



Perspective

Opportunities and challenges for school food programs in Canada: Lessons from the United States

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Abstract

As Canada works towards developing a national school food program, it is timely to examine the lessons learned from the programs of other countries. Analyzing these insights can help Canada avoid key pitfalls and replicate promising practices in program design and implementation. The Government of Canada has the advantage of learning from one of the longest standing national school food programs and our southern neighbour: the United States (U.S.). This paper distills vital lessons from the U.S. school food programs, with a focus on addressing four critical aspects: access, emphasis on health and education, funding, and program implementation. First, the U.S. experience demonstrates the significance of universal free school meals. The historical inadequacies of means-tested programs result

in inefficiencies, stigma, and exclusion of students in need. Second, the paper argues for an emphasis on health and education benefits. Third, it underscores the necessity of adequate funding. Inadequate reimbursements in the U.S. have compromised meal quality and led to the food industry's capitalization on school meals, with negative implications for children's health. Lastly, harnessing the power of procurement and employment can stimulate local economies, create good jobs, and foster a healthier food environment. As Canada tailors its national school food program to its diverse regions and communities, it has an extraordinary opportunity to avoid the policy and program implementation errors revealed by the U.S. experience.

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Résumé

Alors que le Canada travaille à l'élaboration d'un programme national d'alimentation scolaire, le moment est opportun pour examiner les leçons tirées des programmes d'autres pays. L'analyse de ces enseignements peut aider le Canada à éviter les principaux écueils et à reproduire les pratiques prometteuses dans la conception et la mise en œuvre du programme. Le gouvernement du Canada a l'avantage de pouvoir apprendre de l'un des plus anciens programmes nationaux d'alimentation scolaire, celui de notre voisin du sud : les États-Unis. Cet article fait ressortir des leçons essentielles des programmes alimentaires scolaires états-uniens, en se concentrant sur quatre aspects déterminants : l'accès, l'accent mis sur la santé et l'éducation, le financement et la mise en œuvre du programme. Tout d'abord, l'expérience états-unienne démontre l'importance de la gratuité universelle des repas scolaires. Les faiblesses historiques des programmes conditionnels aux ressources

entraînent de l'inefficacité, une stigmatisation et l'exclusion d'élèves dans le besoin. Deuxièmement, cet article préconise de mettre l'accent sur les avantages en matière de santé et d'éducation. Troisièmement, il souligne la nécessité d'un financement adéquat. Aux États-Unis, l'insuffisance des remboursements a compromis la qualité des repas et mené l'industrie alimentaire à tirer profit des repas scolaires, avec des conséquences négatives pour la santé des enfants. Enfin, miser sur le pouvoir de l'approvisionnement et de l'emploi peut stimuler les économies locales, créer de bons emplois et favoriser un environnement alimentaire plus sain. Tandis que le Canada adapte son programme national d'alimentation scolaire à ses diverses régions et communautés, il a une occasion extraordinaire d'éviter les erreurs de mise en œuvre des politiques et des programmes qui se sont manifestées dans l'expérience états-unienne.

Introduction

In the 2018-19 school year, at least 21 percent of elementary and secondary students in Canada participated in one or more free school food programs (SFPs) (Ruetz & McKenna, 2021). Most of these were breakfast or snack programs, but lunch programs have been developed in some regions. Overall, access to SFPs varies greatly between and within provinces and territories (Ruetz & McKenna, 2021). In 2019, the

Government of Canada pledged to develop a national SFP within the country's inaugural Food Policy (Government of Canada, 2019). However, despite this historic commitment, school food was the only program within the Food Policy without any allocated funding (Ruetz & Kirk, 2019). In 2021, Liberal Party of Canada renewed its commitment to the program in its 2021 election platform, vowing to invest \$1 billion over five

years to “develop a national school food policy and work towards a national school nutritious meal program” (Liberal Party of Canada, 2021, p. 7). Since then, the Government of Canada conducted a consultation on developing a national school food policy and released a “What We Heard Report” in 2023 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2023). Canadians are waiting for the release of the national school food policy and to see if the national SFP will be funded in the next budget. Canada has an extraordinary opportunity to create a SFP that truly furthers the goals of its National Food Policy, unencumbered by rules and regulations derived from other eras.

As Canada works towards developing a national SFP, it is timely to examine the lessons learned from the programs of other countries. Analyzing these insights can help Canada avoid key pitfalls and replicate promising practices in program design and implementation. The Government of Canada has the advantage of learning from one of the longest standing national SFPs and its

southern neighbour: the United States (U.S.). School meal programs in the U.S. began at the municipal level during the late 1800s and early 1900s (Levine, 2008; Zhong et al., 2023). It was during the Great Depression of the 1930s that the U.S. federal government first began participating in local school lunch programs. In 1946, the United States established the National School Lunch Program, overseen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Subsequently, the School Breakfast Program was established as a pilot in the late 1960s, and then authorized as a nationwide option in the mid 1970s. Examining both successful and unsuccessful aspects of the U.S.’ national school lunch and breakfast programs provides valuable insights. This article focusses on four key lessons from SFPs in the U.S.: (1) choose universal free meals; (2) emphasize education and health benefits; (3) ensure adequate funding; and (3) champion values-based procurement and employment practices.

Choose universal free school meals

All SFPs must address the fundamental questions of access. For whom are the meals being prepared and served? And who will pay for them? The original National School Lunch Program subsidized all school lunches with an across-the-board cash subsidy and regular donations of commodities from the USDA but provided no additional cash to cover the costs of meals served free, though participating schools were supposed to provide them to children deemed too poor to pay.

In the late 1960s, as part of a national recognition of hunger in America, the defects of this system were revealed. In short, the system worked fairly well in schools in affluent areas, but failed schools where large

numbers of students were poor. There were simply not enough paying customers to subsidize the lunches for poor children, and millions of them went hungry. When this situation was brought to public attention in the late 1960s, the system was radically overhauled. The federal government would now reimburse schools for meals served free, a reduced-price category was created for the “near-poor,” and uniform federal income eligibility standards were established for these categories, removing the local discretion in identifying students for free meals that had been shown to involve abuse, discrimination, and favoritism. This new process, however, involved “means testing” where

families' incomes were assessed and meal subsidies provided based on a set of financial criteria. Free and reduced-price school meals were now an entitlement for those whose incomes qualified, and the program was performance funded; that is, there was a specified reimbursement for each meal served with no cap on spending. While the new system expanded access to millions of impoverished children, and participation soared, it quickly became subject to all the ills associated with a means test.

While a means test is often defended as “efficient,” it can be profoundly inefficient. In school meals, the cumbersome application, certification, verification, and accountability processes associated with means testing generate an onerous amount of paperwork, creating a large administrative burden for schools. This combined with all the other costs associated with handling money from students makes the meals more expensive. Furthermore, the household application means-test is decidedly error-prone, with an error rate of more than one in five being misclassified (Milfort et al., 2021). Further, because the U.S. system uses a single national income standard for eligibility while costs of living vary dramatically across the country, many children in real need are excluded.

Even more damaging is the impact of the means test on the reputation of school food and the experience of students. School meals in many communities came to be regarded as “welfare food” or “poor kids” lunch as a result. This stigma was repeatedly found to deter participation, even among those eligible for free meals. There have been adjustments over the years to try increase anonymity; however, the means test has continued to create divisions among students. While expensive point of sale swipe-cards or personal identification number or biometric systems (fingerprint scanners) can protect the privacy of individual students, “they cannot eliminate the idea that some students eat

free while others pay” (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 263). In the worst situations, eating school lunch becomes a badge of poverty. Students with money often opt for snacks from the vending machines, or leave campus for a fast food meal, thus frustrating the health aims of the program (Poppendieck, 2010). When cashless point of sale systems were established, parents of paying students had to put money on account for their children, launching a whole new episode of shaming as schools tried to figure out what to do when these accounts ran dry, but children continued to show up at the cashier with full trays. Phone calls and emails to parents, stamping children’s hands with an “I need lunch money” message, even confiscation of full trays and their replacement with “stigma sandwiches” raised an outcry all across the country, and food service directors began reporting large amounts in uncollected school food debt.

In the U.S., complaints about the paperwork burden, the high error rates, the uncollected lunch debt, and the stigma have produced reforms. Based on the results of pilot programs undertaken in the 1990s, Congress in 2004 mandated “Direct Certification” of eligibility for free meals for all children who are “categorically eligible” for them: children whose families participate in federal welfare and food assistance programs, foster children, and homeless and migrant youth. In Direct Certification, the state agencies that administer these programs identify categorically eligible children and notify the schools; no parental application is needed. In 2010, the success of Direct Certification led to the creation of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This option allows high poverty schools to feed all children free of charge and receive federal reimbursement based on a formula that reflects the proportion of categorically eligible students. CEP has generated substantial research on the benefits of the universal free school

meals approach (Bartfeld et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2021; Marcus & Yewell, 2022; Rothbart et al., 2023; Schwartz & Rothbart, 2020).

Due to the pandemic, from March 2020 to June 2022 USDA waivers allowed all schools to serve all children free of charge. A survey of families found that when school meals are provided at no cost for to students, children are not embarrassed to eat them, but this stigma would likely return if this policy ended: 42 percent of families with children eligible for free or reduced-priced meals reported their child would be less likely to eat a school meal next year unless it was free for all students (Cohen et al., 2023). Advocates hoped that the documented positive impact would lead to adoption of universal free school meals at the national level. They were greatly encouraged when the Task Force on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, a group advising the Biden-Harris administration in preparation for the 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health recommended universal free school meals (Merod, 2022, paragraph 4) and the White House “National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health” confirmed it will “advance a pathway to free healthy school meals for all” (The White House, 2022: 9). Congressional opposition, however, has scuttled such plans for the time being, despite a recent poll that showed that a majority of U.S. adults believe that universal free is a better approach (Gutierrez, 2022). Meanwhile, in 2021, California and Maine passed legislation establishing universal free school meals statewide (Blossom, 2023), and advocates turned their attention to state-by-state campaigns for Healthy School Meals for All (Food Research & Action Center, n.d.). As of this writing, eight states have passed legislation creating permanent universal free meal programs, with state funding filling in for meals that are not fully reimbursable with federal funds (see the Food

Research & Action Center’s website for updates: <https://frac.org/healthy-school-meals-for-all>).

Some Canadian advocates are hopeful about a “Pay-What-You-Can” approach to avoid means testing without totally foregoing parental financial contributions. “Pay-what-you-can” school food programs, a novel model internationally, present their own challenges. The first is the difficulty of managing ordering and procurement when revenue is uncertain. Second, the pay-what-you-can (PWYC) approach may create a moral hazard, where the more civic-minded a household is, the more it might be inclined to pay. Conversely, other households will voluntarily pay less unrelated to need, which can lead to resentment over time. Lastly, proponents of PWYC programs assert that they reduce student stigma, an assertion not yet confirmed by research. A more thorough understanding of the implications of the PWYC model must be achieved before applying this model en masse. Outstanding questions include: will schools in less affluent areas with smaller populations be able to sustain PWYC where economies of scale and parental contributions are limited? What level of student participation reduces stigma and increases program acceptance? Overall, there is a body of research that confirms that offering universal free school meals removes stigma, reduces program administration time and costs, reduces per unit meal costs, eliminates eligibility errors, boosts student attendance and achievement, reduces rates of school suspensions and other forms of discipline, and increases participation (Cohen et al., 2021; Long et al., 2021; Radsy et al., 2023; Rothbart et al., 2023; Schwartz & Rothbart, 2020), but similar findings do not yet exist for the PWYC model (Ruetz, 2023). Research on PWYC models compared to no cost models is underway and the results from this research should inform program development.

Emphasize health and education

Efforts to expand access to school meals in the U.S. are driven in part by the abysmal state of the American diet in general, and the food consumption habits of children and youth in particular (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2023). Although free school meals are of particular value to low-income households, the well documented health and educational benefits apply to all students. A recent study revealed that school food is the healthiest food that school-aged children consume (Liu et al., 2021). Healthy school meals can improve health in the short term and teach healthy eating habits and preferences for the long run (Cohen et al., 2021; Haines & Ruetz, 2020). Such meals are themselves a form of “food education,” but they can also be explicitly linked to important elements of the curriculum (Andersen et al. 2017; Persson Osowski et al. 2013). In the U.S., this kind of food education generally occurs at school only where a non-profit group works with the schools to provide it, or individual teachers take on the responsibility of using food to achieve various state curriculum standards (Poppendieck, 2010). Many of these efforts are admirable, but only a few are explicitly linked to the food served in the cafeteria.¹ The Biden-Harris administration, however, in the strategy document released in conjunction with the 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health, captured the ideal of a school food program fully attuned to education and health, priorities that can inform Canadian program design and practice.

“A ‘healthy meals for all’ approach would reorient the school meal programs from an

ancillary service to an integral component of the school day and allow schools to focus on providing the highest quality meals and engaging children around healthy food. Essential components of this approach are expanding effort to increase access to local and regional food systems, enabling more schools to cook meals from scratch by funding training and equipment purchases, investing in the school nutrition workforce, and expanding nutrition education for children. Elevating school meals is a key strategy to improve our nation’s health and would benefit all children” (The White House, 2022: p. 9).

In Canada as in the U.S., the diet quality of students across the socioeconomic spectrum is poor (Minaker & Hammond, 2016; Tugault-Lafleur et al., 2017, 2018). Canada has the opportunity to design a program that fully integrates school meals with instruction, amplifying the long-term health benefits of nutritious school food. Integrating school meals with food education is more likely to occur if provincial education and health departments are centrally engaged in the establishment and operation of SFPs. In the U.S., while the national program is administered by the USDA, reflecting the historical links to the distribution of farm surpluses (Levine, 2008), state level oversight of funds and compliance with menu standards is located, in all but two states, in state departments of education.² In Canada, at the federal level, the Prime Minister asked Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Economic and Social Development Canada to take the lead on developing the new program (Trudeau, 2021a; Trudeau

¹ Several non-profit organizations in the U.S. maintain data bases or guides to curricular resources for food education in schools (Center for Ecoliteracy; n.d.; Vermont FEED, n.d.).

² New Jersey and Texas are the exception with State Departments of Agriculture overseeing school meals.

2021b). If Canada hopes to realize the maximum educational and health benefits from school meals,

educators and public health experts should be at the table from the outset.

Ensure adequate funding

In the U.S., funding has been reliable since free and reduced-price meals became an entitlement in the early 1970s, and relatively stable except for sharp cuts introduced by the Reagan administration in the early 1980s. Federal reimbursements are adjusted annually to account for inflation, but are often insufficient when taking into account all costs for providing meals (Congressional Research Service, 2020) thus inadequate for providing the kinds of meals that would most benefit students and local food systems. For any local school food provider, the break-even point is a product of reimbursement rates, the price charged to full price students, and the participation rate. Participation is crucial because fixed costs like electricity and gas, janitorial services, and management salaries are spread over the number of meals served. The higher the participation rate, the lower the unit cost of producing each meal (Long et al., 2021; Poppendieck, 2010). Like the eligibility thresholds, federal reimbursement rates have been uniform across the nation. Federal meal reimbursements are particularly insufficient in areas with comparatively high labor costs, and in large cities and remote rural areas where the costs of local distribution of food supplies are high (Public Plate Working Group, 2014). States can and do supplement the federal reimbursements, but overall, the need to break even has contributed to a downward pressure on nutrition and palatability. Perhaps the most famous episode is the Reagan administration's effort to save money by revising nutrition standards, including counting ketchup as a vegetable (Poppendieck, 2010). That proposal elicited a storm of bad publicity and was

hastily withdrawn, although the most recent round of federal school food rule making has authorized pizza sauce to be counted toward the vegetable standard (Bingham, 2011). In the 1990s, the use of Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NSMP) instead of the food-based approach that had been in place for decades, further opened the doors to items like enriched Cheetos in the cafeteria (Butler, 2014). Happily, this foray into nutritionism was terminated in the U.S. under the 2010 Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act (Smith et al., 2016). Canada can avoid this sort of trap by sticking to the food-based approach featured in its 2019 Food Guide.

The full impact of inadequate reimbursements cannot be appreciated without an understanding of the many ways in which the food industry in the U.S. has capitalized on the budget challenges of school food authorities. In short, food manufacturers use the budget constraints to market highly processed items—for example, Smuckers “Un crustable” peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with twenty-five separate ingredients and a 270-day shelf life—as a way of reducing labor costs (Poppendieck, 2010). For main dish products that contribute to the meat and meat alternate (e.g. beans, cheese) component of the school food meal patterns, USDA facilitates such marketing by permitting manufacturers to state this contribution on their labels and offer a warranty against audit claims for products that have been evaluated by USDA and awarded a CN (Child Nutrition) Label (USDA, 2013). That is, if a state education department reviewing the meals of a local educational authority finds that a beef burrito does not contain the two ounces of meat

specified in the meal pattern and claimed on the CN label, the manufacturer, rather than the local food service will be liable and must reimburse the schools for any meal disallowed because of a failure of the manufactured product to meet the standard.

The most extreme example of the food industry's capitalization on school meals in the U.S. was through the widespread conversion to manufactured heat-and-eat meals called “meal packs” or “prepared meals systems,” in the 1970s and 1980s. Driven largely by efforts to save on labor costs as pensions and health insurance raised the expense of municipal employees, corporations that manufactured frozen meals similar to TV dinners offered school systems complete meals and the walk-in freezers and convection ovens needed to manage them. The frozen meals were stored on trays stacked on racks with wheels. All the cooks had to do was wheel the racks out of the freezers and into the ovens, and then out to the serving lines. Not only fewer workers, but less skilled and thus less expensive labor was needed (Poppendieck, 2010).

The U.S. experience with manufactured meals is a cautionary tale for Canada. Though the meals were technically designed to meet USDA's nutrition requirements, they failed the common-sense test of palatability, with frequent complaints that portions of the meal remained frozen while others were too hot to eat. Laboratory analyses sometimes found the meals lacking in the nutrients they promised to provide (Poppendieck, 2010). Meanwhile, schools using such systems allowed the infrastructure necessary for fresh preparation to atrophy, if they had ever had it, so that when food activists turned their attention to the quality of school food, they often found kitchens without the basics for fresh preparation: knives, meat slicers, and working stoves (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2013). A good news story from a statewide study in California is that schools' combined labour and food costs comprise very

similar percentages of total food service budgets regardless of the amount of scratch cooking. In short, once schools have the infrastructure for scratch cooking, ongoing operations are not more costly than heat-and-serve, yet scratch production generates more full-time jobs, opportunities to source local food and preparing more diverse and culturally relevant meals (Vincent et al., 2020). Communities in Canada should make assessments of their existing infrastructure assets, and build the infrastructure needed to create the kinds of meals they want for their children, and funding for infrastructure should be a central part of start-up assistance (Coalition for Healthy School Food, 2023; Ruetz, 2022).

One other cautionary tale from the U.S. experience rooted in inadequate funding was the sale of other foods to offset costs of reimbursable meals. In the U.S., for many years, school food service operations and other school entities were allowed to sell foods in competition with the reimbursable meal—in the cafeteria, in the school store, in vending machines in the halls, wherever and whenever they pleased (Poppendieck, 2010). Principals counted on such sales for discretionary funds, athletic teams used them for equipment, and cafeteria managers used them to help close the gap between revenues and costs (Poppendieck, 2010). Even items sold a la carte in the cafeteria were not required to comply with the nutrition standards governing the reimbursable meal.

The back story here is instructive. When the Reagan administration cut the federal subsidy for all school meals and raised the eligibility threshold for reduced price meals in the early 1980s, participation plummeted. Food service operators, unable to break even, turned to a la carte sales to make ends meet, often the burgers, fries, chips, pizza, and shakes that were American teenagers' favorite foods. Needless to say, the manufacturers of packaged processed foods of all sorts

began aggressive marketing of their products to schools and became fierce opponents of any regulation of a la carte items sold in schools (Poppendieck, 2010). A la carte undermined the nutritional integrity of the programs, both for students who chose a la carte over the nutritionally regulated meal and for those whose a la carte purchases displaced important elements of the official lunch or breakfast. Further, a la carte exaggerated the gulf between kids with cash and those without, greatly intensifying the stigma attached to the free and reduced-price meals.

As obesity became a national issue, legislation gave the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to regulate sales in the cafeteria (Institute of Medicine, 2007). Not

until 2010 did U.S. policy change to impose significant nutrition standards on food sold elsewhere in the school. Now a detailed list of regulations limits foods for sale anywhere in the school during the school day to items that meet the general nutrition profile imposed on components of the reimbursable meal (Food and Nutrition Service, 2016). Food service providers frequently complained but generally adapted. Canada can avoid these pitfalls by regulating other foods sold at school from the outset—or prohibiting them altogether—and providing performance funding, instead of the predominant method of capped school grants that do not keep a pace with inflation.

Harness the power of procurement and employment

Any policy that establishes large scale procurement of food creates opportunities to enhance the food system. Similarly, any policy that creates a substantial number of jobs impacts labor standards. In the U.S., competitive bidding rules at the federal, state, and local levels long hampered efforts to promote direct farm-to-school purchases and other procurement designed to build local food system capacity and support local economies. Most of these rules were established in the late 1800s or the first decade of the twentieth century when Good Government advocates sought to curb corruption and nepotism in public expenditure. They generated a culture of “best price” as the sole criterion for selection (Public Plate Working Group, 2014). Only recently has the concept of “best value” begun to replace the best price straitjacket (Morgan & Sonnino, 2008). Federal rules now permit local preference in school food purchasing, and a “Good Food Purchasing” movement now urges municipalities to commit to procurement that reflects five core values:

local economic development, nutrition and health, animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and a valued workforce (Farnsworth et al., 2018).

The last of these entails adequate pay and benefits, and safe and healthy working conditions. In the U.S., while unionized school food workers in some large city systems have reasonable pay levels, much school food work has been underpaid and deskilled (Gaddis, 2019). This is particularly troubling because school food jobs can be ideal for single parents because they adhere to the school calendar, reducing the need for childcare. Accordingly, future school food jobs need to be “Good Food Jobs,” which are jobs that promote health and wellbeing for workers, including the provision of a living wage, comprehensive benefits, and a pathway to fruitful careers (NYC Food Policy Center, 2013). In Canada, where many current school food providers are volunteers, there is an opportunity to build a school food workforce that not only provides fresh, nutritious food for students but also creates new jobs.

A preliminary University of Guelph study suggests Canada’s national SFP could directly stimulate 62,000 jobs and indirectly stimulate as many as 207,000 new jobs in the agri-food sector if local food procurement was integrated into the program (Ruetz & Fraser, 2019). If adequately supported, such as ensuring school food staff receive a living wage and scratch cooking training, Canada can reap the crosscutting benefits from creating in Good Food Jobs.

The creation of Good Food Jobs with skilled scratch cooking techniques brings with it a significant opportunity to purchase locally grown, whole food. The purchasing power from Canada’s national SFP can be utilized to make positive impacts on various fronts. A preliminary University of Guelph study suggests that a Canada-wide program could contribute \$4.8 billion

to the economy over ten years if 30 percent were spent on local food purchases (Ruetz & Fraser, 2019). Adopting local procurement strategies aligned with these values is a win-win for both students and the broader community, promoting health, local farmers and businesses, and sustainable food systems in Canada. Values based procurement is on the rise and Canada has the opportunity to build this into its school food policies. Canadian governments should learn from the mistake in the U.S. of not providing school meal funding that accounts for regional differences as labour and food costs vary significantly throughout a country. In addition, school food funding must keep pace with inflation and funders must ensure there is enough funding to pay livable wages to nutrition workers, particularly in communities with a higher cost of living.

Conclusion

Canada’s diverse geography, agricultural regions, and traditions mean that food availability, preferences and funding supports vary across the country. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be suitable for all regions and communities. Certain fundamentals, however, should be embedded at the core of the national program. Based on lessons learned from the U.S. school meal programs, Canada would be well served if the program:

- offers universal free school meals;
- regulates other foods sold at school or prohibits them altogether;
- integrates school meals with food education in the curriculum;

- provides adequate performance funding for school meals instead of capped school grants that do not keep pace with inflation;
- proactively uses food procurement and job creation to advance the goals of Canada’s Food Policy;
- provides enough funding to pay livable wages to nutrition workers, particularly in communities with a higher cost of living.

By incorporating these key lessons into the national SFP, Canada can create a comprehensive and inclusive initiative that addresses students’ nutritional needs, fosters a positive school environment, supports local communities, and promotes healthy habits for future generations.

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