



# How did **food** and **farming** influence the **growth** of Canada's **population** over time?

## food, farming and population growth

Did you know that Canada's population has continued to grow over time, and is still growing? Food and farming were – and continue to be – important influences on Canada's growing population. Food is essential – and crops and livestock fed people who lived and worked in Canada over time.

In the early to mid-1800s, a growing population was seen to be a good thing. More people – and more farmers – meant that more food could be produced and more territory claimed for Canada.

Immigration was encouraged and farming was promoted. Early farmers in New France and later in Upper and Lower Canada grew wheat, peas, oats, rye, barley and maize and raised dairy cows for milk, cheese and butter. These agricultural activities continued to be an important part of Canada's food system, even though the ways crops and livestock were grown and raised changed over time.



Why is the food system an essential aspect of Canada's population growth?

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National Archives of Canada C-63162

## gardens and farming at fur trading posts

The fur trade was an important influence on the early colonization and settlement of Canada by Europeans. Furs were trapped and shipped from what is now Canada's western provinces.

Small kitchen gardens were a source of food on some Hudson's Bay posts. Wheat, barley and oats were also part of these early farms, even though it was difficult to grow these crops in some areas.

Why were these gardens and crops important? In remote areas, all food had to be **imported**, or brought in by ship and transported overland. This was expensive and food took up space that could be used for other supplies. As early as 1674, seeds for vegetables and grains were included in shipments sent from Europe to forts around the Hudson and James Bays.

In these areas, grain crops like wheat, rye, barley and oats did not grow very well. However, vegetable crops like cabbages, turnips, parsnips, carrots and peas, mustard greens, potatoes and onions were able to grow.

This photo shows the garden at York Factory in 1878.



Information from Hudson's Bay Company Gardens. Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation: Online. [www.hbcheritage.ca/history/fur-trade/company-gardens](http://www.hbcheritage.ca/history/fur-trade/company-gardens) and Leechman, D. (May 7, 2016). Fractious Farming at the Fur-trade Posts. Canada's History: Online. [www.canadahistory.ca/explore/environment/fractious-farming-at-the-fur-trade-posts](http://www.canadahistory.ca/explore/environment/fractious-farming-at-the-fur-trade-posts)

Photo: Robert Bell / Library and Archives Canada / e011156536\_s1-v8

## Wheat at fur trade posts

In Canada, wheat was probably first grown at Port-Royal in about 1605; the first exports were made in 1654. Although personnel at some Hudson's Bay Company posts experimented with wheat, and the settlers at the Red River Colony had some success in 1815, the early years in Western Canada were precarious ones for wheat farmers. Many cultivars from Europe were tried: some were winter wheats that could not survive Canada's severe winters; others were spring wheats that matured too late for the short growing season.



David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries

Early farmers in Upper Canada were the United Empire Loyalists who had come from America in the late 1700s. Many of the United Empire Loyalists had lived on farms in New York State. They brought some knowledge and experience of farming with them.

Early farms were located near waterways and close to existing posts. Farmers cleared the heavily forested areas for their crops and homes. They depended on seeds that were provided by the government. Their crops included wheat, oats and potatoes.

These early farms were a foundation for the establishment of permanent agricultural settlements.

Farmers' close relationship with the land meant that they "put down roots" and were more likely to expand their farms. This meant that more land was cleared and permanently settled.



Look carefully at the map of Upper Canada. The squares show areas of settlement in 1800. What patterns do you see? How does the map support the information on this page?

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Farms grew quickly through the fertile lands that are now in southern Ontario. Crops like peas, barley, rye and buckwheat were grown to feed local communities.

However, wheat started to take over and be grown as an **export**, sent and sold to other countries. Some wheat was sold to the United States, but most was exported to Britain. Transportation of wheat to these markets still relied mainly on the waterways.



Photo: Horatio Needham Topley/Library and Archives Canada/PA-020584

### from the fur trade to farming in the west

After Confederation, the government saw the west as an agricultural colony that could grow and ship grain – mainly wheat – to markets in Europe. Much of the agricultural lands were already settled in eastern Canada, although there were still forests with soil that could be suitable for farmland.

A cross-country railway was essential for the government’s vision of the west. To fulfil this vision, the government also believed that farmers had to be attracted from other countries to Canada.



Photo: Library and Archives Canada/PA-149070



How was the impact of early farmers different from the impact that fur traders and loggers had on the establishment of permanent settlements? In what ways do you think early farmers competed with fur traders and loggers?

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### The cost of western expansion

**The government’s vision came at a cost to Indigenous peoples. European communities disrupted Indigenous food systems and destroyed some Indigenous food resources – including the bison.**

**The introduction of new crops and farming methods allowed these European farming communities to grow. This affected the movement of Indigenous peoples by displacing them from traditional lands.**

**The signing of treaties exchanged traditional hunting grounds that sustained Indigenous food systems for farmland, livestock and minimal amounts of cash.**

## expanding agriculture

Canada's population and farms both grew and expanded over time.

- ◆ In 1871 there were about 75 000 people living across the western prairies.
- ◆ Twenty years later in 1891, the population had grown to about 250 000.
- ◆ By 1911, the population across the western prairies was about 1.3 million.

Most of this population growth was related to the growth of agriculture and the spread of homesteads and farms.

- ◆ By the start of the 1900s, about 55 000 farms took up just over 6 million hectares of land.
- ◆ By 1911, 250 000 farms took up 9 million hectares of land.

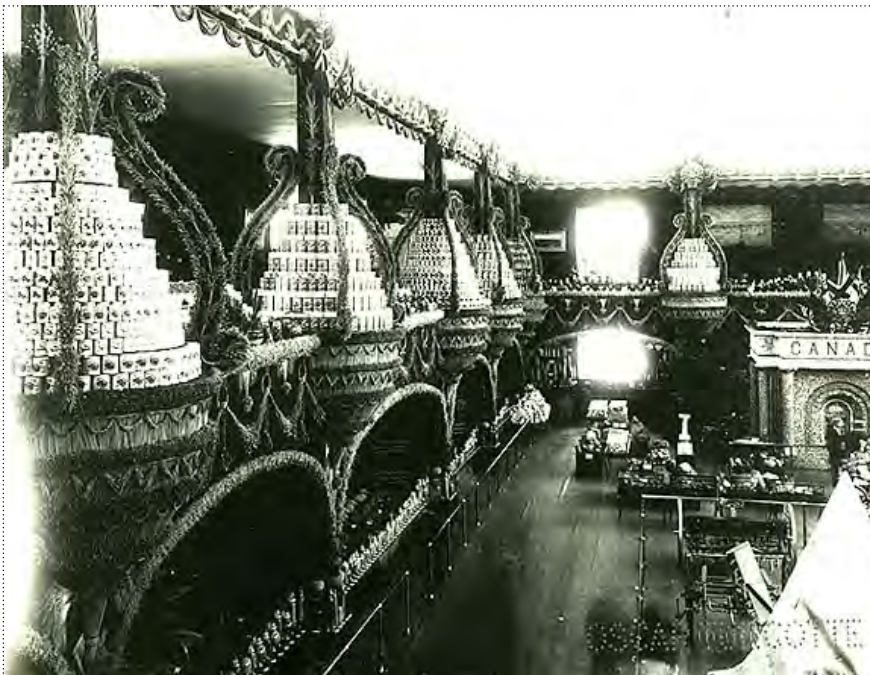


Photo: Library and Archives Canada/PA-076923

The leaders of Canada's government believed that the best way to encourage prosperity in the East was to settle the western prairies with farmers. These farmers would provide two things:

- ◆ A stable source of food for Canada's growing population
- ◆ Grain exports, which were in high demand in Europe

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How could you compare the growth of Canada's population and the increase in the number of farms between the late 1800s and 1911? What type of graph could you create?

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This photo shows a display of food products that were part of a trade exhibition in Europe in 1905. What messages is it giving about Canada?

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This goal of agricultural settlement was part of Canada's **National Policy**. Although there were farms in the eastern provinces, they could not produce enough grain to meet the goals of the government.

Many eastern farmers were also more focused on producing dairy products and fruits. The government thought that settlement would also protect Canada's growth from expansion by the United States.

The National Policy was put in place by Prime Minister John A. Macdonald in 1878. It emphasized the building of the railway, the populating of the west and protection of goods that were produced in Canada.

### treaty land and agriculture

The treaties established with First Nations people throughout the west made promises to provide First Nations people with a way of life through farming.

Treaties were seen by non-Indigenous treaty negotiators as a way to take ownership of most of the lands in Canada so that its resources could be used by settler farmers.

Even before the treaties were established, Indigenous peoples had begun to raise crops and cattle. In the mid-1800s, a group of Cree known to fur traders as the Magpies grew corn and potatoes.

The infographic shows the number of treaties made in different areas of Canada.

## HISTORIC TREATIES AND TREATY FIRST NATIONS IN CANADA



**364 of 617**

First Nations are Treaty First Nations (59%)

Historic treaties are located in **nine provinces and three territories**, covering nearly **50% of Canada's land mass**

Total Population of Treaty First Nations (2006)

**619,020**



**14**

Douglas Treaties (1850-1854)

**11**

Numbered Treaties (1871-1921)

**2**

Robinson Treaties (1850)

**2**

Williams Treaties (1923)

**30**

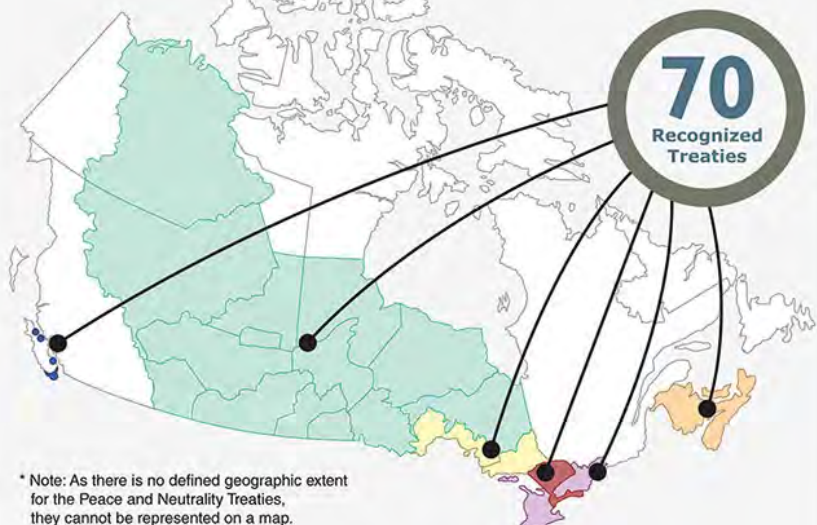
Upper Canada Land Surrenders (1781-1862)

**3**

\*Peace & Neutrality Treaties (1701-1760)

**8**

Maritime Peace and Friendship Treaties (1725-1779)



Historic Treaties and Treaty First Nations in Canada Infographic. Government of Canada: Online. [www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1380223988016/1544125243779](http://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1380223988016/1544125243779)

The government made promises to provide support for farming. For example, read the promises made as part of Treaty 6. These promises included farming tools like hoes, spades and ploughs. They also mentioned **scythes** (a curved blade at the end of a long pole), a **whetstone** and **grindstone** (used to sharpen, grind and polish) and an **auger** (a spiral-shaped tool similar to a drill).



Photo: Library and Archives Canada

Indigenous people were expected to begin farming before they received this support. However, it was almost impossible for them to farm until they received the tools they were promised. And these tools and other supplies were not adequate.

- ◆ Ploughs provided to Indigenous people were made in Ontario and not suitable for prairie conditions.
- ◆ Seed grain that was provided in early years was damaged or arrived too late to plant and harvest.
- ◆ There were no mills located close to reserve land.

There were other challenges that Indigenous people faced.

- ◆ The land and climate was not always good for crops and some were only provided with primitive tools like hoes and axes.
- ◆ Indigenous farmers could not leave the reserves when there were droughts, frosts or fires.
- ◆ They could not move to homesteads. They could not sell any of their grain or the products they grew without a permit. After 1885, they were required to use passes issued by the government before they could move off the reserves.



## Treaty No. 6 and agriculture

It is further agreed between Her Majesty and the said Indians, that the following articles shall be supplied to any Band of the said Indians who are now cultivating the soil, or who shall hereafter commence to cultivate the land, that is to say: Four hoes for every family actually cultivating; also, two spades per family as aforesaid: one plough for every three families, as aforesaid; one harrow for every three families, as aforesaid; two scythes and one whetstone, and two hay forks and two reaping hooks, for every family as aforesaid, and also two axes; and also one cross-cut saw, one hand-saw, one pit-saw, the necessary files, one grindstone and one auger for each Band ... also, for each Band, enough of wheat, barley, potatoes and oats to plant the land actually broken up for cultivation by such Band; also for each Band four oxen, one bull and six cows; also, one boar and two sows, and one hand-mill when any Band shall raise sufficient grain therefor. All the aforesaid articles to be given once and for all for the encouragement of the practice of agriculture among the Indians.

From Copy of Treaty No. 6 between Her Majesty the Queen and the Plain and Wood Cree Indians and other Tribes of Indians at Fort Carlton, Fort Pitt and Battle River with Adhesions. Government of Canada: Online. [www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028710/1581292569426](http://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028710/1581292569426)

Indigenous people adapted to the practices used by European farmers. There are some historical records that show that Indigenous farmers often obtained higher crop yields than settlers, causing the settler farmers to complain.

In 1889, the federal government required Indigenous farmers to reduce their farm sizes and to grow root crops, not wheat. They had to use very basic tools, sow their seeds by hand, harvest crops with scythes, bind the crops with straw and grind their grain with hand mills. This policy lasted for ten years and greatly discouraged Indigenous farmers from continuing to farm.

When Indigenous farmers found it too difficult to use the land to farm, the government allowed cultivated lands to be leased or sold to non-Indigenous farmers.

The restrictions placed on Indigenous agriculture on the prairies was called the Peasant Farm Policy. It lasted from 1889 to 1897. The photos show a Treaty 7 farm and an Indigenous farmer in the late 1800s.

### Farming today

The population of Indigenous people involved with agriculture is increasing. In 2016, of the almost 593 000 people involved in jobs associated with agriculture, almost 16 000 were Indigenous.

Metis represented the largest group of Indigenous people living in agricultural households. Just over 4 000 First Nations and 115 Inuit were part of the agricultural population.

In 2016, Indigenous farmers made up about 2 percent of all farmers across Canada. The number of farmers in 2016, however, increased by 54 percent compared to 1996. Compared with non-Indigenous farmers, Indigenous farmers were more likely to be female.

Statistics from Canadian Agriculture at a Glance (January 17, 2019). Aboriginal peoples and agriculture in 2016: A portrait. Statistics Canada: Online. [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/96-325-x/2019001/article/00001-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/96-325-x/2019001/article/00001-eng.htm)



Photos: Library and Archives Canada