

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Wednesday, 26 May 2021 13:00 GMT -04:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Food Environments' Role in Supporting More Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems / Rôle des commerces alimentaires dans le soutien de systèmes alimentaires plus équitables et durables
CONVENED BY	Natasha Kim, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch / Sous-ministre adjointe, Direction générale des politiques stratégiques, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada / Agriculture et agroalimentaire Canada
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/17312/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Member State
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	Canada

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

37

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0-18

19-30

31-50

51-65

66-80

80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

Male

Female

Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

Agriculture/crops

Fish and aquaculture

Livestock

Agro-forestry

Environment and ecology

Trade and commerce

Education

Communication

Food processing

Food retail, markets

Food industry

Financial Services

Health care

Nutrition

National or local government

Utilities

Industrial

Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Small/medium enterprise/artisan

Large national business

Multi-national corporation

Small-scale farmer

Medium-scale farmer

Large-scale farmer

15 Local Non-Governmental Organization

International Non-Governmental Organization

1 Indigenous People

10 Science and academia

Workers and trade union

Member of Parliament

Local authority

3 Government and national institution

Regional economic community

United Nations

International financial institution

Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

Consumer group

8 Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

The Dialogue was organized to be as inclusive and unifying as possible, ensuring strong representation from all stakeholders at the “fork” end of Canada’s food system. Participant lists for each discussion group were developed to ensure diverse perspectives, with representation from industry, non-government organizations, academia and under-represented groups. The multi-stakeholder approach to engagement aligned with the Food Policy for Canada’s goal to include diverse perspectives in all discussion groups.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

All future statements targeted 2030 with the goal of helping to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. Participants were encouraged to speak freely about ideas and suggestions, and it was noted Chatham House Rules were being applied. This dialogue looked at improving Canada’s food system from the retail perspective - including grocery retail and foodservices. Questions were framed to ensure the focus was on elements where food system stakeholders could make or influence changes, while respecting the autonomy of other stakeholders along the supply chain.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

Despite best efforts, there will be some no-shows in your discussion groups and it will impede attempts for an inclusive dialogue and proper representation. If efforts are made to ensure diversity amongst participants, this should improve the discussions. It is recommended that Dialogue Convenors invite more, rather than fewer, participants, because a portion of registrants will not show up. Selecting strong facilitators for each session will enable a free flow of conversation and ensure that diverse views – even if they conflict – are heard and registered. A strong facilitator is also needed to manage participants who may dominate the session. Having a list of prompting questions to help refocus the conversation if it veers off track can be helpful.

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

Yes

No

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

The focus on this Dialogue was the “fork” end of Canada’s food supply chain – specifically, the contact point with the consumer. It focused on grocery retail and foodservices, but also included convenience stores, cafeterias and other food access points. While these food environments differ greatly, depending on context, they all serve to connect the consumer to food. The types of food offerings are expansive, diverse and provide a variety of different price points. Food environments can determine consumers’ access to foods and therefore have a significant impact on accessibility, sustainability and responding to consumers’ changing preferences.

In focusing on these particular elements, this Dialogue sought to examine the links of Action Track 1, 2, and 5:

- Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all by seeking ways to improve accessibility to nutritious and affordable food.
- Shift to sustainable consumption patterns by exploring means to improve supply chain efficiency and distribute foods in a more sustainable manner.
- Build resilient to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress by exploring means to improve food security and respond to shifts in consumer preferences.

While developing the concept paper for the Dialogue, it became apparent there were strong linkages among these three Action Tracks – food security is strongly linked to affordability and more efficient and sustainable supply chains, which in turn also improve accessibility. These Action Tracks also aligned with a number of departmental and government policies, priorities, initiatives and commitments, including:

- The Food Policy for Canada (seeking to improve food security).
- the Agri-Awareness Campaign (seeking to improve consumer awareness and knowledge of food systems).
- AAFC’s priorities of encouraging improvements along Canada’s food supply chain, working with industry to strengthen the sector’s capacity to develop and improve Canada’s food system to reduce vulnerabilities and lead to a more resilient food system.

As a result, this Dialogue focused on the following Future Statements:

1. By 2030, Canada’s food environments will continue to drive change to support a resilient, innovative and sustainable food system.
2. By 2030, Canada’s food environments can significantly improve accessibility to food for all Canadians, including through the use and promotion of technology, innovation, and new approaches to procuring and distributing locally grown foods.
3. By 2030, Canada’s food environments will be increasingly responsive to changing consumer preferences towards affordable, diverse, and nutritious foods.

ACTION TRACKS

- Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
- Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
- Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
- Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
- Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

- Finance
- Innovation
- Human rights
- Women & Youth Empowerment
- Policy
- Data & Evidence
- Governance
- Trade-offs
- Environment and Climate

MAIN FINDINGS

The Dialogue raised common themes as a result of the linkages among the three Future Statements.

Main findings:

- At the onset, most discussion groups struggled with the definition of “food environments” as being anywhere you can access and purchase food. Many participants were from an NGO or food bank where food is not purchased. Some participants noted that food banks are “retailer customers and wholesalers,” who leverage cash donations to achieve collective purchasing power.
- Access to healthy, affordable, and sustainable food that meets the needs of diverse groups of people is achieved through a people-oriented and decentralized approach to the food system, supported by innovative and/or digital technology (i.e. e-commerce and other digital platforms) and simplified regulations. This goal would be supported by:
 - A better understanding of the barriers to accessing foods – from social, economic, cultural, and other perspectives.
 - Support for small and medium processors/enterprises, through the sharing of common resources such as innovative technologies, infrastructure and food supplies, could help to alleviate food loss and waste.
 - Support for local initiatives addressing the challenges of their communities.
- Participants acknowledged that while a decentralized approach to food systems is extremely difficult to execute, it is useful in addressing the diverse needs and situations of citizens across the country.
- Innovation and investment are affected by scale – large corporations fare better than smaller and medium-sized ones. Funding could target small and medium-sized enterprises which are likely better equipped to support local.
- Local food production was frequently cited as a solution to food insecurity, along with the adoption of innovative technology such as e-commerce and vertical farming.
- The cost of getting food to and growing foods in remote locations is forcing a rethink of how food supply chains work, especially in the North.
 - Local is desired, however not the only solution.
- Participants also suggested considering the perspectives of others such as unions, municipalities, and consumers living in food deserts. As an example, municipal governments could play a greater role in enabling local food markets where people are living.
- Acknowledgement by participants that Canada’s food system is vulnerable to shocks – including economic and environmental – and changes need to be made to ensure resiliency. Examples included investing in local (Canadian) food, assessing distribution models and collaborating with producers, city planners and other key players.
- What qualifies as “nutritious” varies greatly.
- Poverty reduction was cited as key to solving food accessibility issues.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/3

In discussion groups, participants discussed the following future statements:

1. By 2030, Canada's food environments will continue to drive change to support a resilient, innovative and sustainable food system. [Please note we had two discussion groups that focused on this future statement, resulting in additional comments compared to the other future statements.]

Participants noted that large, diverse, metropolitan areas are in need of culturally appropriate food and that some community groups do not utilize food charities (food banks).

One participant noted that food is a human right, and would like to see the current food hub model evolve from a reliance on grant funding to a self-sustained model through capital investment, including support for the use of local farmers and food organizations to advance storage and food waste reduction.

A participant noted the logistical and financial challenges in reaching remote communities. Trucking/air transportation is expensive and costs to operate a local greenhouse in winter are prohibitive. An emphasis was placed on finding ways to improve access to nutritious and affordable foods.

Proposed solutions to these challenges included the promotion of a "circular economy," with a focus on supporting local suppliers for small/medium communities and leveraging e-commerce tools to improve food networks/hubs. The success of these solutions is underpinned by consumers' understanding of how the food systems work. The consolidation of Canada's food system has threatened rural, remote and Indigenous communities, so supporting regional suppliers could help improve resiliency.

Reexamining regulations and reducing red tape may improve resiliency and sustainability of Canada's food system. Small and medium-sized enterprises can increase resiliency, however funding supports need to be made available to achieve those goals as they don't have the capital to invest in technology to the same extent as large organizations.

Participants expressed support for a pan-Canadian school food program.

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/3

2. By 2030, Canada's food environments can significantly improve accessibility to food for all Canadians, including through the use and promotion of technology, innovation, and new approaches to procuring and distributing locally grown foods.

Participants noted the prevalence of food deserts is due, in part, to transportation issues and location challenges. For example, those in rural, remote or Indigenous communities have limited access to food as they often rely on a single, small, independent grocery store.

One participant noted that Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories are traditionally hunters, and that some residential school survivors only know agriculture as being an activity that provided food to priests, and not for their own consumption. Having a more thorough understanding of different populations' relationship with agriculture could help educate consumers to improve accessibility. This could be done through Knowledge Hubs – which Farm Credit Canada is establishing -- to encourage communities and businesses to start up their own businesses or participate in the food system. Collaboration among consumers, unions and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities with the federal government is needed to understand the challenges of different parts of the country and develop tangible solutions. A one-size fits all approach will not work.

A participant noted the importance of the Surplus Food Rescue Program in Northwest Territories communities and expressed the need for a permanent support to improve food security in rural and remote areas.

Participants noted existing mechanisms could be leveraged to improve accessibility:

- e-commerce
- local champions with appropriate skills and tools who encourage collaborative efforts to improve affordability of items
- using a collaborative farmers market method which supports low income families by providing produce and recipes developed by a nutritionist
- the establishment of local/niche food harvesting organizations to capitalize on niche products that grow naturally and empower Indigenous groups to use their traditional knowledge to improve food accessibility and economic self-sufficiency

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OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/3

3. By 2030, Canada's food environments will be increasingly responsive to changing consumer preferences towards affordable, diverse, and nutritious foods.

One participant noted that consumer preference has shifted from types of food to affordable food.

Participants agreed the focus should be on how consumer preferences can be met while ensuring accessibility (as it relates to affordability) to even the most vulnerable segments of the population. Suggested solutions included farmers' market certificates (similar to food stamps) allowing low-income citizens to access fresh produce, and linking suppliers directly to consumers via a food bank.

Participants agreed subsidies and research investments influence food environments, and smaller scale producers often are overlooked for these types of funding, limiting their capacity to become a key contributor to Canada's food environments.

Participants noted while global supply chains are key to resiliency, shorter supply chains are also essential. Canada's vegetable producers need better support to provide affordable, diverse and nutritious food but experience limited access to insurance programs, compared to larger field crops. The diversity of agricultural operations needs to be supported by government programs.

Innovation is key to responding to consumer preference. By investing in alternative growing systems, such as rooftop gardens and vertical agriculture, innovation can improve affordability of nutritious foods. Online purchasing is restrictive to rural, remote and Indigenous communities, and small and medium industries don't have the capacity to invest in it. Supports for online initiatives need to be scalable.

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AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

Definitions of food environment-related elements

- Questions were raised about what constitutes local – is it within the immediate vicinity, regional, provincial, or national? A few participants also questioned the value of the term “nutritious food,” noting the definition of nutritious has evolved over the years.

Who influences who?

- Some participants noted that while consumer preferences can influence food environments, those same food environments can also shape consumer preferences.

Is the issue food environments or poverty?

- A participant noted that accessibility to food cannot be separated from income inequality, and that the root cause of food accessibility issue is poverty.

Ecommerce – an innovation that benefits some while leaving others behind

- While ecommerce has improved accessibility for some, those in rural, remote and some Indigenous communities have limited access to broadband and/or computers, and are often far away from grocery retailers. In addition, these online services may exclude consumers who don't have credit cards, which further restricts access to food.

Policy and funding solutions: they may help large corporations, but can hurt smaller and independent ones

- A number of participants noted many solutions would harm small businesses, such as independent grocery retailers in rural, remote and Indigenous communities, and asked how solutions could be more inclusive for small retailers.
- There was some divergence over the purpose of agricultural policy – whether its focus should be on ensuring affordable food, or profitability of farms.

Can these changes be incentivized if additional profit isn't the end goal?

- Some participants noted there is currently no incentive for industry to improve the situation for rural, remote or Indigenous communities as there's no financial gain.

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ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

RELEVANT LINKS

- **Canada's Member State Dialogues**
<https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/about-our-department/key-departmental-initiatives/food-policy/leadership-2021-united-nations-food-systems-summit-and-dialogues>
- **Concertations des États membres organisées par le Canada**
<https://agriculture.canada.ca/fr/propos-notre-ministere/initiatives-ministerielles-importantes/politique-alimentaire/leadership-sommet-systemes-alimentaires-nations-unies-2021-concertations>