

# Q&A with Canada's ag minister, Marie-Claude Bibeau

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN  
Capital Press

The U.S. and Canadian farming sectors are intricately interwoven, bound by a long history of trade, travel and shared characteristics between the neighboring countries.

According to the International Trade Administration, in 2020, Canada was the second largest export market for U.S. agricultural goods, totaling more than \$22 billion and accounting for nearly 15% of U.S. agricultural exports.



**Marie-Claude Bibeau**

In March 2019, Marie-Claude Bibeau, now 51, became the first woman in Canadian history to be appointed federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food — the nation's top ag official, an equivalent role to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack.

On Feb. 3, Bibeau sat down with Capital Press reporter Sierra Dawn McClain for a wide-ranging interview. The text has been edited for brevity and clarity.

**Let's talk dairy. Under the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), Canada agreed to new market access for U.S. dairy products. The U.S. dairy industry alleges Canada has been evading these obligations by reserving most of its tariff-rate quotas (TRQs) — preferential rates on certain volumes — for processors, which have little incentive to import U.S. dairy. Jan. 4, the U.S. prevailed in the first dispute settlement on this issue. How and when will Canada move into compliance?**

**Bibeau:** I'm pleased with the dispute settlement panel's report, which ruled in favor of Canada and recognized the legitimacy of our supply-managed dairy industry. We're currently reviewing the one out of four rulings against Canada.

Canada takes its obligations under international agreements seriously.

In the coming weeks, Canada will work closely with the Canadian dairy industry to proceed with next steps in the dispute process, considering that the panel affirmed that Canada retains discretion to allocate quotas to processors.

**So, it sounds like both Canada and the U.S. are claiming partial victory in the dispute. Can you clarify which of the rulings you see as being against Canada versus in favor?**

**Bibeau:** Well, the panel confirmed that the supply management system is legit-



Marianne Dandurand/Minister's Office  
**Canadian Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Marie-Claude Bibeau visits a Christmas tree farm.**

imate and that we can allocate the tariff-rate quotas. We can choose the way we allocate them.

But they asked us to review the way we were doing it to avoid — and I'm not giving you the legal language but just trying to be accessible — to avoid doing it in a "pre-emptive" manner.

We've submitted an alternative way of allocating the quotas to the Americans for comment.

And, I mean, I think (as) Canadians, we're good at following the rules. We want to play this by the book, and we will find a way to do it properly.

**Some U.S. dairy groups also allege that Canada has been intentionally skirting the USMCA's export caps on dairy proteins by shifting production and exports toward more milk protein isolates, a category of dairy protein not cited in USMCA. What's your response?**

**Bibeau:** Under the USMCA, Canada has an obligation to maintain export controls on three dairy products: skim milk powder, milk protein concentrates and infant formula. This is what we've implemented, and we take this obligation very seriously. The (Canadian) government doesn't direct private enterprises to export specific products. Canadian exporters make business decisions as to which products they export, whether they be export-controlled or not.

**Shifting to the meat industry — there's a lot of talk in Congress about reintroducing country-of-origin labeling, or COOL, which would require meat companies to disclose where animals were born, raised and slaughtered. How do you feel about that? Where do you stand on COOL, and why?**

**Bibeau:** I've discussed

this with Secretary Vilsack, who has provided assurances that any country-of-origin labeling measure considered by the U.S. would be (World Trade Organization) compliant. We trust the U.S. to live up to that commitment.

Canada will continue to closely examine any labeling measure proposed by the U.S. to ensure that it does not restrict trade or disrupt important food supply chains between our two countries.

**So, in theory, if the U.S. created a labeling system that was WTO-compliant and didn't restrict trade or supply chains, would you support it? I'm looking for a yes or no.**

**Bibeau:** Ha! You know politicians — we're so bad at yes or no. (She laughed.)

I would prefer to put it another way around.

I think it's totally legitimate for a country to define better what is an American or Canadian product. And actually, we do that in Canada. Secretary Vilsack called me when he started this work. He wanted to explain to me that this is what he was working on and that he would be very careful to stay within your and our international rules. My understanding is that (the U.S. is) working on the definition of what an American produces, and that is totally legitimate. But if it was to turn into a COOL, we would obviously firmly oppose (it).

**Let's move onto grain. Prior to USMCA, U.S. wheat sold in Canada would automatically be graded as foreign feed-grade wheat, for livestock. Under the trade agreement, that's no longer the case, meaning growers compete on a more level playing field. The challenge now is that American wheat growers must use Canada's variety registration system, which many call "burdensome." Do you have plans to change the registration system to allow easier market access?**

**Bibeau:** Canada's variety registration system is not a barrier to trade. Foreign variety developers are treated the same as Canadian developers. By the end of 2021, there were approximately 43% foreign-bred varieties, across all field crops, actively registered in

Canada. For wheat, Canada has 178 foreign-bred varieties actively registered, and of these, 84, 47% of all foreign bred wheat varieties, (are) American-bred. (The) USA is the leading country for foreign variety registrations in Canada.

Canada has taken steps in recent years to modernize the variety registration system to promote innovation, enhance competitiveness, traceability and system efficiencies, and facilitate producers' timely access to new varieties, including those developed in the U.S.

**Does that mean you plan on keeping the registration system as-is, at least for now? No major changes in the near future?**

**Bibeau:** Mmmhmm. This is not on my desk right now, so no — no major changes expected in the near future.

**The National Potato Council applauded Canada's recent decision to temporarily halt exports of potatoes from Prince Edward Island (PEI) to prevent potato wart, a serious disease that's currently in PEI, from spreading into other Canadian provinces or U.S. potato crops. When do you think PEI potatoes will resume their flow?**

**Bibeau:** Well, there are three categories of potatoes.

Seed potatoes are planted in the soil to grow other potatoes. If they're contaminated, they could contaminate the soil. So, higher risk is around seed potatoes. This is why we have a Canadian order saying that seed potatoes are not moving out of the island until we complete a full investigation, with tens of thousands of additional soil sampling(s) and analysis.

Then we have the table-stock potatoes. Table-stock potatoes are washed, brushed (and) treated with what we call a sprout inhibitor to make sure that these potatoes cannot grow. They come from fields that are not known as having ever been affected by the disease.

And they are directed to grocery stores, not for gardening, not for agriculture. So, this is why we — and I'm working with scientists — strongly believe that table-stock can move. They're moving within Canada following these very strict phy-

tosanitary measures.

I was in Washington (D.C.) last week, and my request to Secretary Vilsack was to ask APHIS (USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) to focus on table stock. We are asking the Americans to open up for table stock because we have all these measures in place to make sure it's safe.

(Vilsack) told me it could confidently be done within a week or two for Puerto Rico to start, where the risk is low because the disease does not develop in such a climate and because Puerto Rico is not really a potato producer.

And then we have processing potatoes, which will be transformed into french fries or chips. Normally, processing potatoes are not washed before being sent. It's the processing facilities that have in place the appropriate equipment to wash them and to manage all the waste and wastewater. So, it's an in-between risk category. Discussion about processing potatoes will happen at a later phase.

**What percentage of Canada's total potato crop typically comes from PEI?**

**Bibeau:** I don't have the numbers in front of me, but it's extremely significant. Depending on the year, it's the first or the second province that produces the most potatoes.

Potatoes are for them what oranges are for Florida or grapes in California. It's nothing less than their identity. It's their pride for generations. So, this disruption is extremely hard.

**In a Ministerial Mandate Letter Dec. 16, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asked you to work with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to establish a "Canada Water Agency." How will this new agency impact both Canadian and American farmers who rely on many of the same river basins?**

**Bibeau:** The agency will be designed to complement and work in collaboration with initiatives already underway within the government as well as at the provincial, territorial and local levels. The government will respect international commitments and work with the U.S. in the management of water resources shared by our two countries.

The agency will help ensure Canadian farmers have a reliable supply of quality freshwater by protecting lakes, rivers and other freshwater systems.

**The Washington state apple industry has faced barriers trying to introduce the new Cosmic Crisp apple variety to Canadian consumers because of COVID restrictions, including limited taste testing at retail stores. Do you expect that to change in 2022?**

**Bibeau:** COVID-19, and the safety restrictions it's brought, have affected supply chains and commerce around the world. This might include restrictions or limitations on taste testing demonstrations in grocery stores. Provinces have jurisdiction on many retail store practices, (and) individual retailers themselves may impose additional restrictions in the name of safety, independent of any order of government.

**Like the U.S., Canada faces an ongoing agricultural labor crisis. I understand you may be looking to expand pathways to permanent residence for temporary foreign workers. Can you explain your strategy?**

**Bibeau:** We're looking at several ways to address this challenge, including reducing processing times. And, we've established a pilot program that provides a pathway to permanent residence for experienced, non-seasonal workers in specific industries and occupations, including several in agriculture and food processing. Those applying for permanent residence under the Agri-Food Pilot must meet certain conditions, such as having eligible experience in Canada, and meet language and education requirements.

**CP: Where do you see untapped opportunities for collaboration between the U.S. and Canada that could benefit farmers in both countries?**

**Bibeau:** There are many opportunities to grow the Canada-U.S. agriculture relationship, and we have many priorities in common.

As Secretary Vilsack and I have noted, addressing climate change is a critical global challenge. But it also provides collaborative opportunities.

(And) COVID-19 demonstrated how critical Canada-U.S. agricultural supply chains are to food security.

**Do you have any final thoughts?**

**Bibeau:** Just that our agriculture sectors are so much integrated. I mean, it's amazing to see how our commodities go from one side of the border to the other and then come back and sometimes a third time. We can be proud of this collaboration between our producers, ag businesses and our governments. It's great.

**Update:** On Feb. 8, USDA announced the resumption of allowing table-stock potatoes from Prince Edward Island, Canada, into Puerto Rico.

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Notice is hereby given that the following vehicle will be sold, for cash to the highest bidder, on 02/22/2022. The sale will be held at 10:00am by  
LIGHT TRUCK PARTS OF SALEM INC  
2510 TURNER RD SALEM, OR  
1990 INTL DU  
VIN = 1HTSCNDP9LH300214  
Amount due on lien \$2190.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
ROSEBURG FOREST PRODUCTS CO  
5281214-1

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LIGHT TRUCK PARTS OF SALEM INC  
2510 TURNER RD SALEM, OR  
2005 CHEV TBZ UT  
VIN = 1GNDDT13S352344680  
Amount due on lien \$2190.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
AT AND T SERVICES INC  
5281213-1

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2021 HYUN KONA 4DR  
VIN = KM8K23AG9M126366  
Amount due on lien \$1515.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
ALBERTO SCHLAGENHAUFER  
HYUNDAI LEASE TITLING LSSR/TRST  
5281222-1

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2012 BMW 528 4DR  
VIN = WBAXH5C58CDW03896  
Amount due on lien \$1435.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
NOC & JENNIFER  
SANCHEZ HERNANDEZ  
5281221-1

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2015 BMW 328 4DR  
VIN = WBA3K5C56FK300647  
Amount due on lien \$1395.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
ASHISH GUPTA/GUPTA FAMILY TRUST  
5281220-1

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2016 BMW 528 4DR  
VIN = WBA5A7C51GG145632  
Amount due on lien \$1395.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
DAVID ADAM KOHEL  
BMW BANK OF NORTH AMERICA  
5281219-1

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LIGHT TRUCK PARTS OF SALEM INC  
2510 TURNER RD SALEM, OR  
2007 FORD F150 PK  
VIN = 1FTPW14V37FA23451  
Amount due on lien \$2190.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
TED TIAGA & HEATHER SCHOCH  
5281217-1

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LIGHT TRUCK PARTS OF SALEM INC  
2510 TURNER RD SALEM, OR  
2002 FORD EC3 BU  
VIN = 1FB5S31L72HB06774  
Amount due on lien \$2190.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
KENNETH & DEBORAH HENDERSON  
FIRST COMMUNITY CREDIT UNION  
5281215-1

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LIGHT TRUCK PARTS OF SALEM INC  
2510 TURNER RD SALEM, OR  
1990 CHEV CORVETTE 2D  
VIN = 1G1YY2387L5120435  
Amount due on lien \$1106.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
LIGHT TRUCK PARTS  
5281229-1

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2019 FORD RANGER PU  
VIN = 1FTR4FHXXKLA79937  
Amount due on lien \$1435.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
JASON ALAN SMITH  
FORD MOTOR CREDIT CO  
5281228-1

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2021 KIA SOUL UT  
VIN = KNDJ23AU1M7142808  
Amount due on lien \$2055.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
DANIEL WULF & DEREK  
ZACK/ALLSTATE  
5281227-1

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2020 JAGU XE 5 4DR  
VIN = SAJAE4FX9LCP56576  
Amount due on lien \$1435.00  
Reputed owner(s) MELVIND PEREZ  
MACARAIG/JPMORGAN  
JPMORGAN CHASE BANK NA  
5281225-1

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2011 CHEV SLV PK  
VIN = 1GCRKTE33B2224805  
Amount due on lien \$1515.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
BRUCE D & DANYELL D LOGSDON  
5281224-1

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC  
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR  
2018 TOYT RAV 4 UT  
VIN = JTMBFREV9JJ24418  
Amount due on lien \$1515.00  
Reputed owner(s)  
TOYOTA LEASE TRUST  
5281223-1