



INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



**FSC
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Food
Secure
Canada
Réseau
pour une alimentation
durable

CONTEXT

Canadian food policy must acknowledge the history and ongoing legacy of colonialism, and prioritize recognition of Indigenous knowledge in relation to reconciliation and decolonization as key guiding principles of our food system. Food was often used as a tool of oppression and marginalization¹, including through the use of starvation and malnutrition in residential schools and the assumption, upon the arrival of European settlers, that Canada was largely an empty, uninhabited land (“terra nullius”). For many years, it was the Canadian government’s practice to provide only enough food to Indigenous communities on-reserve for basic survival. In addition, policies were implemented with the intention of limiting Indigenous people’s ability to engage in hunting and fishing activities, thereby eroding the food sovereignty, food security and cultures of many communities.

Indigenous food systems are deeply connected to Indigenous economies, cultures, health, and wellbeing. The destruction of traditional Indigenous food systems, including hunting, fishing and gathering, is connected to a broader process of cultural genocide and a deterioration of health and wellbeing in Indigenous communities. While food was often used as a tool of colonization, it has the potential to be a tool for healing and asserting Indigenous food sovereignty. This requires respect for treaty rights and a commitment to building nation-to-nation relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

¹ See Daschuk (2013) and Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015).

CONTEXT

In order to understand and address the food sovereignty needs and to include the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, it is imperative that the inherent connection and need for land access be acknowledged, in order to grow Indigenous food sovereignty. The issue of food access, traditional or country foods and Indigenous foods all rely on the ability of Indigenous communities to have access to land. To repair and reconnect the relationship of Indigenous people to the food that was altered in the colonial process means empowering and giving Indigenous people the space to return to the land and water where their food comes from.

Meaningful reconciliation through food requires action. As the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty writes, talking and consultation are not enough. Addressing the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a crucial component of reconciliation; in addition, however, Indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing and cultural practices must be respected and encouraged, and hunting, fishing and gathering must be supported as key food provisioning activities alongside farming and ranching. It is of vital importance to understand that the practices of the hundreds of Indigenous nations that live within Canada each have distinct beliefs and practices around food. This is a multifaceted issue and holds complexity within the Indigenous context.

KEY STATISTICS:

- As part of the residential school system, Indigenous children were forced to consume a largely foreign diet of processed and sweetened foods and were barred from accessing traditional foods. They were also subject to nutrition experiments that left many of them hungry and malnourished and were denied food as a form of punishment².
- 51% of Indigenous children live in poverty, rising to 60% for children on-reserve³.
- Healthy and nutritious foods remain out of reach to many northern remote communities due to cost and access, despite federal subsidy programs. The average cost of groceries for a month in Attawapiskat First Nation in June 2015 was \$1909, compared to \$847 in Toronto⁴.
- Food insecurity rates in the territories are well above the national Canadian average: 46.8% in Nunavut and 24.1% in the Northwest Territories⁵.

² Mosby, I & Galloway, T. (2017) 'The abiding condition was hunger': Assessing the long-term biological and health effects of malnutrition and hunger in Canada's residential schools. *British Journal of Canadian Studies*

³ MacDonald and Wilson (2016). *Shameful Neglect: Indigenous Child Poverty in Canada*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

⁴ Veeraraghavan et al. (2016). *Paying for Nutrition*. Food Secure Canada.

⁵ Statistics Canada (2014). *2014 Canadian Community Health Survey*.

POLICY PROPOSALS:

- Respect and implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which includes the principle of free and informed consent, and the right to approve or disapprove incursions onto Indigenous land.
- Recognize the fourth jurisdiction of government: First Nations, Métis and Inuit governance structures, alongside municipal, provincial/territorial and federal governments of Canada. Where applicable, respect the sovereignty promised at the time of treaty signing.
- Implement and/or establish a timeline of implementation with sufficient funding for all 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- Work with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples to ensure they have more sovereignty over the foods they eat and are guaranteed access to traditional land-based foods and fishing and hunting rights.
- Ensure country and traditional foods are valued and acknowledged in the national food policy as healthy, nourishing and culturally significant.



POLICY PROPOSALS:

- Support and work with Indigenous leadership(s) that is tackling the epidemic of diet-related disease and food insecurity among Indigenous populations.
- Allocate resources specifically for food programs in both urban and remote, northern Indigenous communities that address the immediate needs of food insecurity while supporting the long-term development of Indigenous food systems, including hunting, trapping, fishing and access to traditional foods.
- Direct the revamping of Nutrition North to improve access and affordability of food while strengthening northern, regional food systems, including public support for programs enhancing access to traditional foods, social innovation and collective food-security programs.
- Designate Indigenous hunting, fishing and gathering reserves within Federal Parks and Crown Land, and work with the provinces and territories to identify suitable tracts of land within provincial and territorial parklands.



QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- In many parts of Canada, Indigenous people's ability to hunt, fish, forage, and farm is compromised by the degradation of land and water through industrial-scale resource extraction. How would your government support the preservation and inclusion of Indigenous food sources into the management of lands and waters in order to ensure both for future generations?
- We are well aware there is a threat to our planet and that there are innumerable situations that demand change now. Food Sovereignty has been noted as a possible route to confront and reverse climate disruption through agro-ecological farming that preserves biodiversity, produces foods, preserves and generates water, produces culture, inhabits and defends territories and generates many jobs. How would your government propose to support Food Sovereignty and some of the examples above?