

Make Food a Part of Reconciliation



A national food policy for Canada must acknowledge the history and ongoing legacy of colonialism and prioritize reconciliation and decolonization as key guiding principles of our food system. Food was often used as a tool of oppression and marginalization¹, including through the use of starvation and malnutrition in residential schools and the assumption, upon the arrival of European settlers, that Canada was largely an empty, uninhabited land (“terra nullius”). For many years, it was the Canadian government’s practice to provide only enough food to Indigenous communities on-reserve for basic survival. In addition, policies were implemented with the intention of limiting Indigenous people’s ability to engage in hunting and fishing activities, thereby eroding the food sovereignty and food security of many communities.

Indigenous food systems are deeply connected to Indigenous economies, cultures, health, and wellbeing. The destruction of traditional Indigenous food systems, including hunting, fishing and gathering, is connected to a broader process of cultural genocide and a deterioration of health and wellbeing in Indigenous communities. While food was often used as a tool of colonization, it has the potential to be a tool for healing and reconciliation. This requires respect for treaty rights and a commitment to building nation-to-nation relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

Vital statistics

As part of the residential school system, Indigenous children were forced to consume a largely foreign diet of processed and sweetened foods and were barred from accessing traditional foods. They were also subject to nutrition experiments that left many of them hungry and malnourished and were denied food as a form of punishment.

51% of Indigenous children live in poverty, rising to 60% for children on-reserve.²

Healthy and nutritious foods remain out of reach to many northern remote communities due to cost and access, despite federal subsidy programs. The average cost of groceries for a month in Attawapiskat in June 2015 was \$1909, compared to \$847 in Toronto.³

Food insecurity rates in the territories are well above the national Canadian average: 46.8% in Nunavut and 24.1% in the Northwest Territories.⁴





What needs to be done

Meaningful reconciliation through food requires action. As the [Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty](#) writes, talking and consultation are not enough. Addressing the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a crucial component of reconciliation; in addition, however, Indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing and cultural practices must be respected and encouraged, and hunting, fishing and gathering must be supported as key food provisioning activities alongside farming and ranching.

- Respect and implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which includes the principle of free and informed consent, and the right to approve or disapprove incursions onto their land.
- Recognize the fourth jurisdiction of government: First Nations, Métis and Inuit governance structures, alongside municipal, provincial/territorial and federal governments of Canada. Where applicable, respect the sovereignty promised at the time of treaty signing.
- Implement and/or establish a timeline of implementation for all 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

National Food Policy Priority Actions

Work with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples to ensure they have more sovereignty over the foods they eat and are guaranteed access to traditional land-based foods and fishing and hunting rights.

Ensure country and traditional foods are valued and acknowledged in the national food policy as healthy, nourishing and culturally significant.

Support and work with Indigenous leadership that is tackling the epidemic of diet-related disease and food insecurity among Indigenous populations.

Allocate resources specifically for food programs in both urban and remote, northern Indigenous communities that address the immediate needs of food insecurity while supporting the long-term development of Indigenous food systems, including hunting, trapping, fishing and access to traditional foods.

Direct the revamping of Nutrition North to improve access and affordability of food while strengthening northern, regional food systems, including public support for programs enhancing access to traditional foods, social innovation and collective food-security programs.

Designate Indigenous hunting, fishing and gathering reserves within Federal Parks and Crown Land, and work with the provinces and territories to identify suitable tracts of land within provincial and territorial parklands.





Key resources

Indigenous Food Sovereignty Discussion Paper. People's Food Policy. Food Secure Canada. 2011.

Indigenous Food Land and Heritage Primer. Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty. October 2015.

Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015

Paying for Nutrition: A Report on Food Costing in the North. Food Secure Canada. 2016.

Food (in)security in the North. Northern Public Affairs. Volume 5 Issue. 2017.

Aboriginal Food Security in Northern Canada. Council of Canadian Academies, 2014.

¹ See Daschuk (2013) and Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015).

² MacDonald and Wilson (2016). [Shameful Neglect Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada](#). Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

³ Veeraraghavan et al. (2016). [Paying for Nutrition](#). Food Secure Canada.⁴ Statistics Canada (2014). 2014 Canadian Community Health Survey.

⁴ Statistics Canada (2014). 2014 Canadian Community Health Survey.

