

EAT
think
VOTE

**HEALTHY DIETS FROM SUSTAINABLE FOOD
SYSTEMS**



**FSC
RAD**

Food
Secure
Canada
Réseau
pour une alimentation
durable

KEY STATISTICS:

- Only 1/3 of children consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables, and nearly a quarter of children's calorie consumption comes from foods not recommended by Canada's Food Guide¹.
- 30,000 deaths could be averted or delayed every year if Canadians adhered to dietary guidelines, particularly regarding the consumption of fruits and vegetables².
- An Ontario research study³ shows that replacing 10% of the top 10 fruit and vegetable imports with Ontario-grown produce would result in a \$250 million increase in provincial gross domestic product.
- 84% of Canadians rank "[c]reating agricultural programs that increase population health" as a high priority for national food policy⁴.
- Every year, 48,000 to 66,000 Canadians die from conditions linked to excess weight, nearly two thirds of adults and one third of children are obese or overweight, and obesity costs Canada between \$4.6 billion and \$7.1 billion annually in health care and lost productivity⁵.

Context

Recent research⁶ estimates the economic burden of diet-related chronic disease attributable to not meeting Canadian food recommendations for eight foods both protective (e.g., vegetables, fruit, whole grains, milk, nuts and seeds) and harmful (e.g., highly processed foods, sugar-sweetened beverages) costs the public purse CAD\$13.8 billion/year (direct health care costs: CAD\$5.1 billion, indirect costs: CAD\$8.7 billion). Canadians who experience poverty are more likely to be food insecure, and are more vulnerable to diet-related chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes⁷. Furthermore, racialized and Indigenous peoples are far more likely to be living in poverty than non-racialized people^{8,9}, therefore disproportionately experiencing the effects of unhealthy diets.

And since our health is intimately linked to the environment, we also need to improve the sustainability of food systems and redefine healthy food as going beyond its nutritional qualities alone. In addition to the impact of diet on health, the impact of food production on climate and the environment needs to be considered. Food in the Anthropocene: the Eat-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems¹⁰ calls for a food system redesign in order to both nurture human health and support environmental sustainability. Shifting to diets that contribute to the health of both people and the planet is a strong lever for change.

¹ Statistics Canada (2014). 2014 Canadian Community Health Survey.

² Bélanger et al (2014). Modelling the impact of compliance with dietary recommendations on cancer and cardiovascular disease mortality in Canada. *Public Health* 128(3): 222-30H

³ Econometric Research Limited Harry Cummings & Associates, Rod MacRae, PhD (2015). *Dollars & Sense: Opportunities to Strengthen Southern Ontario's Food System*.

⁴ Environics Research Group (2011). *Strategic Issues Survey Wave 3*. Prepared for Agriculture and Agri-foods Canada.

⁵ *Obesity in Canada: A Whole-of-Society Approach for a Healthier Canada* (2016). Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

Context

Changing food environments is a key strategic area for policy change, in order to support increased access to healthy sustainable food, and to work with food industry players large and small to improve food options and information available to Canadian consumers in households, retail establishments and public institutions such as schools and hospitals. There are many innovations that could be scaled which generate benefits across the system, for example, healthy corner store initiatives, farmers' market coupons for low-income families, and fruit and vegetable prescriptions.

Health, equity and sustainability are all interconnected. In addition to meeting our nutritional needs, healthy food should come from food-production systems that sustain our natural resources, treat animals humanely, provide fair work for everyone involved in the food system and promote the overall health of communities. Ensuring access, both physical and economic, to local, sustainable and culturally appropriate food needs to be an integral part of working towards healthier eating across Canada.

The revised Canada's Food Guide¹¹ highlights the importance of culturally appropriate and sustainable foods, increasing consumption of plant-based proteins to replace some of the animal proteins and increasing consumption of whole, unprocessed foods. Canada's Food Guide, integrated into a Food Policy For Canada, is a strong policy foundation upon which to build links between healthy eating, sustainable food systems and addressing climate change.

⁶ Lieffers et al. (2018). The economic burden of not meeting food recommendations in Canada: The cost of doing nothing.

⁷ Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy Group (2017). Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy: A Comprehensive Evidenced Informed Plan for Healthy Food and Food Systems in Ontario.

⁸ Canadian Poverty Institute (n.d.). Poverty in Canada.

⁹ Canada Without Poverty (n.d.). Just the Facts.

¹⁰ Willett, W., et al. (2019). Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *The Lancet*, 393(10170), 447–492.

¹¹ Health Canada (2019). Canada's Food Guide 2019. Health Canada (2019). Canada's Food Guide 2019.

Policy Proposals

- Develop a sustainable procurement policy framework to ensure public dollars are generating best value and leveling the playing field for small and medium sized businesses to bid on food contracts. Set benchmarks for local, sustainable food spending and creating healthier food environments. Encourage public institutions to 'bring to life' Canada's Food Guide including sourcing and serving more whole foods and more plant-based protein.
- The Coalition for Healthy School Food is asking the federal government to invest in a universal healthy school food program across Canada, with the vision that all students in Canada would have access to healthy meals at school every day. To learn more, see the website for the Coalition for Healthy School Food.
- Consider taxes and subsidies to encourage healthier eating, such as taxes on sugar-sweetened drinks and subsidies for farmers market coupons, fruit and vegetable programs, healthy corner stores, etc.



Questions for candidates

- How would you encourage Canadians to shift a portion of their diet towards more plant-based proteins as part of the multi-pronged effort needed to address climate change?
- A growing number of public institutions are interested in sourcing more local, sustainable food, which could improve health, preserve the environment and invest in the local economy. What would you do to support public institutions like hospitals and schools transitioning to local food?
- Are you in support of taxes and subsidies to encourage healthier eating, such as a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages?



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