INSTITUTE FOR FUTURE FOOD SYSTEMS

From Feeding to Nourishing

Improving quality and nutrition as the new National School Food Program scales

Commissioned by:

WORLD ANIMAL PROTECTION

About the Institute for Future Food Systems (IFFS):

Because food systems change is among the most under-leveraged solutions to today's health, climate and economic crises, the Institute for Future Food Systems (IFFS) works as a strategic intelligence unit, making the strongest evidence and best practices easier to see, act on and spread. We are an independent non-profit that works with the networks, organizations and individuals best positioned to turn that evidence into action.

The following research was commissioned by World Animal Protection Canada, 2026.

About World Animal Protection:

World Animal Protection is an international animal welfare organization with 75 years of experience working to improve the lives of animals worldwide. In Canada, our work supporting healthier, more humane and sustainable food systems includes longstanding membership on the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC), collaboration with farmers and the agricultural sector, and advocacy with governments, retailers, restaurants and the financial sector to drive meaningful change. This includes increasing the production and consumption of plant-based foods, advancing higher-welfare production systems and supporting innovative solutions that benefit animals, farmers, people and the planet. Our Canadian work draws on international collaboration and expertise, including work with the Danish government to advance plant-based foods and sustainable food systems, alongside engagement with partners across the European Union.

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Executive Summary

Poor diets and food insecurity threaten children's health

Canadian youth face a health crisis shaped by the twin pressures of poor nutrition and household food insecurity, with disproportionate burdens on lower-income, Indigenous and Black families. Nearly one in three children lives in a food-insecure household, while major diet-related risks begin in childhood. This pediatric trajectory is set to severely overburden a healthcare system already pressured by an aging population.

With children consuming roughly one-third of their daily energy during school hours, school food programs aligned with Canada's Food Guide – centred on whole, high-fibre foods and diverse proteins – offer a critical lever to improve diets and equitable access.

A critical opportunity to improve health: school foods

The National School Food Program (NSFP) represents a major step towards this access. Since 2024, Canada has committed $1 billion over five years and legislated a commitment to long-term funding while provinces and territories have doubled their commitments in recent years. Federal transfers, however, add roughly $0.20 to an average provincial and territorial investment of less than $1 per enrolled student per day. Greater funding, to ensure quality grows with access, also benefits Canadians, as there are significant returns for every additional dollar governments invest. Aligning school foods with CFG also strengthens demand for Canadian growers and processors and advances climate progress.

Persistent nutritional gaps

Blais et al. (2025) assessed 2022–23 menus from 67 programs serving 2,597 schools. Menus earned about half the available Food Guide alignment points. Plant proteins and whole grains scored lowest, earning 13% and 27% of their respective available points (vegetables and fruit were also an alignment gap). The voluntary sample was not nationally representative and measured reported menus, not consumption.

Looking beyond program menus, Ziraldo et al. (2026) analyzed 2015 dietary recalls: among children who ate at school, 55% consumed fruit and 22% vegetables, while ten food categories supplied 87% of calories consumed there.

Selected key findings

Responding to Blais et al.'s (2025) call for qualitative research on procuring and serving healthy school food, this report combines literature and policy analysis with stakeholder interviews and written surveys. It traces how policy, procurement and plate shape food quality, with funding as a precondition and equity and coordination influencing every stage (see Figure 5.1). Section 6 presents detailed findings for each driver.

1. Quality is not defined or measured. Bilateral reporting largely tracks spending and reach, but the agreements lack common K–12 standards and measures for Food Guide alignment. Foods provided through programs and foods sold at school can also fall under different rules. Without comparable menu, purchasing and consumption data, governments cannot reliably assess whether programs deliver the nutritional quality promised by the national policy's health-promoting principle. This lack of explicit expectations and checks risks allowing plant-protein and whole-grain gaps to persist as programs expand.

2. Purchasing and operational constraints prevent nutrition priorities from consistently reaching students. Purchasers described plant proteins scattered across supplier catalogues and nutrition criteria missing from tenders. Foods procured through donations and fundraising can contradict nutrition priorities. Kitchens, staffing, preparation skills and delivery logistics constrain what can be served. Cultural relevance, familiarity and time to eat shape uptake. Buyers need credible demand for healthier products, while schools need the means to prepare them and build student engagement.

3. Thin funding and fragmented responsibility make gains uneven and fragile. Food, labour, equipment, transport, training and oversight all need dependable funding. No single actor controls the route from policy to plate. Coordinated purchasing, professional menu review and student-tested recipes work, but too often depend on individual champions to spread. Funded coordination can connect expertise, share tools and sustain improvements

In short, Canada is building access at remarkable speed, but the foods that align most closely with the Food Guide are not yet easy to buy, prepare or serve within the system being built.

The 2027 decision window

Current bilateral agreements expire on March 31, 2027. Outside Quebec, they commit governments to work toward common quality and outcome measures that could be included in future agreements. Renewal can lock in:

- A shared Food Guide-based definition of quality for K-12 meals and snacks;
- A baseline and low-burden measures built from menu and purchasing records;
- Named responsibility for review and correction, funded to act.

Action does not need to wait

Suppliers respond to clear specifications and credible, predictable volumes. Schools build demand by making these foods familiar. Practitioners and purchasers told us both matter. **Appendix E** assigns recommendations to governments and other school food actors, including:

- **Provinces, territories and school boards** can write nutrition specifications into purchasing rules, tenders and contracts.
- **Schools** can test dishes with students, link food learning to meals and protect time to eat.
- **Manufacturers and distributors** can reformulate familiar foods and make plant proteins easy to find.
- **Parents and school councils** can raise dietary, cultural and access needs.

TABLE ES.1 Top recommendations at a glance

RECOMMENDATION	LEAD
SECURE IN THE 2027 RENEWALS	
7.1 Fund the full cost of quality	Federal, provincial and territorial governments
7.2 Define and measure food quality and outcomes	ESDC; Health Canada; P/Ts
7.3 Fund coordination and network leadership	ESDC; P/Ts; delivery networks
7.5 Put nutrition into purchasing and contracts	P/Ts; public purchasers
7.6 Review menus and act on the findings	P/Ts; boards and providers
START NOW	
7.4 Make the Food Guide clear, inclusive and practical for schools	Health Canada; PHAC; P/Ts
7.7 Make food literacy and student participation part of school food	Education partners and communities
7.8 Connect school food with food, health and climate priorities	ESDC; AAFC; PHAC; purchasers

How to use this report

- Sections 1–3 set the context and Food Guide benchmark.
- Sections 4–5 cover school-hour food and methods.
- Section 6 explains the drivers, and uses "Key findings" and "What can help" boxes to help readers make sense of them.
- Section 7 presents the key recommendations that emerged from the report. Appendix E complements this section with a recommendations registry for all stakeholders.
- Section 8 concludes, and Section 9 looks back from 2037 at how Food Guide-aligned school food could become routine.

1. From Patchwork to National Scale

1.1 School meals are expanding worldwide

> *“This is an unprecedented global movement that Canada is a part of, and indeed, leading in. This is about investing in future generations.”*
>
> – **Donald Bundy**, Director, Global Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition[1]

Globally, school food programs (SFPs) are the most widely used child nutrition intervention. They can act as critical social safety nets, improve educational engagement, strengthen economies and alleviate – but not solve – hunger.[2]

The pandemic heightened the growth of these policies, too. From 2020 to 2024, countries with national policies rose from 56 to 107, and annual investment reached $84 billion USD. The global School Meals Coalition, which includes 110 governments representing 67% of the world's population, has a goal for every child to have access to a healthy school meal by 2030.[3]

The economic return of SFPs makes them particularly popular policies: modelled estimates suggest they can generate $7-$35 for every $1 spent. The net economic benefits of healthy, universal school meals in the U.S. alone are estimated at $21 billion USD.

FIGURE 1.1 The global rise of school meals[4]



Source: WFP (2025), *State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024.*

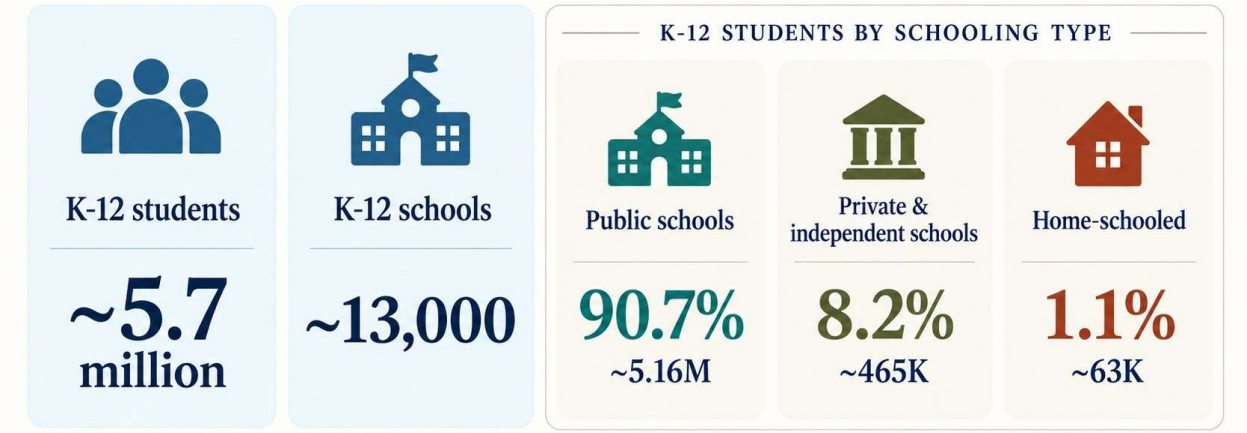
When it comes to what kids should actually eat through these programs, the nutrition challenges differ by income context. In high-income areas, poor diet quality is more prominent: excess calories, sodium, free sugars and saturated fat, and too few vegetables, fruit, whole grains, legumes and water.[5]

In 2024, Canada became the last G7 country to create a national SFP. After over a century of leaving SFPs up to provinces and philanthropy, the federal government has officially gotten involved – and the landscape is evolving quickly.

Building at speed, though, can come with costs – especially if school food standards and environments are not designed to optimize health. As Canada's National School Food Program (NSFP) scales, it should draw on lessons from other countries to avoid rediscovering them.[6]

1.2 Canada moves from patchwork to national program

FIGURE 1.2 K-12 education at a glance



Sources: Statistics Canada, Elementary-Secondary Education Survey, 2023/24; Ruetz & Tasala (2025). Student figures reflect regular programs for youth; school count is based on provincial and territorial Ministry of Education data.

For over a century, Canada's SFPs have been a decentralized patchwork of provincial, territorial and nonprofit investment and delivery. Food security has, understandably, been a dominant rationale for SFPs – especially today. Nearly one in three children now live in a food-insecure household, with Black and Indigenous households experiencing the highest rates. The challenge is growing, too: food prices have risen 31% since 2020.[7]

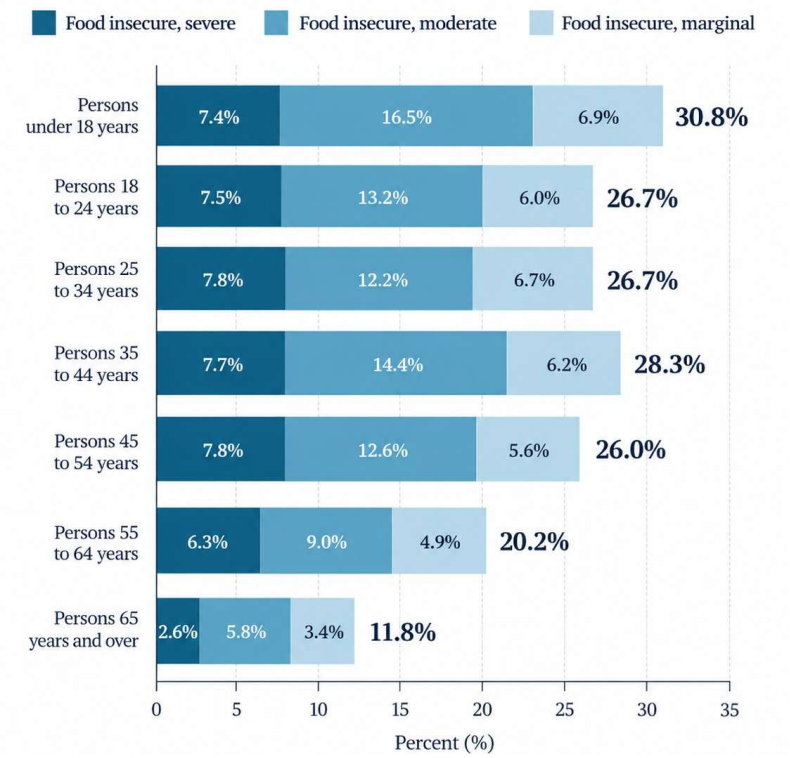
The food security crisis explains why a University of Toronto research team's national survey of almost 2,600 schools and 67 SFPs found that providers allocated the largest share of goal priority to food security (37%), followed by nutritional quality (27%) and child health (12%). Interestingly, the researchers posit that the difference between nutrition and child health may suggest that "many school food providers might not conceptualize nutritional quality as a means to improve child health" and called for SFPs to prioritize overall child health, using nutritious foods as a tool for its promotion.[8]

School food programs do not replace the income supports needed to address household food insecurity. Canada needs both income supports and universal school foods, which provide nutrition and a shared school experience without requiring families to demonstrate need.[9]

An in-depth look at the evidence in this area was beyond the scope of this study. Learn more via the PROOF Report and Put Food Banks Out of Business website.

This emphasis on food security (as opposed to child health, nutrition, or sustainability, the more common program goals in European and Asian countries), the researchers note, places Canada in "the early stages of [SFP] evolution".[10]

FIGURE 1.3 Food insecurity in Canada is hardest for people under 18 years old



Canadian Income Survey (CIS) 2024. Data on food insecurity for CIS are collected in the year following the survey reference year.

> *"Somehow, despite a huge body of research, we continue to talk about and respond to food insecurity as if it's a food problem."*
>
> – **Dr. Valerie Tarasuk**, Principal Investigator, PROOF, University of Toronto[11]

The research suggests that school food programming is an expensive way to address food insecurity, too. Moreover, SFPs have been so chronically underfunded that even alleviating the symptoms of hunger has been challenging. The Coalition for Healthy School Food's 2025 funding comparison put the median provincial and territorial investment at $0.63 per enrolled student per school day.[12] This is public funding, not the full cost of a meal, and it leaves programs heavily reliant on donations and volunteers.[13]

These contributions are not full meal costs. Section 6.1 distinguishes food costs, total program costs, public contributions and family prices. Funding is also uneven, with roughly a 100-fold difference between some provinces in 2023/24 and roughly a 40-fold difference within the P/T action plans. See **Appendix A** for the Coalition for Healthy School Food's estimates of past P/T allocations and this study's rough estimate of planned spending, based on the 2025–27 action plans that all P/Ts had completed by June.

SFP investment, however, is rising. Since Budget 2019 – when the federal government announced its intention to work with P/Ts toward a national program, with no funding attached – P/T investment has more than doubled in the past five years.

Program reach has grown, from roughly one in five students in 2018/19, to one in four in 2023/24, and is projected to reach an estimated one in three under the NSFP. Evidence from comparable countries and Canadian modelling suggests this investment also pays off for families, jobs and producers.[14]

FIGURE 1.4 The direct economic returns of school food investment[15]



In the past three years, Canada has created a national school food policy, a national program and permanent federal funding via Bill C-15. Bilateral agreements were signed with all provinces and territories in under nine months – a historic achievement for a policy of this scale. Note: while the policy development itself moved quickly, it came after years of sustained advocacy from stakeholders like the Coalition for Healthy School Food.[16]

TABLE 1.1 How Canada built a National School Food Program in three years[17]

WHEN	WHAT
2024	Canada's first National School Food Policy, with $1 billion committed over five years. Bilateral agreements with provinces and territories begin to be signed.
2024–25	All thirteen bilateral agreements are signed. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) launched the $20.2M School Food Infrastructure Fund (SFIF) in September 2024. Federal transfers to provinces and territories roughly double, from ~$70 million in 2024–25 to ~$140 million in 2025–26.
March 2026	Bill C-15 receives Royal Assent, making National School Food Program funding permanent with $216.6 million a year committed in year six (2029–30).

Sources: Employment and Social Development Canada (2023–2026); Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (2024); National School Food Program Act (S.C. 2026, c. 3, s. 599)

The federal government also created independent pathways with Indigenous partners, although no such pathway exists for Black school food stakeholders.[18]

The National School Food Policy establishes a common direction through six shared principles, without prescribing a single delivery model (Figure 1.5).

How these principles translate into students' daily experience varies across Canada. P/T systems involve different combinations of ministries, school boards or districts, nonprofits and community partners. Programs differ in who purchases and prepares the food, whether families pay, and how quality is monitored.

The NSFP's challenge is not to standardize distinct P/T systems, but to establish a clear path for operationalizing shared national principles while respecting cultural and regional flexibility.

FIGURE 1.5 The Six Principles of Canada's National School Food Policy (2024)



Source: Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC, 2024). The standard bilateral agreements use these principles to guide implementation; Quebec's asymmetrical agreement uses related objectives.[19]

FIGURE 1.6 How school food programs can differ by province[20]



British Columbia

District discretion

School districts have substantial discretion over program design and delivery.



Ontario

Regional delivery

Programs operate largely through regional lead agencies and community-based delivery.



Nova Scotia

Shared lunch menus

Common provincial lunch menus are paired with several production models.



New Brunswick

Centralized purchasing

Much of breakfast purchasing and distribution is centralized through Feed NB, while a province-wide lunch system is being built.

1.3 The 2027 renewal: a window to define quality

> *"Canada and [Province/Territory] agree to work together, and with stakeholders, as necessary, towards the development of common quality and outcome measures that could be included in future agreements to reinforce the National School Food Policy's vision."*
>
> **– Clause 6.2 of the standard bilateral agreements (emphasis added); Quebec's asymmetrical agreement uses a different framework.**

The NSFP is a major public health investment. The standard bilateral agreements commit to Food Guide alignment while leaving common quality and outcome measures for possible inclusion in future agreements. Quebec's asymmetrical agreement uses a different framework.[21]

These agreements expire March 31, 2027.[21] Their forthcoming renewal presents a key opportunity to define and measure quality as the NSFP scales. Many practitioners see the same window. One procurement lead framed reporting as a condition that naturally arrives with funding: "they [the federal government] didn't have the right to know before, but they do now that it's funded."[22]

How quality gets defined and measured may matter as much as what is defined. A US practitioner who works with school districts nationally put it plainly: "If there's not a phase-in period, then either everything happens all at once or nothing ever changes."

SPOTLIGHT

The Coalition for Healthy School Food (CHSF)

The Coalition for Healthy School Food (CHSF) is Canada's largest school food network, with more than 390 nonprofit member organizations from every province and territory. It links local programs to national advocacy.

IFFS is a Coalition member. This study was conducted independently. It drew on the Coalition's convening and resources, and amplifies its recommendations where the evidence supports them.

Sources: Coalition for Healthy School Food, About Us and Guiding Principles; ESDC (2024), National School Food Policy.

2. Canada's Food Guide: Defining Nutrition Quality

Delivering on the NSFP's health-promoting commitment starts with Canada's Food Guide (CFG): a dietary pattern designed to meet nutritional needs and reduce the risk of diet-related chronic disease.[23]

CFG is a prominent public-health resource, historically described by Health Canada as the federal government's second-most-requested document.[24]

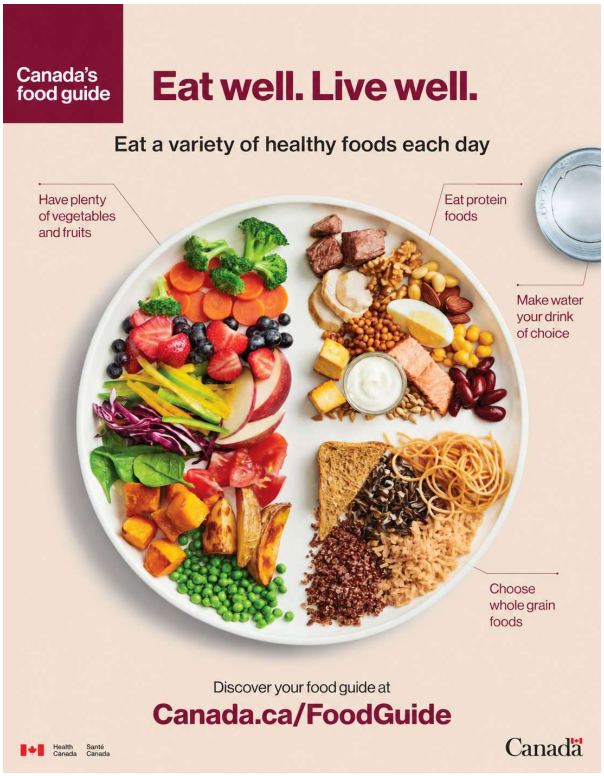
A predominantly plant-based dietary pattern. Half the plate is vegetables and fruits and one-quarter whole grains. Plant foods therefore fill three-quarters before the protein quarter, where beans, lentils, tofu, nuts and seeds are recommended more often. Fish, eggs, lower-fat dairy and lean meats remain options; water is the drink of choice.[25]

Why the pattern matters

Eating this way is associated with lower risks of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. Whole plant foods provide fibre, which supports bowel regularity and can help lower blood cholesterol and keep people feeling full (Figure 3.2).[26]

> *"Many of the well-studied healthy eating patterns include mostly plant-based foods."*
>
> – **Health Canada (2026)**, Canada's Food Guide[27]

FIGURE 2.1 Canada's Food Guide (CFG) Plate



Canada's Food Guide (2019). Developed through a rigorous review of scientific evidence, with safeguards against industry influence. Evidence is continually assessed, and Health Canada's 2025 review reaffirmed the Guide's core recommendations.

What these foods replace matters, too.
Replacing saturated with unsaturated fats, such as using canola oil instead of butter, lowers LDL cholesterol, including in children. High LDL contributes to fatty deposits in artery walls, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke. Nuts, soy protein and certain fibres also help lower LDL. Reducing excess sodium lowers blood pressure; choosing water over sugary drinks reduces sugar exposure and protects teeth.

CFG advises limiting processed or prepared foods high in sodium, free sugars or saturated fat. Processed meats, such as bacon and sausages, also increase colorectal-cancer risk. The whole food matters, beyond its protein or calcium content.[28]

Children also need enough energy, iron, calcium and other nutrients for growth. School meals can meet these needs while building familiarity, food skills and eating habits.

FIGURE 2.2 The evolution of Canada's Food Guide (CFG)[29]



The 2019 guide replaced prescribed servings and four food groups with a proportional plate emphasizing vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods. Source: Health Canada.

The Food Guide is about more than the plate. CFG's healthy-eating recommendations also address cooking, eating with others, enjoying food and being mindful of eating habits.[30]

> *"We don't focus enough on page two of the Canada Food Guide, on the how."*
>
> – **Brent Mansfield**, Co-founder, LunchLAB

Confidence in the guidance. Health Canada's 2025 evidence review reaffirmed CFG's scientific basis. During the 2019 policy development, officials did not meet with food and beverage industry representatives, although industry could participate in public consultations.[31]

In a non-random 2020 survey of 411 registered dietitians across ten provinces, 82.8% considered the recommendation to choose plant proteins more often evidence-based. However, only 57.7% agreed with eliminating dairy as a separate food group and incorporating it into the protein category. The study also found that dietitians reported recommending plant proteins and non-dairy calcium sources significantly more frequently following the 2019 Food Guide's introduction.[32]

Many other countries have been moving in the same direction as Canada with their dietary guidelines. A 2023 analysis of fourteen G20 members with guidelines updated since 2013 found that twelve recommended plant-based diets or more plant-protein foods and ten recommended or were assessed as recommending less meat. Eleven also addressed sustainability, which many stakeholders have called on Health Canada to strengthen.[33]

Canada's Food Guide is a suite of resources. See **Appendix B** for more details on the full suite. Three gaps still need attention, and are explored in this report:

FIGURE 2.3 Health Canada's sample 3-day meal plan

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3
BREAKFAST	**Whole grain cereal** Berries Unsweetened lower-fat milk or fortified plant-based beverage	**Scrambled tofu with kale** Whole grain toast	**Whole grain cornmeal porridge with berries** Orange Unsweetened lower-fat yogurt
MORNING SNACK	Almonds Banana	Carrots Egg salad made with avocado Unsweetened lower-fat milk or fortified plant-based beverage	Broccoli Edamame dip Lower-fat, lower-sodium cheese
LUNCH	**Banh Mi (vegetarian sandwich)** Tofu, daikon and carrots on a whole wheat baguette **Edamame salad**	**Mujadarrah** Lentils, onions and brown rice **Cucumber and yogurt salad**	**Three sisters soup** Corn, kidney beans and butternut squash **Canned salmon sandwich on a whole grain roll**
AFTERNOON SNACK	Navy bean dip Raw mixed vegetables	Melon salad Unsweetened lower-fat yogurt	Apple slices Nut butter
Water available throughout the day			

A Food Guide-aligned menu cycle for breakfasts, snacks and lunches. Source: Health Canada (adapted).

SPOTLIGHT

Why are people still confused about nutrition?

If decades of strong evidence underpin Canada's Food Guide, why are there still contradictory studies?

What studies compare matters. Study design plays a major role in the results. Different comparators can create *false equipoise*: the appearance of scientific uncertainty despite stronger overall evidence. Among 44 trials on red meat, for example, 70% comparing red meat with plant proteins found unfavourable cardiovascular risk-factor effects, while 70% comparing it with other animal proteins found no difference (López-Moreno et al., 2025).

Industry influence and misinformation amplify confusion. Among studies or reviews reporting no association between sugary drinks and obesity- or diabetes-related outcomes, 25 of 26 had industry ties (Schillinger et al., 2016). Selective messaging and online misinformation can obscure scientific consensus.

Confusion extends to families and professionals. Small Ontario studies found uncertainty about whole grains, plant proteins and dairy's reclassification. Among surveyed Toronto physicians, 51% did not recognize fortified soy beverage as the recommended plant-based milk substitute; 49% did not know its protein content was comparable.

Awareness does not equal comprehension. Over 75% of adults in Canada's provinces had heard of or seen the Food Guide in 2024, but recognition does not establish understanding of its recommendations or how to apply them.

Section 6 examines these gaps in practice. Section 3 sets out what is at stake for children's health and the food systems shaped by school food investment.

TABLE 2.1 The growing convergence of dietary guidelines

G20 NATION	INCREASE PLANT PROTEINS AND FOODS	REDUCED MEAT CONSUMPTION	PLANETARY IMPACTS FROM DIET	YEAR UPDATED
Argentina	✓	✓	✓	2016
Australia	✓	✓	✓	2013
Brazil			✓	2015
Canada	✓		✓	2019
China		✓		2016
France	✓	✓	✓	2019
Germany	✓	✓	✓	2022
Indonesia	✓	✓		2014
Italy	✓	✓	✓	2018
Japan	✓	✓	✓	2018
Mexico	✓	✓	✓	2023
South Africa	✓		✓	2013
United Kingdom	✓	✓	✓	2016
United States*	✓			2020

Source: Center for Biological Diversity (2023). Six G20 members (EU, India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Russia and South Korea) were excluded, as they had either not updated guidelines since 2013 or could not be located, while EU members produce distinct policies.
**The coding reflects the guidelines reviewed at that time and predates subsequent U.S. updates.*

- **Translation.** The Food Guide plate was designed to guide individual food choices, not institutional meal service. While its recommendations are clear, the plate does not provide the age-appropriate meal standards, menu cycles, purchasing criteria, substitutions or quality checks needed for school food delivery. Programs must therefore translate this guidance into affordable, nutritious meals within available staffing, infrastructure and kitchen capacity (See sections 6.2–6.4).
- **Comprehension.** Conflicting nutrition messages can weaken understanding and application of CFG. While there is high awareness of the Food Guide, several small studies – and insights from this report's interviews – indicate comprehension gaps, particularly around plant proteins. Misunderstandings about processed foods and healthy eating practices can also affect food choices, menu planning and student acceptance.[34]
- **Accessibility and equity.** Cultural relevance and community preferences shape participation and acceptance of the Food Guide, which is lower in racialized communities. Several interviews reflected that some cultures do not see their foods or culture reflected in the Guide or Health Canada's recipe database.

Where cultural gaps have been bridged, practitioners have crowd-sourced and adapted recipes from a range of different cultures (See sections 6.5 and 6.6). Unequal funding, food access, infrastructure and staffing also make CFG-aligned meals more feasible in some schools than others.

3. Why Nutritional Quality Matters Now

3.1 Chronic disease risk is starting in childhood

> *"Imagine the cost in twenty years if we don't well-nourish this generation."*
>
> – **Wendy Smith** (Sourcing Manager, MEALSource and Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council member)

Chronic diseases – such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer – exact a heavy toll, shortening the quality and length of lives. In 2023, almost half of Canadian adults lived with at least one. Dietary patterns formed in childhood shape later chronic disease risk.[35]

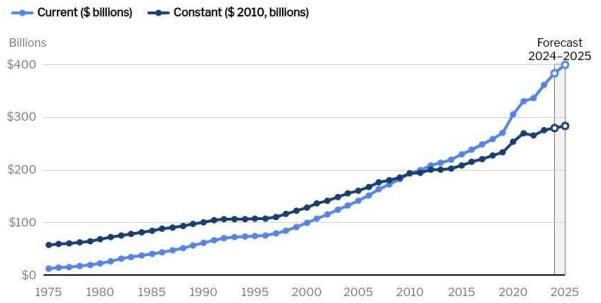
Many children are on a chronic disease trajectory well before finishing high school. Childhood obesity has roughly tripled since 1980, and type 2 diabetes, once an adult disease, has risen about 60% among Canadian children over the past ten to fifteen years. Pre-clinical cardiovascular markers that used to appear in middle age are now appearing in adolescents. This growing health crisis is not evenly carried. In Manitoba, for example, First Nations children develop type 2 diabetes at ~11x the rate of their non-Indigenous peers, and Black and Caribbean children are over-represented in new diagnoses.[36]

The near-term costs land in the classroom, where poor nutrition is connected to weaker attention, lower academic performance and higher absenteeism.[37] Toronto District School Board data show that students who regularly ate breakfast were 28% more likely to be on track to graduate than those who did not.

The larger costs land decades later. Healthcare spending reached nearly $400B in 2025 (about 12.7% of GDP) and it is growing 1.6 percentage points faster than the economy. Chronic disease and related illness already cost about $190B a year and the cost of diet-related disease, specifically, has been conservatively estimated at $16-$26B a year.[38]

> *"Chronic diseases have become a pediatric crisis. The good news is that the evidence and clinical experience show how lifestyle medicine – especially nutrition – can profoundly improve a child's future."*
>
> – **Dr. Rikin Patel (Pediatrician**, Founder of Reset Pediatric Lifestyle Medicine)

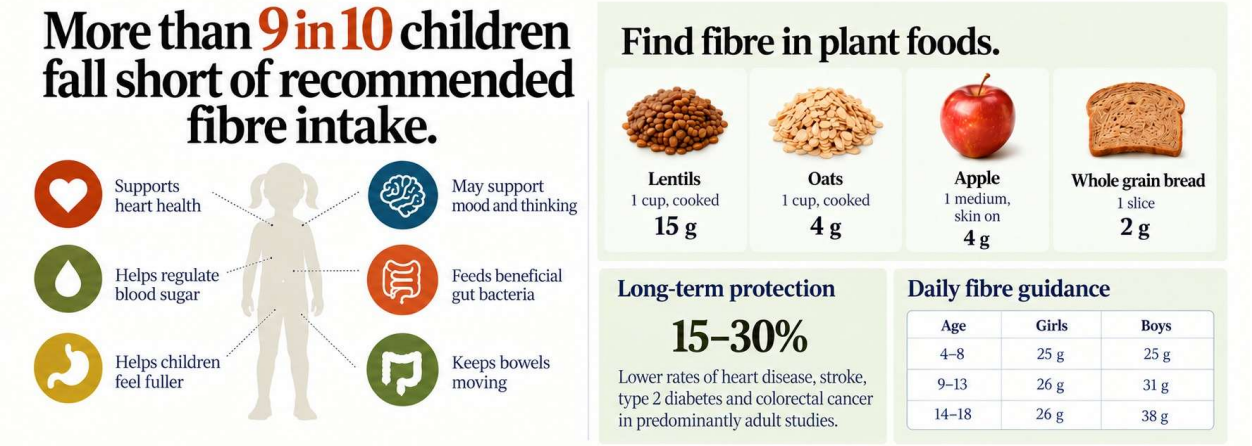
FIGURE 3.1 The rising cost of Canadian healthcare



Health care spending in current and constant (2010) dollars, Canada, 1975 to 2025. Source: National Health Expenditure Database, Canadian Institute for Health Information (© 2025 CIHI).

Those pressures will intensify as Canadians age. There are now more seniors than children, and the share of Canadians over 85 – whose care costs ~7.5 times that of a 50-year-old – is set to triple within twenty years. Children today are the working-age population that will carry that cost.[39]

FIGURE 3.2 The importance of fibre



More than 93% fell below the age- and sex-specific recommended fibre intake (Adequate Intake) in an analysis of 2015 Canadian dietary data for ages 2–18.[40] Sources: WHO/UNICEF/World Bank (2021). JAMA (meta-analysis). ADA. Slavin (2013). Health Canada. Nature Reviews. Pediatrics. CPS (2021). Fibre amounts are approximate.

Canada ranked 37th of 41 wealthy countries on UNICEF's 2017 goal to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition. An NSFP that improves access to nutritious food can help shift eating patterns and this trajectory. Meanwhile, consumption of vegetables and fruits has declined in recent years. Fibre, whole grains and plant protein all remain underconsumed. And just 5% of adult national protein intake comes from nuts, seeds and legumes – the plant protein foods the CFG advises choosing more often.[41]

3.2 What programs serve now will set the defaults

Early influence. Early exposure to key foods can lead to familiarity that spills over to the home. Studies and qualitative data in multiple provinces found that parents reported serving or buying more produce after their children took part in an SFP. In one study, parents reported buying foods their children requested more than half the time after trying them at school. As NSFP participation continues to grow, program quality becomes governments' most direct lever to influence the school day's food.[42]

> *"Schools are where children learn to explore and try new things, including foods."*
>
> – **Audrey Sanchez (Executive Director**, Balanced.org)

Speed. The School Food Infrastructure Fund (~$21 million) closed to applications in October 2024. Yet many SFPs continue to lack menus, purchasing systems or key infrastructure. Canada is building the pipes before defining what flows through them.[43]

Complexity. School food and nutrition quality is influenced by over twenty different stakeholder groups, including government agencies. Governments fund programs and set expectations. Delivery agencies and boards coordinate resources. Suppliers shape availability and prices. School staff and volunteers purchase, prepare and serve food. Public health professionals, researchers and civil-society networks contribute expertise and evaluation. Given the resource and funding challenges, the sector's self-organization has been remarkable. Capturing the full value of the funding, however, still needs greater alignment. See **Appendix C** for a snapshot of the stakeholder ecosystem influencing SFPs.

Measurement gaps. The bilateral agreements still lack common quality and outcome measures. The 2027 renewal is the natural point to specify them. But there is also no standardized way to measure intake, both for what schools are providing and what kids are eating. Baseline collection needs to begin as soon as possible so future standards can be set, tested and defended against real program data. When the 2012 US nutrition standards faced rollback, advocates used evidence of increased whole grain and produce consumption to defend them.[44]

FIGURE 3.3 What scales with programs

FAMILIARITY	OPERATING DEFAULTS	EVIDENCE BASE
What students and families become familiar with and willing to eat	What suppliers, kitchens and staff already regularly serve*	What governments can later measure and improve

** What is most regularly served on low budgets may change with greater funding*

3.3 Planetary and public health risks

Canada ranked second-last among the 22 "Global West" countries in the 2026 Environmental Performance Index. Shifting towards more CFG-aligned and protein-diverse foods can reduce food-related emissions while reducing the unique threats posed by intensive animal farming.[45]

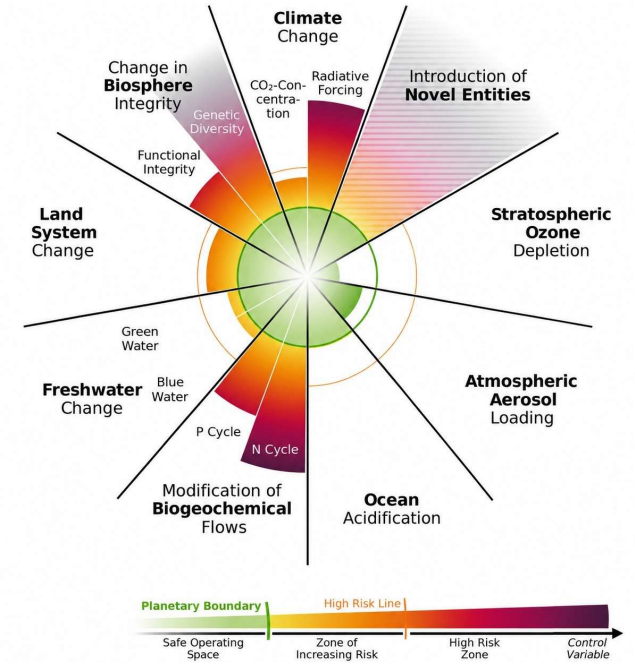
The Planetary Health Diet. CFG states that eating patterns higher in plant-based foods and lower in animal-based foods have a lesser environmental impact. Unlike CFG, which uses proportions, the 2025 EAT-Lancet Commission's Planetary Health Diet (PHD) adds quantities. It sets reference intakes for each food group from health evidence alone, then pairs them with limits on food's share of all nine planetary boundaries. Its priorities overlap with the Food Guide's: mostly whole grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes and nuts, with moderate dairy, fish, eggs and poultry and little red meat. Close global adherence could avert about 15 million adult deaths a year (27% of total global adult mortality). Every national diet currently deviates substantially from it, including Canada (see Figure 3.5).[48]

One global modelling study also found that shifting school menus to flexitarian could reduce their planetary impact by 26% and over half by shifting fully plant-based.[49]

FIGURE 3.4

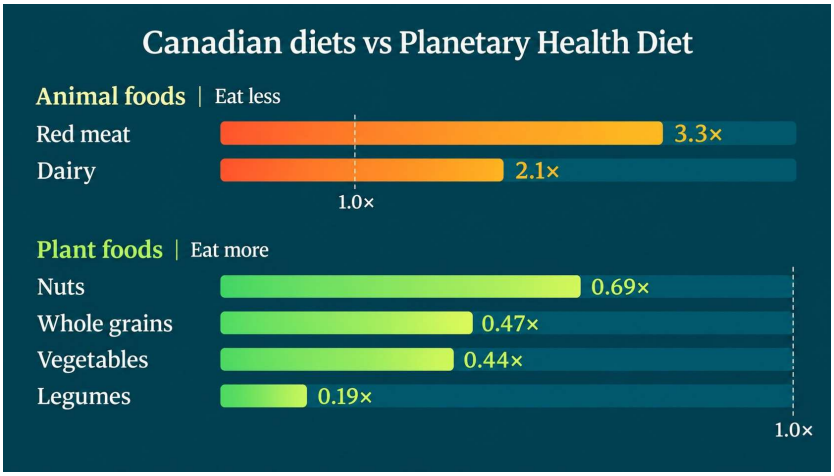
The impact of food systems on planetary boundaries[46]

Planetary pressures. Food systems generate roughly one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions and are the largest driver of five planetary boundary transgressions, including land system change, biosphere integrity, freshwater change, and nitrogen and phosphorus flows. Farmed animals, including their feed, occupy about 83% of farmland while supplying just 18% of calories. Global surveys find people consistently under-rank dietary change relative to its impact. Food and diets receive less than 1% of climate finance.[47]



The evolution of planetary boundary transgression (captured in red). Food systems are driving five of the transgressed planetary boundaries today. Image: Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre.

FIGURE 3.5 **Canadian diets vs. the Planetary Health Diet**



> *"If everyone in the world would eat like a Canadian, we calculated that you would need approximately five Earths just to dilute the greenhouse gas emissions from the food system, provided all other sectors stay the same."*
>
> **– Dr. Marco Springmann (2020)**

From a planetary health perspective, Canadians are underconsuming plants, particularly legumes. Note: scales differ between sections. Pork is included as red meat and processed meats are not included (which often account for up to 1/3 of red meat consumption in Canada). Source: Institute for Future Food Systems (2026).

Pandemics. The average Canadian chicken farm has over 30,000 chickens. This type of concentration across the supply chain, coupled with expansion that increases contact with

wildlife, increases the risk of infectious diseases emerging and spreading. About three-quarters of new or emerging infectious diseases in people are zoonotic, originating in animals. Over the past four decades, new zoonotic diseases have appeared more than four times faster than in previous decades.[51]

EXPLAINER

Shifting food choices and rewilding could exceed the carbon removal needed for 1.5°C

The greater the shift towards plant-based production, the more land can be freed up for rewilding (allowing that land to recover natural vegetation). A full shift would free up more than 75% of agricultural land, which, if rewilded, could remove ~13.5 billion tonnes of CO_2, well over the 10 billion tonne removal needed to meet the global goals to stay below 1.5°C.

Sources: Hayek et al. (2024), Carter, N. (2025).

FIGURE 3.6 The power of rewilding in a picture



From cattle pasture to Atlantic Forest: Instituto Terra, Brazil. Founded in 1998 by Lélia Wanick Salgado and Sebastião Salgado, Instituto Terra has restored degraded former grazing land in Aimorés, Minas Gerais. By 2020, 2.3 million native trees had been planted across its 709-hectare reserve. Wildlife monitoring has recorded 172 bird species and 33 mammal species, demonstrating the potential for ecological recovery on former agricultural land.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Farmed animals consume over two-thirds of antibiotics globally, contributing to antibiotic resistance. Canada's adjusted sales for production animals ranked fourth highest against 31 European countries in 2022 (about three times their median). Drug-resistant infections are ~10x costlier to treat. The EAT-Lancet Commission estimates adoption of the PHD would cut antimicrobial use by about 42%, supporting Canada's One Health approach and the Pan-Canadian Action Plan on AMR.[50]

3.4 Cost, affordability and domestic demand

Cost pressures and perceptions. Canada's National Food Security Strategy (NFSS) reports food prices about 31% higher than in January 2020. Canada's Food Price Report 2026 forecasts a further 4 to 6% rise, with meat the highest of any category at 5 to 7%. Households are already adjusting. Among Canadians eating less meat, 86% named cost or price as a reason. Separately, 17% of all respondents reported eating more plant-based meat alternatives. Whether intake of beans, lentils or tofu changed was not reported. The Food Price Report points to these foods as an affordable and comparatively price-stable protein source.[52]

SPOTLIGHT

Food's climate impact is widely underestimated

Canadians overrate recycling relative to diet. Asked to identify the three most effective emissions-saving actions, 59% selected recycling and 12% a plant-based diet (Ipsos, 2021).

"Local" is mistaken for "low-carbon." In Canada, 62% judged a mostly local diet including meat and dairy more effective than a vegetarian diet with imported produce; only 10% chose vegetarian (Ipsos, 2021).

People misjudge magnitude. A North American study (n=965) found people underestimated meat and air-travel emissions while overestimating recycling (Wynes et al., 2020). Another study found food emissions were underestimated more than emissions from household appliances (Camilleri et al., 2019).

Concern exceeds dietary intentions. Although 60% of Canadians expressed concern about climate change, only 29% intended to reduce meat consumption for climate reasons (Ipsos, 2022).

Support for action is underestimated too. Across 125 countries, 69% were willing to contribute 1% of monthly household income to climate action, yet respondents estimated only 43% of others would. Misperceptions may discourage action (Andre et al., 2024).

If the same pattern holds for food, making both its impact and public support for change more visible could help close these gaps.

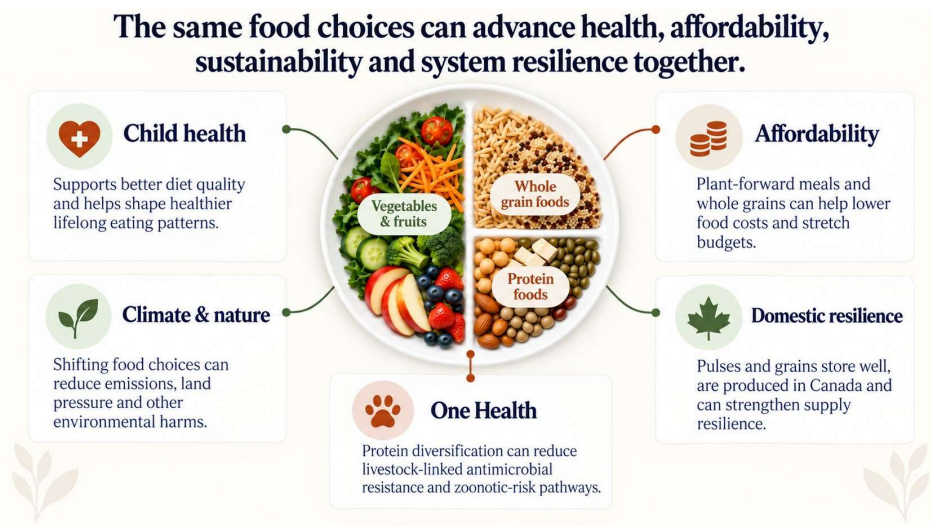
Affordable access to vegetables and fruit deserves equal attention. Statistics Canada reports that the share of adults eating them five or more times daily declined from 2015 to 2021 and was stable between 2021 and 2023. Parliamentary testimony identified higher produce prices as a barrier to consumption. These sources support an affordability concern, but do not establish how much of the national trend was caused by prices.[53]

Canada's Food Price Report 2026 also notes that adhering to the Food Guide raises daily food costs. The Quebec study it cites is more specific. Higher overall adherence cost more only once calories were held constant. Plant-based protein foods, protein foods and the amount of whole grain foods showed no significant cost difference. The largest increases came from limiting free sugars, eating more vegetables and fruits, and a higher share of whole grains among all grains. The study priced adult household diets with 2015–16 retail data, so it does not transfer directly to school purchasing.[54]

Global modelling found healthy and sustainable dietary patterns could cost up to 22–34% less than current diets in upper-middle- and high-income countries, depending on the

pattern. That modelling covered whole foods, not processed meat replacements. At Canadian retail, plant-based cheese and yogurt analogues were priced above dairy equivalents; milk and meat analogues showed no significant difference. In a Dutch cohort of about 4,000 children, healthier plant-based diets at age 8 were associated with slightly lower blood pressure at age 10 and no significant difference in diet cost.[55]

FIGURE 3.7 One plate, many returns



Supply and procurement leverage. Canada is the world's largest pulse exporter. Pulses and grains are produced here at scale, store well, and can diversify purchasing away from the category with the steepest forecast increase. The NFSS, a $3.2 billion commitment over ten years, aims to raise the domestically produced share of Food Guide-based healthy food available to Canadians from 75% to 85% by 2032. School purchasing can help build that home market for foods the Food Guide recommends more often. What institutions specify shapes supplier offers, product development and infrastructure.[56,57]

The Food System Economics Commission brought together 21 leading experts, over four years, to map an economic model that captures the impacts of two possible futures for the global food system: our Current Trends pathway, and the Food System Transformation pathway. It estimates that the global food system imposes about $15 trillion USD a year in hidden health, environmental and social costs – or roughly $41 billion USD daily. Transforming the global food system could generate $5–10 trillion in annual benefits, at a cost of US$200–500 billion a year. Changing diets accounts for 70% of those benefits.[58]

4. What We Know About How Students Eat at School

Canada has no single national dataset showing what schools provide, what students choose and what they ultimately eat, though a pre-expansion baseline can be developed looking at Statistics Canada's 2015 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) and more recent studies on menus, school-environment and implementation.[59]

TABLE 4.1 A snapshot of the different models of School Food Programs[60]

DIMENSION	COMMON MODELS
What is provided?	Breakfast or morning meal • Snack • Lunch
How often?	Daily or selected days each week • Occasional special-event or fundraising days
How is food served?	Classroom bins or delivery • Grab-and-go • Cafeteria or common-space service • Self-serve or salad bar • Hot or cold service
Who pays?	Free provision • Pay-what-you-can • Paid with subsidies or assistance • Fully paid • Commercial or fundraising-based food sales
Who coordinates or runs it?	School, school board or district • Provincial or territorial program • Indigenous partner or community organization • Non-profit or charity • For-profit contractor or provider • Mixed arrangements
Where is food prepared?	Cold assembly or reheating at school • Cooked in a school kitchen • Central, hub or community kitchen • Non-profit or commercial caterer/vendor • Restaurant or other off-site preparation and delivery
How is food purchased or supplied?	Retail or grocery shopping • Wholesalers or distributors • Group purchasing • Local producers or food hubs • Organization-led tenders or contracts • Donations or food rescue
How do families order?	No pre-order or walk-up access • School sign-up or advance ordering • Online ordering and payment platform • Vendor-specific or school-managed ordering

4.1 Children eat from several food routes

Healthier provision is not consistent across these routes. INFORMAS Canada's 2023–24 survey found that, among 92 schools regularly selling or serving food, just 14% offered exclusively options classified as healthier, 51% regularly offered whole grains and about 55% both vegetables and fruits. Across the full 112-school sample, 57% reported using less healthy products in fundraising.[61]

Events and fundraising can affect the consistency of the school food environments and send a different nutritional signal. Pizza days, bake sales, celebrations and sporting events commonly fall outside formal SFP definitions or operate under different rules. Over the course of this study, over a dozen parents and teachers reported weekly pizza days at many schools, which are often a revenue generator.[63]

FIGURE 4.1 How food reaches students at school

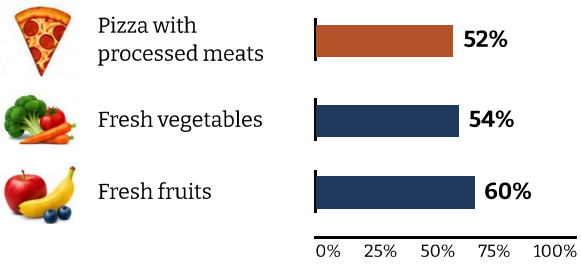
Home / off campus	Program meals	Food sold at school	Events / fundraising
Packed lunches and food bought outside school	Menus, ingredients, portions and access	Cafeterias, vending, contracts and prices	Event types, approvals and policy exceptions

In 2015, students consumed ~33% of their daily energy and 28–36% of measured nutrients at school. ~73% of children reported bringing lunch from home in 2004.[62]

FIGURE 4.2 Processed meats in Canadian schools

Foods sold or served at least weekly

Percentage of 112 surveyed schools, 2023–2024



IARC classifies processed meat as carcinogenic to humans (Group 1). This describes the strength of evidence that it causes cancer, not the magnitude of risk. Source: INFORMAS Canada, 2023–24 school survey; only approximately 10% response rate.

In January, 164 doctors, dietitians and health professionals wrote an open letter urging federal and provincial governments to remove processed meats from hospital and school menus. The majority of schools discussed by stakeholders in the study referenced some form of processed meat still being served – whether pepperoni on pizzas, hot dogs or other forms.

Providing healthier food also does not necessarily displace less healthy food. WHO's 2026 school food evidence review (drawing on 96 intervention studies) found that direct provision could increase consumption of healthier foods. For Canada, the implication is that improving SFP meals and improving the wider school food environment are complementary, not interchangeable.[64]

4.2 Familiar foods, persistent dietary gaps

Differences in the national data between 2004 and 2015 found that whole-grain, sodium and saturated-fat scores did not improve significantly. Older students had poorer school-hour diets, as did children living in food-insecure households.[65]

Ziraldo et al.'s newer analysis of the data identifies where improvement could begin: ten food categories supplied 87% of energy consumed at school, with just three – handheld entrées, baked goods and combination dishes – supplying nearly half.[66]

The foods children already eat most often offer practical starting points. Menu reformulation, purchasing specifications and culinary support can address several nutritional gaps together, while programs widen variety (Sections 6.3-6.4).

SPOTLIGHT

Stealth health: blending familiar foods to close Food Guide gaps

Blending plant proteins, whole grains and vegetables into familiar dishes can help close Food Guide gaps while retaining foods students already eat. Ziraldo et al.'s findings on the 10 leading contributors to school-hour energy intake offer a practical starting point for identifying familiar foods and recipes to improve.

- **Plant proteins.** A blinded taste test with 37 children found similar average acceptance ratings for mushroom-soy-beef burgers and beef burgers, with comparable protein and less saturated fat.[67]
- **Whole grains.** Elementary students ate similar amounts of pizza made with a 50:50 whole-grain/refined-flour blend and conventional refined-flour pizza.[68]
- **Vegetables.** Adding puréed carrots, beans and tomato paste to spaghetti sauce increased vegetable intake from the entrée by 57% without significantly changing the amount eaten.[69]

Implications. These trials were small and short, and measured acceptance and amounts eaten rather than longer-term intake. They suggest blending is most promising for dishes students already choose, provided acceptance, consumption, nutritional adequacy and allergens are tested locally (see Recommendation 7.7).



Blended meat products combine animal meat with plant ingredients, such as mushrooms, soy or legumes, to reduce meat content while retaining familiar flavours and formats. Pictured: roasted red pepper Italian sausage, umami shiitake burger and truffle mushroom meatball (left to right). Images supplied by Carnéa Meat Co.

Practical resource: Forward Food Canada's substitution guide

> *"The investment in school food programs since 2015 creates an exciting opportunity for improving children's fibre intakes by incorporating fibre-rich foods into school food programs."*
>
> – **Canadian School Foods Researcher**, Nutrition Science

TABLE 4.2 Select findings on foods consumed at school

FOOD CATEGORY OR PATTERN	WHAT THE STUDY FOUND
Concentrated intake	Ten leading categories supplied ~87% of energy consumed at school.
Handheld entrées (e.g. wraps, sandwiches, burgers and pizza)	Supplied roughly 26% of energy, ~45% of sodium and 33% of saturated fat. Also the largest calcium and iron sources, and supplied 25% of fibre.
Baked goods (e.g. muffins, cookies)	Supplied roughly 14% of energy, 16% of total sugars and 14% of saturated fat, alongside 11% of fibre.
Combination dishes (e.g. lasagna and chili)	Supplied ~10% of energy and 12% of sodium.
Vegetables and fruits	55% of students consumed fruit, 22% consumed vegetables. Fruit supplied ~28% of fibre. Vegetables supplied ~25% of vitamin A.
Cheese	Supplied 12.5% of calcium and 10.3% of saturated fat consumed at school.
Fibre[67]	Fruit, handheld entrées and baked goods together supplied almost two-thirds of the ~6g of fibre students consumed at school.

Source: Ziraldo et al. (2026), 2015 recalls from 1,690 children aged 4–18 who ate at school. Percentages concern intake at school, not daily requirements. Mixed dishes were not separated into ingredients.

4.3 Better provision must translate into food eaten

Several observational studies suggest program food can compare favourably with food from home, while also showing that effects differ by meal. In a 2023–24 Alberta-Ontario study of 32 schools, for example, afternoon snack use was associated with more vegetables and fruits and less sodium, while lunch use was not associated with better overall diet quality and was associated with higher sodium. These studies cannot isolate SFP effects from other school food.[69]

What students eat also depends on participation, acceptance and the wider home environment. Canadian implementation research identifies stigma, unclear communication and cultural fit as barriers to uptake; education alone has not consistently changed consumption.

Conversely, repeated exposure at school may carry into the home: in B.C.'s fruit and vegetable program evaluation, one-third of responding parents reported buying and eating more produce. Together, the evidence supports measuring food offered, participation and consumption separately.[70]

SPOTLIGHT

Soy: one food, several Food Guide priorities

Soy foods and unsweetened fortified soy beverages turn CFG's advice to choose plant proteins more often into everyday menu items.

- **Dietary inclusion.** Lactose-free and free of milk protein, soy beverages work for students with milk allergies or lactose intolerance, or who avoid dairy. Soy is itself an allergen, so alternatives are still needed.
- **Protein and nutrients that count.** Fortified soy beverages provide similar protein and calcium to milk (Figure 4.3), with co-benefits: vitamins D and B12, and fibre. More than nine in ten children do not meet the recommended daily fibre intake.[40] Calcium-set tofu also supplies calcium.
- **Cardiovascular profile.** Little saturated fat and no cholesterol. Dairy is the largest food-group source of saturated fat in Canadian adults' diets, about 41% in 2015. In a separate analysis of foods children consumed at school, including packed lunches, cheese alone contributed 10.3%. Soy protein also modestly lowers LDL cholesterol.

Implications. Because soy foods fit existing formats such as beverages, sandwiches, soups and sauces, they offer one route to the plant-protein gap identified in Section 4.4. Their contribution depends on whether they appear in purchasing specifications and menu cycles (Section 6.3).

FIGURE 4.3 Unsweetened soy milk vs 1% and 2% milk

Silk unsweetened soy beverage

Nutrition Facts / Valeur nutritive	
Per 1 cup (250 mL) / pour 1 tasse (250 mL)	
Calories 90	% Daily Value / % valeur quotidienne
Fat / Lipides 4.5 g	6 %
Saturated / saturés 0.5 g + Trans / trans 0 g	3 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 4 g	
Fibre / Fibres 2 g	7 %
Sugars / Sucres 1 g	1 %
Protein / Protéines 8 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg	
Sodium 90 mg	4 %
Potassium 350 mg	10 %
Calcium 300 mg	23 %
Iron / Fer 1 mg	6 %

Natrel Fine-Filtered 1% Milk

Nutrition Facts / Valeur nutritive	
Per 1 cup (250 mL) / pour 1 tasse (250 mL)	
Calories 110	% Daily Value / % valeur quotidienne
Fat / Lipides 2.5 g	3 %
Saturated / saturés 1.5 g + Trans / trans 0.1 g	8 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 13 g	
Fibre / Fibres 0 g	0 %
Sugars / Sucres 13 g	13 %
Protein / Protéines 9 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 10 mg	
Sodium 105 mg	5 %
Potassium 350 mg	10 %
Calcium 300 mg	23 %
Iron / Fer 0.1 mg	1 %

Natrel Fine-Filtered 2% Milk

Nutrition Facts / Valeur nutritive	
Per 1 cup (250 mL) / pour 1 tasse (250 mL)	
Calories 130	% Daily Value / % valeur quotidienne
Fat / Lipides 5 g	7 %
Saturated / saturés 3 g + Trans / trans 0.2 g	16 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 13 g	
Fibre / Fibres 0 g	0 %
Sugars / Sucres 13 g	13 %
Protein / Protéines 9 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 20 mg	
Sodium 105 mg	5 %
Potassium 350 mg	10 %
Calcium 300 mg	23 %
Iron / Fer 0.1 mg	1 %

Selected Canadian nutrition labels, per 250 mL. The unsweetened fortified soy beverage shown provides similar protein (8 g versus 9 g) and equal calcium (300 mg) to 1% and 2% milk, with less saturated fat, no cholesterol and 2 g of fibre. Sources: Silk and Natrel product labels shown. Nutrient content varies by product.

What is being substituted matters. In adult diets in 2015, dairy supplied about 41% of saturated fat. Separately, Canadian supply data from 1960 to 2020 show per-capita

consumption of livestock-derived foods holding roughly steady as poultry replaced beef. Shifts between foods therefore do not automatically establish greater CFG alignment. The relevant question is whether substitutions increase priority foods (vegetables and fruits, whole grains, legumes and other plant protein foods).[68]

EXPLAINER

Processing is not the whole nutritional story

What are ultra-processed foods (UPFs)?

NOVA is a four-category system classifying foods by the extent and purpose of industrial processing. In 2015, UPFs supplied about half of Canadian youths' calories and 60% of calories consumed in institutional settings, including schools. Higher UPF intake is associated with poorer diet quality and chronic-disease risk.

Not all UPFs are alike. NOVA Group 4 includes chips, sugary drinks and processed meats, but also some breads, cereals, yogurts and fortified soy beverages. A 2026 review of 14 studies found the most consistent adverse associations for processed meats and sugary drinks; other categories showed neutral or favourable associations. Some unsweetened fortified soy beverages qualify as UPFs, despite Canada's Food Guide recognizing them as nutritious protein foods.

Plant-based meat alternatives can also offer health advantages. A meta-analysis of seven randomized trials found reductions in LDL cholesterol and modest reductions in weight when replacing meat. These products also offer opportunities for continuous nutritional improvement through reformulation, including reducing sodium and saturated fat or increasing fibre.

What should schools do? Processing creates an institutional trade-off: it can concentrate sodium, sugars or saturated fat, but also make foods safer, more stable and practical at school scale. Prioritize whole and minimally processed foods. For other products, assess nutritional profile, food function and what the product replaces, not processing alone.

Sources: Polsky et al. (2025); Health Canada (2019); Kahleova et al. (2026); Fernández-Rodríguez et al. (2025).

FIGURE 4.4 A weekly New Brunswick cafeteria menu Q5

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Breakfast bagel (egg & cheese)	Homemade pizza	Pancakes	Cheeseburgers	Pizza Delight pizza
Goulash & garlic stick	Homemade cheese pizza	Ham & cheese buns	Chicken potato bowl	Pizza Delight garlic fingers & sauce
Taco rice wrap	Chicken fajita wrap	Egg salad wrap	Caesar salad wrap	Taco salad

Available daily | Peanut butter and grilled cheese sandwiches | Caesar salad

Other items for purchase (selected)	
Muffins	$0.75
Cookies	$0.75
Rice Krispie square	$0.75
Fruit to go	$0.50
Carrots & dip	$1.50
Garlic bread stick	$0.75
Yogurt tube	$1.00
Milk (white or chocolate)	$0.75
Sandwiches	$4.00
Wraps	$5.25

Menu for a 170-student K–8 school supplied through a stakeholder interview. Food Guide alignment was not formally assessed and this example is not representative of provincial provision. See Figure 2.3 to compare with Health Canada's sample three-day meal plan.

4.4 The nutritional quality of SFP menus

Blais et al.'s 2025 Canada-wide survey and evaluation provide the largest baseline on SFP menus. The survey covered 59 providers operating 67 programs across 2,597 schools in ten provinces in 2022–23. Providers reported operating conditions and five days of typical breakfast, lunch and snack menus.[71]

TABLE 4.3 Descriptive characteristics of Blais et al.'s survey respondents

2022–23 school year · 59 organizations · 67 programs · 2,597 schools · 10 provinces

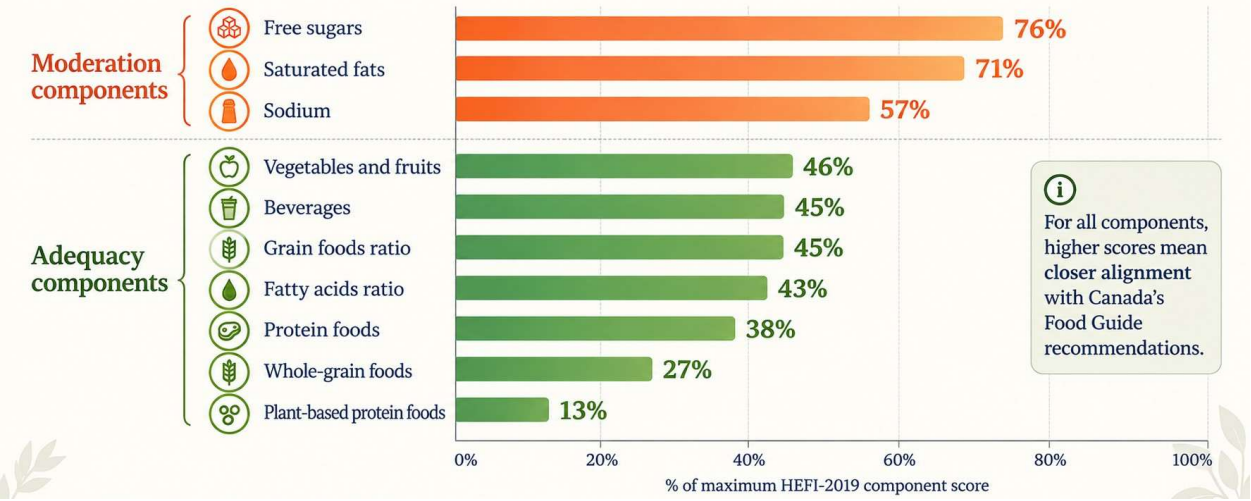
CATEGORY	CHARACTERISTIC	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	SNACK	TOTAL
Respondents	Organizations, n (%)	29 (49.1)	20 (33.9)	18 (30.1)†	**59**
	Schools, n (%)	1,398 (53.8)	1,888 (72.7)	704 (27.1)	**2,597**
School type	Public schools, n (%)	457 (43.5)	801 (76.3)	457 (43.5)	**1,050**
	Private schools, n (%)	36 (28.1)	91 (71.1)	42 (32.8)	**128**
	Catholic schools, n (%)	330 (54.1)	370 (60.7)	179 (29.3)	**610**
Funding model	Meals provided at no cost (%)	79.3	55.0	88.9	**74.6**
	Meals sold at full price (%)	0.0	15.0	0.0	**4.5**
How food is served	Pre-packaged foods (%)	69.0	50.0	100.0	**71.6**
	Warm foods (%)	48.3	60.0	11.1	**41.8**
	Foods requiring preparation at school (%)	55.2	40.0	16.7	**40.3**
Infrastructure	Partial lack of infrastructure (%)	31.0	45.0	50.0	**23.7**
	Complete lack of infrastructure (%)	6.9	15.0	11.1	**5.1**
Frequency of meals	Daily meal service (%)	96.5	90.0	77.8	**89.6**
	Once-weekly meal service (%)	3.5	5.0	11.1	**7.5**
Organization type	Registered charity (%)	34.5	45.0	33.3	**33.9**
	Non-profit organization (%)	62.1	35.0	61.1	**59.3**
	For-profit organization (%)	3.4	20.0	5.6	**6.8**
Level of operation	Local (%)	37.9	20.0	27.8	**39.0**
	Regional (%)	55.2	50.0	66.7	**50.8**
	Provincial (%)	3.4	20.0	5.6	**6.8**
	National (%)	3.4	10.0	0.0	**3.4**

Notes: *n = count. Meal types overlap, so respondent and school totals do not sum across columns. Percentage denominators vary by measure. School type was unavailable for some schools; Catholic schools are publicly funded in Alberta, Ontario and Saskatchewan. Voluntary, self-reported sample; not a nationally representative estimate. Labels shortened; all numerical values reproduced as published.*
† The source reports 18 snack respondents as 30.1%; 18 ÷ 59 = 30.5%. The published value is retained pending clarification.
Source: *Adapted from Blais et al. (2025), Canada-wide survey of school food programs, Table 1. doi:10.1139/apnm-2024-0083; includes the July 2025 correction.*

Vending, fundraising and special-event food were outside the program definition. The authors applied the 2019 Healthy Eating Food Index – a peer-reviewed report card built by Health Canada researchers – to meals.

Overall, reported menus earned 51% of the available HEFI-2019 points. Comparable to the 49% recorded for Canadian children aged 2 to 18 (in the 2015 CCHS), this is not a poor result given chronic underfunding and reliance on volunteers. The component scores, however, diverge sharply. Plant-based protein foods scored lowest, at about 13% of the available component points; whole grains scored 27% of their available component points. SFPs scored higher on components to limit than on components to increase, although sodium stayed high across meal types.[72]

FIGURE 4.5 Food Guide alignment differs sharply by component



These findings are not shares of food or meals. They are mean percentages of maximum HEFI component scores, pooled across meal types. Higher scores mean closer alignment. Sample includes voluntarily reported menus, not independently observed food served or eaten. Given the voluntary participation, better-resourced providers may have been overrepresented, or provided better-than-usual menus. Source: Blais et al. (2025), Figure 3, adapted.

Plant-protein foods accounted for only 2–5% of reported menu offerings, measured in reference amounts across meal types. Whole and refined grains appeared in similar quantities at breakfast and lunch, produce leaned toward fruit over vegetables, and sodium stayed high across meal types.[73]

72% of providers served ready-to-eat prepackaged food, and nearly 30% lacked some or all of the staff, equipment or space they needed. Several reported no way to heat or cook food at all. A 2025 systematic review of school food interventions found the same recurring barriers: staff capacity, access to resources and funding, and consistent leadership.[74]

Expansion is changing the reach, reliability and breadth of school food. Breakfast was the most common provincially or territorially funded program type in the 2018–19 national review. Later provincial figures differ: B.C. reports snacks and lunches in more schools than breakfast, and Manitoba reports snacks as most common.

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are now building lunch provision, and Nova Scotia is extending breakfast funding across the full school year, where federal money was previously used to keep programs from exhausting their budgets mid-year.[75]

5. Study Design and Methodology

The Institute for Future Food Systems (IFFS) conducted this study independently, commissioned by World Animal Protection Canada. Although IFFS is a Coalition for Healthy School Food member, the study did not seek Coalition endorsement or share findings until the report was complete.

The report asks two questions:

- How well do Canadian school food programs adhere to Canada's Food Guide?
- What explains the gaps and what can be done to close them?

Evidence and inquiry

The evidence base combined 152 peer-reviewed and grey-literature sources, policies, bilateral agreements and action plans with 37 interviews and five written surveys involving 40 stakeholders and policymakers. The core study ran from January to August 2026; later research and policy updates were incorporated during drafting.

Research and sector knowledge, including Blais et al.'s studies, informed the questions. Stakeholders were asked to explain known gaps and identify missing issues; plant-protein findings prompted further engagement with specialists later in the study.

Four provinces received closer examination to explore differences in governance, funding, purchasing and delivery: British Columbia, Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Questions were tailored to procurement, manufacturing and food-service specialists; program operators and delivery networks; nutrition, public-health and research specialists; and educators and community organizations. Topics included purchasing, delivery, funding, nutrition standards, evaluation, food learning, cultural relevance and participation.

Interviews and analysis

Interviews lasted 30–75 minutes. Most participants requested no individual attribution; findings were reported thematically, generally by role. Named attribution and direct quotations were subject to permission.

The lead researcher reviewed transcripts, summarized key points and distilled selected passages into 1,152 source-linked ledger entries. Accounts were compared with research and policy evidence, preserving differences and distinguishing evidence, interpretation and proposals. Entries were not treated as independent findings.

The ledger claims were distilled into six key drivers, organized under three domains (see Figure 5.1).

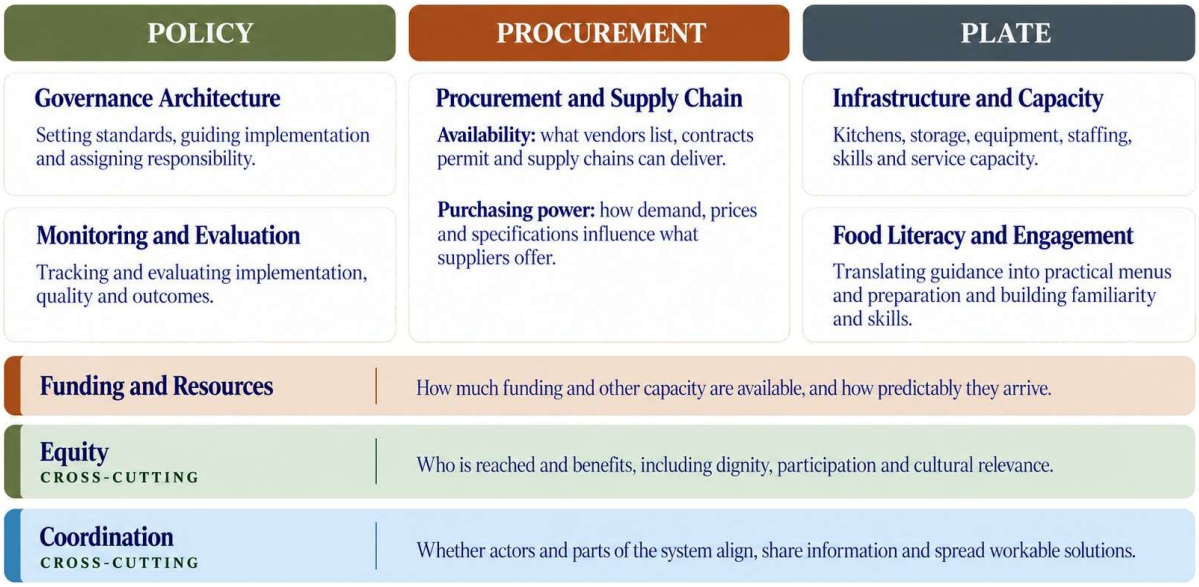
TABLE 5.1 Evidence sources and their use

EVIDENCE SOURCE	HOW IT IS USED AND INTERPRETED
National dietary data	**Use:** Analyzes school-hour dietary intake. **Limits:** Does not consistently identify SFP food or cover all populations.
Canadian SFP menu and provider research	**Use:** Provides direct evidence on program characteristics and menu composition. **Limits:** Relies on non-representative samples and excludes actual consumption data.
School-level environment and implementation research	**Use:** Identifies operational patterns and implementation mechanisms in schools. **Limits:** Constrained by sample and measure differences that prevent national prevalence tracking.
Policies, agreements and action plans	**Use:** Documents formal requirements, commitments, and reported expenditures. **Limits:** Does not independently verify delivery or nutritional outcomes.
Stakeholder research	**Use:** Captures qualitative mechanisms, constraints, and operational disagreements. **Limits:** Lacks quantitative metrics.

Scope and limitations

Coverage prioritized depth across roles, not representativeness. Major commercial actors and government agencies were poorly represented. Direct school-level investigation was limited. Provincial comparisons illustrate arrangements rather than rank performance. Ledger selection and interpretation depended on researcher judgement. Dietary data describe intake in 2015. Distinct Indigenous-led systems were outside scope because of limited baseline coverage and the need for Indigenous-led research.[77]

FIGURE 5.1 The study's organizing framework



The six drivers interact across the policy-to-plate pathway; equity and coordination shape how they operate.

6. Findings: where alignment with Canada's Food Guide varies

Blais et al.'s menu evaluation identified an uneven pattern of Food Guide alignment. Reported menus earned about half the maximum score, with relatively stronger results for limiting nutrients of concern and weaker results for recommended food proportions, especially plant proteins and whole grains. Vegetables and fruits also fell short, while sodium remained a concern. The implication is to improve the balance of foods provided, not only restrict less healthy items.

This section examines the conditions that may contribute to these gaps. It brings together provider research, policy evidence and stakeholder accounts to examine funding, standards, purchasing and delivery. These sources identify barriers and possible mechanisms; they do not establish what caused individual programs' scores or what students ultimately consumed.

Funding is a precondition that determines the resource available, but it is not a complete solution. The other drivers determine what it buys. Policy defines what quality should mean and who must check it. Procurement determines which products can be bought; people, infrastructure and service determine what reaches students. Equity shapes who can participate and influence those decisions. Coordination determines whether knowledge and responsibility connect across organizations. The closing boxes identify practical directions, while Section 7 and Appendix E assign actions to responsible actors.

6.1 Funding: paying for what quality requires

THREE KEY FINDINGS

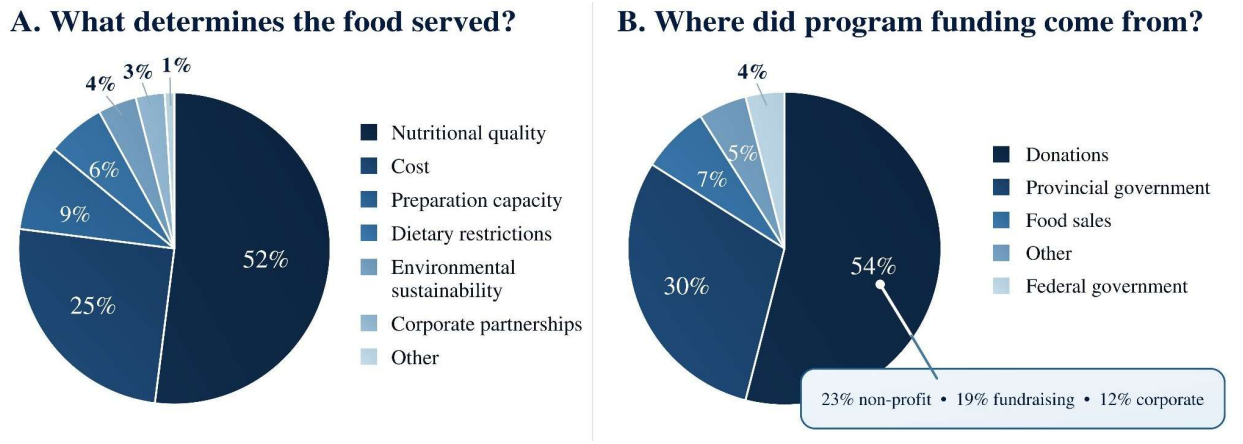
1. **The budget shapes the meal.** Scarcity can reduce components, variety and preparation capacity, while dependence on donations, fundraising and family payments gives those sources greater influence over what is served.
2. **Public funding does not yet cover the full cost of quality.** Food is only part; labour, equipment, transport, maintenance, training and evaluation shape what programs can deliver.
3. **Predictability and flexibility determine what programs can sustain.** Multi-year funding supports staff, equipment and supplier planning, while geography and delivery models require different spending mixes to achieve comparable quality.

6.1.1 | The budget shapes the meal

Family contributions can supplement public funding, but are not dependable. Nova Scotia's lunch program lists a $6.50 meal cost; PEI suggests a $5.75 meal value. Both let families pay all, part or nothing. PEI reports rising participation alongside falling pay-what-you-can revenue.[78]

An Ontario agency lead described school salad bars supported by family payments that subsidized non-paying students. Because they charged some families, these services sat outside their agency's free program. The funding challenge is to support nutritious provision without making payment a barrier: U.S. research links universal free meals with higher participation and less reported stigma (Section 6.5).[79]

FIGURE 6.1 What determines food served, and where funding comes from[80]



Average importance and funding weights across responding programs, not percentages of all Canadian programs. The 23% nonprofit, 19% fundraising and 12% corporate components are shares of total reported funding and sum to 54%; they are not percentages within the donation share or quantities of in-kind food. Source: Blais et al., Canada-wide survey of school food programs (2025).

Even where nutrition is the principal menu objective, constrained budgets determine how fully programs can deliver it. In Blais et al.'s voluntary survey, providers ranked nutrition first and cost second when choosing foods. Practitioners described serving produce alone when funding could not cover grains and proteins, or relying on familiar packaged options when volunteers had little time to prepare meals. Less expensive ingredients such as lentils can improve meal composition, but only if programs have people, storage and preparation capacity. The operating constraints appear in Section 6.4.[81]

The funding picture must also account for how programs raise money. Among 59 responding organizations in the same survey, donations and fundraising accounted for 54% of reported funding, while 93% of responding organizations were nonprofits or registered charities. These percentages describe the sample, not every school program in Canada. Cash contributions can widen purchasing choices; in-kind food can restrict menus to what donors provide, including bakery products that do not meet preferred whole-grain criteria.[82]

The problem extends beyond funded meals. One Alberta school describes pizza days as its largest fundraiser for classroom materials and playground needs, with pepperoni and ham among its options. Such sales can embed competing nutrition and revenue incentives in the broader school environment. Section 6.2 addresses coverage across program food, cafeteria sales and fundraising.

> *"It's really, really important that everything donated meets the Food Guide, which has not historically been the truth. Traditionally, the programs have been so poor that they'll take anything."*
>
> – **Policy stakeholder** (nonprofit organization)

6.1.2 | Quality costs more than food

The Coalition for Healthy School Food's 2025 funding comparison put the median provincial and territorial investment at $0.63 per enrolled student per school day. This is public funding, not the full cost of a meal.[12]

The SPHERU Operations & Costing Guide identifies food and labour as each typically accounting for 40–45% of total program costs. Actual shares vary with delivery model and local conditions; budgets must also cover infrastructure, transport, training and evaluation. A price charged to families is not a measure of either ingredient cost or full program cost.[83]

What funding can pay for also matters. The Northwest Territories' action plan describes its pre-existing Healthy Food for Learning allocation as food-focused, excluding staffing, training and kitchen equipment. Its NSFP plan adds broader capacity investments. Funding food without the people and facilities to handle it can leave the intended menu undeliverable.[84]

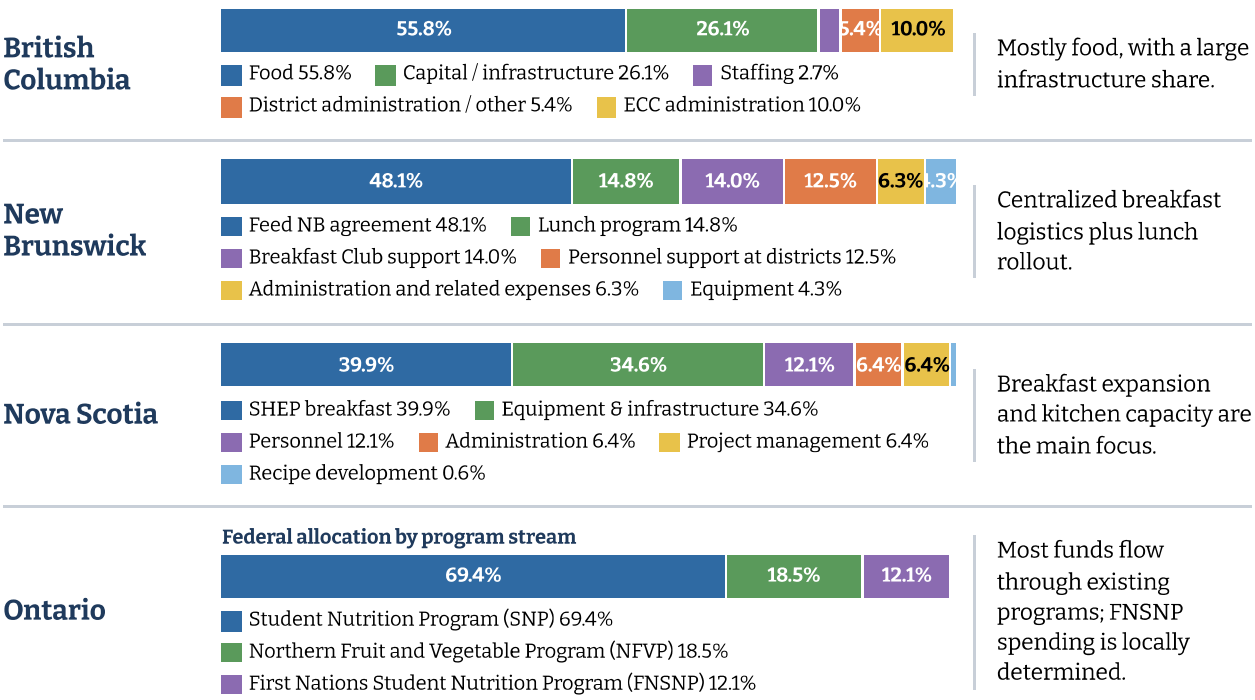
6.1.3 | Predictable, place-sensitive funding sustains quality

Programs need more than annual food purchasing funds. Nova Scotia's action plan reports that rising costs and demand often exhausted breakfast funding midway through the school year. Additional federal funding was intended to sustain service through the year. This identifies continuity of provision, not only meal quality or reach, as a funding outcome to monitor. Practitioners described one-time equipment purchases without assured maintenance or replacement funding, and staff who had gone years without a wage increase. These arrangements make meal quality dependent on unpaid labour, staff retention and the durability of donor support.[85]

Local costs vary. B.C. combines district-level allocations with infrastructure investment; Nova Scotia directs resources to staffed meal production, supplier management and kitchen upgrades; New Brunswick is expanding purchasing, delivery and onsite support. Ontario largely reports federal funds through existing program streams rather than comparable cost categories. These are different responses to different operating constraints, not a ranking of nutrition quality.

Funding must cover a complete service, remain dependable and allow targeted spending on the specific obstacle to quality. The nutrition objectives should be shared; the spending mix need not be identical. Equitable allocation is examined further in Section 6.5.

FIGURE 6.2 Planned use of federal school food funds across the focus provinces (2026–27)[86]



Planned allocations for fiscal year 2026–27, drawn from provincial 2025–27 action plans. Planned allocations, not actual expenditure. B.C. district shares are projections from 2024–25 spending; New Brunswick includes carry-forward funds. Ontario is shown by program stream. Categories and denominators differ across jurisdictions.

WHAT CAN HELP

- Fund the full delivery cost, including food, paid labour, training, equipment, transport, maintenance and evaluation.
- Provide predictable multiyear allocations that can sustain people, equipment and supplier commitments.
- Match flexible spending to local cost drivers while maintaining common nutrition objectives.
- Use donations and fundraising as supplements, not determinants of what students can eat.

Resources: SPHERU Operations & Costing Guide | Provincial-Territorial Action Plans

6.2 Policy: defining quality, assigning responsibility and measuring outcomes

THREE KEY FINDINGS

1. **Canada has committed to Food Guide alignment without yet defining a common school-food test for it.** Provincial translations exist, but expectations, scope and review arrangements differ.
2. **Nutrition expectations change depending on how food reaches students.** Program meals, cafeteria sales, fundraising, donations and special events can fall under different rules or exceptions.
3. **Canada measures reach more consistently than food quality.** Responsibility for reviewing provision, verifying alignment and acting on findings remains uneven, while common quality and outcome measures are still being developed.

6.2.1 | Translate the Food Guide commitment into usable measures

The standard 2024–27 bilateral agreements commit school food to consistency with Canada's Food Guide but defer development of common quality and outcome measures. A dietary guide intended for eating patterns does not by itself tell schools how to assess a breakfast, a snack, a weekly menu or an institutional contract. Governments need practical expectations for what to include, such as vegetables and fruit, whole grains and varied proteins, alongside limits on sodium, sugars and saturated fat.[87,88]

The 2026 National School Food Program Act adds an accountability lever: annual ministerial reporting must cover federal investments and progress, including the program's six principles. The remaining task is to translate health promotion into usable quality definitions and comparable evidence, not to create accountability from nothing.[17]

> *"The biggest change that we have with the 2019 Canada's Food Guide, we don't have specific measurable targets, so everything is qualitative recommendations."*
>
> **– Nutrition science professor**

Provincial systems offer partial translations. Ontario sets components for student nutrition meals and snacks; B.C. provides toolkit and sample-menu guidance; Nova Scotia combines a school food policy with province-wide lunch menus, recipe testing and quality assurance. Their authority, scope and review arrangements differ. These examples show workable tools, not common compliance across the country.[89]

Standards also require an owner. Practitioners described principals, coordinators and dietitians interpreting guidance without consistently protected time or authority to review menus and secure corrections.

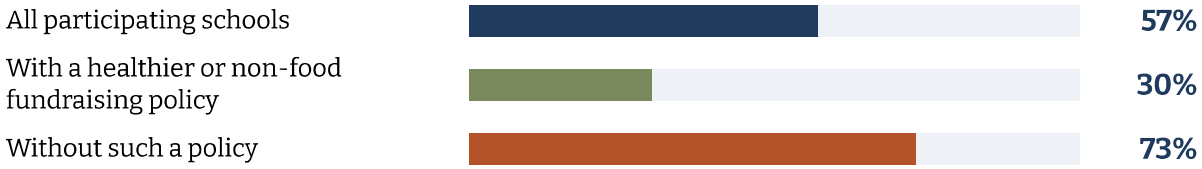
Policy should specify who approves criteria, who checks menus or contracts, what support programs can draw on and who acts when food falls short. Coordination across health, education and agriculture can support that work, but it does not replace assigned responsibility (Section 6.6).

6.2.2 | Apply coherent expectations across food sold, served and supplied

Fundraising policy and practice

Students encounter several food streams at school. A funded breakfast may follow one nutrition guideline while cafeteria sales, fundraising, donated food and special events follow others. Blais et al.'s national program-menu assessment excluded vending and fundraising, so its nutritional scores cannot describe the entire school food environment. Different policy routes therefore matter for both health and measurement.

INFORMAS CANADA Schools reporting less healthy food or beverage fundraising



Source: INFORMAS Canada, 2023–24 participating-school survey. Self-reported, cross-sectional association.[90]

TABLE 6.1 Policy coverage differs by food route

PROVINCE	MAIN COVERAGE	IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES AND EXCEPTIONS
Ontario	SNP guidelines govern program food; PPM 150 governs food sold.	Free food and off-site fundraising fall outside PPM 150; up to ten special-event days are exempt.
New Brunswick	Policy 711 covers food sold, served or otherwise offered, including fundraising.	Flexibility for donation-dependent breakfast programs; distinct provisions for special occasions and after-hours fundraising.
Nova Scotia	Standards cover food sold, served or made available, including fundraising and donations.	Exceptions include designated events, off-site/after-hours fundraising and donations to food-security programs.

Sources: Ontario SNP Nutrition Guidelines and Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 150; New Brunswick Policy 711; Nova Scotia School Food and Nutrition Policy and Standards (2024).[91]

Table 6.1 illustrates the differences between Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Those differences show why standards must address the full food environment while defining exceptions explicitly. Broader scope on paper does not establish consistent implementation. The INFORMAS Canada fundraising comparison is retained above.[90,91]

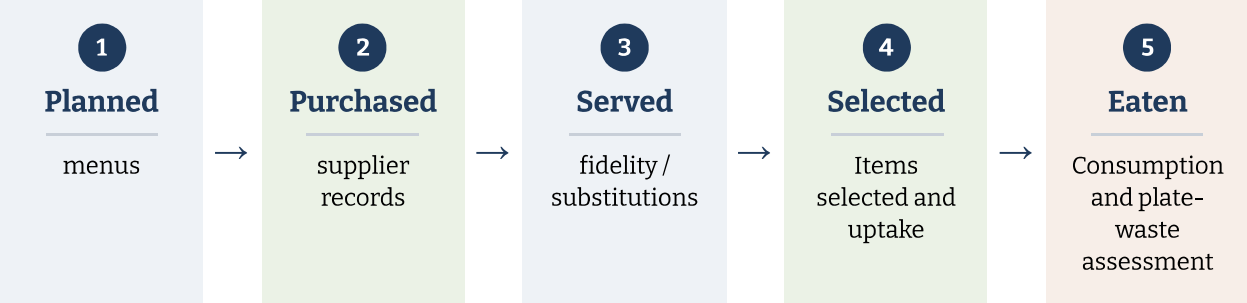
6.2.3 | Make monitoring, verification and evaluation part of implementation

A standard without follow-through may not change meals. Ontario's 2013 and Nova Scotia's 2022 audits identified gaps in oversight. Nova Scotia has since incorporated vendor-compliance requirements, menu testing and quality-assurance staff. In one 2024 German comparison, menus operating under obligatory standards more often met selected requirements than menus under voluntary standards. The observational comparison supports attention to implementation; it does not establish that mandatory standards alone produced the differences.[92,93]

Compliance is not the same question as whether the standard is current. PEI's action plan reports that its provincial lunch program complied fully with the school nutrition policies assessed in the 2024 audit, while other parts of the school food environment required stronger oversight and the policies themselves needed updating.[94]

FIGURE 6.3 Different measures answer different questions

Menus are also not consumption data.



Each measure captures a different part of the pathway from planning to actual dietary intake. Using multiple, complementary measures provides a clearer and more complete picture of Food Guide alignment in schools.

Blais's scores assess reported menu offerings. Separate evidence is needed to establish what was actually served, selected and eaten.

TABLE 6.2 German menus meeting selected standards[93]

CRITERION	OBLIGATORY	VOLUNTARY
Whole grains	83%	30%
Vegetables, legumes or salad	85%	61%
Meat-related requirement	60%	25%

Menu-level observational comparison; percentages are not food quantities or consumption. Source: Hundeshagen, Rosmann and Lindenmeier (2024).

Governments must ask separate questions of separate records:

- A menu review assesses planned provision; supplier records show purchases
- Service checks document what reaches students
- Plate waste and dietary measures help distinguish provision from consumption
- Process and outcome evaluations assess why results changed

Counting meals cannot substitute for nutritional assessment, and a compliant menu does not establish student intake.

Monitoring should begin with existing purchasing and menu systems rather than repeated data entry at every school. School-level information is still needed for substitutions, eating conditions, waste and feedback. A staged approach, such as SPHERU's Monitoring & Evaluation Guide, can keep routine reporting limited while reserving more complex outcome evaluation for sampled studies and research partnerships.[95]

> *"Getting the data from schools is really difficult."*
>
> **– International school-food practitioner**

Public menus, independent review or accreditation could improve transparency and learning, but none currently constitutes a tested national school-food model. Responsibility, standards, costs and review capacity need to be specified before proposing an accreditation requirement. The 2027 agreements provide an opportunity to establish common core measures, while programs can collect baseline data and improve meals now.[96,97]

WHAT CAN HELP

- Define practical Food Guide expectations for meals, snacks, menu cycles and the wider school food environment.
- Assign qualified review, oversight, correction and follow-up above individual schools.
- Use existing purchasing and menu records for low-burden monitoring, with selected checks of service, waste and intake.
- Collect baselines now, review outcomes periodically and bring common quality measures into the 2027 renewal.

Resources: SPHERU Monitoring & Evaluation Guide | Health Canada educator toolkit | WHO school-food guidance (2026)

6.3 Procurement: making Food Guide priorities visible, buyable and scalable

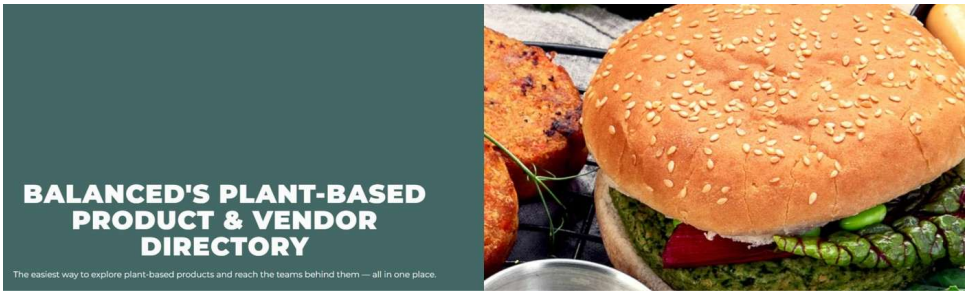
THREE KEY FINDINGS

1. **Priority foods can be difficult for schools to buy.** Plant proteins and other Food Guide priorities may be hard to identify, afford or obtain in workable formats.
2. **What buyers specify and aggregate shapes what suppliers offer.** Nutrition priorities are not consistently translated into specifications, contracts and credible demand, while price, convenience and existing commercial arrangements influence choices.
3. **Purchasing systems provide too little visibility into whether the food mix is changing.** Better categories and quantity data could support accountability and coordinated demand while preserving access for smaller and diverse suppliers.

6.3.1 | Make priority foods visible and practical to supply

Foods can be allowed by nutrition guidance but still be difficult to purchase. Program leads described beans, lentils, tofu and hummus scattered through distributor catalogues with no clear plant-protein category. Products may exist yet lack affordable school-sized formats, ingredient and allergen information, dependable delivery or compatibility with limited kitchen equipment. These accounts help explain, but do not measure the prevalence of, the plant-protein gap documented in Section 4.4.

FIGURE 6.4 The value of a directory



Balanced's directory allows food service professionals to search plant-based items by product, feature, or ingredient and connect directly with suppliers. Source: Balanced.[98]

> *"I would love to see that [number of plant-protein foods on menu] go up, but I am very, very limited in what the companies have to offer."*
>
> **– Leader of a regional school food program**

One manufacturer described developing smaller, lower-priced formats specifically for school food and scaling only after understanding price, nutrition requirements and demand. Smaller producers can face the additional costs of institutional food-safety systems and distribution.

Conversely, Ontario school-food buyers described asking suppliers to identify products that meet Student Nutrition Program criteria, shifting screening from time-poor local volunteers to suppliers. Balanced's U.S. directory illustrates searchable institutional products with allergen and school-use filters.[98]

Product marketing and dietary guidance use different tests. Canadian protein claims depend on protein-quality ratings and specified food quantities; current rules permit either FO-1/PER or PDCAAS. Food Guide alignment alone does not establish eligibility for a protein claim. Whether these methods and thresholds create an avoidable disadvantage for whole pulses requires food-specific assessment.[99]

> *"In my experience, student acceptance is often less of a barrier than adults initially assume. The harder questions tend to come afterward: whether the products are affordable, available through existing distributors, easy to prepare, and compatible with school food procurement systems."*
>
> – **Jason Fonger**, school workshop facilitator

Existing market support also affects which products are familiar and easy to buy. Ontario's dairy-sector school program provides promotional material and purchase-linked incentives, while a Student Nutrition Ontario partnership offers milk rebates. These arrangements can reduce buyer costs but are not equivalent to evidence that dairy purchases displaced plant alternatives. They illustrate why similarly convenient, transparent purchasing pathways for diverse Food Guide proteins are worth examining.[100]

6.3.2 | Make nutrition part of specifications, contracts and purchasing power

> *"Menu before procurement always."*
>
> – **Wendy Smith**, MEALsource

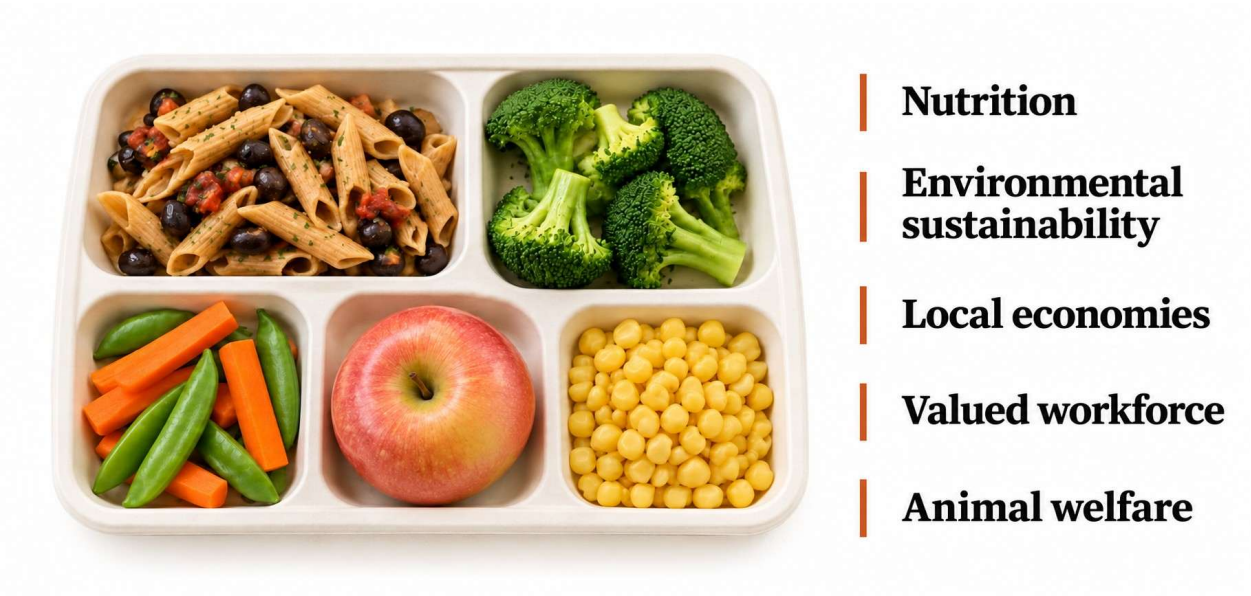
A list of individually approved products does not guarantee a Food Guide-aligned menu. The menu should specify the required mix of vegetables and fruit, whole grains and varied proteins, with attention to sodium, sugars and saturated fat. Qualified menu review then identifies products and performance requirements for buyers.[101]

An institutional procurement practitioner located the intervention before tendering: buyers need to decide what they want the menu to achieve, then evaluate bids and delivery against those requirements. A nutritional preference in a tender has little force if it is neither scored nor checked.[102]

This is more than a preference statement. Buying organizations can specify products, make expected volumes credible, compare supplier bids on more than unit price, negotiate reformulation and measure delivery against contract terms.

One Canadian school-food purchasing organization reported direct-manufacturer prices 20–30% lower than distributor offers in some arrangements and described requesting bread with less sugar, more fibre and less sodium. These are practitioner-reported examples, not typical savings across the sector.

FIGURE 6.5 Enhancing purchasing criteria beyond price can shift plates



Source: Adapted from Good Food Purchasing Program (2024)

New York City illustrates a broader public purchasing framework spanning nutrition, local economies, sustainability, labour and transparency. Its food-policy office reports roughly US$660 million in annual institutional food spending and more than 220 million meals and snacks across agencies, with plant-protein purchases more than doubling from FY2019 to FY2023. These figures are for the wider city food system, not school meals alone, and do not measure dietary intake.[103]

A Canadian hospital study illustrates both the opportunity and the need for full-menu review. Fully plant-based first-choice lunch and dinner dishes increased from 0% to 39%, and estimated menu-related emissions fell 39%. Fibre and iron increased, but sodium also rose. Overall patient experience and plate waste did not change significantly. The process combined recipe development, nutritional assessment, operational testing and repeated feedback: useful implementation lessons for schools, not proof of the same outcomes in children.[104]

Commercial incentives warrant scrutiny without assuming that all for-profit provision is inferior. Rebates, preferred-supplier terms and price-dominant tenders may shape the product offer; several major companies did not take part in the study's interviews, leaving only a partial view of these arrangements. Transparent specifications and supplier reporting are more defensible responses than unsupported claims about particular firms.[105]

6.3.3 | Coordinate demand and record whether the food mix changes

Coordinated demand can create leverage without a nationally standardized menu. Buyers may share nutritional specifications, identify credible aggregate volumes and allow suppliers to adjust formulation, pack size, distribution and prices. The purchasing model determines where that leverage lies, whether through a lead agency, distributor, central kitchen, cooperative group or direct producer relationship.

FIGURE 6.6 Four procurement models and where purchasing leverage sits[106]

PRIME VENDOR	NOT-FOR-PROFIT GROUP PURCHASING	FOOD HUBS	ORGANIZATION-LED TENDER
Partner with one distributor for all needs	Aggregates Member volumes for competitive bids	Collaboration among like-minded organizations	Time-intensive & higher compliance risk
Strong relationship & reliable service	Offers Member support, contract mgmt. & legislative compliance	Promotes community benefit & economies of scale	Hard to know what is in the market from just one viewpoint
Higher pricing may increase over time	Consistent service & pricing	Best for fresh / local products	Can hire purchasing professional to meet your specific needs
Limited to product offering of the supply partner	May include multiple vendors		

Models can be combined. Adapted from Wendy Smith's Coalition for Healthy School Food presentation, November 2025.

Ontario's 2025–27 action plan includes $300,000 to develop group purchasing and $250,000 for a digital/local food-audit tool. Nova Scotia's Station Food Hub illustrates how processing and packaging can make local apples practical for institutions. New Brunswick's Feed NB coordinates breakfast supply, while island schools outside some routes received direct support for local arrangements. The same procurement objective therefore calls for different logistics in different places.[107,108]

Shared infrastructure can widen the supplier base, not just consolidate orders. In *A recipe for competition*, the Competition Bureau identifies shared kitchens and food hubs as ways to reduce the equipment, start-up and compliance burdens facing smaller food businesses. It recommends harmonized rules, clearer facility and tenant responsibilities, and regulatory testing. For school procurement, the implication is to pair access to facilities with workable contracts and food specifications, rather than assume a hub alone will deliver better or cheaper meals.[109]

Procurement also affects whose suppliers can participate. Community partners have requested contract access for Black farmers and food businesses, including practical support to meet volume, insurance and procurement requirements (Section 6.5). Supplier diversity needs a pathway into tenders and contracts, not simply a statement of intent.[110]

Data systems should begin where product information already resides. Distributor movement reports and purchasing records can track product categories, quantities, nutritional attributes and origin, subject to consistent definitions. B.C.'s guidance encourages districts to work toward 30% of food spending on B.C. products, with voluntary tracking. Comparable food-quality categories remain to be established. Purchases do not equal foods served or eaten; food donated or sold through fundraising also requires separate records (Section 6.2).[111]

WHAT CAN HELP

- Make nutritional specifications part of tenders, supplier scoring, contract terms and product substitutions.
- Create searchable screened catalogues that identify food categories, allergens and usable pack sizes.
- Coordinate credible volumes while preserving local menus and access for diverse suppliers.
- Record categories and quantities purchased, donated and sold, separate from what is served or consumed.

Resources: Nourish values-based procurement guide | Balanced institutional product directory | NYC Good Food Purchasing

6.4 Plate: matching people, infrastructure and delivery to the menu

THREE KEY FINDINGS

1. **A healthier menu is only achievable when schools have the people, time and infrastructure to execute it.** Staffing, skills, storage, preparation space and equipment determine what can actually be produced.
2. **Quality can weaken between the menu and the student.** Transport, holding, reheating, service conditions and eating time can change the appeal and quality of the meal that was planned.
3. **Provision does not guarantee consumption.** Taste, familiarity, repeated exposure, choice and student feedback shape what children eat; food learning works best when connected to foods students actually encounter.

6.4.1 | Give staff the time and skills to deliver healthier menus

School food depends on workers who procure, prepare, serve, supervise and adapt meals. Principals and volunteers often absorb grants, purchasing, food preparation and troubleshooting alongside other responsibilities. One Ontario lead agency described five paid staff supporting 163 schools and roughly 1,500 volunteers. (Section 6.1).

Nunavut's action plan makes a related system-level point: without coordination, nutrition and capital-project expertise, even the rollout of funding may be limited. These posts were still unfilled in 2024/25, when Year 1 funding was carried forward. The account illustrates implementation capacity as a prerequisite, not an alternative, to adequate funding.[112]

FIGURE 6.7 Building culinary skills for healthier institutional menus



Chef Amy Symington leads a Forward Food training session. Forward Food provides free, hands-on culinary training, recipes and menu-development support to help institutional food-service teams prepare more plant-based meals.

> *"Even if [funding] was raised to twenty-five or thirty cents, until you can have some staff that can dedicate time to the program, schools are going to do what's easy for them."*
>
> – **Director**, school food delivery agency

Paid coordination and accessible nutrition expertise make improvement more dependable. In Alberta's APPLE Schools, reported adherence to nutrition guidance declined during years of reduced intervention intensity and later improved. That pattern is consistent with the importance of ongoing staffing and support, but the observational comparison does not isolate staffing as the cause.[113]

Culinary training matters only when kitchens can apply it. Forward Food pairs institutional recipes and menu development with practice in preparing lentils, tofu and tempeh.[114]

The SPHERU guide reports that cooks in a 12-school development project wanted training in menu planning, commercial cooking, budgeting and kitchen management, yet none had professional-development time in their contracts. Training therefore needs paid time and operational support, not simply an available resource.[83]

6.4.2 | Match equipment and service models to the intended menu

In Blais et al.'s voluntary provider survey, nearly 30% reported missing needed infrastructure. About half of breakfast providers and 40% of lunch providers reported foods

requiring heating or preparation at school. Storage, refrigeration, preparation surfaces, food-safe service areas and reliable transport can constrain choices as much as cooking equipment.[115]

FIGURE 6.8 "Kitchen-lite" capacity ladder for Food Guide-aligned school foods



Not every school needs a full commercial kitchen. The required preparation and service capacity depends on the menu, volume, workforce and delivery model. For larger treatment of planning guidance, see Alaniz-Salinas et al. (2025), Operations & Costing Guide.

> *"Very few schools have salad bars, simply because of infrastructure and capacity. You don't just need to have one, someone has to oversee it."*
>
> **– Nonprofit executive focused on student nutrition programs**

Not every school needs a commercial kitchen. A school assembling cold foods needs different capacity than a kitchen making cooked mixed dishes or supplying several schools. Start with the intended menu and service volume, then identify the smallest asset investment that unlocks it: refrigeration for produce, preparation space for whole-grain and pulse dishes, or cooking and holding equipment for hot meals. Staff, maintenance and food-safety requirements must accompany that equipment.

Production location is a quality decision. Nova Scotia reported that offsite preparation posed difficulties with temperature and palatability, prompting changes toward onsite models where feasible and more testing with kitchen staff and students. Hubs and caterers can provide preparation scale, but receiving schools still need serving, storage, cleanup and dietary accommodation. New Brunswick's breakfast system shows the distinction: Feed NB distributes food while schools and local partners prepare or serve it.[116,117]

6.4.3 | Make healthier provision appealing, familiar and easy to eat

A nutritious item on a menu is not an item eaten. Small Canadian studies have documented confusion about plant proteins and whole grains; one Saskatchewan pulse-education pilot increased knowledge without a statistically significant increase in pulse consumption. Information alone is therefore not an adequate food-quality intervention. It should accompany changes to the actual food offer.[118]

> *"I actively see that families are learning for the first time and find it quite surprising, but because it is coming from the Food Guide they are open to considering the changes. They especially ask how they bring more plant protein sources to their diet."*
>
> – **Dr. Rikin Patel**, pediatrician

Programs can introduce foods through repeated tasting, appealing preparation and familiar dishes. Practitioners described starting with small tastings, testing recipes with students, then incorporating accepted foods into ordinary rotations. Adding lentils to chili, using whole-grain bread or preparing blended pulse dishes can change composition without requiring students to accept an entirely unfamiliar meal. Vancouver's LunchLAB combines chefs, edible educators and student participation in growing, preparing and serving food.

A teacher in Ireland uses Canada's Food Guide as the foundation for practical produce, whole-grain and pulse activities. In one week, students logged 3,427 self-recorded healthy choices; an informal follow-up found 53% of 236 children said families participated at home. These are illustrative practitioner reports, not controlled evidence of sustained intake changes.[119]

FIGURE 6.9 Closing the gaps with CFG abroad



Irish primary school teacher and nutritionist Shaun Conaghan uses Canada's Food Guide at St David's Boys' National School in Ireland as his education foundation before giving them hands-on experience.

Defaults, placement and eating conditions influence whether improvements reach students. One English secondary-school intervention increased selection of designated plant-based items from 1.4% to 3.0%, with 2.2% at follow-up. Selection is not consumption. In a randomized crossover trial with 38 children at a U.S. summer camp, ten rather than twenty seated minutes reduced the proportion of vegetables eaten by 14.1 percentage points. Nova Scotia's policy specifies at least 20 seated minutes; queueing and collecting food should not absorb that time.[120,121]

These studies assess different steps: learning about a food, choosing it and eating it. Food literacy works alongside affordable access, appealing preparation and sufficient eating time; knowledge gains alone do not establish improved intake.[118,120,121]

Student feedback should distinguish unfamiliarity from poor temperature, unsuitable portions or rushed service and include nonparticipants.

Learning materials also need attention: the study's review of selected TeachNutrition.ca resources found broad Food Guide alignment but less emphasis on plant proteins and fortified plant beverages. Boards should assess scientific accuracy, completeness, sponsorship and cultural inclusion across materials, whether industry-funded or advocacy-produced. Section 6.5 examines participation and whose preferences shape provision.[122,123]

WHAT CAN HELP

- Fund dedicated staffing, nutrition support and protected time for culinary training and continuous improvement.
- Purchase infrastructure only after defining the menu, preparation and service model it must enable.
- Test recipes through transport, service and student experience, not just kitchen preparation.
- Pair new foods with repeat exposure, voluntary tasting, practical food learning, adequate time to eat and meaningful feedback.
- Vet external teaching materials for accuracy, completeness, sponsorship and cultural inclusion.

Resources: Forward Food institutional training | Greener by Default resources | SPHERU Operations & Costing Guide

6.5 Equity: who can participate, whose knowledge counts and who benefits

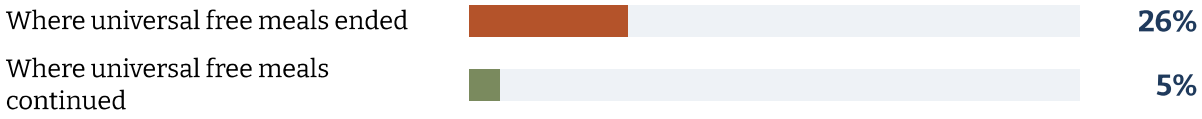
THREE KEY FINDINGS

1. **Universal eligibility does not guarantee equitable participation.** Price, stigma, communication, cultural suitability and service design can still determine who uses a program.
2. **Community expertise does not consistently shape everyday decisions.** Students, families, Black-led organizations and other communities need routes to influence menus, procurement and service, not only opportunities to be consulted.
3. **Comparable quality requires different resources in different places.** Freight, staffing, infrastructure and supplier access vary, while Indigenous food systems require distinct authority and evaluation rather than ordinary stakeholder consultation.

6.5.1 | Remove the practical barriers behind nominal eligibility

Universal eligibility is different from free provision or welcoming participation. In Blais et al.'s voluntary sample, 97% of providers reported that all students were eligible, sometimes with conditions, but only 55% of lunch providers reported meals at no cost. These figures describe surveyed providers, not national proportions of all school lunches.

COHEN ET AL. (2025) School food authorities reporting increased stigma for low-income students



Cross-sectional survey of 941 authorities across eight U.S. states, spring 2023; not a direct measure of students' experiences. Source: Cohen et al. (2025).[124]

Evidence is stronger that universal free meals increase lunch participation than that they eliminate stigma in every setting. A 2024 systematic review found increased participation with moderate certainty based on a small number of studies. In an eight-state U.S. survey, more school food authorities reported increased stigma where universal free meals ended. The study records operators' perceptions, not direct accounts from students.[124,125]

Fees are only one obstacle. An Ontario researcher described families who assumed a program was intended solely for lower-income students, and children who worried that joining would deprive others. Clear communication, appealing and culturally suitable options, respectful service and convenient access all affect who participates. Plate-level eating conditions are addressed in Section 6.4.

6.5.2 | Give communities influence over everyday menus

Cultural relevance is part of nutrition quality. An Ontario voluntary survey of 314 English-language public-school principals found that 83% of respondents to the cultural-food question served Indigenous or culturally specific foods not at all or only occasionally; 8% reported doing so regularly or consistently. The survey did not define cultural relevance, so it cannot establish national prevalence. Respondents identified sourcing, budgets and available products as barriers.

Authenticity and acceptance require more than adding a symbolic menu item. Researchers heard parents offer recipes and cooking help while worrying that unfamiliar dishes would not be prepared well. A University of Guelph child-care centre described asking families for favourite recipes and adapting menus as its community changed. New Brunswick stakeholders described Black, Acadian and Afro-Indigenous food traditions, including fibre-rich plant-forward dishes, as sources of expertise underrepresented in current provision.[126]

> *"What we're seeing is not just a gap in curriculum, it's a gap in whose knowledge is being recognized and included in the system."*
>
> – **Kayla Breelove**, clinical traumatologist, New Brunswick

Invitations to participate are insufficient if parents cannot afford the time, do not expect to be heard or cannot see decisions change.

Build ongoing routes for students, families and trusted organizations to influence recipes, procurement and service, with compensation where participation requires labour. Black-led and other community food organizations seek decision-making and supplier access as well as recognition.

FIGURE 6.10 Adapting the CFG plate visual for different cultural foods



Illustrative African-heritage, South Asian and Chinese meals inspired by the Food Guide plate. IFFS mock-ups, not official Health Canada adaptations or nutritionally assessed portions.

6.5.3 | Resource comparable quality while respecting distinct authority

SPOTLIGHT

Indigenous authority and the legacy of nutrition experiments

Distinct Indigenous-led systems fall beyond this report's scope: Blais's baseline excluded programs exclusively serving Indigenous populations and those in the territories, and further analysis should be Indigenous-led. Between 1942 and 1952, Canadian nutrition researchers working with federal departments conducted experiments involving malnourished Indigenous people, including children in six residential schools, without informed consent.[127] This history underscores the importance of consent and self-determination. Health Canada's 2025 review identifies limited resources reflecting current guidance and support for community-led development.[127] Guidance, program decisions and evaluation require Indigenous authority, not ordinary stakeholder consultation.

Identical spending per student cannot produce identical service conditions. Northern freight, staffing, kitchen capacity, suppliers and cultural-food access change the resources required. B.C. includes rural and equity factors in funding;[128] other jurisdictions invest in kitchens, coordinators and community production. Sections 6.1 and 6.4 trace the delivery costs behind this equity question.[129]

Manitoba's action plan reports that some schools could not prepare and serve food until they installed infrastructure needed to meet public-health requirements. Higher-need schools required additional support. Equal per-student allocations would not, by themselves, give schools with different starting conditions equal capacity to provide meals.[129]

The Black School Food Working Group's February 2026 Senate submission calls for accessible funding for Black-led organizations, representation in governance, procurement access for Black farmers and food businesses, and Black-led research and evaluation. These are stakeholder proposals.[130,131]

Equity monitoring should capture availability, participation, suitability, food quality and student experience, including nonparticipants. It should also record whose knowledge affects decisions. Indigenous-led evaluation requires separate governance arrangements rather than being subsumed into general provincial reporting (Section 6.2).

WHAT CAN HELP

- Remove price, stigma, communication and food-suitability barriers to participation.
- Provide resources reflecting actual delivery costs and routes for community-led suppliers and organizations.
- Compensate and act on community and student input, including from nonparticipants.
- Use disaggregated, community-appropriate evaluation; preserve distinct Indigenous governance and consent.

Resources: SPHERU Needs Assessment & Engagement Guide | Coalition for Healthy School Food

6.6 Coordination: connecting expertise, decisions and shared practice

THREE KEY FINDINGS

1. **No single actor controls the route from policy to plate.** Governments, boards, health professionals, delivery agencies, buyers, suppliers and schools control different decisions, creating predictable handoff failures.
2. **Useful solutions do not spread or survive reliably.** Supplier contacts, recipes, tools and operating knowledge can remain local or disappear when individual champions leave.
3. **Durable coordination requires funded infrastructure, not parallel systems.** Existing government, procurement, health and civil-society structures can carry shared tools and follow-through when responsibilities are assigned and maintained, without displacing public accountability or Indigenous authority.

6.6.1 | Connect people who control different parts of the same decision

No single organization controls the entire route from food policy to the plate. Education ministries fund or oversee programs, health professionals interpret nutrition standards, agriculture partners connect suppliers, boards manage buildings and staffing, purchasers set orders, and cooks and students determine whether a meal works. A menu change can fail simply because the dietitian, buyer, distributor and receiving school never solve the implementation problem together.

Government must retain responsibility for standards, funding and oversight. Networks can connect the people needed to carry them out. An Ontario public-health practitioner described weak connections between food-program funding, health expertise and facilities held in different ministries. B.C.'s action plan has more explicit relationships among education, health, agriculture and infrastructure, district coordinators and community partners. Toronto's Joint Food Committee offers a local example of cross-actor problem solving. These structures differ, but each creates a route from an identified problem to a decision.[132]

Coordination therefore needs assigned roles and follow-through, not a new layer of vague consultation. Network leadership includes identifying shared work, connecting participants, convening productive discussion and tracking the decisions that follow. None of these functions transfers statutory authority away from governments or Indigenous governing bodies.

6.6.2 | Make expertise, relationships and tools reusable

Programs repeatedly encounter similar questions about product screening, suppliers, recipes, staffing and service. One Ontario agency described discovering and using a purchasing membership that others had overlooked; after sharing it, another agency adopted the resource. A school-food coordinator's request for a local bakery reached an institutional buyer, which then included the supplier in a successful tender. Coordination converted an isolated need into purchasing access.

Information should be both findable and usable. A maintained resource hub can hold tested recipes, tender language, costing templates and nutrition-screening tools; a current relationship map can show which agencies have purchasing, culinary, evaluation or community expertise. A Black School Food Working Group representative described the difficulty of mapping its growing relationships and identifying missing connections. A static national diagram cannot replace a maintained operational directory.

Shared resources need people who update them and help others apply them. Coalition exchanges, Farm to Cafeteria Canada's school-food network and SPHERU guides offer foundations. Peer forums can show how practices work, but adoption still depends on cost, authority and staff time. Network performance should be assessed through problems resolved, tools used and joint decisions implemented rather than attendance or membership totals.[133]

6.6.3 | Use existing government systems rather than duplicate them

Connect school demand to domestic capacity. The National Food Security Strategy aims to increase the domestically produced share of Food Guide-based healthy food available to Canadians from 75% to 85% by 2032. It identifies reliance on imported preserved fruit and vegetables as a processing gap. Predictable school demand can support Canadian growing, processing and distribution capacity, helping replace imports where suitable domestic supply can expand.[134]

Make the Buy Canadian policy support nutritious food. Food purchasing under the Buy Canadian policy should pair Canadian-origin objectives with Food Guide-aligned nutrition requirements. Promotional criteria and purchasing specifications should support affordable vegetables, fruit, whole grains and diverse protein foods, not treat Canadian origin alone as a marker of nutritional quality.

Capture more value after the farm gate. EY's analysis for Protein Industries Canada estimates that processing 10% of raw crop exports domestically could add up to $5.4 billion to GDP. This is a broader processing scenario, not an NSFP impact estimate. Its recommendation for commercial procurement pilots supports testing school demand as one route to market for suitable Canadian food products.[135]

Make the connection operational. The Food-Link Fund is intended to support regional storage, processing, distribution and market connections. School buyers can specify foods, formats and volumes; agriculture and infrastructure partners can connect those needs to suppliers and shared facilities. The aim should be reliable, affordable nutritious food for schools and other buyers, including independent retailers. Track delivered prices, supply reliability, import replacement and food quality separately from Canadian origin.[57]

Health Canada, PHAC and the Joint Consortium for School Health hold related roles in dietary guidance, health promotion and measurement. The objective is to connect relevant responsibilities, not expand the school food mandate without funding.

Nourish Leadership and Buyers for Climate Action provide institutional procurement tools that could be adapted to school nutritional criteria and supplier contracts (Section 6.3). Existing provincial school-food coordinators, purchasing organizations and university partnerships can support common measures without requiring every school to build its own analytic system (Section 6.2). A limited number of funded, accountable coordination roles can make these connections sustainable.

The 2027 bilateral renewal can formalize shared quality measures and responsibilities; useful collaboration, supplier screening and menu improvements need not wait. Section 7 identifies priority actions, and Appendix E provides the fuller actor-specific registry.

WHAT CAN HELP

- Fund named network leadership to convene the right actors and carry decisions through implementation.
- Maintain shared resource hubs, relationship maps, tested tools and access to expertise.
- Create standing government and civil-society channels with responsibilities, deliverables and clear follow-up.

Resources: Impact Networks | Farm to Cafeteria Canada | Coalition for Healthy School Food

TABLE 6.3 Section 6 synthesis: why alignment breaks between policy and plate

AREA	MAIN FINDING / GAP MECHANISM	EVIDENCE BASE	LINKED RECOMMENDATIONS
Funding	Incomplete or unpredictable funding constrains meal balance and the work needed to improve it.	Coalition median; full costing; NS continuity; NWT eligible costs[12,83,84,85]	7.1 Fund the full cost of quality
Policy	Governance, K-12 translation, verification and M&E remain uneven; product approval is not menu alignment.	Bilateral clause 6.2; Act section 8; Germany/PEI distinctions[17,21,93,94]	7.2 Quality and measurement; 7.4 Food Guide; 7.6 Review and follow-up
Procurement	Priority foods can be hard to find and specify. Coordinated demand shapes supply. Donations and commercial terms also influence what reaches menus.	Practitioner mechanism; full-menu hospital test; shared-infrastructure barriers; protein-claim rules[99,102,104,109]	7.5 Values-based procurement; 7.8 Policy alignment
Plate capacity	Staff time, skills, facilities and delivery conditions determine which menus are executable.	SPHERU training; implementation review; Nunavut implementation capacity[70,83,112]	7.1 Fund the full cost of quality
Food literacy & engagement	Awareness, familiarity, taste, choice architecture, time and feedback affect different outcomes.	Knowledge, selection and consumption measure different steps[118,120,121]	7.7 Food literacy and student participation
Equity	Universal access reduces barriers, but participation, influence and delivery capacity remain unequal.	Unequal starting capacity; differentiated allocations; community testimony[128,129,131]	Cross-cutting across 7.1–7.8
Coordination	Expertise and resources need network leadership, maintained tools and channels that connect shared work with decisions.	Named ministry roles; nutritious domestic demand; processing and distribution connections[57,128,134,135]	7.3 Coordination architecture; 7.8 Policy alignment

7. Top Recommendations

Funding and stronger policy determine what programs can provide and the quality expected. The first priorities are to fund delivery, define and measure quality, and resource the coordination architecture that puts these commitments into practice.

The eight actions should advance together, not wait for one another or for the 2027 renewal. Equity should shape each, with meaningful community participation, Black-led influence and distinct Indigenous authority. **Appendix E** sets out responsibilities and implementation routes for governments and other actors.

TABLE 7.1 Recommendations at a glance

RECOMMENDATION	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMING
7.1 Fund the full cost of quality	Federal, provincial and territorial governments	Now; renewed funding
7.2 Define and measure food quality and outcomes now	ESDC; Health Canada; provinces and territories	Begin now; formalize in 2027
7.3 Fund coordination architecture and network leadership	ESDC; provinces and territories; delivery and civil-society networks	Start now; sustain roles and tools
7.4 Make the Food Guide clear, inclusive and practical for schools	Health Canada; PHAC; provinces and territories	Research and pilots now
7.5 Put nutrition into purchasing and contracts	Provinces, territories and public purchasers	Now; procurement cycles
7.6 Review menus and act on the findings	Provinces, territories; boards and providers	Now; periodic review
7.7 Make food literacy and student participation part of school food	Education partners, providers and communities	Now; ongoing delivery
7.8 Connect school food with Canada's food, health and climate priorities	ESDC; AAFC; PHAC/JCSH; public purchasers	Now; align implementation

7.1 Fund the full cost of quality

Federal, provincial and territorial governments should fund the full cost of nutritious school food and a phased expansion to universal, free provision for every student who wants it. Budgets need to cover food, paid delivery staff, nutrition and culinary expertise, equipment, transport, training and dedicated evaluation. Increase funding as participation and costs grow, supporting the Coalition for Healthy School Food's call for $400 million annually in federal investment and another infrastructure funding round.[136]

Funding should be adequate, predictable and flexible. Multi-year allocations should sustain staff and equipment, while reflecting differences in geography, food prices, school size and existing facilities. Capital investment should follow the intended menu and service model, including installation, maintenance and operating costs. Accessible funding for community-led providers should support comparable quality without requiring every program to use the same delivery model. Public funding should reduce dependence on donations and fundraising so these sources can supplement provision without determining what students are served.

7.2 Define and measure food quality and outcomes now

Governments should define the quality expected from publicly funded school food and measure whether it is delivered. ESDC, Health Canada and provinces and territories should agree to practical Food Guide-based expectations for meals, snacks and menu cycles, with common quality and outcome measures. Cover vegetables and fruits, whole grains, protein sources, beverages and foods or nutrients to limit. Data collection should begin now. Establish the baseline while improving provision, then use findings to refine expectations and the 2027 agreements.

Fund monitoring and evaluation that programs can sustain. Reuse records held by suppliers, boards and delivery agencies, and resource the work needed to capture substitutions, service and waste. Complement routine monitoring with process evaluation and periodic assessment of consumption, nutritional benefit and who participates. Several practitioners advised allowing about two years to establish a usable baseline, not waiting two years to begin improvement. Test brief dietary measures for their intended populations and purposes. The practical guidance in 7.4 and review responsibilities in 7.6 support implementation; **Appendix E** specifies actor-level actions.

7.3 Fund coordination architecture and network leadership

Make coordination an immediate implementation priority because the other improvements depend on connecting people, resources and decisions. Adequate funding and clear quality requirements come first; coordination helps put them into practice. ESDC and provincial and territorial governments should fund standing cross-ministerial arrangements and partnerships with delivery organizations, public health and civil-society networks, including the Coalition for Healthy School Food. Connect shared priorities with practical joint work and give implementation problems a route to people able to act. The organizational form can differ; responsibilities and connections need to be clear.

Resource the leadership and tools that make collaboration work. Fund capacity to catalyze shared work, weave relationships, convene and facilitate participants, and coordinate follow-through. Equip existing networks with maintained resource hubs, relationship maps and regular communication channels within and between government and civil society. Share tested menus and adaptable templates for expansion, staff retention and resource sharing, with practical help using them.

Assign responsibility for upkeep and support community participation. Assess whether connections help resolve problems, support joint initiatives and improve provision, not just whether membership or meeting counts increase.

7.4 Make the Food Guide clear, inclusive and practical for schools

Health Canada should test and strengthen understanding of the Food Guide. Conduct recurring, direct comprehension research with students, families and school staff through the Evidence Review Cycle, testing practical understanding of plant proteins, whole grains and meal composition. Launch and evaluate practical public education on choosing plant proteins more often, connecting messages to affordable foods and familiar recipes. Work with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and provincial education and public-health partners to increase use of the educator toolkit through school networks and professional learning, and develop suitable resources for secondary students.[137]

Make cultural inclusion and school use explicit in the resources. Co-develop culturally varied plate images for translated guides, and invite racialized and newcomer communities to contribute recipes for adaptation, testing and inclusion in Food Guide Kitchen, with compensation and credit. Pilot a school-use version of the three-day meal plan with age-appropriate portion ranges, scaled recipes, substitutions and preparation guidance. Provinces and territories should use these tools to establish coherent nutrition expectations across food served, sold, catered, donated and used in recurring fundraising, with exceptions defined explicitly. Indigenous food guidance must remain Indigenous-led.[138]

7.5 Put nutrition into purchasing and contracts

Provinces, territories and public purchasers should put nutrition into purchasing decisions. Menu and Food Guide criteria should enter specifications, bid evaluation and contracts alongside price, service, Canadian or local sourcing and environmental objectives. Make rebates, fees, substitutions and other commercial terms transparent. Origin and nutrition should be assessed together, so domestic purchasing supports the foods programs need.

Make suitable foods easier to find and supply. Maintain screened catalogues with clear food categories and usable product information; connect menus with shared specifications, credible volumes and supplier-development support. Keep routes open to smaller, local, Black-owned and culturally relevant suppliers, with Indigenous procurement governed through distinct arrangements. Require usable purchasing records. Complement purchasing records with product and quantity data for donated food and fundraising sales, keeping purchases distinct from food served and consumed. Section 6.3's healthcare examples and the partnerships in 7.8 provide practical starting points.

7.6 Review menus and act on the findings

Provinces and territories should name who reviews food provision and follows up. Place responsibility above individual schools, with qualified nutrition expertise, authority and resources to assess menus and actual service. Reviews should lead to practical support, corrections and follow-up, not end with a score. Measurement under 7.2 establishes what is happening; this recommendation establishes responsibility to respond.

Make review visible and workable across delivery models. Support publication of planned menus, eating-time information and aggregate findings, and apply equivalent quality and reporting expectations to public, nonprofit and commercial providers. Use complete menu-cycle reviews, sampling or periodic assessments as appropriate. Establish a defined review cadence for complete menu cycles and proportionate service checks, with additional review when menus, providers, contracts or delivery models materially change. Test independent accreditation or external menu assessment across different provincial arrangements, with clear criteria, funded review and links to public oversight. Families and students need a route to raise concerns and see what changes.

7.7 Make food literacy and student participation part of school food

Education ministries, boards and delivery organizations should connect food learning with meals students encounter. Resource repeated voluntary tasting and hands-on growing, cooking and serving, with educators and food-service teams working together. Protect time for training and practical food-focused communication. Review school-facing materials, including industry-funded and other external resources, before use for scientific accuracy, completeness, Food Guide alignment, sponsorship and conflicts of interest, commercial promotion, age appropriateness and cultural inclusion.

Give students time and influence. Protect adequate seated eating time, offer appealing Food Guide-aligned choices and test presentation and defaults while preserving choice. Feedback should change recipes and service, drawing on students who participate and those who do not. Assess participation, consumption and waste through the approach in 7.2 rather than treating satisfaction or selection as the whole result. Include families and communities through accessible, culturally relevant engagement, and design access and payment arrangements to minimize stigma.

7.8 Connect school food with Canada's food, health and climate priorities

Use school demand to support Canadian self-sufficiency and affordable nutritious food. ESDC, AAFC and provincial partners should connect school-menu needs and purchasing forecasts with Canadian producers, processors, shared kitchens and food hubs.

Food purchasing under the Buy Canadian policy should include Food Guide-aligned nutrition requirements alongside domestic-origin objectives. Pilot contracts should specify nutrition, usable formats, price and supply reliability, while allowing participation by smaller and community-led suppliers. Evaluate whether the arrangements replace imports, improve school-food affordability and strengthen access to vegetables, fruit, whole grains and diverse proteins.[57,109,134,135]

Use existing purchasing and school-health systems to support implementation. Adapt Buyers for Climate Action's procurement tools and draw on healthcare experience through Nourish, institutional purchasers and PEACH Health Ontario. PHAC, the Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH) and research partners should connect school-food indicators to established school-health planning and surveys, with dietary measures tested for their intended use. A shared implementation plan should name responsible organizations, deliverables and timelines, so these connections become routine rather than depend on individual projects.[139]

What the 2027 agreements should secure

Work should begin now. The 2027 agreements should secure: adequate, predictable and flexible funding; practical definitions of nutritional quality and intended outcomes; funded baseline collection and continuing monitoring; and named responsibility for review and follow-up. They should also resource coordination architecture and network leadership, including cross-ministerial and civil-society partnerships, shared tools and communication channels. Nutrition criteria should enter publicly funded purchasing, with support for food learning, public reporting and student and community participation.

Common expectations can continue to allow for different menus, recipes and delivery models. Health Canada's guidance, comprehension research and communications can advance before renewal, alongside practical improvements by provinces, territories and delivery organizations. **Appendix E** sets out specific recommendations by stakeholder group.

8. Conclusion

The National School Food Program gives Canada a direct opportunity to improve children's dietary patterns at scale: governments can help shape the food provided, not simply encourage families to make different choices. With diet-related risks emerging early in life, its potential extends beyond relieving hunger. It can make nutritious, culturally meaningful meals and practical food learning a dependable part of childhood.

Realizing that potential requires the whole Food Guide. Stakeholder interviews and the larger peer-reviewed and grey report research reflect consensus that increasing students' access to and consumption of vegetables and fruits remain essential. Whole grains and protein diversification need comparable attention.

Plant-protein foods accounted for only 2–5% of reported menu offerings in the pre-NSFP sample, measured in reference amounts. Broader dietary change will not necessarily close that gap: in Canadian supply data from 1960 to 2020, per-capita consumption of livestock-derived foods held roughly steady as poultry replaced beef. What replaces existing foods matters as much as what is reduced.[140]

Adequate, predictable public funding comes first. Donations and fundraising can supplement provision, but should not determine whether a program can offer a balanced meal. Funding must cover the people, skills and infrastructure that turn ingredients into food children can enjoy. The 2027 agreements should pair that capacity with common quality measures and practical menu expectations, reducing avoidable variation while preserving cultural relevance, local flexibility and Indigenous decision-making. Measurement should guide improvement, not merely document under-resourcing.

Values-based procurement connects these commitments to the market. Tools already developed for Canadian healthcare show how environmental and other public objectives can enter specifications, contracts and purchasing decisions. Combined with credible demand and delivery capacity, this approach can give suppliers reasons to offer the foods programs need, rather than leave individual schools to work around existing catalogues.[141]

The resulting public value can extend beyond the meal. Recurring purchases of suitable Canadian-grown pulses, grains and produce can support domestic processors and regional supply chains, connecting school nutrition with the National Food Security Strategy and climate objectives. Affordable meals can relieve family budgets; well-designed menus can reduce environmental impacts and offer opportunities for savings. Those gains depend on the foods substituted, sourcing and full delivery costs. They are reasons to invest in capable programs, not reasons to assume quality can be delivered more cheaply everywhere.[142]

Visible progress can also help change spread. Dynamic-norm research suggests that seeing a practice becoming more common can encourage adoption, although effects vary by setting.

For school food, this suggests making workable change tangible: appealing meals students can try, results communities can see, and practical experience other programs can use. Networks such as the Coalition for Healthy School Food can connect these efforts, helping local learning become shared capacity rather than isolated success.[143]

The report concludes with a "*Hindsight 2037*" exercise, exploring what could follow if these conditions came together, as a way to examine the choices needed now for nourishing school food to become an ordinary, sustained part of Canadian life.

9. Epilogue: Hindsight 2037 | How Canada made Food Guide-aligned school food routine

An illustrative future scenario, not a prediction. Policies and evidence established by October 2026 are historical starting points. Subsequent developments are imagined.

2037: What success looked like

The year is 2037. Students who want school food have dependable access to nutritious meals without having to demonstrate need or pay to participate. Public menus, quality reviews and sampled dietary assessments show what schools plan, buy and serve, and what students eat. Access has expanded alongside nutritional quality rather than being treated as its substitute. Gaps between communities have narrowed, even though the cost of delivering comparable quality still differs.

Meals now routinely include vegetables and fruits, whole grains and varied protein foods. Beans, lentils, tofu and other plant proteins feature much more often than in the pre-program baseline. Water is the default drink, and unsweetened fortified soy beverages sit alongside suitable dairy and other options. Menu cycles, not rigid proportions imposed on every dish, translate Canada's Food Guide into appealing, nutritionally adequate meals.[144] Students and communities help shape recipes, cultural relevance, service and food learning. Reviews also assess sodium, free sugars and saturated fat, rather than treating protein diversification or fibre as the only goals.

What did not happen

Canada did not impose one national menu, supplier or kitchen model, and animal-source foods did not disappear. Common nutrition objectives accommodated different local recipes, service arrangements and dietary needs. Indigenous governments retained distinct authority over their food systems and evaluation. Nor did school food replace income policy: dependable meals reduced pressure on some family budgets, but household food insecurity still required income-based responses.

How the system reached this point

2027 | Commit: fund quality and define accountability

The 2027 bilateral renewals moved the National School Food Program beyond targets for reach. ESDC, Health Canada and provincial and territorial partners agreed on practical Food Guide-based expectations for meals and menu cycles, an initial set of shared measures and clear responsibility for review and improvement. Provinces addressed gaps between food served, sold, donated and used for fundraising through their own policy instruments.

Standards and phase-in schedules reflected meal type, preparation capacity and local contexts. They were not identical menus or untested national scoring cut-offs. Quebec's distinct agreement and Indigenous governance pathways were respected.

Governments also treated food quality as a service cost, not just an ingredient cost. Multi-year funding supported meals, paid preparation and coordination, nutrition expertise, maintenance, transport, staff development and evaluation. Allocations accounted for freight, workforce and infrastructure differences. Expanding universal access proceeded in stages, with funds to improve existing programs rather than requiring under-resourced schools to achieve new standards without support.

Baseline work began before the standards were finalized. Suppliers, districts and delivery agencies identified existing purchasing and menu records. Schools documented essential substitutions and service conditions, while researchers supported sampled assessments of consumption and waste. Named authorities reviewed findings, offered corrective assistance and reported aggregate progress. Measurement did not become another unfunded administrative duty for volunteers.

2028–2030 | Build: turn guidance into workable meals

Health Canada and education and nutrition partners adapted existing tools into tested K-12 meal and snack plans, menu cycles, scaled recipes and substitutions. Guidance made whole grains, vegetables, fruits and diverse protein foods practical for different ages, allergies and preparation settings. Communities contributed recipes and food knowledge with credit and compensation. Indigenous-specific guidance was developed under Indigenous leadership, while Black-led and other community organizations obtained more dependable routes into planning, delivery and funding.

School boards and delivery agencies assessed what each menu required before buying equipment. Some schools needed refrigeration and basic preparation space. Others needed cooking staff, meal-service equipment or stronger arrangements with hubs and caterers. Offsite production was tested through transport, holding and actual service, not judged only by the recipe. Dedicated staff received culinary training and time to apply it. Changes that seemed inexpensive on an ingredient list were costed for labour, storage and delivery as well.

Provincial coordination teams linked education, health, agriculture, buyers and operators to resolve these problems together. Resourced practitioner and civil-society networks maintained shared recipes, purchasing templates, training and supplier contacts. Local successes no longer depended solely on informal introductions or vanished when a champion left. Students and families gained dependable channels to influence what was offered.

2031–2034 | Improve and scale: make purchasing and evidence work together

As menu expectations became clearer, buyers translated them into product specifications, searchable catalogue categories, bidding criteria and contracts. Coordinated demand gave suppliers a reason to offer suitable pack sizes, dependable distribution, better whole-grain

products and more accessible plant-protein options. Nutrition was assessed alongside cost, Canadian sourcing, environmental performance and transparent rebates, fees and substitutions. Purchasing groups preserved routes for smaller, Black-owned and culturally relevant suppliers rather than assuming aggregation was the goal in itself. Indigenous purchasing remained under distinct arrangements.

Food manufacturers and program teams tested healthier versions of familiar dishes, including vegetable-rich sauces, lentil-containing entrées and whole-grain breads. Culinary training, repeated voluntary tastings and student feedback accompanied menu changes. Schools protected adequate seated eating time and improved placement and descriptions of nutritious choices while preserving choice. Independent review of external nutrition-learning materials reduced the risk of selective or commercially driven messaging becoming classroom guidance.

Routine reports distinguished a product meeting procurement criteria from a balanced menu, a meal offered from one selected, and selection from consumption. Quality reviews connected supplier records to menus, service checks, student experience and sampled intake or waste assessments. When progress stalled, the findings identified whether the constraint was cost, product supply, staffing, preparation, delivery or acceptance. Operators received practical support, and successful changes were tested in other settings rather than treated as universally transferable.

2035–2037 | Sustain: make improvement ordinary

Successive agreements maintained funding and named review responsibilities. Public reporting distinguished access, participation, food quality and student experience. Programs could retain staff, replace equipment and plan with suppliers. Routine menu and service reviews guided corrections without penalizing schools for conditions beyond their control. Comparable outcomes became possible through different provincial, territorial, community and Indigenous-governed systems.

Fibre proved a useful connection between whole grains, legumes, vegetables and fruits, but it never displaced the broader Food Guide pattern. Programs assessed overall menu balance, age-appropriate nutrient adequacy, foods to limit and actual intake. Students became familiar with a wider range of nutritious foods through good everyday meals, food learning and meaningful participation, not awareness campaigns alone. By 2037, stronger evidence showed where improvements had occurred and where further investment or adaptation was still needed.

Wider changes that helped

The National Food Security Strategy launched in 2026 had already proposed investment in controlled-environment agriculture and food distribution infrastructure.[134] In this future, linking those investments to Food Guide-based institutional demand helped Canadian growers, processors and regional hubs supply suitable produce, grains and pulses.

School food was one market within that wider transition, not the cause of every national food-system gain. Buyers tested nutritional and environmental performance alongside origin: local purchasing alone did not establish better diets or lower emissions.

Other social policies strengthened household resources, while public-health and food-system initiatives reinforced better dietary patterns. None of the school-food improvements depended on a particular novel-protein technology, carbon market, national industry sales target or imagined income statute succeeding. The decisive changes lay within existing school-food and public-purchasing responsibilities.

Looking back from 2037, the 2027 renewals did not deliver universal, high-quality meals overnight. They made funding, practical nutrition expectations, purchasing, qualified review and public accountability durable enough for a decade of adaptation. That is the choice available to governments now.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Provincial and Territorial Funding

1. P/T allocations in 2024

TABLE A.1 Annual investment from P/T and municipal governments, 2024

$401 million: Annual investment from P/T and municipal governments

Province/ Territory	Total estimate of annual P/T school food funding[1]	Total estimate of annual municipal school food funding	Total number of students[2]	P/T contribution per student/day[4]
Nova Scotia	$81,700,000	$100,000	130,424	$3.30
Newfoundland and Labrador	$39,059,300	$0.00	65,097	$3.16
Prince Edward Island	$7,855,000	$0.00	21,486	$1.92
New Brunswick	$19,000,000	$0.00	103,700	$0.96
Nunavut	$1,726,646	$0.00	10,977	$0.83
Manitoba	$30,000,000	$0.00	210,877	$0.75
British Columbia	$71,500,000	$325,000	598,536	$0.63
Northwest Territories	$700,000	$0.00	8,445	$0.44
Quebec	$65,100,000	$0.00	1,007,991	$0.34
Alberta	$20,000,000	$0.00	715,227	$0.15
Yukon[3]	$154,000	$0.00	5,802	$0.14
Ontario	$36,013,000	$26,353,579	2,073,692	$0.09
Saskatchewan	$1,364,454	$147,942	206,523	$0.03
Total	**$374,172,500**	**$26,926,521**	**5,158,777**	**Median per capita: $0.63**

Source: Coalition for Healthy School Food, Annual investment from P/T and municipal governments (visually adapted). Notes:

1. Figures are the core annual P/T investment, not including infrastructure or one-time funding; P/T contribution per student based on P/T investment only.
2. Including Public and First Nation schools in Canada (2022–23).
3. Yukon: $5.6M additional school food funds from Indigenous Services Canada and Jordan's Principle is available for nutrition programs run by the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate (not shown in chart because only PT government funding is included).
4. Based on an average of 190 school days/year across Canada.
5. Ontario's per capita increases to 10 cents/student/day once adding in the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program.

2. Allocations recomputed where possible from the 2025–27 P/T action plans.

This table is an updated compilation, not a time-series comparison. Differences from earlier CHSF estimates reflect changes in sources, funding definitions, enrollment denominators and jurisdiction coverage, and should not be interpreted as changes in funding over time.

TABLE A.2

JURISDICTION	FEDERAL 2024–25	FEDERAL 2025–26	P/T ANNUAL	P/T $/STUDENT/DAY
Nova Scotia	$3.03M	$4.69M	$82.31M	$3.25
Newfoundland and Labrador	$2.51M	$3.30M	~$39.8M	$3.24
Prince Edward Island	$2.18M	$2.47M	$5.44M	$1.30
New Brunswick	$2.84M	$4.23M	$21.00M	$1.02
Nunavut	$2.29M	$2.63M	$1.85M	$0.86
Manitoba	$3.81M	$6.72M	$30.00M	$0.75
British Columbia	$7.39M	$15.95M	$71.50M	$0.63
Northwest Territories	$2.27M	$2.57M	$0.65M	$0.40
Quebec	$11.56M	$26.72M	$65.10M	$0.34
Alberta	$7.85M	$17.44M	$20.00M	$0.15
Yukon	$2.26M	$2.55M	$0.14M	$0.12
Ontario*	$18.55M	$44.84M	$38.30M	$0.10
Saskatchewan	$3.59M	$6.14M	$2.73M	$0.08

Sources: Federal: Government of Canada backgrounder, 16 June 2026 (notional amounts, adjusted annually under s. 4.2.2 of each agreement). P/T annual: 2025–26 provincial and territorial figures from the NSFP Action Plans 2025–27 (NL, PEI, NS, NB, MB, SK, AB, YT, NWT, NU), the Canada-Quebec agreement announcement (2024–25 basis) and B.C. Feeding Futures (public districts).

Notes: Rough estimates per-day P/T annual divided by action-plan enrolment and 190 school days; MB, BC and AB retain Coalition for Healthy School Food (2025) values, whose numerators match the primary source. Municipal contributions are excluded from these provincial and territorial estimates.

APPENDIX B

Canada's Food Guide Resource Suite

Canada's Food Guide extends beyond the plate to policy and professional guidance, educational resources, food-environment tools, recipes and research instruments. These provide substantial direction, but not an integrated national K–12 framework connecting menus, procurement, substitutions and routine quality assurance.

FIGURE B.1 Canada's Food Guide: more than just a plate

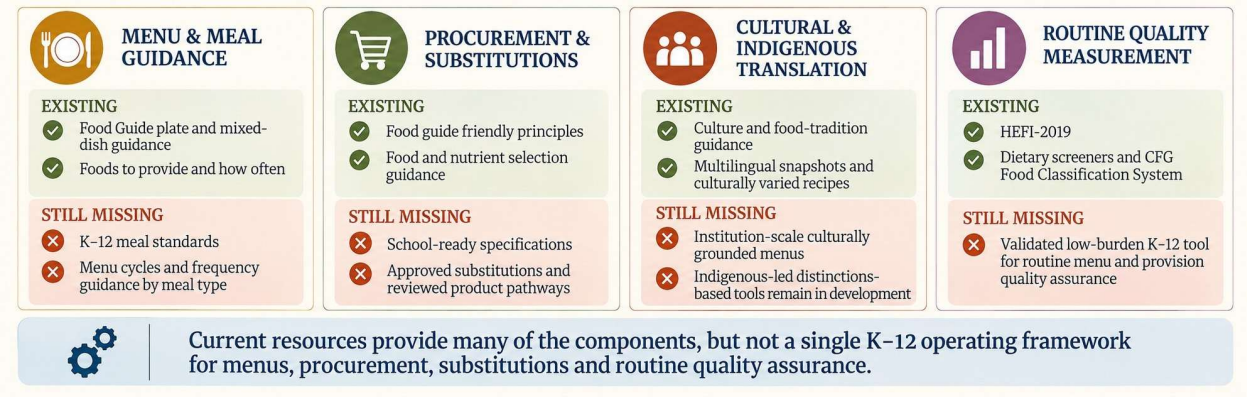


TABLE B.1 Resources and their school-food application

RESOURCE GROUP	WHAT IT PROVIDES AND WHERE SCHOOL-SPECIFIC APPLICATION REMAINS NEEDED
Dietary and professional guidance	**Canada's Dietary Guidelines**, **Applying Canada's Dietary Guidelines** and **Canada's Healthy Eating Pattern** provide nutritional direction, life-stage considerations and institutional planning guidance, but not a complete K–12 operating framework.
Food environments	The **Food Guide Friendly Initiative** provides voluntary assessment and action-planning tools developed and tested in post-secondary and recreation settings, rather than K–12 schools.
Educators and public	The multilingual **Food Guide Snapshot**, **Toolkit for Educators** for ages 4–11, and **Tips for Healthy Eating** support understanding, food skills and everyday choices. The educator toolkit does not prescribe school menus or purchasing requirements.
Recipes and meal planning	**Food Guide Kitchen** offers recipes from varied cultural traditions; the **sample three-day meal plan** illustrates food combinations. These are practical starting points, not a complete school-specific provision framework.
Measurement and review	**HEFI-2019**, the **Canadian Food Intake Screener** and **Canadian Eating Practices Screener** support dietary assessment, rather than a dedicated school-menu compliance system. The **2025 Evidence Review Cycle summary** reaffirms the Guide's scientific basis while identifying institutional planning challenges. See Appendix D for school-food scoring.

Adaptation must go beyond translation. Multilingual resources do not replace culturally grounded menus and practical guidance for mixed dishes. Indigenous guidance requires Indigenous leadership and authority. Sections 6.2, 6.4 and 6.5 examine implementation, food learning and equity in greater detail.

FIGURE B.2 Opportunities targeting CFG towards K–12 schools

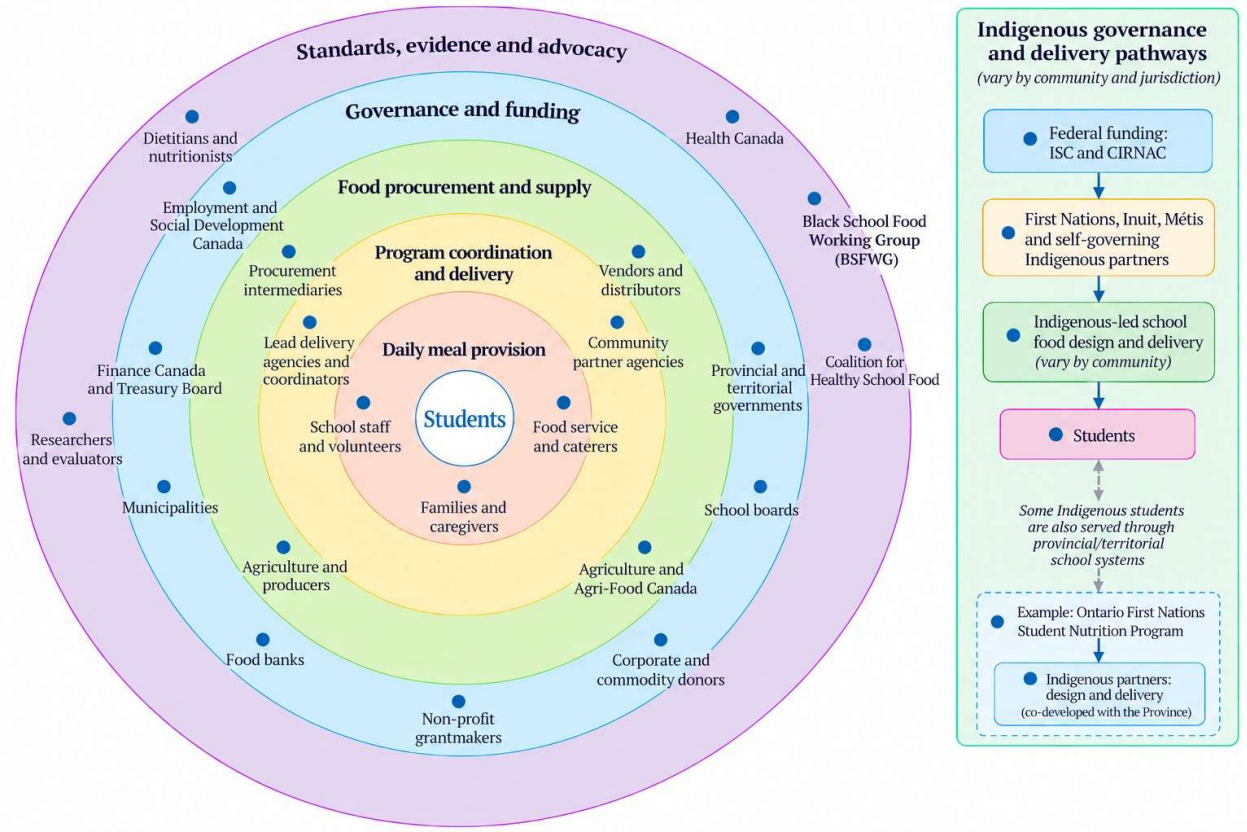


APPENDIX C

Stakeholder Ecosystem: The Many Influences on School Food Quality

The school food system is complex and involves many stakeholders that have an influence on the quality of school foods through a range of roles. The visual below shows the different stakeholders according to how directly they interact with day-to-day meal provision, while showing the wider governance, funding, procurement, evidence and advocacy environment around them.

FIGURE C.1 The school food ecosystem Q11



Notes:

1. Rings show proximity to the student, not importance. Inner rings are actors present in the school day to day; outer rings shape it from a distance. Some important pathways do not fit neatly into a single node.
2. Indigenous-led school food operates through distinct pathways rather than the provincial route shown here, and is noted here rather than "mapped."
3. Black-led school food work has no dedicated funding stream or formal pathway in the National School Food Program. The Black School Food Working Group plays a critical convening and coordination role, and was invited to prepare a submission to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

4. Federal roles are split across institutions: the funding (ESDC), the dietary standard (Health Canada), the fiscal authority (Finance Canada and Treasury Board) and supply-side programs (AAFC). No single body holds responsibility for the nutritional quality of what is served.

APPENDIX D

Scoring School Food Quality

Operationalizing CFG-2019 for meals and menus: While CFG-2019 provides high-level dietary guidance (eat vegetables and fruits, whole grains and plant-based proteins), it does not provide an easy, standardized scoring mechanism for school boards or researchers to evaluate whether a meal or menu aligns with those recommendations.

EXPLAINER

What is the Healthy Eating Food Index (HEFI)?

HEFI-2019 is a Canadian research tool that measures how closely the balance of foods, beverages and nutrients aligns with Canada's Food Guide. It awards up to 80 points across ten components, covering both foods to include more often and nutrients to limit.

What does scoring about 50% mean? Blais et al. found that reported school menus earned about half the maximum available points. This does not mean half the meals were healthy or half of children's nutritional needs were met. It means the menus achieved about half the available points for Food Guide alignment.

The key finding is the uneven pattern behind the score. Menus scored relatively better on limiting sugars, saturated fat and sodium than on including recommended foods, especially plant proteins and whole grains. A menu can score better on nutrients to limit while still falling short on foods to include. Higher sodium scores also did not mean sodium levels were satisfactory.

The 10 categories

Ten components add up to 80 points. Five reward foods you want more of (F&V, whole grains, grain foods ratio, PB proteins, fatty acids ratio), three penalize foods you want less of (free sugars, sodium and saturated fats), and two are balance checks (beverages, proteins).

TABLE D.1

CATEGORY	MAX POINTS	WHAT IT MEASURES
Vegetables and fruits	20	Share of plate that is vegetables and fruits
Beverages	10	Share of drinks that are water or unsweetened
Free sugars	10	Share of calories from added sugars (less is better)
Sodium	10	Milligrams of sodium per calorie (less is better)
Whole grains	5	Share of plate that is whole grains
Grain foods ratio	5	Share of grains that are whole (versus refined)
Protein foods	5	Share of plate that is protein

TABLE D.1 (continued)

CATEGORY	MAX POINTS	WHAT IT MEASURES
plant-based protein	5	Share of protein that is plant-based
Fatty acids ratio	5	Share of fats that are unsaturated
Saturated fats	5	Share of calories from saturated fat (less is better)

How the scoring works

Proportions, not servings

HEFI-2019 scores what share of the plate is what, not how many servings. This is the key change from CFG 2007, which counted servings

Foods are converted into Reference Amounts (RAs), Health Canada's standard portion for each food. so a piece of fruit and a scoop of hummus can be compared on the same scale.

Each category asks a "what share" question, then converts the ratio into points on a sliding scale.

Three examples

- **Plant-based protein (5 points).** Of all the protein on the plate, what share is plant-based (beans, lentils, tofu, nuts) versus animal-based (meat, dairy, eggs)? No plant protein = 0 points. More than half plant = full 5 points. A lunch with chicken and an equal amount of chickpeas scores 5. Chicken only scores 0.
- **Vegetables and fruits (20 points).** What share of the whole plate is vegetables and fruits? Half or more = full 20 points.
- **Sodium (10 points, less is better).** Milligrams of sodium per calorie. Very low = full 10 points. Very high = 0.

Blais et al.'s reported menu sample (51% of available points)

- Vegetables and fruits at 28% (breakfast), 33% (lunch), 41% (snacks). All under the target, and mostly fruit
- Plant-protein foods represented 2–5% of reported menu offerings, versus 18–26% for animal-source protein foods, measured in reference amounts across meal types. Plant proteins were the lowest-scoring component.
- Grains: roughly even split between whole and refined at breakfast and lunch
- Sodium high across every meal type; lunch highest
- snacks high in sugar and low in protein
- Milk lifts the breakfast beverage score

What HEFI is good at

- Peer-reviewed and Canadian, built on the actual Food Guide, not adapted from elsewhere
- Objective and comparable across programs, provinces, and over time
- Measures balance, not quantity. A program cannot game the score by serving more food.
- The only Canadian index built on the 2019 Food Guide

A complementary measure: the Canadian Food Scoring System (CFSS)

HEFI scores how foods combine. The CFSS scores each food on its own, rating it from very poor to excellent against Canada's Food Guide, with deductions for saturated fat, sugars and sodium based on front-of-package labelling thresholds (Lee et al., 2024).

Applied to the same 2022–23 menus, the CFSS averaged about 63%, compared with about 51% on HEFI (Blais, 2024). Lunch scored lowest on both. Most individual foods (60%) were rated good or excellent. This points to how foods combine, including how little plant protein is served (Section 4.4). Part of the gap reflects method, so it is best read as a directional signal.

The tools are complementary. Item scores suit purchasing and product screening; pattern scores suit menu review. A researcher interviewed for this study described the CFSS as scoring plant and lean animal proteins only slightly differently, so it would not reveal the plant protein gap on its own. Neither tool scores fibre or measures what students eat.

Sources: Lee JJ, Mulligan C, L'Abbé MR (2024), Appl Physiol Nutr Metab 49(10):1363–1376, doi:10.1139/apnm-2024-0034. Blais A (2024), MSc thesis, University of Toronto, ch. 6.

APPENDIX E

Recommendation Registry

HOW TO USE THIS LIST

- Find your role below. Each recommendation gives a practical action, supporting evidence and when to act. Items are ordered by priority within each group.
- NOW = can begin now. 2027 = secure in bilateral renewals. NEW FUNDING = requires additional resources.
- All actors should support the full Food Guide while allowing culturally relevant menus and distinct Indigenous-led governance. Quebec follows a separate agreement.
- **[CHSF]** = aligns with a Coalition for Healthy School Food recommendation. **[CHSF+]** = adds a specific implementation step. Examples illustrate practice, not proven impact.

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.5, 7.6

1 Fund the full cost of quality

CHSF+ | NOW + 2027 + NEW FUNDING

Increase predictable federal investment toward the Coalition's $400 million annual request, covering food, paid staff, expertise, transport, infrastructure, training and evaluation, with accessible routes for community-led providers.

Evidence: Among 59 providers in Blais et al. (2025), donations averaged 54% of reported funding; the National School Food Program Act (2026) provides for ongoing federal funding.

2 Define school-food quality in renewed agreements

CHSF+ | NOW + 2027

Agree Food Guide-based meal, snack and menu-cycle expectations with Health Canada and provinces and territories; phase benchmarks against funded baselines without prescribing one menu.

Evidence: Standard bilateral clause 6.2 anticipates common quality and outcome measures in future agreements (NSFP agreements, 2024–27).

3 Make annual reporting measure quality, not only reach

NOW + 2027

Fund shared definitions and low-burden menu, purchasing, service and equity measures; reuse existing records and include aggregate quality findings in federal accountability reporting.

Evidence: Section 8 of the National School Food Program Act (2026) requires annual reporting on federal investments and progress, including the six principles; the proposal to include quality evidence goes beyond what the Act currently prescribes; existing agreements largely track reach and spending (NSFP Act; see Section 6.2).

4 Fund permanent coordination and network leadership

NOW + 2027

Assign federal leads and resource cross-ministerial work with delivery organizations, public health, the Coalition and community-led networks; maintain shared tools and decision pathways.

Evidence: Interviews found promising practices and purchasing solutions stranded in informal networks (see Section 6.6); bilateral agreements already enable intergovernmental cooperation.

5 **Require review, improvement and public follow-up** NOW + 2027

Use the 2027 agreements to establish who reviews menus and food actually served, how findings are published and who must remedy shortfalls, with qualified expertise and funding.

Evidence: Ontario's 2013 and Nova Scotia's 2022 audits found weak oversight; those historical audits do not establish current compliance (see Section 6.2).

6 **Make nutrition a funded purchasing requirement** NOW + 2027

Pair Food Guide criteria with local sourcing, price and environmental objectives in NSFP-funded tenders, contracts and ordering systems; require usable product data and transparent commercial terms.

Evidence: Purchaser interviews identified scattered plant-protein listings and weak visibility of nutrition in tenders; BC already tracks local-food purchasing (see Section 6.3).

Health Canada and Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.2, 7.4, 7.7

1 **Translate the Food Guide into practical K-12 tools** NOW

Co-develop age-appropriate meals, snacks, scaled recipes, substitutions and culturally varied examples with educators and communities; support distinct Indigenous-led guidance under Indigenous authority.

Evidence: Health Canada's 2025 evidence review and Blais et al. (2025) identify institutional planning and cultural-application gaps (see Sections 2 and 6.2).

2 **Test comprehension and communicate practical choices** NOW

Ask students, caregivers and school staff to apply Food Guide guidance in real scenarios, then test outreach and educator tools on whole grains, plant proteins, balanced meals and foods to limit.

Evidence: Existing surveys largely measure awareness or reported use, not correct application; Health Canada has an educator toolkit but limited secondary-school coverage (see Section 6.4).

3 **Modernize rules for truthful protein claims** NOW + REGULATORY REVIEW

Review FO-1/PER and already-permitted PDCAAS ratings, thresholds and reference quantities so Food Guide-aligned pulses can communicate their contribution without overstated claims.

Evidence: CFIA's current rules permit FO-1/PER or PDCAAS; whether their thresholds treat whole pulses appropriately requires review (CFIA protein-claim guidance; see Section 6.3.1). Evidence: Section 6.3.1; Priority: 7.4.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC)

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.1, 7.5, 7.8

1 Connect Canadian food investment to nutritious school demand

CHSF+ NOW

Align the National Food Security Strategy and Food-Link food hubs with schools' Food Guide-based specifications for produce, whole grains, pulses and other nutritious foods, and pair food purchasing under the Buy Canadian policy with Food Guide-aligned nutrition requirements, not origin alone. This nutrition requirement is this report's recommendation.

Evidence: The October 5, 2026 announcement scheduled Food-Link applications to open October 14; domestic origin alone does not establish nutrition quality (AAFC news release, 5 October 2026). Evidence: Section 6.6.3; Priority: 7.8.

2 Launch a new round of School Food Infrastructure Fund grants

CHSF+ NEW FUNDING

Fund menu-matched kitchens, storage, preparation, delivery and equipment for schools and community-led providers, with realistic installation and maintenance plans and coordinated operating support.

Evidence: About 29% of organizations in Blais et al.'s voluntary survey reported missing necessary infrastructure; the first SFIF round is closed to applications (AAFC; see Section 6.4).

3 Make school demand credible and supplier entry feasible

NOW + NEW FUNDING

Coordinate buyer-backed forecasts and pilots with producer, processor and hub development, including shared processing and storage; support appropriate pack sizes, distribution, insurance and bidding access for smaller and Black-owned businesses.

Evidence: Canadian manufacturer and purchaser interviews identified product-format, scale and contract-access barriers (see Section 6.3). Grants alone do not remove licensing or distribution barriers (Competition Bureau, 2026; Protein Industries Canada, 2026). Indigenous procurement must follow distinct arrangements. Evidence: Sections 6.3.3 and 6.6.3; Priority: 7.5, 7.8.

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.5, 7.8

1 Adapt low-carbon procurement tools for school food

NOW

With Health Canada and school purchasers, adapt Buyers for Climate Action and Nourish contract criteria to include Food Guide alignment, affordability, sourcing, supplier access and practical reporting.

Evidence: Existing federal low-carbon purchasing tools offer a starting point, but are not yet a standardized K-12 procurement framework (TBS; see Section 6.3).

Statistics Canada, PHAC and the Joint Consortium for School Health

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.2, 7.7

1 Harmonize school-food participation and barrier indicators

NOW + SURVEY CYCLES

Use existing CIS and Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth school-food questions to distinguish access, participation, accommodations and stigma, publishing coverage limits and avoiding duplicate collections.

Evidence: The 2026 child/youth survey and CIS collect school-food experiences, not observed menu quality or consumption (Statistics Canada questionnaires; see Section 6.5).

2 Build practical school-environment review into existing systems

NOW + TOOL DEVELOPMENT

JCSH and PHAC should test school-food provision, eating time, inclusion and improvement questions through school-health planning and surveys, without presenting these as dietary-intake measures.

Evidence: The SPHERU Monitoring and Evaluation Guide (2026) distinguishes operational assessment from consumption and outcome evaluation.

Research funders, including CIHR and ESDC

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.2, 7.6

1 Fund evaluation alongside program expansion

NOW + GRANT CYCLES

Support designs that test menu quality, actual service, participation, consumption, costs and equity, compensating delivery partners and supporting Black-led and Indigenous-led research under their respective authority.

Evidence: Canada's implementation evidence is stronger on constraints than post-NSFP impacts; federal school-food research awards began in 2026 (see Section 5).

2 Finance usable measures and comparative implementation evidence

NOW + NEW FUNDING

Fund validation of low-burden menu and service tools and comparisons of onsite, hub and vendor models, including full costs, purchasing arrangements, food waste and staff workload; where purchasing pilots aim to build domestic capacity, include delivered prices, supplier participation and import replacement, since expenditure on Canadian products alone does not prove additional capacity.

Evidence: SPHERU's 2025–26 operations and evaluation guides provide starting methods, not validated national performance measures (see Sections 6.1–6.4).

Provincial and territorial governments: common priorities

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7

1 Fund reliable, flexible provision

CHSF+ | NOW + 2027 + NEW FUNDING

Allocate multi-year resources reflecting school size, geography, freight and participation, covering staff, qualified nutrition advice, food, infrastructure, training and evaluation, with equitable routes for community-led programs.

Evidence: Action plans show different cost structures and delivery capacities; a uniform per-student amount cannot establish equal ability to deliver quality (see Section 6.1).

2 Apply coherent Food Guide expectations across food routes

CHSF+ | NOW + 2027

Set age-appropriate meal and snack standards and review their reach across funded food, sales, catering, donations and recurring fundraising, allowing culturally relevant menus and dietary accommodations.

Evidence: Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia policies cover these routes differently, with exemptions that alter the school food environment (see Section 6.2).

3 Measure access, provision and outcomes separately

NOW + 2027

Fund common menu and purchasing measures, reuse supplier data, and sample substitutions, service, consumption and waste; publish aggregate findings with limitations and equity breakdowns.

Evidence: Blais et al. (2025) assessed reported menus, not what students ate; SPHERU (2026) provides staged monitoring tools (see Section 6.2).

4 Fund cross-ministerial coordination and community influence

CHSF+ | NOW + 2027

Name education, health, agriculture and delivery leads, fund practitioner networks, and give students, families and Black-led organizations substantive routes to decisions; respect distinct Indigenous authority.

Evidence: BC coordinates multiple ministries and district food leads, while interviews found decisions often depended on individual contacts (see Sections 6.5–6.6).

5 Assign qualified menu review and corrective action

CHSF+ | NOW + 2027

Place oversight above individual schools, support nutrition review of complete menu cycles and service, and require follow-up and visible results for public, nonprofit and contracted provision.

Evidence: Canadian audits have identified monitoring gaps; Nova Scotia's quality-assurance and vendor review mechanisms illustrate practical implementation (see Section 6.2).

6 Put nutrition into purchasing rules and delivery contracts

CHSF+

NOW + CONTRACT CYCLES

Use Food Guide criteria alongside price, service, local sourcing and environmental objectives; request item and quantity data, assess commercial terms, and keep supplier entry routes open. Apply the same Food Guide-aligned criteria to food purchasing under the Buy Canadian policy, and work with food-safety authorities to make shared-facility compliance responsibilities clear.

Evidence: Interviews found nutrition difficult to identify in catalogues and highlighted the value of credible purchasing volumes; the Competition Bureau (2026) identifies unclear shared-facility responsibilities as a barrier (see Section 6.3).

Four provincial applications: two priority actions each

These apply common levers to existing 2025–27 arrangements. They are implementation opportunities, not rankings of provincial performance.

ONTARIO

1 Connect purchasing records to complete-menu quality

NOW + PROCUREMENT CYCLES

Build Student Nutrition Ontario product screening and planned group purchasing into consistent nutrition-category reports, then review whether purchased products combine into Food Guide-aligned menus.

Evidence: Ontario's 2025–27 plan funds purchasing coordination and a food-audit tool; product approval alone is not meal balance (see Section 6.3).

2 Extend quality review without displacing Indigenous authority

NOW + 2027

Give SNP agencies usable menu-review and school support, align the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program where useful, and co-develop FNSNP changes with First Nations partners.

Evidence: Ontario operates distinct SNP, FNSNP and Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program pathways (Ontario action plan, 2025–27).

BRITISH COLUMBIA

1 Track nutritional composition alongside B.C. origin

NOW

Add Food Guide-relevant product categories to Feed BC and district purchasing records so local sourcing and menu quality can be assessed together.

Evidence: BC's plans and Feed BC guidance support local purchasing records, which do not alone measure diet quality (BC action plan, 2025–27).

2 Make district menu review and service improvement routine

NOW + DISTRICT FUNDING

Use district School Food Coordinators to review complete menus, contractors, infrastructure needs and student feedback, publishing improvements without prescribing one district-wide menu.

Evidence: BC's Feeding Futures model gives districts delivery discretion and reports staffing and kitchen constraints (BC action plan, 2025–27).

NOVA SCOTIA

1 **Use province-wide lunch service to establish quality baselines** — NOW

With lunch now available in all 372 public schools, assess menu composition, actual service, uptake and student feedback and use results in recipe and contract reviews.

Evidence: The 2026–27 rollout reaches all public schools; the action plan already provides menu cycles and quality-assurance functions (Nova Scotia, 2026).

2 **Compare onsite, offsite and hub delivery quality** — NOW + CAPITAL CYCLES

Evaluate food temperature, acceptance, waste and full costs across vendor and school-kitchen models before extending infrastructure choices, using targeted upgrades where evidence supports them.

Evidence: The province reports temperature and palatability problems with offsite service and planned kitchen changes (Nova Scotia action plan, 2025–27).

NEW BRUNSWICK

1 **Strengthen the central breakfast basket** — NOW

Use Feed NB's consolidated purchasing and distribution to expand suitable vegetables, whole grains and plant proteins and track exact items, quantities and nutrition alongside local sourcing.

Evidence: Feed NB coordinates breakfast supply; lunch uses separate school-level providers (New Brunswick action plan, 2025–27; see Section 6.3).

2 **Put quality and equity into the expanding lunch contracts** — NOW + CONTRACT CYCLES

Apply Policy 711 across school-specific lunch providers and require menu, substitution, dietary-accommodation and feedback records as service expands beyond the 241 schools reported in September 2026.

Evidence: The provincial rollout offers school-specific menus, at least one vegetarian choice and phased coverage (Government of New Brunswick, September 2026).

Municipal governments

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.1, 7.5

1 **Use municipal funding, contracts and assets to close local gaps** — NOW + LOCAL FUNDING

Apply Food Guide criteria to municipally supported school food and make public kitchens, storage, distribution facilities or community growing spaces available where suitable, including practical access to appropriately licensed shared kitchens and storage linked to actual school demand.

Evidence: The SPHERU Operations & Costing Guide (2025) documents varied school and shared-facility models; feasibility depends on local infrastructure and municipal authority. The Competition Bureau (2026) identifies shared kitchens as a way to lower entry barriers. Evidence: Sections 6.3.3 and 6.4.2; Priority: 7.1, 7.5.

School boards, districts and delivery leads

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.2, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7

1 Assign paid food and nutrition responsibility

NOW + FUNDING

Provide named coordination, access to registered dietitians and protected staff training time; periodically review full menus and establish a documented correction process.

Evidence: Blais et al. (2025) and the SPHERU guides identify staffing, expertise and oversight as recurring implementation constraints (see Sections 6.2 and 6.4).

2 Connect reviewed menus with purchasing and vendor contracts

NOW + CONTRACT CYCLES

Put nutritional specifications, cultural accommodations and reporting into tenders and approved catalogues, including substitutions, donated foods and supplier change notices.

Evidence: Approved products do not ensure a balanced menu; Ontario's product-screening arrangements show a usable purchase-level control (see Section 6.3).

3 Match kitchens and service to the intended meals

NOW + NEW FUNDING

Inventory cold storage, preparation, cooking, receiving and dining capacity; prioritize affordable upgrades and enough seated eating time to deliver the planned menu.

Evidence: Nearly 30% of Blais respondents reported infrastructure shortfalls; offsite deliveries have created temperature and acceptance issues (see Section 6.4).

4 Make menus and decisions visible to communities

NOW

Publish planned menus and eating-time information, solicit feedback from students and families including nonusers, and disclose how feedback changed provision; vet all externally supplied classroom resources.

Evidence: Published menus support accountability; Canadian stakeholder interviews identify unequal routes into decisions and commercially influenced learning materials (see Sections 6.2 and 6.5).

Schools and front-line program operators

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.6, 7.7

1 Give staff the authority and time to deliver a reviewed menu

NOW + STAFF SUPPORT

Name a service lead, use vetted products and recipes, check substitutions and allergens, and provide paid practice time for food safety, preparation and new ingredients.

Evidence: Operational guidance and interviews show that volunteer effort and equipment alone do not secure consistent service (see Section 6.4).

2 Protect dignified access and time to eat

NOW

Offer clear, stigma-free participation and suitable dietary choices; keep queues outside adequate seated lunch time and resolve temperature, portion and service problems.

Evidence: A randomized 38-child study found more vegetables consumed with 20 than 10 seated minutes; equity research identifies participation barriers (see Sections 6.4–6.5).

3 Test meals with students and connect learning to food

NOW

Use voluntary tastings and feedback from participating and nonparticipating students; improve familiar dishes with vegetables, whole grains and legumes, and link hands-on lessons to meals.

Evidence: Small trials support some blended-food substitutions; practitioner examples support testing recipes before wider use (see Sections 4.2 and 6.4).

4 Screen industry-funded and other external learning materials

NOW

Before classroom use, check materials for scientific accuracy, completeness, Food Guide alignment, sponsorship and conflicts of interest; reject misleading promotion and ensure age and cultural suitability.

Evidence: The study's review found selective emphasis in some industry resources; boards and schools oversee supplementary materials (see Section 6.4).

Food manufacturers and producers

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.5, 7.8

1 Improve frequently purchased school foods

NOW + PRODUCT CYCLES

Use school-buyer feedback to reformulate familiar items with more vegetables, whole grains and plant proteins and less excess sodium, free sugars and saturated fat, testing acceptance and price.

Evidence: Ziraldo et al. (2026) found ten food categories supplied about 87% of 2015 school-hour energy intake; substitution effects require testing (see Section 4.2).

2 Provide verifiable products in school-ready formats

NOW

Supply exact-item nutrients, ingredients, allergens, pack sizes, preparation requirements and pricing; disclose school purchasing incentives and make products usable across kitchen types.

Evidence: Ontario product screening and Canadian supplier interviews show why product data, format and transparent terms matter (see Section 6.3).

Distributors and food-service contractors

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.5

1 Make nutritious products findable and contracting transparent

NOW + CONTRACT CYCLES

Organize catalogues by Food Guide-relevant categories with product-specific filters, and disclose rebates, service fees, substitutions and financing obligations to public purchasers.

Evidence: Interviewed buyers struggled to find plant proteins; reported commercial arrangements can shape what purchasers can afford and order (see Section 6.3).

2 Report what was actually purchased and delivered

NOW

Provide existing product, quantity, price and category records, identifying substitutions and the difference between orders and deliveries; offer workable routes for smaller and culturally relevant suppliers.

Evidence: Supplier transactions are a potential low-burden monitoring source but do not establish food served or eaten (SPHERU, 2026; see Section 6.3).

Donors, foundations and food retailers

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.1, 7.5

1 Offer nutritious, usable and traceable donations

NOW

Agree products with recipients in advance, checking Food Guide fit, cultural suitability, allergens, storage and preparation; record products and quantities rather than cash value alone.

Evidence: Donation-dependent providers may be compelled to use what arrives; the 54% funding figure is not a measure of donated food volume (Blais et al., 2025).

2 Support transitions without replacing public operating funding

NOW

Provide flexible cash or time-limited support for menu trials, training and equipment, without requiring promotional placements or conditions that determine what students eat.

Evidence: The study identifies donation dependence and staff-capacity constraints, but dependable ongoing provision requires public funding (see Section 6.1).

Coalitions, advocates and civil-society networks

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.3, 7.6, 7.7

1 Press for funded, measurable quality commitments

NOW + 2027

Use the 2027 renewal and budgets to seek adequate funding, practical Food Guide expectations, transparent reporting and named review responsibilities, without presenting access as nutritional quality.

Evidence: Blais et al. (2025) identify funding, missing operational standards and monitoring as linked gaps (see Sections 6.1–6.2).

2 Build network capacity and equitable influence

NOW + SUSTAINED FUNDING

Convene implementation partners, share tested tools and link community-led providers, Black-led organizations and student voices to decision-makers while respecting Indigenous self-determination.

Evidence: Interviews document important knowledge trapped in individual networks and unequal access to influence (see Sections 6.5–6.6).

Parents, caregivers and school councils

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.6, 7.7

1 Bring everyday needs into school-food decisions

NOW

Use school councils or accessible feedback channels to raise dietary needs, cultural relevance, service problems, stigma and student participation barriers; ask who will respond and when.

Evidence: Canadian interviews show that parent perspectives influence recipes and access, but time and language barriers make representation uneven (see Section 6.5).

2 Apply nutrition standards when councils choose vendors or fundraisers

NOW

Review regular pizza days, school sales and fundraising offers against applicable nutrition policy, shifting toward Food Guide-aligned or non-food alternatives where feasible.

Evidence: School fundraising often follows different rules; INFORMAS Canada reported less healthy fundraising in 57% of 112 responding schools (see Sections 4.1 and 6.2).

3 Share practical food knowledge without assuming financial responsibility

NOW

Offer culturally familiar recipes and voluntary help with food learning or gardens; use tested school recipes at home if useful, while keeping core meal funding a public responsibility.

Evidence: Canadian stakeholder interviews document family recipes shaping menus (see Section 6.5); the University of Saskatchewan's Food Literacy Education Guide (2025) describes school-community learning opportunities.

Educators and school-based learning teams

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.4, 7.7

1 Teach the Food Guide through real food and curricula

NOW

Use age-appropriate, curriculum-linked lessons on nutrition, agriculture, food systems and food skills, drawing on Health Canada's educator toolkit and suitable external resources.

Evidence: Health Canada's Toolkit for Educators provides activities for ages 4–11; the University of Saskatchewan's Food Literacy Education Guide (2025) connects classroom learning and school meals.

2 Screen commercial and outside teaching materials

NOW

Check industry-funded and other external modules for scientific accuracy, evidence balance, Food Guide alignment, funding disclosure and cultural relevance before classroom use.

Evidence: This study's review found selective emphasis in some industry resources; Ontario places supplementary-resource selection with boards (see Section 6.4).

3 Co-design hands-on learning with students and food teams

NOW + SCHOOL SUPPORT

Coordinate voluntary tastings, food-growing, cooking and student-led investigations connected to the school's meals; share findings with the staff who can change menus.

Evidence: The University of Saskatchewan's Food Literacy Education Guide (2025) documents ways to connect food learning with meals; Carducci et al.'s Canadian systematic review (2024) finds heterogeneous outcome evidence.

4 Show vetted Educated Choices modules

NOW

Use age-appropriate Educated Choices modules in relevant science, health and social studies classes after the school's resource review; discuss links between food choices, health and sustainability. Evidence: The Educated Choices Program's official resource library offers free videos, lesson plans and follow-up activities (ecprogram.org/downloads). This study did not independently assess effects of these modules on students' diets.

Students and student councils

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.6, 7.7

1 Have a real voice in school-food decisions

NOW

Join or form representative food committees and raise priorities on menus, inclusivity, affordability and eating time; ask school leaders to explain the decisions made.

Evidence: The Coalition for Healthy School Food's A.M.P. Up Student Voices initiative provides examples of student committees, menu input and school-food feedback; it is a participation resource, not an impact evaluation (healthyschoolfood.ca/studentvoicesforschoolfood).

2 Help taste-test and improve meals

NOW

Volunteer for food tastings and menu trials, give specific feedback on flavour, portions, temperature and presentation, and invite peers who do not currently use school meals.

Evidence: Program pilots use student feedback to refine recipes; selecting a food does not prove it was eaten (see Section 6.4).

3 Lead food-growing, cooking and food-waste initiatives

NOW + SCHOOL SUPPORT

With school staff, take part in gardens, cooking, service or waste audits and share practical lessons on vegetables, whole grains and diverse proteins with classmates.

Evidence: The University of Saskatchewan's Operations & Costing Guide (2025) describes student roles in food preparation and service; its Food Literacy Education Guide (2025) covers related learning activities, not guaranteed health outcomes.

4 Improve the whole school food environment

NOW

Through student groups, raise concerns about less nutritious sales, fundraisers, misleading sponsored materials and stigma; propose accessible Food Guide-aligned alternatives without shaming peers.

Evidence: Program meals and foods sold or used in events follow different routes; school-level change needs student and staff cooperation (see Sections 4.1 and 6.2).

Researchers and evaluators

Related Section 7 priorities: 7.2, 7.5, 7.6

1 Measure change after NSFP expansion

NOW + FUNDED STUDIES

Link menus, actual service, participation, consumption, waste and equity with clear denominators and study designs; involve Indigenous and Black-led research teams under appropriate governance.

Evidence: Blais et al.'s 2022–23 menus and 2015 dietary analyses are complementary pre-NSFP evidence, not current observed consumption (see Sections 4–5).

2 **Test the tools and mechanisms that could improve quality** NOW + FUNDED STUDIES

Validate meal-cycle scoring and practical comprehension measures; compare full costs, staffing, procurement models, food literacy and accountability interventions using appropriate comparison designs.

Evidence: SPHERU tools and qualitative examples identify plausible routes, but many interventions lack directly measured Canadian outcomes (see Sections 6.2–6.6).

APPENDIX F

Four Provincial Implementation Snapshots

British Columbia, Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, 2025–27

Why these four provinces?

British Columbia, Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were examined in greater depth because they provide contrasting examples of how the National School Food Policy principles are being translated through different provincial systems, and because this study's policy, program and stakeholder evidence supported deeper analysis in these jurisdictions. They are used to illuminate how implementation architecture can shape food quality. The broader national evidence and study limitations are described in Sections 4 and 5. Together, the four provinces span several of the system differences examined throughout the report:

- **British Columbia** places substantial responsibility with school districts and supports implementation through district coordinators and a voluntary School Food Toolkit aligned with Canada's Food Guide (CFG).
- **Ontario** operates largely through regional Lead Agencies and community-based programs, with nutrition requirements, purchasing support and decision-making distributed across several institutions.
- **Nova Scotia** uses a much more centralized provincial lunch model, including standardized menus and recipes, public-health nutrition input and dedicated quality-assurance functions, while retaining different production and service models.
- **New Brunswick** has centralized much of breakfast procurement and distribution through Feed NB and is now building a province-wide lunch system within a comparatively broad school food policy framework.

The profile snapshots in this Appendix use a common set of dimensions to distinguish resources and reach, formal policy, implementation arrangements, monitoring and available evidence of nutritional quality.

Funding and system capacity

The funding figures are not measures of meal cost or program quality. The four provinces fund school food through materially different structures and scopes: provincial base programs, federal National School Food Program (NSFP) transfers, infrastructure and staffing investments, and in Ontario substantial municipal and charitable contributions. Per-student figures are shown only when the numerator and denominator can be stated defensibly and should be interpreted as funding intensity, not as directly comparable meal costs. Section 6.1 explains why food cost, total program cost, government contribution and meal price must remain distinct.

Reach and participation

The four provinces also measure reach differently. A school may have a program, a student may have access to it, and neither establishes how many students participate on a typical day or how frequently they use it.

- British Columbia uses district-reported estimates of students receiving food
- Ontario reports average daily participation for the Student Nutrition Program
- Nova Scotia reports program-specific school and participant figures
- New Brunswick's breakfast reporting emphasizes access while protecting a non-stigmatizing model.

The profiles therefore retain each jurisdiction's own measure rather than converting unlike indicators into a common participation rate. See Section 4.3 on the distinction between availability, participation and nutritional benefit.

Policy and Canada's Food Guide

The comparison is particularly useful because the four provinces translate Canada's Food Guide through different policy instruments.

- British Columbia relies primarily on contemporary voluntary guidance
- Ontario uses the 2020 Student Nutrition Program Nutrition Guidelines while separately regulating foods sold through PPM 150
- New Brunswick's Policy 711 establishes mandatory requirements across much of the public-school food environment.
- Nova Scotia introduced a province-wide School Food and Nutrition Policy and standards in 2024

These instruments differ in scope, authority and level of operational detail. The profiles therefore distinguish the existence of a policy or guideline from evidence that the food actually served reflects the Food Guide. Sections 6.2, 7.2, 7.4 and 7.6 examine these translation and implementation differences.

Procurement, production and delivery

The four provinces also locate food decisions at different points in the system. B.C. districts can use multiple purchasing and production models; Ontario combines local and regional purchasing within a Lead Agency structure; Nova Scotia combines a provincial lunch menu with self-operated, onsite-vendor and offsite-vendor production; and New Brunswick coordinates much of breakfast purchasing and distribution provincially through Feed NB. The profiles describe these arrangements because centralizing one function does not necessarily centralize the others, and the location of purchasing, menu and production authority affects where nutrition requirements can be applied. Sections 6.3 and 6.4 map these pathways in more detail.

Monitoring, oversight and measured quality

All four provinces collect information on school food, but they do not answer the same questions. Routine reporting is strongest for funding, schools reached, participation or access, program activity and implementation. Nutrition-related oversight ranges from menu guidance and product review to quality-assurance functions and policy-adherence targets. Historical Auditor General findings are included where they illuminate governance or implementation, but they are not treated as estimates of current food quality after subsequent policy changes.

Most importantly, none of the four currently provides a directly comparable province-wide measure of the nutritional composition or Food Guide alignment of food served. Compliance with a rule, quality of a planned menu, food actually served and food students consume remain separate outcomes, as discussed in Sections 4.3 and 6.2.

Evidence and limitations

The profiles prioritize the 2025–27 NSFP action plans and agreements, current provincial standards and program documents, official surveillance, Auditor General reports and relevant peer-reviewed research. They also incorporate material 2026 developments where these changed the implementation picture, such as new menu resources, procurement initiatives or program rollout.

The landscape changed during the study period, so these should be read as dated implementation snapshots, not settled descriptions of mature systems. Planned actions are distinguished from implemented practice; reported access is not converted into participation; and the absence of a province-wide quality measure is treated as an evidence gap rather than evidence of poor quality. Indigenous-led programs can also operate through distinct governance and funding arrangements that provincial summaries do not fully capture.

British Columbia

DIMENSION	EVIDENCE AND IMPLEMENTATION
Funding	**Provincial:** $76m annually through Feeding Futures ($71.5m public districts; $4.5m eligible independent schools), plus $5m/year for separate infrastructure. **Federal:** original 2024–27 agreement $39.38m; later plan allocates $15.947m in each of 2025–26 and 2026–27, including $14.353m/year to districts. **Per student:** the $71.5m Feeding Futures allocation to public districts is about $118 per funded public-school FTE/year (~$0.64 per 185 school days), using 2024/25 funded enrolment of 603,688 FTE; [1,2] excludes independent schools, capital and ministry administration.
Reach	**2024–25:** 1,304 of 1,488 public schools (88%) operated programs. Approximately 236,000 students (40% of enrolment) were estimated to receive breakfast, lunch and/or snacks; this is based on the median district-reported share, not an unduplicated daily count. The plan projects enhancements in 1,000 schools reaching 130,000 students in each later year. A more recent provincial statement reported almost 90% of B.C. schools offering school food programs reaching more than 246,000 students; a comparable unduplicated-participant methodology was not published, so this should not [1,6] be read as a simple trend from the action-plan estimate.
Policy instruments and governance	The 2013 Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in B.C. ceased to be in effect March 7, 2025. The B.C. School Food Toolkit provides voluntary guidance for school food purchasing and meal planning, with additional resources for vending, school stores, fundraising and events. Feeding Futures spending and reporting conditions bind funded districts, but its nutrition guidance is not a prescribed [1,3] food-composition standard; local policies may still apply.
CFG translation	The Toolkit translates CFG-2019 into practical school food guidance and, since June 2026, four-week breakfast and lunch cycles for Grab N' Go, Assemble-and-Serve and Cooked-from-Scratch programs. The sample meals are built around vegetables and fruits, grains and protein, with water available, and regularly include plant proteins such as hummus, beans, lentils, tofu, edamame and nut/seed butters. Whole grains are encouraged but not consistently specified across the sample menus. No binding [3] plant-protein share, whole-grain frequency, fibre minimum or CFG plate proportion is prescribed.
Evidence of CFG-2019 adherence	No representative provincial measurement of current menu adherence was located. In 2024–25, 55 of 60 districts reported actions to improve food environments, including CFG-informed purchasing and dietitian collaboration. This is implementation activity, not measured compliance. Historical [1,4] sales-policy studies are not current CFG-2019 evidence.
Programs and delivery	Districts select in-house, hub/commissary, nonprofit and commercial models. Of $22.4m reported to third parties in 2024–25, 45% went to nonprofits, 53% to for-profits and 2% to mixed providers. Feed [1] BC is working toward 30% B.C. food purchasing, an origin target rather than a nutrition target.
2025–27 commitments	Federal funds support expanded food provision, menu variety, staffing and kitchen improvements. District allocations reflect enrolment, rural factors and equity. The plan does not add a binding nutrition standard. In June 2026, the Toolkit added four-week breakfast and lunch plans for three operating models and more than 35 recipes, most adapted to yield 50 servings, providing [1,3] implementation tools matched to different levels of kitchen, equipment and staffing capacity.
Monitoring and evaluation	Districts report spending, reach and program types, and the province reports annually to Canada. Audited federal financial statements are required. No province-wide nutritional outcome target is [1] specified.
Independent oversight	A June 2026 Auditor General audit found general procurement-framework gaps in two of three sampled school districts. It was not a school food or nutrition audit; its relevance is limited to [5] procurement governance and accountability.
Key evidence gaps	Current local sales rules; representative menu quality and student uptake; actual adoption of the Toolkit and sample menu resources; whether procurement and supplier practices translate CFG-2019 [1,3] into consistent meals; comparative operating costs and school-appropriate food-quality measures.

Sources:
1–2. Canada-BC Agreement (2024–27) and Action Plan (2025–27)
3–4. HealthLink BC, BC School Food Toolkit, Sample Menu Plans and Recipes (updated June 2026); Levay et al. (2020)
5. Office of the Auditor General of BC (2026), Procurement in Three B.C. School Districts
6. Government of British Columbia, Minister's statement on Education Week 2026 (April 2026)

Ontario

DIMENSION	EVIDENCE AND IMPLEMENTATION
Funding	**Provincial:** $38.3m/year across the Student Nutrition Program (SNP), First Nations SNP (FNSNP) and Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program. **Federal:** $44.8m/year in 2025–26 and 2026–27. **Per student:** using the NSFP action-plan denominator of about 2.08m public-school students, combined government funding is about $40 per student/year (~$0.22 per 185 school days); it excludes substantial municipal, charitable and local contributions and is not funding per participant. 1
Reach	The NSFP action plan reports 4,848 publicly operated schools and about 2.08m students. Ontario's finalized 2024–25 education statistics report 4,861 publicly funded schools and 2,095,193 students; the public sources do not reconcile the difference, so the action-plan denominator is retained for NSFP baselines and targets. SNP baseline: 3,963 schools and average daily participation of 880,900 in 2024–25 interim reporting; targets rise to 4,218 schools and average daily participation of 935,745 in 2025–26, and 4,460 schools and average daily participation of 960,745 in 2026–27. FNSNP operates through a separate Indigenous stream.[1,5]
Policy instruments and governance	Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) funds SNP through regional lead agencies; funded SNP programs must adhere to the 2020 SNP Nutrition Guidelines. The Ministry of Education's PPM 150 separately governs foods and beverages sold in schools. These instruments differ in [1,2,3] scope, administration and food rules.
CFG translation	SNP meals require vegetables and fruits, protein and whole grain; snacks require vegetables and fruits plus protein or whole grain; water is always available. Product tables use nutrient criteria, including sodium and sugar limits. Plant proteins are encouraged but no mandatory plant-protein frequency or fibre minimum is specified. PPM 150 uses an 80/20 sales rule and a Not Permitted category.[2,3]
Evidence of CFG-2019 adherence	No current province-wide audited SNP menu-compliance rate, direct CFG-2019 menu assessment or student-intake outcome was reported in the action plan. Lead agencies and public health units support menu [1,2] planning, but participation data cannot demonstrate nutritional quality.
Programs and delivery	SNP is community-based and frequently volunteer-delivered, with lead agencies leveraging municipal, charitable and private resources. FNSNP partners control culturally appropriate local delivery. The Northern [1] Fruit and Vegetable Program supplies a weekly serving in northern elementary schools.
2025–27 commitments	Expand SNP and FNSNP reach, strengthen bulk purchasing and local supply chains, and continue the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program. Federal allocations shift across streams while totalling $44.8m/year. Procurement coordination is moving from planning into implementation: in 2025 Student Nutrition Ontario reviewed procurement and distribution practices across its network, and in February 2026 it convened Lead Agency buyers and Ontario growers with provincial and agriculture-sector partners to explore local [1,6] purchasing opportunities.
Monitoring and evaluation	Ontario tracks schools, average daily participation, meals and accommodations through program reporting. The action plan does not add a common nutritional-quality outcome. Served-food and sold-food compliance [1] need to be monitored separately.
Independent oversight	Historical oversight of foods sold is cautionary: the 2013 Auditor General found weak monitoring of PPM 150 and non-compliant sampled menu items. In 2015, none of 10 recommended actions was fully implemented (18% in process; 82% little/no progress). This predates current SNP guidelines and is not current meal-quality evidence.[4]
Key evidence gaps	Current PPM 150 compliance; representative SNP menu quality; whether emerging bulk-purchasing arrangements change food selection, cost or CFG alignment; and how split governance between sold food, [1,2,3,6] funded meals and Indigenous programs affects consistent implementation.

Sources:

1. Government of Canada, Ontario NSFP Action Plan (2025–27)
2. Ontario, Student Nutrition Program Nutrition Guidelines (2020)
3. Ontario, PPM 150: School Food and Beverage Policy
4. Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, Healthy Schools Strategy (2013) and Follow-up (2015; 2017)
5. Ontario Ministry of Education, Education Facts (2024–25; finalized 2026)
6. Government of Ontario, 2026 Local Food Report

Nova Scotia

DIMENSION	EVIDENCE AND IMPLEMENTATION
Funding	**Provincial school food investment:** $33.937m actual in 2024–25; $82.305m forecast in 2025–26 and $102.305m in 2026–27. **Federal:** about $4.680m/year in later-year notional allocations. **Per student: using the action plan**'s denominator of 133,345 school-aged children, 2025–26 provincial + federal funding is about $652 per student/year (~$3.53 per 185 school days); includes staffing, [1] infrastructure and program costs, not just food.
Reach	Breakfast was reported in 373 schools with 51,223 participants in 2023–24. The lunch program reached 258 schools in 2024–25, targets 334 in 2025–26 and all 372 public schools in 2026–27. The action plan [1] uses 133,345 school-aged children as its 2025–26 target denominator.
Policy instruments and governance	The September 2024 School Food and Nutrition Policy (ADM-02) and accompanying standards govern food offered, sold and served in public schools, with defined exceptions. Regional centres and CSAP [1,2] implement the policy. Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey programs have separate oversight.
CFG translation	The 2024 standards operationalize CFG-2019 through food lists, whole-grain criteria, protein choices, beverage rules and limits on sodium, sugars and saturated fat. Plant proteins are promoted. No [2] province-wide mandatory plant-protein share or fibre floor was identified.
Evidence of CFG-2019 adherence	Nova Scotia has unusually strong menu-control infrastructure: standardized lunch menus, public-health nutrition input, recipe testing and ingredient standards. However, no representative post-2024-policy compliance audit or province-wide nutritional-quality result was located. A 2022–23 [1,4] breakfast survey showed fresh fruit served by 90% of responding schools on a typical day.
Programs and delivery	Lunch uses self-operated kitchens, onsite vendors and offsite catering. Offsite models created temperature/palatability challenges, prompting moves toward onsite production where feasible. [1] Standard menus, contracts and a Quality Assurance Manager provide direct levers over food quality.
2025–27 commitments	Stabilize breakfast, extend lunch to all grades, expand menu cycles, hire quality/operations staff, [1] upgrade kitchens and require at least 20% of lunch ingredients by value from local suppliers.
Monitoring and evaluation	The ordering platform and school/Regional Centres for Education (RCEs) reporting capture uptake and satisfaction; student and kitchen testing informs recipe changes. Implementation assessments and [1] quality assurance are planned, but a common nutritional outcome measure is not specified.
Independent oversight	The 2022 Auditor General found the former policy was based on the 1992 Food Guide, that most sampled lunch settings did not comply, and that monitoring was inadequate. All 10 recommendations were accepted. The 2024 policy/standards are a major subsequent system change, so the audit is a [3] historical baseline, not current compliance evidence.
Key evidence gaps	Compliance with the 2024 standards across delivery models; food composition and student uptake/waste; results from quality-assurance processes; and whether local sourcing improves [1,2] nutritional quality.

Sources:

1. Government of Canada, Nova Scotia NSFP Action Plan (2025–27)

2. Nova Scotia Education, School Food and Nutrition Policy and Standards (2024)

3. Office of the Auditor General of Nova Scotia, Healthy Eating in Schools (2022)

4. Nova Scotia Health, School Healthy Eating Programs Provincial Report 2022–23 (2023)

New Brunswick

DIMENSION	EVIDENCE AND IMPLEMENTATION
Funding	**Provincial:** $2m annually supports the universal breakfast program. Budget 2025 allocated $19m to develop the school lunch program; in 2026 the province added $7m, bringing the 2026–27 lunch allocation to $26m. **Federal:** $4.228m/year in 2025–26 and 2026–27, with carry-forward provisions. **Indicative per student:** not recalculated because the 2026–27 lunch envelope changed materially during implementation and includes rollout and operating costs; it should not be interpreted as a meal [1,3] cost.
Reach	**2024–25 baseline:** Feed NB universal breakfast was available in 136 of 295 schools, providing access to 55,703 students. The 2025–26 target is universal breakfast access across all 295 schools and 108,869 students. The action plan also targets lunch access in all schools in 2026–27. Province-wide lunch rollout began in September 2026; by September 10, service was underway in 241 schools, with rollout [1,3] continuing in the remaining schools.
Policy instruments and governance	Policy 711, Healthier School Food Environment, establishes mandatory minimum requirements for foods and beverages sold, served or otherwise offered in public schools; Policy 127 governs food services. Feed NB's contract adds program requirements. The current provincial analysis is examining how Policies 711 and 127 apply to breakfast and lunch rather than rewriting them, and is intended to [1,2] inform enhanced school food guidelines across meal programs.
CFG translation	Policy 711 uses food-category and nutrient criteria and promotes vegetables and fruits, whole grains and protein foods, including beans and lentils. It predates CFG-2019 as an operational framework. No [2] common plant-protein share or fibre requirement was identified.
Evidence of CFG-2019 adherence	The action plan lists the 2024–25 baseline for Policy 711 adherence as unavailable and sets a 100% target by 2026–27. A target is not evidence of achievement. No representative current menu-quality or [1] student-intake assessment was located.
Programs and delivery	For breakfast, Feed NB aggregates orders and distributes food province-wide; schools and community partners prepare or serve it. Lunch is delivered through school-specific providers, while district personnel and contracts provide levers for product screening and purchasing consistency. In the September 2026 rollout, at least two meal options, including a vegetarian option, are to be available daily, with meals priced at $4 for K-8 and $5 for Grades 9–12 and confidential full subsidies available [1,3] for families needing additional support.
2025–27 commitments	Expand breakfast to all schools, strengthen equipment/distribution/staffing, phase in universal lunch, and target 30% local/sustainable sourcing by quantity of food products purchased by 2026–27. The [1,3] new lunch program offers regular and vegetarian choices with confidential subsidies.
Monitoring and evaluation	Program reach, infrastructure and staffing are reported quarterly. Policy 711 adherence, food-safety compliance and local/sustainable sourcing are reported annually, with 100% Policy 711 adherence and 30% local/sustainable sourcing targeted for 2026–27. Product-level nutrition compliance and actual [1] student participation remain important validation needs.
Key evidence gaps	Actual Policy 711 compliance after breakfast/lunch expansion; nutritional quality and supplier specifications across lunch providers; participation rather than nominal access; reconciliation of the action plan's 295-school denominator with September 2026 rollout reporting of 241 schools operating [1,2,3] and 54 remaining; and whether local/sustainable sourcing also improves CFG-aligned food quality.

Sources:

1. Government of Canada, New Brunswick NSFP Action Plan (2025–27)

2. New Brunswick Education, Policy 711: Healthier School Food Environment

3. Government of New Brunswick, School Food Programs; Affordable School Lunch Program Rolling Out Across the Province (September 2026)

Endnotes

1. Bundy DAP. Remarks at a Coalition for Healthy School Food webinar, November 2025. https://youtu.be/DRJK4KUlztk. Public remarks; the quotation in the report removes verbal disfluencies while preserving the substance of his statement that Canada is part of an "unprecedented global movement" and that school meals are an investment in future generations. ↩

2. World Food Programme. State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024. Rome: WFP; September 2025. https://publications.wfp.org/2024/state-of-school-feeding/, Executive Summary and Chapter 1. ↩

3. World Food Programme. State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024. Rome: WFP; September 2025. https://publications.wfp.org/2024/state-of-school-feeding/, Chapter 1, Figures 1.8 and 1.9: 466 million children reached in 2024, 107 countries with national school-meal policies and US$84 billion in annual funding. Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition. Policy insights for national school meals programmes: Annual Research Statements to the members of the School Meals Coalition: 2022, 2023, and 2024. Frontiers in Public Health. 2025;13:1416165. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1416165. This dated account reports 109 Coalition member countries representing 67% of the world's population; Bundy stated 112 countries and 67% in the November 2025 webinar, illustrating that membership counts change over time. For the modelled $7–$35 return range: Verguet S, Limasalle P, Chakrabarti A, Husain A, Burbano C, Drake L, Bundy DAP. The broader economic value of school feeding programs in low- and middle-income countries. Frontiers in Public Health. 2020;8:587046. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.587046. For the U.S. figure: The Rockefeller Foundation. True Cost of Food: School Meals Case Study. 2021. https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/report/true-cost-of-food-school-meals-case-study/. The study estimated about US$39.5 billion in annual benefits against US$18.7 billion in costs, or about US$21 billion net; it evaluates the existing U.S. school-meal system rather than the incremental effect of introducing universal meals. ↩

4. World Food Programme. State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024. Rome: WFP; September 2025. https://publications.wfp.org/2024/state-of-school-feeding/. Figure data as note 3. Figure data are from the WFP source cited above; retain WFP as the data source for Figure 1.1. ↩

5. Leme ACB, Hou S, Fisberg RM, Fisberg M, Haines J. Adherence to food-based dietary guidelines: a systematic review of high-income and low- and middle-income countries. Nutrients. 2021;13(3):1038. doi:10.3390/nu13031038; World Food Programme. State of School Feeding Worldwide 2024. Rome: WFP; September 2025. https://publications.wfp.org/2024/state-of-school-feeding/, Chapter 3. ↩

6. Ruetz AT, Tasala K. The State of School Food Programming in Canada 2023/24: Pre-National School Food Program Baseline. Ruetz Consulting; May 2025. https://amberleyruetz.ca/assets/uploads/ruetz-a.t.-tasala-k.-2025.-the-state-of-school-food-programming-in-canada-2023-24.pdf. ↩

7. Ruetz AT, Tasala K. The State of School Food Programming in Canada 2023/24: Pre-National School Food Program Baseline. Ruetz Consulting; May 2025. https://amberleyruetz.ca/assets/uploads/ruetz-a.t.-tasala-k.-2025.-the-state-of-school-food-programming-in-canada-2023-24.pdf; Ruetz AT, McKenna ML. Characteristics of Canadian school food programs funded by provinces and territories. Canadian Food Studies. 2021;8(3):70–106. doi:10.15353/cfs-rcea.v8i3.483; PROOF, University of Toronto. New data on household food insecurity in 2025. April 2026. https://proof.utoronto.ca/2026/new-data-on-household-food-insecurity-in-2025/; Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. National Food Security Strategy. June 2026. https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/node/4273. The Strategy states food price inflation of 31% since January 2020; it does not name the price measure. PROOF reports that 30.8% of children under 18 lived in food-insecure households in 2025, supporting the report's "nearly one in three" wording. ↩

8. Blais A, Ahmed M, L'Abbé M, Sellen D, Malik V. Canada-wide survey of school food programs. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2025. doi:10.1139/apnm-2024-0083. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2024-0083. ↩

9. PROOF. What can be done to reduce food insecurity in Canada? https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-can-be-done-to-reduce-food-insecurity-in-canada/ ↩

10. Blais et al. 2025, Canada-wide survey (note 8), citing Aliyar R, Gelli A, Hamdani SH. A review of nutritional guidelines and menu compositions for school feeding programs in 12 countries. Frontiers in Public Health. 2015;3:148. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2015.00148; and Tanaka N, Miyoshi M. School lunch program for health promotion among children in Japan. Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition. 2012;21(1):155–158. ↩

11. Tarasuk V. Remarks at Food, Climate and Health: Convening Research, Practice and Policy, University of Toronto, 5 October 2026. ↩

12. Keyes S. Provinces, Territories, Municipalities invest $400M+ annually in school food. Coalition for Healthy School Food. 2 June 2025; updated 7 July 2025. https://www.healthyschoolfood.ca/post/provinces-territories-municipalities-invest-400m-annually-in-school-food. The Coalition reports a median of $0.63 per student per day across 13 provincial and territorial per-capita estimates in its 2025 comparison, presented as a 2025/26 snapshot. Its underlying funding figures use the most recent available years, ranging from 2023/24 to 2025/26. The denominator assumes all enrolled students participate; this is not a national student-weighted average, funding per actual participant, or a meal cost. Separately, Ruetz and Tasala's 2023/24 national calculation reports $0.24 per enrolled student and $0.94 per participating student per school day, using 190 school days (Ruetz AT, Tasala K. The State of School Food Programming in Canada 2023/24: Pre-National School Food Program Baseline. Ruetz Consulting; May 2025. Table 2 and footnotes 12–14. https://amberleyruetz.ca/assets/uploads/ruetz-a.t.-tasala-k.-2025.-the-state-of-school-food-programming-in-canada-2023-24.pdf). Those averages should not be presented as alternative denominators for the Coalition's $0.63 median. ↩

13. Blais et al. 2025, Canada-wide survey (note 8): about 54% of reported funding from donations and fundraising (23% non-profit, 19% fundraising, 12% corporate). Monetary funding, not in-kind food volume. ↩

14. Department of Finance Canada. Budget 2019, Chapter 4, A Food Policy for Canada. March 2019. https://www.budget.canada.ca/2019/docs/plan/chap-04-en.html; Ruetz AT, Tasala K. The State of School Food Programming in Canada 2023/24: Pre-National School Food Program Baseline. Ruetz Consulting; May 2025. https://amberleyruetz.ca/assets/uploads/ruetz-a.t.-tasala-k.-2025.-the-state-of-school-food-programming-in-canada-2023-24.pdf: 151% rise, from about $93 million in 2018/19 to more than $234 million in 2023/24; national average $0.94 per participating student per day; Ruetz and McKenna 2021 (note 7) for the 2018/19 baseline. The one-in-three figure is a projection from the federal target of up to 400,000 more children a year (National Food Security Strategy, note 7), not a count. ↩

15. Lundborg P, Rooth DO, Alex-Petersen J. Long-Term Effects of Childhood Nutrition: Evidence from a School Lunch Reform. Review of Economic Studies. 2022;89:876–908. doi:10.1093/restud/rdab028; Ruetz AT, Edwards G, Zhang F. The Economic Rationale for Investing in School Meal Programs for Canada. Ruetz Consulting; 22 January 2024. https://amberleyruetz.ca/assets/uploads/ruetz-consulting_the-economic-rationale-for-investing-in-school-meal-programs-for-canada.pdf; National Food Security Strategy (note 7) for families saving an average of $800 a year. ↩

16. Employment and Social Development Canada. Backgrounder: Federal vision for a National School Food Program. 16 June 2026. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2026/06/backgrounder-federal-vision-for-a-national-school-food-program.html; Hernandez K, Engler-Stringer R, Kirk S, Wittman H, McNicholl S. The case for a Canadian national school food program. Canadian Food Studies. 2018;5(3):208–229. doi:10.15353/cfs-rcea.v5i3.260. ↩

17. ESDC backgrounder (note 16); Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, School Food Infrastructure Fund, September 2024; Canada. National School Food Program Act, enacted through Bill C-15, Royal Assent March 2026. https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-16.45/FullText.html. The $216.6M annual figure from 2029–30 is also stated in the National Food Security Strategy (note 7). ↩

18. ESDC backgrounder (note 16), distinctions-based Indigenous funding; Black School Food Working Group and School Food Forum sessions 04 and 05 (June 2026). ↩

19. Employment and Social Development Canada. National School Food Policy. June 2024. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/reports/national-policy.html; Canada-Quebec agreement on school food, 2024. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements.html ↩

20. Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html for Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick; IFFS provincial comparison (Appendix F). ↩

21. Canada-Ontario National School Food Program Agreement 2024 to 2027. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/ontario-2024.html. Health-promotion objective and Food Guide commitment. The same wording applies across the standard agreements; Quebec's asymmetrical agreement differs. Clauses 3.1 (expiry), 3.2.1 (renewal) and 6.2 (possible common quality and outcome measures in future agreements). Government of Canada; Government of Quebec. Asymmetrical Agreement between Canada and Quebec on the National School Food Program 2024 to 2027. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/quebec-2024.html. Clauses 2.1, 3.1–3.2 and 7.1: distinct objectives and accountability framework; same March 31, 2027 expiry. ↩

22. Canada-Ontario National School Food Program Agreement 2024 to 2027. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/ontario-2024.html, clause 6.2 and term clause. ↩

23. Health Canada. Canada's Dietary Guidelines for Health Professionals and Policy Makers. 2019. https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/guidelines/. ↩

24. Health Canada. Remarks from Joël Lightbound, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health. June 2017. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2017/06/remarks_from_joellightboundparliamentarysecretaryotheministerof.html. ↩

25. Health Canada. Make healthy meals with Canada's food guide plate. 2026. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/eating-support/cooking/make-healthy-meals-plate.html. The plate illustrates food-group proportions and is accompanied by advice to choose plant protein foods more often. ↩

26. Health Canada. Fibre. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/nutrients/fibre.html. Figure 3.2 is "The importance of fibre" in Section 3. ↩

27. Health Canada. Canada's food guide: Eat a variety of healthy foods each day. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/healthy-eating-recommendations/eat-variety.html. ↩

28. Health Canada. Canada's Dietary Guidelines for Health Professionals and Policy Makers, Section 1: Foundation for healthy eating. 2019. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/dietary-guidelines/section-1-foundation-healthy-eating.html; Health Canada. Evidence review cycle for dietary guidance: 2025 summary. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/educators-professionals/evidence-review-cycle/summaries/2025.html; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Blood cholesterol. https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/blood-cholesterol; Health Canada. Canada's Dietary Guidelines, Section 2: Foods and beverages that undermine healthy eating. 2019. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/dietary-guidelines/section-2-foods-beverages-that-undermine-healthy-eating.html. ↩

29. Health Canada. History of Canada's food guides from 1942 to 2007. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guide/about/history-food-guide.html. ↩

30. Health Canada. Canada's food guide: Healthy eating recommendations. https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/. ↩

31. Health Canada. Development of Canada's food guide. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/development.html; Grant M, Jenkins DJA. Resisting influence from agri-food industries on Canada's new food guide. CMAJ. 2018;190(15):E451-E452. doi:10.1503/cmaj.180037. ↩

32. Asher KE, Doucet S, Luke A. Registered dietitians' perceptions and use of the plant-based recommendations in the 2019 Canada's Food Guide. Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics. 2021;34(4):715–723. https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.12845. In the non-random sample of 411 registered dietitians, 82.8% regarded the recommendation to choose plant-based protein more often as evidence-based and 57.7% supported moving dairy into the protein-food category. ↩

33. Center for Biological Diversity. Analysis of G20 national dietary guidelines. 12 September 2023. https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/analysis-us-lags-behind-other-g20-nations-at-adding -sustainability-into-dietary-guidelines-2023-09-12/. Advocacy-organization analysis, not peer-reviewed. Canada is coded as addressing sustainability; Health Canada. Canada's Dietary Guidelines for Health Professionals and Policy Makers, Section 1: Foundation for healthy eating. 2019. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/dietary-guidelines/section-1-foundati on-healthy-eating.html, "Environmental impact". ↩

34. Health Canada. Evidence review cycle for dietary guidance: 2025 summary (note 28). Eckert KF, Douglas S, Zhang F, Brauer P, Duncan AM, Haines J. Costly, confusing, polarizing, and suspect: public perceptions of plant-based eating from a thematic analysis of social media comments. Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems. 2024;8:1397004. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2024.1397004. The study analyzed 4,918 Facebook comments on nine Canadian news articles from January 2019 to July 2020; it is a qualitative analysis, not a population-prevalence survey. ↩

35. Statistics Canada. Health of Canadians, 2024. Released 5 March 2025. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250305/dq250305a-eng.htm. In 2023, 46.1% of adults aged 18 and older reported at least one of seven selected chronic conditions: arthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer (ever), heart disease (ever), stroke or a mood disorder. The estimate excludes the territories. ↩

36. Rodd C, Sharma AK. Recent trends in the prevalence of overweight and obesity among Canadian children. CMAJ. 2016;188(13):E313–E320. https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.150854. Shields M. Overweight Canadian children and adolescents. Statistics Canada; 2005. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-620-m/2005001/article/child-enfant/8061-eng.htm. The approximately threefold rise applies to obesity among 12–17-year-olds, from 3% in 1978/79 to 9% in 2004; it is not an estimate for all children from 1980 to the present. Patel TJ, Ayub A, Bone JN, et al. Incidence trends of type 2 diabetes mellitus, medication-induced diabetes, and monogenic diabetes in Canadian children, then (2006–2008) and now (2017–2019). Pediatric Diabetes. 2023;2023:5511049. https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/5511049. Baseline: Amed S, et al. Diabetes Care. 2010;33(4):786–791. https://doi.org/10.2337/dc09-1013. Sellers EAC, McLeod L, Prior HJ, Dragan R, Wicklow BA, Ruth C. Incidence and prevalence of type 2 diabetes in Manitoba children 2009–10 to 2017–18: First Nation versus all other Manitobans. Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice. 2024;208:111097. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diabres.2024.111097. The 2017/18 incidence comparison is 121.2 versus 10.7 per 100,000, approximately 11.3-fold. Amed et al. 2010 reports that 10.1% of new cases were among children of African or Caribbean heritage; that is a composition share, not an incidence ratio. ↩

37. Cohen JFW, Hecht AA, McLoughlin GM, Turner L, Schwartz MB. Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index. Nutrients. 2021;13(3):911. doi:10.3390/nu13030911; López-Gil JF, et al. Mediterranean diet and academic performance: systematic review and meta-analysis. Clinical Nutrition. 2024. Associations, not causal effects. López-Gil JF, Victoria-Montesinos D, García-Hermoso A. Is higher adherence to the Mediterranean diet associated with greater academic performance in children and adolescents? A systematic review and meta-analysis. Clinical Nutrition. 2024;43(8):1702–1709. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clnu.2024.05.045. ↩

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39. Statistics Canada. Age and sex, and type of dwelling data: Key results from the 2016 Census. 3 May 2017. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/170503/dq170503a-eng.htm. The 2016 Census was the first to enumerate more people aged 65 and older than children under 15. Statistics Canada. Population projections for Canada, provinces and territories, 2024 to 2074. 21 January 2025. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250121/dq250121c-eng.htm. The population aged 85 and older is projected to rise from about 0.9 million in 2024 to 3.2–4.1 million by 2074; under the medium-growth scenario it more than doubles from 1.2 million in 2031 to 2.8 million in 2051. Canadian Institute for Health Information. Age-Adjusted Public Spending per Person. Updated November 2025. https://www.cihi.ca/en/indicators/age-adjusted-public-spending-per-person. CIHI reports average public health spending on people aged 80+ at about seven times that for ages 1–64. These sources do not establish a 7.5-fold comparison with a 50-year-old or a tripling of the 85+ population within 20 years. ↩

40. Ng A, Ahmed M, L'Abbé M. Nutrient Intakes of Canadian Children and Adolescents: Results from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) 2015 – Nutrition Public Use Microdata Files. Research Square [preprint]. Posted 22 December 2021. Version 1. doi:10.21203/rs.3.rs-1138934/v1. Results, p. 7, subsection on Adequate Intake, reports >93% below the age- and sex-specific fibre Adequate Intake, referring to Table 2 and supplementary Table S10. This is a 2021 preprint analysis of 2015 CCHS-Nutrition data for ages 2–18, not a measurement of current NSFP meals.

The percentage describes intake below a recommended benchmark; it does not estimate the prevalence of physiological inadequacy or clinical deficiency. See Health Canada. Do Canadian Children Meet Their Nutrient Requirements Through Food Intake Alone? 2012. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/health-nutrition-surveys/canadian-community-health-survey-cchs/canadian-children-meet-their-nutrient-requirements-through-food-intake-alone-health-canada-2012.html, on interpreting Adequate Intakes. ↩

41. UNICEF Office of Research, Innocenti. Report Card 14: Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries. Florence; 2017. https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/building-future. Canada's 37th-of-41 rank is the composite Goal 2 nutrition ranking, not an indicator of access to healthy food alone. UNICEF Canada. Canadian Companion. https://www.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2022-07/RC14%20Canadian%20Companion_0.pdf. It reports children's food insecurity separately (Canada 24th, 11.9%) and unhealthy weight separately (29th). Statistics Canada. Health characteristics, annual estimates, Table 13–10–0096–01. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310009601. The fruit-and-vegetable measure is frequency, not servings, and excludes children under 12. Ziraldo et al. 2025 and 2026 (notes 62 and 63); Tugault-Lafleur et al. 2019 (note 65). No primary estimate was identified for the report's separate "9 in 10 children" fibre prevalence claim; an Adequate Intake cannot be used directly to calculate prevalence of inadequate intake. Auclair O, Burgos SA. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2021;46(5):501–510. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2020-0760. Among adults aged 19+, nuts, seeds and legumes supplied about 5% of protein intake. ↩

42. Zahr R. BC School Fruit and Vegetable Nutritional Program Evaluation: Summary Report. BC Centre for Disease Control, Provincial Health Services Authority; October 2018. https://www.bcaitc.ca/sites/default/files/programs/BCSFVNP/BCSFVNP_evaluation_summary_report_Final_2 018.pdf. The report states that 33% of parents agreed their family bought and ate more produce; among parents whose children talked about the items at home, 61% bought apples and 52% bought mini cucumbers. Colley P, Miller L, Seabrook JA, Gilliland J. Children's perceptions of a Centrally Procured School Food Program in southwestern Ontario, Canada. Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada. 2021;41(4):131–137. https://doi.org/10.24095/hpcdp.41.4.02. Both findings are self-reported. ↩

43. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. School Food Infrastructure Fund. https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/programs/school-food-infrastructure-fund. Intake ran 6 September to 4 October 2024; "The program ends March 31, 2026". ↩

44. Cohen JFW, Richardson S, Parker E, Catalano PJ, Rimm EB. Impact of the new U.S. Department of Agriculture school meal standards on food selection, consumption, and waste. American Journal of Preventive Medicine. 2014;46(4):388–394. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2013.11.013; Schwartz MB, et al. New school meal regulations increase fruit consumption and do not increase total plate waste. Childhood Obesity. 2015;11(3):242–247. doi:10.1089/chi.2015.0019. These studies document consumption and waste after the standards changed; they do not by themselves establish that the findings caused a proposed rollback to be defeated. ↩

45. Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy and Columbia CIESIN. 2026 Environmental Performance Index. July 2026. https://epi.yale.edu/. Canada ranked 21st of 22 in the Global West region and 29th of 177 globally in the 2026 EPI. Regional table: https://epi.yale.edu/region/2026/global-west. ↩

46. Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, planetary boundaries graphic; EAT-Lancet Commission (note 47), Figure 1. Background science: Richardson K, et al. Earth beyond six of nine planetary boundaries. Science Advances. 2023;9(37):eadh2458. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adh2458. Figure 3.4 is a general planetary-boundaries status diagram; the report's food-system contribution statements are separately sourced to the 2025 EAT-Lancet Commission. The exact reproduction licence for the embedded artwork is not established by these citations. ↩

47. Rockström J, Thilsted SH, Willett WC, et al. The EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy, sustainable, and just food systems. The Lancet. 2025;406(10512):1625–1700. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(25)01201-2. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(25)01201-2. Key messages and Executive summary. The key messages list climate change among the five; the executive summary describes five of six breached boundaries plus a notable impact on climate and ocean acidification; Poore J, Nemecek T. Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers. Science. 2018;360(6392):987–992. doi:10.1126/science.aaq0216. Global figures; land includes pasture. ↩

48. Health Canada. Canada's Dietary Guidelines for Health Professionals and Policy Makers, Section 1: Foundation for healthy eating. 2019. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/dietary-guidelines/section-1-foundati on-healthy-eating.html, "Environmental impact"; EAT-Lancet Commission (note 47), Glossary, Table 1, Panel 1 and Key messages. The 15 million estimate is for adults at a PHD index score of 120. ↩

49. Springmann M, Hansoge MP, Schultz L, Pastorino S, Bundy DAP. The health, environmental, and cost implications of providing healthy and sustainable school meals for every child by 2030: a global modelling study. The Lancet Planetary Health. 2025;9(11):101278. doi:10.1016/j.lanplh.2025.06.002. Vegan scenario 52%. ↩

50. Van Boeckel TP, et al. Reducing antimicrobial use in food animals. Science. 2017;357(6358):1350–1352. doi:10.1126/science.aao1495 (about 73% of antimicrobials sold globally); EAT-Lancet Commission (note 47), Table 2: 73% of total antimicrobial use; Public Health Agency of Canada. Antimicrobial use: Canadian Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (CARSS) dashboard. Updated 28 November 2024. https://health-infobase.canada.ca/carss/amu/. Measured in mg per population correction unit, which adjusts for animal population; Council of Canadian Academies. When Antibiotics Fail. 2019. https://cca-reports.ca/reports/the-potential-socio-economic-impacts-of-antimicrobial-resistance-in-canad a/; EAT-Lancet Commission (note 47), Panel 2; Public Health Agency of Canada. Pan-Canadian Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance. 2023. https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/drugs-health-products/pan-canadian-action- plan-antimicrobial-resistance.html. The Council of Canadian Academies report estimates approximately C$1.4 billion in AMR-attributable healthcare costs in 2018; it does not support a general claim that drug-resistant infections are ten times costlier to treat. ↩

51. Statistics Canada. Census of Agriculture, historical poultry inventories and farms reporting. Historical census-farm definitions and poultry categories change over time, so the draft's comparison of "fewer than 100" with "over 30,000" chickens per average farm is not established on a consistent denominator. Taylor LH, Latham SM, Woolhouse MEJ. Risk factors for human disease emergence. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B. 2001;356:983–989. https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2001.0888. Taylor reports that approximately 75% of emerging human pathogens are zoonotic. Jones KE, et al. Global trends in emerging infectious diseases. Nature. 2008;451:990–993. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature06536. Jones reports a different measure: 60.3% of emergence events were zoonotic and 71.8% of those zoonotic events originated in wildlife. Hayek MN. The infectious disease trap of animal agriculture. Science Advances. 2022;8(44):eadd6681. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.add6681. Hayek cites earlier literature for an increase at more than four times the earlier rate over the preceding four decades; it does not newly estimate that rate. ↩

52. National Food Security Strategy (note 7); Agri-Food Analytics Lab, Dalhousie University, with University of Guelph, University of Saskatchewan and University of British Columbia. Canada's Food Price Report 2026. December 2025. https://www.dal.ca/sites/agri-food/research/canada-s-food-price-report-2026.html, Table 1, page 5; Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Industry implications of evolving consumer behaviour, Deep dive 3: Animal and plant-based proteins. July 2025. https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/sector/consumer-trends-and-behaviours/deep-dive-3-animal-and-plant-ba sed-proteins. AAFC does not name the underlying survey. AAFC's summary draws on Doan D, Poirier A. Deep Dive #3: Animal- and Plant-based Proteins. Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute; March 2024. https://capi-icpa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Deep-Dive-3-Animal-and-Plant-based-Proteins.pdf, using Canadian Centre for Food Integrity 2023 consumer-trust surveys conducted by Ipsos. The 17% figure applies to all respondents reporting increased plant-based meat-alternative consumption; the 86% figure applies only to respondents who reduced meat consumption and cited cost/price. ↩

53. Statistics Canada. Health of Canadians, 2024. Section 8.0: Health behaviours, Nutrition. Released 5 March 2025. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-570-x/2024001/section3-eng.htm. Adult self-reported frequency of eating vegetables and fruit five or more times daily declined from 2015 to 2021; 21.8% in 2021 and 21.6% in 2023 were reported as stable. Frequency is not servings or Food Guide adherence; adults in the provinces only. Health Canada's 2025 evidence review notes that CCHS changes limit time-series comparisons. House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. Grocery Affordability: Examining Rising Food Costs in Canada. Tenth Report, 44th Parliament, 1st Session; June 2023. https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/AGRI/report-10/page-24. Testimony by Rebecca Lee, Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada; an attributed account, not a causal estimate of the national trend. ↩

54. Agri-Food Analytics Lab, Dalhousie University, with University of Guelph, University of Saskatchewan and University of British Columbia. Canada's Food Price Report 2026. December 2025. https://www.dal.ca/sites/agri-food/research/canada-s-food-price-report-2026.html, page 21, citing Rochefort et al. 2022; Rochefort G, Brassard D, Paquette MC, Robitaille J, Lemieux S, Provencher V, Lamarche B. Adhering to Canada's Food Guide recommendations on healthy food choices increases the daily diet cost: insights from the PREDISE study. Nutrients. 2022;14(18):3818. doi:10.3390/nu14183818. https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/14/18/3818. Quebec French-speaking adults (n=1,147), 2015–16 Nielsen prices. Overall adherence raised cost only after energy standardization (+$1.09/day). Whole grain foods, protein foods and plant-based protein foods showed no significant difference; the grain foods ratio (+$0.71), saturated fats and fatty acids ratio also raised cost. The wording above reflects the study: no statistically significant cost association for whole-grain foods, protein foods or plant-based protein foods does not establish zero cost difference. ↩

55. Springmann M, Clark MA, Rayner M, Scarborough P, Webb P. The global and regional costs of healthy and sustainable dietary patterns: a modelling study. The Lancet Planetary Health. 2021;5(11):e797-e807. doi:10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00251-5. The abstract gives "up to" 22–34% lower for healthy and sustainable patterns as a group in upper-middle- and high-income countries, not plant-based patterns alone; Lee JJ, et al. Journal of Food Science. 2023. doi:10.1111/1750-3841.16691 (3,231 products): plant-based cheese and yogurt analogues were more expensive; milk and meat analogues showed no significant difference; Grey literature: Agri-Food Analytics Lab, Dalhousie University. Plant vs. animal price comparison. April 2022. https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/Plant%20Animal%202022%20EN.pdf; Sun H, et al. Childhood plant-based diet quality and cardiometabolic health, metabolite profiles, and dietary costs. American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. 2026. doi:10.1016/j.ajcnut.2026.101524. Generation R, Rotterdam, n=3,990; diet at age 8, outcomes at about age 10 (mean 1.6 years). In upper-middle- and high-income countries, the model estimated high-grain vegetarian/vegan patterns 22–34% cheaper, high-vegetable vegetarian/vegan patterns 17–27% cheaper, and flexitarian patterns 12–14% cheaper, using 2017 food prices and including household waste. Sun et al. 2026 reports no association between the healthier plant-based diet index and higher dietary costs in the Generation R cohort. ↩

56. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Government of Canada announces funding to strengthen the pulse sector. News release, 9 February 2024. https://www.canada.ca/en/agriculture-agri-food/news/2024/02/government-of-canada-announces-funding -to-strengthen-the-pulse-sector-and-mitigate-climate-change.html; National Food Security Strategy (note 7): KPI to raise the domestically produced share of healthy food, based on Canada's Food Guide, from 75% to 85% by 2032; Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Question Period note AAFC-2026-QP-00051. https://search.open.canada.ca/qpnotes/record/aafc-aac%2CAAFC-2026-QP-00051: "more than $3 billion" in new investments. ↩

57. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The Government of Canada invests in stronger, more resilient and affordable food distribution systems. News release, 5 October 2026. https://www.canada.ca/en/agriculture-agri-food/news/2026/10/the-government-of-canada-invests-in-stronger-more-resilient-and-affordable-food-distribution-systems0.html. C$3.2 billion National Food Security Strategy over ten years; C$1 billion Food-Link Fund, with Food Hub Program and Food Terminal Fund streams. Application intake scheduled 14 October to 11 December 2026. Announced objectives, not demonstrated cost reductions. ↩

58. Food System Economics Commission. The Economics of the Food System Transformation: Global Policy Report. 2024. https://foodsystemeconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/FSEC-GlobalPolicyReport-February2024.pdf. US$15 trillion a year (12% of 2020 GDP, 2020 PPP); US$5–10 trillion in annual benefits; changing diets account for 70% of benefits, globally. Modelling later published as Bodirsky BL, et al. Nature Food. 2025;6:1133–1152. doi:10.1038/s43016-025-01268-y (no dollar figures). See pp. 8–9 and 54–62 for the hidden-cost, transformation-benefit and dietary-change estimates. ↩

59. Hutchinson JM, Lamarche B. What are Canadians eating? A call to action for national surveillance and monitoring of dietary intakes in Canada. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2026. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2026;51:1–4. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2025-0402. ↩

60. Ruetz AT, et al. School Food Programs in Canada, Part 6: Operational Typologies. April 2025; Ruetz AT, Tasala K. The State of School Food Programming in Canada 2023/24: Pre-National School Food Program Baseline. Ruetz Consulting; May 2025. https://amberleyruetz.ca/assets/uploads/ruetz-a.t.-tasala-k.-2025.-the-state-of-school-food-programming-in-canada-2023-24.pdf. Categories compiled by IFFS. ↩

61. Vanderlee L, McLaughlin A, Vaillancourt C, Ahmed M, Olstad DL, Raine K, Kirk SFL. School Food Environment Surveys in Canada: Final Report. INFORMAS Canada; 2024. https://informascanada.com/fileadmin/Fichiers/Default/Provision/School_Food_Environment_Surveys_in_Canada_-_Final_Report.pdf, pages 16 and 20. Self-reported; 112 responding schools, not a census. ↩

62. Ziraldo ER, Ahmed M, Mulligan C, Sellen DW, L'Abbé MR. Nutrient intakes of Canadian children and adolescents at school by meal occasion and location of food preparation. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2025;50:1–12. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2024-0027. Analysis of 2015 CCHS-Nutrition, ages 4–18 (n=1,690); includes food from home; 32.6% of daily energy and 28.4%–35.6% of measured nutrients were consumed at school. Tugault-Lafleur CN, Black JL, Barr SI. Lunch-time food source is associated with school hour and school day diet quality among Canadian children. Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics. 2018;31(1):96–107. https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.12500. Analysis of 2004 CCHS recalls (n=4,589): 72.8% brought lunch from home, 11.6% obtained lunch off campus, 9.6% at school and 5.9% skipped lunch. Related school-day analysis: Tugault-Lafleur CN, Black JL, Barr SI. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2017;42(10):1064–1072. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2017-0125. ↩

63. Blais et al. 2025, Canada-wide survey (note 8): vending, fundraising and special-event food excluded from the program definition. ↩

64. World Health Organization. Policies and interventions to create healthy school food environments: WHO guideline. Geneva; 27 January 2026. https://www.who.int/news/item/27-01-2026-who-urges-schools-worldwide-to-promote-healthy-eating-for-children; Cohen JFW, et al. Strategies to improve school meal consumption: a systematic review. Nutrients. 2021;13(10):3520. doi:10.3390/nu13103520. The WHO guideline was published in 2025 and released 27 January 2026; its evidence base comprises 96 intervention studies, 74 from the original review plus 22 in the update through October 2023, including 81 from high-income countries. Cohen et al. 2021 separately also included 96 studies; the two reviews are distinct. ↩

65. Tugault-Lafleur CN, Barr SI, Black JL. Examining differences in school hour and school day dietary quality among Canadian children between 2004 and 2015. Public Health Nutrition. 2019;22:3051–3062. doi:10.1017/S1368980019000788. ↩

66. Ziraldo ER, Wedekind E, Ahmed M, Sellen DW, L'Abbé MR. Top food categories contributing to Canadian children's energy and nutrient intakes at school. PLOS ONE. 2026;21(1):e0340494. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0340494. https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0340494. Tables 2 to 4: top ten 86.7% of energy; handheld entrées 25.6% energy, 44.9% sodium, 33.3% saturated fat, 24.5% fibre; baked goods 13.7% energy, 11.3% fibre, 14.3% saturated fat; combination dishes 9.7% energy, 11.8% sodium; fruit consumed by 55.2%, vegetables 22.0%; fruit 27.7% of fibre; vegetables 24.9% of vitamin A. Baked goods supplied 15.7% of total sugars, or 16% rounded. ↩

67. Ziraldo et al. 2025 (note 62) for the absolute value; Ziraldo et al. 2026 (note 66) for the shares (27.7 + 24.5 + 11.3 = 63.5%). Ziraldo et al. 2025, Table 6, reports mean fibre intake at school of 5.9 g (SEM 0.2), representing 35.6% (SEM 0.8) of total daily fibre intake in the analytic sample. ↩

68. Auclair O, Burgos SA. Protein consumption in Canadian habitual diets: usual intake, inadequacy, and contribution of animal- and plant-based foods to nutrient intakes. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2021;46(5):501–510. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2020-0760. Dairy products supplied 40.6% of saturated fat among adults in the 2015 CCHS-Nutrition. Harrison S, Brassard D, Lemieux S, Lamarche B. Consumption and Sources of Saturated Fatty Acids According to the 2019 Canada Food Guide: Data from the 2015 Canadian Community Health Survey. Nutrients. 2019;11(9):1964. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11091964. Its broader "milk and alternatives" grouping supplied 23.2% among people aged 2 and older; the estimates use different populations and groupings and are not interchangeable. Arsenault JN, Tyedmers PH, Dias GM. Changes in per capita and aggregate apparent consumption of livestock-derived foods in Canada from 1960–2020. Environmental Research: Food Systems. 2024;1(2):025009. https://doi.org/10.1088/2976-601X/ad7ff2. This is food-availability or apparent-consumption data, not measured individual intake. ↩

69. Dabravolskaj J, et al. Dietary intake and diet quality of Canadian elementary schoolchildren accessing school food programmes: a cross-sectional study. British Journal of Nutrition. 2026. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-nutrition/article/dietary-intake-and-diet-quality-of-canadian-elementary-schoolchildren-accessing-school-food-programmes-a-crosssectional-study/6AC DDA28AB9302E8BBFC610C453FCE32. n=2,366 in 32 APPLE Schools; exposure combines provided and purchased food. Dabravolskaj J, Grubic N, Veugelers PJ, Maximova K. Published online 2 February 2026. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007114526106394. ↩

70. Carducci B, et al. Promoting healthy school food environments and nutrition in Canada: a systematic review. Nutrition Reviews. 2024; Michnik K, Engler-Stringer R. Being well-fed in universal school lunches in Canada: avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach. Health Promotion International. 2025; Spronk I, Kullen C, Burdon C, O'Connor H. Relationship between nutrition knowledge and dietary intake: a systematic review. British Journal of Nutrition. 2014;111(10):1713–1726. doi:10.1017/S0007114514000087; BC School Fruit and Vegetable Nutritional Program evaluation (note 42). Self-reported. Carducci B, Dominguez G, Kidd E, Oh C, Jain R, Khan A, Bhutta ZA. Nutrition Reviews. 2025;83(2):e356–e391; first published online 20 May 2024. https://doi.org/10.1093/nutrit/nuae030. Michnik K, Engler-Stringer R. Health Promotion International. 2025;40(1):daaf012. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaf012. ↩

71. Blais et al. 2025, Canada-wide survey (note 8). The Abstract and Methods confirm coverage of ten provinces in the voluntary sample. ↩

72. Brassard D, et al. Development of the Healthy Eating Food Index (HEFI)-2019 measuring adherence to Canada's Food Guide 2019 recommendations on healthy food choices. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2022;47(5):595–610. doi:10.1139/apnm-2021-0415; Blais A, Ahmed M, L'Abbé M, Sellen D, Malik V. Evaluating the nutritional quality of school food programs in Canada compared to national nutritional guidelines. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2025. doi:10.1139/apnm-2024-0540. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2024-0540. Figure 3 and Table 1; voluntary 2022–23 menu sample. The 49.4% comparator for Canadian children aged 2–18 in the 2015 CCHS-Nutrition is from Brassard D, et al. Evaluation of the Healthy Eating Food Index (HEFI)-2019 measuring adherence to Canada's Food Guide 2019 recommendations on healthy food choices. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2022. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2021-0416. This is distinct from the HEFI development paper. The study adapted whole-diet indices to individual reported meals, including changes to beverage scoring. The voluntary 2022/23 sample is pre-NSFP; menu provision is not observed consumption. Fibre was not among the nutrients separately analyzed. ↩

73. Blais et al. 2025, menu evaluation (note 72), Figures 4 and 7: plant-protein foods 2 to 5% against 18 to 26% animal-source across meal types. Menus were reported, not observed. ↩

74. Blais et al. 2025, Canada-wide survey (note 8): more than 70% served prepackaged food; about 29% lacked necessary infrastructure; Carducci et al. (note 70), published 2024 in Nutrition Reviews; 298 articles, 1990 to 2021. Blais et al. report that some programs with inadequate infrastructure had no way to heat or cook food; the authors label this observation "data not shown" and do not provide a subgroup count. Carducci et al. is a 2025 issue article first published online 20 May 2024 and includes 298 articles from 1990–2021. ↩

75. Ruetz and McKenna 2021 (note 7); Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick plans. The action-plan tables support the stated ordering of meal types in B.C. and Manitoba; the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick plans support lunch expansion. Nova Scotia explicitly states that rising food costs and demand often exhausted breakfast funds midway through the year and that federal support was intended to maintain provision through the full school year. ↩

76. Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html. ↩

77. Ziraldo et al. 2025 (note 62); Blais et al. 2025, menu evaluation (note 72); Blais et al. 2025, Canada-wide survey (note 8): programs exclusively serving Indigenous populations and the territories were excluded. ↩

78. Nova Scotia Government. Province gears up to launch school lunch program this October. News release, 23 August 2024. https://news.novascotia.ca/en/2024/08/23/province-gears-launch-school-lunch-program-october ($6.50 is the 2024 launch figure); PEI School Food Program. FAQ. https://www.peischoolfood.ca/faq ("suggested $5.75 per meal"); Employment and Social Development Canada. National School Food Program: 2025 to 2027 Action Plan, Prince Edward Island. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/prince-edw ard-island-action-plan-2025.html (uptake rising; PWYC revenue "steadily declining"; describes $5.75 as a maximum). The C$6.50 Nova Scotia amount is the meal value stated at program launch in August 2024; this source does not establish that the price remained unchanged in 2026. ↩

79. Spill et al. 2024 (note 125); Cohen et al. 2025 (note 124). ↩

80. Blais et al. 2025, Canada-wide survey (note 8), determinants and funding-source panels, adapted. ↩

81. Blais et al. 2025, Canada-wide survey (note 8): determinants of food served, nutritional quality 52%, cost 25%. ↩

82. Blais et al. 2025, Canada-wide survey (note 8): 54% from donations and fundraising (23% non-profit, 19% fundraising, 12% corporate). Monetary funding sources; in-kind food volume was not measured. The 93% describes responding organizations, not a national share of programming. ↩

83. Alaniz-Salinas N, Ruetz A, Foster S, Veenstra J, Michnik K, Engler-Stringer R. School Food Programs in Canada: Operations & Costing Guide. Part 4 of the School Food How-to Guide. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan; July 2025. https://harvest.usask.ca/items/d268959c-deba-41a5-b7dd-4729b51284b5. Sections 2.1 (Food), p. 23, and 2.2 (Labour), p. 26, give the 40–45% ranges, citing Fox and Gearan 2019 and Ruetz et al. 2024. The guide describes these as typical planning ranges that can vary widely with program design, not a measured Canadian national average. ↩

84. Employment and Social Development Canada; Government of the Northwest Territories. National School Food Program: 2025 to 2027 Action Plan, Northwest Territories. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/northwest-territories-action-plan-2025.html. Section 1: the pre-existing Healthy Food for Learning allocation covered food rather than staffing, training and kitchen equipment; Sections 2 and 4 describe broader NSFP investments. ↩

85. Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: Nova Scotia plan. The Nova Scotia plan states that rising costs and demand often exhausted breakfast-program funds midway through the year and that added federal funding was intended to support provision throughout the school year. This is a stated funding rationale and plan, not an evaluation showing shortfalls have ended. ↩

86. Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Ontario plans. Planned allocations, not expenditure; B.C. district shares projected from 2024–25 spending; NB includes carry-forward funds. ↩

87. Canada-Ontario agreement, clause 6.2 (note 22). ↩

88. Blais A, Organ B, Weber N, Ahmed M, L'Abbé M, Sellen D, Malik V. From policy to plate: strengthening implementation of Canada's national school food policy. Canadian Journal of Public Health. 2025. doi:10.17269/s41997-025-01089-3. https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-025-01089-3. Commentary.

89. Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Student Nutrition Program Nutrition Guidelines. 2020; HealthLink BC. BC School Food Toolkit, sample menu plans and recipes, updated June 2026; Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. School Food and Nutrition Policy. Effective September 2024. https://ednet.ns.ca/docs/schoolfoodandnutritionpolicyen.pdf; Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: Nova Scotia plan. Ontario guidelines: https://files.ontario.ca/mccss-2020-student-nutrition-program-guidelines-en-2021-11-29.pdf. HealthLink BC sample menu plans: https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/living-well/healthy-schools/bc-school-food-toolkit/sample-menu-plans; recipes: https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/living-well/healthy-schools/bc-school-food-toolkit/recipes. The HealthLink pages were updated 22 September 2026. ↩

90. INFORMAS Canada 2024 (note 61), page 20. Self-reported, cross-sectional association (p<0.001). ↩

91. Ontario Ministry of Education. Policy/Program Memorandum 150: School Food and Beverage Policy. 2010 (does not apply to food provided at no cost; up to ten special-event days exempt); SNP Nutrition Guidelines 2020 (note 89); New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Policy 711: Healthier School Food Environment; Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. School Food and Nutrition Policy. Effective September 2024. https://ednet.ns.ca/docs/schoolfoodandnutritionpolicyen.pdf. New Brunswick Policy 711 was revised 3 December 2018. https://www.gnb.ca/content/dam/GNB3/t/et-ef/km-12/policies/docs/policy-711.pdf. ↩

92. Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. 2013 Annual Report, Section 3.03: Healthy Schools Strategy, pp. 104–120. https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en13/303en13.pdf. Follow-ups: 2015 Annual Report, Section 4.03; 2017 Annual Report, Volume 2, Chapter 4. https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en17/v2_400en17.pdf. Office of the Auditor General of Nova Scotia. Healthy Eating in Schools. Released 20 September 2022. https://oag-ns.ca/audit-reports/healthy-eating-schools. Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. School Food and Nutrition Policy. Effective September 2024. https://ednet.ns.ca/docs/schoolfoodandnutritionpolicyen.pdf. Employment and Social Development Canada. Nova Scotia 2025–2027 action plan. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/action-plan -nova-scotia-2025.html. The audits are historical oversight findings; later policy and implementation changes do not by themselves establish that earlier deficiencies have been resolved. ↩

93. Hundeshagen C, Rosmann H, Lindenmeier J. The effect of obligatory versus voluntary school food standard implementation on the fulfillment of the school food standard requirements in Germany. NFS Journal. 2024;37:100197. doi:10.1016/j.nfs.2024.100197. The sample comprised 150 menus: 48 from states with obligatory standards and 102 from states with voluntary standards. Reported obligatory/voluntary compliance was 83%/30% for whole grains, 85%/61% for vegetables, legumes or salad, and 60%/25% for the meat-related requirement. The comparison is observational. Observational comparison; not nationally representative outcomes or a controlled policy effect. ↩

94. Employment and Social Development Canada; Government of Prince Edward Island. National School Food Program: 2025 to 2027 Action Plan, Prince Edward Island. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/prince-edward-island-action-plan-2025.html. Section 1: the action plan's account of the August 2024 Auditor General findings. Cited as the plan's account of the audit, not a separate review of the full audit report. ↩

95. Ruetz AT, Alaniz-Salinas N, Foster S, Engler-Stringer R. School Food Programs in Canada, Part 5: Monitoring and Evaluation Guide. University of Saskatchewan (SphereU) and Coalition for Healthy School Food; February 2026. https://harvest.usask.ca/items/79c52e47-4c38-4d6f-93b5-6745b79a40fa. ↩

96. Seattle Public Schools, Culinary Services. Menus. https://www.seattleschools.org/departments/culinary-services/menus/ (single district example; practice evidence); Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. School Food and Nutrition Policy. Effective September 2024. https://ednet.ns.ca/docs/schoolfoodandnutritionpolicyen.pdf, clause 5.5.1: "a minimum of 20 minutes to sit and eat lunch with others." Seattle's page links current interactive menus, describes real-time menu updates, and provides nutrition and allergen information. It is a single-district practice example, not evidence of improved dietary outcomes. ↩

97. Ontario. Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025 (Bill 33), S.O. 2025, c. 12. Royal Assent 20 November 2025. https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-44/session-1/bill-33/status (allows the Minister to direct boards on matters of public interest); Accreditation Canada. Climate Action Program. https://accreditation.ca/training-workshops/climate-action-program/; Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care. Sustainable by Design: event highlights report. 2026. https://greenhealthcare.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Sustainable-by-Design-TOCWOct-2025-Event-High lights-Report.pdf ("Accreditation Canada and the Coalition have partnered to embed climate action in HSO standards"). The Accreditation Canada page states that the Climate Action Program was developed in partnership with the Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care and includes a maturity assessment, innovation award, and performance and improvement workshop. The page does not identify HSO as the program-development partner.

98. Balanced. Support and resources: plant-based product directory. https://www.balanced.org/support-resources. Practice evidence; U.S. ↩

99. Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Specific nutrient content claim requirements: protein claims and calculation of protein ratings. Accessed 13 October 2026. https://inspection.canada.ca/en/food-labels/labelling/industry/nutrient-content/specific-requirements. Current guidance permits FO-1/PER or PDCAAS; source-of-protein thresholds are 20 and 8 respectively, using the applicable reference quantity or reasonable daily intake. These are nutrient content claims, not health claims. ↩

100. Dairy Farmers of Ontario. Elementary School Milk Program. https://ontarioschools.milk.org/elementary-school-milk-program; Milk Club lunchbox program. https://milkclub.milk.org/Education-List/lunchbox-program/; Healthy minds and healthy bodies: student nutrition in classrooms. https://new.milk.org/corporate-responsibility/nourishing-healthy-communities/healthy-minds-and-health y-bodies-student-nutrition-in-classrooms/. ↩

101. Nourish Leadership. Cool Food Pledge and low-carbon procurement resources. https://www.nourishleadership.ca/coolfoodpledge; Buyers for Climate Action. Low-carbon food procurement guidance. Nourish Leadership. Guide to Best Practices and Green Criteria for Low-Carbon Food Procurement. Produced for Buyers for Climate Action; published 23 April 2025. https://nourishleadership.ca/knowledge-hub/guide-to-best-practices-and-green-criteria-for-low-carbon-fo od-procurement/. Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. Buyers for Climate Action. https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/greening-government/green-pro curement/buyers-climate-action.html. ↩

102. IFFS stakeholder research. Institutional procurement practitioner, interview, 24 July 2026. Unpublished transcript held by IFFS. ↩

103. NYC Mayor's Office of Food Policy. Good Food Purchasing. https://www.nyc.gov/site/foodpolicy/good-food-purchasing/good-food-purchasing.page ("approximately $660 million"; "over 220 million meals and snacks"; undated); MOFP marks major milestones. Press release, 16 December 2025. https://www.nyc.gov/site/foodpolicy/about/press-releases/end-of-term-2025-nyc-mofp-marks-major-milest ones.page ("more than doubled its purchases of plant-based proteins" FY19 to FY23); NYC Food by the Numbers. January 2024. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/foodpolicy/downloads/pdf/nycfoodbythenumbersfinal.pdf (219,831,621 in FY23). City agency purchasing, not school-only. ↩

104. Lalande A, Eppler E, Chiang T, Pow L, Deng Y, Gadhari N, Zhao J, MacNeill AJ. Development, implementation, and evaluation of a Planetary Health menu in a Canadian hospital: an experimental study. The Lancet Planetary Health. 2026;10(8):101483. doi:10.1016/j.lanplh.2026.101483; PEACH Health Ontario. Call for hospital partners. LinkedIn post, 2026. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/peach-health-ontario_call-for-hospital-partners-the-healthcare-activity-74 42307283805487104-XNOS. Social media announcement. Lalande et al.: plant-based first-choice lunch/dinner dishes increased from 0/28 to 11/28 (39%); mean menu greenhouse-gas emissions fell 39%; overall food-experience and food-quality scores did not differ significantly; median plate waste was 33% versus 35% (p=.29). The PEACH post announces a four-week quality-improvement pilot replacing the five most frequently ordered meat entrées with plant-based alternatives; it reports planned implementation, not evaluated outcomes. ↩

105. Foodbuy Canada. https://www.foodbuy.ca/ ("a division of Compass Group"; education sector; "negotiated savings on over 40,000+ SKUs"; rebate cheques). ↩

106. Smith W. Presentation to a Coalition for Healthy School Food webinar, November 2025. Public presentation, adapted. ↩

107. Employment and Social Development Canada. National School Food Program: 2025 to 2027 Action Plan, Ontario. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/ontario-acti on-plan-2025.html. Both amounts for FY2025–26, to Student Nutrition Ontario and for a local and regional food-audit tool. ↩

108. Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture. New apple processing equipment supports Nova Scotia growers. News release, 16 April 2026. https://news.novascotia.ca/en/2026/04/16/new-apple-processing-equipment-supports-nova-scotia-growers; Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: New Brunswick plan. The New Brunswick plan identifies Deer Island and Campobello Island as examples where Feed NB delivery constraints required direct funding for local arrangements.

109. Competition Bureau Canada. A recipe for competition: How shared kitchens and food hubs can strengthen competition and small business growth in Canada's food sector. 19 March 2026; page modified 15 April 2026. Sections on shared infrastructure and recommendations. Research- and consultation-based mechanism evidence, not an evaluation of grocery- or school-meal price reductions. ↩

110. Nourishing Futures School Foods Forum, Policy and Implementation Workshop, 2026. Public forum remarks. Organizer pages confirm two relevant sessions on 4 June 2026: How to embed Black Food Sovereignty into school food programs, 10:40 a.m.–12 noon, and From Policy to Plate, 1:40–2:40 p.m. The procurement-target statement is retained as public participant testimony from the forum record; the available source does not establish which of the two sessions contains the remark. ↩

111. Government of British Columbia (Feed BC). Getting Started: A Guide to Tracking B.C. Food Purchases in K-12 School Food Programs, version 2. August 2025. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/agriculture-and-seafood/feedb c/k12/k-12_tracking_guide.pdf. Districts are "encouraged to work towards a goal of 30%"; reporting "will remain a voluntary component" of Feeding Futures reporting. ↩

112. Employment and Social Development Canada; Government of Nunavut. National School Food Program: 2025 to 2027 Action Plan, Nunavut. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/nunavut-action-plan-2025.html. Section 1, p. 3, and Section 2, pp. 7–8: coordination, nutrition and capital-project positions were unfilled in 2024/25 and Year 1 funds were carried forward. Not a statement about vacancies in October 2026. ↩

113. British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care. Feeding Futures School Food Programs: funding guidelines; Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: British Columbia plan; Maximova K, Dabravolskaj J, Tran T, Leatherdale ST, Patte KA, Veugelers PJ. Toward a national school food program in Canada: understanding current landscape and context. Canadian Food Studies. 2025;12(2):5–22. doi:10.15353/cfs-rcea.v12i2.708. Perspective article. Awareness, incorporation and compliance with nutrition guidelines declined in years four and five, which the authors say "could be attributed to" School Health Facilitators being replaced by volunteer School Health Champions; prevalence peaked beyond the sixth intervention year. Author interpretation, not a tested effect. British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care. Feeding Futures & National School Food Program Funding: Questions and Answers. 1 May 2026, pp. 2–3.

https://blog.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/808/2026/04/2026_27-NSFP-Feeding-Futures-Funding-QA.pdf. Funding may support up to one School Food Coordinator per district and, within reason, other staff directly involved in delivery; general administrative costs are excluded. ↩

114. Forward Food Canada (Humane Society International/Canada). https://forwardfood.org. Current Canadian program page: Humane World Foundation Canada. Forward Food. https://humaneworldfoundation.ca/forward-food. ↩

115. Blais et al. 2025, Canada-wide survey (note 8). The results summary gives 55% for breakfast. ↩

116. Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: Nova Scotia plan. ↩

117. Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: New Brunswick plan.

118. Zhang F, Laila A, Barco Leme AC, Ma DWL, Haines J, on behalf of the Guelph Family Health Study. Knowledge and perceptions of the 2019 Canada's Food Guide: a qualitative study with Canadian children. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2022;47(11):1096–1103. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2022-0271. Ramuscak AV, Duncan AM, Ma DWL, Haines J, on behalf of the Guelph Family Health Study. Parents' knowledge of the 2019 Canada's Food Guide recommendations. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2023;48(12):1015–1018. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2023-0159. Eckert KF, Douglas S, Zhang F, Brauer P, Duncan AM, Haines J. Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems. 2024;8:1397004. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2024.1397004. These small local samples and selected online comments identify comprehension issues; they do not establish national prevalence. Teshome GB, Haileslassie HA, Shand P, Lin Y, Lieffers JRL, Henry C. Pulse-based nutrition education intervention among high school students to enhance knowledge, attitudes, and practices: pilot for a formative survey study. JMIR Formative Research. 2023;7:e45908. https://doi.org/10.2196/45908. n=41 at baseline, no control group. ↩

119. Plant-Based Health Professionals UK. Eat like a champion. 1 June 2020. https://plantbasedhealthprofessionals.com/eat-like-a-champion. The 236-child survey and 53% figure are the teacher's own account. Practice evidence. The public byline confirms the spelling Shaun Conaghan. In his separate written account, an informal follow-up survey included 236 children and 53% reported that their whole family joined in at home. Treat this as self-reported practice evidence, not an independently evaluated outcome. ↩

120. Ensaff H, Homer M, Sahota P, Braybrook D, Coan S, McLeod H. Food choice architecture: an intervention in a secondary school and its impact on students' plant-based food choices. Nutrients. 2015;7(6):4426–4437. doi:10.3390/nu7064426. The paper measures selection of designated plant-based items. ↩

121. Burg X, Metcalfe JJ, Ellison B, Prescott MP. Effects of longer seated lunch time on food consumption and waste in elementary and middle school-age children: a randomized clinical trial. JAMA Network Open. 2021;4(6):e2114148. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.14148. Fruit fell 11.3 points and vegetables 14.1 points; Nova Scotia School Food and Nutrition Policy (note 96).

122. Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: Nova Scotia plan. Nourish Nova Scotia. Annual Report 2024–2025, "Engaging Students: Viewing the School Lunch Program through students' lens." https://nourishns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2024-2025-Annual-Report_Nourish-Nova-Scotia.pdf. Students from four schools participated in spring 2025. See also Farm to Cafeteria Canada. Nourish Nova Scotia's Student Photovoice. October 2025. https://www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/2025/10/nourish-nova-scotias-student-photovoice/. ↩

123. Ontario Ministry of Education. Guidelines for Approval of Textbooks. 2008 (file dated 10 January 2023). https://files.ontario.ca/edu-guidelines-approval-textbooks-en-2023-01-10.pdf ("Boards have sole responsibility for the selection and evaluation of supplementary resources").

124. Cohen JFW, Zuercher MD, Orta-Aleman D, et al. Impact of deimplementing universal free school meals: school food authority perspectives. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior. 2025;57(10):902–908. doi:10.1016/j.jneb.2025.06.001. Eight U.S. states. The survey included 941 school food authorities across eight U.S. states. Increased stigma was reported by 26% of authorities where universal free meals ended and 5% where they continued; these are authority reports, not student prevalence. ↩

125. Spill MK, Trivedi R, Thoerig RC, et al. Universal free school meals and school and student outcomes: a systematic review. JAMA Network Open. 2024;7(8):e2424082. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.24082. The lunch finding rests on three studies.

126. Nourishing Futures School Food Forum 04: Black Food Sovereignty. June 2026. Public forum remarks; Type Diabeat It, London, Ontario. https://diabeat-it.ca/. Nourishing Futures School Food Forum. How to embed Black Food Sovereignty into school food programs. 4 June 2026, 10:40 a.m.–12 noon. https://nourishingfutures.info/how-to-embed-black-food-sovereignty-into-school-food-programs/. The organizer identifies Mystery Furtado as founder and CEO of Type Diabeat It, London, Ontario. https://www.diabeat-it.ca/. ↩

127. Mosby I. Administering colonial science: nutrition research and human biomedical experimentation in Aboriginal communities and residential schools, 1942–1952. Histoire sociale/Social History. 2013;46(91):145–172. doi:10.1353/his.2013.0015. Health Canada. Evidence review supporting Canada's food guide: 2025 summary. December 2025. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/educators-professionals/evidence-review-cycle/summaries/2025.html. Sections on cultural flexibility and Indigenous-led tools; findings about Indigenous-led resources are attributed stakeholder views, not evidence of completed tools. ↩

128. Employment and Social Development Canada; Government of British Columbia. National School Food Program: 2025 to 2027 Action Plan, British Columbia. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/british-columbia-action-plan-2025.html. P. 4: cross-ministerial responsibilities; Section 2, p. 6: additional weight for rural factors and the Equity of Opportunity Supplement. ↩

129. Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: Manitoba plan. The Manitoba plan states that provincial allocations consider enrolment, socioeconomic factors and geography; federal allocations also consider food costs by geographic location. Public schools must provide food at no cost and without barriers or stigma. ↩

130. Nourishing Futures School Food Forum 05: Black School Food Sovereignty, Part 2. 4 June 2026. Public forum remarks ("as Mystery mentioned, less than 1% of Black-led organizations are funded adequately"). The underlying source, denominator and definition are unconfirmed. ↩

131. Black School Food Working Group. Submission to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance. 6 February 2026. Recommendations 2 to 5. Recommendation 5 proposes at least $500,000 a year for Black-led research.

132. Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: British Columbia, Manitoba and Nova Scotia plans. B.C. links Education and Child Care with Agriculture and Food, Health, Infrastructure, and Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Manitoba's nutrition-guidelines working group includes Education and Early Childhood Learning, Manitoba Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, and public-health officials. Nova Scotia links Education and Early Childhood Development, Public Health Nutritionists, Agriculture and Nova Scotia Health. These are coordinated functions, not a single merged ministry. ↩

133. Coalition for Healthy School Food. https://www.healthyschoolfood.ca; Farm to Cafeteria Canada. https://www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca; University of Saskatchewan, School Food Programs in Canada series (SphereU), 2025–26 (Ruetz AT, Alaniz-Salinas N, Foster S, Engler-Stringer R. School Food Programs in Canada, Part 5: Monitoring and Evaluation Guide. University of Saskatchewan (SphereU) and Coalition for Healthy School Food; February 2026. https://harvest.usask.ca/items/79c52e47-4c38-4d6f-93b5-6745b79a40fa). Farm to Cafeteria Canada. School Food Map. https://www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/our-impact/school-food-map/. ↩

134. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. National Food Security Strategy. 2026. https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/department/initiatives/national-food-security-strategy. Historical basis for the June 2026 strategy, import-dependence discussion, $750 million over seven years for controlled-environment agriculture and $1 billion over ten years through the Food-Link Fund. ↩

135. Protein Industries Canada. Canada's Opportunity to Capture More Value from What We Grow. September 2026. Public summary of analysis prepared by Ernst & Young LLP for Protein Industries Canada. https://www.proteinindustriescanada.ca/uploads/EYSummary_Sept2026.pdf. P. 1: scenario processing 10% of raw crop exports domestically, up to C$5.4 billion additional GDP; pp. 3–4: implementation constraints and commercial procurement pilots. A modelled scenario in a public summary, not an NSFP impact estimate. ↩

136. Coalition for Healthy School Food. Submission for Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2026 Federal Budget. 21 May 2026. Recommendation 1: relaunch the School Food Infrastructure Fund; Recommendation 2: double federal investment from $200 million to $400 million a year, matching the more than $400 million combined P/T and municipal investment. ↩

137. Health Canada. Canada's food guide: toolkit for educators. April 2024. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/educators-professionals/toolkit.html. ↩

138. Health Canada. Food Guide Kitchen and sample three-day meal plan. https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/. See Appendix B. Health Canada. Food Guide Kitchen. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/eating-support/kitchen.html; Applying Canada's Dietary Guidelines: What nutritious foods to provide most often in a food environment, Table 1. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/dietary-guidelines/applying/what-nut ritious-foods-provide-often.html. ↩

139. See Section 6.3 notes (Nourish and Buyers for Climate Action; note 101); Joint Consortium for School Health. Healthy School Planner and foundational documents. https://www.jcsh-cces.ca/en/resources/jcsh-foundational-documents/; Public Health Agency of Canada. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study and Canadian Student Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey. The old Healthy School Planner was withdrawn in 2022 and a replacement remained under development in 2026. HBSC is an established school-based health survey. CSADS, formerly CSTADS, is a substance-use survey and should not be treated as a school-food-quality measure. HBSC: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/child-infant-health/school-health/health-behaviour-schoo l-aged-children.html; CSADS: https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canadian-student-tobacco-alcohol-drugs-survey.html. ↩

140. Blais et al. 2025, menu evaluation (note 72), Figures 4 and 7; Arsenault JN, Tyedmers PH, Dias GM. Changes in per capita and aggregate apparent consumption of livestock-derived foods in Canada from 1960–2020. Environmental Research: Food Systems. 2024;1(2):025009. doi:10.1088/2976-601X/ad7ff2. Per capita apparent consumption "remained surprisingly constant", with beef declining and poultry expanding; measured by weight. The full text confirms that per-capita apparent consumption peaked at 108 kg/person/year in the 1970s and remained within 91–101 kg/person/year over the final 35 years, with beef declining and poultry expanding. The measure is edible-weight food availability before retail and consumer waste, not measured individual intake. ↩

141. Nourish Leadership and Buyers for Climate Action (Section 6.3); Lalande et al. 2026 (note 104). ↩

142. See note 56; National Food Security Strategy (note 7); Ruetz, Edwards and Zhang 2024 (note 15); Springmann et al. 2025 school-menu modelling (Section 3.3); Rochefort et al. 2022 (note 54). ↩

143. Sparkman G, Walton GM. Dynamic norms promote sustainable behavior, even if it is counternormative. Psychological Science. 2017;28(11):1663–1674. doi:10.1177/0956797617719950; Reintgen Kamphuisen FM, Bouman T, van der Werff E. Unpacking dynamic norms: identifying key elements of dynamic norms and a meta-analysis of their effects on pro-environmental behaviour. Journal of Environmental Psychology. 2026:103060. doi:10.1016/j.jenvp.2026.103060 (79 studies; small, variable effects). The 2026 meta-analysis examined 79 studies from 49 articles; pooled effects were very small and varied with how dynamic norms were defined and presented, approximately r=0.03–0.10. ↩

144. Health Canada. Make healthy meals with Canada's food guide plate. 2026. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/eating-support/cooking/make-healthy-meals -plate.html. The plate illustrates food-group proportions and is accompanied by advice to choose plant protein foods more often. ↩

145. Ruetz and Tasala 2025 (note 7). Printed p. 13 reports 151% growth from about C$93 million in 2018/19 to C$234.38 million in 2023/24; Table 2 and footnote 13 support the C$0.94 per participating student per school day calculation using 190 school days.

146. National Food Security Strategy (note 7).

147. Statistics Canada. Table 17–10–0009–01, Population estimates, quarterly. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000901; Statistics Canada. Table 37–10–0109–01, Number of students in elementary and secondary schools; Ruetz AT, et al. School Meals Case Study: Canada. Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition; April 2023. The student totals and school-type shares are 2023/24 Elementary-Secondary Education Survey data from Table 37–10–0109–01; the approximately 13,000-school figure is a rounded estimate from Ruetz et al. (2023), rather than a same-year Statistics Canada school count.

148. Provincial and territorial National School Food Program action plans 2025–27, Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food.html: British Columbia plan; WHO 2026 guideline (note 64). WHO guideline, Section 5, Implementation considerations: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK620635/?report=reader. WHO calls for coordinated multisectoral involvement in design, delivery and monitoring; this is implementation guidance rather than a separate graded recommendation.

149. Environment and Climate Change Canada. Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy. 2024. https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/biodiversity/canada-2030-nature-strategy. html; Public Health Agency of Canada. Pan-Canadian Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance. 2023. https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/drugs-health-products/pan-canadian-action- plan-antimicrobial-resistance.html. Existing policy priorities; their integration with dietary change is part of the scenario.

150. Vivici. Vivici unveils innovative nature-equivalent whey protein. 2025. https://www.vivici.com/insights/vivici-unveils-innovative-nature-equivalent-whey-protein-a-game-change r-in-sustainable-nutrition. Manufacturer's description; the composition of finished foods depends on their other ingredients.

151. Abu Dhabi Investment Office, EVERY-Vivici partnership (2025). https://www.mediaoffice.abudhabi/en/economy/abu-dhabi-investment-office-partners-with-the-every-co mpany-and-vivici-to-scale-alternative-protein-production-using-fermentation-technology/; SDIC novel-protein investments and innovation centre (2026). https://inno.sdic.com.cn/swcxy/xxzx/gsdt/webinfo/2026/05/1776120519537511.htm; European Investment Bank, EUR 35 million for Formo (2025). https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2025-008-eib-provides-eur35-million-to-formo-to-expand-production-of -cheese-alternatives-free-from-animal-products; Singapore Food Agency, S$42 million (2025). https://www.sfa.gov.sg/news-publications/newsroom/2025/sfa-commits--42-million-to-drive-breakthroug hs-in-future-foods-and-food-safety; IntegriCulture SBIR support (2025). https://integriculture.com/en_news/research/921/; Australia, Industry Growth Program grant to Cauldron. https://business.gov.au/grants-and-programs/industry-growth-program/grant-recipients. Different technologies and mechanisms, not a comparable series.

152. Prime Minister of Canada. Principled and pragmatic: Canada's path. World Economic Forum address, 20 January 2026. https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2026/01/20/principled-and-pragmatic-canadas-path-prime-minist er-carney-addresses. Subsequent food-sector effects are imagined.

153. Kortleve AJ, et al. Stranded assets in European agriculture during food system transformations. Nature Food. 2026;7:38–44. doi:10.1038/s43016-025-01283-z; Garel A, Romec A, Sautner Z, Wagner AF. Do investors care about biodiversity? Review of Finance. 2024;28(4):1151–1186. doi:10.1093/rof/rfae010; Riemer O, Mairaj Shah T, Müller A. The role of true cost accounting in guiding agrifood businesses and investments towards sustainability. FAO Working Paper 23–13. 2023. doi:10.4060/cc8422en.

154. University of Oxford. Oxford researchers launch updated carbon offsetting principles. 28 February 2024. https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2024-02-28-oxford-researchers-launch-updated-carbon-offsetting-principles.

155. Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security. Food insecurity in Canada: new public opinion survey shows growing concern and support for action. 2026. https://www.feedopportunity.com/blog/food-insecurity-in-canada-new-public-opinion-survey-shows-gro wing-concern-and-support-for-action/. June 2026 survey of 3,223 adults: 81% found a low-income food benefit desirable, 77% a minimum income floor. Desirability of concepts, not support for a bill.

156. Parliament of Canada. Bills S-233 and C-223 (44th Parliament): https://www.parl.ca/legisinfo/en/bill/44-1/s-233, https://www.parl.ca/legisinfo/en/bill/44-1/c-223; Bills S-206 and C-253 (45th Parliament): https://www.parl.ca/legisinfo/en/bill/45-1/s-206, https://www.parl.ca/legisinfo/en/bill/45-1/c-253. Passage in 2030 is imagined.

157. Employment and Social Development Canada. National School Food Policy. 2024. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/reports/national-policy. html; Canada-Ontario agreement (note 22), section 3.1. The 2027 expiry establishes the renewal opportunity; the monitoring sequence is imagined.

158. Protein Industries Canada. The Road to $25 Billion. 2021. https://www.proteinindustriescanada.ca/pic-updates/the-road-to-25-billion; How Canada can achieve a $25 billion opportunity. 2023. https://www.proteinindustriescanada.ca/pic-updates/how-canada-can-achieve-a-25-billion-opportunity. Achievement is imagined.

159. Protein Industries Canada. Canada could add $5.4B to GDP by processing more of its crops at home: EY. 2026. https://www.proteinindustriescanada.ca/news-releases/ey-report-2026. A modelled opportunity, not a realized contribution.

160. Associated Press. Fiber is something most people could use more of. But experts advise caution with "fibermaxxing". 2025. https://apnews.com/article/730bdd5f68f448fe979f4ebd598e2340.

161. Better Food Foundation. Plant-Based Nudge Calculator. https://www.betterfoodfoundation.org/nudge-calculator/. Estimates require comparison with local results.

162. Brubacher LJ, et al. Evaluating a 52-week fresh food prescribing program in Ontario, Canada: a mixed-methods study on food insecurity, fruit and vegetable intake, and health. BMC Primary Care. 2025;26:208. doi:10.1186/s12875-025-02907-w; Community Food Centres Canada. A fresh produce prescription bolsters health and well-being for people living on low incomes. 2023. https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/a-fresh-produce-prescription-bolsters-health-and-well-being-for- people-living-on-low-incomes-850316426.html. National integration is imagined.

163. Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries. Action Plan on Plant-Based Foods. 2023. https://en.fvm.dk/news-and-contact/focus-on/action-plan-on-plant-based-foods. Canada's 2040 plan is imagined.

Appendix endnotes

Appendix A. ESDC backgrounder, 16 June 2026 (note 16); standard bilateral agreements, clause 4.2.2.

Appendix A. Employment and Social Development Canada. National School Food Program agreements and 2025–27 action plans. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements.html; Canada–Quebec agreement announcement (2024–25 funding basis); British Columbia Action Plan 2025–27, Feeding Futures (public school districts). https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/british-colu mbia-action-plan-2025.html; Keyes S. Provinces, Territories, Municipalities invest $400M+ annually in school food. Coalition for Healthy School Food. 2 June 2025; updated 7 July 2025. https://www.healthyschoolfood.ca/post/provinces-territories-municipalities-invest-400m-annually-in-scho ol-food. The Coalition tracker combines the most recent available years, ranging from 2023–24 to 2025–26. Report calculations use the stated P/T numerator, action-plan enrolment denominator and 190 school days; they are not funding per participating child.

Appendix A. Employment and Social Development Canada. National School Food Program: 2025 to 2027 Action Plan, Ontario. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/ontario-acti on-plan-2025.html.

Appendix A. Toronto Public Health. Achieving Universal Student Nutrition: 2026 Service Subsidies. Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 15 May 2026, pp. 1–3. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2026/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-287068.pdf; City Council decision, 24–25 June 2026, item HL33.2. https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2026.HL33.2. Approved 2026 municipal operating funding is C$31.970 million, approximately C$32 million; the report describes expansion toward universal morning-meal coverage across public-school communities by 2026–27. The earlier approximately C$26.4 million Ontario-wide municipal figure comes from a different reference period and scope and should not be compared directly with Toronto's later budget.

Appendix B. Health Canada. Food Guide Kitchen: Recipes. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/eating-support/kitchen/recipes.html. The catalogue contained 141 recipe entries when checked 9 October 2026. Applying Canada's Dietary Guidelines: What nutritious foods to provide most often in a food environment, Table 1. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/dietary-guidelines/applying/what-nut ritious-foods-provide-often.html. Figure 2.3 is a daytime excerpt of the whole-day sample, which also includes dinner.

Appendix B. Health Canada. Canada's Dietary Guidelines (2019), https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/dietary-guidelines.html; Applying Canada's Dietary Guidelines (released 3 May 2022), https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/dietary-guidelines/applying.html; Food guide friendly: Create a healthier food environment, https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/educators-professionals/friendly.html; Canada's food guide snapshot (2019), https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/snapshot.html; Toolkit for educators (launched spring 2024), https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/educators-professionals/toolkit.html; Food guide kitchen, https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/eating-support/kitchen.html; Canada's food guide research tools, https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/educators-professionals/research-tools.html; overview and Tips for healthy eating, https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-guide/explore/about.html. Web resources checked 9 October 2026. A current standalone publication titled Canada's Healthy Eating Pattern was not located; the Dietary Guidelines refer to it as a forthcoming resource, so it should not be listed as a separate published resource unless a current source is identified.

Appendix B. Health Canada. Evidence review supporting Canada's food guide: 2025 summary. December 2025. Catalogue H164-415/2025E-PDF. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2026/sc-hc/H164-415-2025-eng.pdf. This is the complete PDF of the 2025 summary, not a separate full technical report. See note 28.

Appendix B. Health Canada. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Published 11 April 2007; archived publication. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guide/about/history-food-guide/eating-well -canada-food-guide-first-nations-inuit-metis.html; Brake J. First Nations, Inuit an Métis food guides may be coming, Health Canada indicates. APTN News. 25 January 2019. https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/first-nations-inuit-an-metis-food-guides-may-be-coming-health- canada-indicates/. The 2019 report described planned distinctions-based work, not completed replacement tools.

Appendix B. Corkum A, Vanderlee L, White CM, Hammond D. Awareness of Canada's Food Guide among Canadian youth. Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research. 2023;84(1):49–53. https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdpr-2022-019. In a 2019 online survey of 3,674 youth aged 10–17, East/Southeast Asian, South Asian, Latino and Middle Eastern participants were less likely than White participants to report awareness; the finding should not be generalized to every racialized group. This replaces the untraceable "Amin et al., Canadian Journal of Public Health, 2023" citation.

Appendix C. Indigenous Services Canada. Elementary and Secondary Education, National School Food Program update. https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033676/1531314895090; Employment and Social Development Canada. Nova Scotia Action Plan 2025–27, section 5. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/action-plan -nova-scotia-2025.html; Northwest Territories Action Plan 2025–27, sections 1 and 5.

https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/northwest-territories-action-plan-2025.html. These illustrate distinct First Nations and Indigenous-led funding and delivery pathways; see Section 6.5.

Appendix C. Black School Food Working Group, Senate submission, 6 February 2026 (Section 6.5).

Appendix C. Blais A, Ahmed M, L'Abbé M, Sellen D, Malik V. Canada-wide survey of school food programs. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2025. doi:10.1139/apnm-2024-0083. About 54% of reported funding came from donations and fundraising; monetary funding, not in-kind food volume.

Appendix D. Brassard D, Elvidge Munene LA, St-Pierre S, et al. Development of the Healthy Eating Food Index (HEFI)-2019 measuring adherence to Canada's Food Guide 2019 recommendations on healthy food choices. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2022;47(5):595–610. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2021-0415. Developed by a multi-institution team led at Université Laval with Health Canada co-authors. Table 2 awards maximum points at vegetables/fruits ≥0.50 of total food reference amounts, plant proteins >0.50 of total protein-food reference amounts, and sodium <0.9 mg/kcal. These are food reference-amount ratios, not grams of protein or literal plate area; an exactly 50:50 animal/plant protein split does not meet the published >50% plant-protein threshold for full points.

Appendix D. Blais A, Ahmed M, L'Abbé M, Sellen D, Malik V. Evaluating the nutritional quality of school food programs in Canada compared to national nutritional guidelines. Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism. 2025;50:1–11. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2024-0540. Table 1 and Figure 4: vegetables and fruits represented 28%, 33% and 41% of total food reference amounts at breakfast, lunch and snacks, respectively. These are shares of menu provision, not proportions of students or observed food consumption.

Appendix E. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The Government of Canada invests in stronger, more resilient and affordable food distribution systems. News release, 5 October 2026. https://www.canada.ca/en/agriculture-agri-food/news/2026/10/the-government-of-canada-invests-in-stronger-more-resilient-and-affordable-food-distribution-systems0.html. Food-Link Fund applications scheduled to open 14 October 2026 (AAFC recommendation 1). Announced objectives, not demonstrated cost reductions.

Appendix E. Competition Bureau Canada. A recipe for competition: How shared kitchens and food hubs can strengthen competition and small business growth in Canada's food sector. 19 March 2026; page modified 15 April 2026. Shared kitchens, food hubs and facility/tenant compliance responsibilities (AAFC recommendation 3; provincial and territorial recommendation 6; municipal recommendation 1). Mechanism evidence, not an evaluation of price reductions.

Appendix E. Protein Industries Canada. Canada's Opportunity to Capture More Value from What We Grow. September 2026. Public summary of analysis prepared by Ernst & Young LLP. https://www.proteinindustriescanada.ca/uploads/EYSummary_Sept2026.pdf. Pp. 3–4: implementation constraints and commercial procurement pilots (AAFC recommendation 3). A modelled scenario, not an NSFP impact estimate.

Appendix E. Canada. National School Food Program Act. S.C. 2026, c. 3, s. 599. https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-16.45/FullText.html. Section 8: annual reporting on federal investments and progress, including the six principles (ESDC recommendation 3). The Act does not specify a school-menu scoring instrument.

Appendix E. Government of Canada; Government of Ontario. Canada-Ontario National School Food Program Agreement 2024 to 2027. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/school-food/agreements/ontario-2024.html. Clause 6.2: possible common quality and outcome measures in future agreements (ESDC recommendations 2 and 3).

Appendix E. Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Specific nutrient content claim requirements: protein claims and calculation of protein ratings. Accessed 13 October 2026. https://inspection.canada.ca/en/food-labels/labelling/industry/nutrient-content/specific-requirements. FO-1/PER or PDCAAS permitted (Health Canada/CFIA recommendation 3).