



# Why isn't food important?

ON MARCH 25TH, Statistics Canada released a quiet little bulletin that should have grabbed the attention of what passes for policy makers these days in Ottawa.

Authored by researchers Shirin Roshanafshar and Emma Hawkins, Food Insecurity in Canada is but the latest in a string of indictments of Canada's failure in the food policy arena.

In 2011-2012, fully 8.3 percent of Canadian households – over 1.1 million families – experienced food insecurity, defined as lack of access to a sufficient variety or quantity of food due to lack of money.

And it gets worse...in households with children, the average level of food insecurity in Canada jumps by 25 percent - from 8.3 to 10.3 percent. Close to one in four single parent families (22.6 percent) are food insecure. When government benefits are the main source of household income, the percentage of children who are food

insecure rises to 26.6 percent.

According to Statistics Canada: Food insecurity can be harmful to children's healthy growth and development (and) can pose numerous health risks for children due to a lower consumption of fruits and vegetables, milk products, or other important sources of vitamins and minerals. Such deficiencies may lead to serious health

tion, not support for domestic agriculture - is an embarrassment. And this leaves us vulnerable.

A good example of this is the increasing spotlight on supply management at the international trade table. If Ottawa was staunch in its defense of supply management, those seeking trade concessions would seek elsewhere.

Instead, Canada's trade negotiators – with one ear to the political pundits - give “nudge-nudge-wink-wink” support to a system they believe will be around till it isn't. Ever on the prowl, global

players sense SM's vulnerability and move in for the kill.

The legacy of Canada's food policy poverty includes the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board, the failure to use trade remedies to defend Canada's cattle farmers in the face of BSE, weakening of competition rules that allow for inappropriate concentration pre and post farm gate, the systematic

**Food insecurity can be harmful to children's healthy growth and development...**

problems like obesity, developmental abnormalities, or a compromised immune system.

In December 2014, the Auditor General's Report on our Nutrition North Canada program delivered the same message: failure...

What are we thinking? We are not thinking. Canada's 'position' on food security - rooted in trade liberaliza-

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elimination over the past 20 years of agriculture support policies and farm extension programs, dramatic cuts in funding to agriculture research, reduction in infrastructure support for new and existing cooperatives, and failure to protect prime farmland across Canada.

The Guardian ran a story last January on UK dairy farmer Mark James, one of 1,400 members of a dairy cooperative in Herfordshire. Under the banner Dairy farmers' despair: 'now milking doesn't really make economic sense', it describes the plight of British dairy farmers facing a global milk surplus, higher feed prices and supermarket wars that have left them "on the ropes." One year ago, James was being paid 32.5p a litre. By the beginning of 2015, this had dropped to 20p; 23p is break even. In the last decade alone, half the dairy producers in England and Wales have exited the sector.

Abandoning farmers to the dogs of the market throws food security under the bus. How is this even possible in a democratic society where government is there to serve the people?

What we need is a tough Canadian Food Policy, replete with a mandatory set of screens to which all new policies and programs are subject to ensure

none detract from our national food policy objectives of food security and sustainability. This occurs with other important priorities such as gender and the environment. Food is of equal policy standing.

The good news is that communities across Canada are beginning to connect the dots. But it isn't happening fast enough.

The priority in the next federal election must be to put food on the political plate: make every wanna-be politician who eats for a living understand that without an entrenched and comprehensive national food policy that respects and supports farmers, there can be no food security in Canada.

Tracing problems back to 1994 when UK dairy farmers lost their milk marketing board, Mark James tries for optimism in his closing remarks to the Guardian reporter: "We've got to believe we won't go down the same route the miners and steelworkers. We've got to believe there's a future." But it was the Guardian cameraman who captured the truth in his eyes.

Canada's supply managed farmers still HAVE a bright future. But only if you fight for it. Support for food security is catching. Make it the election issue. **D**

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