

ARRELL FOOD INSTITUTE

FOOD SYSTEM SUMMIT DIALOGUE

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Preamble

Ahead of the upcoming United Nations Food Systems Summit, Arrell Food Institute at the University of Guelph hosted three independent Food System Dialogues to bring together voices from across and beyond the Canadian Food System. One dialogue focused on strategies to put agriculture at the heart of a green economic recovery plan; one was about the root causes of food insecurity; and one explored models of collaborative governance to help create holistic and equitable policies and programming for food systems. Attracting over 200 participants, the delegates included farmers, researchers, politicians, policy makers, restaurateurs, and NGO representatives. Each Dialogue was opened with reflections to frame the discussions before participants joined break-out discussions. There were 18 discussion groups across the three Dialogues.

The following action points arose from these dialogues and are presented here in the hopes that they might be useful in informing the Canadian government's position at the upcoming United Nations Food Systems Summit.

1. The Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council (CFPAC) is a unique forum that can be leveraged domestically to bring voices from across the Canadian food system together and advise on pressing issues.

Collaborative leadership is vital, bringing together a wide variety of perspectives and paying special attention to those who are marginalized. Food systems change will only happen when enough people see how they can benefit from and contribute to that systemic change. Internationally, the CFPAC is a leading example of collaborative food systems governance that can help lead to progress on all of the UNFSS' action tracks and Levers of Change.

2. Canada should commit to reducing food insecurity in our country by 50% by 2030. To measure progress towards this target, we must create a national framework to measure food insecurity.

Food justice is a poverty issue with links to health, education, and community building. Further, food insecurity finds its roots in structural racism and colonialism. Initiatives to address this include school nutrition programs, income floors and other forms of social protection that guarantee every Canadian has a basic standard of living. While funding for these programs can emerge from federal investments, the specifics of any program need to be tailored to community-specific solutions. This links to UNFSS Action Tracks 1 and 2.

3. Clearly establish a national sustainability benchmarking process, linked to a robust data collection framework, that transparently shows how Canadian producers perform environmentally on a global stage.

Preliminary data suggest that although progress is still needed, our producers are often among the most sustainable on the planet. Canada can embrace the idea that we are the world's trusted producers of safe and sustainable food and put agriculture at the centre of a green economic recovery program. Recent announcements in the 2021 federal budget move us in this direction. A next step is to create a national sustainability benchmarking program that would give Canada economic advantage in export markets, contribute to our ability to meet our Paris climate commitments and to the UNFSS Action Tracks 3 and 4.

Conclusion

Major global trends linked with population growth, climate change, new consumer expectations and novel technologies suggest that the next 10 years may be incredibly disruptive for food systems everywhere. In Canada, we have much to celebrate: our producers are amongst the most environmentally conscious in the world, most Canadians enjoy safe, healthy, and affordable food year-round. Nevertheless, systemic problems of food insecurity and disruptions to the food system caused by the pandemic mean that we need to do better. Together, by embracing models of collaborative governance (Recommendation 1, above), working to empower communities to develop locally-relevant programs to address the root causes of food insecurity (Recommendation 2), and putting environmental sustainability at the centre of the Canadian agri-food sector's identity (Recommendation 3), we can ensure Canada has the tools it needs to continue having one of the greatest food systems in the world. This will not only help support domestic producers and consumers as well as allowing those parts of our food system that depend on exporting to international markets thrive and expand over the next generation.

DIALOGUE SUMMARIES

Fostering Collaboration

(framing speakers Rt Hon Marie-Claude Bibeau, Federal Minister for Agriculture and Agri-Food, and Evan Fraser, AFI Director. Bilingual French/English)

- Having trustworthy, accessible and robust processes for making decisions
- Maintaining effective horizon scanning efforts
- Building collaborations across other sectors (eg. healthcare, education, economic development)
- Embracing complexity & building collaborations across stakeholders
- Trust is key and power dynamics matter
- Showing successful projects & initiatives

Food Insecurity

(framing speakers Suzanne Barr Chef and Food Activist, and Paul Taylor, Food Share Toronto)

- Food insecurity is a poverty issue
- Structural racism exists within food access
- Different communities need different things
- Food banks need support and are only helping those who are severely food insecure – not a long-term solution
- Labour rights/workers rights must be considered, not just welfare or charity approach
- Data, properly disaggregated, to benchmark and measure impact is crucial
- School nutrition (education and food supply) vital part of this

Green Growth

(framing speakers David McInnes, Canadian Agrifood Benchmarking Project, Vimlendra Sharan, FAO, Michelle Nutting, Nutrien, and Bill Gruel, Protein Industries Canada)

- Improve ag education, at a young age especially
- Address land costs/ownership barriers
- Record protocols and be more transparent about sustainability efforts and outcomes within agriculture; sharing best practice but recognising that different situations need different approaches.
- Explicitly include aquaculture and water-based food production
- Consider further digitization of agricultural information beyond productivity – including carbon sequestration
- Benchmarking and showcasing sustainability practices and outcomes in regional and national agricultural and food systems

This report was prepared by Arrell Food Institute based on the reflections heard and noted at three independent Food Systems Summit Dialogues in early 2021.

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