



Civil Society Input to a Renewed Food Policy for Canada

Brief Food Security

What is said in the [Food Policy for Canada](#)

The idea of “food security” is a central part of the Food Policy’s vision for “*All people in Canada are able to access a sufficient amount of safe, nutritious, and culturally diverse food. Canada’s food system is resilient and innovative, sustains our environment and supports our economy.*”

It is also the major theme behind two of action areas to address key gaps (2019-2024)

Help Canadian communities access healthy food

Community-based initiatives will invest in projects that increase access to food, with the potential to provide social, health, environmental, and economic benefits in support of vibrant communities across Canada. The Government of Canada will also engage with provinces, territories, and key stakeholder groups to work toward the creation of a National School Food Program.

Support food security in Northern and Indigenous communities

Actions will advance efforts towards Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples by strengthening First Nations, Inuit, and Métis food systems, recognizing the importance of food to Indigenous culture and well-being, and, in so doing, supporting Indigenous food self-determination.

The policy also mentions a more specific concept of food insecurity. Household food insecurity is defined and conceptualized in Canada as the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.

*“Improved health status of Canadians related to food consumption and reduced burden of diet-related disease, particularly among groups at higher risk of food insecurity” is **one of the priority outcomes identified.***

The “*reduction in the number of food insecure households in Canada*” was an example of **a potential target for the policy to explore and set** that would align with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals.

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), Target 2.1: *By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.*

Household food insecurity is currently used by the Canadian Indicator Framework to describe progress towards SDG2. Monitoring the prevalence of severe food insecurity (households reporting experiences like missing meals, reducing food intake, and at the most extreme going day(s) without food, due to a lack of money) provides a direct measure of Canada’s process towards “zero hunger”.

The policy also outlined the importance for a whole-of-government approach to income-based interventions to reduce food insecurity.

“All orders of government, including many federal departments, have taken actions to address food system issues, for example through: income support programs that reduce poverty, that can also reduce food insecurity”

Federal budget lines directly associated with the Food Policy (2019-2024)

What was included in [Federal budget, March 2019](#)

The Local Food Infrastructure Fund (LFIF) (page 163 of Budget 2019) is a five-year, \$50 million initiative ending March 31, 2024, in support of infrastructure for local food projects, including at food banks, farmers’ markets, and other community driven-projects. It is described as supporting organization working to [reduce food insecurity](#).

Harvesters Support Grant (page 163 of Budget 2019) is a grant to help lower the high costs associated with traditional hunting and harvesting activities, which are an important source of healthy, traditional food.

Northern Isolated Community Initiatives Fund (page 163 of Budget 2019) is a five-year, \$15 million fund to support community-led projects, with funding for equipment such as community freezers, greenhouses, local food production projects, and skills training for local and Indigenous food producers.

While not part of Budget 2019, the federal government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic included \$330 million for the [Emergency Food Security Fund](#), “new funding for Canadian food banks, food rescue organizations, and other assistance providers to improve access to food for people experiencing food insecurity”, and \$50 million for the [Surplus Food Rescue Program](#), “new funding for organizations addressing food insecurity to help them manage and redirect food surpluses and to avoid food waste.”

Federal government policy progress since 2019

The prevalence of household food insecurity across the 10 provinces has persisted at a high rate, with a considerable increase between 2021 to 2022. [In 2022, 6.9 million people in the 10 provinces, including almost 1.8 million children, lived in food-insecure households.](#)

There have been various measures at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels to mitigate the effects of rising costs of living, particularly for low-income households, but given the small scale and short-term nature of these interventions, they are unlikely to yield meaningful, sustained reductions in the prevalence of household food insecurity.

A Working Group of the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC) prepared a report for the Minister (unpublished), presenting 3 recommendations: 1) Set a target to reduce food insecurity by 50% by 2030, based on the Canadian Income Survey's 2019 baseline. Further, seek to eliminate severe food insecurity. 2) Alleviate the disproportionate impact of food insecurity on Black and Indigenous people. 3) Enhance measurement of food insecurity in Canada noting the comprehensive report that was submitted with recommendations on measurement and reporting. ([see record of proceedings](#))

An [auditor general report](#) on Canada’s food system during the pandemic found that the Emergency Food Security Fund and Surplus Food Rescue Program were unable to demonstrate an impact on reducing food insecurity.

FSC and/or food movement recommendations and analysis

The Food Policy should continue its focus on household food insecurity and Indigenous food security and self-determination ([see backgrounder on Strengthening Indigenous Food Systems](#)).

Given the systematic monitoring of household food insecurity in Canada, the scale and severity of the problem, and what it means for Canadians' health and well-being, reducing the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity should be a priority. As explained by [Deaton and Scholz \(2022\)](#), this indicator aligns most closely to the ambitious vision for food security in Canada.

Setting a target for food insecurity reduction, an existing recommendation by the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council, could be a valuable step for providing a framework for accountability. A target should consider the severity of food insecurity and be accompanied by concrete plans grounded in the evidence on effective policy interventions to reduce food insecurity, in order to be meaningful. [All of the evidence from research on food insecurity data points to the need to improve the adequacy and stability of incomes for low-income households \(PROOF\)](#).

A renewal of the 2023 Food Policy should continue towards a whole-of-government approach and build upon existing relationships established between AAFC, ESDC, and Health Canada through the 2019 Food Policy. To achieve any meaningful, sustained reduction in household food insecurity in Canada, it is necessary to establish food insecurity reduction as a policy objective for federal income supports (Canada Child Benefit, Canada Workers Benefit, Employment Insurance, etc.) for low-income households and a central consideration for the design of these supports.