Civil Society Input to a Renewed Food Policy for Canada

Discussion results   Food Policy Governance

On May 9th, 2023, Food Secure Canada (FSC) held an open consultation on the future of food policy in Canada. Watch the plenary recording and explore results from all discussion groups here.

*To provide context for the discussion group on **Food Policy Governance (2019 - 2023)**, FSC prepared a backgrounder summarizing current federal Food Policy language, instruments, and financing.*

Recommendations to Government for 2023 Food Policy for Canada

Effective food policy governance is essential for achieving Canada's commitment to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. By implementing the following recommendations, Canada can actively contribute to the advancement of its SDG targets.

Food Systems Approaches and Mechanisms at Every Scale
● Recognize that there can be no sovereignty without food sovereignty, and this is highly relevant to broader public policy discussions at all levels.
● Establish national legislation on the right to food, accompanied by implementation instruments and mechanisms.
● Acknowledge the diverse ways of governance beyond top-down approaches, including Indigenous approaches.
● Foster democratic, inclusive, collaborative Food Policy Councils with stable financing at every level of governance (community, municipal, provincial, territorial, federal, etc). Each level of government should have a holistic food policy and a local food security strategy.
● Ensure that Indigenous Peoples' needs and knowledge are incorporated.
● Challenge the barriers faced by communities confronting racism and anti-Black racism in nurturing their own food cultures and sovereignty, and establish equity-building structures.
● Ensure representation from diverse communities and departments in Food Policy Councils, recognizing the multi-faceted nature of food systems – touching on health, environment, social, planning, education, finance, agriculture, fisheries, and other portfolios.
● Beyond representation, incorporate food policy work into the work plans and budgets of relevant departments at all levels of government.
● At the federal level, avoid limiting the perception of food policy solely to agriculture or assigning responsibility within a single department, such as AAFC.
● Recognize that enormous opportunities for learning exist between and across scales and jurisdictions, including sharing best practices, learning from communities, and scaling out and scaling up.

Resourcing, Transparency, and Voice
● Recognize that increased resources usually result in increased voice and power. Level the playing field by providing resources to community, equity-deserving, civil society, and Indigenous voices, balancing the influence of well-resourced private interest voices. This applies specifically to the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC), and generally.

- Allocate predictable and sustained funding for staffing food policy councils and roundtables at all jurisdictional levels, acknowledging the over-reliance on motivated and engaged individuals who often serve as volunteers. Mitigate the risk of dependence on municipal funding that may disappear with a change of government.

- Prioritize transparency and communication to democratize decision-making in food systems. Limiting access to information is a means of exercising power.

Research, evidence, and evaluation

- Support policies and budgets that support public science. Counter the almost complete capture of regulatory systems by private interests, as seen in the case of gene editing. Transparent, public science in the public interest is essential, especially in the face of climate change and threats to food systems.

- Foster community-university research partnerships.

- Restore or establish farmer-led research, farmer-to-farmer learning, community incubator farms, and independent, publicly-financed extension services to counter corporate capture of farmer support.

- Provide independent research capacity for the CFPAC and Food Policy Councils operating at other levels. Establish evaluation and research capacity to inform the Council's decision-making and underpin policy recommendations, drawing on universities, StatsCanada, and all relevant government departments, through a food systems lens.

Leveraging existing policies and identifying gaps

- Utilize existing policies in addition to introducing new ones. For example, place greater emphasis on policies and budgets that ensure everyone can eat according to Canada's Food Guide. Emphasize the importance of whole plant-based foods, as they connect health, environmental, agricultural, and trade policy benefits. Address the large transition costs to be identified and met, despite Canada's already strong pulse sector.

- Leverage the federal Interdepartmental committee of Assistant Deputy Ministers (ADMs) from across 12 departments and ministries as a mechanism for addressing food systems issues and

expanding the typical stakeholder base. This serves as a helpful starting point for joined-up policy-making.

- Follow the model of the Smart Cities Challenge and finance a Local Food Systems Challenge that supports community, municipal, and regional food policy actors, as a step towards system-wide and scaled responses.

- Support small-scale fisheries that are overlooked and can bring many benefits.

- Prioritize access to farmland and recognize its fundamental importance.

Best practices / Successful Community Models to Scale or Replicate

- Brazil has implemented the right to food legislation and instruments.

- Community Land Trusts which democratize access to farmland, preserve land for food and make access more equitable. Examples include:
  - The Ontario Farmland Trust
  - The work of the NFU-BIPOC caucus, FarmFolk CityFolk (BC), and farm incubator programs across the country

- Examples of on-farm actions include:
  - Young Agrarians work that includes diverse perspectives and identities.
  - Ecological farmer-led research (Ontario)
  - OMAFRA-style extension services: allows for more unbiased approaches and counters farmers only getting company information.

- Examples of effective Food Policy Councils:
  - Guelph Smart Cities challenge winner, Our Food Future, has been very effective, funding staff and generating momentum.
  - North Shore Table Matters Vancouver: 2 year public consultation for a Food Charter, now working on implementation.