

# Equitable Access to Healthy Sustainable Food

Synthesis Policy Report and Recommendations



**FSC**  
**RAD**

Food  
Secure  
Canada

Réseau  
pour une alimentation  
durable

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## Introduction

The government of [Canada](#) signed on to achieve the seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The goals address social, economic and environmental challenges, offering a global roadmap for better, more sustainable futures for people and the planet.

Food Secure Canada (FSC) co-ordinated three years of work, from 2021 to 2024, laying out how [food systems pathways](#) can help to meet multiple SDGs. Three key action areas were identified: [Healthy School Food](#), [Indigenous Food Sovereignty](#) and [Equitable Access](#) to healthy, sustainable food. The work on Equitable Access, the focus of this paper, was aimed especially towards meeting Zero Hunger: SDG2 and also No Poverty: SDG 1. Challenging racism, anti-Black racism, and the continuing impacts of colonialism on food systems are at the heart of this action area.

## *Methodology*

This synthesis policy report brings together the context and the findings of several papers and associated processes around equitable access to food which FSC undertook with partners and allies over the three years of work. In particular, the following report and civil society engagement process brought broad impact analysis and associated recommendations which are highly relevant:

- [Sustainable Consumption for All](#): Revisiting the accessibility of sustainably-produced food in Canada in COVID-19 (2022); and
- [Food Security Brief](#) prepared with support from PROOF for the 2023 civil society “Town Hall” consultation on renewing the Food Policy for Canada as well as the [recommendations](#) issued from those consultations.

Food Secure Canada’s ongoing accompaniment of the Food Policy for Canada and its associated Advisory Council during this period informed the work.

In addition, the insights from two studies on specific populations produced by community-based researchers have been both integrated into the overall recommendations of this synthesis, as well as separately reported as community case studies:

- [Access to Local Food in Francophone Canada: Anti-racist and Decolonial Perspectives](#); and
- [Food Sovereignty for Black Communities in Toronto: Challenges and Policy Opportunities](#).

Although food systems affect and are affected by all the SDGs, Zero Hunger, SDG 2, and especially food security, was the main focus of this research and policy work.

Associated advocacy and convening work with allies also had a strong No Poverty, SDG 1, lens.

### Policy context and overarching considerations

The policy and wider context in which the work on Equitable Access took place is important to consider. Of note, is that the government established the [Canadian Indicator Framework](#) to set ambitions, and measure its domestic progress towards the SDGs. Two specific indicators are listed for Goal 2, which are discussed below.

Since 2019 the [Food Policy for Canada](#) has been in place to guide actions and enable better cross-sectoral decision-making about food in Canada. Its associated [Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council](#) (CFPAC) was launched in 2021. There is great complementarity between the ambition of SDG 2, and the vision statement of the Food Policy for Canada, although the latter has a broader food systems lens. Finally, it is worth noting that both the Covid-19 pandemic and the escalating food affordability crisis impacted significantly on how this work unfolded in the period 2021-2024. Communities and partners engaging with the work were under strong pressure as food access changed and food insecurity rose.

#### **SDG 2**

Zero Hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture<sup>1</sup>

#### **Canadian Indicator Framework for SDG 2<sup>2</sup>**

Ambition: Canadians have access to sufficient, affordable and nutritious food

Indicator: *Prevalence of food insecurity*

Ambition: Canadian agriculture is sustainable

Indicator: *Index of Agri-Environmental Sustainability*

#### **Vision of Canada's Food Policy**

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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved from: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals Data Hub. Retrieved from: <https://sdgcif-data-canada-oddcic-donnee.github.io/2/>

<sup>3</sup> Government of Canada, The Food Policy for Canada, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/departement/initiatives/food-policy/food-policy-canada>

## Canadian ambitions and indicators for Zero Hunger, SDG 2

The Government of Canada’s approach to achieving Zero Hunger: SDG 2 is to prioritise two ambitions, one of which is about food security and the other about sustainability. There are several problems with the metrics that are being used to measure progress on these two goals. Neither one of them adopts an intersectional or anti-colonial lens, and the indicators used are therefore of limited use.

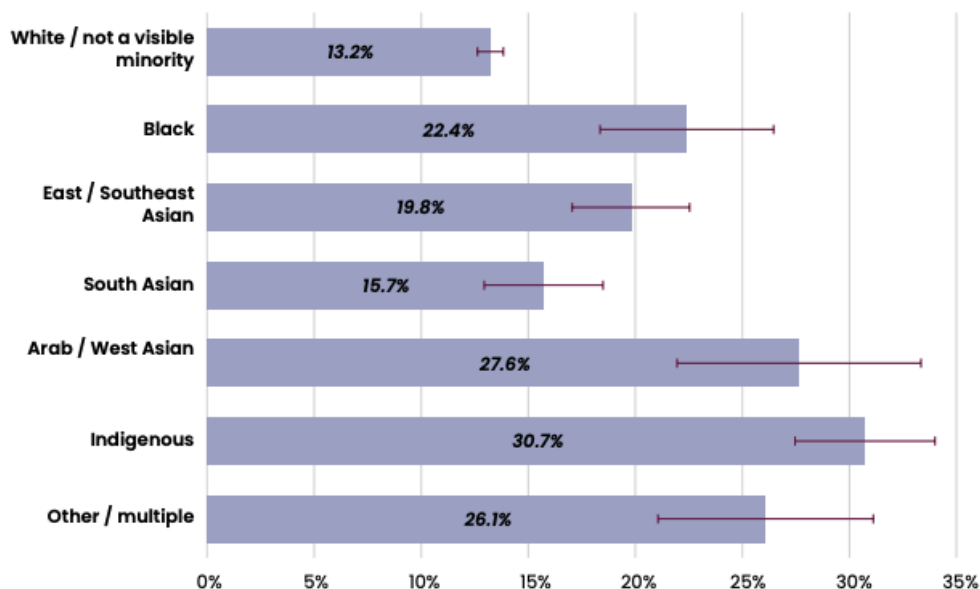
### *Food Security*

In the case of the food security ambition, “access to sufficient, affordable, and nutritious food” as measured by the indicator prevalence of food insecurity, the overall number of food insecure Canadians is increasing according to official Statistics Canada monitoring (see below, including groups missing from this data). Recent research has also highlighted that rates of food insecurity are much higher for racialized and immigrant populations compared to white people living in Canada, as illustrated in the following Statistics Canada data<sup>4</sup>.

#### **Food insecurity and racial/cultural identity & Indigenous status**

**People identifying as white have a lower prevalence of food insecurity than any other group** (Figure 18). The highest percentage of individuals living in food-insecure households was found among Indigenous Peoples at 30.7%. (See Appendix H for a detailed breakdown)

**Figure 18. Percentage of individuals living in food-insecure households by racial/ cultural identity & Indigenous status, 2021**



Data Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Income Survey (CIS) 2020.

<sup>4</sup><https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Household-Food-Insecurity-in-Canada-2021-PROOF.pdf> p. 28. See also appendix H, p 47 in the same document.

This is in large part due to the lower incomes among working people from these communities.<sup>5</sup> This research also highlights the inadequacy of levels of support for people who rely on government assistance. These results point to the need for proper systematic disaggregation of data according to socio-economic and demographic criteria to make evidence-based and strategically targeted policy responses attainable.

### *Sustainable agriculture*

In the case of sustainable agriculture, four indicators (soil health, water and air quality, and biodiversity) are used. These do not address the economic or social aspects of sustainability such as farmer livelihoods, local foods, agricultural resilience, or the politics of land use as it relates to colonialism and indigenous food sovereignty. In fact, the concept of food sovereignty is largely absent from federal government documentation, and with it, the notion of democratic control over local food systems or relevance to emerging discussions regarding Indigenous food systems.

### Food (in)security trends

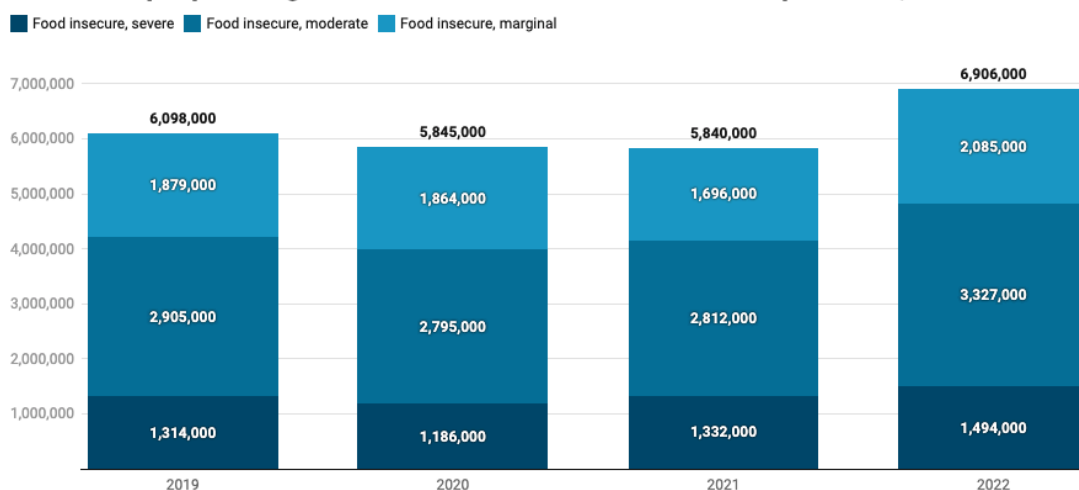
As mentioned above, one of the indicators for Canadian progress towards Goal 2—prevalence of food insecurity—is worsening, not improving. The number of food insecure households increased from 16% in 2020 to 18% in 2022<sup>6</sup>. Actual rates are even more elevated, as these figures do not include people living on First Nation reserves, people in some remote Northern areas, or unhoused people - groups at high risk of food insecurity. 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”. In 2022, 6.9 million people, including almost 1.8 million children, were living in food insecure households in Canada’s ten provinces, a considerable increase over previous years. Almost 1.5 million people met the criteria for being severely food insecure, a situation that is getting worse. It is now well established in the research that the primary driver of household food insecurity is lack of income.

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<sup>5</sup> “Families with a racialized major income earner (23%) reported higher food insecurity compared to families with a non-racialized, non-indigenous earner (16%). This was especially true for Black Canadians (38%). Families with an Indigenous major income earner living in the provinces and off reserve were almost twice as likely to report food insecurity (34%), compared to those with a non-Indigenous major income earner (18%).” <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2023001/article/00013-eng.htm#a1>

<sup>6</sup> [Food insecurity among Canadian families: Which families are the most vulnerable? \(Portable Document Format \(PDF\), 2.35MB\)](#)

## Number of people living in food-insecure households in the ten provinces, 2019-2022



Canadian Income Survey (CIS) 2018-2021. Data on food insecurity for CIS are collected in the year following the survey reference year. We've chosen to label the data using the year of data collection to better reflect the timing of experiences captured.

CIS 2021 data from the territories slated for release June 2023.

Chart: PROOF - Source: Statistics Canada Table 13-10-0834-01 - Get the data - Created with Datawrapper

### Recommendations from CFPAC Working Group

In January 2022 a Working Group of the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC) presented a detailed report and three recommendations on Reducing Food Insecurity to the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. The recommendations were:

- 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.

Achieving these recommendations would be an important starting point for reaching the more ambitious Sustainable Development Goal Two.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Record of proceedings, January 2022, at <https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/departement/initiatives/food-policy/advisory-council>

## Food movement research and convening

### *Sustainable Consumption for All Report*

FSCs [Sustainable Consumption for All](#) report surveyed diverse food movement leaders looking at barriers to the consumption of sustainable foods during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report highlighted the primary importance of sustainable food affordability, while underlining the significant impact of cultural and racial inequalities and the ongoing impact of colonialism and racism on Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour’s (BIPOC) right to food. While there were some issues with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) a majority of the food movement leaders surveyed felt that it helped to address food insecurity at the time, and that it showed that the federal government had the capacity to address the root causes of food insecurity. Because the experience of accessing food varies for different groups of people, it is vital that policy solutions for food insecurity be designed with an intersectional lens which prioritises traditionally disenfranchised voices, using processes which are culturally sensitive, democratic, and inclusive. Zero Hunger will not be achieved without such analytic and programmatic nuance. This also applies to SDG 1 (the elimination of poverty) as well as to other SDGs.

### *Civil society town hall on the renewal of the Food Policy for Canada*

In 2023 FSC brought together leaders from the food movement to contribute to the government’s reflection on the Food Policy for Canada, as the first tranche of associated funding from 2019 to 2024 was coming to an end. The topics addressed included Food Security. A background [Brief](#) was prepared and shared in advance of a well-attended civil society “Town Hall” where a breakout group was convened on the topic. Experts from the food movement partnered with FSC to support this work, including valuable advice from PROOF on the food security preparatory brief. The discussion and its [Recommendations](#) were written up and shared directly with the Secretariat of the Food Policy for Canada at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), and other decision-makers. These recommendations are reflected in the synthesis below.

## Insights from community-based case studies

### *Black Food Sovereignty work in Toronto*

*“Black Food Sovereignty is an approach and a process whereby Black people define and develop food and agriculture systems in the interests of their communities and to meet community needs in ways that are sustainable. Achieving Black Food Sovereignty is contingent on dismantling systemic barriers such as the acute shortage of land, diminished opportunity for Black leadership in food and agriculture, and lack of access to infrastructure and capital.”*



Food Secure Canada offered support to the Black Food Sovereignty Working Group (BFSWG) which produced the report [Food Sovereignty for Black Communities in Toronto: Challenges and Policy Opportunities](#) (2023). Regular community convenings since 2020 informed this action-oriented publication.

The report begins with the disproportionate food insecurity experienced by Black households. In 2018, Black families in Canada were 3.5 times more likely to be food insecure than white families, and over one-third of Black children lived in food insecure households. This chronically insecure access to food illustrates how systemic inequality undermines Black Canadians' health and wellbeing. Inequitable access to food and other inequities in health and wellbeing are the result of generations of racism, discrimination, and inequality. Achieving Black Food Sovereignty entails removing the systemic barriers that affect Black people's ability to produce and access food, and instituting policies and programs that support and strengthen access to food of appropriate quality and quantity.

In addition, Black people face barriers in accessing quality land, farming and related activities, and they are under-represented in the leadership of organisations working on food and agriculture. While Black communities throughout Canada experience chronic food insecurity, there is a lack of disaggregated data on farming and land ownership even though the coerced labour of Black farm workers has subsidised the production and consumption of food in our country for the past fifty years.

Nonetheless, inspiring new initiatives such as the [Black Food Sovereignty plan for the City of Toronto](#) have paved the way for more B3 (Black-led, Black-serving, Black-mandated) stewardship. Community leadership, sustained advocacy, and strong Black-led networks will be required to ensure that the promise of Black food sovereignty is met, and delivers more equitable access to food, better realisation of the right to food, more control over food production and consumption, and helps to dismantle the structures of racism built over generations.

### **Synthesis of community recommendations on Black food sovereignty**

#### For Food Movements

- Ensure that the most food-insecure Black communities have leadership roles in organisations that work to address this.
- Work to dismantle structural and systemic barriers to Black Food Sovereignty in policy work and grassroots organising.
- Advocate for and hire full-time staff to work on the priorities identified by Black communities.

#### For Government

- Address poverty and other social determinants of health in Black communities which have resulted in disproportionately higher levels of food insecurity.
- Undertake research with Black farmers in order to understand the challenges, potential, and the policy directions for promoting and supporting access to land and other infrastructure for sustainable agriculture.
- Develop policies to enhance access to land, sustainable farming and food processing, infrastructure, and distribution that directly benefits Black communities such as Black food centres with long-term economic viability, not constrained by the priorities of mainstream food retailing.
- Invest in and support Black Food Ecosystems and employment where Black Canadians can be drivers of their own development, as has been done in Toronto with the Black Food Sovereignty Action Plan.

#### *Local Communities in Francophone Canada*

*“Decolonizing our understanding of food promotes a political posture where cultural knowledge as well as food and agricultural practices held and applied by Indigenous, racialized, and immigrant communities are perceived as a rich heritage for the community in all its diversity.”*

Food Secure Canada commissioned two scholar-activists from Quebec to report on [Access to Local Food in Francophone Canada: Antiracist and Decolonial Perspectives](#) (2021). Local food has a particular resonance in Quebec, and the debate is somewhat distinct from that which takes place in other parts of the country. The notions of food sovereignty and food autonomy or self-sufficiency have been more prominent, including in the provincial government’s discourse, and especially during the pandemic. *[There are several government initiatives regarding local food access, such as the Politique bioalimentaire and the Stratégie nationale d’achat d’aliments québécois (SNAAQ) which aims to increase local food supply in public institutions.]* This study aimed to understand how interest and pride in local food culture impacts equitable access for racialized, Indigenous, and low-income or marginalised communities, not only in Quebec, but also in other francophone communities.

Despite some isolated initiatives, recognition of systemic racism, and a commitment to anti-racism and de-colonial perspectives, are lacking in the Quebec

government's food policies. Decolonial perspectives would work to maintain Indigenous nations' relationship to the land, supporting Indigenous efforts to shape healthy and culturally appropriate food systems, and the ongoing involvement of Indigenous peoples over their food systems and broader policies. Support for these kinds of policies have been compromised by effects in the global food system: the COVID 19 pandemic which disproportionately affected vulnerable populations; inflationary pressures on the cost of food; as well as declining working conditions in sectors of the economy employing women (public sector, food services).

A number of specific projects are surveyed in the paper which lend themselves to incorporating the kind of anti-racist and decolonial approach that is promoted. These include: the Bordeaux-Cartierville Food Systems Project; Marché du Château in Chateauguay; Food'elles; Intégration Nutrition; Jardin Lakou; Jardin d'Edem; Jardins Épicés; and L'environnement, c'est intersectionnel. Building upon the lessons from these initiatives and working to scale or replicate them is one avenue for centering anti-racist and anti-colonial initiatives in our efforts for more sustainable, local food systems.

### **Recommendations from the Francophone Canada report**

- “Determine a shared vision of sustainable food and shared objectives, including antiracism, eco-feminism and food justice. FSC commits its members and partners to mobilize for the recognition of a systemic perspective to a decolonial approach and to antiracism regarding issues of sustainable food.
- Decompartmentalize the domain of food to understand and discover, using the Canadian Food Guide, the reasons why certain food products from Indigenous, Black, racialized and immigrant communities are not valued.
- Support a Francophone and Québec Forum on the intersections of the needs and aspirations of racialized, First Nations and Inuit communities relating to their food needs.
- Encourage research and initiatives relating to food justice.
- Provide concrete resources on inclusivity principles to different actors in the food sector who work with diverse communities. Sustainable initiatives contribute to implementing structures that help collaboration from and the inclusion of different stakeholders.
- Facilitate access for all, including racialized and Indigenous populations, to sustainable food by supporting new collective, local and equitable initiatives:
  - Develop agricultural and collective cooking workshops and initiatives using a popular education approach:

- Support and consolidate local initiatives led by and for racialized and Indigenous populations with a discourse that supports healthy food habits within athletic, educational and environmental spaces.
- Encourage philanthropic support and funding practices that prioritize initiatives developed by Indigenous, Black, racialized and immigrant community members.”

## Synthesis of Policy Recommendations

On the basis of this context, research, processes and community insights, overall policy recommendations have been synthesised below. They are addressed to FSC and food movements, and to the government, with a primary emphasis on the federal level.

### *For Food Secure Canada and Food Movements*

1. Continue to prioritise and foster discussions related to food sovereignty with an intersectional lens so that a more nuanced understanding of policy options can be developed and advocated.
2. Advocate for systemic solutions that address root causes of food insecurity – such as lack of income, discrimination, racism, colonisation, systemic failures – and contribute to discussions on long-term policy solutions as opposed to emergency aid or reliance on charitable solutions.
3. Help to ensure that civil society voices act in the public interest and ensure credibility is not compromised by corporate interests or limited definitions of key concepts such as “sustainability” or “food security”, notably by working with, and advocating for, a human rights framework, including the right to food.
4. Bring a food systems lens to work on food “affordability”, highlighting income-based solutions, challenging corporate control and greedflation in industrial food systems, and supporting (w)holistic and distinct approaches to food provisioning.

## *Government Policy*

### *Core socio-economic policy measures*

1. Set a target of *at least* 50% reduction for household food insecurity, and eliminate severe food insecurity by 2030 (as recommended by the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council) and align progress with the commitment to fully meet Zero Hunger: SDG 2.

2. Address the disproportionate impact of food insecurity on Black and Indigenous Peoples, and other affected communities.
3. Tackle household food insecurity in alignment with the Poverty Reduction Strategy to meet No Poverty: SDG 1, and address the tensions between housing costs, food costs, and other basic needs.
4. Establish a universal livable income floor beneath which no one can fall. This can and should be achieved by increasing and expanding diverse (federal, provincial, and territorial) government income supports and tax credits, implementing a mandated livable minimum wage, and providing subsidies for necessities of life (e.g., rent), complemented by well-designed basic income schemes with social safeguards and public review.
5. Establish the reduction by *at least* 50% of household food insecurity, and the elimination of severe food insecurity by 2030 as policy objectives for federal income supports for low-income households (e.g. Canada Child Benefit, Canada Workers Benefit, Employment Insurance) and as a central consideration for the design of these supports.
6. Monitor food affordability and support innovative strategies to prohibit monopoly pricing, strengthen (w)holistic approaches to food provisioning and embedded food markets, and assist low-income groups who are most vulnerable to food inflation.

#### *Additional Strategies and Reflections*

7. Consider the intersectionality of food security and adopt a rights-based approach, working towards food justice. Reverse the trend of rising food insecurity amongst vulnerable groups in Canada in keeping with our commitment to progressively realise the right to food under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
8. Work towards a whole-of-government approach and build upon existing relationships established between AAFC, ESDC, Health Canada, and others through the development of the Food Policy for Canada.
9. While older adults/seniors and Elders generally benefit from a form of universal income support, it is important to recognize that other demographic/socio-economic factors influence their food insecurity, such as physical mobility, immigration status, connection to community, and gender. This reinforces the need for careful management and evaluation of programs with an intersectional lens.
10. Support and fund programs to enhance Black and Indigenous food sovereignty, including leadership, land access and stewardship. Ensure that government policies help dismantle systemic barriers to more equitable and democratic control over food for communities who have been traditionally disenfranchised.

11. Examine and clarify the relationship between household food (in)security and community food security in order to have more consistency in policy documents and discussions.<sup>8</sup>

Food Secure Canada warmly thanks the partners, researchers, scholar activists and community leaders who contributed to the work that resulted in these recommendations.

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<sup>8</sup> The civil society Town Hall integrated longstanding reflections on the need to separate and clarify the concepts of food security and food insecurity, the emphasis on households in data collection while the food movement also emphasises community food security, and the relevance of the six dimensional framework for food security as used by the [High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security](#).