Growing the Next Generation of Agricultural Leaders – The Canadian Agriculture Youth Initiative

The global population is now approaching 8.3 billion and is projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050. Against a backdrop of climate change—which is leading to reduced agricultural yields—future generations will play a crucial role in meeting the challenge of food security and helping to shape the agriculture of tomorrow to ensure a viable and sustainable planet.



Canada will have a leading role to play. Canadian agriculture is at the heart of the country's food system, helping provide safe, nutritious, and sustainable food for people at home and around the world.

The involvement of the next generation will be crucial. However, young people continue to leave rural areas and don't show much interest in farming. A lack of information about the numerous opportunities and careers offered by agriculture is a core part of the problem.

Designed as an educational program, the *Canadian Agriculture Youth Initiative* connects students through hands-on learning, collaboration, and real-world agricultural challenges. Participants gain valuable insight into how food is produced, how farmers care for the land, and how innovation is helping agriculture respond to some of the world's most pressing challenges.

One of the program's primary goals is to strengthen agricultural literacy. Many young people today have limited exposure to farming and food production, despite relying on agriculture every day. By introducing students to the realities of modern agriculture, the program helps build a better understanding of the important role farmers play in society and also a deeper understanding of agriculture and the food value chain.

Throughout the program, students explore topics such as soil health, crop production, sustainable farming practices, agricultural technology, global food security, and environmental stewardship. They learn how science-based approaches help farmers grow more food while using resources responsibly and protecting the environment for future generations.

The initiative also highlights the wide range of career opportunities available in Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector. Agriculture today extends far beyond the farm gate, offering careers in science, research, technology, engineering, environmental management, agronomy, business, and food production. By exposing students to these opportunities early, the program helps encourage the next generation of innovators and agriculture leaders who will support one of Canada's most important industries.



A unique feature of the program is its emphasis on leadership, teamwork, communication, and critical thinking. Students work together, often in international teams, to tackle real-world agricultural challenges. This collaboration helps participants develop needed skills and also creates a network that will enable them to succeed in future careers while gaining a broader understanding of agriculture's global impact.

The program culminates in a capstone project where students create and present a sustainable farm plan. Teams are challenged to balance environmental stewardship, economic viability, and social responsibility while addressing practical agricultural issues. Through this experience, students gain a firsthand appreciation for the complex decisions farmers make every day to produce food sustainably and responsibly.

As the industry continues to evolve, there is a growing need for future leaders who understand the science, technology, and innovation that drive modern farming. The *Canadian Agriculture Youth Initiative* was created by OCP North America, Inc. (OCPNA), a subsidiary of global phosphate fertilizer and agricultural solutions leader OCP Group, to help meet that need by inspiring young people to explore agriculture and its role in building a more sustainable future.

Programs like the *Canadian Agriculture Youth Initiative* help bridge the gap between consumers and agriculture. By providing young people with accurate, science-based information and meaningful experiences, it aims to support Canada’s next generation of farmers and its ecosystem. At the same time, it helps build the skilled workforce and leadership talent that Canadian agriculture will need in the years ahead.

As agriculture continues to play a critical role in food security, environmental sustainability, and economic growth, investing in agricultural education has never been more important. Through innovation, collaboration, and hands-on learning, the *Canadian Agriculture Youth*

Initiative is helping prepare the next generation to lead Canadian agriculture into the future and to strengthen national and global food security.

An OCPNA representative in Canada sums up the situation as follows: “The *Canadian Agriculture Youth Initiative* demonstrates OCPNA’s commitment to Canadian agriculture’s development. However, without support from other agriculture stakeholders, the growth and evolution of this program will be limited. The first year of the *Canadian Agriculture Youth Initiative* was considered pilot and included the participation of more than 500 students. The next step for us is to develop this Initiative with our partners in a more ambitious way, and to gradually increase the numbers of beneficiaries. To achieve this goal, the support of the Canadian Ag eco system will be crucial. “