



Peterborough Food Action Network

January 23, 2020

The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, P.C.,
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food

Sent via e-mail: Marie-Claude.Bibeau@parl.gc.ca

The Honorable Patty Hajdu,
Minister of Health

Sent via e-mail: Patty.Hajdu@parl.gc.ca

Dear Honourable Ministers:

As members of the Peterborough Food Action Network (PFAN) and Durham Food Policy Council (DFPC), we are pleased that Canada's inaugural, long-awaited National Food Policy has been released. This multi-faceted and multi-ministerial policy emerging from wide-ranging, active consultation and longstanding civic advocacy is an important achievement that will no doubt strengthen Canada's food system in some ways. Details, however, make all the difference and right now the policy doesn't explicitly articulate how the diverging components of the food sector will work with one another. We hope that, now in its second term, the Government will expound on such details and vigorously pursue goals that can make the National Food Policy successful for all Canadians. However, the recently released mandate letters to federal ministers demonstrate little focus on local food, food security, the relationship between food and environmental concerns, or indeed the National Food Policy at all.

The Policy website states, "The food we eat plays a huge role in our overall health." We agree. In fact, we believe that attention to health in its broadest sense should constitute the core of the Policy, especially as it is fostered through social determinants of health such as income security and housing security. For this reason, we support ministers' mandates to focus on quality of life measurements and we support an emphasis on well-being that extends past economic levels to social and environmental ones. We are pleased to see the use of inclusive and multi-faceted *community food security* language in the Policy vision, "All people in Canada are able to access a sufficient amount of safe, nutritious, and culturally diverse food." As the Government understands, however, food *insecurity* is a serious health issue in Canada that is strongly rooted in income insecurity. All people in Canada deserve the right to food and the income security and housing security that can help ensure that all households, especially Northern, Indigenous and lone mother households, can afford the food they require and prefer.

We look for a policy response to food insecurity through close integration with the National Poverty Reduction Strategy. With it, we would like to see an iterative and meaningful link between statistics and policy. To be sure, the Poverty Reduction Strategy sets quantitative targets and better ways of measuring poverty, but it does not explain what mechanisms/processes link data to policy (e.g. what will be done if the current suite of federal social welfare programs does not produce expected changes in relevant numbers?). A mandate

(perhaps as a condition of social transfers) for all provinces and territories to report annually on food insecurity could increase accountability and the ability to track food insecurity accurately over time. We appreciate the policy's aim to "help Canada meet its commitments under the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, including to end hunger, promote good health, cut food waste and encourage a sustainable food system" as well as mandate letter references to the SDG goal of No Poverty. However, we wonder if Canada will finally legislate the right to the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of food after failing for decades to assure the right to food as agreed to in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

We appreciate the Government's recognition of Indigenous food system self-determination as a vital component of reconciliation and the mandate to all ministers to prioritize relationships with Indigenous people. This provides an opportunity to work towards Indigenous food system self-determination. Recognizing that a fundamental power differential remains, it is crucial to set up a mechanism to reflect Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples as a Nation-to-Nation relationship. We urge the Government to extend this vision to Indigenous food sovereignty and the assurance of the land required to realize it through, in part, fairer negotiations, Indigenous law revitalization, educating the public about what reconciliation means and putting an end to appealing orders made by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

We were glad to see the Government's attention to food waste as it occurs along the food value chain, and not just at the consumer level. We hope that the Policy will prioritize waste *reduction* over waste *recovery*. Likewise, we were pleased to see attention to the impacts of all points along the food value chain on climate change and a focus on sustainable food practices. We look forward to seeing the steps that will be taken in all these areas.

We see a tension between the policy's support of local food infrastructure and the promotion of Canadian food abroad. We hope that the policy's implementation will prioritize food security - and the incomes to support it - for all in Canada, including our wide diversity of small- and medium-sized food producers and the "infrastructure of the middle" to ensure better local food production and distribution. We suggest that a continued over-emphasis on food for export may work counter to this goal. We would remind the Government that giving lower-level governments a strong mandate and funding for such initiatives is a more appropriate approach to the non-income aspects of food security, i.e. food access, than supporting private food access charities. We hope that the Local Food Infrastructure Fund will serve to support these goals.

The idea of introducing a national advisory council in the policy is bold but the policy right now doesn't acknowledge the fact that the distribution of power among all the players at the table is very unequal. Can you explicitly stipulate what mechanisms will be put into place to ensure that all voices are heard equally and equitably?

Finally, we anxiously await the introduction of a national school food program that will ensure access for all children during the school day to nutritious food for health and learning.

Overall, we appreciate that the Government is putting forward a vision for a food system that is sustainable in multiple ways. It is indeed critical. But visions need strong actions to come into reality. We look forward to seeing how your Government will bring this vision to fruition. We hope that the steps forward to improve Canada's food system will continue to be guided by civic perspectives.

Sincerely,



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Chair, Peterborough Food Action Network
Medical Officer of Health, Peterborough Public Health



Mary Drummond
Chair, Durham Food Policy Council
Durham Region

cc: Hon. Maryam Monsef, MP for Peterborough-Kawartha
Hon. Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
Hon. Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services
Hon. Mona Fortier, Minister of Middle Class Prosperity