

September 26, 2017

The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, PC, MP
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON, Canada K1A 0A6
Sent via e-mail: FoodPolicy-PolitiqueAlimentaire@canada.ca

RE: Feedback on the National Food Policy on behalf of the Durham Food Policy Council

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Durham Food Policy Council (DFPC), Durham Region, Ontario, please find enclosed our comments regarding the proposed National Food Policy. DFPC is a collective of individuals and organizations working towards the common goal of securing a just and sustainable food system for Durham Region. We work closely with the Region of Durham, Agriculture and Rural Affairs staff, through their Regional Agricultural Strategy and local food programs, which are aligned with many of our initiatives aimed at local food and food security.

We commend the federal government for facilitating this discussion and embarking on the path to develop a National Food Policy for Canada. This is an important venture for tying together the multiple issues, stakeholders, and benefits related to our food system and ensuring its sustainable future from coast to coast to coast.

We have reviewed the four proposed pillars and supporting objectives and principles. We are particularly supportive of the attention to the diversity of issues associated with our food system, including food security, health, environment and economic issues. We support the seven foundational principles, and would like to see all of them reflected in the National Food Strategy.

There are seven areas where we believe the National Food Policy can be strengthened, particularly in the linkages between national and local level policy and action. In no order of priority these are:

- **Incorporate income security as a key means to removing existing barriers to accessing food** – In Durham Region, over a third of single parent households with children under 18 and over half of households supported by social assistance live with food insecurity¹. Low food prices (i.e. affordable food) alone will not address food insecurity, and studies have shown that cheap food is often unsustainable and unhealthy. Instead, the National Food Policy should increase transfer payments to provinces and territories for social assistance, re-examine federal income tax mechanisms and social support systems, and explore options for basic income guarantee at the national level as ways to improve access to healthy food at the local level.
- **Support diverse food production activities** – The landscape in Durham is a mosaic of small, medium and large sized farms, with increasing interest and initiatives in urban and peri-urban agriculture. In addition to large scale agriculture involved in food production for Canada and internationally, the

¹ http://www.durham.ca/departments/health/food_nutrition/com_nutrition/foodBasket.pdf

National Food Policy needs to explicitly support sustainable food production and processing by small and medium farmers, as well as in urban and peri-urban areas. Small and medium farms, urban agriculture, and peri-urban agriculture are essential for ensuring food chain resilience in the face of pressures including climate change. They benefit our food system through improved access to food, community building, local economic development, support of local biodiversity, and land/water stewardship.

- **Balance food safety and local food production** – In Durham Region, home-based food-related entrepreneurial activities are hindered by policies with requirements at a scale beyond which home-based businesses can achieve. Food safety policy needs to consider that more levels of approval can hinder the ability of small-scale food production and processing, especially in terms of food-related business start-ups in low-income households. The National Food Policy needs to include scale-appropriate food safety protocols and assurance systems that support local small-scale food-related activities.
- **Ensure trade policies do not impede support of local food** – A report by Durham Integrated Growers and Durham Food Policy Council² showed that local food procurement in some Durham municipalities is restricted by local interpretations of trade policies. The National Food Policy needs to support the ability of municipal institutions to promote good health, community economic development and environmental responsibility through local food procurement.
- **Endorse food sovereignty** – The National Food Policy must include the right of all Canadians to food and indigenous food sovereignty, especially communities outside the agricultural lens such as indigenous food systems focused on the hunting, fishing and gathering of country foods.
- **Support a national food program** – Under the National Food Policy the federal government should, in partnership with the provinces and territories, create a cost-shared Universal Healthy School Food Program to ensure that all school children learn basic food skills and have access to healthy, nutritious meals every day. This includes working with Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous leadership to create a Healthy School Food Program for schools within First Nation reserves.
- **Provide a clear model for national-local coordination** – We are particularly interested in how the National Food Policy will interact with local level policies and programs in municipalities. The National Food Policy needs to be clear on how it will operate in communities and the ongoing mechanisms that will connect national level goals and objectives with local level activities and policies to better support sustainable food systems. If a national food policy council is established, it should provide resources, funds, and recommendations that support municipalities and local food policy councils in delivering coordinated policy and programs that support food systems at local, provincial and federal levels. We would like to see a model that emphasizes ongoing accountability and incorporates local voices in design and implementation.

² <http://www.durhamdigs.ca/s/DIG-FINAL-Urban-Ag-Policy-Scan-Nov-17-2016.pdf>

To ensure success of the National Food Policy, it should identify the minimum funds that will be committed, encourage all provinces and territories to collect food insecurity data through the Canadian Community Health Survey, and set targets and timelines for key indicators like food insecurity. The National Food Policy can provide guidance on better engaging youth in our food systems through improved educational platforms implemented in schools and non-profit agencies.

Our food system has benefits beyond nutrition and economics. Growing, processing, and eating food can help foster mental and social health, build communities, support culture, and promote sustainable use of the natural environment. We see the National Food Policy as providing consistency among food policies currently scattered across agriculture, health, environmental, economic and other departments, in order to achieve common goals. As such, we see the National Food Policy as the umbrella document under which all other food-related policies are situated.

We look forward to seeing Canada's first integrated National Food Policy and the benefits it generates for all of Canada, especially its most vulnerable. Thank you for this opportunity to help shape this important policy.

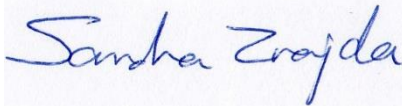
Signed by,



Mary Drummond
Chair, Durham Food Policy Council



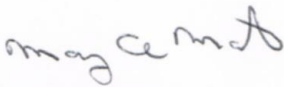
Cesar Caneo,
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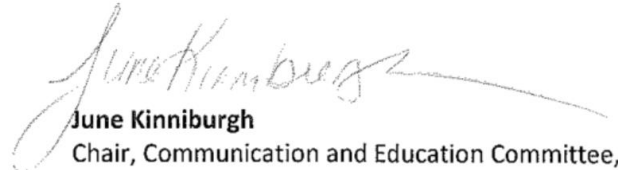
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