

Recommendations of Food Secure Canada on Nutrition North Canada

To the Team consulting on Nutrition North Canada,

On behalf of Food Secure Canada, it is my pleasure to submit in writing the considerations we have already shared with you regarding Nutrition North Canada. Food Secure Canada is a national membership-based network working for zero hunger, healthy and safe food and sustainable food systems. For many years Food Secure Canada has had an indigenous circle collaborating with us (which was responsible for the drafting of the first chapter of the [People's Food Policy](#) on Indigenous Food Sovereignty) as well as a northern network of experts, organizations and individuals who are concerned with food insecurity in Canada's north. We recently published a study, [Paying for Nutrition: A Report on Food Costing in the North](#) which contains many recommendations that are pertinent to the reform of Nutrition North (see in particular page 40 which also contains research and food costing recommendations).

Food Secure Canada (FSC) calls for a complete overhaul of Nutrition North Canada (NNC). *Paying For Nutrition: A Report on Food Costing in the North*^[i], contributes to the evidence that NNC is failing even on its own narrow terms. Isolated communities do not have affordable access to perishable, nutritious food and in some communities families would need to spend over half their income on food if they are relying on NNC. Furthermore, the broader context – of ongoing and worsening food security and health crises^[ii] facing Northerners - demands comprehensive solutions that are innovative and community-led. Food Secure Canada believes that the **principled starting points** for an overhaul of NNC, or its successor(s), should be:

- Canada must comply with its obligations under **global human rights treaties**. Article 11 of the legally binding International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is the right to adequate food and a fundamental right to be free from hunger^[iii]. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples^[iv] enshrines their right to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence (Article 20) and the right to indigenous lands, territories and resources (Article 26).
- **Reconciliation** with First Nations cannot be achieved when their local food economies are suppressed, monopolies are reinforced, and colonial patterns of fear and dependence and using food as a weapon are perpetuated. Instead, community control and self-reliance, with a deep respect for the traditional food systems that have sustained life in the North for millennia, is a pathway to reconciliation.
- Canada's new **Food Policy** must have Northern food security at its heart. With up to ten departments involved in the design of Canada's new food architecture this is the chance to create a holistic, comprehensive framework towards ending the food and health crises engulfing Northern communities.

Food Secure Canada makes the following **observations about the existing NNC** program (drawing particularly on the research and experience of Board member Joseph LeBlanc):

- NNC is a market-based program that in practice has **entrenched market monopolies** rather than empowering the consumer by promoting greater choice and competitive pricing. While eligibility is supposedly by community (and a limited list at that), in practice the eligible suppliers are the defining actor in NNC, with a strong incentive to keep out competition. Transport monopolies further reinforce the power

of established players in isolated communities. Previous schemes, like Food Mail and individual receipt-based reimbursement, at least avoided this pitfall.

- The **weight-based system** incentivises suppliers to actually make available heavy products with a long shelf life like potatoes, rather than lighter, highly perishable products like spinach.

- NNC is framed around the **individual** and the commoditisation of food whereas Indigenous food systems are in many dimensions framed around **community**. Community knowledge, transport and infrastructure deployed to address food insecurity (e.g. community freezers, stainless steel processing equipment, meat saws and grinders), have no means of support through NNC as currently designed. Community food co-ordinators could be a way to re-integrate this dimension, if funds were available for such a positioné

- **Local and traditional food production** is not supported by NNC. Paying for vegetables but not the seeds to grow them, fish sticks but not fishing rods, and frozen chicken but not chicks, is absurd. Country food can only be purchased from the South or from Nunavut with no support for local hunting, fishing and gathering. People know what they need. Community driven, innovative solutions that provide employment and local economic empowerment are the way forward.

Finally, Food Secure Canada notes that as a country we have a huge blind spot as to how much it would **cost to make the North food secure**. In fact, the question can be better re-framed as how much would we **save**, in money as well as human terms, if we solved Northern, and Canadian, food insecurity and the related cardio-vascular, obesity and diabetes crises?

Thank you for the opportunity to intervene on this important topic. I wish our organization had been in a position to do more, mobilizing the organizations we work with to be involved in this review. I trust you have been able to reach many people in remote communities who experience the consequences of this program first hand.

We look forward to you report and to rapid concerted action from the federal government.



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