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SEED FUELS FARMING AND THE ECONOMY

For farmers it's about growing a better crop; for the economy it's about jobs, expanding exports and leading-edge science.

JANUARY 20, 2009 – Canadian farmers have access to one of the widest selections of high-quality seed varieties in the world. New varieties with higher yields or improved disease and pest resistance provide optimism for a successful crop. While seed fuels opportunity and optimism for farmers, it also helps fuel Canada's economic engine. With \$3.95 billion in economic activity generated every year, and employing over 14,000 people from coast to coast, Canada's seed industry is a vibrant contributor to the nation's economy.

A new study, commissioned by the Canadian Seed Trade Association (CSTA) examined the economic contribution of Canada's seed sector including plant breeding and research, seed production and processing, and marketing and distribution. "Canada is a principal producer of high-quality seed," says Jeff Reid, President of the CSTA. "This study reveals exactly how this sector is fuelling our economy, creating jobs for knowledge workers and providing innovations to meet the challenges facing agriculture today." Of the 14,229 Canadians employed in 2007, more than 3,000 were highly-skilled plant breeding staff including scientists, biotechnologists and technicians. In addition, a large number of these jobs are located in small regional centres and rural communities helping Canada's rural fabric thrive.

In 2007 alone, the domestic seed industry contributed \$3.95 billion to Canada's economy through salaries and wages, operating costs, investment in capital goods and export sales. That's a pretty big number for an industry that is not as widely known as dairy, brewing or horticulture.

In addition to fuelling our domestic economy, Canadian seed also attracts strong demand in the international marketplace. With \$569 million in international sales from all industry segments, the sector makes substantial contributions to Canada's global export position, marketing seed products and services to numerous countries including China, Japan, India, the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States.

In a world facing challenges with food security and the environment, innovative solutions provided by Canada's seed sector can help tackle these issues from the ground. Throughout the past two decades the seed industry's investment in research and development has made growing more food, feed, fibre and fuel possible. For example, during the last 15 years, canola yields have increased 27%, Ontario corn yields have increased 59% and Ontario winter wheat yields have increased 62%. At the same time nutritional profiles of many of these crops has also been altered for the betterment of human health.

In 2007, Canada's plant breeding and research segment contributed \$361 million to the economy. The production of new varieties for sale in Canada was a primary driver of this economic activity. "Continued investment in seed innovation is critical as agriculture is facing some of its greatest challenges – from climate change to food security for rapidly growing populations," says Reid. "An

environment conducive to investing in leading-edge science for both traditional plant breeding and biotechnology is essential.” And that includes continuing to develop new seed technologies such as drought tolerance, improved fertilizer use efficiency, improved disease and pest resistance and specialty grains and oilseeds with enhanced nutritional profiles.

Canada’s seed industry is strong and vibrant and is poised for continued growth here at home and abroad.

This article is brought to you by the Canadian Seed Trade Association.

- 30 -

For further information please contact:

Patty Townsend, VP, CSTA
Tel: (613) 829-9527 Cell: (613) 277-0622
Email: ptownsend@cdnseed.org