

Key considerations for a National Food Security Strategy

Food security is a critical component of environmental sustainability, community resilience and national security. When the Government of Canada announced in January plans to create a National Food Security Strategy, AFI launched a collaborative policy project exploring the strategy's potential scope and impact. Here are our findings.



The potential

Today, Canada has a generational opportunity to boost the economic strength of our food and agriculture sector while meeting the challenges of food insecurity and climate change. A National Food Security Strategy can help us realize this potential.

If done right, a National Food Security Strategy could meet multiple imperatives. It could drive economic growth, strengthen domestic food supplies, help meet global climate commitments, drive down inequalities, bolster domestic infrastructure and capacity and build geo-political leadership and influence. The strategy can also underpin a domestic innovation agenda that will make our country more resilient, equitable, productive and environmentally sustainable.

Importantly, Canada has among the most abundant and fertile farmland and greatest supplies of fresh water of any country on Earth. A visionary strategy now can protect this productive capacity for future generations facing a changing climate.

The goal

A National Food Security Strategy could set an audacious yet achievable vision for our country, such as: **Within the next 10 years, Canada should be the world's primary food producing nation while reducing food insecurity and greenhouse gas emissions domestically.** This should be pursued through three strategic pillars: resilience, equity and productivity.

The context

Agri-food is not simply a sector; it is a structural lever that touches almost every part of life. Agri-food underpins our ability to feed ourselves, to thrive in a changing climate, to be healthy as people and to be resilient as a country. In this age of climatic and geopolitical instability, food also has profound global implications. **Agri-food needs to be positioned as central to Canada's future viability and elevated in terms of federal priorities.**

This approach has succeeded elsewhere. The Netherlands identified agriculture as a "top tier" sector of the economy and turned a small country into an agri-food exporting powerhouse. Canada should do the same. All major federal policies, including upcoming investments in defence, should explicitly explore both impacts and opportunities for agri-food.

Elevating agri-food to a national priority can help address critical vulnerabilities. The bulk of Canada's fresh food and many essential agricultural inputs, such as fertilizer, are exposed to trade disruptions, geopolitical conflicts and climate change. We must identify and address those vulnerabilities at a national level.

Canada's growing regions are vastly varied. A National Food Security Strategy must support and empower localized ways of implementing a national vision. A National Food Security Strategy must also address food equity, and form part of broader government efforts to tackle food insecurity caused by financial and systemic barriers that lie between people and affordable, nutritious food.

This policy brief was written by Evan Fraser, with Tenille Bonogore and Kristy Tomkinson, Arrell Food Institute, April 2026.

Three strategic pillars for a National Food Security Strategy

PILLAR 1: RESILIENCE

Ensuring Canada's food supply lines can withstand political, economic and climatic volatility.

The problem

- Most of Canada's fruits and vegetables either come from, or transit through, the United States.
- Many other critical agri-food inputs are sourced from, or transit through, the U.S., such as eggs/chicks for laying hens.
- Canadians are eating more fish (~4 percent increase year over year), but 75 percent of fish we eat is imported.
- Climate change is already impacting agri-food systems. Sustainable practices will protect our ability to eat, while reducing agricultural impacts on the planet.
- Given political and climatic volatility, Canada's strained supply chains are vulnerable to rapid deterioration.

The opportunity

Canada should establish multi-use infrastructure (e.g. strategic multi-use corridors, dynamic supply chains, community-use greenhouses) that supports local communities and national priorities, while minimizing climate impacts. Policies should reinforce food systems that can better withstand political, economic and climatic volatility. Investments in resilient infrastructure should strengthen communities and food sovereignty, particularly in regional, rural and Northern areas; meet global environmental commitments; and strategically connect with national defence strategies.

Recommended actions for resilience

- 1. Conduct a thorough risk assessment. Map out all critical dependencies to guide strategic investment in Canada's domestic capacity.**
 - Develop coordinated mapping and digital integration of domestic agricultural production, ingredient manufacturing and processing infrastructure.
 - Link this information through national data platforms and product passport systems. This approach can better allocate resources, strengthen supply chain coordination, support the development of complete, nutritionally balanced foods made from Canadian-grown ingredients and help Canadian producers meet increasing sustainability and traceability requirements in international markets.
- 2. Provide Federal support to address critical vulnerabilities in Canada's food supply.**
 - Recognize that advanced technologies such as AI, robotics and genomics are already being deployed to support controlled environment agriculture. With these technologies, Canada can enhance the capacity and sustainability of local and regional food production, processing and distribution. This can be achieved by ensuring that agri-food enterprises (including social enterprises) have access to preferential electricity rates, improved zoning permissions processes, and access to targeted innovation funding.
 - Commit to the modernization, decentralization and expansion of food processing and storage infrastructure to address a "missing middle" in Canada's food processing and storage infrastructure: commercially viable operations suitable for local/regional producers and early-stage entrepreneurs. This middle tier **would enable** local and regional producers to add value, extend shelf life and access institutional markets.
 - Coordinate with Provincial and Territorial counterparts, industry and communities to better support regional and distributed processing capacity; improve transportation corridors; and develop and deploy modular, mobile and automated processing systems that can operate close to production sites.

3. **Launch an Agriculture and Food Investment Agency, with a mandate to ensure food security is embedded in government policies, and to stimulate and direct investment in multi-use infrastructure projects.**

- Modelled on the Defence Investment Agency, this strategic coordination office could provide coordination for cross-governmental and intergovernmental processes (including Federal-Provincial-Territorial processes).
- Multi-use infrastructure should include trade corridors used for defence purposes, dynamic supply chains, community-use greenhouses, community food hubs and other investments that strengthen the resilience of communities across Canada.
- This agency would support food sovereignty, including for Indigenous communities, rural communities and in remote areas, especially in the North, in ways that also underpin defence strategies.



“Food is national security. Agriculture is being treated as a sector, and what it really is, is our strategic infrastructure.”

Alison Sunstrum, Nya Ventures

PILLAR 2: EQUITY

Addressing food insecurity through innovative social policies and human rights.

The problem

- Food *insecurity* is caused by financial and systemic barriers between people and affordable, nutritional food. It is addressed through social policy and income-based interventions. Food *security* is addressed through research and development, investment and other supports directed at producers, processors and primary agriculture / fisheries. Both are important components of a National Food Security Strategy and represent different but vital components of a **balanced portfolio** of food security policies. However, it is important to note that neither approach does it all and they should not be mistaken for each other.
- 1 in 4 Canadians is food insecure. Food bank use has never been higher. Meeting this basic need cannot default to food charities.
- Food prices are expected to rise by about \$1800 for a family of four in 2026 and are expected to keep rising with inflation. The one-time increase to the [Groceries and Essentials Benefit](#) means some families will keep up with food price inflation this year but risk falling behind again in 2027.
- The national food insecurity crisis comes at great social cost, including decreased human health and wellbeing, and is a drain on the economy, including through reduced productivity.

The opportunity

A National Food Security Strategy can provide a catalyst for addressing what are now unprecedented rates of food insecurity, impacting over 10 million Canadians and one in three children. Canadians are incredibly creative, and social innovations hold great promise to solve complex issues within food insecurity and food sovereignty. A National Food Security Strategy can support systemic investments and innovations that can improve affordability and support better access to local, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

Recommended actions for equity

1. **Increase the benefits at-risk Canadians receive, such as increasing the Canada Disability Benefit and/or further expanding the Groceries and Essentials Benefit.**
 - Expanding the Canada Disability Benefit as part of a National Food Security Strategy would recognize that 50 percent of people living with a disability are also food insecure.
 - The Groceries and Essentials Benefit expansion could be made permanent and indexed to remain in step with food price inflation.
2. **Pilot and/or invest in measures that directly increase food access. This could include partnering with organizations that have established locally relevant and effective solutions.**
 - Support technology innovation, such as a pre-loaded grocery card redeemable at a range of grocery stores (including independently owned stores, etc.) to purchase nutritional food, that can increase food access and reduce food bank use.
 - Support, directly or through policy, traditional and community-based food gathering and production, such as hunting and fishing, wild foods harvesting and food gardens.
 - Launch a federal partnership with organizations already working in this space to test economic innovations at scale, and to evaluate their impacts on food insecurity.
3. **Expand and target the Local Food Infrastructure Fund.**
 - An expansion of the Local Food Infrastructure Fund could support social innovations, such as community food hubs, mutual aid/solidarity markets, community kitchens, municipalities pursuing public market initiatives and public grocery stores.
 - This expansion could also better support Indigenous traditional food systems.
 - Create more opportunities to fund ongoing overhead costs associated with local food infrastructure. Government should consider focusing investments on infrastructure with strong business plans and determining ways (either through the Local Food Infrastructure Fund or otherwise) to provide ongoing support so that infrastructure is able to be staffed, used and maintained throughout its lifespan.



“We had major wildfires a couple of years ago that shut down the only roads into our capital city, and we had no food coming in. Our entire community, the capital city of the Northwest Territories, had to evacuate to Alberta because we couldn’t bring food in for our population. That should never happen in Canada. And if we had supported food systems and localized production, it wouldn’t have had to happen.”

Janet Dean, Territorial Agrifood Association

PILLAR 3: PRODUCTIVITY

Putting Canada on a path to be the world's primary food-producing region.

The problem

- Our position in global agriculture and agri-food trade [has slipped from 5th to 7th](#) and could drop to 9th by 2035.
- Smaller countries such as the Netherlands (in agri-food) and Norway (in aquaculture) out-compete us in terms of exports, innovation and productivity.
- Canada's agri-food sector faces both a labour and skills shortage, and too few Canadians are aware of the innovation opportunities in agri-food.
- Many talented young people do not consider agri-food as a valid and attractive career path.

The opportunity

Given Canada's endowment of land, fresh water and skilled labour, our relatively untapped coastal and marine resources, and climate trends that are lengthening the growing season in some areas, we have the potential to be the world's top food producing country. Canada's greenhouse boom means we are already a world leader in controlled environmental agriculture, which creates economic opportunities and builds resilience. Investing in Canadian ingenuity can create jobs and provide more sustainable food. If we also create incentives for climate smart farming, then agri-food has the potential to help Canada meet international climate goals.

Recommended actions for productivity

- 1. Create a \$500M Grand Challenge Innovation fund that aims to double the productivity and carbon efficiency of Canada's agri-food system.**
 - This "double-double" challenge should aim to inspire interest in agri-food innovation and bring new people into the sector.
 - The challenge could be run on an **XPRIZE model** and build on lessons learned by several large-scale agri-food challenges.
 - Based on data collected by **XPRIZE Foundation**, every dollar invested in creating these challenge funds results in a further >\$30 raised by teams through matching funds in the pursuit of solving the challenge.
- 2. Offer tax relief or incentives and government matching funds for people and investors who take equity in Canadian agri-food startups, and farmers using environmentally sustainable practices.**
 - Tax relief or incentives to investors willing to bet on Canadian-grown innovations could help drive the domestic innovation agenda.
 - Domestic investment means Canadian business ownership and Canadian-made IP is more likely to stay in Canada.
 - Offer financial incentives, such as tax relief, for farmers who meet agreed-to practices associated with climate smart and regenerative farming practices.
- 3. Develop targeted supports, including a national co-op program for agri-food to create more pathways into agri-food careers, thus addressing major skills or labour shortages.**
 - Canada should aspire to be the world leader in training the next generation of agri-food leaders who will understand that the future of agri-food is linked to innovation and entrepreneurship.
 - Work with universities, colleges and training programs to create a "national innovation in agri-food" co-op program aimed at attracting and training the best minds of the next generation.

Support for this vision

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Further reading

Resilience

- [Community food systems are critical to Canada's national security, Policy Options](#)
- [You can't have national security without food security, The Toronto Star](#)
- [In Carney's new world order, Canada's opportunity is as a breadbasket, The Globe and Mail](#)
- [Canada's Reliance on the U.S. for our food is a recipe for disaster, The Globe and Mail](#)

Equity

- [The Hunger Count 2025 by Food Banks Canada](#)
- [Household Food Insecurity in Canada by PROOF](#)
- [Putting values on our plates: Reimagining food in public institutions by Chef Joshna Maharaj](#)

Productivity

- [The Next Green Revolution by RBC, BCG and the Arrell Food Institute](#)
- [The Next Course by the Council of Canadian Academies](#)
- [Feeding the Future with Canadian Technology by the Arrell Food Institute](#)

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