

Towards a National Food Strategy

A framework for securing the future of food



NATIONAL
FOOD STRATEGY 

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Securing the Future of Food

Few Canadians give their daily food a lot of thought. Our abundance has allowed this luxury for many, but not all Canadians. Few Canadians understand what goes into bringing food to our plates and how the choices we make at the grocery store affect our food chain and our health.

Perhaps because of our abundance we have not, as a nation, comprehensively planned to ensure an adequate and wholesome food supply for future generations.

But the urgency of this issue has begun to resonate. The local food movement is demonstrating clearly that Canadians are increasingly aware of food and food issues. They are showing concern with the environmental impact of our food supply. They are concerned with the impact of urban development. And more so than ever, spurred by stories of food riots, under and poorly nourished Canadian children and a rapidly growing global population, Canadians are concerned with the availability of food domestically and abroad.

The heightened awareness of and about food has made clear the need for a plan. Agriculture and agri-food policy has been addressed in isolated five-year planning cycles. The policies undertaken and the private sector response to the policies were short-term approaches to long-term issues. It became clear to the agri-food sector that a comprehensive strategy was needed for food in Canada.

Conceptualized by those closest to our food production system, the National Food Strategy (NFS) is a long-term framework for policy and programs for food. As food touches so many elements of our lives, so the NFS must necessarily address multiple concerns and considerations. With the commitment of all those involved in the food chain and policy makers, the NFS will enable a healthier, socially responsible, economically successful and environmentally sustainable country.

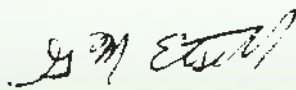
The National Food Strategy is a vision for the future and represents an ongoing process. This vision and direction for the future of our food system is, very simply, the first step in enabling food in perpetuity. It is that simple and it is that complex.

We hope that all readers of this Strategy will appreciate its purpose and intent and join the national dialogue to secure the future of food.

With thanks to our collaborators across the agri-food sector,



Neil Currie
NFS Steering Committee Co-Chair



Garnet Etsell
NFS Steering Committee Co-Chair

The Context

Canada is an abundant and prosperous nation. Initially built around harvesting of natural resources, crops and livestock, our country has flourished to become a world leader in manufacturing and science. And yet we have not lost our roots in resource and food production.

Farming and food production, processing and distribution account for a sizable piece of our economy. Nine per cent of annual GDP is generated by the food system across Canada. Our domestic and export market sales create and sustain 2.4 million jobs. Food contributes substantially to our standard of living.

But food and food production achieves and represents so much more than simply a percentage of our gross domestic product.

Food is a fundamental necessity of life. For humans to survive on this planet, we need to plan and provide a food supply that will match our population. The global population is expected to reach 9 billion people by 2050. It is, therefore, incumbent on each and every successive generation to take all measures necessary to plan and provide for a sustainable food supply.

Food is not only a necessity; it is a centerpiece of our respective cultures and the centerpiece of family gatherings. Food defines who we are and contributes to good health.

In spite of our abundance and access to nutritious and healthy foods, many Canadian adults and children have developed poor eating habits and poor lifestyles that are conducive to poor health.

In spite of the food sector's contribution to a healthy economy, the bottom line of many producers and processors of food remains low. Farm incomes have suffered a roller coaster ride which includes nominal or negative farm income. Food processing capacity has witnessed an exodus from Canada. More of our food is imported in spite of our abundance of land and water, our entrepreneurial spirit, access to technology and human capital – all of which should facilitate expansion of our food production and processing capacity.

Our food production, processing and distribution system (for future reference: the “food chain”) is subject to a complex regulatory infrastructure. There is a need, however, to ensure that existing or new regulations complement and are cohesive with our policy objectives and societal obligations.

“Food can give life and, through absence or extreme overindulgence, it can take life away.”

Jessica Leeder, “Why Canada needs a national food strategy”, *The Globe and Mail*, April 29, 2011.



Food safety regulations in Canada are designed to meet the expectations of Canadians for the highest food standards, and yet we import from countries that do not maintain equivalent food safety and inspection standards. We regulate crop inputs and yet import food from countries that use the products that we prohibit through regulation.

Clearly, our food system is simply not functioning as effectively as it should, nor is it sustainable in its current form.

Canada does not currently have a long-term vision for our food system. Agricultural and agri-food policy is developed within five-year windows. The policies therefore tend to address immediate needs and may not always include provisions for the longer-term vision. As is often said, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there".

Within this context, the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry set out over two years ago to develop a long-term strategy for the Canadian food system. The intent is to address the anomalies within our food system (the food chain plus the end consumer) through a more holistic and strategic approach to food.

The National Food Strategy (NFS) establishes a shared strategic vision for our food system that will serve as a clear guide for public policy development and private decision making to secure a sustainable food system for Canada. This vision is outlined in the nine strategic objectives that our food system must meet to serve the needs of future generations in Canada as well as the global community.

Mission

Canada will be a leader in providing safe and nutritious food through a vibrant, competitive, responsive and sustainable farming, processing, distribution and sales sector.

The Process

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA), representing the primary food producers developed the NFS concept within the context noted previously.

Recognizing the very broad scope of the Strategy, the CFA began working with participants in the food system - from input suppliers through processors, distributors, retailers and consumers.

The NFS is a unique effort that strives to establish a long-term strategic vision for food. It is also unique in being driven and developed by those closest to our food production systems.

We have also been working with other organizations committed to similar initiatives such as the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute (CAPI), the Conference Board of Canada and the People's Food Policy Network. Each of these initiatives provides a slightly different and complementary perspective to the notion of a food strategy. The chronology of the development of the NFS is contained in Appendix A.

The NFS is intended to be a living strategy that will be adapted and adjusted as we move towards implementation. Given the broad range of contributors, it should be read as a collaborative effort and will require the engagement of both federal and provincial governments for it to succeed.

“We see the strategy, when complete, reconnecting the Canadian public with one of society’s most fundamental elements of survival, but often taken for granted – food.”

Mark Wales, Vice-President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, “Designing a National Food Strategy”, *The Post*.



Fundamental Principles

Canada's national discussion on food and food related matters has only just begun. The local food movement and the increasing interest of Canadians in the safety and the environmental footprint of food have recently opened our national consciousness to issues of and about food.

Consequently there may not yet be an explicit national consensus on the fundamental principles on which the NFS is based. We think, however, that Canadians hold common beliefs about food that should be articulated.

And so we present a short list of fundamental principles, necessary and essential to the development and adoption of the National Food Strategy.

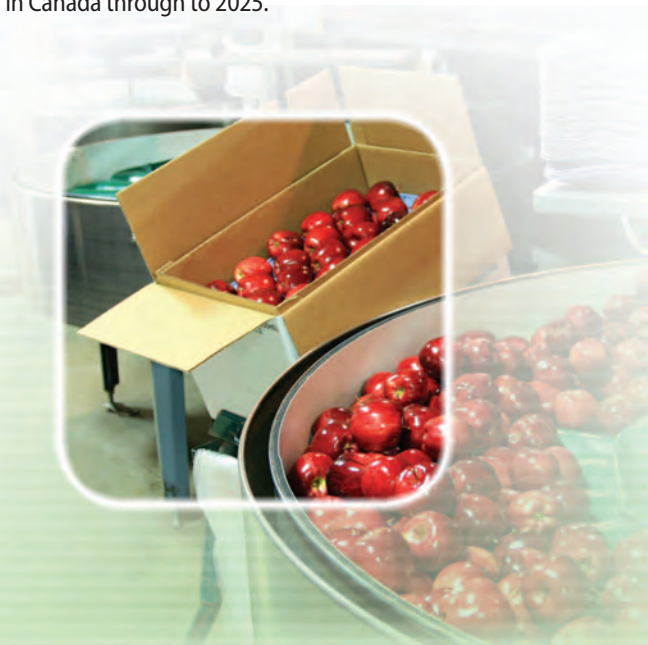
1. Food is a basic human need and right.
2. Maintaining a strong and healthy domestic food chain contributes to national food security.
3. Food production must be sustainable.
4. A "sustainable" food system is one which is:
 - Economically sustainable
 - » participants in the food chain have reasonable and equal opportunity to prosper
 - Environmentally sustainable
 - » the food system conserves, protects and regenerates resources
 - » the food chain is resilient to unpredictable climate and conditions
 - Socially sustainable
 - » food is readily accessible and culturally appropriate

With the fundamental principles guiding the NFS, the strategic vision for food in Canada is presented as **nine Strategic Objectives**. They present our goals and aspirations for the food system in Canada through to 2025.

Associated with each of the Objectives are several **Key Outcomes** that further refine the nature of the goal and what must be achieved in order to reach our vision. The Outcomes have been categorized under four key subject areas. The subject areas reflect the comprehensive nature of the NFS and, indeed, the broad impact and reach of the food system itself.

The Outcomes have focused on:

- Environment
- Business
- Science and Health
- Marketing and Education



Strategic Objectives and Outcomes

A) Canadian grown, fresh and processed products are the first choice of Canadians.

From a Business Perspective

To achieve this:

- Food labeling and retail signage systems clearly identify Canadian grown and Canadian processed products to enable consumers to choose.
- Canadian governments and public institutions lead by example and increase the utilization of Canadian grown and processed products by at least 2% per year.
- Retail and food service outlets increase utilization of Canadian grown and processed products by at least 2% per year.
- Sectors adapt quickly to evolving market demands.
- The environmental, employment and food safety standards of imported foods that compete with domestic production will be equivalent to Canadian standards.

From an Environmental Perspective

To achieve this:

- The Canadian food chain will be a leader in environmentally-sustainable food production.

From an Education and Marketing Perspective

To achieve this:

- Quality improvement, developed and managed by industry organizations, will be continuous.
- Farmers, food processors and all members of the value chain will continuously research and innovate to provide the products in demand by Canadian consumers.

“The NFS presents a tremendous opportunity for Canada to establish a comprehensive food plan to secure healthy food for current and future generations, to guard our environment and to boost our economy.”

Ron Bonnett, President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture,
“A growing need for a national food strategy”, *Toronto Star*, March 2011.



B) Canadian grown, fresh and processed products are the preferred choice of international markets.

From a Business Perspective

To achieve this:

- Pricing strategies allow for shared value for all stakeholders along the food chain to enable Canadian companies to be competitive internationally.
- Producers and processors are able to offer food products adapted to changing global market demand.
- Quality assurance programs are developed and managed nationally by industry.

From an Environmental Perspective

To achieve this:

- Canada is a recognized leader in the environmentally-sustainable production of foods.

From an Education and Marketing Perspective

To achieve this:

- An identifiable standard for Canadian food products encourages the purchase of these products by international buyers.
- Canadian companies marketing food products internationally capitalize on a clearly recognized Canadian brand(s), promoted by governments.
- Market intelligence data readily identifies international market opportunities.

C) Consumers choose foods and healthy eating patterns that promote optimal health.

From an Environment Perspective

To achieve this:

- Canadian food production and processing are environmentally sound, science-based and complement the health of Canadians.

From a Health and Science Perspective:

To achieve this:

- Food product innovation is aligned with Canada's Food Guide.
- Research focuses on current food offerings and new food product innovation that maintains or improves the health of Canadians and citizens in other markets.

From an Education and Marketing Perspective

To achieve this:

- Canadians understand healthy eating patterns, nutritious foods and how to choose, prepare and include these foods in daily meals.
- The Canada Food Guide is clear, simple and widely distributed.
- Food claims and images are clear, factual, informative and not misleading.
- By the age of 16, each Canadian child can plan and prepare at least 6 nutritious meals.

D) Consumers always have access to safe and nutritious food.

From a Business Perspective

To achieve this:

- Threats to the food system from input supplies to distribution are identified and mitigated with contingencies available.
- Food safety, security and sustainability systems are in place and documented.
- Clear and enforceable land, soil, air and water protection arrangements secure arable land and sustainable farming for future generations.
- Infrastructure and food distribution processes and regulations guarantee efficient and effective distribution to all areas of the country including urban, rural and remote.
- Canadian infrastructure ensures the efficient storage, transportation and distribution of food.

From an Environmental Perspective

To achieve this:

- Food will be produced and processed sustainably and contribute positively to environmental stewardship.

From a Health and Science Perspective

To achieve this:

- Nutritious foods are readily accessible in public buildings, schools and worksites.
- All people have access to affordable, nutritious food. Where this is not possible, access is facilitated through public and/or privately funded programs.
- Coordination and collaboration between the food industry and health sector ensures food availability and choice addresses the health interests of Canadians.

From an Education and Marketing Perspective

To achieve this:

- Consumers have easy access to accurate and science-based information about the safety and nutritional value of the Canadian food supply.

“The development and implementation of a comprehensive National Food Strategy will provide safe, wholesome food to Canadians and a secure future for Canadian farmer.”

Bertha Campbell, President, PEI Federation of Agriculture.



E) The Canadian food chain is driven by its diverse, sustainable, innovative and profitable farm and food supply sectors.

From a Business Perspective

To achieve this:

- Canada's private and public investment in food research and innovation increases by 10% per year.
- Innovation in genetics, production and processing practices, and marketing drives food chain success.
- Regulations and regulatory processes balance public protection and competitiveness.
- Imported food matches Canada's standards for nutrition, safety and environmental responsibility.
- Enhanced food chain relationships produce process and deliver food efficiently with equitable sharing of risks and rewards.
- Effective and predictable business risk management programs at the farm level manage income fluctuation due to natural or market impacts.
- International trade agreements and arrangements level the playing field in government support and production standards.
- Protocols enable the rapid approval of plant protection and veterinary products, approved in other jurisdictions for use in Canada.
- Investment in educational programs on agriculture and food production and processing promotes careers in the food industry.
- Market structures that enhance farmer empowerment in the market place (co-operatives, managed supply, farmers markets and value adding activities) are supported and facilitated.
- Continuous improvement actively identifies and breaks down barriers to profitability.
- Working relationships with University researchers maximize the value of their work to advance the industry.

From an Environment Perspective

To achieve this:

- Ecosystem goods and services provided by the food chain are recognized by consumers and rewarded.
- New entrants are drawn to the fields of food production, processing and distribution because of the recognized environmental stewardship of the industry.

From an Education and Marketing Perspective

To achieve this:

- Consumers have confidence in, understand and appreciate the multiple advantages of supporting the domestic food sector.
- Consumers are educated on the environmental, food safety and processing standards of all domestic and imported food choices.

F) Canada's food chain capacity meets future demand in a sustainable manner.

From a Business Perspective

To achieve this:

- Ongoing research continuously identifies the quantity and nature of future demand domestically and globally.
- Succession planning will facilitate sustainable farm businesses.
- A balance between the production of food and the production of crops for energy is identified and sustained.
- Food processing capacity and output expands at a sustainable level.
- A skilled and motivated workforce for the agriculture and agri-food sector is sustained.
- The food chain productively utilizes agricultural by-products and waste as useable resources.
- Government programs remain resilient to help farmers mitigate impacts of climate change.

From an Environment Perspective

To achieve this:

- Soil, air, arable land and water resources are conserved and improved for future generations.
- Research focuses on developing renewable inputs and outputs.
- Yields and nutrition content are increased using more renewable inputs.
- Spoilage and waste across the food chain is reduced by 10% per year.
- Research enables the food system to be resilient to the future impacts of climate change.
- Biodiversity will be fostered.

G) Canada has a secure infrastructure to support the production, processing, distribution and sale of food in Canada and abroad.

From a Business Perspective

To achieve this:

- Resources used as farm and food production input supplies are readily available at competitive prices.
- Adequate and competitively priced energy for food production, processing and distribution is readily available.
- Cutting edge communication technology is available to all Canadian producers and processors.
- Transportation capacity for perishable and non-perishable food products will be adequate and secure.

H) Canada grows and provides green energy and other renewable products in balance with our food requirements.

From a Business Perspective

To achieve this:

- Sustainable energy pricing policies and research facilitate new and renewable energy production technologies.

From an Environment Perspective

To achieve this:

- A sustainable balance between crops used for food and used for energy is identified.

I) Canada is a global leader in ensuring international agreements impacting food are based on science, sustainability, fairness, consistency and enforceability.

From a Business Perspective

To achieve this:

- Canada works to ensure international agreements impacting food are based on science, equitability, consistency and enforceability.
- Canada secures international markets, focused on providing technology, food and other agricultural products that are not detrimental to domestic production.
- Canada improves food security in vulnerable countries through technology transfer, skills development, nutritional research and crop productivity, supporting the whole value chain approach and sustainable production methods.

From an Environment Perspective

To achieve this:

- Canada is a leader in validating greenhouse gas emission reduction within the food production and processing industry across all countries.
- International agreements with trading partners on environmental standards for food production and processing and inspection are signed.
- Canada is a leader in the use of renewable resources for food production and processing.



Moving Forward

The National Food Strategy presents a strategic vision for food and for the Canadian food system. As food touches most aspects of our lives, so the NFS touches on most aspects of our society – from environmental considerations to health, to education, to agriculture policy, to infrastructure, economic development and international relations.

Admittedly – our food system is complex.

Its complexity makes a holistic and comprehensive approach that much more critical to our food system's sustainability.

That approach, ultimately to be made functional through public policy and private business plans, must begin with the destination in mind – the strategic vision for Canada's food system.

The current lack of shared vision may have very well kept the Canadian food system from achieving its potential, but we do believe it is not too late to achieve a sustainable and secure food system.

To do so, we envision a process as follows:

- Launch a national awareness campaign for the National Food Strategy to engage Canadians in thinking and talking about food. Solicit further perspectives of Canadians on food system goals.
- Begin a dialogue between key participants in the food system and governments (federal, provincial and municipal) on the content of the NFS to ensure the vision can and will be shared.
- On achieving consensus, a process for generating the preferred “ways and means” (policies) of achieving the Outcomes and Strategic Objectives needs to be established. This should be done at the federal, provincial and territorial levels and necessarily, at a joint federal-provincial-territorial level encompassing all jurisdictional responsibilities within the NFS. Similarly, it will be necessary to consider new ways and means of developing policy given the holistic nature of the NFS. Inter-departmental, cross ministry dialogue and joint decision making will be needed to comprehensively address some goals. In a more immediate context, the aim is to have the key objectives taken into consideration as the specific policies and programs of Growing Forward II are developed.
- The novelty of a shared vision across the food system will refocus existing structures and processes. We envision the Value-Chain Round Tables being active in identifying a myriad of new policy undertakings over the course of the next several years to achieve our shared goals.

Milestones/Goals

July 2011	Federal/provincial/territorial Agriculture Ministers receive the NFS Report
August 2011	Government/Industry initiate work on Objectives and Outcomes
October 2011	NFS consensus achieved
November /December 2011	National information campaign launched
January 2012	Consumer survey undertaken to assess food strategy attitudes
March 2012	Outcomes incorporated in development of Growing Forward II
October 2012	Year of review of progress and Outcomes
	National Food Summit

“We can either put our heads in the sand and hope that other people will fix the challenges we’re facing, or we can take this opportunity to feed the hungry people of our planet and strengthen the Canadian economy at the same time.”

Jay Bradshaw, President of Syngenta Canada,
 “Nourishing the world through Canadian research”, *Toronto Star*, March 2011.



Final Thoughts

Canada has much to offer its citizens and the global community. Our human resource and our natural resource capacity to produce a safe, nutritious and bountiful food supply is not only a blessing but is also an opportunity and a moral imperative.

The continued well-being and, indeed, the existence of mankind relies on a sustainable food supply. That can only happen through comprehensive planning and execution of a shared set of food chain and food system objectives.

The food chain proudly presents the National Food Strategy to recognize the need and to initiate our collaborative work in developing the vision to **secure the future of food**.

“A National Food Strategy will organize the discussion going forward so that farmers and processors can make Canadian food the natural choice for consumers, in Canada and abroad!”

Chris Kyte, Food Processors of Canada.



Appendix A – Development Timeline

Phase 1 – Exploratory

- Fall 2009 to July 6, 2010
- Do we need a NFS and do other stakeholders want to be involved?
- Meetings:
 - Agri-food stakeholder consultation, June 23, 2010, Toronto
 - Tripartite Roundtable with Agriculture Ministers, July 6, 2010, Saskatoon

Phase 2 – Consultation

- July 2010 to December 2010
- Finalize Mission and Objectives
- Develop Goals and Action steps necessary to accomplish each strategic objective

Phase 3 – Consensus

- January 2011 to July 2011
- Discuss with stakeholders
- Agree on timelines and responsibilities
- Finalize strategy contents





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