



Original Research Article

Governance recommendations from forty years of national food policy development in Canada and beyond

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Abstract

This paper contributes to Canada's current national food policy discussion by introducing lessons gleaned from the development of two earlier Canadian government food policy efforts, *A Food Strategy for Canada* (1977) and *Canada's Action Plan for Food Security* (1998), as well as lessons drawn from national food strategy development in seven other countries. By examining the strengths and weaknesses of these previous policy-making processes, we show how today's food policy conversation builds on the legacy of 1998's *Action Plan*. We then offer food policy governance recommendations designed to avoid the mistakes of the previous efforts. This paper explores international precedents for governance mechanisms designed to be inclusive of key food systems' stakeholders, and to meaningfully include multiple levels of government in food governance. Drawing on both our domestic and international research, we conclude by recommending the establishment of a multi-sectoral and inter-governmental National Food Policy Council. We show how such a Council, operating in close cooperation with other key mechanisms, could help govern the pan-Canadian food strategy we advocate.

Keywords: national food policy council; national food policy; Canadian food policy

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DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v5i3.283

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes. – Mark Twain

Building on Mark Twain's observation, this paper contributes to Canada's current national food policy discussion by introducing lessons gleaned from the development of two earlier Canadian government food policy efforts, *A Food Strategy for Canada* (1977) and *Canada's Action Plan for Food Security* (1998), as well as insights drawn from national food strategy development in seven other countries. This paper is grounded in an analysis of historical policy documents, an environmental scan of relevant international policy precedents, and a literature review. It is also informed by participant observation and interviews. The lead author, Peter Andrée, has worked closely with Food Secure Canada and other national food policy stakeholders on this file since 2012, including organizing and chairing round-table discussions with key national actors. The authors also interviewed a variety of civil society, industry, and government actors in early 2017. These latter activities encouraged the authors to hone in on the issue of inclusive food policy governance mechanisms.

This paper begins by relating 1977's *Strategy* and 1998's *Action Plan* to the political economies of their times. We examine the strengths and weaknesses of these previous policy-making processes before explaining why each failed to have substantive impact. Nonetheless, we show how today's food policy conversation builds on the legacy of *Action Plan*. We then offer a set of food policy governance recommendations designed to avoid the mistakes of these previous efforts.

Next, this paper explores international precedents for governance mechanisms designed to be inclusive of key food systems' stakeholders, and to meaningfully include multiple levels of government in food governance. Drawing on both our domestic and international research, we conclude by recommending the establishment of a multi-sectoral and inter-governmental National Food Policy Council. We show how such a Council, operating in close cooperation with other key mechanisms, could help govern the pan-Canadian food strategy we advocate.

Historical context

In the summer and early fall of 2017, the Canadian government undertook nation-wide consultations on "A Food Policy for Canada" (Government of Canada, 2017a). This consultation represented the latest step towards realizing the decades-old dream of a comprehensive, integrated, national food policy (or strategy)¹ for Canada held by many advocates for a health-

¹ A strategy is generally understood to be a plan, grounded in core principles or values, designed to advance broad goals and objectives. A policy is typically more focused and includes specific rules for decision making. In Canada, the terms "plan", "strategy" and "policy" have all been used at various times in history, though we argue (below)

promoting, sustainable and just food system (Kneen, 2010; People’s Food Commission, 1977; People’s Food Policy Project, 2011). MacRae and Winfield (2016) define an integrated, or “joined-up,” policy approach to food in Canada:

By joined-up food policy, we mean the coherent and comprehensive policy environment that links food system function and behaviour to the higher order goals of health promotion and environmental sustainability. A joined-up policy unites activities across all pertinent domains, scales, actors and jurisdictions (p. 141).

Canada has never had a functional, federal-level food policy, let alone one that is coherently integrated across levels of government. Instead, Canada has had a disparate array of food-related legislation, regulations, directives, standards, and guidelines (which we collectively define as “policy”) at all levels of government. Canada’s earliest federal legislation explicitly focused on food—the *Inland Revenue Act* (1875) and the *Adulteration Act* (1884)—both significantly influenced by British law, addressed issues of food safety and adulteration (Gnriss, 2008). But food policy extends beyond legislation deliberately focused on food products. Equally important are policies focused on agriculture, fisheries, nutrition, public health, the environment and economy, as established at all four levels of government (federal, provincial/territorial, municipal, and Indigenous governments), insofar as these policies help define the food that is produced, processed, distributed and consumed in Canada or exported. This diverse array of economic, social, health, and environmental policies has never been strategically connected through a shared set of goals and objectives. In fact, Canadian policy-makers have ventured into the domain of an integrated food policy or strategy only twice in the past, and as described below, neither had much impact.

The federal government has previously introduced two national policy documents that should inform the current national food policy conversation: *A Food Strategy for Canada* (Government of Canada, 1977) and *Action Plan for Food Security* (AAFC, 1998). While both the *Food Strategy* and *Action Plan* were formally adopted by the federal Cabinet, their respective impacts remain limited. Still, examining these documents reveals how the policy conversation about food has evolved in Canada, and which forces have dominated such conversations in the past. Further, their limitations highlight strategic mistakes to avoid this time.

In the next two sections, we look at these earlier efforts through a political economy lens informed by Grace Skogstad’s periodization of agricultural policy. Agriculture played an important role in Canada’s economic and political history (Winson, 1993), and Skogstad (2012) describes three paradigms of agricultural policy since the Second World War: the “Productivist Paradigm”—shaped by state assistance programs (1945–1980); the “Global Trade Regime Paradigm”—underpinned by liberal market competitiveness (1980–2000); and the still emergent

that the term ‘strategy’ is really the most appropriate for the pan-Canadian response to food issues necessary at this juncture.

“Multifunctionality Paradigm”—influenced by the health and ecological value of food and agriculture (2000 to the present). Skogstad’s periodization helps us make sense of these documents in the context of their times.

The government’s two previous attempts to build a national consensus around food-related policies represented federal responses to moments of crisis in the food system (both global and national). Each effort also occurred at moments of transition between agricultural policy paradigms. Below, we show how the transition in the agricultural landscape that took place in the late 1970s to early 1980s helps to explain the failure of *Food Strategy*. Skogstad’s framework also partially explains the limited impact of *Action Plan*.

A Food Strategy for Canada (1977)

Canadian federal agricultural policy has traditionally been structured to “serve national economic and political goals as well as the interests of those who are directly involved in and affected by Canadian agriculture—primary producers, food processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers” (Skogstad, 1999, p.1). In the productivist era (1945 to 1980), Canada had a regime of accumulation based on mass production and consumption, through the manufacturing and export of primary resources (Jenson, 1990). Conscious of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the Great Depression, proponents of this regime focused on nation-building. In this period of “embedded liberalism” (Ruggie, 1982), Canada’s government embedded the national economy within the liberal international economic order to bolster the domestic market, strengthen the welfare state, create high levels of employment, and increase manufacturing to feed into both domestic markets and international trade. Specifically, the emergence of high-input, high-yielding crop varieties, and a growing welfare state structure led to significant government interventions (such as the Canadian Wheat Board, supply management systems in dairy and poultry, and direct income-support programs) that effectively supported farmers in efforts to sustain high levels of primary food production.

However, the global economic recession of the mid-1970s, catalyzed by the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) oil crisis coupled with a short-term decline in global food production and escalating food prices (Clapp, 2016), spurred the first stages in the neoliberal roll-back of the welfare state, including the dismantling of support programs vital to Canadian agriculture. A growing adherence to neoliberalism prompted policy-makers to reframe agriculture and food policy (Jenson, 1990; Koç & Bas, 2012). On the one hand, federal publications such as *Canadian Agriculture in the Seventies* (1969) and *Orientation of Canadian Agriculture* (1977) identified the main national objectives of “economic development, rising and stable incomes, full employment and harmonious international and federal-provincial relations” (Skogstad, 1999, p. 38). These documents also reiterated three traditional post-war agricultural policy goals: (1) stable and fair producer returns; (2) adequate supplies of high-quality, nutritious food at stable and reasonable prices; and (3) rural development and resource conservation. These values are associated with both the productivist period and embedded liberalism. However, these

documents were also informed by emerging neoliberal objectives of reducing government interventions and allowing markets a stronger role in determining the fate of Canadian agriculture. *Food Strategy for Canada* (1977), Canada's first attempt at a strategy encompassing the entire food system from production to consumption, is equally a product of this era, and embodies a similar mix of productivist and neoliberal values.

Food Strategy was produced as a public response to both social and political economic pressures. The federal government was confronted with two (sometimes opposing) groups of advocates. One group, comprised primarily of “agricultural economists committed to liberal markets” (Skogstad, 2012, p.20), pushed back against government intervention in agriculture. The other group, consumers, expressed concern over the rapidly rising food prices of the 1970s. Due to “events in international grain markets” and “general inflationary trends” spurred by the OPEC oil embargo, average food prices rose by 50 percent from 1972–1975 (*A Food Strategy*, 1977, p. 14). Canadians acutely felt inflationary pressures: at the time, food expenditures represented 18.7 percent of the average Canadian's disposable income as compared to 14.3 percent in 2015 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Consumers raised several additional issues, including the desire for better nutrition, concern over food additives, and the “widespread use of agricultural chemicals” (*A Food Strategy*, 1977, p. 14).

What can contemporary advocates of a national food policy learn from Canada's first attempt at developing a national, cross-departmental response to a diverse set of food-related issues? In this section, we focus on how *Food Strategy* was structured, comparing the way certain issues were conceived of by the federal government in the 1970s to how they were understood by food system activists at the time, as well as how they are discussed today. We then identify some reasons *Food Strategy* failed to have a lasting impact as an integrative policy document.

Co-signed by the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, *Food Strategy* (1977) sought to link together a range of existing and “emerging” food-related policies and programs under one umbrella, aimed at aligning all federal legislation and policies related to food and agriculture through a shared set of “general principles” that include developing and expanding “Canada's production and export strengths”, ensuring farmers and fishers “have the reassurance that they can earn a stable and adequate return on their labour and long-term investments”, and that Canadian consumers have “reassurance that the food marketing system is fair and efficient and that, in any government involvement in the industry, the interests of both producers and consumers are taken into account” p. 17). *Food Strategy* proved to be a statement of general principles and policies. It had no budget, few specific directives, and no new monitoring mechanisms.

Food Strategy includes six short sections (each with federal policy goals): Income Stabilization and Support; Trade Policy and Safeguards; Research, Information and Education; Marketing and Food Aid; Processing, Distribution and Retailing; and Consumer Concerns. In the first section, for example, *Food Strategy* notes that “farmers and fishermen [sic.] have suffered from the severe effects of income instability or chronically depressed incomes” (p.17) and

advocates income support programs for these sectors, such as the promotion of orderly marketing, domestic market protection from depressed or inflated world prices, and the protection of producers from weather uncertainties. This section also states that chronically depressed incomes for some producers may reflect “serious structural problems” that may require “training programs, relocation assistance, programs to deal with special problems of regional food production”, and “as a part of the broader approach to social security” (p.18).

In general terms, *Food Strategy* contains little new. It names existing policies and programs, seeking to concurrently protect producers and encourage market efficiencies. It does, however, identify areas of potential alignment among federal departments. For example, it identifies the need to address “administrative problems associated with the coverage of the self-employed...in the context of the Social Security Review” (p. 21)—an issue that received considerable attention in subsequent years. *Food Strategy* also focuses on “consumer” concerns and the impact of food prices in general terms. However, notably, *Food Strategy* pays scant attention to the variegation of poverty and food insecurity—the notion that some Canadians are affected disproportionately, and how their needs might best be addressed.

This omission is striking because only three years later, the report of the People’s Food Commission (PFC), Canadian food activists’ first attempt to develop a national position statement, highlighted explicitly how axes of social differentiation such as class, race, gender and age correlated with food insecurity resulting from rising food prices. While no systematic analysis of the incidences of hunger and/or food insecurity existed in Canada at the time, the PFC explicitly pointed out that rising food prices had particularly affected “low-income mothers”, “persons on welfare”, “senior citizens”, “Canada’s native population” and “Canadians living in more isolated areas” (PFC 1980, p. 14–17). While misunderstanding and prejudice continue to create blind-spots, scholars and practitioners now understand in much greater detail the sub-populations most vulnerable to food insecurity, and how government programs *do* or *do not* help them.²

Food Strategy also notes consumer concern that high food prices could be linked to “high concentration of ownership in some areas of processing, distributing and the retailing sector” and posits a “renewed examination of structure and performance in the provision of these services” (p.14), directing the Bureau of Competition Policy to study the sector. In their report, *The Land of Milk and Money*, the PFC (1980) echoed this concern. Strikingly, while *Food Strategy* identifies corporate concentration as problematic, none of the proposed actions intended to address consumer concerns (p. 20 of the report) target this specific issue. Rather, *Food Strategy* focuses on ensuring consumer representation on government marketing bodies and other regulatory agencies. Its authors, the (then) Ministers of Agriculture Canada and Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada, explain:

While Canadian consumers need not worry unduly about the sufficiency of food resources or supplies for the foreseeable future,

² See Tarasuk & Drachner in this issue of *Canadian Food Studies*.

they need the reassurance that the food marketing system is fair and efficient and that, in any government involvement in the industry, the interests of both producers and consumers are taken into account (1977, p. 17).

This statement effectively shifts the policy focus from corporate concentration to ensuring consumer interests influence marketing systems (especially highly-regulated industries like dairy and poultry). *Food Strategy* (1977) states that the federal government will “ensure that, in any appointments to boards, agencies and other institutions involved in food production and marketing, it utilizes the services of persons with wide experience in marketing, economics, finance and administration, and that the views of producers, processors and consumers are adequately represented” (1977, p. 20, *emphasis added*). The issue of corporate concentration held resonance then, as it does today. The absence of concrete steps to address it in *Food Strategy* belies the restricted mandate writers of cross-national policy often place on themselves, and serves as a warning for contemporary food policy advocates with similar concerns.

Food Strategy (1977) appears to have been developed without active inclusion of the provinces and territories, despite the jurisdictional role of the provinces, in particular, over aspects of the Canadian food system.³ *Food Strategy* recognizes their importance, stating the need “to initiate consultations and, in some cases, complex negotiations with the provinces” on issues such as the co-ordination of federal and provincial income stabilization programs, dietary and nutritional guidance, and land use policy, among others (p. 20). *Food Strategy* also recognizes the need to consider “the concerns of various...interest groups” (p. 20). Nonetheless, the document reveals no effort to consult with the provinces, territories, or these “interest groups” during its preparation. It was published on the assumption that the federal government can unilaterally “set out the basic principles of a food strategy for Canada to assure all Canadians that its policies and programs ensure adequate supplies of safe and nutritious food at prices which are reasonable to both producers and consumers” (p. 16). The lack of consultation in preparing *Food Strategy*, on policies that would require buy-in from the provinces and the private sector, in particular, to be effective, represents an important weakness of this policy document.

In terms of the history of agricultural policy in Canada, *Food Strategy* signals a shift from the “Productivist Paradigm” to the “Global Trade Regime Paradigm” (Skogstad 2012). While reinforcing policies of embedded liberalism, it aims to increase market competitiveness—a goal espoused by the increasingly influential neoliberals of the time. The authors advocate for an “efficient market system...which enhances the attainment of social goals within a framework of

³ The Canadian Constitution Act of 1982 recognizes joint federal and provincial jurisdiction over agriculture in section 95. Further, several clauses of section 92 (outlining provincial powers) included food system-related jurisdiction over the “creation and administration of health-related institutions” (clause 7), “local works and undertakings” such as the building of railways and canals (clause 10), as well as control over how land is owned and sold (clause 13). Spending power (a power of both the provinces and the federal government) is another avenue through which the federal government indirectly exercises power over food-related policy and legislation within provinces. It is thus another area of government activity that requires federal-provincial coordination.

continuing government expenditure restraint with less, rather than more, direct government intervention in the economy” (1977, p. 16).

While this first attempt at a comprehensive food strategy was laudable, it never had much impact. *Food Strategy* was “subsumed” (Skogstad, 2012) and eventually overshadowed by a subsequent strategy, outlined in Agriculture Canada’s (1981) *Challenge for Growth: An Agri-Food Strategy for Canada*. This subsequent strategy marked the real turning point towards neoliberalism, and generated controversy among consumer groups. Unlike *Food Strategy*, *Challenge for Growth* did not identify consumers as agricultural stakeholders, thereby excluding their concerns. Instead, *Challenge for Growth* forcefully championed market liberation and reduced state support for agricultural producers. Moreover, in *Challenge for Growth* the government merged the concepts of food and agriculture into “agri-food”. In doing so, food policy became explicitly bound to agricultural policy—for the purposes of policy formulation and political decision-making. Further, because neoliberal ideology heavily influenced agri-food policy, *Challenge for Growth* did not mention, much less address, the socio-cultural, environmental, and health-related implications of agri-food at the household level. From its outset in 1981, then, Canadian “agri-food policy” has primarily focused on financial benefits for farmers, Canadian food processors, and governments (through taxation) from agricultural commodities competing on global markets.

The late 1970s and early 1980s was a time of profound ideological change. Neoliberalism influenced democracies around the world, including Canada. *Food Strategy* had impressive intentions by seeking to address, in an integrated approach, a wide range of domestic and international issues facing Canada’s food producers, harvesters, processors and consumers. However, by 1981, the influence of neoliberalism on the government proved even stronger than in 1977. As a result, a narrow focus on the agri-food sector (and its potential to supply export markets) eclipsed Canada’s first attempt at a national food strategy.

Canada’s Action Plan for Food Security (1998)

Canada’s *Action Plan for Food Security* (1998) emerged from a very different context than 1977’s *Food Strategy*. Skogstad (2012) argues that the “Global Food Trade Regime Paradigm” dominated agricultural policy-making in Canada from 1980 to 2000. As the name suggests, this paradigm legitimized corporate restructuring for global markets, dismantled the welfare state, and emphasized the value of “free” trade agreements designed to lower tariff barriers and encourage international competition. The crowning achievement of this era, from the perspective of neoliberals, was the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995. Meanwhile, in the 1980s and 1990s, government and new civil society actors increasingly sought to tackling food insecurity, both domestically and internationally. Together, this (sometimes conflicting) emphasis on international trade and growing attention to food security set the stage for a very different approach to food policy in 1998’s *Action Plan*.

The concept of food security has its origins in post-World War II conversations about how to build on the successes of feeding Europe after the war to eliminate hunger globally (Martin & Andrée, 2014). Working as part of a coordinated international effort in the 1950s and 1960s, states such as Canada used food aid channels to dispose of surplus grain—thereby supporting Canadian farmers—and extend technical expertise to “needy” areas of the world (Cavell, 1952; Clapp 2012). In 1974, the global crisis brought on by the collapse of the Soviet grain crop, spurred the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) conference in Rome to formally adopt “food security” as an international policy goal. Until then, Western governments like Canada viewed food insecurity as primarily a problem that occurred in “developing” countries—an issue best addressed by the export of food and productivist agricultural technologies (Martin & Andrée, 2014).

Other perspectives were emerging, however, on the nature of the food security problem, where it occurred, and how it should be addressed. For example, the Canadian government funded several international civil society organizations (CSOs) based in Ottawa to attend the 1974 FAO World Food Conference. Unlike the government which sponsored their participation, organizations like Oxfam Canada were part of an emergent activist community who “diagnosed the world food crisis as a political problem, based in the structure of North-South relations” (Van Rooy 1997, p. 94-95). By the 1980s, several CSOs had also identified the problems of hunger and food insecurity in Canada, and increasingly worked to address this issue domestically. The first Canadian food banks were established in the early 1980s by charitable organizations (including churches) and organized labour (Riches, 1986). As with overseas food aid, food banks were designed to combat hunger by redistributing food surpluses from other parts of the food system (Riches, 2002). By the late 1980s, CSOs such as FoodShare in Toronto (founded in 1985) adopted a longer-term view to what they called “community food security,” organizing cooperative buying clubs, collective kitchens, and community gardens to improve long-term community capacity to strengthen food security (Martin & Andrée, 2014).

These CSOs sought support from municipal, regional, and provincial governments, leveraging the fact that the Canadian constitution grants a high degree of autonomy to provinces (and even municipalities) to intervene in public welfare (Koç et al., 2008). Notably, the City of Toronto worked closely with CSOs and local academics to establish the Toronto Food Policy Council, an advisory body to the Toronto Board of Health, in 1990. Thus, by the 1990s, the political landscape of Canada’s food system had changed significantly. The country still had its traditional agriculture and fishery sector lobbies, but also a host of new organizations working on food security, both internationally and domestically. Further, municipal governments became actively interested in food security, alongside the provinces and federal government.

Both CSO and government actors participated in the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome. That Summit developed the following definition which prevails today: “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (reproduced in FAO, 2006). This definition is more multi-dimensional than earlier

understandings, emphasizing food access, availability, use and stability. Directly following the 1996 Summit, the Canadian government formed a consultative group including the Programs and Multilateral Affairs Division, and Marketing and Industry Services Branch of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to create *Canada's Action Plan for Food Security*. This consultative group also included many of the Canadian CSOs that emerged to work on both international and domestic food security issues (e.g., Oxfam Canada and the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto) (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 1998 p. 50). Because of this wider engagement process, *Action Plan* is remarkably different from *Food Strategy* both in content and tone, providing further lessons to inform today's food policy conversation in Canada.

In contrast to the unilateralism of *Food Strategy*, 1998's *Action Plan* was prepared by a "joint consultative group" that included all relevant federal departments, under the shared leadership of the Ministers of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister for International Cooperation. This group included broad participation among CSOs as well as some provincial representation (Alberta, New Brunswick and Ontario). Given the presence of civil society actors, it is notable that food industry actors were not involved in the plan's development. Koç and Bas (2012) argue that industry actors simply did not identify *Action Plan* as a priority for their participation in the 1990s, especially when compared with their active engagement in the drafting and implementation of the NAFTA (in the early 1990s) and the formation of the World Trade Organization (in 1995).

Another distinguishing feature of *Action Plan* is its broad scope. Shaped by a deepening understanding of the multiple dimensions of food security, it sought to address a wide array of issues, such as "Food Access", "Healthy Eating Practices", "Poverty Reduction", "Traditional Food Acquisition in Aboriginal Communities", "Sustainable Agriculture", and "Rural Development". It also advocated for inclusive food security governance processes—an issue at the fore of contemporary food policy discussion, evidenced by the 2017 joint industry/civil society call for a National Food Policy Council.⁴

Action Plan also included a commitment to "clarifying" the "implications" of the emerging concept of the "Right to Food" as an "important element of food security" (AAFC, 1998, p. 6). This was a significant development for its time. As a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (since 1976), and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1981), Canada has a legal duty to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food (OHCHR 2018).⁵ However, to this day (and despite a promising commitment in 1998's *Action Plan*), Canada has not yet realized this right through formal constitutional or legal protections (de Schutter 2012; Berger Richardson & Lambek, this issue). Hence, the question of how to formally implement the right to food is back on the table in the 2018 debate over a Food Policy for Canada.

⁴ See: *Broad Coalition Calls on Federal Government to Create a National Food Policy Council* (CFA, 2017).

⁵ This duty was further strengthened when Canada became party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 (OHCHR 2018).

Action Plan also tackled the contentious subject of trade. It argued that “fair trade” can make “positive contributions” to food security by “increasing incomes and employment for many and offering consumers a broader choice of foods” but noted that “freer trade” can also “decrease incomes for certain segments of the population,” with the result that “food security for some Canadians may be compromised” (1998, p. 24). We see this attention to the benefits and drawbacks of free trade as progressive for its time, even though *Action Plan* ultimately contains strong language on Canada’s desire to “continue to promote the benefits of rules-based trade through the next round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations and regional trade negotiations” (1998, p. 39). Thus, Canada proved deeply entrenched then (and likely now) in the prioritization of trade liberalization above most other concerns.

While *Action Plan* contained a long list of actions and commitments, the following continue to resonate. (The departments, governments or actors responsible for carrying each out are identified in brackets):

- “Promote the participation of all stakeholders in the development of food security solutions at the national and community level. (Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), civil society)” (p. 31)
- “Participate in a discussion to review the relationship between trade, trade agreements and food insecurity in order to develop and support research on the impacts of trade policies on food security. (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), CIDA, provincial agri-food ministries, civil society)” (p. 39)
- “Work together to build the dimension of food security and traditional food access into existing policies and activities that affect traditional food acquisition; for example, the promotion of food security in sustainable development activities and health promotion. (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and its partners)” (p. 19)

Action Plan ends with a commitment to coordinate the implementation and monitoring of key actions and report findings to Canadians every two years. To accomplish this goal, Canada established the Food Security Bureau within the Global Affairs Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The Bureau produced annual reports for FAO on Canada’s efforts to meet objectives from the WFS 1996 Declaration. Arguably, however, this was the only formal commitment ever realized from the *Action Plan*.

Koç and Bas (2012) note that the 1998 *Action Plan* was “stillborn” after being formally co-signed by the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister for International Cooperation in 1998. One of its core problems is that *Action Plan* was framed as a strategy with only broad “commitments” and “actions” to be taken by the “federal government”, “civil society” and in some cases “provincial and territorial departments responsible for social services” (1998, p. 16). Such vague language is not easily implemented or monitored.

1998's *Action Plan* presents a comprehensive, integrative vision of how the federal government, with provincial governments and civil society, should work together to advance food security, agricultural sustainability, and human rights, both within Canada and overseas. However, the vagueness of its commitments and deadlines partly explain its limited impact. Skogstad's (2012) analysis of agricultural policy paradigms also provides explanatory value. She argues the most recent paradigm in food policy and governance, the "Multifunctionality Paradigm", emerged around 2000, which is just after *Action Plan* was written. Interestingly, while the "Multifunctionality Paradigm" is implicated in the implementation of more comprehensive policy approaches (such as that recommended in *Action Plan*) in a variety of international settings such as the UK (discussed shortly), multifunctionality has had only limited uptake in Canada to date.

A multifunctional agricultural policy "puts value on the non-commodity social, environmental, and rural development outputs of agriculture, and recognizes that the market either will not produce them or will under produce them—and rewards agriculture for doing so" (Skogstad, 2012, p. 22). This policy paradigm emerged in Europe in response to several moments of crisis which shook public confidence in food systems and regulators alike, as well as challenges to European Union (EU) subsidy programs for agriculture in WTO Agreement on Agriculture talks that began in the early 2000s (Grossman, 2003, p. 86). In the context of WTO negotiations, multifunctionality effectively became a way to argue for continued subsidies of agriculture, but for non-productive, often environmental or social, benefits (Garzon, 2005).

In Canada, a view commensurate with the "Multifunctionality Paradigm" can be found in a growing number of municipal food charters and planning policies (e.g. Vancouver's Food Strategy, Edmonton's Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy, Toronto's Food Charter), as well as provincial food policies including New Brunswick's Local Food and Beverage Strategy, Newfoundland and Labrador's Food Security and Agricultural Growth Strategy, Quebec's Agri-Food Policy, Manitoba's Food Charter, Ontario's Local Food Act, Bill 36 (2013) and Ontario's 2014 Provincial Policy Statement (FSC, 2017; Sustain Ontario, 2016; TFPC, 2017). These policies acknowledge the multiple benefits that well-functioning, sustainable, agricultural systems provide Canadian society (beyond the production of food and fibre). They show that the food policy realm has been evolving at the municipal and provincial levels in Canada. However, Skogstad (2012) argues that federal policy had simply not moved into the "Multifunctionality Paradigm" in the early 2000s, and we agree. Unfortunately, *Action Plan* presented an integrative vision that required a more multifunctionalist outlook to be realized.

Notwithstanding its limited direct impact, *Action Plan's* legacy is substantial. Bringing together CSO voices for the 1996 World Food Summit spurred AAFC to re-activate an interdepartmental committee where representatives of various government branches would periodically meet with invited civil society representatives. This committee supported the development of *Action Plan* and convinced the federal government to fund a food security conference to listen to civil society organization voices (Koç & Bas, 2012, p. 131). That conference, held in 2001, sowed the seeds for the membership-based, non-profit organization

known as Food Secure Canada (FSC). Today, FSC presents itself as the national “voice of the food movement” in Canada (PFPP, 2011, p. 25), and played a key role in encouraging the Trudeau government of 2015 to commit to a Food Policy for Canada. Furthermore, the comprehensive scope of *Action Plan*, and the inclusiveness through which it was prepared, sets a much better precedent upon which to build the current policy conversation than 1977’s *Food Strategy*.

Implications for governance

Our analysis of *Food Strategy* and *Action Plan* lead to four specific recommendations for governance of a national food policy in Canada:

First, frame efforts as a “pan-Canadian food strategy” (inclusive of the provinces, territories, municipalities, and Indigenous governments, as well as the private sector and civil society) as opposed to a more narrowly-defined national food policy. The government’s summer 2017 consultations took a small step in this direction. They included: an online survey to which over 40,000 people responded; a two-day Food Policy Summit in Ottawa that brought together over 300 representatives of diverse stakeholder groups; and six regional engagement sessions⁶ (GoC, 2017b). While the consultations achieved were significant given the tight timelines, there was minimal inclusion of provinces and municipalities in Canada. Further mechanisms are needed to ensure the provinces and territories can participate in defining (and implementing, within their respective jurisdictions) pan-Canadian food policies. The research group *Food: Locally Embedded, Globally Engaged* (FLEdGE), working in partnership with FSC, conducted a scan of provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous government (e.g. Treaty-based) food policy initiatives (FSC, 2017). It revealed important roles played by other jurisdictions in advancing food policy, as well as uneven engagement across the country. Ideally, a pan-Canadian food strategy would examine successful initiatives across the country to assess whether they could be scaled up and out. Better engagement could emulate formal Federal Provincial Territorial (FPT) processes (e.g. establish a FPT Council of Food Ministers that brings together Ministers of Health, Agriculture, Environment and Social Services for starters) or it could be organized informally, at least initially, through a learning exchange convened by a National Food Policy Council (discussed below).

Second, in response to one of the major weaknesses of *Action Plan*, it is important that *A Food Policy for Canada* define clear goals and targets and include transparent accountability mechanisms, rather than only vague “commitments”. This recommendation might be difficult to achieve in its first iteration—given its swift formulation. *A Food Policy for Canada* is likely to simply state general principles and goals (much like *Food Strategy*). As a result, the food policy

⁶ Held in: Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; Saint-Hyacinthe, Québec; Vancouver, British Columbia; Yellowknife, Northwest Territories; Guelph, Ontario; and Winnipeg, Manitoba.

will require ongoing mechanisms for deliberating on targets and monitoring efforts to advance its goals.

Third, create mechanisms to avoid policies/strategies being captured by specific departments, especially AAFC, the current host of the national food policy conversation. Of our two case studies, departmental capture is most evident in *Food Strategy*, which framed food policy in narrow terms (notwithstanding attention to “consumer” issues). *Action Plan*, on the other hand, had a more comprehensive scope, prepared through a true cross-departmental process. One option for *A Food Policy for Canada* might be to have leadership of a high-level interdepartmental committee on food come from a central agency (e.g. the Privy Council Office or Prime Minister’s Office) rather than a line department like AAFC. Another option might be to have committee co-leadership between two equally-powerful departments with distinct interests in food system issues like AAFC (which tends to pursue the growth of production and exports) and Health Canada (which focuses on health outcomes, and thus questions of equity and food access). We found the mandate letter of the new Minister of Health, appointed in 2017, encouraging. The 2015 mandate of the previous health minister did not include A Food Policy for Canada (this was only in the Minister of AAFC’s letter), but the 2017 mandate letter did (Trudeau, 2017).

Fourth, ensure policy development as well as actual governance mechanisms include *both* civil society and agricultural and food industry actors and perspectives to achieve traction. *Action Plan* erred on this front by bringing in civil society, but with minimal industry input. The result was a lack of industry buy-in for the commitments made in *Action Plan*.

All four of these recommendations speak to mechanisms for ensuring the “joined up” approach to food policy advocated by MacRae and Winfield (2016). The literature on “co-governance” (aka collaborative governance) offers one way of conceptualizing what this approach looks like in practice. Co-governance can be defined most simply as multiple actors working together to meet shared governance goals (Kooiman, 2003). Emerson et al. (2012) similarly define collaborative governance as “the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished” (p. 2).⁷

How can governance of a national food policy address these four recommendations? The next section gleans insights from international examples of governance mechanisms, especially regarding multi-sectoral engagement and multi-level governance. We present constructive examples from Norway, Finland, Brazil and the UK. In cases where inclusive and transparent multi-stakeholder processes have not been fully realized (e.g. Australia, Scotland and Wales), considerable civil society and academic critique has resulted.

⁷ While space restrictions do not allow for a deeper analysis of the contributions of this theoretical approach to a future Food Policy for Canada, we encourage further scholarship on this topic.

International precedents

In recent years, various countries have developed national food policies or strategies designed to address, in a more coordinated and harmonized manner, an array of complex food system issues. We analyzed national food strategies from Norway (1975), Scotland (2009), the United Kingdom (2010), Wales (2010), Australia (2013), Brazil (2013), Finland (2017), and Ireland (2017). To advance its food policy goals, each country developed an array of substantive, procedural and institutional policy tools. While the impetus behind each country's national food policy development varied, most introduced some form of intra-governmental and multi-stakeholder co-governance mechanisms to assist with implementation, stakeholder engagement and monitoring. These successes elsewhere provide examples that Canada can emulate.

Three approaches to multi-level and multi-sectoral co-governance are exemplary: Brazil's collaborative approach to achieve national food and nutrition and support for food as a human right; the United Kingdom's cross-sectoral governance to advance a national food strategy; and Norway and Finland's high level of intra-governmental coordination around its food and nutrition policies.

First, a whole-of-government approach, such as Brazil's Unified Health System, seeks to align food policy horizontally across departmental silos and vertically through the different levels of government (Leão & Maluf, 2013). Initially developed in 1999, Brazil's National Food and Nutrition Plan (Brazil Ministry of Health, 2013) seeks to address poverty and improve the diet, nutrition, and health of its population. This particular food policy is thus best characterized as a national food security policy. Implementation of the policy rests on both strong multi-level governmental coordination and active civil society co-governance. The main mechanism for intra-governmental coordination is Brazil's Intersectoral Committee for Food and Nutrition (part of the National Health Council). It co-ordinates policy across relevant ministries, with sub-national authorities, and with the National Food and Security Council (CONSEA)—the main civil society engagement mechanism—to turn proposals into policy. One-third of CONSEA's membership is comprised of high-level government officials responsible for areas related to food security, with the remainder from civil society organizations (e.g. non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, and professional associations) (Leão & Maluf, 2013). Brazil is the only example we investigated to entrench the Right to Food in its constitution. In fact, such pairing of legislation and constitutional entrenchment ensured commitment to carrying out a national food security policy in Brazil.

Second, a federal structure that offers flexibility might best accommodate Canada's physical and cultural diversity of food. The United Kingdom offers an example of a national food policy within a federal framework—an over-arching set of standards, principles, and goals set out for devolved governments to follow, enabling the latter to identify means suitable to their circumstances. To assist in the implementation of its food policy, the UK created a fifteen-member cross-sectoral advisory Council of Food Policy Advisors in 2008. The Council ensured multi-stakeholder input, though perhaps not active engagement. The Council also included a

secretariat (established under the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) with reporting functions. The Council then played a key role in developing and implementing a whole-of-government (cross-departmental) food strategy, *Food 2030* (UK DEFRA, 2010). A change of government in 2011, however, meant no further action was taken to implement the strategy.

Norway and Finland exemplify a third approach to bringing together intra-governmental coordination with the advice of external experts. Norway's Inter-Ministerial Council ensures food policy is coordinated across government departments. This Council then has an advisory mechanism for multi-stakeholder input into government policy. Created in 1975, Norway's National Nutrition Council sought to address two major issues: growing rates of cardiovascular disease within Norway, and the global food crisis of the mid-1970s (Food Strategy Blueprint, 2017, p. 26). Similarly, in the 1980s, Finland restructured its National Nutrition Council (set up in 1936) to better facilitate policy deliberation and coordination. Thirteen council members represent key government departments, industry, agriculture and consumer organizations. The Council proposes motions for the authorities, undertakes research and reports on efforts by industry and other actors to improve diets (Roos et al., 2002). In both countries, councils serve a coordinating and deliberative role, with no formal executive power (Klepp & Forster, 1985; Milio, 1981).

Norway and Finland's food policies are comparably as ambitious in scope as Canada's, including agricultural policies as well as nutrition and food security policies (the narrower focus of Brazil's policy). However, Canada's situation remains quite different. Canada is the world's fifth largest agricultural exporter. Both Norway and Finland are high-cost agricultural producers whose agricultural policies tend to focus on maintaining a high degree of self-sufficiency. (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017a; 2017b). Like Canada, they are also major food importers.

What happens when countries do not find ways to work across multiple levels of government, and to engage productively with both civil society and industry actors? In 2013, Australia's proposed National Food Plan (Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, 2013) intended to work with the states and territories on food-related policy through traditional mechanisms, including the Council of Australian Governments Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation, and the Standing Council on Primary Industries.⁸ Australia also consulted and engaged stakeholders through the Australian Council on Food—comprised mostly of industry representatives. Further, Australia's high-level National Food Policy Working Group, serving as a conduit between the food industry and government, had ten of thirteen members coming from industry. No parallel mechanism was created for engaging with civil society stakeholders (Food Strategy Blueprint, 2017, p. 29). Civil society organizations challenged the Australian government at multiple stages in the development of its food policy, arguing its processes lacked inclusion and transparency (Carey et al., 2015). They ultimately formed the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance and developed "The People's Food Plan" (2013).

⁸ Australia's National Food Plan was never implemented due to a change in government.

A National Food Policy Council for Canada

The examples from Brazil, the UK, Norway and Finland above show that there are different ways of approaching food governance in different countries. There are also commonalities across these approaches, including the need for strong intra-governmental and inter-governmental coordination, and mechanisms for ensuring strong engagement with both civil society and industry players in one way or another. In Canada, we have worked with FSC to advocate for multi-stakeholder involvement in defining the parameters of a national food policy, and to advance the creation of a National Food Policy Council (NFPC) consisting of representatives and stakeholders from all parts of the food system. Our assessment of the governance requirements of a National Food Policy that avoids the pitfalls of the past, combined with evidence of what food policy councils have achieved at other levels, as well as the existing international precedents of multi-stakeholder advisory bodies, lead us to support this recommendation as one possible pathway forward in the Canadian context.

Currently, over two hundred food policy councils do creative work worldwide. Most advise municipal or (US) state governments.⁹ McNicholl (2015) showed that the major stakeholders in Canada are ready for a food policy council (even drafting a National Food Policy Council of Canada Act). Since food issues are cross-cutting and complex, who better to populate a deliberative council than representatives from the relevant levels of government, industry, and civil society? Food policy councils are ultimately about co-learning between governments and the people they represent. Canada's National Round Table on Environment and Economy (NRTEE)—a force for sustainable development until 2013—demonstrated the role advisory bodies can play in designing innovative solutions. While a national food policy council (with the models' origins in the Toronto Food Policy Council of the 1990s) would prove a made-in-Canada solution, the international examples from Finland, Norway, Brazil and the UK discussed above all support diverse stakeholder engagement at the highest levels of food system planning.

NFPC membership should include representatives from key federal government departments and agencies, academia, food industry, farmers and food producers, civil society, the philanthropic sector and Indigenous organizations. It should also have a mechanism to ensure interaction between regulatory bodies and provincial and territorial governments (and possibly provincial and territorial policy councils). It should publish an annual state of food policy report and engage in benchmarking, data gathering and target setting. However, we caution that the NFPC, as a key advisory mechanism, can only exist within a larger architecture that listens to it and ensures coordination across multi-level governance structures. Other key elements include a Federal-Provincial-Territorial (FPT) process of pan-Canadian food policy engagement, and meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples (Nation-to-Nation and Inuit-to-Crown) to

⁹One example of the many food policy councils that include a mix of government, civil society and industry representation is Michigan's Interdepartmental Collaboration Committee (ICC) Food Policy Subcommittee (http://www.michigan.gov/mdard/0,4610,7-125-1572_2885_70065---,00.html)

ensure coordination, as well an inter-ministerial committee at the level of Deputy Ministers (in the federal government) to align over sixteen federal departments and agencies with food policy goals.

Conclusions

Our analyses of 1977's *Food Strategy* and 1998's *Action Plan* support the following four recommendations: 1) Frame efforts as a 'pan-Canadian food strategy' (to include provinces, territories, municipalities, and Indigenous governments) as opposed to a more narrowly defined national food policy; 2) Set clear targets and accountability, and not just vague 'commitments'; 3) Create mechanisms to avoid policies/strategies being captured by specific departments; and, 4) Ensure governance is inclusive of both civil society and industry.

International precedents illustrate mechanisms to include multiple stakeholders in an advisory and monitoring capacity, and to ensure coordination across multiple levels of government. We support FSC's call for a National Food Policy Council as a key co-governance mechanism. In our view, the NFPC must be deliberative—not with tight organizational lines of accountability—and complemented by coordinating mechanisms with other levels of government (provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous governments) and with federal departments and agencies.

Critical questions going forward include how the voices of those most affected (e.g. small producers, the food insecure, consumers) will inform food policy governance processes in Canada, and to what effect? If AAFC continues to take the lead on food policy in Canada, traditional agriculture stakeholders will likely dominate the conversation. Thus, there is a real risk that even if marginalized voices are included at the table (e.g. on the proposed NFPC), they will not be able to exert great influence.

Today's conversation about a Food Policy for Canada builds on a rich legacy. 1998's *Action Plan* made considerable strides forward compared to 1977's *Food Strategy*, but the core ambitions of both previous food policy efforts are yet to be realized. In 2018, the federal government has a unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership—nationally and internationally—by creating a successful joined-up policy and governance approach to the food system in Canada. Time will tell if the lessons have been learned from past attempts to do the same.

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