



# **SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION FOR ALL**

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## **IMPROVING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF SUSTAINABLY-PRODUCED FOODS IN CANADA**

**FOOD SECURE CANADA RESEARCH REPORT**

**DESRÉ M. KRAMER, RHONDA FERGUSON, JENNIFER REYNOLDS  
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**Jill Guerra**

Research and Special Projects  
Coordinator, Canada Organic Trade  
Association

**Kelly Hodgins**

Program Officer, McConnell  
Foundation

**Susanna Klassen**

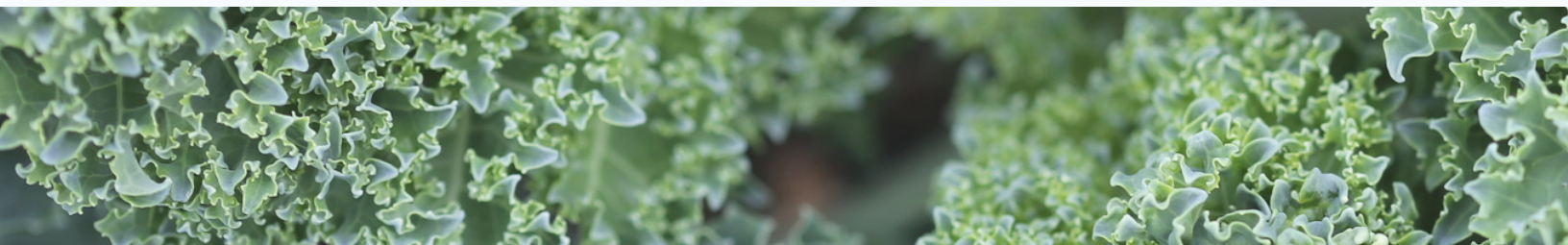
PhD Student, Public Scholar,  
Institute for Resources, Environment  
and Sustainability, University of  
British Columbia

**Charles Levkoe**

Assistant Professor, Canada Research  
Chair in Sustainable Food Systems,  
Lakehead University

**Kathryn Scharf**

Chief Operating Officer, Community  
Food Centres Canada





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interest in sustainably grown food has grown exponentially in recent decades and the linkages between sustainable food, human and planetary health are receiving increasing acknowledgement from policy-makers. Goal 12 of the United Nations' (2016) Sustainable Development Goals aims to increase sustainable food consumption and production, and Health Canada's (2019) new Dietary Guidelines also highlight the important relationships between healthy eating, food environments, the social determinants of health, and environmental impacts of food choices.

While there are a wide range of initiatives across the country seeking to get more healthy and sustainable food onto the plates of Canadians, these foods are not accessible to all. Food Secure Canada led a research project (April 2018 - March 2019) to better understand how consumers living with low-incomes value and access sustainably grown foods, what barriers they face in doing so and what policy measures could be undertaken to facilitate greater access.

Throughout the project researchers used open-ended questions to surface participants' understanding of sustainably grown food, and also offered

a definition ("locally-grown food that is produced without pesticides or genetically modified organisms, uses fair labour practices for farm workers, and treats farm animals humanely") in order to frame certain research questions.

Research included a literature review, interviews with nearly 30 food security experts, six focus groups across Canada engaging over 50 people who identified as living with low-incomes and/or experiencing food insecurity and a nation-wide survey. The online survey polled 1,500 Canadians on how they define and value sustainably grown food, their food shopping habits and any barriers they face in accessing these foods. Quotas were set by region, age, and gender to be proportionately representative of the Canadian population (based on 2016 Census data). The sample was also stratified by income to ensure an adequate sample of low-income Canadians (a minimum of 500, or 33% of the sample) for analysis.

Altogether, the findings of this study reinforce that income/cost is the main barrier for Canadians living with low-incomes to access sustainably grown foods, even though it is valued, and goes further into how the food environments in which people live, their values, and public trust in the food system, all help to shape access.



Findings from the consumer survey show high support for sustainably grown food. When asked about how they value six characteristics of sustainably grown food, Canadians across income groups ranked as extremely/very important: treating farm animals humanely (62%), using fair labour practices for farm workers (59%), growing food without pesticides (46%), locally grown food (43%), growing food without the use of genetically-modified organisms (GMO) (42%) and food being certified organic (16%).

A majority of poll respondents reported buying sustainably grown foods “at least sometimes” (70% of higher-income vs 64% of lower-income Canadians), with 6% of lower-income respondents (vs 2% higher income) buying sustainably grown foods “always”. However, focus groups which enabled deeper discussions illustrated that even though sustainably grown food is valued by those who participated in the conversations, it is rarely consumed for a variety of reasons.

Lack of income/cost was clearly reported as the most significant barrier to purchasing sustainable foods for participants living with low-incomes, and/or experiencing food insecurity, in both the focus groups and survey. In a country where 1 in 8 Canadian households experiences some level of food insecurity, regular consumption of sustainable foods is not always an option. A common theme reported in focus groups was the need to choose between rent and food, with rent being a non-negotiable expense.

Canadians living with low-incomes also reported lower access to smaller specialty grocers and farmers’ markets in their neighbourhoods where sustainably grown foods tend to be more readily available. Based on the survey, Canadians living with low-incomes are three times more likely to report challenges getting to the places where they buy food (grocery stores, convenience stores, farmers markets etc), particularly due to difficulties with walking/mobility.

Focus group participants also highlighted the importance of culture when it comes to food, and how racism and discrimination can limit and shape food choices. People will only buy food where they feel comfortable and will not shop at certain places where they feel discriminated against, even if this affects the quality of food they buy. There are a number of important questions that must be explored with future research about the role of racism in food access and consumption patterns.

Identifying sustainably grown foods where they shop was another barrier for consumers. From the survey findings, certified organic and locally-grown foods are considered relatively easy to identify, yet Canadians have difficulty judging other aspects of sustainability, particularly how animals and farm workers are treated in food production. This is notable as, based on poll data, these aspects are valued over others.

Priority policy options to increase access of sustainably grown food that were raised by key informants and found strong public support in the survey are:

- Providing support for local farmers so they can grow markets for sustainable, local food (84% support based on poll).
- Supporting public institutions like schools and hospitals to buy and serve more local, sustainably grown food (82% support based on poll).
- Ensuring everyone in Canada has a guaranteed annual minimum income and can adequately feed their households (75% support based on poll).
- Providing support for more community gardens, community produce markets, and farmers markets so they are widely available (range of 74 to 77% support based on poll).
- Offering subsidies (fresh-food stamps, farmers market tokens, or funding supplements) to Canadians living with low-income to increase access to sustainable foods (69% support based on poll).

While accessing more sustainably grown food has been a growing consumer priority for some time, this research is particularly timely as the federal government is currently developing a Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy, a Poverty Reduction Strategy, and a Food Policy for Canada. A better understanding of how to expand the accessibility of sustainably grown food connects to poverty reduction, social innovation and food policy.

Research findings will enable Food Secure Canada and partners to provide valuable insights on policies to improve the accessibility of sustainable foods and to increase dialogue between food security and food sustainability stakeholders, while building the movement for sustainable foods for all.

Food Secure Canada has received funding from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's Contributions Program for Non-profit Consumer and Voluntary Organizations. The views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada or the Government of Canada.





# RESEARCH APPROACH

**Research questions were addressed through iterative qualitative and quantitative methods, with the following timeline:**

## **Literature review**

An initial literature review was undertaken to better understand the existing research landscape (April to August 2018).

## **Interviews**

Key informant interviews with nearly 30 leaders in food security were used to develop and confirm research tools and early analysis (July to October 2018).

## **Focus Groups**

“Kitchen table talk” focus groups were hosted in Toronto, Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Vancouver, Montreal, and Saskatoon (August 2018 - January 2019). “Kitchen table talks” are a form of community-driven, semi-structured meeting intended to promote community engagement and inclusivity (Levkoe and Sheedy, 2017, p. 7). They generated insights from over 50 people who identified as living with low-incomes and/or experiencing food insecurity, and many are also involved in food programs such as food banks, meal and cooking programs and community food growing.

## **Survey**

Following this, a consumer survey of 1,500 Canadians was conducted online (December 18, 2018 to January 4, 2019). Quotas were set by region, age, and gender to be proportionately representative of the Canadian population (based on 2016 Census data). The sample was also stratified by income to ensure an adequate sample of low-income Canadians (a minimum of 500, or 33% of the sample) for analysis. Low-income was defined using Statistics Canada’s Low-income Measure (before tax), which is based on a combination of household income and household size. Researchers did not note any significant mainstream media stories around food issues while the poll was conducted. For example, a person living alone with an annual income below \$25k is considered low-income, as is a four-person household with a combined income below \$50k.

In addition to weighting by age, gender and region, weighting was also used to ensure low-income Canadians are present in the final sample in the same proportion as in the general population (14%).

Researchers did not note any significant mainstream media stories around food issues while the poll was conducted.

## RESEARCH ADVISORY GROUP



Feedback was provided by a Research Advisory Group through quarterly meetings and written comments on draft research documents. Members of the Food Secure Canada National Community of Practice on Food Security also provided feedback during the project. A third-party methodologist reviewed draft research findings and feedback was integrated into the final report.

## STUDY LIMITATIONS



### **For the survey:**

Because an online survey represents a sample of convenience, no margin of error can be ascribed to the results.

### **For the focus groups:**

Due to economic and time constraints, the voice of those facing food insecurity in remote Northern Canada was not a focus of this study. Food insecurity challenges in these regions are distinct from urban, or even rural, Southern Canada, although of course there are systemic commonalities. However, some of the focus group participants had experience with living in the North, and some of the key informants could also talk to those issues as well. These comments have been included in the report.

## READING SURVEY RESULTS



Because an online survey represents a sample of convenience, no margin of error can be ascribed to the results. Throughout this report, arrows in figures indicate statistically significant differences (at the 95% confidence level) between lower- and higher-income groups.



# RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

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# 1 - CANADIANS VALUE SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOODS

**Canadians most value foods grown in ways that treat farm animals humanely and use fair labour practices for farm workers. Foods being locally grown, grown without pesticides and without genetically-modified organisms (GMO) is also important.**

Defining sustainably grown food is complex and multi-faceted. In its broadest definition, sustainably grown food is that which is produced and distributed in a way that supports the longevity of the food system, including its natural resources and the wellbeing of all of its participants now, and in the future. In this study, researchers asked open-ended questions to surface participants' understanding of sustainably grown food, and also offered a definition ("locally-grown food that is produced without pesticides or genetically modified organisms, uses fair labour practices for farm workers, and treats farm animals humanely") in order to frame certain research questions.

Among focus group participants, most were not familiar with the specific term "sustainably grown" food. When asked to define what it meant to them, there was often a discussion whether it meant "preserved food", "food that can be used for a long time", or "packaged" food. After a definition was offered by the facilitator or a focus group participant, subsequent discussions illustrated that though the specific term may not be widely used, the types of food production practices to which the term applies are generally known.

In the interviews with key informants, sustainably grown food was often used interchangeably with terms such as "biodiversity", "agroecology", "local", "nutritious", "organic", and "permaculture". Some also said that sustainably grown food included fair wages for farmers and farm workers, access to land for young farmers, having land set aside for biodiversity, and having control over decision-making about what food you eat and where you obtain your food.

Findings from the consumer survey show high support for sustainably grown food. An open-question asking survey respondents how they defined sustainably grown foods, surfaced general descriptions such as those which don't harm the environment or deplete our future resources, and along with food being locally-grown, certified organic or pesticide-free.





When asked about which aspects they value most in sustainably grown food from a list of six characteristics, Canadians across income groups ranked as extremely/very important: treating farm animals humanely (62%), using fair labour practices for farm workers' (59%), growing food without pesticides (46%), locally grown food (43%), growing food without the use of genetically-modified organisms (GMO) (42%) and food being certified organic (16%) (Figure 1).

Many of these aspects of sustainability were also identified by key informants and were valued by some participants in focus groups although many others expressed they could not consider purchasing these types of foods because they were economically inaccessible. As one focus group participant shared:



I would love to prioritize very healthy, organic food and have it all the time, but honestly, especially towards the end of a paycheque, whatever is going to be able to spread the paycheque is what's okay. And it's probably noodles.

Another focus group participant commented:



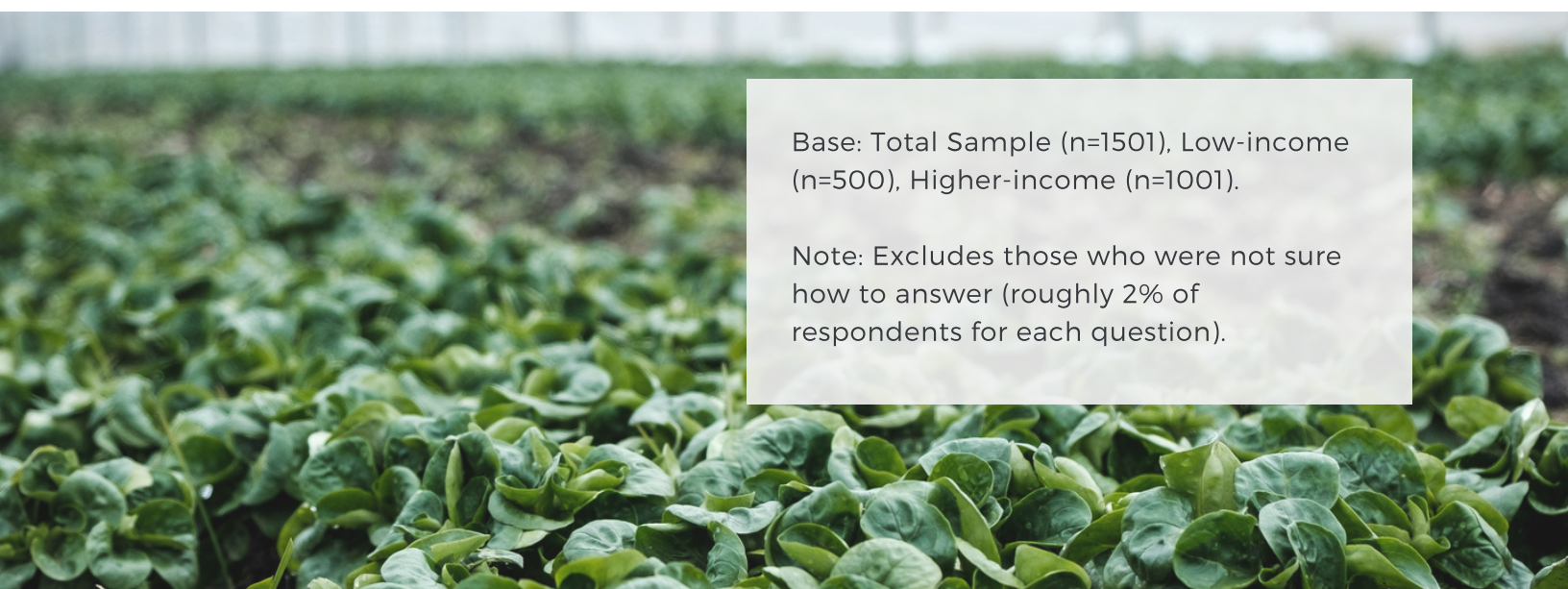
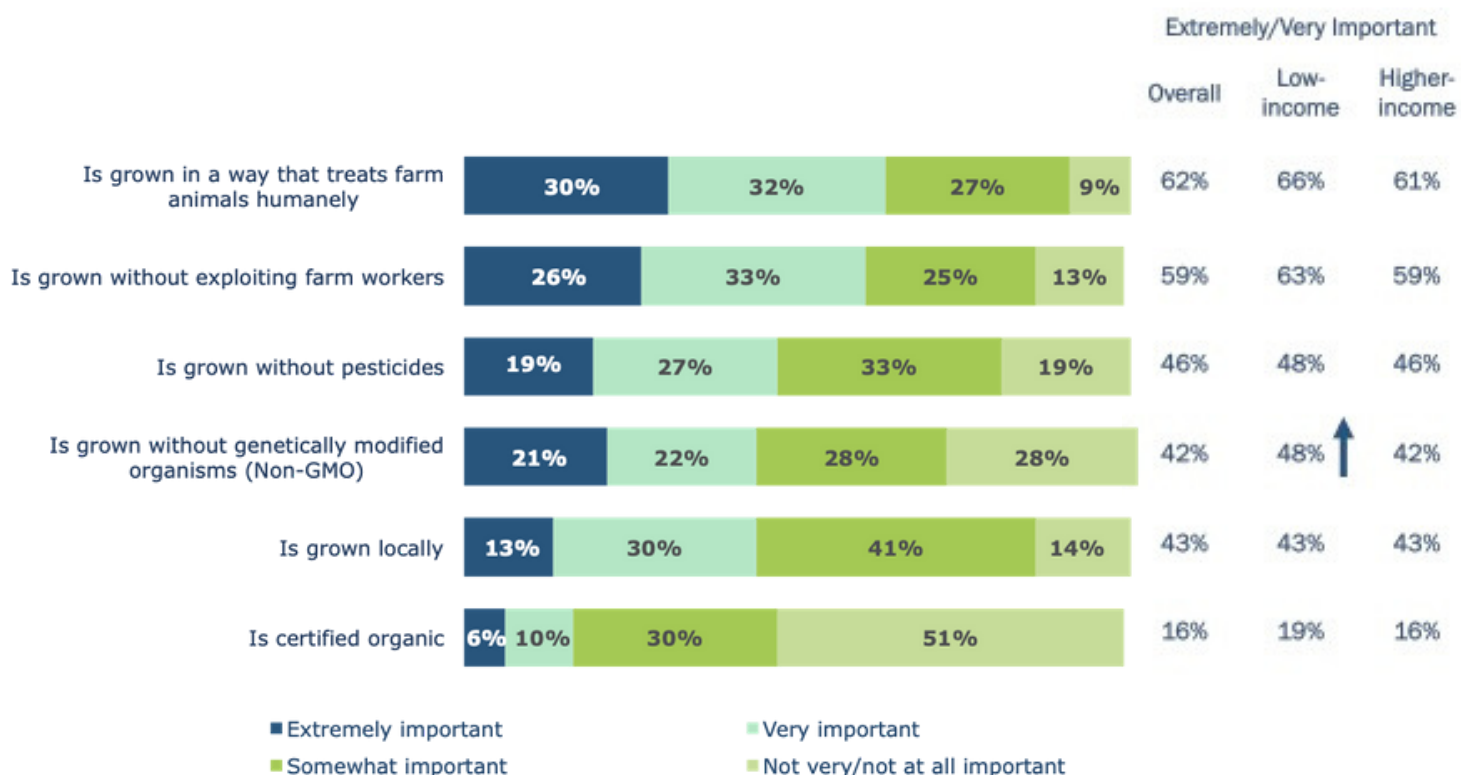
If I had the money for the food that I want to buy, I would buy more organic. I would have such a variety of non-GMO products. I would buy the \$10 non-GMO cereals, the prime organic vegetables. I have pretty much opted out from eating meat. I eat vegetables most of the time because of the hormones that go into the meat and the cruelty to animals. But I would love to buy meat again! I would love some bacon; sausages; a good roast! I would fatten up my children. I would have all of this food!



# FIGURE 1: IMPORTANT FACTORS WHEN BUYING SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOOD



**SURVEY QUESTION:** Sustainably grown food can encompass many different aspects of food and its production. How important is it to you that the food you buy...?



Base: Total Sample (n=1501), Low-income (n=500), Higher-income (n=1001).

Note: Excludes those who were not sure how to answer (roughly 2% of respondents for each question).

# 2 - SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOOD PURCHASE FREQUENCY

## Research found a diversity of data on the consumption of sustainably grown foods in Canada.

Focus group discussions with over 50 Canadians who identified as living with low-incomes illustrated that the vast majority never consume sustainably grown foods. However, the consumer survey results show a relatively widespread consumption of sustainably grown foods with 70% of higher-income and 64% of lower-income Canadians purchasing “at least sometimes”, and 6% of people living with low-income buying sustainably grown foods “always” compared to only 2% of higher-income Canadians (Figure 2). It was statistically significant that more higher-income Canadians (40%) reported buying these foods “sometimes” compared to Canadians living with low-incomes (34%).

Research by Webber and Dollahite (2008, p. 200) and Howard and Allan (2008, p. 239) indicates that consumers living with low-incomes are particularly attuned to inequities in the food system, which could make them more likely to select sustainably grown foods because of the social benefits - if persistent barriers to their access were removed. The poll results mentioned above (Figure 1) indicating that lower-income respondents consistently rated the importance of sustainable production methods as more important than higher-income respondents echo this analysis.

Additionally, the Canadian Organic Trade Association (2017) has found that the lowest and highest-income brackets allocate larger budget percentage to organic foods, with middle-income brackets trailing both.

Other intervening factors in the purchasing habits of Canadians have been identified in studies by Johnston, Szabo, & Rodney (2011), and Baumann, Engman, Huddart-Kennedy, & Johnston (2017) and others. These include education level, race, presence of children in the home, age of children, age and gender. Baumann et al. find that different traits are associated with the intention to purchase different kinds of sustainable foods; for example, having young children is associated with purchasing more organic foods, while being white and a woman is associated with being more likely to purchase local foods (p. 80).





Indeed, they found that many living on low-income and belonging to racialized communities employ “creative adaptations of dominant ethical eating repertoires to fit low income circumstances, as well as the use of different cultural frameworks to address moral issues around eating” (Johnston et al., 2011, 293-4).

The tensions in this research related to the relationship between income and attitudes toward sustainable foods merits reflection and opens the door to further investigation. It is possible that the difference may be at least partially contextualized by research methodology. The poll was conducted online, using Statistics Canada’s Low-income Measure, which is based on a combination of household income and household size.

More broadly, economic access to food, not just food that has been sustainably grown, continues to be a very important issue across Canada. With one in eight Canadian households experiencing some level of food insecurity, access to food in general is difficult for many people. Some groups experience food insecurity disproportionately, pointing to the structural and systemic inequalities in society at large. As noted by Tarasuk, Fafard-St Germain, & Mitchell (2019): The probability of household food insecurity in Canada and the severity of the experience

depends on a household’s province or territory of residence, income, main source of income, housing tenure, education, Aboriginal status, and household structure. Our findings highlight the intersection of household food insecurity with public policy decisions in Canada and the disproportionate burden of food insecurity among Indigenous peoples.

Focus group participants emphasized the necessity to prioritize the cost of housing over food. This was especially noted by parents, whose children may be taken away from them by the state if they do not have housing. In this context, food was considered a “compressible” expense. As a focus group participant said:

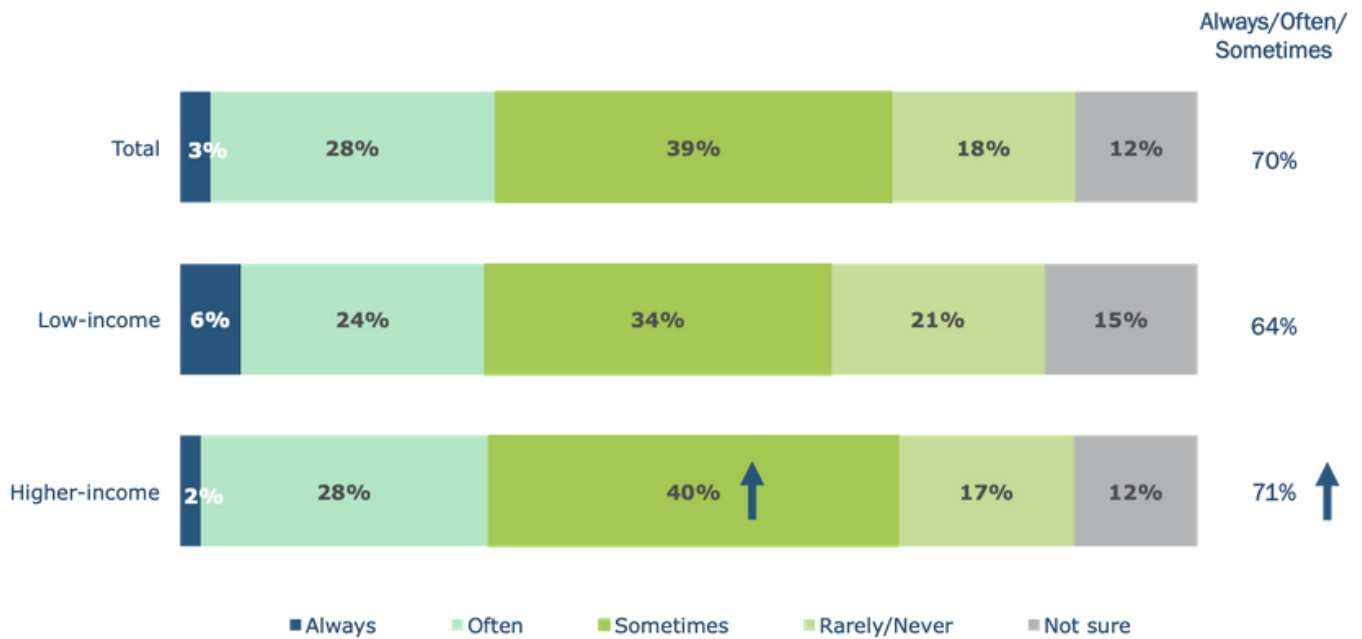


**It is hard for me. Next Friday, I get my cheque and that has to last me to the end of January. It won’t. By the time I have paid my bills and get groceries, I have maybe between \$100 to \$150 left. I am struggling so badly. I have my niece come over once in a while. It is so hard to feed her. Right now, I don’t have any food in the house. I am really struggling. . . It is my birthday tomorrow. I have told everybody to get me gift cards to Metro [the grocery store] because that will help me get through this month and next month.**

# FIGURE 2: SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOOD PURCHASE FREQUENCY



**SURVEY QUESTION:**  
**How often do you/does your household member buy sustainably grown food?**



Base: Total Sample (n=1501),  
 Low-income (n=500),  
 Higher-income (n=1001)



# 3 - INCOME/COST IS SEEN AS MAIN BARRIER TO BUYING SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOOD

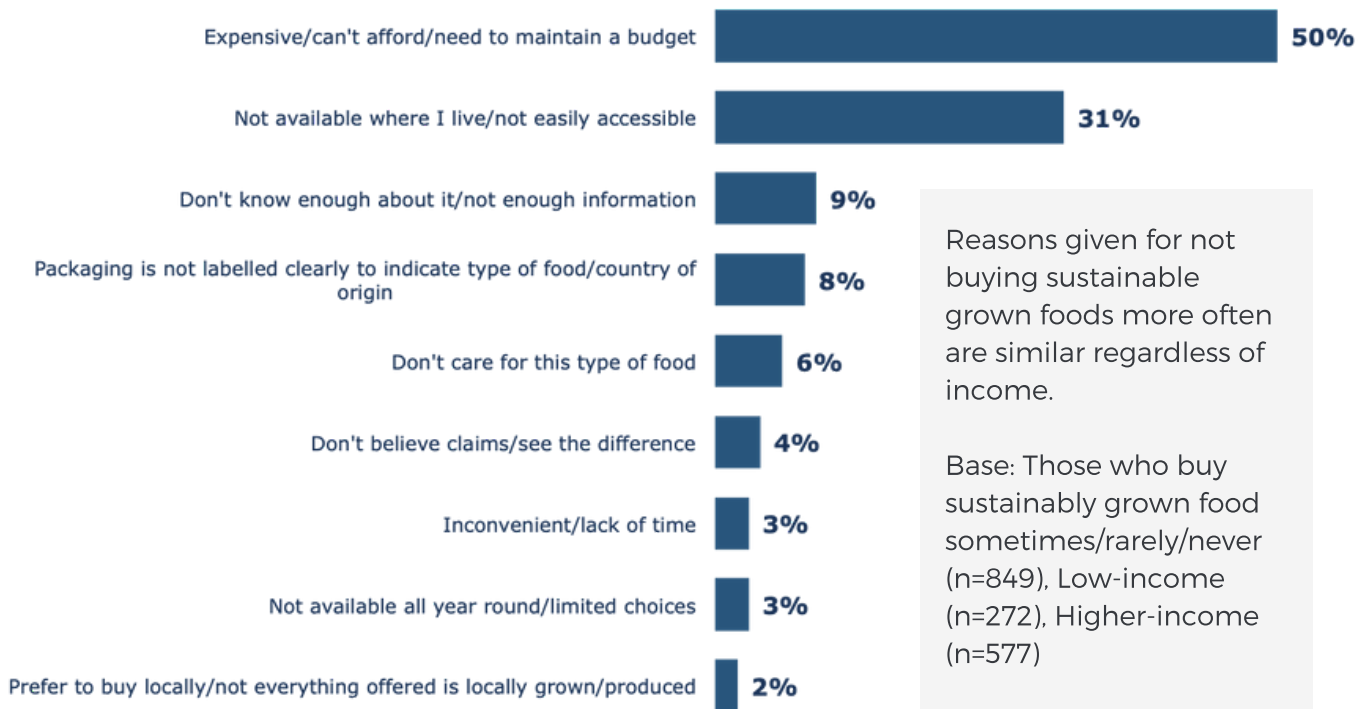
**While income/cost is seen as the main barrier to sustainable foods for Canadians living with low-incomes, access and time constraints are also barriers.**

Survey respondents who reported that they sometimes/rarely/never buy sustainably grown food were asked an open-ended question as to why they do not buy it, or buy it more often. Across income groups, higher cost was the most commonly mentioned (unprompted) reason for not buying sustainably grown food more often, but availability was also a concern (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3: REASONS WHY SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOODS ARE NOT PURCHASED MORE OFTEN**



**SURVEY QUESTION: Why do you not buy sustainably-grown food/more often?**





When focus group participants were asked whether they would like to buy sustainably grown food, most expressed the reality that, although it is in fact a priority, it is often impossible. One focus group participant stated:



I have to be very economical. I can't afford everything. The healthier food, the nutritious food, is so expensive. I just buy things that are affordable, and sometimes for survival.

Another commented:

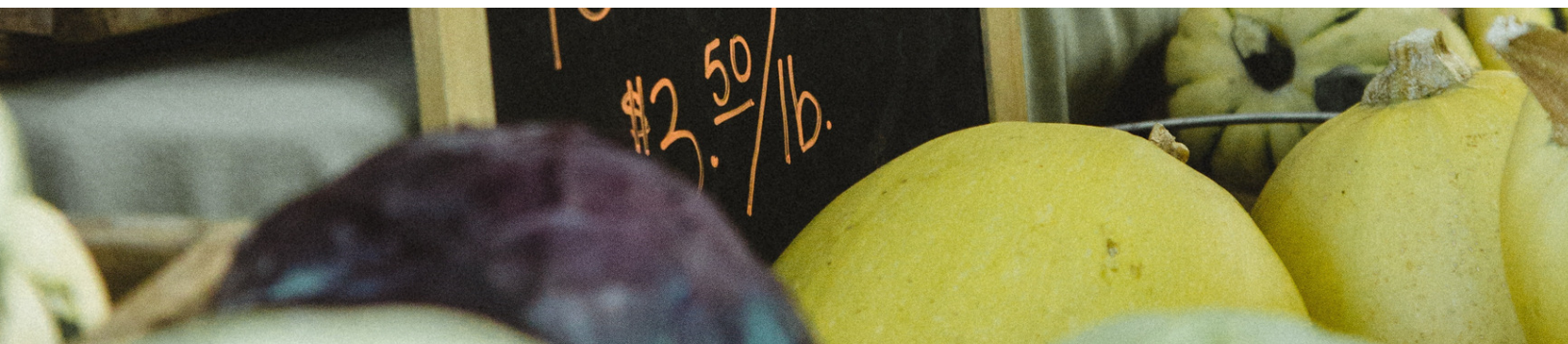


The bureaucrats make your life decisions. They say: "This is what you are going to live on, and this is where you are going to live, and this is what you can eat." They expect us to live on expired boxes of Kraft Dinner and dented cans of tuna. They might as well put us in front of a garbage can, put on a [nosebag] like we are horses, and tell us to eat the scraps. It is frustrating.

As these quotes illustrate, people living with low-incomes and/or experiencing food insecurity often cannot prioritize the quality of the food they eat, or whether it was sustainably grown - even when there are health reasons for doing so - in the context of other more pressing financial needs. One focus group participant said:



We are really struggling with our finances right now. My son has [behavioural problems]. We find that the processed foods contribute to his attitudes. But now I have had to go back to the processed foods because they are cheaper than the made-from-fresh stuff. It has totally changed his attitude. The bureaucrats make your life decisions. They say: "This is what you are going to live on, and this is where you are going to live, and this is what you can eat." They expect us to live on expired boxes of Kraft Dinner and dented cans of tuna. They might as well put us in front of a garbage can, put on a [nosebag] like we are horses, and tell us to eat the scraps. It is frustrating.

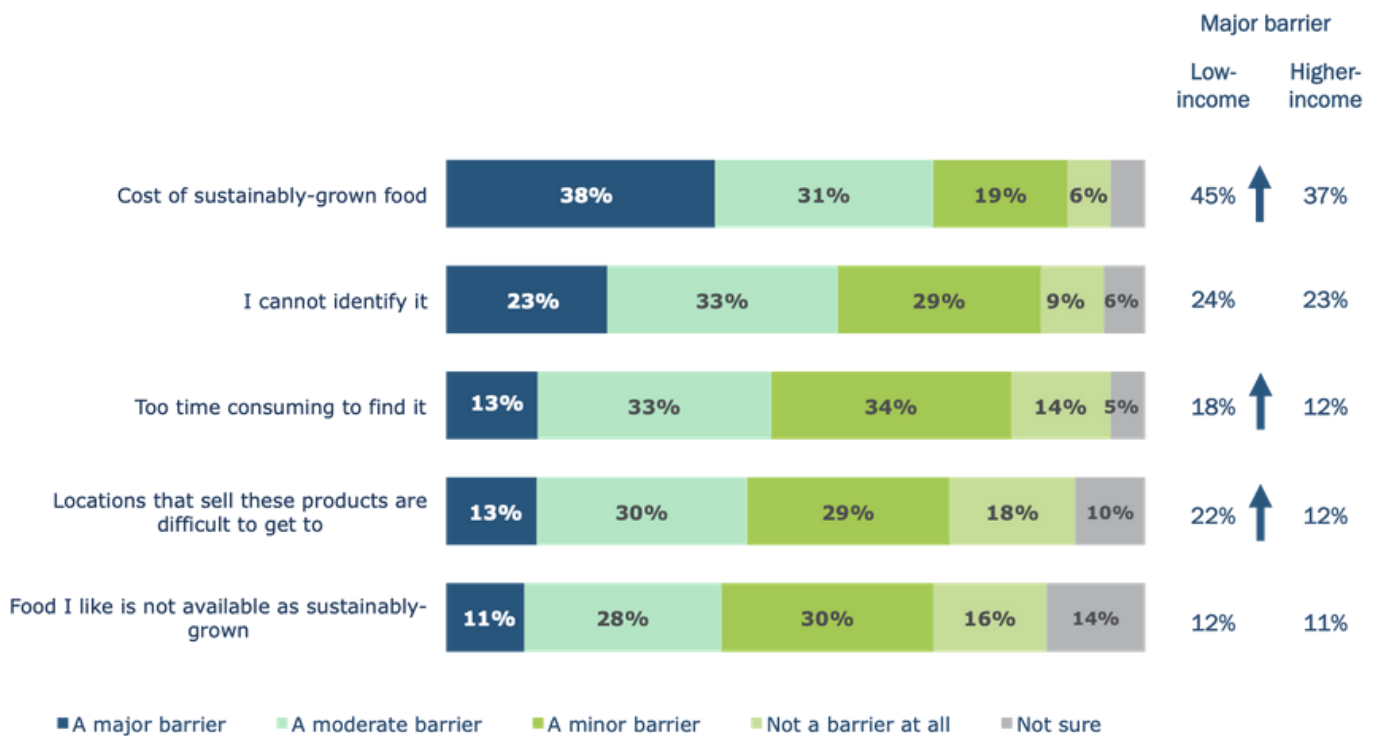


People will only buy food where they feel comfortable and will not shop at certain places where they feel discriminated against, even if this affects the quality of food they buy. There are a number of important questions that must be explored with future research about the role of racism in food access and consumption patterns.

## FIGURE 4: BARRIERS TO BUYING SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOOD



**SURVEY QUESTION: How much of a barrier to buying sustainably-grown food is each of the following for you?**



Base: Total Sample (n=1501), Low-income (n=500), Higher-income (n=1001)



# 4 - LESS AVAILABILITY OF SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOOD IN LOWER-INCOME NEIGHBOURHOODS

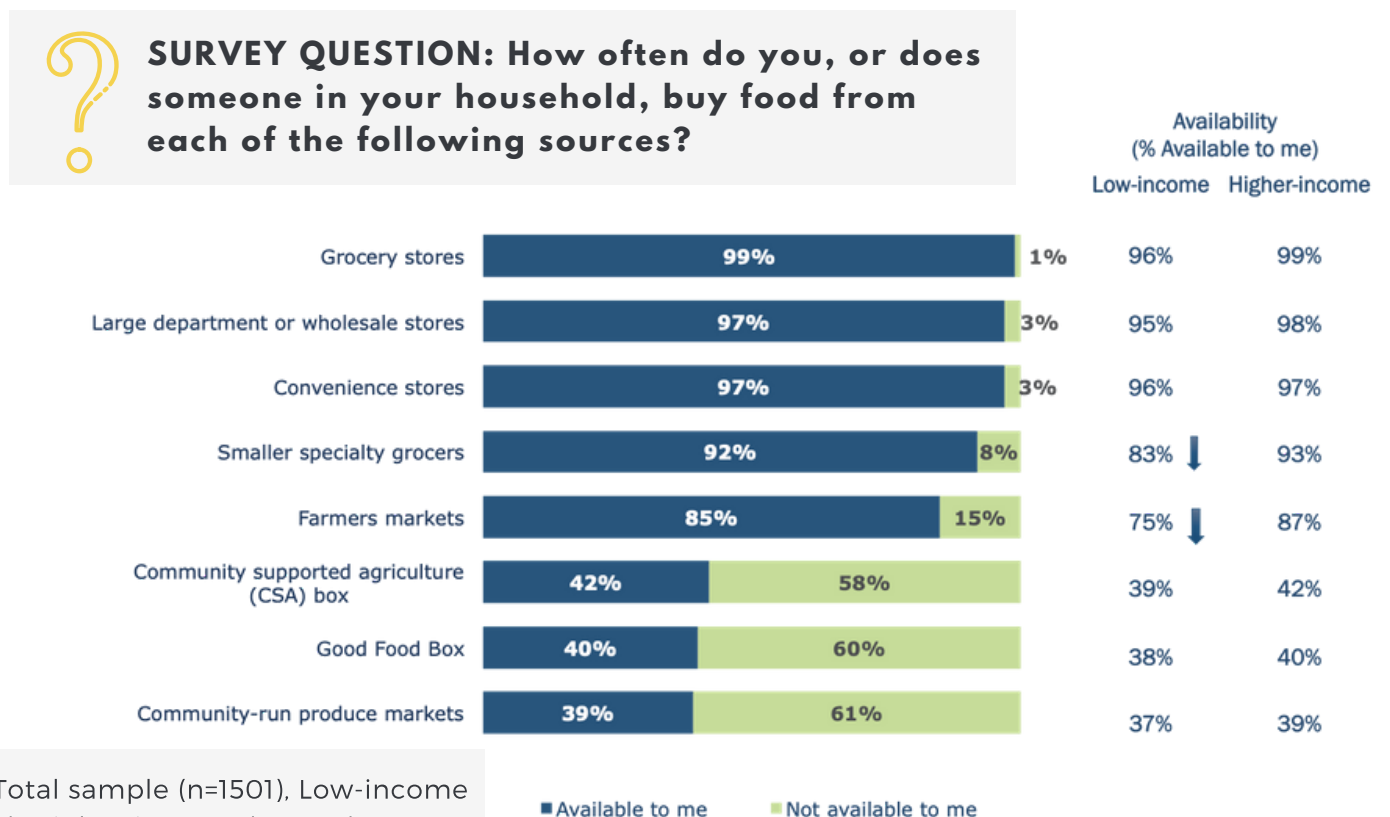
**Canadians living with low-incomes report less access to smaller specialty grocers and farmers markets where sustainably grown foods tend to be more readily available.**

According to the survey, Canadians living with low-incomes are less likely to say they have access to smaller specialty grocers and farmers markets in their neighbourhoods, where sustainably grown foods are more likely to be readily available (Figure 5).

Discussions among focus groups participants regarding local farmers markets and community gardens largely

emphasized barriers - higher cost, unwelcoming for lower-income people, the challenge of finding volunteers for the gardens, etc. Several people mentioned holding farmers markets in high esteem, and that they carry the best food available, with one person noting the enjoyment of visiting the market even if she could only afford “a couple of zucchinis”. Others had never visited their nearest farmers market.

**FIGURE 5: AVAILABILITY OF DIFFERENT FOOD SOURCES**





# 5 - TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY/WALKING CHALLENGES IN GETTING TO STORES

**From the survey, Canadians living with low-incomes are three times more likely to report challenges getting to stores, particularly due to difficulties with walking/mobility.**

Both focus group discussions and survey data illustrated that consumers living with low-incomes experience difficulty getting to stores generally, due to greater reliance on public transit and health-related walking/mobility challenges.

About 50% of lower-income poll respondents who reported having challenges in getting to where they buy food identified this was due to walking/mobility difficulties, and 33% said stores were too far away/take significant time to get to (Figure 6).

Difficulties with transportation and mobility were also repeatedly mentioned in each of the focus groups. Focus group participants spoke about the increases in the costs of public transportation, the challenges of taking buses with groceries, navigating ice and snow in wheelchairs and the difficulties of getting rides from others. Participants also mentioned specific obstacles for people living in 'food deserts' where there are few shops and cars are needed for transport, as well as for people living in fly-in communities, and communities only accessible by ferries, where food is very expensive and the supply unreliable.

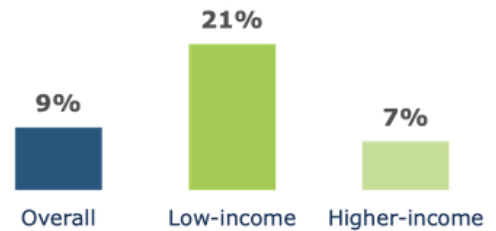


## FIGURE 6: LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES TO BUYING FOOD



**SURVEY QUESTION: Do you or someone in your household have any challenges getting to the place(s) where you buy food?**

Yes, I face challenges getting to place(s) where I buy food



**SURVEY QUESTION: What types of challenges do you/your household member have getting to the place(s) where you buy food?**

Base (above): Total Sample (n=1501), Low-income (n=500), Higher-income (n=1001)

Base (below): Those who say they experience challenges (n=182), Low-income (n=107), Higher-income (n=75)

Among those reporting challenges			
Types of challenges (unprompted)	Overall	Low-income	Higher-income
Don't have a car/use public transit	45%	52%	42%
Mobility/walking difficulties	36%	50%	30%
Food stores are far away/takes significant time to get to	31%	33%	31%
Busy/hard to fit in time to shop for food	24%	16%	27%
Allergies/diet restrictions which limit where you can shop	11%	11%	11%
Have young children/challenging to bring/shop with them	6%	7%	6%
Other	5%	8%	4%

# 6 - CHALLENGES IN IDENTIFYING SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOODS AND TRUST IN PURCHASING

**Certified organic and locally-grown products are considered relatively easy to identify, but Canadians have difficulty judging whether foods fulfill other aspects of sustainability.**

As mentioned earlier in this report, consumers across income groups noted a barrier to buying sustainably grown foods was identifying them generally (Figure 4). When asked about identifying specific aspects of sustainability in the survey, respondents across income groups reported that it was relatively easy to identify organic foods (44%) and locally-grown products (28%) (Figure 7).. However they reported difficulty across income groups in judging whether foods fulfill other aspects of sustainability - particularly if farm animals were treated humanely (only 8% found it extremely/very easy to identify), and if farm workers were treated fairly (only 7% found it extremely/very easy to identify). This is notable as these are the aspects of sustainably grown foods valued over others (Figure 2).

The literature review and several focus group discussions indicated that for some consumers, there is no perceived difference between food labelled as sustainably grown and conventionally grown which may be related to public trust. For example, one of the focus groups highlighted some of the challenges experienced by newcomers. Some newcomers were used to buying meat and produce directly from farmers, but in Canada, their trust has been undermined by the separation between consumers and producers/processors. Here they buy food in supermarkets, it is usually imported, and the supply chains are long and distant. Conversely, when farmers market vendors say their produce is organic, they are believed, and their produce is valued over all others, but there is still a price barrier.

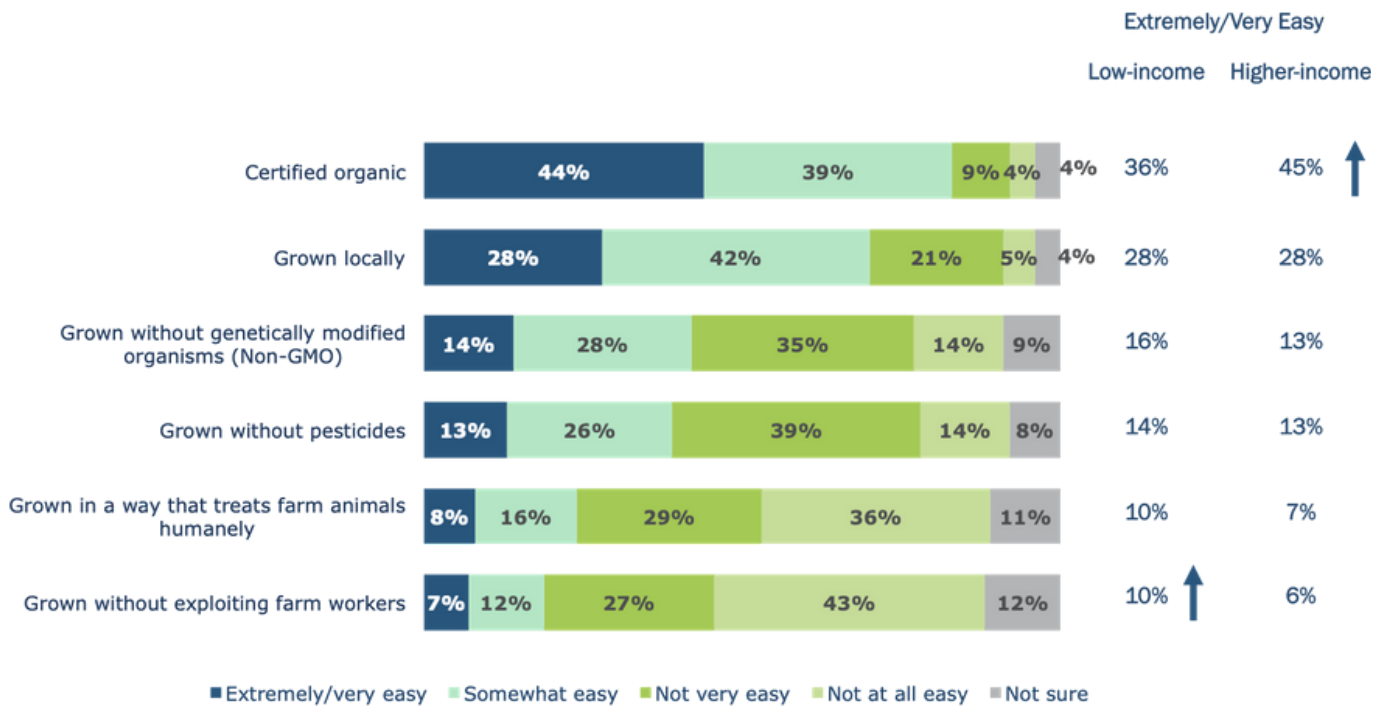




# FIGURE 7: EASE OF IDENTIFYING SUSTAINABLY GROWN PRODUCTS



**SURVEY QUESTION: How easy do you find it is to identify products which are....**



Base: Total Sample (n=1501), Low-income (n=500), Higher-income (n=1001)



# 7 - POLICY OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOODS FOR CONSUMERS LIVING WITH LOW-INCOMES

**Policy proposals were generated from interviews with food security leaders.**

Food security leaders who were interviewed as key informants for this research project offered analysis on what could be improved or done differently to support low-income access to sustainably grown foods. Policy proposals were generated around supports for: sustainable farmers to grow and distribute more sustainable foods; institutions (schools, universities, hospitals, long-term care facilities) to purchase and serve more sustainably grown food; the non-for-profit sector to enhance their work and programs in support of access to sustainable foods; people living on low-incomes to directly improve access to sustainably grown food.

Key informants also highlighted the importance of the right of farmers to make a living wage, and for the right of farm workers to be treated well and earn fair wages. The proposal was echoed that farmers growing sustainably should receive government support for their contribution to the environment. Key informants also underlined that people experiencing food insecurity denotes a systemic problem that could be solved with a universal minimum annual income.



## **There is widespread support for policies that increase greater access to sustainably grown foods across income brackets.**

Policy priorities to increase access to sustainably grown food that were raised by key informants and found strong public support across income groups in the survey are (Figure 8):

- Providing support for local farmers so they can grow markets for sustainable, local food (84% support based on poll).
- Supporting public institutions like schools and hospitals to buy and serve more local, sustainably grown food (82% support based on poll).
- Ensuring everyone in Canada has a guaranteed annual minimum income and can adequately feed their households (75% support based on poll).
- Providing support for more community gardens, community produce markets, and farmers markets so they are widely available (range of 74 to 77% support based on poll).
- Offering subsidies (fresh-food stamps, farmers market tokens, or funding supplements) to Canadians living with low-income to increase access to sustainable foods (69% support based on poll).

It was statistically significant that Canadians living with lower-incomes more highly rated with strongly/somewhat support two of the policy proposals: guaranteed annual minimum income (83% compared with 74% higher-income respondents) and offering subsidies so sustainably grown vegetables are accessible to low-income Canadians (74% compared to 68% higher-income respondents).

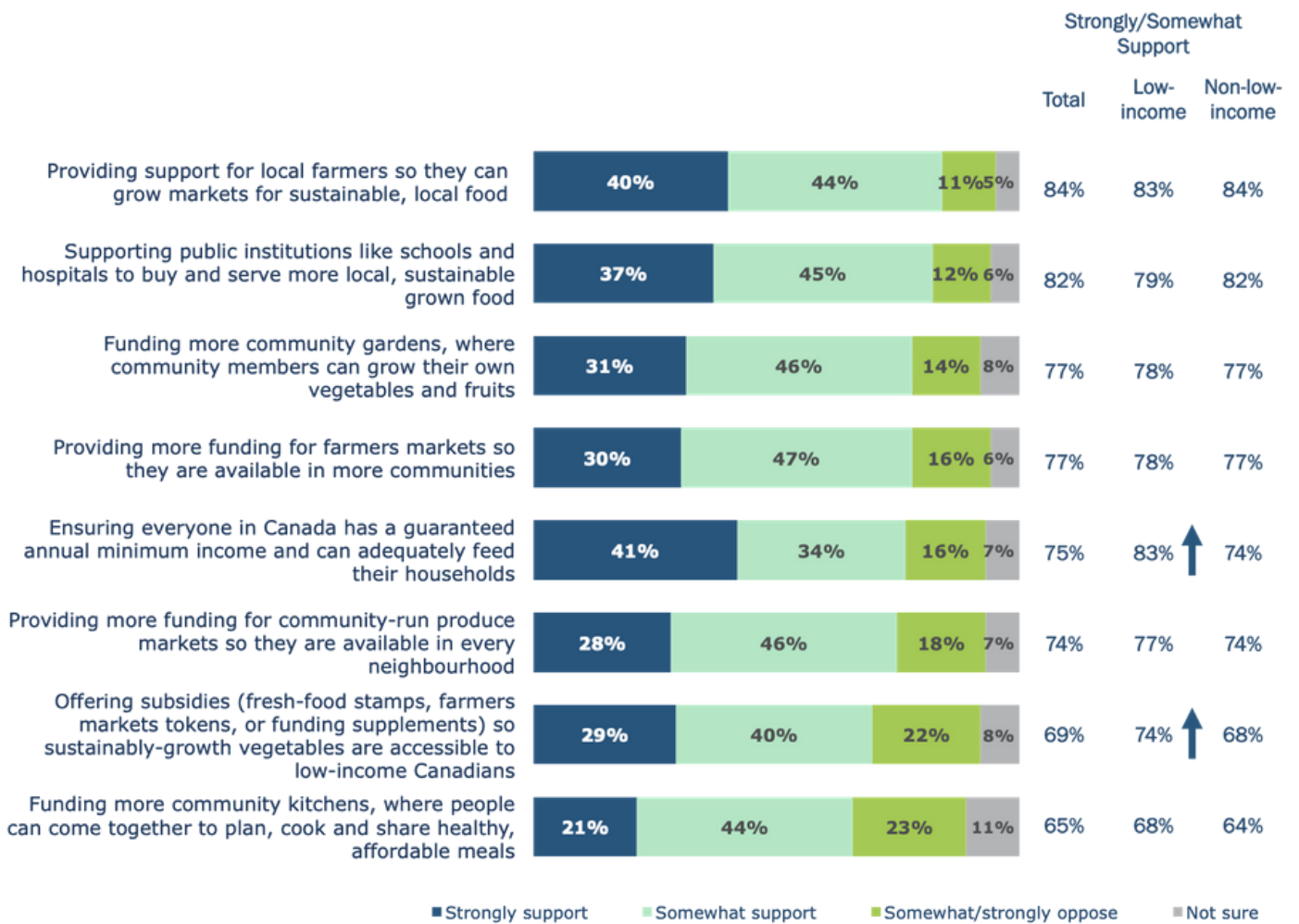
Overall these findings resonate with analysis that joined-up approaches in social, economic and environmental policy are needed in order to address issues of consumer access and social justice, while simultaneously ensuring producers earn a fair wage and are able to employ sustainable techniques (Levkoe, 2011).



# FIGURE 8: SUPPORT FOR SPECIFIC POLICIES TO INCREASE ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLY GROWN FOOD



**SURVEY QUESTION:** The following public policies have been suggested as ways to increase access to sustainably-grown food. Keeping in mind that increasing services could increase taxes or allocate existing tax dollars differently, how much do you support or oppose each policy idea?



Base: Total Sample (n=1501),  
Low-income (n=500),  
Higher-income (n=1001)



# FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is obvious that while economic barriers are significant in improving access to sustainably grown food, there are complex social, geographical, and cultural factors at play as well. These must be better understood and addressed in order to make meaningful policy changes that can facilitate better access to sustainable foods for all. This is important not only for the needs of the individuals and households experiencing food insecurity, but for the environmental and economic health of communities across the country, and the food security of future generations.

There are a number of important questions that must be explored about the role of racism in food access and consumption patterns. Pockets of our food system perpetuate forms for racism, while others function as sites of resistance. In terms of physical spaces, while the implicit barriers faced by people visiting farmers markets or shops specializing in sustainable foods were discussed in the focus groups, these issues did not surface in the survey results.

They may be better explored further through in-person discussions rather than online surveys. Additional studies are needed to uncover the complex intersections between social, cultural, and economic barriers in these spaces; how some alternative food spaces function as elite spaces, and; how others are being used to dismantle racism, sexism, and classism.

There is also great potential to further investigate the crucial role of consumer food literacy and how to build it effectively. How can information about sustainable food production methods, such as fair labour practices for farm workers, be better communicated to Canadian consumers so they can better understand the impact of their food purchasing choices? How can we better understand the priorities and tradeoffs consumers may be making in their purchasing around sustainability, and whether this changes as they learn more about sustainable food practices?

Acknowledging the consequences of unsustainable food production also leads to additional relevant questions. Specifically, what are the social, economic, and environmental costs associated with failing to improve access to sustainably grown food across Canada? How do we calculate them? How can we ensure that the consumption of sustainably grown foods is encouraged through policy change and not simply individual behaviour changes that place additional burdens on those living on low-incomes?

There is great potential in exploring how we can re-imagine our food system with decolonization, reconciliation, justice, and equity as central guiding principles which will help to ensure greater support for, and access to, sustainably grown food for all Canadians.





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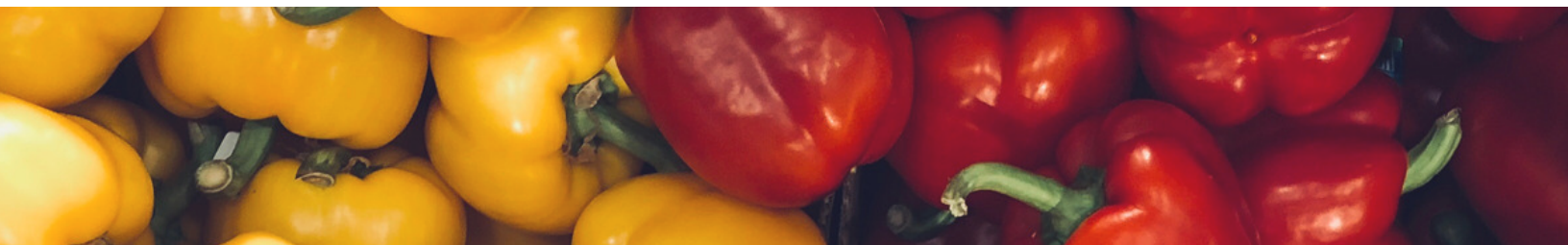
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## **ABOUT FOOD SECURE CANADA**

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.

[www.foodsecurecanada.org](http://www.foodsecurecanada.org)

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[www.foodsecurecanada.org](http://www.foodsecurecanada.org)



3875, St-Urbain street, #502  
Montreal (Quebec) H2W 1V1