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Food Secure Canada

Growing resilience and equity:

A food policy action plan in
the context of Covid-19

May 2020



Food Secure Canada is a pan-Canadian alliance of organizations and individuals working together to advance food security and food sovereignty through three interlocking goals: zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and sustainable food systems.

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Growing resilience and equity: A food policy action plan in the context of Covid-19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food is undeniably center stage in Canada and around the world today, and with this comes an unprecedented opening and urgency to advocate for food systems change. Covid-19 is revealing and magnifying the structural inequalities in our food systems, the insufficiencies of our social protection programs, and the challenges with the dominant food supply chains - largely controlled by a limited number of often multinational corporations. Food insecurity in Canada is expected to double from the existing 4.4 million, and there are disproportionate impacts on Indigenous, Black and racialized communities. Our long distance, overly import/export oriented, fossil fuel-dependent food chains are exposing wide-ranging vulnerabilities to market, labour and border disruptions. Farmers were already struggling with a farm income crisis, and their livelihoods are now further in jeopardy. And low-paid, often precarious food system workers are on the frontlines of the crisis, facing increased health risks as they work to ensure a steady supply of food.

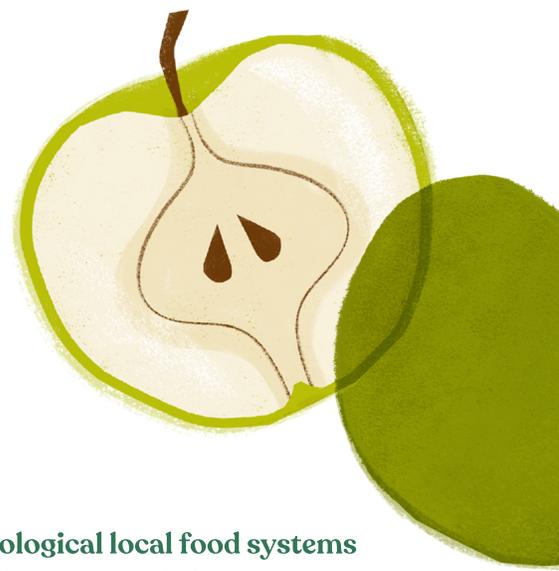
The moment clearly calls for visionary and bold structural change rather than piecemeal approaches grounded in “more of the same.” Pandemic response and recovery plans, and



It is critical that decisions made now – when system change is finally understood as not only possible, but necessary – lay the foundations for resilient and equitable food futures.



associated stimulus packages, will impact our food systems for years to come. It is critical that decisions made now – when system change is finally understood as not only possible, but necessary – lay the foundations for resilient and equitable food futures, notably in the context of climate change and the ongoing collapse of biodiversity. With an inclusive public-interest based approach to food policy and programming, Canada can:



- Address the root cause of food insecurity through **establishing a universal livable income floor beneath which no one can fall**, while ensuring that everyone in Canada has access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food;
- **Support Indigenous food sovereignty** where First Nations, Metis and Inuit determine their own place-based food systems, advancing policies that will best support resilient futures;
- Ensure everyone is at the policy-making table through **immediately convening, resourcing and empowering the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council** to engage in policy decisions and program design **measured against fulfilling the right to food, other human rights obligations, and the Sustainable Development Goals**. The Council should actualize the broad vision of the Food Policy for Canada, as well as include resourcing to ensure that wider civil society voices, above all those most marginalized by the present food system, are included;
- **Build resilient, ecological local food systems** that shorten and diversify food chains, revitalize communities, ensure greater access to healthy and fresh foods, support lower-emissions food systems, build greater resiliency to shocks and reduce food loss and waste;
- **Champion decent work and justice for all workers along the food chain** by ensuring decent pay and conditions for every Canadian and international food worker, and meeting the specific demands of migrant workers;
- **Harmonize Canada’s national and international food policies**, prioritizing food sovereignty approaches, supporting family farms and low-input, low-emissions agroecological food production as well as sustainable processing and distribution, and
- **Immediately advance a National School Food Program**, as promised in Budget 2019 and in the Food Policy for Canada, ensuring that it meets health outcomes, is universal, and is developed in collaboration with provinces, territories, key stakeholder groups and Indigenous leaders.

The time for healthier, more just and more sustainable food systems is now.



Introduction

Sustainable Development Goals

Canada, along with all member states of the United Nations, is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals¹ (SDG) by 2030.

In Canada and globally, the necessity to accelerate attainment of the goals has only been underlined by the Covid-19 crisis. Food Secure Canada's non-partisan action plan situates its policy proposals within the SDG framework. The plan is grounded in food movement proposals from across the country, laying out concrete policy pathways to meeting multiple and interlinked SDG goals.

The policy and program priorities named in this document directly

support the attainment of the four goals highlighted by the Food Policy for Canada (Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well Being, Responsible Consumption and Production, and Climate Action) and six others (Life below Water, Life on Land, Decent Work, Reduced Inequalities, and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, Quality Education). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is another essential global framework that informs this action plan.

Food movement analysis

This Policy Brief is grounded in analysis and policy proposals from "food movements," social movements advancing food-system transformation. The main sources of evidence for each section are listed in the footnotes. A more comprehensive listing of emerging proposals from food movements in the context of Covid-19 are curated in this spreadsheet².

1. United Nations (2015) Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Food Secure Canada (2020) Covid-19: Policy proposal from the food movement.



Covid-19 and food systems change

Food is undeniably center stage in Canada and around the world today, and with this comes an unprecedented opening and urgency to advocate for food systems change. Covid-19 is revealing and magnifying at once the structural inequalities in our food systems, the insufficiencies of our social protection programs, and the challenges with the dominant food supply chains, largely controlled by a limited number of often multinational corporations. Food insecurity in Canada is expected to double from the existing 4.4 million, with disproportionate impacts on Indigenous, Black and racialized communities. Our long distance, fossil fuel dependent food chain is exposing vulnerabilities to market, labour and border disruptions and logistical bottlenecks. We import 30% of our food, yet export more than 50% of what we grow¹. And low-paid, often precarious food system workers are on the frontlines of the crisis, facing increased health risks as they work to ensure a steady supply of food.

In this context, communities, organizations, nations and governments are striving to address immediate food security needs. At the same time, more systemic questions are being asked: what does this moment tell us about what needs to change in our food systems? What policies and programs are needed to grow equity and resiliency into the future, including in the context of other crises such as those brought on by inequality, climate change and the collapse of biodiversity? What seeds of change and innovation are being planted now that, if scaled up, could help build sustainable local food systems across the country? And

¹.MacRae, R.J. (2019) [Reliance on Exports - Food Policy for Canada: joined up food policy to create a just, health promoting and sustainable food system.](#)

importantly, which emergency responses may be false fixes, sowing the seeds of the next crisis? The moment clearly calls for visionary and bold structural change rather than piecemeal approaches grounded in “more of the same.”

Decisions made now and in the medium-term – specifically with regards to recovery plans and associated stimulus packages – will impact our food systems for years to come. We knew already that our future would be shaped by the climate crisis and ongoing societal inequalities, and Covid-19 has exposed additional vulnerabilities. It is critical to work towards ensuring that decisions made in the context of the pandemic – where system change is finally understood as not only possible, but necessary – build the foundations for resilient and equitable food futures. With an inclusive public-interest based approach to food policy and programming, Canada can fulfill the right to food for all; build resilient, ecological local food systems; support Indigenous food sovereignty and uphold justice for all workers along the food chain. The time for healthier, more just and more sustainable food systems is now.

It is critical that decisions made now – when system change is finally understood as not only possible, but necessary – lay the foundations for resilient and equitable food futures.

Policy priorities background

The policy proposals below have been developed through a process of information gathering, listening, consultation and convening with individuals and organizations involved in food movements. The longstanding policy positions of Food Secure Canada, including the [People's Food Policy](#)¹ and advocacy towards a [Food Policy for Canada](#)² provide important foundations. This action plan will necessarily be a living document, as the impact of Covid-19 unfolds. It is important to note that Food Secure Canada understands the various aspects of food systems to be interconnected and interdependent. As such, the sections below are intended to be considered as of a whole, in relation to one another.

1. Food Secure Canada (2nd edition, 2015) [A People's Food Policy for Canada](#).

2. Food Secure Canada (2019) [Food Policy Analysis](#).

Address the root causes of food insecurity.



SDG 2

ZERO HUNGER: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

SDG 3

GOOD HEALTH & WELL-BEING: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Context

Canada has ratified the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which gives our government the legal duty to guarantee its citizens the right to adequate food¹. Yet, before Covid-19, more than 4.4 million people in Canada were already living with food insecurity², and these numbers were rising.

"**Food security** exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." (World Food Summit, 1996)

1. Ad Hoc Working Group on the Right to Food (2017) Ensuring the Human Right to Food Through A Food Policy for Canada (Submissions to the Government of Canada).

2. Tarasuk V, Mitchell A. (2020) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF).

Notably, 65% of people living with food insecurity are working (wages, salaries, self-employed). Indigenous and racialised people are disproportionately likely to be both food insecure and susceptible to Covid-19. Black households are 3.5 times more likely to be food insecure than white households¹, and almost half of all First Nations families are food insecure². Food security is overwhelmingly about poverty. Now, millions more people have been pushed out of employment and will be reliant on inadequate income supports, despite emergency government programs. Current predictions are that food insecurity may double before the end of the year.

Adequate and good nutrition is directly linked to immunity. People who are food insecure are much more likely to suffer from chronic physical and mental health conditions and have lower life expectancy. Diet-related conditions including heart disease and diabetes are associated with higher risks from Covid-19, further underscoring the links between unhealthy eating and poor health. Diet-related diseases were already costing the Canadian economy an estimated \$26 billion a year³. Considering the impact of market forces on price and accessibility, non-stigmatized government-funded healthy food access programs managed by non-profits are necessary measures to support healthy eating and strengthen food security. Examples include good food boxes, farmers market vouchers, food and vegetable prescriptions and school food programs. There is an urgent need to make healthy eating for all a public policy priority, aligning agricultural, health, economic and social policy accordingly.

Local food organizations including food banks are working hard to distribute food to people in communities

4.4 million

Canadians were experiencing food insecurity before the crisis, and this number is set to double

Make healthy eating for all a public policy priority

Establish a universal livable income floor, adequate for the local cost of living

1. PROOF and FoodShare (2019) [Race and Food Insecurity \(Fact Sheet\)](#).

2. FNFNES First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study (2019) [Summary of key findings](#).

3. Moubarac J. (December, 2017) [Ultra-processed foods in Canada: consumption, impact on diet quality and policy implications](#) (Heart & Stroke).

across the country. Yet, even with increased funding, charity-based models will never be able to deliver the right to food¹. To address the root causes of food insecurity, and realise the right to food, it will be necessary to ensure everyone's income is adequate for the local cost of living.

Policy priorities

- Establish a universal livable income floor beneath which no one can fall. This can and should build on increasing existing diverse government income supports and tax credits; mandated livable minimum wage; and other subsidies for necessities of life (e.g., rent), complemented by well-designed basic income schemes (with social safeguards and public review);
- Strengthen food security by increasing access to healthy, ideally local and sustainably-produced food for low-income households² through government-funded, non-profit managed programs (such as good food boxes, good food markets, farmers market vouchers, food and vegetable prescriptions and subsidies, and school food programs);
- Uphold the Healthy Eating Strategy, including using the Canada Food Guide³ to promote healthy eating, and measure all policy and programme interventions against how well they move Canada towards ensuring everyone can afford and access healthy, sustainably produced food; and
- Ensure that those disproportionately experiencing food insecurity, including Indigenous Peoples, Black and racialised communities, lead and coordinate appropriate and distinct responses.

Food is a basic human right. We all have the right to feed ourselves, our families and our communities in dignity. The federal government has an international legal obligation to ensure the full realization of the right to food for all those living in Canada, in light of its engagement to *respect* (to not infringe upon), *protect* (prevent third parties from infringing upon), and *realise* (put in place programs) this right when it ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976.

1. Saul N. (24 April, 2020) [Remarks to Finance Committee - the federal government's COVID response](#) (Community Food Centres Canada).

2. Kramer D., Ferguson R., Reynolds J. (2019) [Sustainable Consumption for All: Improving the accessibility of sustainably grown foods in Canada](#) (FSC Research Report).

3. Government of Canada (current version) [Canada's Food Guide](#).

Build resilient local food systems

Context

The Covid-19 crisis has exposed the interconnected fragility and concentration of power within Canada's dominant long-distance food supply chain¹. Weaknesses include: an overreliance on import/export systems, especially for fruit and vegetables; the concentration of food chain ownership by a handful of large, often multinational corporations – including the control of seeds and inputs; the dramatic centralisation of abattoirs^{2,3} and food processing; an overreliance on high-input, high-emissions farming; as well as often harsh working conditions and low incomes for farmers and farm workers, whether Canadian or from abroad. Food policy prescriptions focused on big data and enhanced logistics⁴ risk

SDG 12

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

SDG 13

CLIMATE ACTION: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

SDG 14

LIFE BELOW WATER: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

SDG 15

LIFE ON LAND: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

1. Roberts M. and Yasmeen G. (28 March, 2020) [An opening to transform our food systems](#) (Food Secure Canada).

2. Mosby I. and Rotz S. (29 April, 2020) [As meat plants shut down, COVID-19 reveals the extreme concentration of our food supply.](#)

3. National Farmers Union (22 April, 2020) [COVID-19 shuts down half of Canada's beef supply.](#)

4. Mooney P. (2018) [Blocking the chain: Industrial food chain concentration, Big Data platforms and food sovereignty solutions](#) (ETC Group).

entrenching problematic long food chains and deepen concentration of power and inequities.

In recent months, stories illustrating challenges from the frontlines of our broken industrial food system have repeatedly been front page news. It is a coast-to-coast “aha” moment – as it becomes clear to all, government and the public – that in order to respond to future challenges (including infectious diseases but also, notably, climate change and the collapse of biodiversity) deep system change is needed to build resiliency and equity into the future.

It is time to transition from dominant long distance food chains controlled by a handful of multinational corporations, to reinforcing regionally and locally-controlled food “webs.” Food webs, a cornerstone of food sovereignty¹, are place-based and human scale, and are the foundation for great societal shifts with many co-benefits. These include the revitalization and economic renewal of rural and remote communities, greater access to healthy and fresh foods, lower-emission food systems, greater resiliency to shocks and reduced food waste.

Building resilient local food webs will require a significant shift in policy direction. Rather than a policy excessively focused on commodity production for exports, there is a need to rebalance agricultural incentives in all jurisdictions to prioritize sustainable local and regional production of healthy food for Canadian consumption. A study² published in 2015 showed that replacing only 10 percent of the top 10 fruit and vegetable imports in Ontario with locally grown produce would result in a \$250 million increase

It is time to transition to regionally and locally-controlled food webs

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems (La Via Campesina).

1. ETC Group (3rd edition 2017) [Who Will Feed Us? The Industrial Food Chain vs. The Peasant Food Web](#).

2. Econometric Research Limited, Cummings H., MacRae R. (2015) [DOLLARS & SENSE: Opportunities to Strengthen Southern Ontario's Food System](#).

in provincial gross domestic product and the creation of 3,400 new jobs. If this were done across the country, and for many more foods, the impact would be significant.

Building resilient local food webs will also require strategic investments in local and regional food infrastructure, such as food hubs, decentralized small and medium sized abattoirs, and food processing and storage facilities – particularly cold chain. And critically, it means valuing and supporting micro, small and medium scale food production, processing and distribution into the future. With the average age of a Canadian farmer at nearly 60, and within a volatile global context, guaranteeing viable farmer livelihoods – as well as supporting new Canadian farmers, and other new and younger farmers – is necessary for the future of food in Canada. Since 1990, the profit motive of corporations that supply farm inputs and services have left farmers with just 5% of farm revenues. This has caused farm debt to nearly double to \$106 billion since 2000¹. Reducing dependence on high-emissions petroleum based inputs, and moving towards low-input, low-emissions agroecological food production² grounded in farmer innovation and knowledge, will bolster farmer livelihoods, strengthen biodiversity, and build resilience to climate change. New targeted supports for farmers who wish to transition or enter into these kinds of forward-looking farming^{3, 4} will be essential.

With Covid-19, Canadians increasingly want to help build and support resilient local food webs^{5, 6}. Support for

"Agroecology is understood here as “the science of applying ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable food systems”. It encompasses various approaches to maximise biodiversity and stimulate interactions between different plants and species, as part of holistic strategies to build long-term fertility, healthy agroecosystems and secure livelihoods. It also represents a social movement.” International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food systems, IPES-Food (2016)



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1. Qualman D. (2019) [Tackling the Farm Crisis and the Climate Crisis: A Transformative Strategy for Canadian Farms and Food Systems, discussion document](#) (National Farmers Union).
 2. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food systems IPES-Food (2016) [From uniformity to diversity: a paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems.](#)
 3. Équiterre (23 April, 2020) [Recommandations pour le budget fédéral 2020: Bâtir la résilience des collectivités pour offrir une réponse durable face aux crises.](#)
 4. Qualman D. (n 1)
 5. Neamtan N. (1 May, 2020) [Working together to build sustainable food systems: A view from QC.](#)
 6. Queirolo M (9 April 2020) [Toronto Food Policy Council on Markets & COVID-19.](#)

buying local is building week to week, sign-ups for Community-Supported Agriculture programs are surging, and people are growing whatever food they can on balconies and yards across the country. Buying local is also being championed by some provincial governments and many municipalities. Sustainable procurement by public institutions (i.e., schools and hospitals¹), and supporting Canadians to eat according to the new Food Guide², contribute demand-side support for local, healthy food webs. With a clear federal-level priority placed on building local food webs, Canada would be much better-placed to encounter future challenges, including the inevitable impacts of climate change on our food systems.

Policy priorities

- Re-balance agricultural incentives in all jurisdictions to prioritize sustainable production of healthy food for Canadian consumption, rather than a policy excessively focused on commodity production for export;
- Use incentives, including stimulus packages, to support transition from high-input, high-emissions farming approaches to low-input, low-emissions agroecological farming approaches to strengthen biodiversity, meet climate goals, build resilient local food webs, reduce waste and support farmer livelihoods into the future;
- Support human-scale food production and processing (micro, small and medium farmers; fisherfolk; Indigenous food systems³), including specific support for new and young producers and processors, and new Canadians;
- Strengthen local food webs through support for local and regional food infrastructure including food hubs, decentralized abattoirs, food processing and storage facilities, farmers markets, Community Supported Agricultures, direct delivery, urban agriculture, community gardens, change of use for public land, and sustainable, affordable greenhouses;
- Use public procurement (for institutions such as schools and hospitals) to model and drive the interlinked co-benefits of local food webs, sustainable sourcing and healthy dietary shifts.
- Ensure that food policies are measured against the objective of strengthening food webs and safeguarding against further concentration or overreliance on long-chain vulnerabilities.

1.Reynolds J. (2019) Nourishing The Future of Food in Health Care: A Pan-Canadian Policy Scan 2018 (NOURISH).

2.Government of Canada (current version) Canada's Food Guide.

3.Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food (May 2019) Support for Indigenous Peoples in Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Support Indigenous food sovereignty.



This section is based on the sources included as footnotes, Food Secure Canada policy documents, the People’s Food Policy Indigenous Circle analysis, and input from Food Secure Canada’s Indigenous Board members. It is not an exhaustive presentation of the issues, nor of potential policy proposals. It should be viewed as a living document.



United Nations
Declaration on the
Rights of Indigenous
Peoples

Context

Despite promises made by the British Crown through the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the Treaty of 1764, subsequent Treaties, and UNDRIP¹ (“the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world”), Canada has in the words of a previous Supreme Court of Canada Chief Justice, practiced genocide. Food deprivation, stolen lands and interfering with access to sources of food sovereignty, along with poisoning of the waters

1. General Assembly (2007) [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#).

and lands and other destruction of habitat for traditional food, medicine and other economic sources along with the marginalization of Indigenous women and others have and continue to be part of the colonial reality in Canada.

In place of a system based on natural law and respect for the sacred elements and all of life, colonial dictates have created dependency-based food structures (e.g. imports, state supports) which undermine food sovereignty, and allow even culturally weak food insecurity to perpetuate. The Covid-19 crisis has and will continue to exacerbate the high rates of food insecurity among Indigenous households and communities, which, before Covid-19 was already prevalent in almost half of First Nations families¹. The health crisis calls for lockdowns and road closures, further threatening unreliable food supplies of imported food, and underlining the fragility of this approach.

Demand for culturally appropriate traditional/country foods - which reduce dependency, improve health, increase connection to land and culture, and bring pride in self to community members - are rising and unmet. Some communities are also facing this crisis within the context of boil water advisories and crowded living conditions, leading to further challenges with respect to following Covid-19 health guidelines and ensuring adequate food supply.

Yet, critically, Indigenous communities across the country are innovating local approaches to address Covid-19 related food challenges². These communities

The Covid-19 crisis has and will continue to exacerbate the high rates of food insecurity among Indigenous households and communities

1.FNFNES First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study (2019) [Summary of key findings](#).

2.Thunder Bay & Area Food Strategy (9 April, 2020) [Food Strategy Covid-19 Statement](#).

know what will best meet the urgent needs of today while building foundations for resilient futures. The path forward requires a rights-based approach to Indigenous food sovereignty. As underlined by a recent policy brief published by Yellowhead Institute¹, “Relying on charity to address food insecurity in Indigenous communities is extremely problematic. (...) We have to look beyond short-term emergency driven solutions to address food insecurity for Indigenous peoples in Canada and for the long-term. This includes addressing infrastructure issues and those that have existed in many Indigenous communities for a long time.”

Now is the time for Indigenous communities to take back control to determine their place-based food systems, as well as the policies that will best support these resilient futures. There is an urgent need to support self-determined First Nations², Métis³ and Inuit⁴ Covid-19 responses which address short-term needs while strengthening Indigenous food sovereignty into the future.

Indigenous communities know what will best meet the urgent needs of today while building foundations for resilient futures



1. Levi E. and Robin T. and a group of signatories (29 April, 2020) Policy Brief: COVID-19 Did Not Cause Food Insecurity In Indigenous Communities But It Will Make It Worse (Yellowhead Institute).
2. Assembly of First Nations (2020) Covid-19.
3. Métis Nation (2020) Covid -19.
4. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2020) Covid-19.

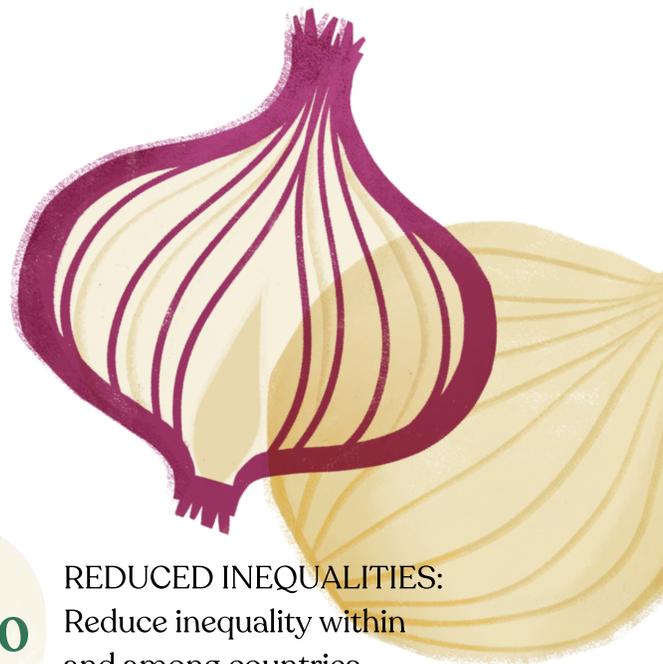
Policy priorities

- Commit to Reconciliation As Relationship¹, and the 10 principles² for Canada's political and legal systems, educational and religious institutions, corporate sector, and civil society to function in ways that are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Canada has endorsed;
- Honour both the spirit and the letter of the law of Canadian Constitutional commitments to Indigenous peoples' rights and responsibilities;
- Respect treaties (historic and modern) and other land rights, ensure Indigenous control over land and waterways;
- Self-determination for Indigenous peoples and communities, and distinct approaches for First Nations, Inuit, Métis, as well as urban, remote, northern and rural realities;
- Provide direct support to Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving groups that are focused on Indigenous food systems, for instance through the Local Food Infrastructure Program;
- Support communities to design new models, and support and reinvigorate Indigenous food ways like community kitchens, gardening programs, greenhouses, other community-led infrastructure, hunter support programs and goose camps;
- Support Indigenous-led cooperative and other non-profit motivated grocery stores and other traditional/country food and supplies;
- Initiate Nutrition North Canada (NNC) Reform, including increase in the land-based harvest supports to a minimum 25% of total NNC expenditures;
- Instate a universal livable income guarantee;
- Immediately invest in the infrastructure to ensure all communities have guaranteed access to clean drinking water, and housing adequate for local needs;
- Provide distinct, appropriate state investments in Indigenous communities (child welfare, education, minor/major capital and infrastructure); and
- Support for Indigenous-led coordination of Covid-19 response and recovery in Indigenous communities.

1. Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2015) [What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation](#).

2. Ibid.

Champion decent work and justice for workers all along the food chain



SDG 10

REDUCED INEQUALITIES:
Reduce inequality within
and among countries

SDG 8

DECENT WORK: Promote
sustained, inclusive and
sustainable economic
growth, full and
productive employment
and decent work for all

Context

Workers all along the food chain (including farmers, labourers, migrant workers, processors, delivery and retail workers) have been facing ongoing personal risk since the beginning of the pandemic to ensure a steady food supply for Canadians. While enabling public recognition of their essential role in Canada's food security, Covid-19 has also highlighted long-standing unacceptable working conditions¹ experienced by workers along the food chain including: low pay (in some cases lower than the government's emergency benefits); lack of access to sick pay and other benefits; harsh and unsafe living and working conditions (including, in the current context, a lack of access to personal protective equipment), and precarious employment terms. Temporary foreign workers

1. Canadian Labour Congress (9 April, 2020) [COVID-19 has exposed wide gaps in Canada's social-safety net.](#)

experience particular vulnerability^{1,2} as they are legally obliged to be tied to one employer, and they experience isolation, racism and discrimination and lack of status.

The widespread societal recognition of the essential roles and contributions of food workers is an opportunity to extend justice and uphold rights all along the food chain. Importantly, the crisis should not be used to justify changes in the food system that reduce reliance on human workers (e.g., drone delivery, increased automation and digitisation in fields and warehousing, etc.), without democratic public interest oversight, and the participation and agreement of workers in potential identification of alternative decent work opportunities. With the clear frontline contributions food workers have made to maintaining the food system at this critical time, this is a moment to double down on valuing food workers, and to build policy that protects them from being replaced by machines.

The widespread societal recognition of the essential roles and contributions of food workers is an opportunity to extend justice and uphold rights all along the food chain

Policy priorities

- Support civil society and labour-led campaigns for decent pay and conditions for every Canadian and international worker along the food chain, whether unionized or not, recognising that women and racialized communities experience multiple layers of discrimination;
- Support campaigns led by migrant workers and their allies to realise their specific demands, including open work permits, access to healthcare and benefits, and permanent residency status upon arrival (updated June 2020³), and;
- Ensure that the rights and roles of food chain workers are properly valued and protected in future plans to bolster and protect the food supply (e.g., in reviewing plans for increased use of data, automation and digitisation in the food supply).

1. Weiler A., McLaughlin J., Caxaj S., and Cole D., (1 April, 2020) [Protecting the health and rights of migrant agricultural workers during the COVID-19 outbreak should be a priority.](#)

2. Migrant Rights Network (16 March, 2020) [Migrant, poor, racialised: Petition to leave no-one behind \(healthcare, worker protection, status, community support, leadership\).](#)

3. This Policy priority was updated in June 2020 to include permanent residency on arrival, see Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC) (June 2020) [Unheeded Warnings: COVID-19 & Migrant Workers in Canada.](#)

Ensure everyone is at the table



SDG 16

PEACE, JUSTICE & STRONG INSTITUTIONS: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Context

In June 2019 Minister Bibeau launched the first-ever [Food Policy For Canada](#)¹. While [welcoming the Policy](#)² as an important first step, and encouraged by its ambitious vision and principles, Food Secure Canada was disappointed by its modest initial budget and limited programming mechanisms. The provision for a diverse Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC), which had been [advocated for by a multi-stakeholder group](#)³ including Food Secure Canada, offered hope. However, nominations to the CFPAC closed in September 2019, and members have not yet been announced. Without the CFPAC, existing industry roundtables and strategy tables representing private interests dominate. In the context of Covid-19, a series of disconnected ad hoc engagement mechanisms have been put forward by the federal government, without an inclusive space for coherent strategy and dialogue on obvious food systems-wide challenges and related openings for positive change.

1. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food (June 2019) [Food Policy for Canada](#).

2. Food Secure Canada (June 2019) [Food Policy Analysis](#).

3. Food Secure Canada (December 2017) [A New Governance Structure for Food Policy](#).

Convening a diverse CFPAC is an urgent and long overdue first step. It will be important for the CFPAC to be working to actualize the broad vision of the Food Policy for Canada, and be empowered to engage in policy decisions and program design measured against Canada's right to food and other human rights obligations, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals. However, developing and financing spaces and channels for broader and deeper civil society participation will be necessary to provide diverse and inclusive contributions to food policy-making. Ensuring that those who disproportionately experience food insecurity are resourced and heard is vital. Now, more than ever, we need everyone at the table, guiding further development and implementation of coherent, coordinated food policy in the public interest.

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It is also important to consider the international dimensions¹ of the current pandemic. Covid-19 is affecting people and food systems globally. The World Food Programme is warning of the risk of a major global food crisis, potentially doubling the existing number of people facing starvation to 265 million people by the end of 2020². It is critical that Canada play a strong role on the world stage in order to encourage the kind of global response³ that will not only respond to immediate food needs, but build more resilient food systems longer-term. Coherent and integrated trade, aid and development policies, programmes and approaches must be designed to both specifically support the small farmers who produce more than 70% of the world's food, and to prioritise low-input, low-emissions, agroecological food production that will help food producers and processors get through subsequent shocks and crises.

Canada's international response must encourage more resilient food systems in the long term

1. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) (April, 2020) COVID-19 and the crisis in food systems: symptoms, causes, and potential solutions.

2. World Food Program (21 April, 2020) COVID-19 will double number of people facing food crises unless swift action is taken.

3. Rabinowicz J. and Settle M. (22 April 2020) COVID-19 is creating a [global] food crisis and Canada needs to respond (SeedChange).

More broadly, farmers and communities must be supported in their efforts to build place-based resilient and agroecological food webs and systems¹. Having everyone at the table reminds us that ultimately, we are all in this together. Championing healthy, just and sustainable food policies domestically and abroad will build a better food future for all.



Policy priorities

- Immediately convene, adequately resource and empower the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC) to engage in policy decisions and program design measured against fulfilling the right to food, other human rights obligations, and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to actualize the broad vision of the Food Policy for Canada;
- Prioritize a “nothing for us, without us” approach to food policy development, by developing and financing channels to ensure that civil society voices beyond the CFPAC, above all those most marginalized by the present food system, are included in policy conversations; and
- Harmonize Canada’s national and international (aid, trade, and development) food policies, prioritizing food sovereignty approaches, supporting small producers and processors, and encouraging low-input, low-emissions agroecological food production.

¹: National Farmers Union and Via Campesina (17 April, 2020) [Till, sow and harvest transformative ideas for the future! - Now is the moment to demand food.](#)

Spotlight:

Advancing a National School Food Program

SDG 2

ZERO HUNGER: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

SDG 4

QUALITY EDUCATION: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Context

School food programs exist all over the country and, indeed, around the world and involve providing a meal or snack to children. A national school food program would bring together the policy priorities above, with multiple, linked benefits rippling out across education, health, food systems and local economies. In addition to improving the physical and mental health of our next generations, well-designed programs enable children and youth to develop the skills and literacy needed for a lifetime of healthy eating; improve readiness to learn at school; support local, sustainable food production and processing; work to address the climate emergency; and have a positive impact on all families, particularly women who invest a significant amount of time preparing food for school¹. Universality is an important principle since it ensures equitable and dignified access for children and builds on existing widely-supported and successful social protection benefits. Supporting the development of Indigenous-led and oriented school food programs would also advance Indigenous food

1. Haines J., and Ruetz A.T. (2020) [Comprehensive, Integrated Food and Nutrition Programs in Canadian Schools: A Healthy and Sustainable Approach](#) (Arrell Food Institute at the University of Guelph).

sovereignty, supporting access to culturally-appropriate healthy food and food literacy, and the connection of younger generations with elders and traditional food systems.

Canada is the only G7 country without a national school food program. In Budget 2019 and then in the Food Policy for Canada, the federal government committed to “engage with provinces, territories and key stakeholder groups to work towards the creation of a National School Food Program” but no steps have yet been announced.

Since schools closed due to Covid-19, the [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#)¹ (CHSF) has been [documenting innovation](#) by its members to shift from school-based provision for children, to community-based provision for children, youth and, in some cases, families. Members across the country pivoted to different purchasing, preparation and distribution models to enable this shifting mandate, including new partnerships with farmers, chefs, restaurants, municipalities and community hubs. In a context of rapidly accelerating need, Coalition members are striving to uphold values of universality (avoiding screening and stigma), healthy food, local sourcing, and food literacy so that short-term actions enhance long-term goals. On this basis, CHSF has prepared and costed medium and long term research and program proposals to support progress towards the policy priority of a universal, healthy cost-shared National School Food Program.

A national school food program ensures that children have access to healthy food at school, at the same time encouraging their food literacy, and supporting the local economy

Policy priority

- Create a National School Food Program as promised in Budget 2019 and in the Food Policy for Canada, ensuring that it meets health outcomes, is universal, and is developed in collaboration with provinces, territories, key stakeholder groups and Indigenous leaders.

1. [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#).

2. [Coalition for Healthy School Food Covid-19 School Food Response](#).

Program proposals of the Coalition for Healthy School Food



MEDIUM-TERM: SCHOOL FOOD FUND

A costed proposal for \$200 million to the federal government to create a special School Food Fund as part of expected “public works” stimulus programs, including a job-creation focus. The Fund would be administered through existing provincial and territorial departments who would flow funds to school boards or through partnerships with community NGOs.

Funds to support:

- Infrastructure and equipment, including kitchen and canteen retrofits, tools and equipment, and greenhouses and gardens, as part of job creation and stimulus;
- Distribution and food preparation experimentation: work with farmers and chefs to test different sourcing and preparation models;
- Research and evaluation of emerging best practices;
- Food processing and distribution pilots: expand programs that build; and strengthen partnerships with community kitchens, processing facilities and food hubs.

LONG-TERM: NATIONAL HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM

In July 2019, the Coalition for Healthy School Food prepared a submission¹ to the 2020 pre-budget consultations, proposing an annual initial contribution of \$360 million from the federal government towards establishing a universal school food program. This assumes a cost-shared model that would involve investments from the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, as well as from non-profits and parents, where feasible. The estimated total cost is \$1.8 billion a year for food costs, some staff, infrastructure, and accountability measures.

1. Coalition for Healthy School Food (26 July, 2020) Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2020 Budget.

