



Field Report

**Strengthening food systems governance:
Civil society efforts within and beyond government**Johanna Wilkes^{a*}, Charles Z. Levkoe^b, Peter Andrée^c, Patricia Ballamingie^d, Kristen Lowitt^e^a Lakehead University; ORCID: [0000-0003-1960-8553](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1960-8553)^b Lakehead University; ORCID: [0000-0003-4950-2186](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4950-2186)^c Carleton University; ORCID: [0000-0002-9814-9481](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9814-9481)^d Carleton University; ORCID: [0000-0002-7709-6755](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7709-6755)^e Queen's University; ORCID: [0000-0003-4636-5980](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4636-5980)**Abstract**

Food systems face a polycrisis on multiple environmental, social, economic, and political fronts—each challenge amplifies the others, making solutions all the more complicated to achieve. To address these challenges, communities are turning to critical and creative approaches to make food systems governance more accessible to a wider range of people. Yet, there is still much to learn about how communities have contributed (and could or should contribute) to building solutions based on differing governance and engagement structures. The Participatory Food Governance project has studied diverse perspectives on governance issues from food movement and civil society (CSO) leaders through a national survey, in-depth interviews, and a series of case studies. To understand how the overall insights from the project resonated with the organizations, networks,

and movements we studied, five CSO leaders from across Canada were invited to reflect on these insights.

This field report outlines a process of dialogue with five CSO leaders and how they experience food systems governance. By connecting conversations between academics, community-based practitioners, and CSO leaders, this process seeks to advance both theory and practice. The CSO leaders who participated offered stories about what governance means on the ground, while also expressing how government processes could better reflect local, contextualized realities. In addition to revealing important insights about the different power dynamics and objectives at play, the reflections captured in this field report highlight key possibilities, tensions, and complexities that proponents of participatory governance must address moving forward.

Keywords: civil society, food system governance, participatory governance

*Corresponding author: jwilkes@lakeheadu.ca

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Résumé

Les systèmes alimentaires font face à une multicrise sur les plans environnemental, social, économique et politique : chaque difficulté amplifie les autres, ce qui rend les solutions d'autant plus complexes à mettre en œuvre. S'attaquant à ces enjeux, les communautés adoptent des approches critiques et créatives pour rendre accessible la gouvernance des systèmes alimentaires à un plus grand éventail de personnes. Il y a cependant encore beaucoup à apprendre sur la manière dont les communautés ont contribué (et peuvent ou doivent contribuer) à l'élaboration de solutions en fonction de diverses structures de gouvernance et d'engagement. Au moyen d'une enquête nationale, d'entrevues approfondies et d'un ensemble d'études de cas, le projet « Gouvernance alimentaire participative » a étudié les perspectives offertes par des leaders de mouvements alimentaires et d'organisations de la société civile concernant des enjeux de gouvernance. Pour comprendre comment les observations d'ensemble du projet trouvaient un écho dans les organisations, les réseaux et les mouvements que nous avons étudiés, nous avons invité cinq de ces leaders

répartis à travers le Canada à réfléchir à ces idées.

Ce rapport de terrain expose le processus de dialogue avec les cinq leaders et la manière dont ces personnes expérimentent la gouvernance des systèmes alimentaires. En ouvrant la conversation à des gens du milieu de la recherche, à ceux impliqués dans des pratiques basées sur la communauté et à des responsables de mouvements alimentaires et d'organisations de la société civile, il s'agit de progresser à la fois dans la théorie et dans la pratique. Les leaders de mouvements alimentaires et d'organisations de la société civile qui ont participé ont raconté ce que la gouvernance signifiait sur le terrain et ont mentionné en quoi la manière dont le gouvernement procède pourrait mieux s'arrimer aux réalités locales et contextuelles. En plus de révéler des observations importantes sur les multiples dynamiques de pouvoir et les objectifs en jeu, les réflexions recueillies dans ce rapport mettent en évidence des possibilités, des tensions et des complexités importantes auxquelles doivent faire face les partisans de la gouvernance participative pour aller de l'avant.

Mots-clés : société civile, gouvernance des systèmes alimentaires, gouvernance participative

Introduction

Food systems face a polycrisis on multiple environmental, social, economic, and political fronts—each challenge amplifies the others, making solutions all the more complicated to achieve. The urgency of addressing these crises is well documented and recognized by governments, producers, harvesters, and eaters around the world (IPCC, 2023; FAO et al., 2025; HLPE, 2020, 2025). To better understand the challenges and solutions, scholars have pointed to the critical role of governance in food systems transformation (Andrée et al., 2019, p. 216; Wilkes, 2022; Moragues-Faus et al., 2024; HLPE, 2025), including how power interplays with decision making and policy processes (Montenegro de Wit & Iles, 2016; Clark, 2021; Wilkes, 2024). To address these challenges, communities are

turning to critical and creative approaches that attempt to make food systems governance more accessible to a wider range of people—especially those made most vulnerable by the dominant system (e.g., landless peoples, people living in poverty, Indigenous people, people of colour, people with disabilities, people who identify as part of the LGBTQ2SQIA+ community). Yet, there is still much to learn about how communities contribute (and could or should contribute) to building solutions based on differing governance and engagement structures.

Our ongoing research through the Participatory Food Governance (PFG) project investigates how food movement leaders and civil society organizations (CSOs) across Canada and Indigenous territories envision and

experience food systems governance and analyzes what these experiences can teach us about building more just and sustainable food systems. Our PFG research aims to better understand and connect diverse perspectives about governance issues from food movement and CSO leaders through several ways, including a national survey, in-depth interviews, and a series of case studies (i.e., the Canadian National Food Policy Advisory Council, the Coalition for Healthy School Food in Canada, and the Technical Committee on Organic Agriculture¹ (see Levkoe et al., 2023, 2025; Littlefield et al., 2024). To date, our research has identified four key insights.

First, the CSO initiatives that we studied go beyond just engaging with existing governance structures that are too often experienced as top-down and siloed. Instead, many CSOs advance more engaged approaches to food systems governance through their attempts to co-develop participatory, holistic, and multi-scalar actions. As Levkoe et al. (2025) explore, CSOs demonstrate how systems-based governance works to create change within food systems and how governments can learn (and in some cases have learned) from these efforts. For example, the announcement of a national Food Policy Advisory Council in 2021 came after significant advocacy efforts by civil society actors and a growing and sustained movement of local and regional food policy councils across the global North (Schiff et al., 2022). Our research illuminates the opportunities and challenges national governments face using this model to engage CSOs in governance processes (Wilkes et al., 2025a).

Second, CSOs work to influence governance by creating alliances, including building cross-sectoral coalitions to further new policy solutions, as demonstrated by the Coalition for Healthy School Food in Canada² (Ruetz et al., 2024). The Coalition is a network of over 375 CSO member organizations from every province and territory. Since its establishment in 2014, the Coalition has advocated for a universal cost-shared school food program that would ensure daily access to healthy food for all students from kindergarten to grade twelve across Canada and Indigenous territories. This kind of coalition building supports more systemic ways of thinking and acting that can impact government policy and civil society activities.

As a result of these collective efforts, in spring 2024, the Canadian government announced the launch of a National School Food Program that aims to provide healthy meals and snacks across Canada (Government of Canada, 2024).

Third, despite centering social justice and environmental sustainability, many CSOs unintentionally reinforce settler-colonial structures (see Littlefield et al., 2024). Several CSO and food movement leaders have acknowledged their complicity and clearly articulate the need to more deliberately address justice through meaningful reconciliation and the development of alliances with Indigenous communities and organizations—along with the significant work required to actualize change. Littlefield et al. (2024) highlight the importance, tensions, and connections made through settler CSO engagement with Indigenous People. For example, participants engaged with the National Farmers Union (NFU) highlight the organization’s attempt to build on decades of allyship toward creating normative change. The authors note that the NFU “encouraged their membership to learn about the realities of settler colonialism and work toward reconciliation as individuals, organizations, and a broader farming network” (p. 1092). The process of awareness acts to shift normative understandings of settler-Indigenous relations and supports the re-imagining of roles and histories beyond allyship and toward action. We also considered the motivations underlying settler CSO engagement with Indigenous peoples. Our analysis emphasizes the need for settlers to clarify their motivations, shift toward more meaningful action, and remain self-reflexive in engagement opportunities.

Fourth, CSOs operate strategically within differing governance approaches. Structures with narrowly defined mandates and enhanced decision-making power may have more direct, short-term impact on policy making than broader advisory structures. For example, Brynne and Wilson (2025) and Wilson et al. (2026) show how the narrowly focussed Canadian Organic Standards Council carved out a space (not without challenges) for farmers and others to be part of the decision-making process for the renewal of national organic standards. On the other hand, Wilkes et al. (2025a) found that the experiences of those involved with the Canadian Food Policy Advisory

Council highlight how its wide-ranging mandate and absence of robust report-back mechanisms make it difficult to identify how council members' input is reflected in policy outcomes. Although these wider structures may have the opportunity to create long-term structural and normative change, their impact is less direct and difficult to measure.

While the aggregate findings of the PFG project have been shared through publications and presentations, it is important for the research team to understand how these findings relate to the experiences of current food systems leaders. We invited five CSO leaders from across Canada to reflect on the insights outlined above to explore whether and how they resonate with proponents within food systems organizations, networks, and movements.

Engaging civil society organization leaders

The authors of this article (all part of the PFG research team) and five individuals with significant experience working within food systems spaces (namely agriculture, policy, networking, anti-racism and equity, food sovereignty, Indigenous rights, and community building), joined together in a process of collective discussion and reflection. We sought to ensure different geographies and positionalities were represented to understand how different communities experience, face challenges, and identify opportunities within food systems governance. The participants included:

- > Marissa Alexander, Co-Executive Director, Food Secure Canada (FSC)³
- > Rachel Cheng, Mobilization Officer, Montreal Food Policy Council⁴
- > Mair Greenfield, Director, Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund⁵; former Advisor, Nourish⁶
- > Scott Ross, Executive Director, Canadian Federation of Agriculture
- > Wendie Wilson, Board Member, FSC; African Nova Scotian and Black Food Sovereignty Advisory; Pan-Canadian Black Food Sovereignty Caucus; Indigenous and Black Food Sovereignty Advisory Circle⁸; Coalition for Healthy School Food Nova Scotia

To hear from these individuals both individually and collectively, we created several engagement opportunities as part of (and ahead of) the Canadian Association of Food Studies (CAFS) conference held in Toronto. These included a virtual meeting (held on May 7, 2025), written/oral reflections on the main findings of the PFG project, an interactive workshop (held on June 2, 2025), and a roundtable discussion⁹ (held on June 3, 2025). Each of these field sessions provided an opportunity to build a better understanding of each other's perspectives and to discuss research insights in relation to the CSO leaders' experiences.

Virtual meeting

The virtual meeting was guided by an overview of the central PFG insights (outlined in the previous section). We developed a set of questions that probe each CSO leader's experience with participatory food governance and how those experiences connect to—or differ from—PFG insights. The questions included how to better understand the value of participatory governance, what opportunities and challenges it presented, what the CSO leaders' priorities were in this space, and a reflection on the key PFG insights presented.

Written reflections

After the virtual meeting, we gave the leaders a set of questions and each submitted their written or oral reflections ahead of the in-person workshop and roundtable. Together, the research team analyzed the reflections and identified emerging themes shared by the leaders and experiences unique to a specific leader or organization. We used the following questions to guide the individual reflections:

1. What do you see as the value of inclusive, participatory, food systems governance in Canada?
2. How have the opportunities and challenges to engage in food systems governance changed over the last five to ten years?
3. What are your priorities for further food systems governance engagement at this historical juncture?
4. How does your experience resonate with the research results chapter you read before the event?

In-person workshop and roundtable

The in-person workshop allowed for an intimate conversation between the participants and the research team about the challenges, opportunities, and connections that exist across food systems governance; it provided space to collectively discuss the research insights in relation to each individual's experiences and reflections and to identify and prepare key highlights to share at the CAFS roundtable discussion the following day. The roundtable comprised a round of introductions, general reflections, a discussion with the audience, and a last word from each of the CSO leaders.

In the next section, we present a synthesis of these discussions along with our own reflections about what these conversations mean for making food systems governance more participatory.

Synthesis of the reflections

Overall, participants' responses underscore the need for meaningful spaces of dialogue about food system governance that include a wide range of community voices to elevate the realities of those most impacted by the dominant food system. The CSO leaders highlight how their experiences and advocacy contribute to regional and international efforts. While the conversations did not always fit neatly into the original questions posed to the five CSO leaders, the themes that emerged from these discussions supported and enhanced the questions in a way that highlights the connections, insights, and challenges central to food governance. While the observations of the participants spoke to the aggregate learnings from the CSO leaders across the PFG data, their observations also enriched and broadened the discussion to incorporate important elements that were not prominently featured in the summary presented in the virtual call. Further, these sessions proved valuable for encouraging conversation among diverse CSO leaders on issues of participation and inclusion in food systems governance processes.

Value and importance of participatory governance in decision making

Both the workshop and the roundtable discussions highlight the role of participatory processes in elevating and connecting different voices. With respect to food systems decision making, Wendie Wilson notes: "Decisions need to be made by those who will be impacted the most. To me, those will always be the best decisions." Wilson describes noticing what kids were eating in school—making an explicit connection to academic performance: "The better they ate, the better they did, and vice versa." This insight led Wilson to find ways to elevate the voices of her community. One such effort was through becoming involved in initiatives at the local and national scales that focus on the need to get healthy school food to children in Halifax and elsewhere. The goals of these initiatives, including those of the Coalition for Healthy School Food, are, in part, to contribute to changing norms, shift governance practices, maximize impact, center community, and ultimately, get



Wendie Wilson

culturally appropriate, sustainably sourced healthy food into the hands of people as a right, not a privilege.

In addition to supporting better outcomes within a particular community, these multi-scale efforts also help connect leaders. For example, both Mair Greenfield and Rachel Cheng participated in Nourish to instill a sense of inspiration and connection among local communities. As some of the panelists described, sitting in company with one another allows space to recognize the pluralities within different initiatives (e.g., working toward food sovereignty while acknowledging and respecting diversity across Black and Indigenous communities and community members). These discussions among the participants emphasized that policy and governance processes need to respond to the complexity of different experiences, geographies, and identities rather than treating the initiative or concern as a monolithic phenomenon.

Opportunities and challenges within participatory food governance

Participatory food governance outlines challenges between invented and invited spaces. MirafTAB (2004) describes invited spaces as “ones occupied by those grassroots and their allied non-governmental organizations that are legitimized by donors and government interventions” (p. 1). While invented spaces are also defined by grassroots and non-governmental organizations, they centre on “directly confronting the authorities and the status quo” (p. 1). Experiences from CSO leaders across the PFG project and those who participated in the roundtable highlight the tensions and challenges that can arise when an invented space transitions into an invited space.

CSO leaders with experience in the advocacy and implementation process of the Food Policy for Canada frame it both as an opportunity and a challenge in participatory food governance. Two of the food systems leaders, Scott Ross and Marissa Alexander, discuss how the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and FSC, respectively, have participated in lengthy discussions (an invented space) with CSO, academic, and industry leaders around the need for a national joined-up food policy (see MacRae, 2011). As a result of this advocacy (and the work of many

other organizations and individuals), the Food Policy for Canada (announced in 2019), along with the supporting Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council (announced in 2021), attempted to bring a systems lens to the work of government and centre the need to support sustainable food systems across the country (Levkoe & Sheedy, 2019; Andrée et al., 2021).



Marissa Alexander

However, our research found that the government fell short in implementing the vision for the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council as presented by over 20 civil society organizations involved in developing the model (Wilkes et al., 2025a, 2025b). Instead, the government announced and created a Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council that reports only to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada rather than a cross-departmental government committee (an invited space). This limits the ability of members to discuss topics with their communities or engage in dialogue with other stakeholders—in

addition to struggles with representation and capacity issues over its tenure.

Participating CSO leaders whose organizations had engaged in the government's consultation process leading up to the announcement of the Food Policy for Canada, such as Ross and Alexander, reflect that with the benefit of hindsight there is value beyond just developing the proposal for the government. The connections built throughout the process are critical. For example, the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council advocacy process involved the formation of unlikely alliances as well as community building to strengthen understanding of different positions and common goals. Ross and Alexander lament that these relational bonds were not actively maintained after the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council was launched and about the possibility to rebuild these bonds in the future.

During the roundtable discussion, participants emphasized the role of relationality within advocacy work. Ross explains:

Relationality is just so key. And so much of what could have made a Food Policy for Canada substantive and real was already being done, and the government didn't need to be the centre of that discussion [...] If we had just continued to work on that and build momentum and build energy, [if we had] really conscientiously tried to foster and create more substance around the unique relationships and diverse networks that we had established, there could have been a lot of substance that had followed from that regardless of how government had reacted...

Alexander reiterates the value generated in the advocacy process itself as well as the need to rebuild deeper connections. While FSC was a central force in the advocacy process, their efforts during Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council discussions were also connected to their broader mandate to support the food movement and effect change. In its role of convenor of different actors, FSC expressed interest in re-creating a coalition of diverse actors to engage on important issues. Alexander reflects on the potential "to bring a lot of folks together who do not all have common goals, but [who] have enough agreement that something needs to change and something needs to



Scott Ross

happen." Of the previous effort to build a national food policy council, she explains: "It was then handed off to the government—that is inherently siloed—and fell flat." In response, she says: "That is where we are picking up as FSC, really trying to do that again [i.e., rebuild the collaboration] but without a centering of government...."

The tempered reception of the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council and power of the advocacy process that preceded its implementation highlight the need to reconcile, further study the tension between invited and invented spaces within participatory governance efforts, and better understand the space in which they meet (see Le Roux, 2015 for a South African example). This emphasis on relationality and the importance of connection that transcends institutional change is an essential element often underrepresented in discussions of governance and central to participatory processes seeking transformative change.

Creating participatory spaces that can hold discomfort and respond at critical junctures

Food governance, when thoughtfully undertaken, has the potential to create space for the difficult conversations desperately needed in today's increasingly polarized political climate. This is the case both within movements with shared ideals, as Alexander articulated, and across stakeholder groups in the process leading up to FPC, as Ross described. The work toward a more participatory food governance can also be achieved through innovative government spaces where community converges with municipal processes, such as local food policy councils. Rachel Cheng, in discussing work at the Montreal Food Policy Council, shares the need for collaborative decision making that brings in a diverse set of voices.

Initiatives rooted in a food systems approach can create contextualized and scale-appropriate governance responses that allow for divergent opinions and difficult conversation. For example, the Montreal Food Policy



Rachel Cheng

Council aims to create a space where diverse voices are welcomed and encouraged. Cheng explains:

We work with over 200 community organizations and partners, academics, and others to set the strategy we are going to take for more sustainable food, more accessible food for every person in Montreal. And so, we are trying to do this participatory process where we get more voices, especially community members, but because it is the first time, we are looking for inspiration from our peers in other cities... So, this fall we are organizing a series of events with civil society and community members across the Island of Montreal, as a way to get more diverse perspectives on what food in Montreal should and could be like. Related to this, we set up a goal last year when we were recruiting members for the Conseil to have a minimum of 50 percent applications come from underrepresented communities—of which some council members were skeptical. But I am really pleased to say that we did get minimum 50 percent applications. We were able to outreach in different ways and explain the importance and reach of municipal food policy work to different people. For example, I love that someone who runs one of the best restaurants in Montreal who is also a butcher, sits on the food policy council next to an environmental worker and vegetarian, who believes that there is no place for meat in the future of food. And I love that we can have some difficult conversations together.¹⁰

In a discussion about the participatory engagement process the Montreal Food Policy Council is undertaking, Cheng elaborates on the different positionalities of council members and that, while they may come from different perspectives, the Council is a space they can work to find common ground.

Going beyond government

The participants also highlight that many governance efforts led by CSOs go beyond government. Rather than centering all efforts on attempting to make change within government (as seen, for example, in the Food Policy for

Canada process), the idea of change in other areas of food governance (e.g. at the community, organisational, or network level) proved to be a central point of discussion. Some of the initiatives cited include those that focus on local action, collaboration across positions on shared challenges, and support for one another in advocacy work. The CSO leaders further consider how this work—through impact and collective action—has the potential to ripple out from communities to influence or impact government. Mair Greenfield explains that organizations are stronger when they collaborate and the importance of predictable resourcing models. She highlights an Indigenous food sovereignty initiative coordinated by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit with a group of First Nations located in Northern Ontario that was shared by a public health nutritionist at the CAFS conference.¹¹ Greenfield explains:

Two things come to mind, accessibility and sustainability. So, I find that I am in a really awesome position right now where [the public health nutritionist] just handed me this beautiful colouring book that has been made. And I am in a position that I can share this nationally—it can reach communities way up from Big Trout Lake to Nunavut. And for sustainability, right, we want things to keep going. We don't want to have to rely on funding. We want people to be in a position to grow their own food and access their own food... and just keep going.

Discussion

These discussions bring to life key findings of the PFG project, showing how ideas about, and approaches to, governance span far beyond what governments do; they illuminate the critical work of civil society actors within and across communities (Levkoe et al., 2025). The roles that CSOs play and the value they bring to governance processes are increasingly recognized by governments and scientific experts. However, there remains a need to further identify governance structures that allow communities to work within and outside of government in ways that effectively



Mair Greenfield

support food systems transformation while ensuring the agency, dignity, and impact of those most affected.

By connecting conversations between academics, community-based practitioners, and CSO leaders, a synergy is created that advances both theory and practice. The CSO leaders who participated in this process offered stories of what governance means to those working at the forefront of change and expressed how governance processes could better reflect local, contextualized realities.

The food systems leaders who participated in the PFG processes showed how they are forging new ways for communities to lead and build more equitable and sustainable food systems by engaging in collective advocacy and action as well as how CSOs can interact with one another to mobilize change at the national level. Through the essential role of relationality in food systems governance, these leaders strengthen ties to external networks and other leaders while also deepening their connection to community. More research is required to explore how

to elevate civil society voices within governance structures through invented and invited spaces as well as all the connecting space in between. This includes bringing the needs and values of past, present, and future generations to the fore. Specifically, these conversations point to the value of diverse civil society actors discussing and working on food systems issues among themselves without solely focusing on how they can influence governments to take action.

In addition to continuing these conversations with the five CSO leaders who participated in this engagement process, our research team is in the process of archiving¹² in-depth interviews with more than 30 food movement elders (featuring 5 Indigenous elders and 23 senior food movement leaders, including civil society representatives and community-engaged academics) as one of the primary data sources of the PFG project. These interviews embody the idea of Sankofa by working to bridge the intergenerational knowledge gap identified within the food systems movement (Levkoe et al., 2025). We will also disseminate elders' interviews using an online, open source, and interactive educational resource.

Conclusion

The overarching goal of the PFG project is to glean lessons learned with the benefit of hindsight and share these lessons to support learning for the broader food systems community. Institutional memory, institutional capacity, collective impact, and reflection on how people who are part of the food movement can help (re)envision what the future looks like are. These are essential elements of participatory food governance work. During the roundtable, Wilson presented the idea of Sankofa as a metaphor for the collective work required:

Sankofa (an adinkra symbol out of West Africa) is a bird looking backward, body facing forward, head looking backward at an egg—the next generation—but also looking back to the past. So, it is not wrong to go back to the past to find those things that you need in order to propel yourself into the future... And so, what we are talking about here is that institutional memory, which I think is so important,

and going to the elders—looking for the information and doing that research—and bringing that forward to the next generation so that we have past, present, and future. We need to meld all of those things.

Collectively, these food systems leaders reflected on a range of themes: their own personal (and organizational) successes and limitations in building healthier, more equitable, and sustainable food systems and the strategies they employed; the value of participatory governance in supporting long-term, systemic change; the different scales of policy strategies; and the potential to model alternative food futures via more participatory governance processes. The reflections captured in this article reveal important insights about the different power dynamics and objectives at play that build on, and deepen, our previous research findings. They also highlight the many possibilities that participatory governance supports and the tensions and complexities to be addressed. The PFG team looks forward to continuing its work with the CSO leaders who have been involved in this process to unpack and further explore how food governance can support more equitable and sustainable food futures.

Endnotes

¹ Learn more about [the Participatory Food Governance research on the Sustainable Food Systems Lab website](#).

² [The Healthy Food Coalition](#) is Canada's largest school food network that advocates for access to healthy food.

³ [Food Secure Canada](#) is "an alliance of organizations and individuals all across Canada working together to advance food security and food sovereignty."

⁴ The Montreal Food Policy Council ([Conseil du système alimentaire montréalais](#)) started in 2018 and is the first food policy council in the francophone world. It is a non-profit organization that works closely with the city, with representatives from the city of Montreal sitting on the council, as well as from major institutions such as the public health department, the provincial ministry of agriculture, and the school sector.

⁵ According to [their website](#), the goal of the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund is "to continue the conversation that began with Chanie Wenjack's residential school story and to aid our collective reconciliation journey through a combination of awareness, education, and action."

⁶ [Nourish is a national network](#) that uses food as a tool within the health care sector to address issues of health equity, climate action, and community well-being.

⁷ The [Canadian Federation of Agriculture](#) is a national organization representing Canadian farmers.

⁸ See the Food Secure Canada website for more about the [2023 Indigenous and Black Peoples' Food Sovereignty Advisory Circle](#) gathering in British Columbia.

⁹ A [recording of the roundtable discussion](#) is available on YouTube.

¹⁰ This quote has been lightly edited—without removing substantive elements—in collaboration with the CSO leader to assist with brevity and clarity. A full, unedited audio version of the quote will be available as part of the Carleton University Dataverse Collection.

¹¹ More details are available on the [Understanding our Food Systems project website](#).

¹² The full, unedited audiovisual files and transcripts will be housed on the Carleton University Dataverse Collection (as part of our commitment to making openly accessible data available for future research), beginning in spring 2027.

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Johanna Wilkes is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at Lakehead University. Johanna focusses on state-led food systems transformations and how government institutions tackle issues surrounding climate-resilient farming. Prior to starting her doctoral studies, Johanna served as a senior policy advisor to two Ontario Cabinet Ministers. During her tenure, she helped to facilitate dialogue on policy and form collaborative processes that empower community-led solutions.

Charles Levkoe is the Canada Research Chair in Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems, a Member of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists of the Royal Society of Canada, and an Associate Professor in the Department of Health Sciences at Lakehead University. His community engaged research uses a food systems lens to better understand the importance of and connections among social justice, ecological regeneration, regional economies, and active democratic engagement.

Peter Andrée is a Carleton University Professor. His courses span political science, political economy, geography, and environmental studies. Peter's food systems work brings researchers, policymakers, and community partners together to advance a more just and sustainable world. He chaired the Canadian Association for Food Studies roundtable discussed in this field report.

Patricia Ballamingie is a Professor at Carleton University, cross-appointed in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies and the Institute of Political Economy. Her current program of research focusses on just and sustainable food systems, food policy, and food systems governance. She is a community-engaged scholar who works to support groups within civil society that advance social justice, ecological integrity, community economies, and deliberative democracy.

Kristen Lowitt is an Associate Professor in the School of Environmental Studies at Queen's University, where she undertakes research on sustainable food systems and leads the Community Food Systems Lab. Particular interests include the role of small-scale fisheries in local food systems, blue justice for coastal communities, basic income as a tool for food systems change, and food movements. Her research prioritizes knowledge co-production with communities.

Conflicts of Interest: None to declare.

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