ARRELL FOOD INSTITUTE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

The Guelph Declaration

On building a food system that can feed Canada through the next shock

Prepared by the youth participants of the Guelph Food Fight, Arrell Food Institute, University of Guelph. Presented in Ottawa, November 26, 2026.

PREAMBLE

We, the young people who took part in the Guelph Food Fight, have spent this term studying how Canada's food system holds up under pressure, and where it does not.

We recognize that Canada does not produce enough of the food it eats. Twenty-five years ago, we produced about 80% of the food we needed; today, it is closer to 70%.[1] When borders close, trade tensions rise or global supply chains break down, the gap between what we produce and what we consume becomes a real vulnerability.

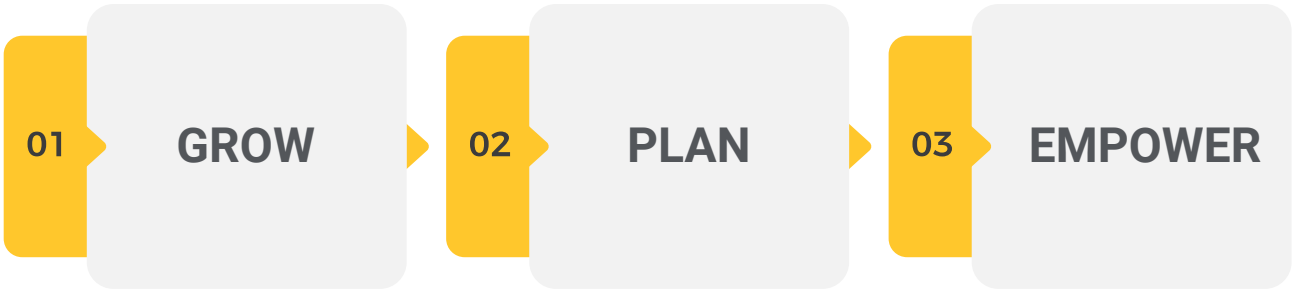
We recognize that nearly 1 in 4 Canadians lives in a home that struggles to afford food,[2] and that food banks, for all the good they do, were built for a bad week, not a way of life.

We recognize that shocks to the food supply chain are inevitable, but that tragedies are not, and that the difference is preparedness.

We recognize the right of Indigenous Peoples to decide what happens on their lands, and that any plan to grow, process or move more food in Canada must respect that right.

We have asked ourselves one question: **what can we build today, so that tomorrow's shocks never become tomorrow's crises?**

Our answer rests on three commitments: to **Grow** more diverse food at home through research and technology, to **Plan** ahead so that warnings turn into action, and to **Empower** communities and young people to take part in their own food system.



I. Grow

Grow the food we eat, and eat the food we grow.

Increasing domestic production will take more than asking farmers to grow more. It requires investment in people, research and technology, and it must go hand in hand with protecting our natural ecosystems, wildlife and the rights of Indigenous communities.

1. Breed crops for Canada's climate

To grow more of our own food, we need seeds that work here, bred and tested in Canada. That means climate-resilient varieties that can handle drought, heat and early frost, and a wider diversity of crops, so one bad season, pest, or disease cannot wipe out everything at once. It also means preparing crops for land further north, which may become more suitable for farming over the next 50 to 100 years.[3]

We call on federal research programs, universities and farmers to breed and test crops for Canada's climate, in our fields, greenhouses and vertical farms.

2. Process what we grow, close to home

Too much of what we grow is shipped away to be processed and shipped back to us. We want affordable mills, canning lines and mobile processing units in every region, small enough for farmers to share. In Sweden, the company Hälsingestintan ran Europe's first mobile slaughterhouse for cattle, travelling to the farm instead of the other way around, a model that could especially serve remote and Indigenous communities.[4]

This infrastructure must be built with communities, around their needs, priorities and knowledge, not simply delivered to them.

We call on governments to fund shared processing and to connect our provinces, so that food grown in Canada is processed in Canada and feeds Canada first.

II. Plan

Canada needs to stop reacting to crises, and start preventing them.

3. Build a shared early warning system

Before a crisis hits, the signs are already there: fuel prices rise, the weather turns, supply gets thin. But each signal goes to a different place, and nobody connects the dots.

We propose one shared system, built on a digital twin of the food supply chain, that brings weather, satellite imagery, prices and supply data into one place. When something looks wrong, it raises a flag, and every flag comes with a plan: who gets the call, and what happens next. Cities in Europe, including Bruges, Haarlem and Vicenza, are already working with partners across the supply chain to build a digital twin of the food supply chain.[5]

We want to go one step further: not only to track food, but to test a crisis before it happens. By simulating a snowstorm or a fuel shortage, we can see where the supply chain holds and where it breaks, and fix the weak points in advance.

These tools must be secure from day one, and people, not machines, must make the decisions.

We call on universities and the federal government to build this system, and on communities and businesses to contribute their data to it.

4. Create early warning councils with the power to act

In a crisis, hard questions come fast. Who gets fuel first? Who pays? Who can cross the bridge? Answered during the storm, these questions come too late. Answered together, in calm times, they become a plan.

In 2021, Canada created a national Food Policy Advisory Council to advise the government. It was a good start, but it has not met since September 2023, and advice alone is not enough when the shelves are empty.[6] Early warning councils would identify risks, decide how to respond before a crisis escalates, and determine how food is distributed when one arrives. Every group would have a seat at the table: farmers, food businesses, community groups, Indigenous leaders, governments, and people who have known hunger themselves.

We call on governments to create early warning councils with real power to decide, and with a seat for the people their decisions affect.

III. Empower

We can grow the food. We can see the storm coming. But a plan does not feed anyone. People do.

5. Build and connect community food hubs

We need more hubs, more community kitchens and more cold storage, offering more than food. People around the world are already showing the way: job training in Iqaluit, Nunavut;[7] garden jobs in Besançon, France;[8] low-cost restaurants in Belo Horizonte, Brazil;[9] community meals for children in Tokyo, Japan.[10]

Then we must connect them, hub to hub and town to town, so that when a storm hits, no town faces it alone. A hub can call the town next door for food, a kitchen or ten more volunteers. When a council raises a flag, the hubs are already on the street. One hub is a lifeline; connected hubs give a whole region the power to take care of itself.

We call on governments, schools and universities to help build the hubs, connect them to each other and connect young people to them, starting by asking each community what it needs.

6. Use our voices online for food resilience and food sovereignty

Young people already shape what the country talks about, and much of that conversation now happens on social media. We want to use that reach to show Canadians what a fair, resilient food system looks like, and to build an online community where people can learn, organize and act.

That means sharing stories of the farmers, processors, hubs and Indigenous food leaders and food system folk already doing this work; making it easy to find local food, community kitchens and volunteer opportunities; spreading reliable information during a crisis, when rumours travel faster than trucks; and amplifying the voices of Indigenous Peoples and other communities working toward food sovereignty, the right of people to shape their own food systems. An online movement can also feed the early warning system, carrying community knowledge up and carrying alerts back out.

We call on young people across Canada to use their platforms to imagine and promote an ideal food system, and to build an online environment that supports food resilience and food sovereignty. **We call on** governments, universities and food organizations to support youth-led digital campaigns, share open and trustworthy information, and treat young people's online organizing as part of Canada's food preparedness.

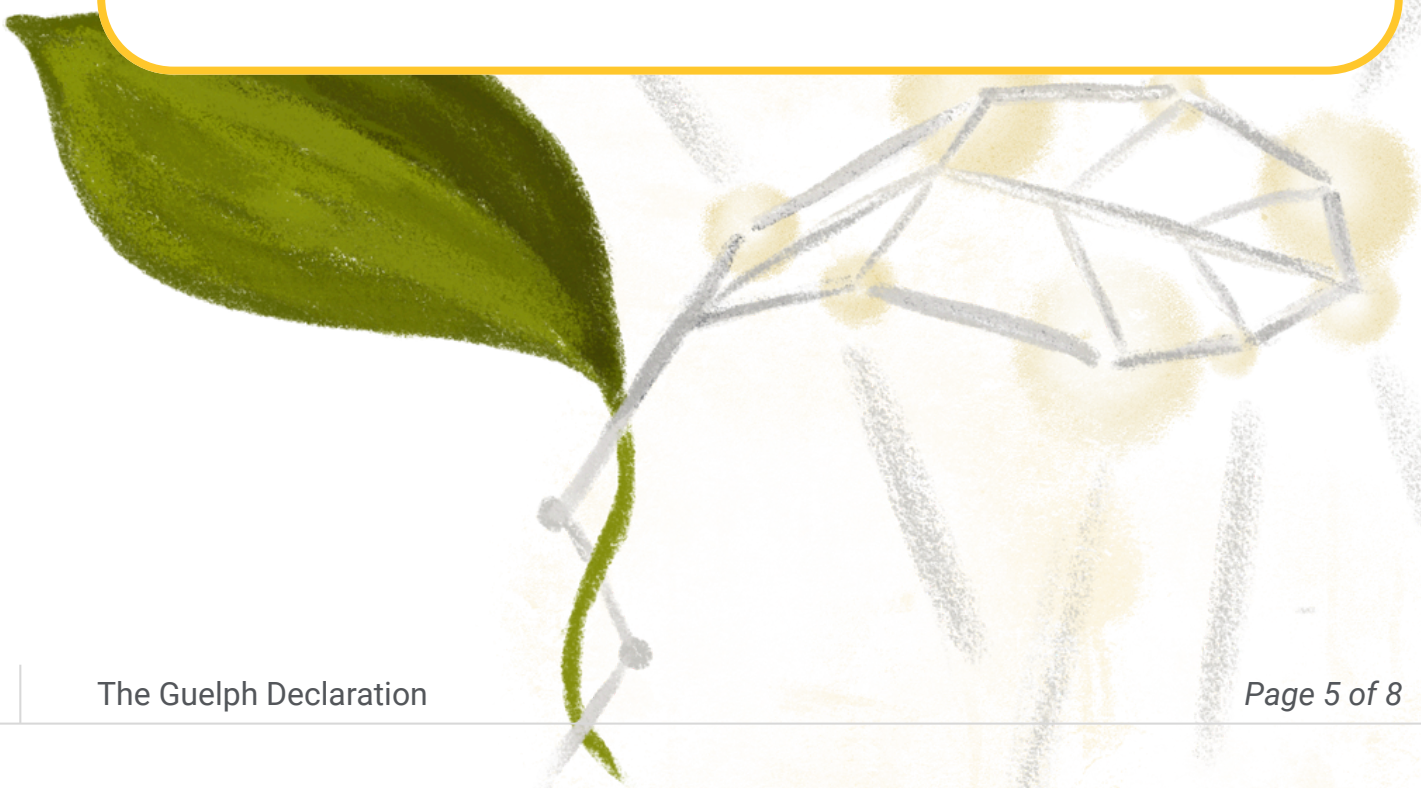
Our Vision

Picture a Canada with hubs that know their communities, a warning system that sees the storm coming, councils ready to act, and a generation of young people helping to build all of it, in their towns and online. A country that can feed itself, and a country that is ready when something goes wrong. The next shock will come, but it will not catch us by surprise, and it will not become a crisis.

We are ready to grow, to research and to show up. Today, we are volunteers. Tomorrow, we will be the farmers, planners and food leaders this country needs.

What is missing is someone to connect these pieces. We want that to be us.

We are not asking you to build this **for** us.
We are asking you to build it **with** us.



Summary of Calls to Action

1. **Grow:** Breed and test climate-resilient, diverse crops for Canada's climate through federal research programs, universities and farmers.
2. **Grow:** Fund shared, regional food processing built with communities, and connect provinces so Canadian food feeds Canada first.
3. **Plan:** Build a secure, human-led early warning system on a digital twin of the food supply chain.
4. **Plan:** Create early warning councils with real decision-making power and a seat for everyone their decisions affect.
5. **Empower:** Build and connect community food hubs, starting by asking them what they need.
6. **Empower:** Support youth-led social media and online networks that promote food resilience and food sovereignty.

Signatories

The youth participants of the Guelph Food Fight

GET INVOLVED

Will you sign the Guelph Declaration?

View the declaration online, add your signature, and share on socials.

References

[1] Graeme Crosbie, "Canada becoming more self-sufficient in fresh fruit and vegetable production," Farm Credit Canada. Domestic production fell from about 80% of food consumed at the start of the century to 70% by 2015, and has held near that level since.

[2] PROOF, University of Toronto, "New data on household food insecurity in 2025," April 29, 2026. In 2025, 24.0% of people in Canada (about 9.8 million) lived in a food-insecure household, down from 25.7% in 2024.

[3] University of Guelph, "Climate Change to Increase Global Farmland, But at Environmental Costs, Study Reveals," U of G News, February 2020, reporting on Hannah et al. (2020), PLOS ONE. See also Fraser et al. (2021), **"Opportunities and trade-offs for expanding agriculture in Canada's North,"** FACETS 6.

[4] Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), "Small-scale and mobile slaughter." Hälsingestintan AB operated Europe's first commercial mobile slaughter unit for cattle from 2015 to 2019.

[5] European Commission, CORDIS, "CITIES2030: Co-creating resilient and sustainable food systems towards FOOD2030" (Horizon 2020, project 101000640); Future Food Institute, "Co-Creating Resilient and Sustainable Food Systems Towards Food2030" (pilot cities include Bruges, Haarlem and Vicenza).

[6] Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, "Everyone at the Table: Minister Bibeau announces members of the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council," February 19, 2021; Wilkes, Levkoe, Andrée and Clark, Understanding Food Systems Governance in a Changing World: The Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council (2025).

[7] Community Food Centres Canada, "Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre." The centre runs a paid pre-employment culinary skills training program in Iqaluit.

[8] Banque des Territoires, "Réseau Cocagne : insertion professionnelle et distribution de produits bios en circuits-courts" (more than 130 Cocagne gardens); macommune.info, "Les Jardins de Cocagne nés en Franche-Comté" (the first garden opened near Besançon in 1991).

[9] World Future Council / Future Policy, "Belo Horizonte's Food Security Policy."

[10] Nippon.com, "Japan's Growing 'Children's Cafeteria' Movement Supporting Adults Too" (the first kodomo shokudō opened in Tokyo in 2012; more than 10,000 now operate across Japan).