

**Submission to House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs  
study of Food Security in Northern Communities**

**Ron Lemaire, President, Canadian Produce Marketing Association**

**March 11, 2021**

On behalf of the Canadian Produce Marketing Association, representing over 800 companies within the fresh fruit and vegetable supply chain, I respectfully submit our comments to the Committee's study of measures to support food security in Canada's North.

CPMA is a 96-year-old not-for-profit trade association representing member companies growing, packing, shipping and selling fresh fruit and vegetables in Canada. In a sector supporting roughly 249,000 jobs across the country, our members are responsible for 90% of fresh produce purchased by Canadians. This submission reflects a complex supply chain that works tirelessly to provide fresh fruit and vegetables across Canada.

CPMA was also a proud partner in delivering the federal government's Food Surplus Rescue Program (SFRP). Working with Second Harvest, CPMA has purchased over 10 million dollars worth of surplus food from the produce sector, fish, seafood, meat and poultry. This food has been distributed to food banks and communities across Canada, with 23% delivered to northern and Indigenous communities. In all, 1,121 agencies received food from our SFRP contract, contributing to a 50% reduction in food insecurity in communities compared to projected forecasts.

The Food Policy for Canada has at its core the objective of working towards the following vision for the future of food in Canada:

*All people in Canada are able to access a sufficient amount of safe, nutritious, and culturally diverse food. Canada's food system is resilient and innovative, sustains our environment and supports our economy<sup>1</sup>.*

CPMA is supportive of this vision for our food system and emphasizes that ensuring that all Canadians can access nutritious food, no matter where they live, must be a top priority for the federal government.

CPMA also recognizes that Indigenous and northern communities are more likely to experience food insecurity and that the challenges of food insecurity in Canada's northern communities are complex and multi-faceted. We know that Canadians living in rural and remote areas are less likely to consume at least 5 daily servings of vegetables and fruit than people living in urban settings. To make matters worse, in a September 2020 Nielsen survey, more than 10% of respondents living in rural areas indicated that their intake of fruits and vegetables had decreased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Food insecurity is widely recognized to have significant negative consequences on a person's health, both mental and physical. By contrast, increasing consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables has been linked to reduction in death due to chronic illnesses, reduction in the risk of cancer, and reduced risk for heart disease and stroke. Therefore, it is clear that promoting access to these nutritious products in all regions of the country can contribute significantly to the health and well-being of our communities.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Food Policy for Canada: Everyone at the Table](#), Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, 2019, pg. 5.

From our own experience with the SFRP, we became keenly aware of significant coordination and logistical challenges in providing fresh product along remote supply routes. As noted by Lori Nikkel of Second Harvest in her testimony before the Committee, transporting perishable food, including healthy fresh fruits and vegetables, is extremely expensive and made more complicated by the need for infrastructure to support the maintenance of the cold chain. The lack of a centralized, coordinated logistical infrastructure to bring food into the many remote communities spread across the North is a significant contributor to food insecurity.

Increasing overall access to a variety of nutritious food for all Canadians, year-round, means supporting the entire agri-food value chain, including support for innovation in areas such as the storage, distribution and transportation sectors, resulting in better nutrient retention, reduction in food waste and lower prices for the consumer. We also know that one solution will not work for every community and the government must work to provide Canadians with the food products they want and need. The implementation of a system of food hubs that can identify community needs and better connect remote areas to the food supply chain should be considered in efforts to strengthen food security in the North.

The Committee is well aware that affordability of food, especially for products like fresh fruits and vegetables is a significant barrier to food security in our northern communities. CPMA emphasizes that affordability and accessibility are mutually inclusive and should not be separated in government policy. Affordability should not equate to “cheap or inexpensive” food, which risks driving down food costs to a level that is economically unsustainable for producers, with negative consequences for Canada’s food security. Instead, the federal government should create the opportunity for Canadians to have the appropriate financial means or assistance to afford and access nutritious food, no matter where they live.

Longer term, there are multiple technologies, such as indoor production of leafy greens and other high density rotational crops, that can be utilized to produce more food locally in northern communities. In addition to the food security benefits of encouraging local production, these types of innovations have the potential to provide multiple community benefits in terms of employment and broader economic development. CPMA urges the Government of Canada to take a whole-of-government approach to identifying and supporting initiatives to address the social, environmental and economic sustainability of the food system in the North, including by ensuring that communities have the necessary power, energy and other infrastructure to benefit from opportunities for innovation and economic development.

At the same time, we must note that, while we are fully supportive of Canadian producers, and growing our agricultural production in Canada, it is imperative that we provide a variety of nutritious and affordable food to Canadians year-round, not just during our growing season, and not just providing foods we grow or produce in Canada. There must be a clear goal and an integrated, inter-governmental approach to ensure adequate access to culturally appropriate, fruit and vegetables to northern, rural, and remote areas. All food sectors such as exporters, importers and distributors have an important role to play in providing Canadian consumers with access to safe, nutritious food, year-round, in all locations of the country.

Finally, while the Surplus Food Rescue Program was an important tool in mitigating the social, economic and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadian families, we know that the work of improving food security in Canada is far from over. CPMA therefore urges the federal government to provide ongoing financial support to achieve the targets of the Food Policy for Canada to promote long-term social, environmental and economic sustainability of the Canadian food system and increase Canadians' consumption of safe and nutritious food. This support should include enhanced funding for an effective food recovery program for at-risk Canadians and marginalized communities, including those in the North, that builds on the lessons learned in the SFRP to ensure a strategic approach to food purchasing and distribution, while also reducing food waste and supporting Canadian producers.

CPMA is appreciative of the opportunity to share our comments and would be happy to answer any questions from Committee members.

Sincerely thanks for your consideration,



Ron Lemaire, President  
Canadian Produce Marketing Association