

Everybody eats

OUR VISION FOR A PAN-CANADIAN FOOD STRATEGY

Introduction

Our 2011 NDP Election Platform committed to introducing a “Canadian Food Strategy that will combine health goals, environmental goals, and food quality objectives, and increase access to local and organic choices for consumers across the country.”

This vision document outlines the major elements for such a pan-Canadian food strategy. We identify progressive federal leadership opportunities on agriculture and food issues. It is our hope that this can ignite a dialogue with those who care passionately about these issues, connect to new audiences outside those already engaged, and strengthen our work with business and farming communities.

This strategy is comprehensive, encompassing the inter-related issues of rural development, food security, health and safety, consumer rights and agri-business development.

I look forward to sharing this strategy with Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Sincerely,



Malcolm Allen

Agriculture Critic, New Democratic Party of Canada

Executive summary

Everybody eats. New Democrats understand that food matters, from farm to factory to fork. Working with the provinces and territories, we need to improve access to healthy food for every Canadian, ensure sustainable agricultural communities and resources, and promote Canadian food here at home and around the world.

Canada is without a comprehensive food policy—lagging behind other industrial countries in the OECD, like England and Australia. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has raised serious concerns about food security in Aboriginal communities and the lack of a coordinated food strategy in Canada. More than 2 million Canadians are at risk of going hungry, compromising our families, our health care system and our children’s potential.

New Democrats have a vision for our food system—one that connects Canadians from farm to fork. We need to look at the whole picture and bring an integrated approach to federal policy that connects agriculture, rural development, health and income security. It can be done.

We want to see a thriving agricultural sector. Agriculture and food are major drivers of the Canadian economy, nourishing our population and providing one out of eight jobs. Today’s farmers are modern farmers, and they need to be linked to cutting-edge research and market information. Our rural communities need investment and infrastructure, and to be linked to growing urban markets. We also need to make sure that agricultural development is sustainable and protects critical watersheds and natural environments.

Ensuring that Canadians have healthy, affordable food is a national priority. Focusing on healthy food now means a healthier population down the road.

Our vision of a pan-Canadian food strategy ensures that everyone eats well, that our agricultural communities are sustainable for generations to come, and that Canadian products find growing markets at home and abroad.

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1. Sustainable agricultural communities and resources for generations to come

1.1 Rural livelihoods are real livelihoods

The federal government needs to work with the provinces and territories to make sure farmers get the business supports they need. We should be proud of our legacy of public infrastructure and collective solutions. The federal government should respond to the unique challenges facing young and new farmers in today's agricultural economy. Their success is critical to future economic development and ensures that our rural communities do not get left by the wayside.

- ✓ **Invest in rural economies**
 - Foster community economic development by addressing challenges for existing enterprises and investing in viable business ventures that would re-localize food production and processing.
 - Maintain world-renowned grain inspection infrastructure and the public benefits it generates.
 - Support sustainable fisheries management for generations to come.

- ✓ **Grow farm incomes and ensure that farming remains profitable for producers**
 - Address affordability issues on farms and ensure that Business Risk Management tools meet the needs of today's producers.
 - Ensure that Business Risk Management tools are available to all affected farms, based on need.
 - Provide public and affordable crop, livestock and farm insurance.
 - Ensure that disaster relief is timely, effective and distributed fairly.
 - Promote best practices to reduce input costs through more efficient, innovative and sustainable equipment and production methods.
 - Preserve the right of farmers to save and condition seed for their own use.

- ✓ **Ease entrance barriers for new and young farmers**
 - Ensure that young and new farmers can access the capital and land they need to gain entry to the farming sector, including through consultation with all sectors.
 - Promote best practices in incubator programs and shared risk models.

- Provide educational tools and support for succession planning between generations.
- Support farmers with young entrant hiring, enhanced skill training and mentorship programs.
- Review the tax code so that it supports new entrants into farming, such as through an increase in the restricted farm losses exemption.

✓ **Ensure that risks and rewards throughout the supply chain are spread more fairly**

- Monitor and prevent anti-competitive behaviour and monopolistic practices in the agri-business supply sector.
- Support the development of new seed varieties, including through public plant breeding, that provide direct economic benefits to farmers.
- Put in place a variety registration system that ensures that seed meets farmers' needs for quality, reliability and agronomic performance under local conditions across Canada.
- Ensure that economic costs and benefits are included as a factor in new regulatory approvals for GM seeds.

✓ **Support marketing boards as critical supports to domestic production**

- Protect the supply managed agricultural sectors of Canada.
- Ensure that producers make the decisions on the future of their marketing boards.

✓ **Ensure the fair treatment of workers**

- Promote decent working conditions for all workers in the agriculture and agri-food industry.
- Develop a supportive EI framework for seasonal workers.
- Ensure that a path to citizenship is available for temporary foreign workers.
- Work with industry to ensure that workers receive adequate training for the tasks they are required to carry out.

1.2 Sustainable agriculture ensures Canada's environment is protected for future generations

Food production is entirely reliant on the health of the natural environment. The federal government has a key role to play in working with the provinces and territories to promote the sustainable production of food, to protect critical watersheds that cross provincial boundaries, to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to reduce food waste.

- ✓ **Make Canada a leader in the environmentally sustainable production of food**
 - Provide clear and consistent guidelines to give businesses the confidence to make investments in improving their long-term environmental and economic sustainability.
 - Work with industry and researchers to develop and promote techniques that reduce fertilizer and pesticide load and run-off as much as possible.
 - Promote healthy soil management.
 - Monitor and protect the health of pollinators.
 - Work with the agricultural sector to develop a strategy to adapt to climate-induced weather changes and help farmers with adaptation costs.
 - Foster social, environmental and animal welfare best practices as part of corporate social responsibility in the agricultural sector.

- ✓ **Protect critical watersheds**
 - Achieve a better understanding of changes to major water systems, such as Lake Winnipeg, Lake Diefenbaker and Lake Erie, and of the role of agriculture in the health of those aquatic ecosystems.
 - Encourage federal research dollars that link research findings and increase knowledge transfer to concrete changes in farming practices.
 - Promote best practices in irrigation.
 - Promote watershed health through policies and support to farmers to protect natural wetlands, which play a vital role in flood control, drought protection, groundwater filtration and wildlife habitat.

- ✓ **Reduce food waste**
 - Develop a comprehensive, pan-Canadian strategy to reduce food waste from farm to fork.

✓ **Promote the welfare of farm animals**

- Provide sustained funding to the National Farm Animal Care Council for the development and continued revision of Codes of Practice for animal agriculture industries.
- Ensure that industry has the capacity to meet standards of care and to adopt best practices as elaborated in National Farm Animal Care Council Codes of Practice.
- Work with industry and stakeholders to update the Health of Animals Regulations to align them with welfare standards in other developed countries and provide for improved care and welfare of animals during transportation.

✓ **Protect Canada's agricultural biodiversity**

- Ensure access to timely compensation for farmers complying with the *Species at Risk Act*.
- Protect Canada's heritage seeds and breeds.
- Ensure that plant varieties remain in the public domain following the expiration of plant breeders' rights.

✓ **Reduce greenhouse gases in the farming sector**

- Encourage the continued reduction of greenhouse gases across the farming and agri-food sector.
- Promote investment in clean energy on farms.
- Promote the role of agriculture in providing green energy and renewable products.
- Ensure the responsible development of biofuels.

✓ **Protect the legacy of agricultural land in Canada**

- Work with provinces, territories and municipalities to prevent both domestic and foreign land speculation.
- Work with the provinces to identify major issues in the future of land use in the Greater Toronto Area and in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

2. From farm to fork, support local agriculture

2.1 Canadians can easily find fresh, seasonal products in their community

The federal government should work with municipalities, provinces and territories to identify barriers to growth in local agricultural markets, and to identify means to support stronger business development and direct marketing. This involves both supporting farmers to provide fresh, seasonal produce and supporting consumer choice so that Canadians can find the products they want.

- ✓ **Make strategic investments to help farmers develop local and regional markets**
 - Work with other levels of government to build farmer and retail networks so Canadian produce makes it to store shelves—such as through local Agricultural Councils working to put local produce in grocery stores by building direct linkages between farmers and major chains.
 - Look at supporting cooperative models for achieving better marketing and producer security, such as renewal of the Cooperative Development Initiative (CDI).
 - Support and promote mechanisms that ensure that more profits reach farmers through direct sales—such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives and other social enterprises, and reducing barriers to farm-gate transactions.

- ✓ **Support consumer choice for fresh, seasonal produce**
 - Work with regions and municipalities to support initiatives like food hubs to actively manage the aggregation, distribution and marketing of food products from local and regional producers to satisfy wholesale, retail and institutional demand.
 - Work with producers to promote a better understanding of food miles and ensure better transparency around the origin of products.
 - Work with municipalities and provinces to understand opportunities and barriers to urban agriculture.
 - Encourage pan-Canadian support for local food fora and networks, with the goal of increasing the amount of food that is sold, processed and consumed in local and regional markets.
 - Develop a pan-Canadian food policy council comprising different levels of government, department agencies and stakeholder groups to identify opportunities for federal support of healthy eating and investment in local and regional markets.

3. Thriving agricultural businesses drive our national economy

3.1 We have a successful and high value-added agri-business sector

The food sector is a major driver of the economy, generating one out of eight jobs. Small and medium-sized enterprises drive much of this growth, and the federal government can help them take advantage of growing agri-food markets. The focus needs to be on adding value in the Canadian economy and helping successful start-ups scale up.

- ✓ **Grow an innovative and high value-added food processing sector**
 - Achieve more scale in the food and drink sector.
 - Ensure a supportive and innovative business climate that encourages Canadian operators to stay in Canada.
 - Support a food processing system that creates skilled jobs, is scale appropriate and responds to local needs.
 - Help farmers access and develop value chains from field to plate, through targeted investments in marketing and research.
 - Ensure better returns for Canadians by increasing the processing value captured in Canada, including through:
 - Commercialization support;
 - Promotion of available technologies and knowledge transfer from research projects;
 - Establishment of innovative incubator projects;
 - Better risk management for small enterprises.

- ✓ **Support the organics sector to meet growing consumer interest**
 - Provide support for the scaling up of organic production.
 - Help organic producers to expand production and market opportunities, and encourage market linkages between organic food producers and specialty retailers and restaurants.
 - Ensure adequate resources for organic certification and market development.

- ✓ **Promote the sustainable development of aquaculture**
 - Develop a pan-Canadian policy and regulatory framework for aquaculture, including through a federal *Aquaculture Act*.

- Support a transition to closed containment aquaculture.
 - Work with industry to establish a dedicated fund for closed containment demonstration projects.
 - Support the funding of research and development for sustainable closed containment technologies.
- ✓ **Recognize food as a priority area of small business development**
- Promote Canadian horticulture with special attention to regional needs.
 - Grow the cooperative business model and reinstitute the Cooperative Development Initiative (CDI).
- ✓ **Make rail transportation safe and fair for producers**
- Ensure that farming infrastructure and rail transportation treats all producers fairly and enables the efficient storage, transportation and distribution of food.
 - Review railway service levels and freight tariffs to ensure fair and efficient service for farmers.
 - Establish mandatory price reporting along the supply chain in order to increase transparency and provide better information to farmers.
 - Review infrastructure needs in rural Canada to ensure sufficient linkages to regional and urban economic centres.

3.2 Knowledge and innovation underpin our agricultural system

As a funder, producer and user of agricultural research, the federal government has a key role to play in supporting knowledge and innovation. The federal government should provide stable, long-term funding and should continue to support research in the public interest.

- ✓ **Recognize that research and development is the key to a successful agricultural sector**
 - Provide stable, long-term funding to promote peer-reviewed agricultural research in the public interest.
 - Promote networks bridging researchers, farmers, government and agri-business.
 - Reverse cuts to public research facilities and regional projects.
 - Maintain and promote farmer-directed research institutions.
 - Work with research institutions and producers to improve knowledge transfer from research labs to the farm field.

- ✓ **Fund public research to improve outcomes for producers, consumers, the welfare of animals and the environment**
 - Foster the development of crop varieties that are more resilient to climate impacts like heat and drought.
 - Encourage research that supports environmentally sustainable farming practices.
 - Promote research and innovation in the food sector focused on improving personal health.

- ✓ **Ensure that market information makes its way to farmers**
 - Improve and maintain important public goods like the annual farm data survey that help farmers make sound business decisions.

3.3 Ensure growing markets for Canadian products at home and abroad

Canadian products are some of the best in the world, and the federal government should make the targeted investments needed to promote them around the globe.

- ✓ **Invest in market development for Canadian products**
 - Create a Canadian market secretariat to build market development for Canadian products.
 - Ensure authentication and verification of source claims and labels so that the Canadian brand remains high quality.
 - Work with the provinces and territories to address inter-provincial/territorial barriers to trade in Canadian products.
 - Lead the way in the early adoption and support of regional and Canada brand products through federal procurement policies.
 - Develop access-to-market strategies for small and large producers.

- ✓ **Promote Canadian products around the world through trade**
 - Ensure that trade negotiations secure real and meaningful market access for Canadian exporters while protecting the supply-managed agricultural sectors.
 - Provide better supports for Canadian agricultural exporters to access global markets, including through trade facilitation offices.
 - Work to identify and address particular barriers of small and medium Canadian exporters, including organic farmers.
 - Work in international fora to develop support for, and to improve compliance with, the highest standards of health and safety regulations.

- ✓ **Support global food security**
 - Utilize our international aid and partnerships to improve food security in vulnerable countries by using targeted means to support capacity of small producers—including through technology transfer, skills development, sharing research on nutrition and crop productivity, promoting sustainable production methods and supporting a whole value chain approach.
 - Support flexibility in international trade rules to enable developing countries to pursue food security goals.
 - Provide support to developing countries for participation in rule-making fora regarding food safety standards and compliance.

4. Everyone eats well: Safety, transparency and healthy choices

4.1 Canada maintains the highest standards of food safety

Canadians need to trust what they eat and expect the highest standards of food safety. The federal government has a direct responsibility for food safety, and should be more vigilant in ensuring adequate resources for inspection at federally inspected slaughterhouses and for food imports.

- ✓ **Provide more resources for food safety**
 - Conduct an immediate, independent audit of Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) resources that addresses the adequacy of staffing levels and inspection processes, particularly given the changing consolidation and centralization of food processing in Canada.
 - Dedicate more front-line inspectors in Canadian processing plants.
 - Allocate resources for the assessment of new technologies used in food production.
 - Ensure that imported food meets equivalent standards to domestic products, and increase the amount of direct CFIA inspections at the border.

- ✓ **Foster a food safety system that meets the needs of industry and the public, now and into the future**
 - Work with the provinces and territories to implement scale-sensitive and processing-speed-sensitive inspection systems that do not create unmanageable burdens on small processors.
 - Address conflicts of interest in food safety, and ensure that food safety decisions are made in the public interest.
 - Undertake meaningful consultation with industry regarding changes to inspections or other government programs related to food safety.

4.2 Consumers know what they are getting

The federal government has a direct role in ensuring that labelling is accurate and trustworthy, and that the public understands the information provided. New Democrats will ensure that food claims and images are clear, factual, informative and not misleading to the public.

- ✓ **Develop labelling standards that improve consumer choice**
 - Develop clear, accurate and consistent labelling regarding animal treatment in food production.
 - Ensure clear, accurate and verifiable labelling on the origin of food and food products.
 - Develop clear, accurate and verifiable labelling for products that have undergone genetic modification.
 - Implement updated, relevant and easy to understand nutritional labelling to make caloric and sodium information easier to understand.
 - Ensure up-to-date labelling for new food processing techniques that change food safety requirements (e.g. meat tenderization).
 - Work with industry and the provinces to phase in nutritional information on menus at major chains.
 - Work with industry and provinces to improve public education and literacy regarding information provided on food labels.

- ✓ **Ensure that industry has the capacity to comply with consumer-driven change and adopt best practices**
 - Address the need for transition funds to support industry-driven codes of practice in animal welfare.
 - Ensure that labelling changes follow principles of timely consultation, impose a minimum of red tape and ensure that enterprises—particularly small and medium-sized businesses—have the resources they need to transition successfully.

4.3 A balanced diet keeps every Canadian healthy

We need to help make healthier choices easier choices. The federal government needs to work with experts and stakeholders to ensure that dietary guidelines are up to date, so that Canadians trust the information they are given. The federal government also has a responsibility to improve dietary choices within the programs it administers directly, and it should work with the provinces and territories to foster better choices in shared public institutions.

✓ **Promote food literacy for better health**

- Update Canada's food guide and ensure that it is developed by independent experts.
- Work with the provinces and territories to ensure that, by age 16, each Canadian child can plan and prepare at least six nutritious meals.
- Ban the advertising of food to children.

✓ **Make healthier choices easier choices**

- Work with industry to monitor and improve processed foods in the interest of public health.
- Adopt the Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada.
- Phase out the use of trans fats in processed food.
- Work with industry to clearly label and reduce the use of problematic food components, such as deadly allergens and problematic food dyes.

✓ **Improve the nutritional and health impacts of food**

- Develop an integrated approach to federal government policies that support healthy eating.
- Work with the provinces and territories to ensure that healthy food is accessible for critical groups, such as infants and children, expectant mothers, hospital patients and those in long-term care.
- Ensure that healthy food is available in institutions and programs administered by the federal government.
- Review and address medical concerns regarding antibiotic resistance and the food supply.

Food is a social determinant of health, and eating well is a major tool to prevent and treat disease. Making the most of healthy eating means a healthier and happier population down the road, and saves valuable health care dollars.

4.4 Every Canadian can afford a healthy meal

Food is not just a commodity; it is a human necessity. The federal government needs to work with the provinces and territories to implement a whole-of-government approach to food security and to ensure that healthy meals are accessible to all Canadians.

✓ Ensure that every child has a healthy meal

- Work with industry and the provinces and territories to establish a Pan-Canadian School Nutrition Program, sourced locally as much as possible, with excellent nutritional standards.

✓ Improve seniors' access to healthy food

- Increase GIS to ensure that seniors can afford the food they need.
- Identify ways to improve seniors' access to healthy food, scaling up best practices of non-profit and community organizations (such as meals on wheels programs), and addressing nutrition in home and long-term care in institutions administered by the federal government.

✓ Reduce reliance on food banks

- Implement a whole-of-government approach to food security.
- Improve incomes and supports for working families, so that they can spend more of their household budgets on healthy food.
- Work with all levels of government to identify where healthy food is inaccessible and address the unique needs of urban and rural communities.

2.3 million Canadians (9%) experience food insecurity, and over 800,000 visit food banks every month.

✓ Make healthy and culturally appropriate food more accessible in the North, on reserves, and in remote communities

- Assess the potential of farming in northern communities by supporting existing agriculture innovation projects across Canada's North, and support successful initiatives as economic diversification for Canada's northern, Aboriginal and rural communities.
- Increase the availability of research funding that addresses food security in the North and that considers the impacts of environmental contaminants in northern food chains.
- Restructure relevant federal programs in recognition of the importance of traditional foods.

Food is a human right. Canada is one of 162 signatories to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which includes the right to adequate food.