

The People's Food Policy Project

Thirty years ago, a group of activists created the People's Food Commission (PFC). The Commission toured the country, holding hearings in 75 communities that explored how food systems affected ordinary Canadians: farmers, fisherpeople, housewives, poor people, trade unionists, academics, artists and others. The PFC final report, *The Land of Milk and Money*, predicted many of the changes that have now come to pass, and identified the need for a change in the direction of food policy in Canada. Unfortunately, this change has not materialized, and the policy framework supporting the industrialized food system and its social, environmental and economic costs is still firmly in place, even as the advent of 'Peak Oil', climate change, and the current rise in food prices worldwide make a new approach imperative.

Socially, however, much has changed in the past 30 years. There is now in Canada a general public awareness of food systems and their problems, especially those related to pollution, hunger and chronic disease. A grassroots movement has grown up seeking to address these problems through a host of local projects from stream remediation on farms to school breakfast programs. People are seeking to reclaim the food system at the local level through skill- and community-building projects. However, most of these initiatives have limited engagement with the policy-making process. As a result, food policy in Canada remains dominated by governments and industry and does not reflect the perspectives of people on the ground.

In the fall of 2006, after several years of meetings and preparation, Food Secure Canada/Sécurité Alimentaire Canada was created as a voice for civil society on matters related to the food system. It links the local food initiatives with food producers and health practitioners to ensure that the food security movement is based on the integral connections between the three commitments, to zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and a sustainable food production and distribution system – in other words, a food system based on the principles of social justice and economic and environmental sustainability.

To carry out this ambitious mandate, Food Secure Canada is embarking on a project to engage grassroots organizations and individuals in a process of policy development. *The Land of Milk and Money* summed up the message of the PFC with a call to work to “*understand how those of us to continually get ripped off by people in power ... can begin to work at taking back some of that power and making some of the decisions ourselves.*”

The People's Food Policy Project (the title is a nod to the People's Food Commission) starts where the PFC left off. It is based in the concept of Food Sovereignty, proposed and developed by the global peasant movement, La Via Campesina, which seeks to place decision-making power about food systems in the hands of the people themselves. Food Sovereignty adds to the concept of 'food security' the commitment to local self-reliance and respect for natural ecosystems and the people who nurture them, and includes ideas about autonomy and access to territories which are important to Indigenous food sovereignty. It also reflects a commitment to international solidarity: food security at home cannot be achieved at the expense of food security in other countries.

The PFPP will explore how Food Sovereignty and the principles it embodies can be relevant and useful in working towards the goals of the Canadian movement for food security. The project's ultimate goal is a suite of food policies, generated by the people working on food issues across the country, which will together provide a just and sustainable food system – food sovereignty – in the face of the imminent breakdown of the current globalized food system. We hope and intend to engage a broad range of organizations in this project, and like the PFC, we are looking for support from non-government organizations, including the trade union movement, faith-based organizations, and international development and community-based groups.

First, however, we have to design the project, and we are determined that both the process and the focus of the project will be appropriate to the contexts and needs of the people who are working to create practical alternatives to the dominant system. We also want to make sure that we take advantage of modern technology and communications, and the immense potential of film, video, and theatre to both develop and share ideas. To that end, in June 2008 we are conducting a series of consultations with the food security movement in every part of Canada to design the People's Food Policy Project. The PFPP Coordinating Committee will use the results of these consultations to create the plan for a three year project, to be launched at the biennial National Assembly of Food Secure Canada in Ottawa, November 7-10, 2008.

The project will then take two years to develop a People's Food Policy, which will be presented to the National Assembly in 2010; the third year of the project will be devoted to advocacy and implementation of the elements of the People's Food Policy wherever they are relevant, from the very local (workplace or school food policies) to policies of the Federal Government, both domestic and in international arenas.

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