

Food Policy - Produce

A balanced diet rich in fruit and vegetables is a cornerstone of good health, as it is important for managing weight and reducing the incidence of chronic disease—yet Canadians consume less fruit and vegetables than *Canada's Food Guide* recommends. This is due partly to the affordability, accessibility, and availability of fruit and vegetables, in addition to the inadequate food literacy of Canadians. While provincial, territorial and local initiatives to promote healthy eating are underway, there is an opportunity for all stakeholders to collaborate on a national Food Policy that supports continued access to safe and healthy food for all Canadians.

Background

- Canada is the only G7 country without a national fruit and vegetable nutrition policy—the European Union, United Kingdom, United States, and Japan have all instituted programs to improve nutrition and promote fruit and vegetable consumption.
- *Canada's Food Guide* recommends that adult males should consume eight to ten servings of fruit and vegetables per day, while adult females should consume seven to eight. Adult males in Canada consume on average 3.5 servings of fruit and vegetables per day while females consume 4.3.
- There is considerable variation among provinces and territories; for example, 54% of Quebecers report that they consume more than 5 servings per day compared to 20.8% of Northwest Territories residents and 22.3% of Nunavut residents (Statistics Canada, 2014). Overall, 37% of adult males and 50.1% of adult females consume at least five servings per day. Fruit and vegetable consumption by women was relatively constant from age group to age group, while males ranged from a high of 49.1% for males aged 12 to 17, to a low of 32.5% for those aged 45 to 54.
- Chronic diseases (diabetes, cancer, stroke, cardiovascular illness and respiratory illness) and excess weight are conditions that reduce the quality of life for three of five Canadians. Consuming seven portions of fruit and vegetables has been linked to a 42% reduction in risk of death from all cases of chronic illness, with a 25% reduction in the risk of cancer, and a 31% lower risk of heart disease and stroke.
- The economic burden attributed to low fruit and vegetable intake in Canada is estimated to be \$4.4 billion annually in direct and indirect costs.
- Addressing the healthcare shortfall requires a pan-Canadian, whole of government approach that begins with renewed health promotion initiatives to address the benefits of consuming more fruit and vegetables.

Action required

Canada's fruit and vegetable industry urges the federal government to:

- Adopt an integrated and collaborative approach to increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, focused on Canadian produce when in season, by one serving per day within 5 years. Reaching this goal would increase Canadians' consumption by about 20%.
- Establish a clear goal for an integrated, inter-governmental approach to bringing adequate supplies of fruit and vegetables to northern, rural, remote and inner city areas.
- Better inform consumers of the benefits of consuming adequate quantities of fruit and vegetables, and to collaborate with non-government and industry stakeholders to achieve this goal.