

How Will We Shop?

Shrinkflation, skimpflation and affordability challenges in the food system

Final Report to the Office of Consumer Affairs

November 2023 - March 2025

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Executive Summary

Canadian consumers are increasingly experiencing shrinkflation (reducing product quantities while maintaining prices) and skimpflation (reducing ingredient quality without price reductions). The Office of Consumer Affairs asked Food Secure Canada to examine these practices and their impact on consumer protection and food affordability.

Over 16 months, Food Secure Canada's "How Will We Shop?" project has catalyzed a coast-to-coast conversation about food justice and affordability through comprehensive stakeholder engagement involving over 1,000 participants. Grounded in three strategic pillars—addressing poverty as the root cause of food insecurity, reining in corporate profiteering, and investing in (w)holistic approaches—our work has demonstrated that addressing food affordability requires addressing root issues such as high corporate concentration in the food system and insufficient incomes leading to a cost of living crisis.

The project has revealed that Canadians are ready for transformative approaches to food provisioning that move beyond corporate grocery monopolies toward (w)holistic, community-supported models including public grocery stores, cooperatives, Indigenous foodways, and solidarity grocery stores.

Key Achievements:

- Increased understanding of **shrinkflation and skimpflation** amongst our partners and the public, highlighting these deceptive pricing practices as key consumer protection issues
- Engaged over **1,000 participants** across five webinars and our flagship convening
- Built partnerships with **25+ organizations** spanning Indigenous communities, Black food sovereignty groups, research institutes, cooperative networks, and policy advocates
- Generated **1,629+ YouTube views** and reached **5,759 newsletter subscribers**
- Hosted Canada's largest food systems convening since 2018 with **240 participants**
- Influenced policy discourse through strategic advocacy and direct engagement with MPs
- Produced **18 blog articles** and **3 major op-eds** that shifted narrative from individual choice to systemic transformation
- Established lasting research collaborations with academic institutions across the country



A Note from our Co-Executive Directors

Thank you for supporting Food Secure Canada's "How Will We Shop?" project. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to have undertaken this transformative work.

Food Secure Canada has been working to make food a political priority since its beginnings two decades ago. And now, with food prices skyrocketing, food insecurity worse than it has ever been, and unprecedented public activism and engagement, it is at the top of everyone's mind. This is a decisive time for food activists, organizers, workers, and educators.

Over these 16 months, we have been reminded again and again that we cannot address our challenges in silos. We need to come together and solve our problems through a whole-of-food-systems lens. This project has shown us the power of bringing people together—from our webinars that connected hundreds across the country to our convening that brought 240 people together for the first time since 2018. These were rich and vibrant experiences that reminded us why our work matters.

The communities we have worked with—Indigenous food sovereignty leaders, Black food justice organizers, leaders in the cooperative & farmers market movements, migrant farm workers, and policy advocates—have taught us that the solutions to our food affordability crisis already exist. They just need government support that recognizes food as a human right rather than a commodity. We hope this report helps chart that path forward.

This report represents 16 months of collaborative work with communities across Canada. We honor all those who shared their time, wisdom, and vision for food justice. Together, we can create food systems that nourish both people and the planet.

Our warmest gratitude for your partnership in this essential work.

Marissa Alexander & Wade Thorhaug
Co-Executive Directors



Introduction: A Food Systems Approach to Affordability

Canada is confronting an unprecedented crisis in food affordability that demands urgent, systemic intervention. According to Statistics Canada, food prices have increased by an astounding 25% from 2020 to 2024—double the rate of other goods—while 8.7 million Canadians experience food insecurity.¹ These are the highest recorded rates since Canada began monitoring, representing not just individual hardship but a fundamental breakdown in our food systems' abilities to nourish our communities.

The pattern of hunger starkly reflects Canada's ongoing colonialism and structural racism², with Statistics Canada documenting astounding food insecurity rates among Black (40.4%), Indigenous (36.8%) and Latin American (31.1%) households.³ These figures do not include people living on First Nation reserves, in remote Northern areas, and unhoused people—groups at even higher risk of food insecurity. This is not a crisis of a lack of food but of access—people's incomes are too low to meet living costs.

A food systems approach also reveals that raising incomes alone cannot fix our food system. Reports by the Competition Bureau and an all-party parliamentary committee found that Canada's three largest grocers—Loblaws, Sobeys, and Metro—collectively earned \$3.6 billion in profits in 2022, with profits increasing by 46% since the pandemic. Meanwhile, these corporations have employed tactics like shrinkflation (cutting quantities while maintaining prices) and skimpflation (reducing ingredient quality) to maintain profit margins during a cost-of-living crisis. With just five corporations controlling over 80% of Canada's grocery market, consumers face market concentration that requires policy intervention to ensure fair competition and consumer protection.⁴

Food Secure Canada's "How Will We Shop?" project emerged at this critical moment to address shrinkflation, skimpflation, and other practices negatively impacting consumers while exploring options for strengthening alternative food marketing systems. Our project placed particular emphasis on shrinkflation and skimpflation as emblematic of broader market concentration issues. These practices have become increasingly prevalent during the cost-of-living crisis,

¹ PROOF, 2024. "New data on household food insecurity in 2023"

<https://proof.utoronto.ca/2024/new-data-on-household-food-insecurity-in-2023/>

² Structural racism refers to systemic barriers to racialized communities such as: higher unemployment rates, lower average employment incomes, discriminatory housing practices that concentrate poverty in certain neighborhoods, and lack of community food security due to unavailability of adequate and culturally appropriate food sources.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Competition Bureau, 2023. "Canada Needs More Grocery Competition: Competition Bureau Retail Grocery Market Study Report".

<https://competition-bureau.canada.ca/en/how-we-foster-competition/education-and-outreach/canada-needs-more-grocery-competition>

representing a form of stealth inflation that is particularly difficult for consumers to detect and track.

The goal was to contribute to legislative and policy paths ensuring the consumer public is well-informed and effectively engaged with their food systems, aware of their rights and alternatives available to them, and conscious of the roles and responsibilities of government, industry, and civil society in creating fairer, healthier, and more sustainable food environments.

The Three Pillars Framework

Our project approached this crisis through three interconnected pillars that address root causes rather than symptoms:

Pillar One: Address Poverty as the Root Cause

The primary reason people cannot access sufficient, healthy, and culturally-appropriate food is insufficient income, not individual food choices. With nearly 1 in 4 Canadians living in food-insecure households, our research confirmed that food affordability cannot be separated from broader issues of income inequality and structural racism. This pillar focused on policy solutions including a guaranteed livable basic income, comprehensive employment insurance reform, and targeted supports for communities facing the highest food insecurity rates.

Pillar Two: Rein in Corporate Profiteering

What are the underlying causes of practices such as skimpflation and shrinkflation during inflationary periods? This pillar focused on how market concentration has created conditions where a small number of companies dominate retail, suppliers, cooperatives, and farmers while driving up prices for consumers and engaging in practices of price gouging. Our research demonstrated the need for transparent labeling requirements, fines for anti-consumer behavior such as mislabeling, mandatory grocery codes of conduct, competition policy reform, oversight of excess profits, and creating regulatory space for diverse food retail models to operate alongside existing retailers.

Pillar Three: Invest in (W)holistic Approaches

Just as the government has recognized that the housing crisis needs to be addressed with non-market solutions, our food systems benefit from similar policy intervention. Rather than attracting more foreign multinationals, Canada must support the (w)holistic food systems that already exist and are demonstrating success. From Arctic Co-op's stable pricing during inflation to Indigenous initiatives that strengthen both food access and cultural sovereignty, this pillar showcased alternatives including solidarity grocery stores, cooperatives, public markets, and Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives. These models prioritize community needs over shareholder profits while building long-term food system resilience. The (w)holistic approach encompasses justice, resilience, ecological sustainability, and economic dimensions, recognizing that true affordability cannot be separated from broader community wellbeing.

These three pillars work in tandem to address the food affordability crisis comprehensively. Without sufficient income, people cannot access food regardless of retail competition; without market oversight, concentrated corporate power undermines both consumer welfare and alternative food models; and without investment in diverse food systems, communities remain dependent on a small number of large retailers. Together, these pillars create a framework for food system transformation that recognizes affordability as interconnected with income security, fair market competition, and community resilience.



Project Evaluation

Effectiveness of Communication Strategies

Our communication approach successfully shifted the narrative from individual consumer choice to systemic food systems transformation. By grounding our messaging in lived experiences and centering marginalized voices, we achieved our core objective of advancing a food systems lens on affordability and equity.

Strategic Approach Validation:

- **(W)holistic Framework:** Our "(w)holistic" messaging resonated across diverse audiences, demonstrating that we cannot address affordability concerns without looking at the whole picture, and considering holistic solutions
- **Community-Centered Content:** Featuring Indigenous food sovereignty leaders, Black community organizers, and cooperative pioneers created strong connections that advanced advocacy goals
- **Multi-Platform Dissemination:** Our bilingual approach across digital platforms, traditional media, and in-person gatherings effectively reached diverse stakeholder groups

Achievement Assessment:

Objective 1 - Raise Awareness: Successfully elevated understanding of shrinkflation, skimflation, and corporate concentration through targeted educational content

Objective 2 - Build Coalitions: Established lasting partnerships across the food movement, evidenced by our Program Advisory Committee and continued collaborative initiatives like our Provincial and Territorial Network

Objective 3 - Influence Policy: Achieved direct parliamentary engagement and contributed to all-party committee recommendations on food price volatility

Objective 4 - Amplify Alternatives: Showcased cooperative models, solidarity grocers, and Indigenous foodways as viable (w)holistic alternatives to corporate retail dominance

Comprehensive Project Evaluation

The 16-month timeline allowed for organic relationship building and authentic community engagement that would not have been possible in a shorter timeframe. Our iterative approach—adjusting timelines to maximize impact rather than adhering rigidly to original schedules—ultimately strengthened project outcomes. This was particularly evident in our decision to move the flagship convening from summer to November 2024, which allowed for deeper relationship building, more comprehensive programming, and increased accessibility for farmers, harvesters, and those who are on the land during the summer months.

The project succeeded in building authentic partnerships with Indigenous communities and marginalized groups by centering their voices rather than tokenizing their participation. Our policy impact extended beyond our initial expectations, with direct influence on parliamentary discourse. Most importantly, we created lasting networks that continue beyond project completion, evidenced by ongoing collaborations between organizations that first connected through our convenings.

As part of our mandate to focus on shrinkflation and skimpflation, we quickly discovered that these issues resonate strongly with the public. Through our scoping research, public messaging, and community engagement, we found that consumers are experiencing these practices firsthand but often lack the tools to identify or respond to them effectively. Our analysis revealed a strong need for accurate and transparent labeling requirements and regulations to address anti-consumer practices. However, our stakeholder conversations consistently highlighted that while regulatory responses are necessary, there is also significant interest in understanding and addressing root causes. Participants emphasized that the market concentration creates conditions where these practices can persist with limited consumer recourse or competitive pressure.

Our reflections reveal important areas for growth. Earlier completion of the snapshot report would have provided a stronger foundation for subsequent activities, and we recognize the need for more targeted outreach to rural communities to broaden geographic representation. Additionally, despite our bilingual approach, we could have done more to engage francophone Quebec communities beyond Montreal. Participant feedback also highlighted the need for greater accessibility support, including further funding for Indigenous and BIPOC participation, and more robust accommodation for dietary restrictions, people with disabilities, and interpretation services.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Metrics

Digital Engagement Metrics

Website Traffic & Content Performance:

- Blog articles published: **12 (English) + 6 (French)**
- YouTube channel views: **1,629+ total views** across all OCA webinars
- Top performing content: "Greedflation" webinar (**527 views**)

Newsletter Growth:

- Starting subscribers (Q1 2024): ~4,000
- Final subscribers (Q4 2024): **5,759** (44% growth)
- Bilingual reach: **4,947 English + 812 French subscribers**

Social Media Engagement:

- Instagram: **2,676 followers** with consistent 20-80 likes per post
- LinkedIn: **2,800 followers**
- Facebook: **12,000 followers**
- Twitter: **2,231 followers**
- Cross-platform reach: **~20,000 total followers**
- Educational content on shrinkflation and skimpflation gained wide traction and interest

Event Participation & Community Building

Webinar Series Success:

1. **Agroecology in Canada**: 104 live participants, 158 recording views
2. **Public Markets**: 27 live participants, 161 recording views
3. **Greedflation**: 203 live participants, 575 recording views
4. **Solidarity Grocery Stores & Co-ops**: 223 live participants, 363 recording views
5. **Indigenous Foodways**: 250 live participants, 297 recording views

Total webinar engagement: 807 live participants + 1,554+ subsequent views

Flagship Convening 2024 in Montreal:

- **240 in-person participants** from coast-to-coast-to-coast
- **25+ partner organizations** actively involved
- **15 expert speakers** representing diverse communities and expertise
- **35+ volunteers** supporting event delivery

Partnership & Network Development

Our approach to partnership development prioritized authentic relationship building. We established meaningful connections with academic institutions including Dalhousie University, Queen's University, and the University of Toronto, creating research partnerships that extended beyond our project timeline. Our work with Indigenous organizations, particularly Tkà:nios, the Kahnawà:ke community, and Tea Creek Farm, exemplified our commitment to supporting Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives led by Indigenous peoples themselves.

The relationships we built with Black food sovereignty groups, including the Afri-Can FoodBasket and African Nova Scotian Food Sovereignty networks, were grounded in addressing the stark reality that 40.4% of Black households experience food insecurity. Our collaborative work with cooperatives such as Freedom Dreams and Karma Co-op demonstrated viable alternatives to corporate retail dominance that already exist across Canada.

Our Provincial/Territorial Network engagement through quarterly meetings strengthened connections with umbrella organizations across all provinces and territories, creating a foundation for ongoing collaboration that extends far beyond our project scope. These relationships were essential to our policy influence work, particularly our partnerships with organizations like PROOF and the Coalition for Healthy School Food.

We also worked closely with Equiterre and Option Consommateur, two organizations also tasked with engaging on the issue of shrinkflation and skimpflation, by holding regular meetings and sharing lessons learned about our campaigns.

Media Coverage & Thought Leadership

Our strategic approach to media relations focused on positioning Food Secure Canada as a credible voice on food system transformation. Through targeted op-ed placements in the Hill Times and National Observer, we succeeded in influencing policy discourse beyond traditional food advocacy circles. Our blog content strategy produced 18 comprehensive articles across both official languages, ensuring our research reached diverse audiences across Canada.

Our policy influence work achieved concrete results, including direct input to the House Agriculture and Agri-Food Committee and testimony that informed parliamentary recommendations. The "Question Period" event at our convening demonstrated the power of direct democracy, with MPs Yves Perron and candidate Nimâ Machouf making concrete commitments to reduce food insecurity by 50% and eliminate severe food insecurity by 2030.

Stakeholder & Participant Feedback

Participant feedback from Convening 2024 revealed the transformative power of in-person gatherings after years of virtual events. With a response rate of 67% (n=161), participants expressed overwhelmingly positive feedback, with 78% rating the experience as excellent and 19% as good. The feedback highlighted the importance of authentic representation of marginalized communities, with participants particularly valuing the centering of Indigenous and Black voices throughout the programming.

The most valued aspects of the convening included the practical solutions focus rather than academic theorizing, networking opportunities with like-minded organizations, and the innovative Question Period with MPs that demonstrated real political engagement. However, feedback also revealed important areas for improvement, including the need for better financial support for Indigenous and BIPOC participation, more comprehensive dietary accommodations, and enhanced accessibility features.

Comment cards from participants revealed both appreciation and constructive criticism. Many expressed gratitude for creating space for essential conversations, with one participant noting it was "the best convention I've attended, so much learning and discussions on essential topics." Others highlighted specific areas for growth, including the need for more local francophone presenters, better accessibility supports, and more diverse audience representation. Some participants also raised important concerns about political representation, particularly regarding the inclusion of MPs who support policies they view as contradictory to food justice principles.

Community feedback through our webinar series demonstrated remarkable geographic reach across all provinces and territories, spanning farmers (23%), non-profit workers (31%), academics (18%), public servants (12%), and the general public (16%).

Stakeholder Advisory Input

Our Program Advisory Committee provided ongoing feedback that shaped project direction throughout the 16-month timeline. Indigenous partners consistently emphasized the importance of land-based learning and sovereignty approaches rather than charity-based models for addressing food access. Their guidance was instrumental in ensuring our convening began on the traditional lands of Kahnawà:ke with authentic ceremony and land-based teachings rather than superficial acknowledgments.

Academic collaborators highlighted the strength of our community-engaged research methods and praised our commitment to accessible knowledge translation. They confirmed that our approach of centering community expertise rather than extractive research practices created more meaningful and actionable findings. Policy organizations, particularly those working on parliamentary advocacy, confirmed the project's influence on federal discourse and its contribution to building political will for substantive food system reform.

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The feedback from Black food sovereignty leaders was particularly important in helping us understand how to create safer spaces for marginalized communities. Their input guided our programming decisions and helped us recognize where we still need to improve representation and accessibility, particularly in ensuring adequate financial support for BIPOC participation in future events.



Communications Report

Content Strategy & Execution

Our communication strategy successfully balanced accessibility with analytical rigor, making complex food system issues understandable to diverse audiences while maintaining credibility with policy makers and academic partners. We grounded our messaging in lived experiences and centered marginalized voices, which proved essential to shifting discourse from individual consumer choice to systemic food system transformation.

The development of our "(w)holistic" messaging framework resonated across diverse audiences by demonstrating that affordability cannot be separated from justice, sustainability, and equity concerns. Our content strategy was built on four pillars:

Content Pillars:

1. **Educational Content:** Informative articles on greedflation, skimflation, and corporate concentration
2. **Solution Showcasing:** Highlighting cooperative models, solidarity grocers, and Indigenous foodways
3. **Policy Analysis:** Critical examination of government responses and budget allocations
4. **Community Amplification:** Centering voices of those most impacted by food insecurity

Our bilingual approach ensured meaningful engagement with francophone communities, though participant feedback revealed opportunities to better integrate local Quebec voices and increase French-language programming. The multimedia approach, combining long-form articles with visual storytelling and video content, successfully reached audiences across different learning preferences and digital literacy levels.

Platform-Specific Achievements

Blog & Long-Form Content:

- **18 comprehensive articles** (12 English, 6 French) published on FSC website
- **3 major op-eds** placed in Hill Times and National Observer
- **Bilingual accessibility** ensuring francophone audience engagement
- **Policy analysis pieces** that directly influenced parliamentary discourse
- **Community spotlight articles** amplifying grassroots solutions

Our blog and long-form content strategy served as the foundation for broader media engagement and policy influence work. The bilingual accessibility approach ensured

francophone audience engagement, though feedback revealed opportunities for more localized Quebec content.

Social Media Strategy:

- **Consistent messaging** across Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter
- **Visual storytelling** through speaker spotlights and infographic content
- **Real-time engagement** during webinars and convening events
- **Community building** through hashtag campaigns and cross-promotion with partners
- **Bilingual content creation** of all materials
- **Cross-platform reach**: ~20,000 total followers

Our social media strategy maintained consistent messaging while adapting content formats to each platform's strengths. Visual storytelling through speaker spotlights and infographic content proved particularly effective at making complex food system analysis accessible to broader audiences. Real-time engagement during webinars and convening events created community dialogue that extended beyond formal programming.

Video Content & Knowledge Sharing:

- **5 webinar recordings** hosted on YouTube with ongoing viewership
- **Speaker spotlight videos** amplifying diverse voices
- **Convening 2024 documentary** capturing key moments and insights
- **Educational content** making complex policy accessible to broad audiences

Video content and knowledge sharing through our webinar recordings created lasting educational resources with ongoing viewership. Speaker spotlight videos successfully amplified diverse voices beyond our immediate networks, while our Convening 2024 documentary captured key moments and insights for future reference and organizing.

Media Relations & Earned Coverage

Our strategic media engagement focused on proactive op-ed placement in key policy publications, positioning FSC leaders as thought leaders on food affordability issues. Through expert commentary and partnership amplification that leveraged partner networks for broader reach, we successfully gained traction for our core messages about the need for systemic change rather than market-based solutions.

Key Publications:

- **Hill Times**: "Budget 2024: A missed opportunity to address food affordability" (May 2024)
- **Hill Times**: "MPs unite against greedflation and monopoly power in Canada's food systems" (July 2024)

- **National Observer:** "An oligopoly is driving up grocery prices. What can we do?" (May 2024)
- **Food Secure Canada blog:** Zero-profit food grocery stores op-ed (September 2024)

Newsletter & Direct Communication

Newsletter Growth & Engagement:

- **Starting subscribers** (Q1 2024): ~4,000
- **Final subscribers** (Q4 2024): **5,759** (44% growth)
- **Language distribution:** 4,947 English + 812 French subscribers
- **Content strategy:** Project updates, policy analysis, event promotion, and community spotlights
- **Engagement metrics:** Consistent open rates above sector averages

Direct Stakeholder Communication:

- **Bi-weekly project team meetings** ensuring internal alignment
- **Quarterly Provincial/Territorial Network meetings** maintaining national connections
- **Regular partner consultations** with Équiterre, Option Consommateurs, and research collaborators
- **Government engagement** through formal reports and informal briefings

Event Communications & Promotion

Webinar Promotion Strategy:

- **Multi-platform campaigns** 2-3 weeks before each event
- **Speaker spotlight content** building audience connection
- **Educational teasers** providing context for complex topics
- **Partner network amplification** leveraging organizational reach
- **Bilingual promotional materials** ensuring accessibility

Convening 2024 Campaign:

- **3-month promotional campaign** building anticipation and community buy-in
- **Speaker announcement series** highlighting diverse voices and expertise
- **Registration milestone celebrations** acknowledging community response
- **Real-time documentation** through social media during the event
- **Post-event amplification** sharing key insights and maintaining momentum

Translation & Accessibility

Our commitment to language accessibility extended beyond basic translation to ensure cultural appropriateness and meaningful engagement with francophone communities. All major content was produced in both official languages, with professional translation that captured cultural nuances rather than just linguistic accuracy. Visual materials were designed for accessibility across literacy levels, recognizing that food system information must be accessible to the communities most impacted by food insecurity.

Accessibility Measures:

- **Professional translation services** for all major content
- **Visual accessibility design** for diverse literacy levels
- **Multiple format options** (text, video, infographic, audio)
- **Community-specific outreach** through established cultural networks
- **Interpretation services** at events (though feedback indicated need for enhancement)

Community-specific outreach involved targeted engagement with Indigenous communities in culturally appropriate contexts, collaboration with Black food sovereignty organizations using community-preferred communication channels, and rural and remote community engagement through established partner networks. However, participant feedback revealed the need for enhanced interpretation services at events and more comprehensive accessibility supports overall.

Evaluation Metrics & KPIs

Digital Engagement:

- **Website traffic:** Increased project-related page views by 150%
- **YouTube views:** 1,629+ total across all OCA webinars
- **Social media reach:** ~20,000 followers across platforms
- **Newsletter growth:** 44% increase in subscribers
- **Blog article performance:** 18 articles with sustained readership

Community Engagement:

- **Webinar participation:** 807 live participants across 5 events
- **Convening attendance:** 240 in-person participants
- **Geographic representation:** All provinces and territories engaged
- **Demographic diversity:** 15% Indigenous, 28% racialized communities, 34% rural
- **Partnership development:** 25+ organizational collaborations established

Media & Policy Impact:

- **Op-ed placements:** 3 major pieces in key policy publications
- **Parliamentary influence:** Direct input to all-party committee recommendations

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- **Government engagement:** Regular briefings with Office of Consumer Affairs
- **Policy commitments:** Concrete political commitments from MPs on food insecurity targets



Recommendations for Government

Through our comprehensive research, community engagement, and the ten key policy ingredients for food sovereignty outlined in Food Secure Canada's platform, we present the following recommendations to the Office of Consumer Affairs and broader government. These recommendations are grounded in the voices of over 1,000 participants in our programming and reflect the urgent need for systemic transformation of Canada's food system.

Immediate Actions Required

1. Address the Root Cause: Poverty

The primary driver of food insecurity and unaffordability of food is insufficient income, not individual food choices. Government must commit to measurable targets including reducing overall food insecurity by 50% and eliminating severe food insecurity by 2030, using a racial equity lens to address the fact that Black and Indigenous households experience 40.4% food insecurity rates. This requires implementing comprehensive income supports through working-age supplements, enhanced disability benefits, and Employment Insurance reform. As our convening participants emphasized, a guaranteed livable basic income is essential to ensure everyone can afford the basics, which can be achieved by expanding existing benefits programs and, for example, developing a new Groceries and Essentials Benefit.

2. Address Market Concentration and Corporate Practices

With just five corporations controlling over 80% of Canada's grocery market and earning \$3.6 billion in collective profits in 2022 alone, policy intervention is needed to ensure fair competition and consumer protection. The government should make grocery codes of conduct mandatory with clear enforcement mechanisms, implement windfall taxation of excess profits during crisis periods to fund food system alternatives, and strengthen competition policy to prevent further market concentration. Our research demonstrates that creating space for diverse retail models will benefit both independent retailers and consumers. Additionally, regulation of shrinkflation and skimpflation practices through enhanced labeling requirements will protect consumers from misleading pricing tactics.

Specific Measures to Address Shrinkflation and Skimpflation. Our engagement revealed that current labeling requirements are insufficient to help consumers make informed purchasing decisions when faced with these practices. Government should implement enhanced labeling regulations that require clear disclosure when product sizes, quantities, or ingredient quality change. This includes enforced fines and penalties for misleading packaging that obscures size reductions, as well as mislabeling origin of the product. Regulatory frameworks should also establish clear definitions of deceptive pricing practices and provide enforcement mechanisms that protect consumers from stealth price increases.

3. Invest in (W)holistic Approaches

Rather than inviting more multinationals into Canada, the government should support (w)holistic alternatives that already exist. This includes federal loan programs for cooperative development modeled after Quebec's successful initiatives, funding for Indigenous food sovereignty programs that prioritize land-based learning and cultural reclamation, and investment in public markets, solidarity grocers, and other community-controlled food retail models. This can also be done through expanding and funding infrastructure for local food hubs, which are publicly run distribution centers, warehouses, and educational centers that can support local food procurement by consumers and public institutions.

Medium-Term Structural Changes

4. Expand and Universalize School Food Programs

Building on the National School Food Program included in Budget 2024, the government must expand this initiative to create a universal program embedded in legislation that provides all children with healthy, culturally relevant meals every school day while sourcing from local food systems. As Coalition for Healthy School Food advocates demonstrated at our convening, school food programs represent one of the largest and most accessible food system transformation levers because they involve local employment, farming, and economies while improving family budgets and child health.

5. Build Food System Resilience Through Trade Policy

With Canada importing over half its food while exporting over half its food production, our food system remains vulnerable to geopolitical and climate shocks. The government must build resilience by expanding supply management systems, improving food labeling so Canadians know where food comes from, and increasing supports for local markets. This approach will protect farmers, fishers, and domestic markets while reducing dependence on volatile global supply chains that leave consumers vulnerable to price manipulation.

6. Strengthen Local and Regional Food Systems

The government must prioritize local food procurement in government institutions, support agroecological transitions for small and medium farmers, invest in food processing infrastructure that serves regional rather than global markets, and remove barriers preventing cooperatives and social enterprises from accessing corporate-dominated supply chains. A coordinated, cabinet-level food policy approach is necessary to create coherence across health, environment, and agriculture departments while strategic investments through the Food Policy for Canada can simultaneously strengthen supply and demand in support of resilient local markets.

7. Reform Northern Food Programs and Address Geographic Inequities

The Nutrition North program requires comprehensive overhaul to ensure subsidies actually reach consumers rather than corporate profits. While more than two-thirds of households in the North experience food insecurity, only 67 cents of each subsidy dollar reduces prices. The

government can support Indigenous-run food programs in remote communities and break up retail monopolies in Northern communities through cooperative development funding, while investing in programs that strengthen food sovereignty through locally hunted and harvested food.

Long-Term Vision: Just and Sustainable Food Systems

8. Advance Food as a Human Right

Government must enshrine the right to food in federal legislation, align all food policies with human rights obligations, and create accountability mechanisms for measuring progress on food security targets.

9. Support Decent Work Throughout the Food Chain

From farmers to grocery store workers to migrant agricultural laborers, our food system depends on workers who face exploitation and poverty wages. Government must reform labor laws to ensure decent work for all, provide permanent resident status for migrant farmers and factory workers, and recognize food production as work deserving respect and fair wages. This includes addressing the structural inequities that force many farmers into debt while corporate profits soar.

10. Prepare for Climate Impacts

Climate change is already disrupting food production across Canada, requiring immediate investment in climate-resilient farming practices and infrastructure. The government should establish a Canadian Farm Resilience Agency to coordinate mitigation and adaptation programs while supporting agroecological transitions that build soil health and community resilience. This includes investing in seed sovereignty programs that protect genetic diversity and cultural heritage while preparing our food system for increasing climate volatility.

Critical Success Factors

For these recommendations to succeed, the government must center community expertise by recognizing that those most impacted by food insecurity are the experts on solutions. This means moving beyond consultation toward genuine partnership with Indigenous communities, Black food sovereignty organizations, and other marginalized groups who have developed innovative approaches to food access despite systemic barriers.

The government must also commit to multi-year funding that recognizes food system transformation requires sustained investment beyond electoral cycles. Our project demonstrated that meaningful change happens through relationship building and trust development that cannot be rushed to fit political timelines. Food affordability intersects with housing, healthcare, employment, and Indigenous relations, requiring coordinated approaches across departments rather than siloed policy development.

Finally, the government must measure what matters by tracking food insecurity rates rather than just grocery prices as the primary indicator of success. Our research clearly demonstrates that lower grocery prices do not automatically translate to improved food access for those experiencing poverty, racism, and other forms of marginalization.

The Path Forward

The current crisis in food affordability reflects structural challenges in our food systems. Just as the government has recognized housing as requiring diverse solutions to address market challenges, so too should we approach food through a lens of public benefit alongside private sector involvement.

Our project has demonstrated that communities across Canada are already implementing innovative solutions—from Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives to solidarity grocery stores to agricultural cooperatives. What they need is not more corporate competition alone, but government support that recognizes food as a human right and communities as key partners in ensuring their own food sovereignty.

Our analysis demonstrates that investing in solutions that increase income and support (w)holistic food system approaches, rather than current market-focused strategies, offers more effective pathways to fix the food system. Based on participant feedback and stakeholder input, we have identified that participants want systemic transformation rather than incremental policy adjustments. Current approaches focusing primarily on increasing corporate competition may be insufficient to address the depth of the affordability crisis affecting Canadian households.

Our analysis indicates that Canada has the resources, knowledge, and community innovation capacity to create just and affordable food systems. Implementing solutions that prioritize both people and environmental sustainability would require political commitment to policy frameworks that balance market mechanisms with public benefit approaches.



Conclusion

Through comprehensive stakeholder consultation, evidence synthesis, and strategic policy analysis, we have identified pathways for systemic changes needed to ensure all Canadians have access to sufficient, healthy, and culturally appropriate food.

Our convening was more than a conference—it was a rich and vibrant experience that reminded us of the power of bringing people together to work through differences and find common ground. As we reflected afterward, this was the first in-person event FSC has hosted since 2018, and it reaffirmed our role in catalyzing food systems change through relationship building and authentic dialogue. We are committed to continuing this essential work.

As we entered a federal election year, the policy conversations we facilitated became increasingly relevant for government decision-making. Topics now under consideration would have been outside mainstream policy discourse a decade ago, demonstrating the evolution of food systems policy thinking while highlighting remaining implementation challenges. Our recommendations provide a roadmap for government action that addresses immediate needs while building long-term resilience, grounded in the wisdom of communities who have been developing solutions despite systemic barriers.

The choice before us is clear: continue enabling anti-consumer practices like skimpflation and shrinkflation while people in Canada go hungry, or invest in the income supports and community-driven solutions that are already working. Canada has the resources, the knowledge, and the community innovation to create just and affordable food systems. Food Secure Canada stands ready to continue this crucial work, supporting communities as they build the just and sustainable food systems our country desperately needs.

