



September 14th, 2020

Honourable Navdeep Bains
Minister for Innovation, Science, and Industry
Parliament of Canada

Dear Minister Bains

Re: Food Security/Insecurity

On behalf of the members of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) I am writing to you to raise our concerns regarding food security/insecurity in our country. This is not a new issue; it is a long-standing concern the NCWC has often brought to your attention. However, prompted by the findings of researcher Sylvain Charlebois at Dalhousie University and the oft publicized negative outcomes presented by COVID -19, we are compelled to once again urge our government to take action to eradicate this egregious situation.

While this letter is directed to you, this issue will require collaboration so it can be successfully resolved; therefore, your colleagues are being copied for their information and action.

Food security, or more accurately stated, food insecurity, is increasingly becoming a serious problem for Canadians. This is unacceptable for a high-income, well developed, country like Canada. Intervention by our government is well beyond its "best before date", and action must be taken now.

The latest data from Statistics Canada through the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 2017-18, estimated that one in eight households, a staggering 4.4 million people, are food insecure. Food insecurity is higher in households with children (10.2%) than in households without children (7.6%). Since the on-set of COVID-19, Statistics Canada reports one in seven Canadians indicated they felt the impact of food insecurity (Canada Perspectives Survey May 2020). This indicates that food insecurity is significantly higher than the 2017-18 results, respectively 14.6 % vs. 10.5%. In households with children this rose to 19.2%. While food insecurity is greater in the far north, all Canadian provinces and territories show the prevalence of food insecurity is at least one in every ten households.

As might be expected, financial constraints are the single most cited explanation for people becoming food insecure. Social and economic disadvantage contribute significantly to this issue. Food insecurity is exacerbated by dependence on social programs and precarious employment conditions that provide an inadequate and/or insecure income.

In recent weeks, another issue has arisen that is fully expected to increase food prices and significantly impact consumers' purchasing power. Five major grocery retailers dominate the food supply chain in Canada: Loblaws, Sobeys, Metro, Walmart, and Costco. In July, Walmart announced it would be imposing additional fees on suppliers. As reported by the Globe and Mail (Report on Business, August 27th, 2020), others have given notice that they expect to offer the same terms as their competitors. These costs will no doubt be passed on to consumers, many of whom are already struggling with increased food prices.

It goes without saying that food security is critical to the health of Canadians. Health Canada considers nutritional food insecurity as a key predictor of unhealthy eating and an important determinant of health and life expectancy. In view of this, it is deplorable that Canada ranks a dismal 12th according to global development indicators, leading us to surmise that our country is not among those states that prioritize economic rights (2019- <http://hdr.undp.org>), which is particularly disturbing as Canada is signatory to international agreements that impact citizens' rights to food security:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
- Convention on the Rights of the Child

We strongly urge you to consider these initiatives to ensure food security while addressing Canada's obligations under these agreements:

- Institute a Guaranteed Basic Income for all Canadians
- Address the issue of precarious employment as it relates to wages, benefits, terms, and conditions
- Amend government sponsored programs such as EI
- Enhance the supply management systems to support high nutritional food consumption
- Ensure sustainable production processes and distribution
- Encourage green energy initiatives to preserve farmland and support food production
- Establish a national child-care program that will support women's participation in the work force, thus enabling them to contribute to the support of their families

All Canadians deserve to be secure in their ability to provide food for themselves and their families. The NCWC looks forward to working with you and your colleagues to alleviate this serious issue that affects so many Canadians.

Sincerely
Patricia Leson, President
National Council of Women of Canada

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Canada is the traditional territory of First Nations and Metis People. We are grateful to join with others in peace and hope, advocating for an improved quality of life for women, children, families, and society.

C: Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Small Business, Export, Promotion, and International Trade
Honourable Marie Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
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