FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES (FSDs)

GUELPH, 26 JUNE 2019

CO-ORGANIZED BY THE ARRELL FOOD INSTITUTE

SUMMARY REPORT*

*FSDs Summary Reports develop over time as a result of comments received from participants. This report may be subject to change

Executive Summary

On 26 June 2019 a Food Systems Dialogues (FSDs) event took place in Guelph, Canada co-organized by the Arrell Food Institute. This FSDs event was held in the context of the Agri-Food Excellence Symposium. Approximately 71 participants attended, reflecting a range of actors working in Food Systems, ranging from farmers to food processors.

Tables were asked to present one or more proposals to address a specific area of food systems, with a focus on Canada. Ideally, the proposals were to be achievable within 3 years. The prompt themes for dialogue at this event addressed the following areas: value-add production, circular economy, Northern resilience, food policy, multi-stakeholder platform, livestock & proteins, biodiversity protection, technology, school nutrition program and food labelling.

The following is a summary of the tables' proposals for food systems transformation as well as the discussion topics that led them to their conclusions.

As is the norm at FSDs events, all Proposals outlined in this Summary Report are not attributed to any particular individual or organization. Each proposal did not necessarily receive universal support from all participants at the event; rather, the aim of this report is to capture recommendations made at the event, in order to allow continuity and consensus - a 'red thread' - to emerge across all FSDs events.

Proposals

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“With support from government and industry, farmers engage in food processing and product development, allowing them to capture a greater share of the value chain and be more connected to consumers”.

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Proposal 1: Develop and strengthen participatory public policies that underline food as a public good

There is a need for public policy that supports a cultural shift towards food as a public good. These policies should include reengineering subsidies to align to the desired outcomes; including health, sustainability, environment, local economy, and equity outcomes. Public sector procurement will be a key factor to this shift. The design of national public policy must be participatory and community-driven.

This approach will succeed when the price of food reflects its true value, and there are new entrants into the food space. Increased community processing in food transformation centers with appropriate levels of technology would be a sign of progress. The development of long term policy that supports sustainable and healthy food, in addition to training that supports the transition will also be important.

Participants at this FSD table indicated that to support these outcomes, the China Food Policy Council will share their lessons learnt, and the university and the city of Toronto will support sustainable procurement public policies. The University of Florida will support food safety research and connect with various farm organisations that have already created community processing centers. University of Guelph will consider to focus some of their education programmes on design innovation. Canadian community food centers will use their knowledge of food as a public good to influence policy. Provision will support food-based assistance with a food driven strategy that aligns to the desired outcomes of our food system.

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"Canada has mobilized all consumers, producers, retailers and food service processors and providers to participate in a circular economy of sustainable food production".

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Proposal 2: Establish a national forum to support the advancement of circular economies

To generate more circular economies, a national forum should be held that brings together diverse individuals to highlight the positive work that has been done in this sector, as well as the challenges in pursuing this approach. It can also explore work that is planned (such as the Guelph circular economy project). The forum should also develop guidelines for best practices to reduce waste and optimise circular economies. Potential attendees would include government, private sector, educational institutions, elementary and high school participants, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The forum should be a space to identify existing partnerships between entities successfully driving circular economy activities.

A measure of the forum's success will be the development of a clear set of guidelines and best practices on achieving waste reduction and waste optimisation. At least some partnerships should be set up within three years, preferably at a provincial level.To demonstrate its support, the University of Guelph could host the forum. A number of NGOs and private sector actors that play significant roles in the food system have committed to take leadership roles.

A positive example to look to is the recycling program in Washington DC, the result of a public-private partnership, that has been quite successful. A key factor in the success of this program was the significant "green" movement that supported it. Since this type of movement does not exist in every part of the country, the uptake may be uneven. However, even uneven momentum can be powerful and can lead to new norms.

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"As recommended in Canada's food policy, Farmers in the north have increased their resilience to the effects of climate change by shifting to production in greenhouses".

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Proposal 3: Farmers in the north of Canada develop community-owned farming practices that are adapted to climate challenges, and are supported with investment (especially infrastructure) from the government

Northern Canada's farmers should be supported to develop tailored approaches to farming that are community owned and respect the diversity in the north. In order to address the significant infrastructure and technological challenges to farming in the north, these approaches must be

government-supported. Such support should be part of a broader integrated farming in the north food policy that considers production, nutrition and access. Importantly, production must include hunting and foraging, access must consider affordability, and climate change resilience must underpin all aspects of government policy.

Clear benchmarks must be set and monitored, including diet related food health outcomes, to define and measure success. Such measures need to be set and driven by the communities themselves. There should be rapid progress, even in the short term, with a special emphasis on children's nutrition. Examples of indicators could include: when poorer people living in the north do not feel disadvantaged in terms of food; and when every family in the north can sit down to a meal made up of culturally appropriate ingredients that draws guidance from the new Canada recommendations on dietary guidance.

To support this approach, it will be necessary to tap into existing capacity across the country in a way that is responsive to the desires and needs of the communities in the north, including, for example, scholarships and exchanges for community members.

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"Federal policy in Canada supports access to healthy and affordable food for all Canadians, with a particular focus on food insecure communities".

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Proposal 4: Subsidize the cost of fruits and vegetables, particularly frozen and canned.

The federal government should develop a policy to subsidize the cost of fruits and vegetables with a focus on frozen and canned foods. The policy would subsidise farmers that grow fruits and vegetables (which Canada has a competitive advantage in), and retailers and other industry support along the food chain.

Short-term success will be determined when there is increased demand and intake of fruits, vegetables and fiber; reduced micronutrient deficiencies and an increased profit and/or income for Canadian fruit and vegetable farmers.

Long term success would see a reduction in healthcare costs, particularly for chronic diseases associated with nutrition such as diabetes.

Support for this approach must include advocating to policy makers and researching better technologies for processing, storage, and freezing.

An additional key activity should be an effort to stimulate different social norms with regard to the existing stigma against frozen and canned foods (as compared with fresh food, despite the

nutritional value being equivalent or even better). People should be enabled to understand that when food is preserved it does not imply that it is sub-standard.

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"Canada's National Food Policy Council successfully brings together representatives of diverse food systems stakeholders, creating an effective channel for them to share experience and expertise with the government".

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Proposal 5: Ensure the Food Advisory Council is a public entity that supersedes politics, and is adequately representative.

In order for the Food Advisory Council to be effective, it must operate as a technical body and not be subject to political influence. It should be supported from the top of Government but the mandates, objectives and timelines of the council must be independent.

A robust selection process for the Council's membership should be developed that carefully identifies groups of actors that need to be represented. Representation should not solely be based on population demographics, but also include groups who have more at stake, such as youth, farmers or indigenous Canadians. The selection system, which should be flexible and self-reflective, must be driven by government but be non-partisan with regards to turnover timelines and quantity of council members. There should be a process for the Council to self-regulate, reflect and improve on a regular basis.

The Council will have succeeded when its communications affect policies, when there is a diverse and appropriate balance in government prioritization, and when there is system consensus that it is doing the right thing. There should also be a three-year review and audit to ensure that the Council is achieving its goals.

Support needed to make the Council a success should include convening conversations, developing innovative ideas and exploring conduits to analysis of what's going on and suggestions as to how to create change. The government should act as a filter; a door for the local communications to come through, and a support to data collection.

It would be valuable to increase communication across all value chains and all kinds of media. For example, in all food facing places, such as grocery stores and city councils, there could be a matrix of the global situation including droughts, harvests, hunger and malnutrition.

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“Livestock producers are protected from financial and other risks associated with the transition towards sustainable plant-based proteins”.

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Proposal 6: Improve research on the optimal agriculture systems in every region to support farmers to shift to more sustainable livestock agriculture and explore options for plant-based proteins

To assist and encourage the transition to a balanced combination of sustainable livestock farming and sustainable regenerative agriculture, research must be conducted or collated on the appropriate agricultural systems for each region or bio-region in Canada. This should include ecological mapping on air, water, soil, nutrition so that farmers are able to make decisions based on the ecological and micro climate conditions in their farm system.

Concurrently, an incentive programme should be introduced to support ecological outcomes for farmers and support practices of diversification or sustainability decision making on the farm. This would include knowledge transfers (farmer-to-farmer training and on farm support) as well as a funding mechanism to support farmers to make those transitions themselves. There should also be a push for local procurement of Canadian livestock from farms that are using agriecological and regenerative principles and indicators.

The research should be completed after three years and it should include concrete examples of farmers who have successfully diversified and are producing livestock according to these agriecological principles. Discussions should happen at the national food policy level and focus on best practise modelling, engaging with peers, setting up pilots, getting broader funding for research, and pilot programs.

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“Farmers receive proper compensation for their expertise and efforts to conserve biodiversity."

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Proposal 7: Develop a series of policies that work together to drive an increase in biodiversity

To increase biodiversity a wide menu of policy interventions is needed, building on the good points of relevant policies. There must be a complex menu of agri-environmental schemes, including capacity building around peer-to-peer learning and farmer support, and local design in communities of what is place-appropriate and likely to bring about the biodiversity uplift that is needed.

The government must also intervene in driving markets towards biodiversity producing products such as mandating market standards through public procurement, driving public awareness of biodiversity friendly products to try and stimulating markets so that farmers are rewarded through market mechanisms and subsidies. This could include a carbon tax, or even an input tax, within the food system, in order to encourage minimal use of pesticides and emphasize a precision agriculture approach.

All these policies must be supported by problem monitoring and evaluation, and dynamic management.

These policies will have succeeded when the guidelines monitoring the dynamic practice are developed and in use and showing that food is being produced properly. It will also be crucial to show widespread farmer engagement.

Support for this approach must include more research, engagement in policy dialogues and capacity building and outreach of relevant actors.

Proposal 8: Modify trade standards to encourage production of goods that improve biodiversity.

Biodiversity could be promoted by modifying trade standards to grow the market for green goods. This would stimulate the market and encourage farmers to begin or continue producing green goods that improve biodiversity, and have a low carbon impact.

Success would be determined when all trade agreements have the equivalency of green standards. This would mean that bilateral agreements with the European Union are based on having biodiversity-friendly production, and (ultimately), the World Trade Organization adopting green standards as the norm for global trade.

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"Technology, both new and established, has been harnessed by the Canadian government and the private sector to reduce inefficiencies and fraud in the food supply chain".

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Proposal 9: Develop a community-led, human-centric approach to technology

A human centric approach to technological solutions is needed to harness the potential of technology. From the outset, all community members affected by the technology should be engaged to drive the objectives and outcomes, and develop common definitions.

To ensure that a human story is at the centre of any technological implementation, the government needs to change the narrative from ‘technology as the solution’ to ‘technology as a tool to help us solve a problem’.

In order for technology to be properly harnessed at the community level, change is needed in the bureaucracy to access funding and in the ability to use funds for innovative and technological solutions. The current complexity of the bureaucratic hurdles that must be navigated to access government funds act as a barrier for many actors to access these funds, especially community-led groups.

Success must include an improvement in social and health indicators. These indicators must be defined by the community, and should come from qualitative and quantitative approaches. Universities can support this process by developing holistic approaches to matrices and ensure there are interdisciplinary discussions around these issues.

Academics will catalyze, but not necessarily drive this approach.

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“A national school nutrition program is in place in Canada to support children’s health, food security and local and national economic development”.

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Proposal 10: A vision for the school nutrition program is developed collaboratively and adopted across Canada

The federal government should initiate a multi-jurisdiction, multi-stakeholder consultation process where multiple voices are heard and a clear vision for the school nutrition program is developed.

To be effective, this process should be led by a small group who develop the vision based on the input of many different voices. The objective would be to articulate what the school nutrition program aims to achieve in relation to health, food security, education curriculum, and economic development. A federal mandate will be crucial but implementation would be at other jurisdictional levels. As such, once the vision is agreed, strategies would need to be developed to implement the vision nationally. Implementation would need to be tailored to the local context in different areas.

Success would be when there is a vision that has broad multi-stakeholder support and that all of the provinces and territories support implementation. It is also important for school districts and boards to be supportive.

To support this proposal, the Advanced Agriculture Leadership Program could include this as one of the issues that they work on. Agriculture Canada would also support this process, although it would more fall under the mandate of Health Canada.

The University of Guelph could play a facilitator role, and undertake some of the research and advocacy. It would be necessary for research to be multi- and trans-disciplinary and look at nutrition policy options as well as at the social and economic impact. This would help define what the most important issues to address are, what is the most effective way to do it, and what the likely outcomes are.

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“Consumers have a clear understanding of the food they buy."

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Proposal 11: Develop new technology to empower people with the details of the ingredients of the food they consume

New technology should be developed enabling people to have a clear understanding of the ingredients in the food they consume. This technology should allow consumers to verify and assess the contents of food according to their individual values.

When developing this technology, vulnerable populations must be considered and included and have equal access to whatever the solution is, which may present a challenge considering the barriers in accessing technology. There would need to be clear, uniform regulations around its use.

Success would be when consumers have a good understanding of what they are consuming and food producers feel that they are part of the solution.

Necessary support for this solution would include research and knowledge exchange. This solution would need support and input from many other disciplines and perspectives. For example, consumer education and student nutrition should be linked in, and distribution systems would be a key piece of this problem. Other considerations include data, access, availability of technology, and regulation.

David Nabarro's key take-aways

- The framing and the language of the propositions being explored by each table has a major influence on the way the FSD evolves: it is worthwhile that participants in each table discuss the framing before they start their Dialogue.

- Food policy is about people and needs to be person-centric. That applies whether it is centered on the interests of producers, of consumers or of other people within food systems. Fundamentally, food policy must be focused on the public-good.

- Working on the future of food is fundamentally about working within power structures - how power is distributed and used - as well as appreciating how political systems operate. This political context has a major influence on issues to do with equity in people's access to food and to being involved in production. This applies between different parts of the country and may influence, for example, whether whether or not school nutrition actually responds to the needs of everybody.

- There are no simple solutions to food systems challenges. Instead, any solution will be multi-component and needs to be implemented with an interdisciplinary mindset. This also applies to technological solutions.

- Engagement with and participation of all groups in society is key. There is a need for inclusive programming, popular participation and local level solution development.

- Qualitative measures of success may be at least as important as quantitative measures.

- The importance of understanding and navigating the systems of government, especially when it comes to accessing funds, must be acknowledged.

- Public policy is an important aspect of the solution, both because of the direct impact of these policies, and because of the power of public policy to stimulate development of new norms.

- Universities have important roles as sources of information: they validate existing frameworks and analyses. They facilitate connections between different actors and perspectives

- Underlying values - related to equity, access, affordability and quality - are of key importance when food policies and being developed and implemented