

## Invite More Voices to the Table



*“This dialogue, informed by diverse viewpoints, will bring forward innovative ideas and best practices; and set the stage for greater collaboration among governments, stakeholders, community organizations, Indigenous peoples, and citizens on the food issues that affect us today and into the future.” - Government of Canada Food Summit website*

Currently, food-related policies and programs are disconnected, decision making is not transparent and there are few non-industry voices at the table, particularly in regards to agricultural policy (under which agri-food gets subsumed). This lack of coordination and transparency has resulted in a lack of public trust in our food system.

In order to increase public trust and to bring about necessary changes to our food system, we need mechanisms for diverse stakeholders to contribute to both the creation of policy and to its continued stewardship. Key to any multi-stakeholder process is a commitment to deep and meaningful forms of participation, backed by transparent and accountable implementation. When food-system actors from across the country and from various sectors feel engaged around food policy, and when government has instituted proper mechanisms for consolidating and analysing these conversations, we can start to create more systemic change.

Working across sectors and silos through a comprehensive and open policy approach, Canada can build an economically vibrant, health-promoting, environmentally sustainable food system from which everyone can access a nourishing diet. Such an integrated policy framework justifies strong leadership from the federal level. We need innovative governance mechanisms for diverse stakeholders to contribute to both the creation of policy, the adoption of a common set of priorities and to the continued stewardship of our food system.

### Vital statistics

Only 30% of Canadians feel the food system is going in the right direction, 50% are unsure, and 20% feel it is going in the wrong direction.<sup>1</sup>

Only 35% of Canadians view government favourably and only 30% of Canadians view food industry associations favourably.<sup>2</sup>

For the first time, there are 16 government departments around the food policy table chaired by Agriculture and Agri-food Canada.<sup>3</sup>





## What needs to be done

In the short term, the Canadian government should ensure the consultations on national food policy are accessible and comprehensive and that special steps are taken to hear the voices of people living in food insecurity, Indigenous communities, Northern communities, youth and civil society organizations. The government should listen actively to a variety of stakeholders and support innovative initiatives that help break down governance silos. This must go on beyond the short formal consultation period (to be over by end of September 2017).

When the policy is launched in 2018, it should provide for the creation of an ongoing governance mechanism for multi-stakeholder discussion of food policy issues. This could be an Act of Parliament or the initiation of a process that would eventually include a new law. The precise mandate, mechanisms, and accountability to Parliament could then be worked through. This new governance mechanism must have a long-term mandate, measured in decades not years. Food Secure Canada is part of a multi-stakeholder working group trying to achieve consensus on some options for a new governance mechanism for food policy. We have suggested a National Food Policy Council as a potential mechanism.<sup>4</sup>

National advisory councils are relatively inexpensive. For example, the net expenses of the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy in its last year of operation (2011-2) were \$6,932,957. This included not only convening the council but also commissioning research on questions related to government priorities.

## National Food Policy Priority Actions

Create a multi-stakeholder governance body (such as a National Food Policy Council) that would bring stakeholders from across the food system to help the government make smart, common-sense decisions about the food we eat.

Ensure the governance mechanisms are properly resourced to ensure meaningful participation of stakeholders and overall accountability and implementation.

Ensure the governance mechanism has adequate budget to propose and implement innovative food programming and experimentation that meets the priorities set out in the policy.





## Key resources

People's Food Policy Project (2011). Food Democracy and Governance, Resetting the Table: A People's Food Policy for Canada, Food Secure Canada.

Sasha McNicoll. More Voices at the Table: The Case for a National Food Policy for Canada. Food Secure Canada.

Food Secure Canada. National Food Policy Council of Canada Act.

Harper et al (2009). Food Policy Councils - Lessons Learned. Food First.

The Canadian Centre for Food Integrity. 2016 Canadian Public Trust Research.

MacRae, R. (2011). A Joined Up Food Policy for Canada. Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition, 6(4), 424-457.

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<sup>1</sup> The Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (2016). 2016 Canadian Public Trust Research. <http://www.farmfoodcare.org/canada/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-Public-Trust-Research-Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Canada (2017). Learn more. <https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/food-policy/learn-more.html>

<sup>4</sup> See MacRae (2016). [A National Food Policy Council for Canada](#)

