

A Comprehensive National Food Policy: Strengthening Canada's Place in the World

The Canadian Food Security Policy Group (FSPG)¹ welcomes recent Canadian efforts to develop policies to improve food security in Canada and globally. If they are to succeed, we believe Canada's domestic and international policies must be linked, and consistent with one another. National and global food security is inseparable. Decisions taken in Canada can have negative or positive impacts on our efforts to improve food security in other countries. The values and policies we promote abroad can directly affect the policies we pursue within our borders. A national food policy must therefore include a well-developed international component that acknowledges the links among issues, and takes account of Canada's international goals, commitments and obligations. Policy integration within the Government of Canada will be critical. Food and agricultural issues touch many aspects of government responsibility, including agriculture, health, environment, transport, trade, finance and international cooperation. To develop and implement an effective Canadian policy it will be essential for these departments to work towards common objectives, and not at cross purposes. This brief, directed at government policy makers, political parties, agriculture and food-related organizations, makes nine recommendations for integrating an international component into a comprehensive food policy for Canada.

Background: Global food security

In 2010, nearly one sixth of the world's population is chronically hungry. After three decades of slow progress, global hunger increased sharply in 2008, when more than a billion people lived with chronic hunger. Since then the figure has dropped to an estimated 925 million²: an improvement, but still unacceptably high. Millennium Development Goal #1 (to cut poverty and hunger by half between 1990 and 2015) is seriously off track. Hunger is more prevalent among women and children than men, more common in rural areas than urban.

¹ The Food Security Policy Group is an autonomous working group of Canadian humanitarian and development NGOs and other Canadian organizations with experience and expertise in food security in developing countries. Current membership includes Africa Canada Forum, Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Canadian Council for International Cooperation, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief, Canadian Red Cross, CARE Canada, CHF – Partners in Rural Development, ETC Group, Farm Radio International, Food Secure Canada, Inter Pares, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Micah Challenge Canada, National Farmers Union of Canada, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Quebec, Plan International, Rights & Democracy, United Church of Canada, UPA Développement international, USC Canada, World Vision Canada.

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² In September 2010 the FAO released new figures on world Hunger. www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/45210/icode/

In fact, about three quarters of hungry people worldwide are food producers: smallholder farmers, landless rural labourers, fishers and herders.

The food crisis of 2007-2008 pushed food prices beyond the reach of many poor people, and dramatically increased the number of hungry people in the world. Causes of the crisis include a rapid increase in the use of grains and oilseeds for biofuels, and speculation in food commodities, but its roots can be traced to the previous two decades, when prices fell below the cost of production - crippling agricultural production in many countries. In addition, the impacts of climate change have already begun to disrupt food production and livelihoods, exacerbating the crisis.

The crisis of 2007-2008 also accelerated a wave of large-scale land acquisitions in developing countries, by foreign investors seeking more reliable food sources and the profits that follow. Such 'land grabs' are now coming into direct competition with local populations, for whom land is a critical source of food and livelihoods. Looking ahead, such trends are expected to grow more acute.

Canada's impact on global food security

Canada can and should play a strong and positive role in the struggle against global hunger. In a globalized economy, Canadian policies on agriculture and food are affected by, and have an impact on the rest of the world. Our food exports, our trade and investment relationships, our foreign aid (both short-term food aid and long-term development assistance), and our role in multilateral processes may all have an impact on global hunger.

In 2009, Canada joined with other G8 countries in the *L'Aquila Food Security Initiative*, a substantial re-investment in agriculture and food intended to tackle global hunger. CIDA adopted a new *Food Security Strategy*, pledged to double Canada's aid for agriculture, and targeted smallholder farmers in the poorest countries. The FSPG welcomes this strategy, and underscores its importance in a coherent, whole-of-government approach to global food security. To be successful, it cannot be implemented in isolation.

Canada is a major exporter of food, including grain, oilseeds and meat products. These food exports can contribute to greater food security in food-insecure countries, but only if Canadian policies are carefully constructed so that our exports do not undermine local producers and the markets they rely on for their survival.

Canadian trade and investment policies can have a significant impact on global food security, and can undermine the Government of Canada's own global food security objectives. For example, while the CIDA-led *Food Security Strategy* aims to improve the viability of smallholder farming in developing countries, the Government of Canada advances policies in multilateral and bilateral trade negotiations – such as the rapid reduction of agricultural tariffs – that could undercut the viability of smallholders. This example illustrates how important it is to consider fully the implications of trade policy on

global food security objectives and to pursue a comprehensive ‘whole-of-government’ approach, to ensure that our international food security objectives can be realized.

To illustrate further, there is no guiding Canadian policy framework to govern Canada’s relations with the numerous multilateral institutions that deal with food and agriculture. CIDA relates to the UN’s World Food Programme, the Food Aid Convention, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research; Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC) relates to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization; AAFC and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The lack of coherence across these departments weakens Canada’s influence, and can lead to conflicting messages and actions abroad.

Canada is a world leader in food aid, with the highest *per-capita* contributions to the Food Aid Convention. In 2010-2011, Canada is expected to lead a process to renegotiate the Convention. This will provide an opportunity for Canada to promote the integration of the Convention into the emerging global food security architecture. If successful, it will also make food assistance more responsive to the needs of undernourished people, while continuing to provide a predictable minimum level of global food assistance.

Policy makers should also remember that the human right to food is recognized internationally as a fundamental human right, which all ‘States Parties’ to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including Canada, have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfill. Canada’s *Official Development Assistance Accountability Act* lays out three conditions to govern Canada’s official development assistance (ODA). It states that all Canadian ODA must 1) contribute to poverty reduction; 2) take into account the perspectives of the poor; and 3) be consistent with international human rights standards. In developing a national policy on food security, Canada must therefore consider its responsibilities with respect to the human right to food.

Recommendations for an integrated, international dimension in a Canadian Food Policy

A comprehensive, ‘whole-of-government’ food policy for Canada should include both domestic and international components, and should ensure that all government departments work toward common objectives. The Food Security Policy Group makes the following ten recommendations for a Canadian food policy that would improve global food security and strengthen Canada’s role abroad. Recommendations are divided into two sections. First are those that relate primarily to CIDA and its international work. Second are recommendations that go beyond CIDA, and have both domestic and international implications, including the agricultural, environmental and trade implications of food security goals.

CIDA-focussed Initiatives:

1. **Make CIDA's Food Security Strategy an integral part of a national food policy:** To ensure coherence among domestic and international policy objectives, integrate Canada's CIDA-led *Food Security Strategy* into a Canadian policy on food security.

2. **Maintain food security as a key CIDA priority, with budgetary allocations to reflect this priority.** The department of Finance should reverse its decision to freeze aid. An effective aid policy demands increasing aid commitments that can be allocated in a predictable way, over long term, to priority areas such as food security. Agriculture is the largest source of livelihoods and improved nutrition in most developing countries and agriculture can become the engine of both food security and economic growth for developing economies. In all bilateral and multilateral food security initiatives, ensure that CIDA respects existing donor commitments, as set out in the 2008 *Accra Agenda for Action for Aid Effectiveness*.³ Specifically, CIDA's Food Security Strategy must:
 - **Focus agricultural development on the poorest, including smallholder farmers:** Given that most of the world's hungry people are involved in food production, and that in many agro-ecological contexts, smallholders produce more food per unit of land than commercial agriculture, CIDA should maintain its focus on small scale farmers and landless agricultural workers, including attention to land tenure and access to financial services, agriculture inputs and research appropriate to small farms. Consistent with human right standards, an emphasis on food security should also ensure participation by the beneficiary populations in establishing goals for domestic agriculture and food security policies.

 - **Promote the role of women in agriculture, agricultural policy and decision-making:** The majority of developing country farmers are women, yet they usually have unequal access to land, credit, extension services, etc. In keeping with Canada's support for the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CIDA should promote the rights and participation of women in small-scale agriculture, including support for women in rural organizations, income generating activities, and control over productive assets (land, water, labour, and capital). CIDA has a wealth of expertise in promoting gender equality, which can be leveraged to support rural women – improving the gender responsiveness of local governance and building the capacity of women to influence national agricultural policy-making processes. Within households,

³ The *Accra Agenda for Action* committed all OECD governments to "broaden country-level policy dialogue" on aid and "strengthen developing country capacity to lead and manage development", and to use country systems in their aid delivery.

women normally have greater influence than men over children's education and nutrition, so a focus on women will also lead to better outcomes for children.

- **Encourage resilience through agro-ecological farming:** The input-intensive agriculture common in Canada and other industrialized countries depends on a predictable climate, reliable infrastructure and markets. Ecological farming methods, including diversified crop rotations, on-farm nutrient cycling, and the conservation and use of agricultural biodiversity are more resilient to the conditions found in many developing countries, including unstable markets, poor roads, weak infrastructure, poor governance and a changing climate. CIDA has recognized the importance of ecologically sustainable agriculture and should continue to emphasize these methods, which contribute to social and environmental benefits as well as economic well-being.

 - **Recognize civil society's key role in food security:** The international component of a Canadian food policy should recognize the importance of strong, rural-based civil society organizations (e.g. farmers' organizations, agricultural cooperatives) in promoting access to agricultural services, markets and technologies in developing countries. The *Accra Agenda for Action* acknowledges Civil Society Organizations as development actors in their own right, distinct from governments and official donors. CIDA's programs for food security should support the active engagement of smallholder farmers and organizations that work with them in the development of country-led agriculture and food security strategies to ensure their needs and perspectives are reflected in those strategies.
3. **Integrate food aid and food security:** Canada should improve coordination between short-term food assistance and long-term food security, by strengthening early warning systems for food insecurity, better integrating social safety nets into initiatives that address both seasonal hunger and food emergencies, and by making key development objectives such as improved nutrition an explicit goal of its support to smallholder agriculture.

An enabling environment beyond CIDA:

4. **Ensure trade and investment agreements are pro-poor:** Canada should play a more careful and nuanced role than it has played in past WTO discussions about agricultural trade policy in developing countries. This means supporting trade rules that allow developing country governments more policy space to encourage local food production and to protect smallholder producers and consumers from price volatility and unfair trade. It should include support for a provision that permits developing countries to shield "Special Products" from deep tariff cuts, and a Special Safeguard Mechanism to

counteract import surges that disrupt local markets. These two tools, together with the maintenance of preferential trading arrangements for the poorest countries, would safeguard food security for the poorest population segments by protecting rural livelihoods and keeping prices stable for urban consumers. Such policy tools for developing countries must also be included in Canada's bilateral trade agreements.

Canada should support a flexible approach to limiting domestic agricultural supports in developing countries, when they are designed to increase food production for local consumption. At the same time, Canada should continue to pursue transparency of reporting on domestic agricultural subsidies in developed countries, and work to end subsidies that lead to the under-pricing of agricultural goods on international markets.

The support that Canadian negotiators at the WTO have shown for our own marketing boards should be extended to similar efforts at collective marketing by developing country farmers. Canada should call for increased transparency and new disciplines for large agricultural companies, to prevent dumping, price fixing and other unfair trade practices.

5. **Give food priority over biofuels:** The use of food crops to produce biofuels poses a serious threat to global food security, as the world seeks alternatives to fossil fuels. This was made evident in the 2007-2008 food price crisis⁴, when increased demand for grains and oilseeds, driven in part by the rapid growth of the biofuel industry, helped push food prices beyond the reach of millions of poor people. Expansion of biofuel production in developing countries not only diverted food crops from alleviating hunger, it displaced communities from traditional lands. In this context, the Food Security Policy Group believes Canada should review its policy on biofuels, especially first generation⁵ biofuels, which in Canada are made from staple food crops. We further recommend that Canada phase out all policy measures that encourage the production of first generation biofuels in developing countries, including foreign aid projects. Regarding second-generation biofuels, further research on the environmental and food security implications is needed to determine whether large-scale investment by Canada is warranted. While second-generation biofuels may not directly divert food crops, they can still undermine food security if their production involves the displacement of people from their traditional lands, the diversion of water, fertilizer and other inputs to cellulosic feedstocks, or the conversion of agricultural and hunting lands from food production.
6. **Promote a human rights framework for land investments:** Commercial pressures on land are increasing as international investors and sovereign wealth funds buy up land

⁴ *Anatomy of a Crisis: The Causes and Consequences of Surging Food Prices*. IFPRI discussion paper 00831, 2008.

⁵ First generation biofuels are produced from crops that could be used for human consumption (e.g. corn, wheat, sugarcane). Second generation biofuels are produced from by-products of agriculture or forestry (e.g. straw, woodchips etc.)

worldwide. Smallholders are being displaced as land sales and concessions are fast-tracked – for agribusinesses to grow food for global or home markets, for resource extraction, forestry and biofuel plantations. Canada should work with others to develop a comprehensive approach to responsible land investments, which would protect the rights of traditional land users, including herders and nomadic peoples.

Current approaches by the UN, International Financial Institutions, the G8 and G20 lack effective means for civil society input, particularly from people most at risk from land pressures. Canada should encourage the direct participation of farmers', rural people's, and Indigenous Peoples' organizations in multilateral discussions about land sales and foreign direct investment in agriculture. Canada should support initiatives that provide secure tenure for current land users before governments decide whether land is available for sale or lease, and should support the principles of free, prior and informed consent in land transactions. Canada should help shape the principles, procedures and compliance mechanisms governing international land investments, paying particular attention to transparency and the protection of people subject to forced evictions. Pursuit of Canadian bilateral Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements (FIPAS) should be suspended pending a review of their impacts on access to land and food at the community level.

- 7. Mitigate climate change and invest in adaptation:** Farmers in developing countries are already feeling the effects of a changing climate, and more dramatic changes are expected: changes in rainfall patterns (most African agriculture is rain-fed); changes in flooding (much of Asia's agriculture depends upon predictable flooding of rivers); changes in storm intensity; a rising sea level, and more. Canada has started and must continue to fund its fair share of climate change adaptation, with special attention to the most vulnerable people, including women farmers. Evidence confirms that when smallholders have secure tenure they plant trees and restore marginal soils, thus improving food production, while increasing the capture of greenhouse gases. At the same time, Canada should take the initiative on domestic mitigation measures, as our high *per-capita* emissions of greenhouse gasses (GHG) are a significant contributor to climate change.

There is much scope for improvement in agriculture, both domestically and internationally. Agriculture currently contributes about 14% of global GHG emissions, not including emissions from the manufacture of fertilizer. Promotion of ecological agriculture as an alternative could produce a win-win-win situation. Experience shows us that it can reduce GHG emissions through decreased use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and increased sequestration of carbon in the soil. It can improve the soil's ability to withstand drought and erosion, and can make farmers more resilient to climate change by diversifying their production, with drought resistant polycultures and rotationally grazed animals, for example. For many farmers in the developing world,

ecological farming methods would improve their food security directly, by boosting production.

8. **Oversee commodity markets:** Measures that stabilize commodity markets and support fair prices for farmers should be promoted and defended. Canada should work with G20 countries to address excessive speculation in commodity prices, which contributed to sharp price spikes in 2008 and pushed millions more people into hunger. Such measures should include greater oversight and regulation of financial derivatives based on food commodities. In the longer term, Canada should build alliances to support the orderly marketing of internationally traded food commodities including the use of commodity reserves to stabilize supply and reduce price volatility.

9. **Improve multilateral governance in food and agriculture:** For Canada to succeed in delivering results on food security, our government should play an active political role in efforts to reform the multilateral organizations that deal with food and agriculture. Building on Canada's traditional commitment to multilateralism, our government should participate actively in the process to identify a new Director General for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization with a clear mandate to increase coherence among the 'Rome-based agencies': the FAO, World Food Program, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Canada should support a reformed Committee on World Food Security, as an appropriate mechanism for coordination among these agencies. Restructured 'multilateral architecture' for food and agriculture would help ensure that Canadian and other G8 resources flow through the most effective institutional mechanisms possible to achieve their specific mandates, and together, to achieve Millennium Development Goal #1.