



## **Weston Family Foundation launches \$33-million innovation challenge to support Canada's food system**

- With as much as 80% of Canada's fresh fruits and vegetables supplied through imports, the country is vulnerable to food system instability
- Eight in 10 Canadians believe it is important that Canada has affordable, sustainable ways of growing fruits and vegetables year-round
- Running until 2028, the Homegrown Innovation Challenge is positioned to become an incubator for new ideas, technologies and business models that will build Canada's long-term food system sustainability

**Toronto, Ontario, February 8, 2022 —** The Weston Family Foundation today announced the launch of its \$33-million **Homegrown Innovation Challenge** to spark creative solutions and encourage new ideas to boost the sustainable production of fruits and vegetables in Canada.

The Challenge centres around a competition to generate solutions that will enable domestic food producers to grow berries out of season, sustainably, competitively, and at scale. Funding will be awarded in stages over six years to eligible teams developing tools and technologies that solve the interconnected challenges of growing produce out of season in Canada.

"There is a golden opportunity to boost innovation in the food sector by nurturing bold, game-changing solutions for agricultural producers," says Emma Adamo, chair, Weston Family Foundation. "By catalyzing these solutions for berries, we anticipate the creation of systems relevant to a broad array of fruit and vegetable crops, helping to position Canada as a leader in this sector."

Like many countries, Canada is heavily reliant on imported fresh fruits and vegetables; we bring in nearly 80% of our fresh produce, predominantly from climate-vulnerable areas. This situation creates the potential for food shortages due to food-systems disruptions such as border closings, droughts, flooding, or future pandemics.

To gauge the level of public awareness of these issues, the Weston Family Foundation recently surveyed more than 1,500 Canadians via Leger. The study found that 65% of Canadians underestimate the proportion of fruits and vegetables imported from foreign countries. At the same time, 73% of Canadians indicated that not relying on imported fruits and vegetables is an important measure to guard against future disruptions. So, while consumers recognize the situation, they are unclear about its severity.

This reality presents a unique opportunity to spread awareness of a critical issue and create a homegrown solution to a global problem. Thanks to its socio-economic profile and extreme seasons — made even more extreme through the effects of climate change — Canada is an ideal testbed for innovative agricultural ideas.

Ideas, however, require funding and support to develop into functioning, scalable systems, and that is where the Homegrown Innovation Challenge comes in.

Challenge prizes are a tried-and-tested method for incentivizing innovation, with clear goals, objective criteria, and a laser-like focus on solutions and outcomes. Developed by the Weston Family Foundation and Nesta Challenges, a world leader in challenge prizes, the Homegrown Innovation Challenge calls for entrepreneurs and innovators, food producers and farmers, researchers and scientists to tackle this challenge.

“The Challenge’s goals are grounded in our Foundation’s commitment to advancing sustainable innovation for the well-being of all Canadians for generations to come,” adds Tamara Rebanks, project chair and director, Weston Family Foundation. “If you have exciting, creative ideas on how to improve the way we grow food in Canada, we want to hear from you.”

The ultimate winner of the Challenge could be awarded as much as \$8 million, with substantial funding also available to eligible teams that progress through different stages as they develop, scale, and ready their innovations for market.

Learn more about the criteria and process for applications at [www.homegrownchallenge.ca](http://www.homegrownchallenge.ca).

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### **About the Homegrown Innovation Challenge**

With funding and support from the Weston Family Foundation, the \$33-million Homegrown Innovation Challenge aims to spark creative solutions and encourage new ideas to boost the sustainable production of fruits and vegetables in Canada.

Over six years, eligible teams will advance through a series of funded phases as they create, test and refine their systems to grow berries out of season and at scale, leading to the selection

of both an overall winner and a technology breakthrough winner. The winning team could receive up to \$8 million in funding. By solving the interconnected challenges that currently prevent year-round berry production on a commercial scale, the Homegrown Innovation Challenge will catalyze a range of systems relevant to a broad array of fruit and vegetable crops in Canada and around the world, dramatically increasing food availability and food system resiliency in a climate-changing world.

### **About the Weston Family Foundation**

At the Weston Family Foundation (formerly The W. Garfield Weston Foundation), more than 60 years of philanthropy has taught us that there's a relationship between healthy landscapes and healthy people. That's why we champion world-class health research and innovation with the same passion that we support initiatives to protect and restore biodiversity on our unique landscapes. We take a collaborative approach to philanthropy, working alongside forward-thinking partners to advance Canada and create lasting impacts. We aspire to do more than provide funding; we want to enable others to find transformational ways to improve the well-being of Canadians.

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