



From Patchwork to Policy Coherence: New Directions for Canadian Food Policy

Presentation to the Standing Committee on Agriculture

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September 26, 2017



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Thank you very much for the invitation to appear before you today. I am representing Food Secure Canada, a national alliance of organizations and individuals who are committed to achieving three goals: zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and a sustainable food system for all Canadians. Over the past decade, we have spoken directly with thousands of Canadians in all regions of the country about their vision for food policy. An overwhelming conclusion from our work is that we need a “whole of government” approach to food policy. We need to work with all partners to build a common vision, common goals and common priorities. We believe the Minister of Agriculture is taking the right steps by convening 16 federal agencies and choosing themes that address health, equity, environmental sustainability and economic growth. But, very soon, we shall need other partners at the table: provinces, municipalities, civil society groups, and of course, industry.

Why do we need a whole of government approach?

- We are a leading global food exporter yet 4 million Canadians are food insecure.
- Diet related disease costs an estimated \$26 billion annually (direct and indirect costs) and our health care system is literally crumbling under the cost of treating diet-related diseases– type 2 diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease.
- Canada ranks 37th out of 41 countries when it comes to children’s access to healthy food.
- 86% of Canadian want to consume local food but public policy in public institutions has not caught up with public opinion
- The organic sector is the fastest growing market in food yet receives only 0.24 of the funding for research.

This policy is not just about growing the Canadian agri-food sector. It is not just about healthy eating. And it is not just about eliminating hunger or mitigating climate change. It is about finding ways to build a food system for the future that works towards all of these goals, together.

We recognize that Canada’s food system is complex and it will not change overnight. But there are priority actions the federal government can take now. Food Secure Canada will be submitting a detailed set of policy recommendations, but today I would like to provide an overview of some key proposal we think need to be in the Food Policy for Canada for your consideration and support.

1. **The right to food must be embraced as a guiding principle of this policy.** This is not a new idea, but it is fundamental. Hunger continues to grow despite the fact that Canada committed to realize the right to food when it ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights back in 1976. The epidemic of hunger and lack of affordable food in northern and remote regions of our country is acknowledged as a national crisis, but food insecurity also exists in urban centres, affecting workers, students, recipients of social assistance and, disproportionately, people of colour. In our view, the new Food Policy for Canada should embrace a human rights approach to food and lay out a precise roadmap to progressively realizing this right for all Canadians, as recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur in 2012.

2. **A Food Policy for Canada must support the establishment of a new relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples.** One need only read the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to find examples of how food has been used as a tool of colonization: forced labour, deliberate denial of food, and erasing of traditional food cultures are all part of that history. But food also has the power to bring people from different cultures together, restore broken relationships to land and water and culture, nourish healthier lifestyles, increase self-sufficiency in First Nations communities, and reduce hunger, as high as 70% amongst Inuit children in Nunavut for example.

2. **A Food Policy for Canada needs to prioritize children and youth.** Healthy eating habits, better food skills and renewed connections to where their food comes from, particularly for urban youth, are critical to Canada's future. When it comes to healthy food in school, Canada is a laggard. Food Secure Canada, along with the Coalition for Healthy School Food, supports the creation of a cost-shared Universal Healthy School Food Program to ensure Canada's next generation grows up on a healthy diet and that a child's opportunity to learn in school is not diminished by hunger.

4. **A Food Policy for Canada must support the next generation of farmers, promoting a diversity of farming practices and sizes.** We have more farmers over the age of 70 than we do under the age of 35. 92% of them have no succession plan. New entrants to farming face significant challenges in accessing the land, capital and training they need to farm successfully. Similar challenges confront fish harvesters. Amongst other measures, we need to use the purchasing power of our public institutions – our hospitals, our schools and

our government offices to leverage the health, economic and environmental benefits from good local food.

5. **We are joining our partners in calling for the establishment of a new National Food Policy Council, building on successes we have had at the municipal level.** The proposed National Food Policy Council would be a para-governmental agency, where diverse stakeholders from across the food system can work together to oversee the implementation and ongoing evaluation of A Food Policy for Canada. Civil society actors who are on the front lines of our food system—workers, health professionals, educators, non-profit organizations – want to contribute their expertise to food policy making and implementation but we are not yet at the table.

A National Food Policy Council could provide broad stakeholder engagement and support for the new food policy. It could undertake high-priority research, monitor impacts and convene actors across the public, private and non-profit sectors to agree upon common goals and enhance our collective impact. We believe that a Food Policy Council can help set us on long term direction towards an economically robust, innovative and sustainable food system where all Canadians can fully enjoy their rights to healthy food. We have been working with our partners in industry and academia, notably the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Maple Leaf Foods, the McConnell Foundation and the Arrell Food Institute at Guelph University to fine-tune a consensus proposal that will be tabled in the coming week.

6. **Finally food policy should embrace social innovation on an equal footing with technological innovation.** Throughout our food system, social innovators are working at the community level: transforming food banks into community food centres, farming on downtown rooftops, developing innovative school meal programs, bringing good food into hospitals, restoring traditional practices and knowledge in Indigenous communities, certifying sustainable fish, practicing agro-ecology, and a variety of farm to fork initiatives. The government has recognized the importance of innovation to the growth of the Agri-Food Sector through the Innovation Super Cluster Initiative, but we also need to support social innovations which hold some of the keys to a more sustainable, healthy and equitable food future.

Food policy has the potential to help the federal government achieve many of its top goals: Human rights, reconciliation, youth empowerment, sustainable economic growth, better health, more innovative and open policy making. We look forward to working with you on all of these important goals.

Thank you for your attention.



Food Secure Canada is a pan-Canadian alliance of organizations and individuals working together to advance food security and food sovereignty through three interlocking goals: zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and sustainable food systems.