

Finding Common Ground

A collaborative discussion on shaping Canada's national food strategy



Summary Report from a Meeting of Agriculture and Food Sector Stakeholders



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Executive Summary

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) has long advocated for a National Food Strategy and was pleased to see the mandate letter for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food clearly outline a commitment on this front, noting the need to “Develop a food policy that promotes healthy living and safe food by putting more healthy, high-quality food, produced by Canadian ranchers and farmers, on the tables of families across the country.”¹

CFA participated in an informal brainstorming session held by Maple Leaf, Food Secure Canada and the new Arrell Food Institute at the University of Guelph on March 21st, 2017, which focused on ideas for public engagement within such a food policy. Building upon this discussion and recognizing the diversity of perspectives that would come forth to inform development of such a policy, the CFA convened an event entitled ‘Finding Common Ground: A collaborative discussion on shaping Canada’s National Food Strategy’ on June 5, 2017. Stakeholders from a number of fields were brought together to explore the four themes proposed by the Government in Canada in their consultations on *A Food Policy for Canada*, and identify areas of common ground amongst them. These themes include:

- improving health and food safety;
- conserving our soil, water, and air;
- increasing access to affordable food; and
- growing more high-quality food.

A panel was held on each theme to identify existing initiatives, emerging issues, and possible directions for a NFS, followed by a plenary discussion on potential common ground and associated governance requirements. The contents of this report should not be considered the positions of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, but instead, present an outline of the range of perspectives likely to inform future discussions on a NFS.

A number of opportunities, challenges and potential directions were identified with regard to each of the respective themes and they are articulated further in this report. However, a number of cross-cutting items were identified that spanned all four themes, suggesting long-term objectives and early actions that should be considered when developing a National Food Strategy.

Four long-term objectives stood out in the discussion as ideally suited to the whole-of-government approach that a National Food Strategy entails:

1. Reducing Food Waste
2. Promoting Food Literacy
3. Reducing the cost of diet-related disease
4. Positioning Canada as a trusted global leader in safe, nutritious, and sustainable food.

However, to achieve these long-term objectives, participants stressed the need to first develop certain basic elements at the outset of a National Food Strategy:

1. A common understanding of concepts and terminology amongst all stakeholders
2. Accountability, on the part of all stakeholders, to clearly defined roles and responsibilities

¹ Office of the Prime Minister. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food Mandate Letter. Available at: <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-agriculture-and-agri-food-mandate-letter>

3. Identify data required to identify Canada's strengths, establish baselines across all objectives, and benchmark progress through metrics based on sound evidence and science
4. Aggregate the necessary data into a common framework and develop models to outline potential interdependencies and avoid unintended consequences.

To achieve these outcomes, participants also focused on a few key elements required of any approach to governing a National Food Strategy:

1. Engaging the entire supply chain, from input providers to retailers, to inform policy and ensure broad-based buy-in to proposed outcomes.
2. Incorporating indigenous leadership to address unique policy and jurisdictional issues that confront Canada's indigenous communities.
3. Developing a network to engage a broad base of stakeholders and maintain their engagement through clearly defined roles.

To ensure these elements were put in place, participants noted four critical steps that were required in the process of developing effective governance under a National Food Strategy:

1. Establish common principles and clear priorities
2. Reconvene stakeholders to subsequently review and assess potential governance models
3. Identify specific outcomes with clearly defined targets
4. Create a formal and transparent framework to institutionalize accountability across government departments.

The following report provides an overview of the discussions that informed these recommendations, in addition to overviews of each discussion and the subsequent outcomes identified under each theme. Throughout the report it is evident that a wide range of perspectives exist as to what a National Food Strategy should address, but despite any differences, significant common ground exists upon which all stakeholders can build.

Introduction

On June 5th, 2017, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture convened an event entitled ‘Finding Common Ground: A collaborative discussion on shaping Canada’s National Food Strategy’. Participants included representatives from multiple governmental departments, civil society, industry, indigenous groups, and academia (see **Appendix A** for a list). The event’s discussions were broken up into four panels focused on identifying opportunities, challenges, and proposed directions under the four themes identified by the Government in Canada in their consultations on *A Food Policy for Canada*:

- improving health and food safety;
- conserving our soil, water, and air;
- increasing access to affordable food; and
- growing more high-quality food.

In addition to these thematic discussions, the event concluded with a plenary discussion on areas of consensus or ‘common ground’, short- and long-term priorities under a National Food Strategy, and the governance mechanisms needed to make progress towards those priorities.

The Government of Canada recently announced consultations on *A Food Policy for Canada*, and highlighted the need for this intersectoral, cross-cutting discussion. However, several transformative initiatives already underway across the federal government had identified the need to explore whole-of-government approaches in a number of more specific policy domains. Amongst a range of ongoing federal policy initiatives and dialogues with relevance to this discussion, notable examples include:

- Canada’s actions on climate change;
- Health Canada’s Healthy Eating Strategy,
- Employment and Social Development Canada’s Poverty Reduction Strategy,
- Indigenous & Northern Affairs Canada’s Nutrition North Program, and
- The Barton Report and Federal Budget 2017’s Agri-food growth targets, skills and innovation agenda.

These wide-ranging and seemingly disparate policy initiatives all relate to food, through one means or another, demonstrating the rationale behind *A Food Policy for Canada*. Throughout the discussions summarized below, a number of stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that a food *strategy* was a more appropriate lens through which to address these diverse themes, acknowledging the need for an action-oriented approach capable of integrating numerous policies, bringing together various government departments. Thus, although there was not unanimous consensus behind this approach, this document will refer to a National Food Strategy (NFS) in place of a Food Policy, with references to *A Food Policy for Canada* limited to referencing the government’s ongoing consultation.

A National Food Strategy presents a unique opportunity for Canada to address cross-cutting issues through a forward-looking, integrated approach that aligns governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in contributing to informed, joined up policies. A successful NFS must create a vision that brings stakeholders together, engages them around common priorities, and builds upon Canada’s strengths. This report provides an overview of some of the diverse stakeholder opinions that came out in the discussions held on June 5th at CFA’s ‘Finding Common Ground: A collaborative discussion on shaping Canada’s National Food Strategy’ event.

Finding Common Ground: Summary of a Collaborative Discussion

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture hosted a series of panels on each of the aforementioned themes in order to identify existing initiatives, emerging issues, and possible directions for a NFS. This report briefly summarizes each of these discussions on pages 7 through 14, with a focus on opportunities, challenges and potential directions.

These panels were followed by a plenary discussion on potential areas of common ground and the governance structure required to achieve associated outcomes. This discussion is summarized in the report through two sections: [Areas of Common Ground](#) (pg. 15) and [Governance](#) (pg. 17).

Before summarizing these discussions, it is important to note that the summaries provided below provide only a high-level overview of discussions that took place and neither imply consensus on the part of all participants nor reflect the positions of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. Instead, the contents of this report should be considered the beginning of a broader discussion, demonstrating the range of perspectives likely to inform future discussions on a NFS, with a focus on identifying those areas of common ground that a NFS can look to build upon.

Links to initiatives identified through these discussions, noteworthy resources, and potential examples of effective governance raised during the day's discussions will be compiled and posted on the CFA's website for further reference: <http://www.cfa-fca.ca/programs-projects/national-food-strategy/>.

Improving Health and Food Safety

Opportunities and challenges

Throughout the discussion on how a NFS can contribute to improving health and food safety, a few key contextual pieces were noted repeatedly.

First, poor eating patterns and poor diets represent a primary risk factor for many chronic diseases in Canada, resulting in dramatic increases in healthcare costs that continue to rise faster than economic growth in Canada. Obesity rates in Canada, with more than 20% of Canadians classified as obese and over 50% of adults as overweight, were highlighted as an important indicator of the scale of this challenge. The food environment was noted by some as a primary concern on this front, with less healthy foods often more accessible, available, and less expensive than their healthier counterparts.

Second, information overload in the food environment make it challenging for Canadians to make healthy choices and difficult to effectively get messages out to consumers. The importance of improved food education and literacy were stressed as critical for Canadians to understand the importance of a healthy diet and how it relates to their individual situations. At the same time, participants noted the multi-faceted nature of this challenge, with socioeconomic, hectic lifestyles, and the prevalence of non-scientific misinformation all playing a role. The need for comprehensive, holistic policy responses in this area were identified as critical elements under a NFS.

A holistic approach to health was identified as including both effective policy and supportive infrastructure, addressing everything from food labels to governance and leadership. An assessment of Canada's health policy environment through the lens of a comprehensive NFS was proposed, with improved evaluation and monitoring of health policies regularly identified as critical to making targeted, impactful policy interventions moving forward. In addition, a number of successful collaborations at municipal, regional or provincial scales were noted in this discussion, as vital sources of information for lessons learned and potential scaling up.

Overall, improving health was identified as a critical theme under any NFS, noting that rising healthcare costs represent an issue with intersectoral and interdepartmental linkages. An example of these linkages is that total healthcare costs for households facing severe food insecurity are 121% higher than for food secure households². Health Canada's Healthy Eating Strategy was identified as a transformative initiative in this space and as a prime example of a policy that must align with a NFS.

For the NFS to truly inform policies in this area, participants noted the need for engagement with all stakeholders early in the policy development process, rather than simply responding to proposals. Recent front-of-package labelling proposals put forth as part of the Healthy Eating Strategy were noted by industry as an example where early engagement with industry would have helped ensure those responsible for implementation were engaged in identifying workable solutions, thus enabling more streamlined implementation.

However, a number of participants noted that health and food safety must be considered as distinct policy areas. Canada maintains a strong global reputation for global food safety, noted in a recent study

² Tarasuk et al. (2015). Association between household food insecurity and annual health care costs. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 187(14).

by the Conference Board of Canada, which ranked Canada as first in food safety performance amongst 16 peer OECD countries³. Food safety was noted as a prime example where ‘level-setting’ under a NFS was critical, noting that improvement is constantly ongoing and that food safety should be considered a source of strength for Canada.

Potential directions

Based on these discussions, a number of health-related outcomes were proposed as targets for a NFS. Reducing healthcare costs was identified repeatedly as a potential long-term, over-arching policy objective, with a number of more specific outcomes identified within that. Examples include:

1. Increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables through clearly defined, forward-looking targets.
2. Establishing a ‘Health-in-all policies’ approach, which would integrate health impact assessments or a health lens across all departments. Slovenia was indicated as an example in this space.
3. Improving data collection on food consumption and literacy, setting targets for high impact segments of the population, such as youth. For example, regular collection of CCHS Nutrition cycle data every 5 years.
4. Identifying and assessing Student Nutrition Programs to share best practices and promote scaling up of existing, successful initiatives. Schools in indigenous communities were identified as an area of federal jurisdiction where a NFS could play a more direct role in this area.

³ Le Vallée & Charlebois (2014). 2014 World Ranking: Food Safety Performance. Conference Board of Canada. Available at: <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/cfic/research/2014/foodsafety.aspx>

Conserving our Soil, Water, and Air

Opportunities and challenges

Participants explored the potential to address environmental outcomes through a NFS by looking at the possible links between existing federal policy initiatives. No single, over-arching federal policy encompasses such a broad subject, nor is there a single department capable of addressing it in isolation. A plethora of relevant, existing initiatives were roughly categorized into three areas: climate change mitigation & adaptation, biodiversity & conservation, and food waste. In particular, a NFS was identified as having potential to convene interdepartmental and cross-sectoral dialogue that could help advance a number of key areas:

- carbon sequestration;
- renewable fuel production;
- greenhouse gas (GHG) management;
- protection of species at risk;
- water quality and weather monitoring;
- process and product innovations in the agri-food industry; and
- the collection and reporting of data on environmental performance in the agri-food industry.

Food waste reduction was highlighted as a policy outcome that would benefit considerably from a whole-of-government approach to food policy. With the true cost of food waste in Canada estimated to cost Canadians approximately \$107 billion each year⁴, and half occurring at the consumer or retail level, a NFS presents a unique opportunity to address this multi-faceted issue. With implications for efficiency and profitability within the agri-food industry, resource conservation, reduction of GHG emissions, and to a limited extent, domestic food insecurity, a NFS would provide a unique forum through which to address this cross-cutting issue.

Despite this potential, participants felt there are limited indicators in place to track progress, due to insufficient or outdated data in a number of key policy areas. This was identified as a fundamental challenge. A noteworthy example is the [2020 Biodiversity Goals and Targets for Canada](#). A number of these targets directly relate to Canada's agriculture and agri-food system, yet Canada lacks information in regard to monitoring invertebrate species and quantifying ecological goods & services. This limits the capacity to measure and accurately define success in these areas. Furthermore, this discussion highlighted the need for aquaculture and traditional food environments to be considered within a NFS. As a source of growth potential for communities across Canada, particularly in Canada's North, improved data collection on fish stock sustainability and environmental indicators relevant to other traditional food environments were identified as requiring further attention.

This dearth of metrics was noted as the source of considerable missed opportunity, with environmental considerations increasingly integrated into business decision-making and driving continued process and product innovations. Participants noted that Canada's endowment of natural resources coupled with its highly-efficient primary agriculture industry provided a potentially significant source of comparative advantage and future growth. Industry collaborations were identified as critical means of promoting

⁴ Gooch & Felfel (2014). "\$27 Billion" Revisited – The Cost of Canada's Annual Food Waste. Value Chain Management International Inc. Available at: <http://vcm-international.com/new-report-annual-food-waste-in-canada-is-31-billion/>

sustainable production through sharing best practices and resources relating to conservation of soil, water, and air. Industry participants acknowledged environmental performance as a known risk with considerable opportunity, if properly accounted for and demonstrated in the marketplace.

Moreover, improved indicators were noted as beneficial to all orders of government, helping identify high impact targets for funding and awareness-raising programs. Considerable provincial variation in environmental performance was noted as an opportunity, as a NFS may increase interdepartmental and cross-sectoral sharing of best practices — a desired outcome noted throughout the discussion.

For example, the development of a more uniform, national Environmental Farm Plan program would foster increased collaboration. There is considerable potential to improve aggregate data collection and transparency through such an approach, allowing industry to better illustrate the progress made on a number of environmental fronts and also to inform next steps to continue this progress. However, a lack of effective indicators was noted as limiting the capacity to compile an accurate, aggregate picture of industry's progress to date, as well as the ability to identify the most impactful best management practices (BMPs) eligible for future funding under such a program.

This discussion also highlighted the need to engage the entire supply chain, from farm input manufacturers to the retail sector, in identifying opportunities that often span any segment of the supply chain.

Potential directions

Improved environmental data collection was identified as an over-arching outcome under a NFS and benefiting from a whole-of-government dialogue on relevant data needs that extend beyond single departmental mandates:

1. To compile a common database capable of benchmarking and tracking future progress on all proposed outcomes under a NFS. Where indicators do not currently exist, identify further data collection measures required to meet the associated need.

The market continues to demonstrate an increasing need for environmental indicators, with financial incentives increasingly available to firms and industry segments capable of demonstrating environmental performance that exceeds baseline regulatory standards. By better defining Canada's comparative advantages in natural capital, targeted improvements in environmental performance can be incentivized through market-based tools. This informs a number of the potential directions identified for a NFS:

2. Immediate focus on establishing objective and reliable reporting of aggregate environmental performance in the agri-food sector.
3. Promote precompetitive collaborations amongst industry to share best practices that can help leverage financial incentives in the global marketplace.
4. Support government in encouraging the adoption of high impact environmental best management practices, where there is considerable potential for public good but a lack of corresponding benefit to the measure for a given operation.

Increasing Access to Affordable Food

Opportunities and challenges

Income levels, geography, infrastructure, housing and food literacy were all identified as having a significant influence on community and/or household food security. Participants noted that the solution to domestic food security did not require production of more food or reduction of food waste, noting that socioeconomic factors are central to understanding and address this issue. Farmers and food processors were viewed as playing a limited role, in providing efficient, affordable food. Transportation bottlenecks, and streamlined regulations were suggested as possible levers on this front. However, anti-poverty strategies, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy at Employment and Social Development Canada, were highlighted as critical levers in directly addressing food insecurity.

Food insecurity was noted to disproportionately affect vulnerable populations that have not historically been adequately engaged in previous top-down policy approaches. Examples of initiatives focused on access to food banks or food waste diversion programs were noted as problematic because they do not actually address food insecurity (the lack of income and resources to access food), while not respecting the dignity of the individuals expected to rely upon them. Participants felt that ensuring broad-based engagement with affected populations would be critical to addressing food insecurity in Canada.

Recognizing that the drivers of food insecurity vary regionally and tend to extend across sectoral and departmental boundaries, participants noted the value of addressing food security as a basic human right that comes with clear obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. A NFS vision focused on achieving an outcome of zero hunger, as a right for all Canadians, was proposed as a long-term objective to be progressively realized and improved upon over time. A report published by Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, following his visit to Canada was suggested as a reference point that should be revisited when identifying food security outcomes under a NFS.⁵

Similar to the previous discussions, the current measurement of food insecurity was noted as a challenge confounding progress in this area. Food security is directly measurable at the household and individual level, but concerns were raised with provinces' ability to opt out of collecting data on food security measures through the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). This results in gaps in data on food insecurity, limiting the capacity to understand and track progress.

From an industry perspective, impact investing in innovations with measurable benefits was identified as a critical tool to help address food security, based on shared learnings as to what has worked in the past. Working in collaboration with civil society and charitable organizations was identified as an integral approach. By measuring previous programs' efficacy through in-depth, outcome-based evaluation, future funds can be better targeted to ensure they are impactful. Building capacity, support systems, skills training, and creating inclusive economic opportunities were all highlighted as contributions that respect the dignity and rights of those most negatively affected by food insecurity. Sensitization to this

⁵ De Schutter (2013). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food: Mission to Canada. United Nations Human Rights Council. Available at: http://www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/officialreports/20121224_canadafinal_en.pdf

issue was also noted as an important factor, highlighting the important role that media and social media play in connecting individuals to resources and advancing opportunities for shared learnings.

There is no single, overarching policy instrument or department in place to address food security. The Nutrition North program administered by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada was noted as an example. This retail food subsidy program targets specific northern communities with associated nutritional education components delivered by Health Canada and the Public Health Agency. In addition, the Northern Contaminants program was identified as a source of funding for research on contaminants that find their way into northern food chains to inform both community members and other programs as to the safety of country food in traditional territory. The targeted nature of both these programs was noted as a common approach to regional food security issues, with participants raising the need to see a holistic, over-arching strategy to food security that could share best practices and assist in scaling up successful initiatives.

Potential directions

Given the complex and intractable origins of food insecurity amongst Canadian communities and households, participants offered a range of potential steps towards addressing Canadian food insecurity through a NFS:

1. Establishing an appropriate governance structure to address food security issues that maintains ongoing engagement with vulnerable and traditionally less engaged populations in identifying outcomes and developing policy-based solutions.
2. Improving mandatory reporting of food insecurity data by all provinces through the CCHS and continued dialogue as to the indicators needed to track progress on the multiple drivers of food insecurity.
3. Acknowledging food as a basic human right, centred around a long-term outcome of zero hunger in Canada.
4. Assess existing anti-poverty, income support pilots and enhanced social benefits through an outcome-based perspective, providing support to scale up high impact initiatives.

Growing More High-Quality Food

Opportunities and challenges

The Second Report from Minister Morneau's Advisory Council on Economic Growth (The Barton Report)⁶ was identified at the outset of the meeting as a unique opportunity to build upon the economic strength of Canada's agri-food industry. Canada continues to face lagging economic growth, while ranking poorly in innovation relative to peer countries. The Barton Report identified Canada's agri-food sector as an industry with immense potential for inclusive growth and laid out a series of recommendations to make progress towards growth in this sector, with subsequent measures introduced in the 2017 Federal budget and a target of \$75 billion in agri-food exports by 2025.⁷

Participants regularly noted the need to build upon the sector's existing economic weight, while acknowledging that achieving \$75 billion in agri-food exports would require considerable growth in the capacity of Canada's food processing sector to add value to a greater proportion of Canada's primary agricultural production. Concerns were raised with regard to this alignment by some participants, noting that a National Food Strategy must more directly integrate considerations in regard to health, equity, and environmental dimensions. Thus, while it was strongly suggested that a NFS must closely align with the economic advisory council's report, others noted that a NFS provides a unique opportunity to better integrate health, equity and environmental considerations through strong multi-stakeholder partnerships.

One area of particular attention was the need to focus on better quantifying and leveraging Canada's comparative advantage, with Canada's ecological surplus highlighted as a prime opportunity to differentiate Canadian agri-food products in the global marketplace. For example, Canada was identified as one of the most efficient producers of animal protein in the world, with the industry's water use provided as another example. 11% of global food traded was noted to currently depend on depleted aquifers, with much of global trade occurring below the true cost of production. These were identified as key areas where Canada could establish comparative advantage as a source of sustainable food products.

Participants noted that this approach, again, requires that all stakeholders work to improve data collection in areas of potential comparative advantage to track historic and ongoing progress, while benchmarking Canada against its international competitors. Canada's low food costs, high food safety standards, and continued improvements in efficiency and productivity were all noted as strengths for the sector that must be considered both in identifying opportunities for growth, but also in setting baselines for outcomes under the other themes of a NFS.

The vibrancy of rural communities was identified as critical to achieving sustainable growth. Rural communities and farmers need to be economically sustainable and prosperous to see continued growth in the sector, with Canada's continued labour shortages a prime example of how intertwined Canada's agri-food industry and rural communities are. Participants highlighted food processing as the top employer in rural Canada with more than 300,000 jobs and 6,000 facilities located in every region across

⁶ Advisory Council on Economic Growth. Second Report – Unleashing the Growth Potential of Key Sectors. Government of Canada. Available at: <http://www.budget.gc.ca/aceg-ccce/pdf/key-sectors-secteurs-cles-eng.pdf>

⁷ Government of Canada. Budget 2017. Available at: <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2017/home-accueil-en.html>

Canada. As an important market that adds value to Canadian farm products, the fact that Canada only processes approximately 50% of its domestic agricultural production was proposed as a target for significant growth. When discussing growth, participants also noted that there was room to grow for all scales of operations and industry segments, with a range of market-based incentives for growth in both export and domestic markets.

Canada's continued export reliance on the US market and the ongoing uncertainty surrounding that market was noted as a key challenge, with diversification into international markets highlighted as a critical focal point for further growth. Declining investment in food manufacturing facilities and the need to see greater investments in automation and robotics were both noted as challenges that required a new vision and mindset amongst industry, focused on value-added production through enhanced R&D. This innovation was highlighted as source of potential gains across multiple themes, with improved efficiency, sustainability and health-related product innovations all identified as current focal points for Canadian agriculture and food businesses.

To make progress in this area, participants felt regulations should be targeted for improvement, noting that regulators must adopt a more future-facing approach grounded in science and informed by early consultation with the value chain to help mitigate against any unintended consequences. As one stakeholder noted, "regulate for tomorrow, not today".

Potential directions

To achieve the sector's growth potential through a NFS, participants note the need for immediate actions focused on:

1. increased innovation and value-added production based on improved understanding and measurement of Canada's comparative advantages,
2. streamlining of regulations through a future-focused lens and early consultation with the entire supply chain, ensuring regulations are based on sound evidence and science, and
3. addressing Canada's labour gap as it presents a critical constraint to growth throughout the supply chain.

While participants noted the value that will come from agri-food's economic strategy table and potential supercluster funding, the need for ongoing engagement around future growth was identified as a crucial role that the NFS could support. A few potential directions were identified to achieve this:

4. Canada must use its position in international fora to raise the bar on global competitors in regard to market distortions arising from subsidized access to natural capital, such as water, and associated negative environmental externalities. The World Trade Organizations review of domestic supports was highlighted as a short-term target for this approach; and
5. Providing a governance structure to support trans-disciplinary, innovation-focused research through multi-stakeholder partnerships. Through improved, multi-disciplinary data collection, monitoring and assessment, a NFS must explore cross-sectoral growth opportunities that arise through improved understanding of Canada's comparative advantages. For instance, further research into health and the gut biome could identify market opportunities for Canadian products; and similarly, soil health was identified as an important source of opportunity to achieve growth and improved environmental outcomes.

Areas of Common Ground

Throughout discussions, a number of common themes have surfaced that may benefit from the interdepartmental, cross-sectoral dialogue that would emerge from a NFS. This section briefly highlights these areas of common ground across the various themes.

While a number of issues were identified that spanned multiple themes, three issues stood out as outcomes ideally suited to the whole-of-government approach enabled by a NFS. Four cross-cutting long-term objectives were identified that spanned all four thematic areas:

- 1. Reducing Food Waste:** While it was noted that reducing food waste should not be considered a solution to food insecurity, a holistic approach is required to reduce the food waste estimated to cost Canadians \$107 billion each year. Reducing this waste would not only increase efficiency and improve profitability in the sector, it would also contribute to the reduction of GHG emissions through improved resource efficiency.
- 2. Promoting Food Literacy:** Educating Canadians as to the healthy food grown here in Canada, its preparation, and its implications for health was noted as key tool in addressing many of the challenges noted throughout the day. With potential to reduce healthcare costs through improved eating behaviours and diets, address food waste at the consumer level, increase consumption of Canadian fruits and vegetables, and raise awareness around the agri-food sector's importance to Canada, improving food literacy was identified as a unique opportunity to address challenges across the themes discussed.
- 3. Reducing the cost of diet-related disease:** As a source of rising healthcare costs that disproportionately affects food insecure households, the reduction of diet-related illness is an objective that crosses a number of the aforementioned themes and requires a truly integrated, whole-of-government approach. For example, increasing consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables in Canada presents opportunities for Canadian growers, but requires an integrated approach to issues ranging from poverty to transportation to the prevalence of misleading, non-scientific claims that inform consumers eating habits.
- 4. Positioning Canada as a trusted global leader in safe, nutritious, and sustainable food:** Canada's natural capital endowment and reputation for producing safe, high-quality food products was highlighted for its potential as a source of comparative advantage for the sector. If appropriately quantified, water use, production efficiency, and low residue agri-food products were a few key areas identified as means through which Canada could demonstrate leadership on a global stage. A NFS was noted as uniquely positioned to bring together the relevant stakeholders required to integrate the full range of considerations required to truly implement this vision by establishing the necessary metrics and promoting further innovations in these areas. As an industry with immense potential for inclusive growth, the NFS could provide a vision for the sector's growth that more directly integrates environmental dimensions, equity, and health considerations, while providing employment and economic opportunities across the country.

In terms of early actions, four outcomes were identified across all four discussions:

- A. Establishing Common Language & Definitions:** Throughout the discussion, the importance of clear, commonly understood language was highlighted as critical to the success of a NFS. Early efforts to bring stakeholders together and establish common nomenclature were noted as essential to providing a foundation for effective coordination and collaboration under a NFS.
- B. Accountability through Clear Roles and Responsibilities:** A number of participants noted that a National Food Policy was only acknowledged within the Mandate letter of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food, raising questions as to other departments' accountability within a NFS. Existing cross-department dialogues in support of *A Food Policy for Canada* were lauded, and demonstrate the commitment of 16 departments and agencies to the current process. However, moving forward, participants noted the importance of defining specific roles and responsibilities at the outset to institutionalize collaboration within a NFS, including roles for industry and other non-governmental stakeholders.
- C. Data collection, evidence-based policy, and clear targets:** Across all four discussions, participants emphasized the importance of collecting better data, quantifying progress through clearly defined metrics, and reporting on that information on regular and transparent basis. In particular, participants suggested that a successful NFS must acknowledge areas of strength (such as the affordability of food and Canada's robust food safety standards), establish baselines, and benchmark progress through science-based indicators. Establishing clear, quantifiable targets was highlighted as critical to ensuring the accountability of all parties.
- D. Data aggregation and modelling:** Recognizing the importance of evidence-based decision making, the potential for unintended consequences was noted repeatedly as a risk under a NFS. Given the complexity and inter-related nature of the concepts discussed, participants noted the importance of aggregating data within a common framework and informing this framework through modelling exercises that would outline the potential interdependencies and externalities of a given initiative.

Governance

In addition to the policy areas and specific outcomes identified as pertinent to a NFS, considerable portions of the discussion focused on governance under a NFS. As one participant noted “If we don’t get the governance piece right between now and a year from now, we will be further behind. This will have been a counter-productive process.”

Opportunities and challenges

Food touches upon the lives of Canadians on a daily basis in a number of ways. This outlines one of the core motivations behind development of a NFS. Participants noted that a NFS presents an opportunity to inform a whole-of-government approach to food issues, but cautioned that international attempts to implement similar policies or strategies have demonstrated how fragile a process this can be. The short consultation period and wide-ranging issues potentially relevant to a NFS further reinforce the importance of ongoing engagement and evolution under a NFS. Participants repeatedly noted that NFS must be an evolving document, rather than a static policy, and that a robust, inclusive governance structure was needed to ensure continued engagement on the part of stakeholders.

For a NFS to be truly effective, participants repeatedly noted the need for industry and civil society leadership. In defining the parameters of such an approach, the following recommendations were noted:

- **Engaging the entire supply chain:** When engaging industry, a NFS must take into account the entire supply chain, including retailers, processors, primary producers, input providers, and other ancillary services.
- **The Importance of Engaging Indigenous Leaders:** Indigenous communities must be engaged in governance through band councils, tribal councils, and territorial organizations. It was noted repeatedly that, unlike most other communities in Canada, a number of the issues falling under potential NFS themes, such as school nutrition programming, fall within federal jurisdiction in many indigenous communities.
- **A Broad Network of Stakeholders:** A network-based approach to ongoing stakeholder engagement may be most effective, engaging a wide range of stakeholders through clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

In terms of governance within the federal government, participants highlighted the need for the NFS to report directly to the centre of government. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food’s mandate letter does not currently cross-reference other Ministers, and as such, central agencies must play a central role in ensuring cross-departmental accountability. This would help address another key point raised by many participants; a NFS must be aligned to other federal policy initiatives and priorities.

Furthermore, while *A Food Policy for Canada* has been positioned as a federal initiative, a NFS requires engagement from all orders of government, with provincial and municipal issues likely to arise when looking at prospective solutions. Ongoing information sharing between the federal government and provincial governments must be strengthened, encouraging alignment and shared learning around common objectives.

However, the discussion concluded with a suggestion that the form of governance should ultimately follow from its function. Thus, setting priorities and establishing common principles represent critical first steps that would help inform an appropriate approach to governance.

Potential directions

Based on the discussions noted above, a number of key initial directions were identified as first steps under a National Food Strategy:

- 1. Priority setting and common principles** must be identified and agreed upon through a multi-stakeholder, cross-silo discussion before an appropriate governance structure can be determined. The scope and parameters of a NFS must be better-defined in order for stakeholders to understand their respective responsibilities and subsequent governance roles.
- 2. A multi-stakeholder discussion should be reconvened**, following the definition of priorities and common principles, to explore what governance of a NFS should look like.
- 3. Effective governance must focus on outcomes**, with clearly defined targets and specific stakeholders accountable to those targets.
- 4. A formal and transparent framework** must be put in place to institutionalize accountability to a NFS across government departments. While early engagement signals strong collaboration amongst federal departments, a NFS will inevitably include a focus on both short- and long-term outcomes. Formalizing departmental accountability to a NFS was noting as contributing to buy-in on the part of other stakeholders when addressing longer-term objectives.

Appendix A

Agriculture & Agri-food Canada
Canadian Agri-food Policy Institute
Canadian Cattlemen's Association
Canadian Hatching Egg Producers
Canadian Organic Trade Association
Canadian Produce Marketing Association
Chicken Farmers of Canada
Conference Board of Canada
Egg Farmers of Canada
Environment and Climate Change Canada
Food and Consumer Products of Canada
Food Processors of Canada
Food Secure Canada
Gaylea Foods
Health Canada
Heart and Stroke Foundation
Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Maple Leaf Foods
MNP
Ontario Public Health Association – Nutrition Resource Centre
Provision Coalition
Pulse Canada
Sustainable Beef Roundtable
Sustainable Crops Roundtable
Syngenta
University of Alberta



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