

August 31, 2017

The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
1341 Baseline Road
Ottawa, ON K1A 0C5



Re: Food Security Action Group Response to a Food Policy for Canada

The Food Security Action Group (FSAG) of the Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force applaud the Government of Canada and Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-Food's efforts to develop a *Food Policy for Canada*. Working in partnership with 51 agencies and community groups; universities, institutes and policy-makers the Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force facilitates meaningful dialogue, education and purposeful partnerships that address the root causes of poverty in our community. The Grey and Bruce counties are the primary funding source of this group.

The FSAG recognizes the development of a national food policy as an integral effort towards a healthy and sustainable food system that meets the needs of all Canadians. The FSAG recommends connecting *A Food Policy for Canada* with the *National Poverty Reduction Strategy* (Government of Canada, 2017) and Canada's commitment to meet the WHO *Sustainable Development Goals* (Government of Canada, 2017).

Many Canadian communities, including those in Bruce County and Grey County, have recognized the impact of food on many aspects of Canadian's lives, through the development of local food councils, charters, and strategies. These efforts integrate health, social, economic priorities to reflect the multidimensional relationship Canadians have with food. Local and provincial efforts towards food sovereignty should be integrated in the national food policy through continued opportunities for consultation as the *Food Policy for Canada* is developed and implemented. Further, the *Food Policy for Canada* should build on these efforts by identifying clear mandates and responsibilities within the policy. Continued research, monitoring, and evaluation of policy efforts should be incorporated as part of the policy to ensure evidence informed actions and policies are supported.

The Food Security Action Group has identified elements within each of the described pillars which we would recommend for inclusion in a *Food Policy for Canada*.

Pillar 1: Increasing access to affordable food

The FSAG recognizes the impact of poverty on access to food and supports an income response to achieving household food security. We recommend changing the title of this pillar to Achieving Household and Community Food Security for all Canadians. This change acknowledges the importance of access to food that is appropriate, adequate, *and* affordable for individuals and populations.

Recommendations for inclusion to this pillar:

- The *Food Policy for Canada* must consider recommendations which recognize the unique challenges in access faced by Canadians living in rural, remote, and Northern communities.
- A commitment to a government response to meet emergency food needs. Government has demonstrated decreased involvement as charitable responses have grown (Tarasuk, Dachner, & Loopstra, 2014). These charitable responses are neither an effective or efficient use of resources (Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health, 2015). An income response that reflects housing and transportation challenges is necessary to food insecurity.
- Current census practices allow provinces and territories to opt out of food insecurity measurements (Government of Canada, 2017). The *Food Policy for Canada* should incorporate mandatory, consistent data collection on food insecurity using validated and reliable measures.
- Address issues of food distribution and transportation issues which create disparities in access to food and services.
- Nationally recognize the unique needs of both urban and rural/remote Indigenous populations to achieve food security

Pillar 2: Improving health and food safety

Recommendations for inclusion to this pillar:

- *Food Policy for Canada* must include recommendations to improve food environments as well as efforts to increase the nutritional quality and food safety of foods and Canadian diets
- A national policy should support healthier food environments in public settings including the establishment of a national student nutrition program
- Support for improved food literacy across the lifespan should be included in the policy. This may include increasing early exposure to healthy foods and experiential learning opportunities related to food and food literacy
- Foods of low-nutritional quality are ubiquitous in Canada, the *Food Policy for Canada* must ban marketing of food to children under 18 years in order to curb the impact of this exposure (Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada, 2017)
- Food and food security are important in achieving mental and social wellbeing (Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health, 2015), the *Food Policy for Canada* should facilitate the celebration of Canadian diversity through food

Pillar 3: Conserving our soil, water, and air

Recommendations for inclusion to this pillar:

- Canada is rich in many natural resources, recognizing the right to a healthy environment for all Canadians will support currently recognized human rights to food and water (United Nations, 2017). This is important to sustaining natural food systems and access to country foods.
- The *Food Policy for Canada* must reinforce Canada's recognition of both food and water as a human right. The Policy should guarantee access to safe, affordable, tap water for all Canadians.
- Current systemic issues result in inefficiencies that allow too much food to be wasted at all levels of the food system (Gooch & Felfel, 2014). The *Food Policy for Canada* should provide more support for reducing food waste and building effective connections between food and consumers. Improved monitoring of food wasted is needed to build greater transparency and inform public action.
- Current land use policies are failing to protect land needed to produce food for a growing population. The *Food Policy for Canada* should support efforts for innovative food production and utilization of public spaces for food production.
- The *Food Policy for Canada* should support research to sustain access to wild food sources and country foods
- The *Food Policy for Canada* should recognize environmental impacts of the food system and encourage research and innovation to reduce negative environmental outcomes

Pillar 4: Growing more high-quality food

Recommendations for inclusion to this pillar:

- The *Food Policy for Canada* should refocus efforts towards producing health-promoting foods. Food systems growth is more than increasing exports and overall productivity (Gooch & Felfel, 2014). Simply producing more food may not be an effective solution. Changes in production, distribution, retailing, and consumption to increase efficiencies and reduce food losses should be encouraged jointly with efforts that prioritize nutritious, high-quality foods (Gooch & Felfel, 2014) (Cummings, Kanaroglou, Kubursi, & MacRae, 2015).
- The *Food Policy for Canada* must recognize the contributions of small and large food businesses and support their ability to meet the needs of both domestic and international markets.
- The *Food Policy for Canada* must target support towards smaller scale food businesses and initiatives. This must include efforts to mitigate or remove regulatory barriers which have an inequitable, negative impact.
- The *Food Policy for Canada* must support the viability of farming as a career, particularly for young farmers and food entrepreneurs

References

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