

# Re-committing to Global Food Security

## *A Multi-dimensional Approach for Canada to Advance a Food Secure Future*

May 2015

In light of the focus on setting the global development agenda through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Financing for Development (FfD) processes, this is a perfect time for Canada to review its Food Security Strategy and consider how Canada can continue to work toward ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition by 2030 while promoting sustainable agriculture. Drawing on our diverse expertise and experiences, and that of hundreds of partner organizations that we work with in developing countries, the Food Security Policy Group<sup>1</sup> outlines our vision for how Canada could effectively promote global food security.

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<sup>1</sup> A coalition of Canada's leading development and agricultural organizations concerned with global food security, including Aga Khan Foundation Canada, Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Canadian Feed the Children, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Canadian Hunger Foundation, Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief, Canadian Red Cross, CARE Canada, ETC Group, Farm Radio International, Huairou Commission, Inter Pares, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, National Farmers Union, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Québec, Plan Canada, Results-Resultats Canada, Save the Children Canada, United Church of Canada, UPA Développement international, USC Canada, World Animal Protection, World Vision Canada.

## Background

Canada's Food Security Strategy, which was released in 2009 as a response to the global food crisis, has permitted significant progress in achieving its stated goals.<sup>1</sup> Canada has made gains toward food security, contributed to sustainable development and improved resilience, in part because of its focus on rural women small-scale farmers. Strong funding for the first three years of the strategy made Canada a global leader in food security and nutrition work.<sup>2</sup>

Six years on, food insecurity persists as a significant challenge in international development. As we approach the finish line for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) we note that global hunger has fallen from 23% of the world's population in 1990 to 13% in 2015, but remains stubbornly high at approximately 800 million people.<sup>3</sup>

Canada's Food Security Strategy includes three paths to action: sustainable agricultural development, food assistance and nutrition, and research and development. These three paths, including short-, medium- and long-term measures, present a comprehensive approach to increasing food security. However, while funding for food assistance and nutrition has continued to grow over the past five years, support for research has been flat, and investment in agriculture has declined significantly since 2011.<sup>4</sup>

It is time for the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development to review its Food Security Strategy and consider how best to increase food security for the duration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) from 2015 to 2030. Drawing on our own experience, and that of hundreds of partner organizations that we work with in developing countries, the Food Security Policy Group outlines our vision for how Canada could effectively promote global food security.

## Threats to food security

### **Poverty**

People are most vulnerable to food insecurity when they are poor. There is enough food produced each year for everybody to enjoy full nutrition,<sup>5</sup> but hundreds of millions cannot buy or otherwise access it. The vast majority of the world's hungry people (98%) live in developing countries and especially in rural areas (75%).<sup>6</sup> Ironically, the poorest people of the world are those who feed the world, relying on agriculture (crops, livestock, fishery, etc.) as their primary source of food and income. In developing countries, 79% of economically active women spend their working hours producing food through agriculture and account for 43% of the farming work force; making them the most vulnerable segment of the poorest.<sup>7</sup> The most effective way to reduce poverty is to support small-scale women farmers in Africa, Asia and Latin America in their efforts to improve their own livelihoods. A comprehensive approach must be taken to see that those efforts are not undermined by global agricultural trade policies, market and production practices (e.g. food diversion for biofuels and livestock feed), which can significantly decrease the accessibility, availability, and quality of food and agricultural resources for the poor.

## ***Conflict and Natural Disasters***

Major conflicts and natural disasters destabilize local food supplies. This can create a food security crisis for vulnerable households in developing countries.<sup>8</sup> Restoring food security for affected people is a fundamental post-disaster response. There is growing consensus that greater investment to improve disaster preparedness, risk reduction, and resilience is needed, and is more cost-effective than responding after disasters strike.<sup>9</sup>

Disasters can have a direct impact on the livelihoods and food security of millions of smallholder farmers and pastoralists and can slow economic growth and impact agricultural trade. A recent FAO report showed that farmers and pastoralists absorbed 22% of the losses in natural disasters, yet received less than five percent of post-disaster aid.<sup>10</sup> The report recommends increased investment in disaster risk reduction to build resilient food systems. For example, efforts to protect animals in the early response to drought in Kenya would save over \$392 million in humanitarian aid.<sup>11</sup> Enhancing local capacity to protect agricultural livelihoods and assets (e.g. livestock, tools and seeds) during disasters generates significant economic benefits for the local community and can maximize aid effectiveness.<sup>12</sup>

## ***Climate Change***

Changes in patterns of rainfall, storms and flooding pose enormous risks for food security.<sup>13</sup> Farming is heavily dependent upon the weather, so changes in climate affect farmers' livelihoods, as well as the food security of urban populations.<sup>14</sup> Changes in climate also threaten food security by destroying fragile ecosystems such as mangroves or wetlands, damaging infrastructure, forcing mass migration, and increasing the risk of conflict over resources. Agriculture contributes to climate change through the greenhouse gas emissions associated with crop inputs (e.g. fertilizers and pesticides) and intensive livestock and irrigation practices.

## ***Diversion of Farmland and Food***

Approximately 52% of global grain production is utilized for purposes other than feeding people.<sup>15</sup> Livestock feed makes up 33%,<sup>16</sup> and this percentage is expected to rise as the growing middle-class is able to afford more meat. A significant portion also goes to produce biofuels, in a policy-driven system of subsidies and mandates that was a significant factor in the rapid rise of food prices in 2007-08.<sup>17</sup>

Along with higher prices, we witnessed a dramatic increase in foreign investment in farmland, especially in countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia with weak governance around land tenure.<sup>18</sup> While many of these investments were carried out in the name of food security (or at least food production), they raised considerable concern over whether they might actually be displacing the people who already farmed or lived there, and increasing food insecurity at local levels. There is mounting evidence that speculators with little interest in agricultural production are now driving up land prices, posing a risk to smallholder farmers' capacity to access land.<sup>19</sup>

## ***Food Waste and Losses***

Food losses during production, post-harvest, processing and distribution, and food waste at the consumer level account for approximately one third of all food produced.<sup>20</sup> Food losses are

most significant in low-income countries, often because of inadequate storage and processing facilities. Per capita food loss in Sub-Saharan Africa and South/Southeast Asia is between 120-170 kg/year. In contrast, there is more food waste in high and middle income countries, with Europe and North America wasting 280-300 kg/person/year.<sup>21</sup>

Food losses and food waste cost the world \$750 billion annually.<sup>22</sup> They impact food prices, and unnecessarily generate pressure on climate, water, land, and biodiversity. Investment in proper storage, transport, and processing facilities to prevent food losses is a first-line of defence against food insecurity in developing countries. Policies that localize food systems are also a viable strategy to reduce food losses, while encouraging dynamic local markets.

## Dimensions of food security

### ***Role in the Economy***

Agriculture is central to the economy of most developing countries, with 86% of rural people in the developing world making their living from farming.<sup>23</sup> The most effective way to spur economic growth that benefits the poor is to invest in smallholder agriculture. According to the World Bank, economic growth in the agricultural sector is at least twice as effective at reducing poverty compared to other types of economic growth.<sup>24</sup> There are three reasons for this: improvements in farming lead to better livelihoods for the farmers themselves, for those they employ, and for other rural businesses.

As individual countries become more integrated into the global economy, it has become clear that market forces alone are not well suited to address extreme inequality (between and within countries). Demand-driven markets have allowed over-consumption by those who have a wealth of resources, while making it increasingly difficult for others to access the basics for survival - food, land, and water. Governments should strive for policies that mitigate extreme inequality by factoring in the needs of all citizens regardless of wealth.

### ***Role of Smallholder Farmers***

About 75% of the food insecure people in the world are food producers – small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fishers and farm workers.<sup>25</sup> While they deal with uncertain land tenure, degraded soils, unpredictable weather and weak infrastructure, they still feed about 70% of the world's population on less than 25% of the arable land.<sup>26 27</sup> Small farmers breed and nurture 40 species and almost 8000 breeds of livestock.<sup>28</sup> They also breed 5000 domesticated crops and have donated more than 1.9 million plant varieties to the world's gene banks.<sup>29</sup> With better conditions, they could not only feed their families, but generate surpluses to sell; feeding cities and driving the economy.

### ***Role of Women***

Women make up 43% of farmers worldwide, and a much greater proportion of the smallholder farmers in some developing countries.<sup>30</sup> Their role in food production and family nutrition is widely recognized, but too often, they suffer discrimination. They have limited control and rights over productive assets such as land, water and farm inputs, rarely benefit from agricultural

research and extension, have limited access to financial services, and derive fewer benefits from markets.

### ***Role of Livestock***

Livestock play an indispensable role in food security, by providing animal-source foods (i.e. meat, eggs and milk), manure and draft power for crop production, and income from the sales of livestock and livestock products as well as transportation.<sup>31</sup> The livestock sector accounts for more than a third of the agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) in developing countries and is the fastest growing sub-sector.<sup>32</sup>

Animals are an important productive asset for poor, rural households, particularly for women and pastoralists. Two-thirds of poor livestock keepers are women<sup>33</sup> and in many parts of Africa, livestock are the only productive assets that women can access and control.<sup>34</sup>

Livestock can act as a risk buffer in times of crop failure or destruction and food scarcity, and they enable savings and the accumulation of assets in more stable periods.<sup>35</sup> <sup>36</sup> Improvements in animal health and welfare and the preservation of diverse, local livestock breeds are important for building more climate- and disease-resilient food systems.

### ***Role of Nutrition***

Between two and three billion people lack proper nutrition to lead healthy lives.<sup>37</sup> This includes those lacking in sufficient calories, those who are overweight, and those deficient in micronutrients. Poor nutrition increases the risk of disease and death in the short term, and in the long term it hinders physical and cognitive development and earning potential.<sup>38</sup>

Agriculture is crucial in the global effort to improve human nutrition. Farming is the main source of nutrition for most malnourished families, as well as the basis of their livelihood. Increasing the diversity of foods produced by these families is one of the most effective and sustainable methods of improving nutritional outcomes. For many of these families, livestock are an important source of protein and micronutrients. This is particularly important for pregnant, breast-feeding women and those with immune deficiencies.

To improve nutrition for children, it makes sense to work with women, as they are usually the ones to make family decisions around nutrition, and are more likely than men to invest in children's health.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Role of Trade***

Tens of millions of small-scale farmers depend on local, regional, and global markets for their livelihood. Done well, agricultural trade can contribute to rural livelihoods as well as rural investment, infrastructure and community development, all of which help to improve food security. Trade can facilitate improved nutrition and make food more affordable.

But trade does not always bring these benefits. As a daily necessity for all, food cannot be treated the same as other commodities. International trade can weaken rural livelihoods and undermine food security. Member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), including Canada, have persisted in maintaining significant market-

distorting agricultural subsidies despite World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.<sup>40 41</sup> OECD and other major food exporters' subsidies artificially depress commodity prices<sup>42</sup> and create barriers for others to enter the market. WTO rules constrain the ability of developing countries to protect their agricultural sectors from these commodities even though they disrupt domestic markets and rural livelihoods.

Dependence on food imports increases vulnerability to market instability and price volatility.<sup>43</sup> Thus, while imported goods can compensate for a lack of food availability in the short run, they may undermine local availability in the long run by reducing the incentive to invest in agriculture.<sup>44</sup> While it has been argued that trade liberalization will benefit developing countries,<sup>45</sup> further analysis reveals that these benefits will accrue primarily to a few countries, and are unlikely to reach smallholder farmers in the poorest countries.<sup>46</sup> Trade policies must support smallholder farmers by building dynamic local markets and rural economies. This would be a win-win strategy to enable the poorest groups to move out of poverty, and increase local food availability at the same time.<sup>47</sup>

Canadian trade and investment policies can undermine the Government of Canada's own global food security objectives. National food reserve implementation and seed policy are two areas that exemplify this. Implementing national food reserves have faced major challenges in trade negotiations, despite the crucial role they can play in protecting the food security of the most vulnerable. While the 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 or the need to adopt new seed laws – that could undercut the survival of smallholder farming. Bilateral investment agreements often include requirements for countries to adopt measures such as those set out by the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) under its Convention revised in 1991. There is widespread concern that the development of seed policies and legal frameworks based on UPOV 1991 will have adverse impacts on farmers' rights, and concomitantly, on agricultural biodiversity, food security, livelihoods, knowledge systems and culture.

### ***Role of Private Sector***

Smallholder farmers are themselves the most numerous private sector actors in agriculture. Investing directly in their priorities can improve food security through increased food production and quality, and farm-generated income that they can reinvest in their families and farm businesses.

Connecting with other private sector actors in the value chain gives smallholder farmers opportunities to access new markets and new products with potential to improve the quality and quantity of their crops. Some pro-poor market-based strategies have included partnerships between farmers and farmer groups, civil society organizations, and local, national, or multinational businesses. These partnerships can benefit farmers and businesses economically while prioritizing social and environmental goals. While identifying appropriate partners that are

committed to shared objectives may be a challenge, these strategies acknowledge and empower farmers as market actors and decision makers rather than beneficiaries of time-bound projects.

Links to larger private sector actors in agriculture can also expose smallholder farmers to risks such as price volatility and unequal power dynamics. Strategies to address food security must consider ways to reduce risks for smallholder farmers, including insurance and financial tools, or policies and dispute mechanisms that protect the rights of smallholder farmers.

Investments in the agricultural private sector must complement, and not replace, the government's responsibility to reduce poverty and achieve development outcomes, such as food security.

## What Should Canada do to Increase Global Food Security?

Canada's food security strategy should reflect the Sustainable Development Goals with a strong focus on the needs of smallholder farmers, building resilient and productive food systems, and linking immediate and long-term food security objectives. This could be accomplished by:

### ***Investing in Agriculture (SDG 2.3, 17.2)<sup>ii</sup>***

After a promising start in the early years of the Food Security Strategy, Canada's support for agricultural development declined significantly. Official Development Assistance (ODA) for agriculture is now back down to pre-AFSI (L'Aquila Food Security Initiative) levels.<sup>48</sup> It is time for Canada to re-affirm its commitment to agricultural development by updating its strategy and by restoring funding to AFSI levels or higher. By doing so, Canada can demonstrate its commitment to increasing agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists, and fishers.

### ***Investing in Research and Extension (SDG 2.3)***

Research and extension that is relevant for smallholder farmers drives productivity and raises farm incomes.<sup>49</sup> This needs a long-term commitment of public research funds, and farmers should have a central role in shaping and carrying out the research that is available for public use and benefit. Participatory extension services such as farmer field schools and recipe sharing will improve adoption of innovative ideas. Farm improvements based on knowledge and management lead to more long-lasting benefits than productivity gains based on inputs alone. Applied research and research methodologies in such areas as agro-ecology and indigenous farming methodologies have wide-ranging benefits for food security, nutrition, and the right to food.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Investing in Rural Infrastructure and Strengthening Local Markets (SDG 2.a, 7.a, 9.1)***

As noted in SDG goal 2.a, a vibrant agricultural sector and rural economy depends on reliable infrastructure and this calls for increased international investment. This includes investments in roads, irrigation systems, energy supply, technology development, post-harvest storage, and markets. These investments reduce transaction costs and increase farmer incomes. Public investment in these areas will lay the foundation for private investment by farmers and companies.

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<sup>ii</sup> Included in parentheses are the related proposed Sustainable Development Goals and indicators at the time of writing (May 27, 2015). The FSPG recommendations may be reflected in whole or in part by the SDG goals noted.

### ***Promoting Opportunities for Women and Youth (SDG 1.2, 1.4, 2.3, 4.3, 5.1, 5.5, 5.a, 5.c, 8.5)***

Canada's food security strategy should support specific actions to strengthen the rights and participation of women and youth. This could include supporting women's leadership in rural organizations, measures to improve women's tenure over productive resources such as land and water, supporting women's economic empowerment through training and improving women's access to extension services, markets and market information. Furthermore, strategies should seek to support the development of the next generation of farmers through relevant post-secondary and vocational and business training as well as improving access to land and productive resources for youth and new farmers. The flight of productive adults from rural areas can be addressed by creating opportunities that enable agriculture to be a profitable and rewarding vocation, particularly for youth.

### ***Promoting Better Livestock Health and Welfare Practices (SDG 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.a)***

There are huge opportunities for boosting livestock productivity and sustainability by enabling smallholder farmers to achieve their potential, through better animal feeding, nutrition, health management and use of existing grazing lands. Small-scale livestock production<sup>iii</sup> can positively contribute to climate change mitigation and global food security,<sup>51</sup> with changes in traditional farming systems delivering up to 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>52</sup> Studies conducted through the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund demonstrate the importance of good livestock management and veterinary services on improving household nutrition, food and economic security and empowering women. More research on the impacts of livestock health, welfare and genetic diversity on sustainable and resilient food production and food security would be beneficial.

### ***Promoting Resilient Agriculture and Food Systems (SDG 2.4, 2.5)***

Support for resilience is about helping farm families strengthen their capacity to adapt to changes during times of increased vulnerability. Resilient agricultural and eco-systems are premised on farmer knowledge and practices that are innovative, diverse, and have evolved with time and changing conditions.<sup>53</sup> The most important resilience strategy is diversity – both in maintaining the widest possible base of genetic resources, and in practicing a wide range of agro-ecological techniques. A diversity of crops, seed varieties and animal breeds will minimize risks, ensure survival, and enhance livelihood security. A diversity of techniques allows farmers to cope with differences in local environments, conditions, and the seasonality that is part of life.

Practicing a range of agro-ecological and climate-sensitive farming methods, such as conservation agriculture, crop-livestock integration, agro-forestry, integrated pest, watershed

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iii Small-scale livestock production includes pastoralism, small ranching, backyard pig and poultry production and small mixed farming systems. These systems are similarly characterized by the high multifunctionality of livestock and can produce high quality proteins while minimizing environmental impacts and competition with humans for food.

and soil management, is all part of working with nature to enhance system resilience. Likewise, social strategies that improve gender equality and women's rights to productive assets, and increase opportunities for youth, will have far reaching social benefits. Finally, linking smallholders to local markets and financial institutions, and local economic development will strengthen rural economies.

### ***Promoting Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture (SDG 2.2)***

In line with its focus on maternal, newborn and child health, Canada should work to increase adoption of agricultural methods that deliver nutrition outcomes. This would involve promoting more biodiversity on farms (including home gardens, legumes, livestock, and agro-forestry), improving the nutritional content of the foods people already eat, and empowering women.

### ***Supporting Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation through Agriculture (SDG 13.1, 13.a)***

Canada has already committed funds to support climate change adaptation and mitigation in developing countries. In order to maximize outcomes, a portion of this money should be earmarked to deal with the unique challenges of smallholder farmers – crops, livestock, management techniques, and farming systems that help them adapt to the changes they are experiencing in weather patterns. Promoting a widespread shift to low external input, ecological agriculture will also reduce production of greenhouse gases.

### ***Strengthening Farmer and Food Producer Organizations***

Strengthening the organizations of those who have the most intimate knowledge of the food system, such as smallholder farmers, small-scale fishers, pastoralists, livestock keepers, indigenous peoples and women, is a strategic investment in long-term food security. Farm organizations play a key role in giving voice to farmers concerns, and are especially important for farmers with small landholdings.

These organizations play a vital role in developing and nurturing knowledge of biodiversity, natural resources and ecosystems *in-situ*. Organizations can help in dealing with other actors, to negotiate prices, procure loans, and influence government policies in important areas such as land tenure (especially avoiding the negative impacts of large-scale land acquisitions), access to credit, trade policies, women's right to land, and seed laws. With its history of strong farm organizations, including agricultural co-operatives, Canada could play a valuable role in promoting farm organizations that lead to long-term food security.

### ***Promoting Short- and Long-Term Approaches to Food Security***

Canada has an opportunity to develop an integrated approach to food security through clearly linking immediate and long-term food security objectives. The lessons learned from Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program, which is supported by Canada, could be applied in other contexts. Canada could work to strengthen food security early warning systems like the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS). The Livestock Early Warning System (LEWS) can be strengthened with more support for infrastructure (e.g. slaughterhouses and reliable markets) so communities can act upon the recommendations provided once a warning is issued.

Canada can fulfill its commitment to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction by investing in the protection of livestock and other productive assets to reduce the impact of disasters and conflicts on food security and accelerate recovery.

## Developing a framework for food security

In addition to the focus on smallholder farmers, Canada should work toward a framework, within Canada and internationally, that keeps food security and human rights central.

### ***Within Canada***

Since the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) joined the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) to become the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), we have seen considerable effort to integrate the foreign affairs and development sections. This seems to be keeping development concerns, including food security, in the forefront.

More could be done to integrate development into the work of the trade section. Trade can contribute to food security and nutrition, but only if they are prioritized as independent goals. There should be appropriate policies and programs to buffer the risks on global markets and the role of trade should be evaluated in relation to securing these goals.

Greater efforts could be made to demonstrate how all of Canada's aid work contributes to poverty reduction and promotes the human right to food, as outlined in the ODA Accountability Act.

### ***In International Fora***

In discussions of aid and trade Canada should ensure that its own position is transparent and consistent with the realization of the human right to food, and Canada should proactively promote the human right to food in international fora.

Canada should continue to promote food security, agriculture and nutrition as prominent goals within the Sustainable Development Goals and the Financing for Development process. This would be an effective way to advance several development priorities including job creation and sustainable economic growth.

Trade rules and loan conditions must allow governments to support sustainable local food production and protect smallholder farmers from unfair trade. Canadian trade negotiators should cease their efforts to further reduce protection for the developing world's poor farmers, and support special products and special and differential treatment provisions.

Steps must be taken to reduce the volatility of commodity prices, as these create hardship for consumers, and discourage sustainable production by smallholder farmers. Canada should urge that international fora examine the use of commodity agreements and democratic food reserves to reduce price volatility and ensure fair prices to food producers. Canada should also support developing countries to re-establish mechanisms (particularly national grain reserves) that stabilize local market prices.

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