



SUPPORT INDIGENOUS FOOD
SOVEREIGNTY



WHAT IS EAT THINK VOTE?

Eat Think Vote is a non-partisan campaign, gathering community members living coast-to-coast-to-coast to speak with federal candidates ahead of the upcoming election. This backgrounder, and other policy backgrounders are based on Growing resilience and equity, Food Secure Canada's food policy action. It is grounded in the analysis and policy proposals of civil society food movement actors across the country, and situated within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Framework. This page highlights the intersections between the policy issues and the SDGs

This backgrounder on Indigenous Food Sovereignty is based on the sources included as footnotes, Food Secure Canada policy documents, the People's Food Policy Indigenous Circle analysis, and input from Food Secure Canada's Indigenous Board members. It is not an exhaustive presentation of the issues, nor of potential policy proposals. The backgrounders should be viewed as living documents.



CONTEXT: INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Despite promises made by the British Crown through the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the Treaty of 1764, subsequent Treaties, and UNDRIP¹ ("the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world"), Canada has in the words of a previous Supreme Court of Canada Chief Justice, practiced genocide. Food deprivation, stolen lands and interfering with access to sources of food sovereignty, along with poisoning of the waters and lands and other destruction of habitat for traditional food, medicine and other economic sources along with the marginalization of Indigenous women and others have and continue to be part of the colonial reality in Canada.

In place of a system based on natural law and respect for the sacred elements and all of life, colonial dictates have created dependency-based food structures (e.g. imports, state supports) which undermine food sovereignty, and allow even culturally weak food insecurity to perpetuate. The Covid-19 crisis has and will continue to exacerbate the high rates of food insecurity among Indigenous households and communities, which, before Covid-19 was already prevalent in almost half of First Nations families.² The current health crisis and other potential future health crises stemming from zoonotic disease call for lockdowns and road closures, further threatening unreliable food supplies of imported food, and underlining the fragility of this approach.

Demand for culturally appropriate traditional/country foods - which reduce dependency, improve health, increase connection to land and culture, and bring pride in self to community members - are rising and unmet. Some communities are also facing this crisis within the context of boil water advisories and crowded living conditions, leading to further challenges with respect to following Covid-19 health guidelines and ensuring adequate food supply.

¹ General Assembly (2007) United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

² FNFNES First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study (2019) Summary of key findings.

CONTEXT: INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Yet, critically, Indigenous communities across the country are innovating local approaches to address Covid-19 related food challenges.³ These communities know what will best meet the urgent needs of today while building foundations for resilient futures. The path forward requires a rights-based approach to Indigenous food sovereignty. As underlined by a policy brief published by Yellowhead Institute,⁴ "Relying on charity to address food insecurity in Indigenous communities is extremely problematic. (...) We have to look beyond short-term emergency driven solutions to address food insecurity for Indigenous peoples in Canada and for the long-term. This includes addressing infrastructure issues and those that have existed in many Indigenous communities for a long time."

Now is the time for Indigenous communities to take back control to determine their place-based food systems, as well as the policies that will best support these resilient futures. There is an urgent need to support self-determined First Nations,⁵ Métis⁶ and Inuit⁷ responses which address short-term needs while strengthening Indigenous food sovereignty into the future.

³ Thunder Bay & Area Food Strategy (9 April, 2020) [Food Strategy Covid-19 Statement](#).

⁴ Levi E. and Robin T. and a group of signatories (29 April, 2020) [Policy Brief: COVID-19 Did Not Cause Food Insecurity In Indigenous Communities But It Will Make It Worse](#) (Yellowhead Institute).

⁵ Assembly of First Nations, [Covid-19 response](#)

⁶ Métis Nation [Covid-19](#).

⁷ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2021), [Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy](#)

POLICY PRIORITIES

- Commit to Reconciliation As Relationship⁸, and the 10 principles⁹ for Canada's political and legal systems, educational and religious institutions, corporate sector, and civil society to function in ways that are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Canada has endorsed;
- Honour both the spirit and the letter of the law of Canadian Constitutional commitments to Indigenous peoples' rights and responsibilities;
- Respect treaties (historic and modern) and other land rights, ensure Indigenous control over land and waterways;
- Self-determination for Indigenous peoples and communities, and distinct approaches for First Nations, Inuit, Métis, as well as urban, remote, northern and rural realities;
- Provide direct support to Indigenous-led and Indigenous-serving groups that are focused on Indigenous food systems, for instance through the Local Food Infrastructure Program
- Support communities to design new models, and support and reinvigorate Indigenous food ways like community kitchens, gardening programs, greenhouses, other community-led infrastructure, hunter support programs and goose camps;
- Support Indigenous-led cooperative and other non-profit motivated grocery stores and other traditional/country food and supplies;
- Initiate Nutrition North Canada (NNC) Reform, including increase in the land-based harvest supports to a minimum 25% of total NNC expenditures;

⁸Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)(2015) [What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation.](#)

⁹Ibid

POLICY PRIORITIES

- Instate a universal livable income guarantee;
- Immediately invest in the infrastructure to ensure all communities have guaranteed access to clean drinking water, and housing adequate for local needs;
- Provide distinct, appropriate state investments in Indigenous communities (child welfare, education, minor/major capital and infrastructure); and
- Support for Indigenous-led coordination of Covid-19 response and recovery in Indigenous communities.



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?
- First Nations people experience food insecurity at rates 2.5 times the national average. Hunger in our northern communities is among the highest level in any Indigenous population in the western world. How would your party address this issue while supporting Indigenous food sovereignty?
- Canada's adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is a small but positive step towards Indigenous food sovereignty, but some concerns have been raised about a top-down approach towards implementation. How would your government support communities to design new models, and support and reinvigorate Indigenous food ways led and managed by First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities?