



## Understanding Consumer Preferences Key to Value Chain Success

**Guelph, ON (May 1, 2007)** A new project is underway that will help establish a closer link between the agri-food sector and consumers, in turn assisting primary producers in making more informed business decisions.

The three-year initiative is the result of a partnership between the Canadian Pork Council, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Canadian Sheep Federation, Ontario Veal Association and the George Morris Centre.

The project, partly funded through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) program, will use 'food diaries' to track consumer purchasing behaviours for pork, chicken, veal, and lamb across all retail outlets – including farmers markets and alternative shopping venues – in 4,500 households throughout Canada, over a 12-month period.

Additionally, an online national usage and attitude survey will provide data on consumer purchase and behaviour patterns from 3,200 individuals across Canada. The data will be collected by Ipsos-Reid, one of the world's leading market research firms, using their consumer online I-Say Panel. This group includes more than 210,000 individuals from across Canada, and is continually refreshed, thus yielding an average response rate of over 40%.

The overall results of the project will be presented to sector stakeholders, across Canada, including producers, along with recommendations on how to take advantage of identified commercial opportunities.

According to Martin Gooch, Senior Research Associate with the George Morris Centre, "Without detailed market information, business decisions are based on conjecture rather than facts. This project will provide primary producers with opportunities to extract added value from the market by giving them the ability to make more informed business decisions."

The anticipated long-term benefits of the project include a greater capacity among the farm, food processing, foodservice and retail segments to work together for mutual advantage.

“Having accurate information about customers’ purchasing and usage habits is crucial for the agriculture and agri-food industry. This project will provide valuable insights to the pork, chicken, lamb, and veal sectors, as well as to other important members of the food value chain,” says Anita DeCoste of the Canadian Pork Council, the organization leading the project. “We applaud Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for supporting this exciting new project, and we look forward to working with all of our partners over the next three years.”

Challenges facing the Canadian sector have shown the need for differentiation in order to satisfy market segments and consumer demands. In light of that need, project support is also coming from many other members of the food value chain. These include representatives from the processing and retail sectors, who are playing an important advisory role throughout the life of the project in order to maximize its outcomes.

“This initiative will help take the guesswork out of what you put in the ground or produce. The better the understanding of what consumers want and value, the greater the opportunities for Canadian business,” explains Nick Jennery, President and CEO, Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors.

Adds John Scott, CEO and President of the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers, “Independent retailers are always at the forefront of understanding and satisfying consumers’ ever changing demands, so it was a natural fit for us to be included in this ground-breaking study.”

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