

# Canadian Agricultural Policy

## The Historical Pattern

*By*

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*To*  
*the memory of*  
FRANK NESBIT FOWKE  
*Canadian pioneer*



## PREFACE

CANADIANS are familiar with the idea that agriculture is Canada's basic industry. A statement to this effect is commonly assumed sufficient to explain the position of agriculture within the Canadian economy. In particular, such a statement is assumed sufficient to explain the agricultural policy of Canadian government. The underlying assumption is that agriculture, because of its exceptional importance within the Canadian economy, can—and always has been able to—expect exceptional consideration. An historical analysis of Canadian agricultural policy indicates the inadequacy of the prevailing concept of agriculture. Argument concerning the degree of truth in the description of agriculture as "Canada's basic industry" conceals the fact that the expression has through prolonged repetition become a *cliché*, devoid of content. Its continued ritualistic use offers no assistance towards the interpretation of Canadian agricultural policy or of the place of agriculture within the framework of the economic and political life of Canada.

In this study the hypothesis is advanced that agricultural policy can best be explained by an historical consideration of agricultural functions. Essential to an understanding of governmental treatment of the agricultural community, it is argued, is an historical knowledge of the uses to which agriculture has been put from time to time and from place to place. If we can learn why agricultural development was wanted at a particular time and place there arises the possibility of knowing why agriculture was encouraged or neglected, what groups were interested in its development, and the political pressures under which agricultural assistance was extended. In support of this contention the present volume seeks to portray the role or roles of agriculture within territories which now form the Dominion of Canada, and to relate these roles to the formation of the agricultural policies of the respective governments.

The central analysis of this volume was prepared originally as a doctoral dissertation for the University of Washington. Since its acceptance in that form by the University of Washington in 1942

the materials have been re-worked and extended. The research was carried on chiefly in Ottawa, in the Public Archives of Canada, the Parliamentary Library, and the Main Library of the Department of Agriculture; and in Toronto, in the Library of the University of Toronto, and in the Reference Department of the Toronto Public Library. The author gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to the officials and staffs of these libraries for generous and unflinching courtesy in making their services available to him. He also acknowledges his indebtedness to the members of his advisory committee at the University of Washington for approving a research project of particular interest to a Canadian student; to the officials of the University of Toronto who made possible for the author a year's appointment at that institution under conditions which permitted very considerable research opportunities; and to the officials of the University of Saskatchewan who allowed the author leaves of absence and who assisted towards the productive utilization of those leaves.

Among the many individuals who have contributed to this study the author is particularly indebted to the following: to Dr. W. W. Swanson, former Head of the Department of Economics of the University of Saskatchewan, and to Dr. H. H. Preston, Dean of the College of Economics and Business of the University of Washington, whose continued and co-operative interest in the progress of the author's research served to untangle many a knotty problem; to Dr. H. A. Innis for the opportunity of spending a year at the University of Toronto where frequent consultations with him and other members of the staff and access to suitable library facilities gave direction and meaning to the author's researches; to Professors M. M. Skinner, Henry A. Burd, Joseph Demmery, and Vernon Mund of the University of Washington for careful reading and helpful criticism of the thesis manuscript; to Professor V. W. Bladen for editorial advice and for assistance in the conduct of arrangements for publication; and to Mrs. Hewitt and her staff for meticulous editorial assistance.

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University of Saskatchewan,  
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