



FOOD SECURE CANADA
SÉCURITÉ ALIMENTAIRE CANADA

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Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you this evening.

Food Secure Canada is the only national membership-based organization that brings together the Canadian food movement in all its diversity. Food Secure Canada members includes farmers, fishermen and women, dieticians, public health officials, teachers, food bank workers, provincial and territorial food networks, international development NGOs, trade unions, academics and concerned individuals.

Our goal is to build a healthy, fair and ecological Canadian food system with zero hunger.

As you are aware, Canada currently has no national food policy. Programs and policies that affect food are divided up among departments and agencies. There is no master plan, no central coordination and no clear method for ensuring optimal outcomes from national policies. A national food strategy, would allow us to take the many issues related to food, such as health, the environment, hunger, economics and many others –

into account and view them as they are in reality – part of a inter-connected web.

Food Secure Canada is emerging from an unprecedented country-wide undertaking called the People’s Food Policy – where we did just this –taking a “whole-picture” look at the Canadian food system. The People’s Food Policy was a citizen-led initiative to develop a national food policy for Canada, grounded in the principles of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is an approach which privileges people, communities and nation-states having the right to define their own food systems. Thousands of Canadians participated in the People’s Food Policy -- gathering around real kitchen tables, talking about real experiences with food, in both urban and rural communities, from coast to coast to coast.

The result is this: “Resetting the Table: A People’s Food Policy for Canada”, available on our website: foodsecurecanada.org. The process also produced ten detailed policy documents, including two on Agriculture as well as one on science and technology. All of these are available on our website. The People’s Food Policy is the most comprehensive food policy being advanced in Canada today.

We began with the recognition our food system is failing Canadians. Close to two million Canadians regularly don’t have enough to eat. Thousands of family farms are disappearing. One in four Canadians is considered obese and children are going to school hungry. And the environment is being pushed

to the limit by the industrial food system, and over half of young farmers are unable to remain on the farm. The status quo is no longer an option. It is time for widespread change – innovation is not only possible, but necessary.

These problems are not only Canadian problems; they are international ones. I am sure your committee is familiar with the ground-breaking International Assessment of Agricultural, Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report that was published in 2009. This study was sponsored the World Bank and the FAO, involved over 400 scientists and it concluded, like the People's Food Policy that business as usual was not an option. Rather, this study concluded, amongst other things, that strengthening agro-ecology will contribute to addressing environmental issues while increasing productivity.¹

Today I would like to focus on our recommendation for the federal government to support sustainable local food systems. Again and again, people told the People Food Policy that they want to serve their families food produced and processed closer to home, using ecological methods of production. This means developing sustainable local food systems should be a top policy priority. Concretely, it would mean shifting away

¹ export oriented agriculture was not sustainable; that policy makers needed to consider the multi-functionality of agriculture; that formal sciences must be complemented by agro-ecological and traditional knowledge.

from prioritizing commodity-based, export-focused goals for Canadian agriculture, and towards regional, sustainability-focused food system.

The potential benefits of this innovation in our agricultural system are huge. Local selling and processing opportunities shorten the food chain, help develop regional economies and that has tremendous job creation potential as well as environmental benefits. Working this way more closely links farmers to food-buying citizens, maximizing the dollars that farmers receive. A shift to fresh and healthy food based on local ingredients brings great benefits to Canadians – from school children, to people recovering in our hospitals. If we can quadruple food exports in twenty years, as we have just done, then surely we can quadruple how much sustainably-produced Canadian food is being produced, processed and eaten close to home. There is already a good deal of research showing that a shift of this nature could substantially reduce our health care costs.

Food Secure Canada's entrepreneurial and innovative community already has many such examples. One is FarmStart – an NGO that supports young farmers just beginning to farm. Others include Local Food Plus, a local/sustainable certification service. These are only two of the ground breaking sustainable local food programs which would benefit from an enabling policy environment and additional funding.

Agricultural innovation cannot be reduced to a narrow scientific

approach. With all due respect, we disagree with Minister Gerry Ritz when he says that what is required is “More of the same”. Genuine agricultural innovation will be driven by a comprehensive national food strategy that tackles hunger, environmental degradation, the difficulties faced by farmers and fishers to make a decent living, and the predominance of unhealthy food habits in our country. These are some of the many inter-connected issues addressed in the People’s Food Policy. Real innovation in food policy making will require much broader participation with civil society as a full partner at the table.