices that reduce output per unit of greenhouse gas emitted.

- Finally, our supply management policy needs to be reformed in order to reflect our economy’s open nature. Global markets and trade make it impossible for a closed, exclusive system like supply management to survive. Signing trade deals is necessary, and yes, financially supporting our supply-managed sectors will become necessary. Supply management needs reform. In dairy alone, longterm consolidation trends, accelerated by new trade deals, mean we could lose almost half of the 10,600 dairy farms we have by the year 2030, even with the compensation program presented earlier this year. A new plan for supply management should clearly focus on farm and processing competitiveness and should have proper coverage of all markets in Canada.