

# CANADIAN ISSUES THÈMES CANADIENS

Winter 2006 / Hiver 2006

*Nouveau  
New*



TOWARDS A CANADIAN FOOD POLICY  
POUR UNE POLITIQUE ALIMENTAIRE CANADIENNE

Nathalie Cooke

Rod MacRae

Grace Skogstad

Douglas D. Hedley

Aleck Ostry

Robert Beauchemin

Lise Renaud

Monique Caron-Bouchard

Marie-Claude Lagacé

Lyne Mongeau

Diane T. Finegood

Graham Riches

Nancy A. Ross

GUEST EDITOR / RÉDATRICE INVITÉE  
Lorna Hutchison  
McGill Institute for the Study of Canada

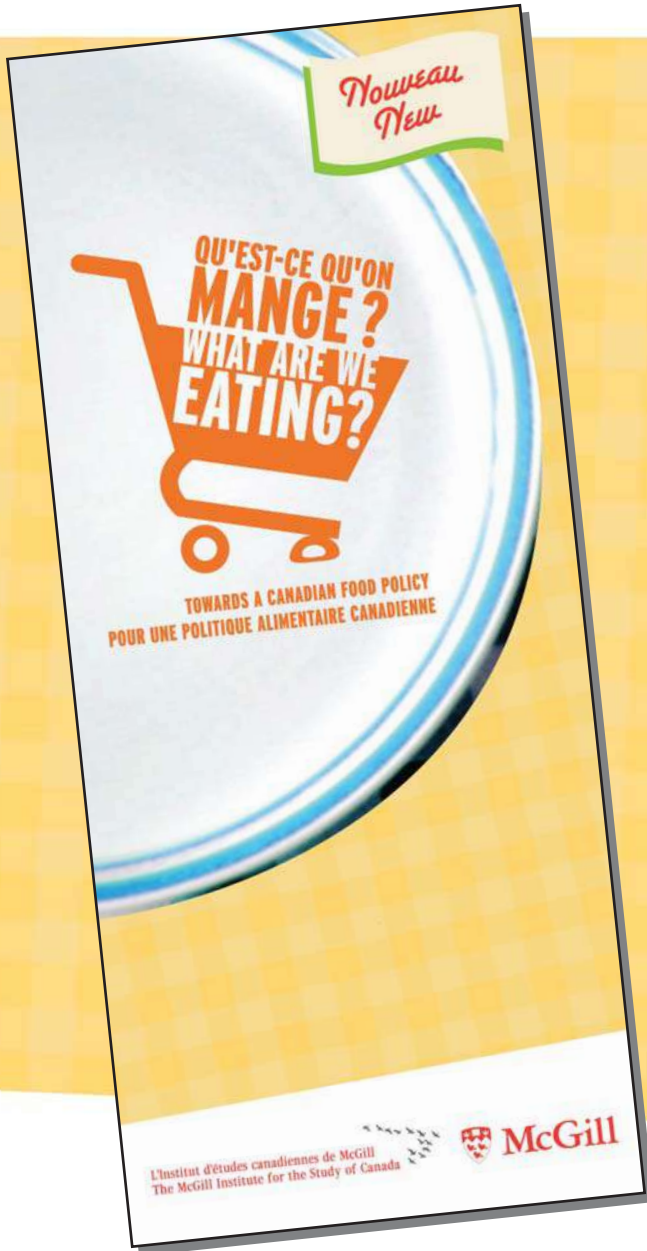


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TOWARDS A CANADIAN FOOD POLICY  
POUR UNE POLITIQUE ALIMENTAIRE CANADIENNE



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## **CANADIAN ISSUES THÈMES CANADIENS**

**EDITOR / RÉDACTRICE EN CHEF**  
Marie-Pascale Desjardins, Association for Canadian Studies

**DESIGN / GRAPHISME**  
Bang Marketing (514) 849-2264 – 1-888-942-BANG  
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(514) 925-3099

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Disticor Direct  
695 Westney Road South, Unit 14  
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**CITC/ACS STREET ADDRESS / ADRESSE CIVIQUE CITC/AEC**  
1822A, rue Sherbrooke Ouest, Montréal (Québec) H3H 1E4  
Tél / Tél. : (514) 925-3094 – Fax / Téléc. : (514) 925-3095  
E-mail / Courriel : general@acs-aec.ca

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CITC is a quarterly publication of the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS). It is distributed free of charge to individual and institutional members of the Association. CITC is a bilingual publication. All material prepared by the ACS is published in both French and English. All other articles are published in the language in which they are written. Opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ACS. The Association for Canadian Studies is a voluntary non-profit organization. It seeks to expand and disseminate knowledge about Canada through teaching, research and publications. The ACS is a scholarly society and a member of the Humanities and Social Science Federation of Canada. The ACS is also a founding member of the International Council for Canadian Studies.

CITC est une publication trimestrielle de l'Association d'études canadiennes (AEC). Elle est distribuée gratuitement aux membres de l'Association. CITC est une publication bilingue. Tous les textes émanant de l'Association sont publiés en français et en anglais. Tous les autres textes sont publiés dans la langue d'origine. Les collaborateurs et collaboratrices de CITC sont entièrement responsables des idées et opinions exprimées dans leurs articles. L'Association d'études canadiennes est un organisme pancanadien à but non lucratif dont l'objectif est de promouvoir l'enseignement, la recherche et les publications sur le Canada. L'AEC est une société savante, membre de la Fédération canadienne des sciences humaines et sociales. Elle est également membre fondateur du Conseil international d'études canadiennes.

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## **LETTERS/LETTRES**

**Comments on this edition of Canadian Issues?  
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# PLANNING COLLOQUIUM

## What's to Eat in Canada? / Qu'est-ce qu'on mange au Canada?

Thursday, May 26, 2005 – 12:00-5:00 / Le jeudi 26 mai 2005 de 12 h à 17 h  
Thomson House, 3650, rue McTavish, Montréal

### PARTICIPANTS

**Julian Armstrong**

Journalist, Montreal Gazette, Montreal

**Johanne Beaulieu**

Director, Policy Coordination and Integration, Food Safety and Quality Policy, Agriculture Canada, Ottawa

**Paul Bélanger**

Assistant Director, Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes, Canadian Institute of Health Research, Ottawa

**Deborah Buszard**

Dean, Agricultural and Env. Sciences, McGill, Montreal

**Shelley Butler**

Visiting Assistant Professor, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, Montreal

**David Castle**

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Guelph, Guelph

**Nathalie Cooke**

Canadian Studies Programme Director, MISC and Associate Professor, Department of English, Montreal

**Victoria Dickenson**

Executive Director, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal

**Elizabeth Driver**

Program Officer, Foodways Montgomery's Inn Museum, Toronto

**Laurette Dubé**

Faculty of Management, McGill University, Montreal

**Anne Fowlie**

Executive Vice-President, Canadian Horticultural Council, Ottawa

**Bob Friesen**

President, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Ottawa

**Heather Holland**

On-Farm Food Safety, Cdn Fed. of Agriculture, Ottawa  
Department of Theatre and Dance, History of Rhetoric and Performance, University of California, Davis

**Lara Houry**

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, McGill, Montreal

**Kristine G. Koski**

Director, Dietetics & Human Nutrition, McGill, Montreal

**Mary L'Abbé**

Director, Bureau of Nutritional Sciences Food Directorate, Health Canada, Ottawa

**Rod MacRae**

Seagram Chair, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada and Food Policy Analyst, Toronto

**Antonia Maioni**

Director, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, Montreal

**Marie Marquis**

Professeure agrégée, département de nutrition, Université de Montréal, Montreal

**Lyne Mongeau**

Conseillère scientifique, Développement des individus et des communautés, Institut national de santé public du, Montreal, Quebec

**Rhona Richman Kenneally**

Assistant Professor, Department of Design and Computation Arts, Concordia University, Montreal

**Stephen Samis**

Director, Health Policy, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, Ottawa

**Joe Schwarcz**

Director, McGill Office for Science and Society, Montreal

**Paul Thomassin**

Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics, McGill University, Montreal

**Elbert van Donkersgoed**

Strategic Policy Advisor, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Guelph



Photo credit: Owen Egan

MISC Staff: Johanne Bilodeau, Linda Huddy, Nathalie Cooke, Antonia Maioni, Adriana Goreta and Melanie Prydatkewycz.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Conference Steering Committee: Nathalie Cooke, MISC; Antonia Maioni, MISC; John Henning, Agricultural Economics, Macdonald Campus, McGill; Maeve Haldane, McGill Reporter; Laurette Dubé, Desautels School of Management; Rod MacRae, Toronto; Grace Skogstad, University of Toronto; Victoria Dickenson, McCord Museum. (Absent: Kris Koski, Nutrition, McGill; Marie Marquis, Nutrition, Université de Montréal; Sarah Musgrave, The Gazette).

# WHAT ARE WE EATING? QU'EST-CE QU'ON MANGE?

## TOWARDS A CANADIAN FOOD POLICY POUR UNE POLITIQUE ALIMENTAIRE CANADIENNE



### PROGRAM FEBRUARY 15-17, 2006 PROGRAMME 15-17 FÉVRIER 2006

#### WEDNESDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2006 - MCCORD MUSEUM

- 5:00 p.m. *Word of welcome*  
*The Ideal Meal Challenge*
- 6:30 p.m. *Opening Reception*

#### MERCREDI 15 FÉVRIER 2006 - MUSÉE MCCORD

- 17 h *Mot de bienvenue*  
*Le défi du repas idéal*
- 18 h 30 *Réception inaugurale*

#### THURSDAY, 16 FEBRUARY 2006 - OMNI MONT-ROYAL HOTEL

##### **Diagnostic: Identifying the Problem** **The Need for Change**

- 8:00 a.m. *Registration opens*
- 8:30 a.m. *Word of welcome*  
*Opening address - Douglas Hedley*
- 9:15 a.m. **PLENARY SESSION I** *Reality Check: What Are Canadians Eating?*
- 10:30 a.m. *Break*
- 10:45 a.m. **PLENARY SESSION II** *What Affects Canadian Consumer Food Choices?*
- 12:30 p.m. *Lunch - Special Address - Elizabeth Baird*
- 2:00 p.m. **PLENARY SESSION III** *From Field to Fork: What Are the Challenges in the Canadian Food Scene?*
- 3:30 p.m. *Break*
- 4:00 p.m. **PLENARY SESSION IV** *New Realities: What Are the Implications of Canadian Consumer Food Choices?*
- 5:30 p.m. *Cocktail*

#### JEUDI 16 FÉVRIER 2006 - HÔTEL OMNI MONT-ROYAL

##### **Diagnostic: identifier le problème** **Un besoin de changement**

- 8 h *Ouverture de l'inscription*
- 8 h 30 *Mot de bienvenue*  
*Discours d'ouverture - Douglas Hedley*
- 9 h 15 **SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE I** *Mise au point : Que mangent les Canadiens présentement ?*
- 10 h 30 *Pause*
- 10 h 45 **SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE II** *Qu'est-ce qui influence les choix alimentaires des consommateurs ?*
- 12 h 30 *Déjeuner / Allocution - Elizabeth Baird*
- 14 h **SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE III** *Du champ à l'assiette : Les défis de la scène alimentaire canadienne*
- 15 h 30 *Pause*
- 16 h **SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE IV** *Nouvelles réalités : Quelles sont les conséquences des choix alimentaires des Canadiens ?*
- 17 h 30 *Cocktail*

#### FRIDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2006 - OMNI MONT-ROYAL HOTEL

##### **Policy and Solutions**

- 8:00 a.m. *Registration opens*
- 8:45 a.m. *Word of welcome*  
*Keynote Address - Leonard J. Edwards & Morris Rosenberg*
- 9:30 a.m. **PLENARY SESSION V** *What's on the Table? Balancing our Needs*
- 10:45 a.m. *Break*
- 11:00 a.m. **PLENARY SESSION VI** *What's Cooking? Promising Ideas Already Cooking in Canada*
- 12:30 p.m. *Lunch - Special Address - Carolyn Bennett*
- 2:00 p.m. **PLENARY SESSION VII** *Food Forward: Who and What Will Drive Change?*
- 3:30 p.m. *Break*
- 3:45 p.m. *Response Panel*
- 5:00 p.m. *Cocktail*

#### VENDREDI 17 FÉVRIER 2006 - HÔTEL OMNI MONT-ROYAL

##### **Politique et solutions**

- 8 h *Ouverture de l'inscription*
- 8 h 45 *Mot de bienvenue*  
*Discours-programme - Leonard J. Edwards & Morris Rosenberg*
- 9 h 30 **SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE V** *Les enjeux de la table : à la recherche d'un équilibre*
- 10 h 45 *Pause*
- 11 h **SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE VI** *Qu'est-ce qui mijote ? Des idées prometteuses pour changer nos choix collectifs*
- 12 h 30 *Déjeuner / Allocution - Carolyn Bennett*
- 14 h **SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE VII** *En avant les aliments : d'où viendra le changement ?*
- 15 h 30 *Pause*
- 15 h 45 *Table ronde*
- 17 h *Cocktail*



**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2006**  
**MERCREDI 15 FÉVRIER 2006**

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**OPENING EVENT - The Ideal Meal Challenge / INAUGURATION - Le défi du repas idéal**

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*Montréal is a mecca of fine-dining, so where better for a panel of gastronomic gurus to dream up a dish that represents what's on the table in Canada? Five high-profile participants share their very different visions of what is, could, or should be on the menu for eating out at lunch, and eating in at dinner. They have two challenges – to fill a lunchbox for \$10 or less, and to design a menu for an evening meal.*

**Each panelist will be asked to respond to two questions:**

- *What would be the ideal economical lunch and why?*
- *If there were no practical and budgetary limitations, what would your ideal dinner be and why?*

Montréal est un haut lieu de la fine cuisine. Il n'y avait donc pas meilleur endroit pour inviter des experts en gastronomie à imaginer un plat qui mettrait en valeur ce qui se retrouve sur la table au Canada. Cinq participants de grande réputation partagent leur vision de ce qui est, de ce qui pourrait ou devrait être au menu lors d'un déjeuner à l'extérieur et lors d'un dîner à la maison. Ces participants doivent relever deux défis - remplir une boîte à lunch d'une valeur de 10\$ ou moins et concevoir un menu pour le dîner.

**Tous les conférenciers auront à répondre à deux questions :**

- Quel serait le menu idéal pour un déjeuner économique, et pourquoi ?
- S'il n'y avait aucune restriction ni pratique ni budgétaire, quel serait votre menu idéal pour le dîner et pourquoi ?

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**5:00 p.m. Welcome at the McCord Museum 690 Sherbrooke Street West**  
**17 h Bienvenue au Musée McCord 690, rue Sherbrooke Ouest**

*Master of Ceremonies / Maître de cérémonie :*

**Victoria Dickenson** *Executive Director McCord Museum and Member of the Board of Trustees, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada / Directrice générale, Musée McCord et membre du conseil d'administration, Institut d'études canadiennes de McGill*

*Moderator / Modératrice :*

**Hélène Laurendeau** *Nutritionist and Host / nutritionniste-animatrice, Radio-Canada*

› **Ricardo Larrivé** *TV chef / animateur de l'émission culinaire Ricardo, Radio-Canada*

› **Jane Rabinowicz** *Director / directrice, Santropol Roulant*

› **David McMillan, Frédéric Morin** *Chefs and Restauraters / chefs et restaurateurs, Joe Beef*

› **Gérald Le Gal** *President and Founder / président et fondateur, Gourmet Sauvage*

› **Philippe de Vienne** *President / président, Les épiciers de cru*

**6:30 p.m. Cocktail / Cocktail**  
**18 h 30**

**Event co-sponsored by / événement parrainé par :**

Café McCord - Chef Christian Desaulniers

Musée McCord Museum

Brasserie McAuslan Brewery

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**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2006**  
**JEUDI 16 FÉVRIER 2006**




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**DIAGNOSTIC: Identifying the Problem    The Need For Change**  
**DIAGNOSTIC : Identifier le problème    Un besoin de changement**

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**8:00 a.m.    Registration    Omni Mont-Royal Hotel, 1050 Sherbrooke Street West    Foyer**  
**8 h    Inscription    Hôtel Omni Mont-Royal, 1050, rue Sherbrooke Ouest**

*Master of Ceremonies / Maître de cérémonie :*

**Nathalie Cooke** *Canadian Studies Program Director, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada /  
 Directrice du programme en études canadiennes, Institut d'études canadiennes de McGill*

---

**8:30 a.m.    Words of Welcome & Opening Address    Salon des**  
**8 h 30    Mot de bienvenue et discours d'ouverture    saisons**

› **Antonia Maioni** *Director, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada /  
 directrice, Institut d'études canadiennes de McGill*

› **Alex Paterson** *Co-Chair, Board of Trustees, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada /  
 Coprésident du conseil d'administration, Institut d'études canadiennes de McGill*

› **Anthony Masi** *Provost, McGill University / vice-principal exécutif, Université McGill*

**Keynote: The State of Food Policy in Canada**

**Discours : L'état de la politique alimentaire au Canada**

› **Douglas Hedley** *Founding Editor, "Agricultural Economics",  
 Former Assistant Deputy Minister, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada / directeur fondateur  
 du magazine Agricultural Economics, ancien sous-ministre adjoint, Agriculture et  
 Agroalimentaire Canada*

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**9:15 a.m.    PLENARY SESSION I Reality Check: What Are Canadians Eating?    Salon des**  
**9 h 15    SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE I Mise au point : Que mangent les Canadiens présentement?    saisons**

*This panel examines Canadians' food consumption habits. There are a number of surveys emerging this year. It's time to crunch the numbers and to identify some problems raised by what we eat and where we eat it.*

Ce panel porte sur les habitudes alimentaires des Canadiens. Plusieurs enquêtes ont été rendues publiques cette année. Il est maintenant temps d'en analyser les résultats et d'identifier certains problèmes reliés à la nourriture que nous mangeons et à l'endroit où nous la mangeons.

*Moderator / Modérateur :*

**Stephen Samis** *Director, Health Policy, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada / directeur,  
 Politique de la santé, Fondation des maladies du cœur*

› **Aleck Ostry** *Associate Professor, Health Care and Epidemiology / professeur agrégé,  
 Soins de santé et épidémiologie, University of British Columbia*

› **Mary Bush** *Director General, Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion, Health Canada /  
 directrice générale, Bureau de la politique et de la promotion de la nutrition, Santé Canada*

› **Robert Beauchemin** *Food Journalist / critique gastronomique, La Presse*

› **Katherine Gray-Donald** *Associate Professor, School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition,  
 McGill University / professeure agrégée, École de diététique et de nutrition humaine,  
 Université McGill*

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10:30 a.m. Break / Pause  
10 h 30

Atrium

10:45 a.m. **PLENARY SESSION II What Affects Canadian Consumer Food Choices?**  
10 h 45 **SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE II Qu'est-ce qui influence les choix alimentaires des consommateurs?**

Salon des  
saisons

*This panel looks at several factors affecting Canadian consumers' food choices: advertising, retail store layout, cultural conditioning, information sources, pricing and the role of technology. It examines what we eat, where we eat it, and why.*

Ce panel porte sur les facteurs qui affectent les choix des consommateurs canadiens en matière d'alimentation : la publicité, la présentation des produits dans les magasins de vente au détail, le conditionnement culturel, les sources d'informations, le prix et le rôle des technologies. Les panélistes examinent ce que nous mangeons, où et pourquoi nous le mangeons.

Moderator / Modératrice :

**Louise Thibault** Associate Professor, School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition, McGill University / professeure agrégée, École de diététique et de nutrition humaine, Université McGill

- › **Caroline Dubeau** Director, Service Initiatives and Regional Development, Dietitians of Canada / directrice, éducation en nutrition et développement régional, Les diététistes du Canada
- › **Frédéric Blaise** President / président, Enzyme inc.
- › **Lise Renaud** Director / directrice, Groupe de recherche médias et santé, communication sociale et publique, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM)
- › **Spencer Henson** Professor, Agricultural Economics and Business / professeur, Économie et affaires agricoles, University of Guelph
- › **Tony Winson** Professor, Sociology & Anthropology / professeur, sociologie et anthropologie, University of Guelph

12:30 p.m. Lunch / Déjeuner  
12 h 30

Salon  
Pierre-de-  
Coubertin

**Luncheon Address:** Overview of Canadian Food Practice Over Time  
**Déjeuner conférence :** Aperçu des pratiques alimentaires au Canada au fil du temps

- › **Elizabeth Baird** Food Editor / rédactrice en chef (section nourriture), *Canadian Living*

2:00 p.m. **PLENARY SESSION III From Field to Fork: What Are the Challenges in the Canadian Food Scene?**  
14 h **SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE III Du champ à l'assiette : Les défis de la scène alimentaire canadienne**

Salon des  
saisons

*Panelists representing different aspects of the food supply chain identify obstacles to and opportunities for profitability that arise in serving the goal of providing affordable and nutritious food for Canadians in an environmentally sustainable way.*

Des panélistes représentant différents groupes de la chaîne d'approvisionnement identifient les opportunités et les obstacles à la rentabilité qui apparaissent lorsqu'il s'agit de fournir des aliments nutritifs à prix abordable aux Canadiens tout en respectant l'environnement.

Moderator / Modérateur :

**Bruno Larue** Canada Research Chair in International Agri-Food Trade / Titulaire de la Chaire de recherche du Canada en commerce international agroalimentaire, Centre de recherche en Économie Agroalimentaire (CREA)

- › **Bob Friesen** President, Canadian Federation of Agriculture / président, Fédération canadienne de l'agriculture
- › **Annalisa King** Senior Vice-President, Maple Leaf Foods / première vice-présidente, Les Aliments Maple Leaf
- › **Nick Jennery** President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors / président et chef des opérations, Conseil canadien des distributeurs en alimentation
- › **Guy Laframboise** President / président, Subway Restaurants, Québec



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<b>3:30 p.m.</b> 15 h 30	<i>Break / Pause</i>	<b>Atrium</b>
<b>4:00 p.m.</b> 16 h	<b>PLENARY SESSION IV <i>New Realities: What Are the Implications of Canadian Consumer Food Choices?</i></b> <b>SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE IV <i>Nouvelles réalités : Quelles sont les conséquences des choix alimentaires des Canadiens?</i></b> <i>This panel probes the dynamics of supply and demand in the food system, and addresses some of the broader societal and economic impacts of collective food choices.</i> Ce panel porte sur la dynamique qui existe entre l'offre et la demande dans le système d'approvisionnement ainsi que sur les conséquences sociales et économiques des choix collectifs en matière d'alimentation. <i>Moderator / Modérateur :</i> <b>Yvan Grégoire</b> <i>General Manager, Governors' Foundation / directeur général, Fondation des gouverneurs du CRDA (Le Centre de recherche et de développement sur aliments)</i> ➤ <b>Jean-Claude Hardy</b> <i>Marketing and Communications Director / directeur marketing et communications, Les Rôtisseries St-Hubert Ltée</i> ➤ <b>Nathalie Jobin</b> <i>Director of Nutrition and Scientific Affairs / directrice de la nutrition et des affaires scientifiques, Extensio - Centre de référence sur la nutrition humaine</i> ➤ <b>Christina Blais,</b> <i>Responsible for clinical education / Responsable de la formation clinique, Département de nutrition, Université de Montréal</i> ➤ <b>Jean Larose</b> <i>General Manager / directeur général, L'Union des producteurs agricoles</i> ➤ <b>Elaine Power</b> <i>Assistant Professor, School of Physical and Health Education / professeure adjointe, Éducation physique et santé, Queen's University</i>	<b>Salon des saisons</b>
<b>5:30 p.m.</b> 17 h 30	<i>Cocktail / Cocktail</i> <i>Sponsored by / Parrainé par:</i> <i>Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, McGill University /</i> <i>Faculté des sciences de l'agriculture et de l'environnement, Université McGill</i> <i>Faculty of Medicine, McGill University /</i> <i>Faculté de médecine / Université McGill</i>	<b>Salon Pierre-de-Coubertin</b>

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# FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2006 VENDREDI 17 FÉVRIER 2006

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## Policy and Solutions / Politique et solutions

**8:00 a.m.** **Registration** **Omni Mont-Royal Hotel, 1050 Sherbrooke Street West** **Foyer**  
**8 h** **Inscription** **Hôtel Omni Mont-Royal, 1050, rue Sherbrooke Ouest**

*Master of Ceremonies / Maître de cérémonie :*

**Nathalie Cooke** *Canadian Studies Program Director, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada /  
Directrice du programme en études canadiennes, Institut d'études canadiennes de McGill*

**8:45 a.m.** **Word of welcome / Mot de bienvenue** **Salon des  
8 h 45** **saisons**

**Antonia Maioni** *Director, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada / Directrice, Institut d'études  
canadiennes de McGill*

**Keynote:** *What goals should a food policy be striving for?*

**Discours :** *Quels buts une politique alimentaire devrait-elle viser ?*

*Introduction / Présentation :*

**Chandra Madramootoo** *Dean, Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, McGill  
University / doyen de la Faculté des sciences de l'agriculture et de l'environnement,  
Université McGill*

› **Leonard J. Edwards** *Deputy Minister, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada / sous-ministre,  
Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada*

› **Morris Rosenberg** *Deputy Minister, Health Canada / sous-ministre, Santé Canada*

**9:30 a.m.** **PLENARY SESSION V What's on the Table? Balancing our Needs** **Salon des  
9 h 30** **SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE V Les enjeux de la table : à la recherche d'un équilibre**

*This panel deals with trade-offs, and how to balance different needs in the system.*

*Ce panel porte sur les compromis et sur la manière d'équilibrer les besoins dans le  
système agro-alimentaire.*

*Moderator / Modératrice :*

**Rod MacRae** *Toronto*

› **Diane Finegood** *Scientific Director, Canadian Institutes of Health Research - Institute of  
Nutrition, Metabolism, Diabetes / directrice scientifique, Instituts canadiens de recherche  
en santé - Institut de nutrition, du métabolisme et du diabète*

› **Tom Manley** *Organic Processor / producteur de produits biologiques, Homestead Organics*

› **Richard Barichello** *Associate Professor, Food Nutrition and Health / professeur agrégé,  
Santé et nutrition, University of British Columbia*

› **Darrin Qualman** *Director of Research, National Farmers Union / directeur de la  
recherche, Syndicat national des cultivateurs*

› **David Cooper** *Senior Programme Officer, Secretariat of the United Nations Convention  
on Biological Diversity / administrateur de programme, Secrétariat de la Convention des  
Nations unies sur la diversité biologique*

**10:45 a.m.** **Break / Pause** **Atrium**  
**10 h 45**

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<b>11:00 a.m.</b> 11 h	<p><b>PLENARY SESSION VI <i>What's Cooking? Promising Ideas Already Cooking in Canada</i></b> <b>SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE VI <i>Qu'est-ce qui mijote ? Des idées prometteuses pour changer nos choix collectifs</i></b></p> <p><i>Speakers from the grassroots up identify and investigate solutions that address health, social justice and the environment, with the common goal of optimally nourishing the Canadian population.</i></p> <p>Des intervenants provenant d'organismes de base populaire identifient et étudient diverses solutions permettant de nourrir de manière optimale la population tout en portant une attention particulière à la santé, à la justice sociale et à l'environnement.</p> <p><i>Moderator / Modératrice :</i></p> <p><b>Linda Jacobs Starkey</b> <i>University Coordinator - Dietetics, School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition and Associate Dean of Students, McGill University / coordonnatrice universitaire - diététique, École de diététique et nutrition humaine, vice-doyenne, Services aux étudiants, Université McGill</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; <b>Paul Finkelstein</b> <i>Culinary Arts Teacher / professeur d'art culinaire, Stratford Northwestern Secondary School - Avon Maitland District School Board</i></li><li>&gt; <b>Grace Egeland</b> <i>Associate Professor, Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment, and School of Dietetics and Human Nutrition, McGill University / professeure agrégée, Centre d'études sur la nutrition et l'environnement des peuples autochtones, École de diététique et de nutrition humaine, Université McGill</i></li><li>&gt; <b>Graham Riches</b> <i>Director, School of Social Work / directeur, École de travail social, University of British Columbia</i></li><li>&gt; <b>Hugh Maynard</b> <i>Owner / propriétaire, QU'ANGLO Communications and Consulting</i></li><li>&gt; <b>Louise Lambert-Lagacé</b> <i>Dietitian and author / diététiste et auteure, Clinique de nutrition Louise Lambert-Lagacé et associés</i></li></ul>	<b>Salon des saisons</b>
<b>12:30 p.m.</b> 12 h 30	<p><i>Lunch / Déjeuner</i></p> <p><i>Luncheon Keynote Address / Discours-programme de déjeuner</i></p> <p><b>The Honourable / L'honorable Carolyn Bennett</b> <i>Member of Parliament (St. Paul's), Former Minister of State, Public Health / Député (St-Paul), ancienne ministre d'État, Santé publique</i></p>	<b>Salon Pierre-de-Coubertin</b>



Friday, February 17, 2006 / Vendredi 17 février 2006

<b>2:00 p.m.</b> 14 h	<b>PLENARY SESSION VII Food Forward: Who and What Will Drive Change?</b> <b>SÉANCE PLÉNIÈRE VII En avant les aliments : d'où viendra le changement ?</b> <i>This panel examines the respective roles of government, producers, food manufacturers and retailers, health practitioners, educators, home food providers and consumers for putting good, safe and nutritious food on Canadian tables. Who's responsible?</i>  Ce panel porte sur ce que les gouvernements, les producteurs, les fabricants et les détaillants de produits alimentaires ainsi que les spécialistes de la santé, les éducateurs, les fournisseurs de nourriture maison et les consommateurs peuvent ou doivent faire pour permettre aux Canadiens de mettre sur la table de bons aliments sécuritaires et nutritifs. Qui est responsable?  <i>Moderator / Modérateur :</i> <b>Garth Coffin</b> <i>Director, Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute /</i> directeur, Institut canadien des politiques agro-alimentaires  ➤ <b>Lyne Mongeau</b> <i>Scientific Advisor / conseillère scientifique, Institut national de santé publique du Québec</i>  ➤ <b>Nancy Ross</b> <i>Assistant Professor, Geography, McGill University; New Investigator, Canadian Institutes of Health Research / professeure adjointe, département de géographie, Université McGill, nouvelle chercheuse, Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada</i>  ➤ <b>Louis Frenette</b> <i>President and Chief Executive Officer / président et chef de la direction, Danone Canada</i>  ➤ <b>The Honourable / L'honorable Wayne Easter</b> <i>Member of Parliament (Malpeque, PEI) /</i> Député (Malpeque, PEI)  ➤ <b>Hélène Delisle</b> <i>Professor, World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre, Department of Nutrition / professeure titulaire, Centre collaborateur de l'Organisation mondiale de la santé (OMS), Département de nutrition, Université de Montréal</i>	<b>Salon des saisons</b>
<b>3:30 p.m.</b> 15 h 30	<i>Break / Pause</i>	<b>Atrium</b>
<b>3:45 p.m.</b> 15 h 45	<b>Response panel : Observations, conclusions, and next steps</b> <b>Table ronde : Observations, conclusions et prochaines étapes</b> <i>Moderator / Modératrice :</i> <b>Grace Skogstad</b> <i>Professor / professeure,</i> Department of Political Science, University of Toronto  ➤ <b>Rory McAlpine</b> <i>Vice-President, Government and Industry Relations, Maple Leaf Foods /</i> vice-président, relations avec le gouvernement et l'industrie, Les Aliments Maple Leaf  ➤ <b>Gaëtan Lussier</b> <i>Chair, Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute / président, Institut canadien des politiques agro-alimentaires</i>  ➤ <b>Sally Rutherford</b> <i>Policy development consultant / Consultante en élaboration des politiques, BioProducts Canada Inc.</i>	<b>Salon des saisons</b>
<b>5:00 p.m.</b> 17 h	<i>Cocktail / Cocktail</i> <i>Sponsored by / Parrainé par :</i> <i>Desautels Faculty of Management, McGill University /</i> Faculté de gestion Desautels, Université McGill  <i>Faculty of Arts, McGill University /</i> Faculté des arts, Université McGill	<b>Salon Pierre-de-Coubertin</b>

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## Thanks

### Remerciements

**Daniel Chonchol**, Electronic Communications Editor, Development and Alumni Relations Office, McGill University / Rédacteur, communications électroniques, Bureau du développement et des relations avec les anciens étudiants, Université McGill  
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*The staff of the Omni Mont-Royal Hotel. / Le personnel de l'hôtel Omni Mont-Royal.*  
*The McGill students working at the conference. / Les étudiants et les étudiantes de McGill travaillant à la conférence.*  
*Those who contributed their expertise at the May 2005 preparatory colloquium. / Les personnes qui ont partagé leur expertise lors du colloque préparatoire de mai 2005.*



Chefs Come to the Table: Ricardo Larrivée, TV Chef; Jane Rabinovitch, Director, Santropol Roulant; Hélène Laurendeau, Nutritionist and Host.

Photo credit: Owen Egan



Opening Event: McCord Museum.

Photo credit: Owen Egan

# INTRODUCTION

Papers in this special issue emerged from a February 2006 conference<sup>1</sup> hosted by the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada (or the MISC). Since 1995, the MISC has hosted an annual national conference on public policy issues of pressing concern to the Canadian public. The MISC's conferences bring together decision-makers, researchers, practitioners, activists, students and the general public from diverse and often conflicting perspectives. The annual conferences create unique opportunities to network and share ideas, and they receive national television and print coverage in both English and French, which communicates developments in the debate to a wider audience. These bilingual events attract large audiences of 350-400 participants.

In 2006, for its eleventh annual conference, the MISC focused its attention on the problems of food in Canada – with a particular focus on food policy and the shaping of taste and culture. Like other MISC conferences, it opened with a public event on the first evening, followed by two full days of panel sessions. In this instance, one day was devoted to identifying specific problems in food policy and practice (what *are* Canadians eating?), and the other to proposing solutions (what *will* Canadians eat?). Approximately 35 speakers were invited and each were asked to speak for 5-7 minutes, a format that allowed for plenty of time for audience questions.

## The Planning Colloquium:

On May 26, 2005, the MISC hosted a planning colloquium to assess the current state of food policy in Canada and determine the goals of the 2006 conference. The participants included representatives from federal ministries, health and agricultural agencies, news outlets, and three Montreal universities.<sup>2</sup> They proposed speakers, suggested sources of funding, and identified policy weaknesses.

The consensus that emerged from the colloquium was that (a) the time was right for a Canadian food policy conference and (b) it should target the issue of the lack of cross-disciplinary integration in Canadian food policy.

### a) The Time was Right

The moment was right for this type of conference, given public concern about nutrition, media interest in food safety, emerging data on Canadian food choices, and the restructuring of Canada's Food Guide. Important forums on obesity, foodways, and food security were scheduled for 2005 and 2006, but they would not address – as this event would – Canadians' collective food behaviours and the forces that shape them. A conference on Agri-Food and Health Innovation mounted in Toronto (2005), for example, failed to address the bilingual dimension of Canadian food culture. The aim of a September 2005 conference on food security was to found a new national organization, Food Secure Canada, but it addressed topics relating to only one subset of the set of concerns that were later raised at the MISC conference. Boston University was planning to host a conference on *The Social Spaces of Food and Agriculture in June 2006*, but its focus was to be primarily on the United States. These conferences simply lacked the scope and balance of representation that we hoped would distinguish the MISC conference, then entitled *What Will Canadians*

*Eat* (the double entendre on the word “will” fully intended).

In addition, the MISC conference would build on the momentum created by a conference hosted at the McCord Museum in November 2005, co-organized by two members of the MISC conference steering committee – Nathalie Cooke and Victoria Dickenson (McCord Museum Director and member of the MISC Board of Governors). The McCord conference, entitled *The Daily Meal in Canada*,<sup>3</sup> would focus on historical food practices or what Canadians *used* to eat, past tense.

#### **b. Cross-disciplinary integration in Canadian food policy**

A comprehensive Canadian Food Strategy was attempted in the 1970s, but failed to be fully implemented. Since then, no comprehensive food policy has been formulated, despite awareness on the part of government ministries, health agencies, and charitable foundations that their strategic investments often contradict each other. Furthermore, these conflicting or misaligned agendas send a confusing message to the health-conscious public, who depend on experts for advice on their consumer choices. Participants agreed that a university conference could provide a more neutral space for debate than an event sponsored by a specific policy body, as well as lend credibility to the findings disseminated to an increasingly bewildered public.

The format of the MISC conference is intended to compel stakeholders to negotiate their positions in a relational matrix, instead of simply reiterating their standard positions. For example, the Agricultural Policy Framework has been developing infrastructural agreements between the federal government and the provinces and territories since 2001, but solely within its restricted domain. One strategic aim of the food conference, then, was to encourage the agricultural sector to work more closely with representatives from health, marketing, and the environment, and for these sectors to have a more complete understanding of agricultural realities.

#### **Structuring the Conference:**

Broadly, we were interested in better understanding the collective food choices of Canadians, and how our social, cultural, economic, and policy environments shape food choices. Virtually all segments of Canadian society are affected in some way by our collective food choices, from children growing up in poverty to isolated seniors, from

food producers to Aboriginal populations that historically relied on traditional wild foods, from downtown dwellers living in food retail deserts to rural townspeople whose services are slowly dwindling as farm depopulation occurs. Some of the most discussed subjects of the day – obesity, rising costs of health care, the farm income crisis, genetic engineering, globalization, and climate change – are all shaped by our collective food choices. Yet current policy analyses lack an interactive focus and isolate areas of interest in a manner that underestimates the complexity of the issues at hand.

Panel sessions were organized around particular questions: Why is the Canadian public concerned about food? What do Canadians find to be the most important challenges to address – loss of taste, worries about food safety, costs, genetic engineering, how kids are eating, what to eat, what not to? Who is poised to make changes to the way our food system is organized? What kinds of changes to food – rather than to nutrition or agriculture – policy are being proposed? Is there room for an integrated food policy? This conference would bring together delegates that would normally be separated by geographical, disciplinary, and institutional boundaries to debate the current and future direction of food policy in Canada. Contributions from civil society, farmers and food businesses, health professionals, concerned citizens, students, and all levels of government will shape our understanding of the challenges and how to advance improvements. Currently, each sector favours a different methodology – such as innovation systems theory in economics, and chaos theory in management – which hinders dialogue between researchers working on different aspects of the same problems, unless they are thrust together in a collaborative environment.

As such, this conference would be the first large scale interdisciplinary forum in 25 years to bring together a full range of actors, including health, agriculture, and industry representatives, to debate the current and future direction of food policy in Canada. It would enable policy makers to better recognize the different facets of their policy domains and their interconnections, as well as encouraging policy makers to establish contacts outside of their principal field.

The conference itself, **What Are We Eating? Towards a Canadian Food Policy/Qu'est-ce qu'on mange? Pour une politique alimentaire canadienne** – was also made possible thanks to a generous

donation from the Max Bell Foundation, as well as contributions from a diverse number of sectors including Health Canada; Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion; McGill's Faculties of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Arts, Management, Medicine; McGill Food Services; McCord Museum and the Café McCord; McAuslan Breweries; and *Canadian Living* Magazine.

### **This issue and the focus on demand – side policy themes**

Governments have traditionally intervened on the supply side of the food policy equation. Their intervention has produced many benefits, though many challenges remain. The demand side (what and how much people eat, why they eat as they do, how food tastes are shaped, and what it costs to eat well) has received, for a variety of reasons, decidedly less attention from policy makers. Given a vast array of possible special issue themes, we chose to focus on the demand side of the equation – as the selection of articles in this issue indicate – our contribution aimed at redressing this historical deficiency.

### **Endnotes**

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- <sup>1</sup> In this discussion of the MISC conference format we draw from a number of MISC documents – funding applications and reports, correspondence with panelists and organizational committee members – constructed variously by those involved in organizational logistics. We would particularly like to recognize the invaluable assistance of Lynne Darroch, Ian Rae (Max Bell Postdoctoral Fellow 2004-5), Johanne Bilodeau, and Melanie Predacowyz. Nathalie Cooke is also grateful to the SSHRC for support of her ongoing investigation of Canadian food practice.
- <sup>2</sup> See detailed list of participants and their professional affiliations printed in this issue.
- <sup>3</sup> See <[http://www.misc-iecm.mcgill.ca/enpages/pdf/food\\_progform\\_30sept05.pdf#search=%22The%20Daily%20Meal%20in%20Canada%20%22](http://www.misc-iecm.mcgill.ca/enpages/pdf/food_progform_30sept05.pdf#search=%22The%20Daily%20Meal%20in%20Canada%20%22)>.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Antonia Maioni : Director, McGill Institute for the Study of Canada.  
Words of Welcome



Photo credit: Owen Egan

At the Discussion Table.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Nathalie Cooke, Conference Chair, MISC, McGill University.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Plenary Session II: What Affects Canadian Consumer Food Choices?

# WHY IS THERE NO CANADIAN FOOD POLICY IN PLACE?



## ABSTRACT

In wealthy countries, the transformation from food as the means of survival to food as life style has begun to raise many questions about the linkages between food, health and the environment. Changes in economy and society have been fostered not only by massive technological change, but also by very substantial policies and programs by governments in agriculture and food over the last century. This paper explores the evolving role of governments over time, the dramatic changes in the role of food in society, the political economy of food policy formation itself, and the need for debate on appropriate food related policies for Canada's future. As health care costs represent the largest growth item in government budgets, the emerging linkage between food choices and health care costs cannot be ignored.

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans les pays riches, l'alimentation est passée d'un moyen de survie à un mode de vie, transformation qui commence à soulever de nombreuses questions sur les liens entre l'alimentation, la santé et l'environnement. Les changements économiques et sociaux ont été causés par l'évolution rapide de la technologie, mais aussi par de très importants programmes et politiques en matière d'agriculture et d'alimentation qui ont été instaurés par le gouvernement au cours du siècle dernier. Cet article explore l'évolution du rôle du gouvernement au fil du temps, l'importante transformation du rôle de la nourriture dans la société et l'économie politique régissant le façonnement de la politique alimentaire. On y souligne la nécessité de tenir un débat sur la mise en place de politiques appropriées en matière d'alimentation pour l'avenir du Canada. Au moment où les coûts des soins de santé représentent le plus important poste budgétaire en expansion des gouvernements, on ne peut négliger le lien entre ces coûts et les choix en matière d'alimentation.

## Introduction

Agriculture and the resulting food production have been the primary economic endeavour supporting human survival from the time of hunter/gatherer societies until about 150 years ago. Until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the vast majority of households in North America were involved in agriculture. Today, many countries, particularly the least developed nations, continue to have the greater share of their populations involved in food production, and food insecurity still affects nearly one billion people in the world. In postmodern societies, food purchases now represent 10 percent or less of household expenditure, and agricultural production involves only about two percent of the work force. Even in this case, only 10 to 20 percent of those in agricultural production generate 80 to 90 percent of all food supply. This shift from a principally agrarian society to an industrialized and postmodern society has taken place over the past 150 years in North America and Europe, and many other countries are well advanced in this transformation. In wealthy countries, the transformation from food as the means of survival and subsistence to food as life style has begun to raise many questions that were not posed in earlier societies about the linkages among food, health and the environment.

The changes in economy and society have been fostered not only by massive technological change, but also by very substantial policies and programs by governments in agriculture and food for well over a century. Indeed, the impacts of these governmental actions in agriculture and food lie at the heart of the international trade negotiations completed in 1994 and the impasse in the current WTO Doha Development Round negotiations. In this context, the title for this article and conference panel, "Why is there no food policy in Canada?" seems odd, out of place, and

**DOUGLAS D. HEDLEY** is Founding Editor of Agricultural Economics and former Assistant Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Dr. Hedley serves now as the Executive Director of the Canadian Faculties of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine.

inconsistent with a record of government involvement in agriculture and food. This paper examines this apparent inconsistency, and the context and relevance of the topic with regard to the conference as a whole. Exploring the evolving role of governments over time, the dramatic changes in the role of food in society, and the political economy of food policy formation itself, focuses serious and much needed debate on appropriate food related policies for the future in Canada.

### **Conference scope**

The conference focuses on food consumers of all types: the young, the aged, families, singles, and native and ethnic groups in Canada. It includes the characteristics and norms surrounding food and food choices, including health, safety and quality, nutrition, variety, life style, eating habits and diets, as well as the linkages to health, wellness and illness, and the impacts of food choices on our environment. Industry structure and concentration involving inputs, farm production, distribution and retail outlets, round out the topics for the conference. These areas go well beyond the more traditional scope for agriculture and food policy in Canada, and result from the emerging concerns linking food with health and environmental issues in the Canadian society and economy.

### **The changing role of government**

From an historical perspective, the traditional scope for agriculture and food policy has been founded on “an ample supply of safe, high quality food at reasonable prices for all Canadians.”<sup>2</sup> For some, it has been characterized as a “cheap food policy” for Canadians. For others, it represents responding to consumer desires and choices in an open market economy. Domestic suppliers and importers have responded to whatever consumers have wanted at a competitive price, so long as two conditions were met: that food was “safe,” and that participants in the market respected trade, commercial, and competition law.

The scope of governmental action in Canada has evolved considerably over the past century. The political foundations for governmental intervention and “consumer choice” in the market place can be illustrated by the writings of John Stuart Mill in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

“governments ought to confine themselves to affording protection against force and fraud: that these two things apart, people should be free agents, able to take

care of themselves and that so long as a person practices no violence or deception to the injury of others in person or property, legislatures and governments are in no way called upon to concern themselves about him.”<sup>3</sup>

Mill’s view of the role of government fostered many of the early actions in agriculture and food through weights and measures, grain grading, transportation regulation for grains, and food safety requirements in the meat industries. The policies were to protect market participants – both buyers and sellers of food and food products – but in the early years they did not extend to direct governmental involvement in food commerce. That is, the role of government was generally restricted to the prevention of violence or deception in the market place by third parties.

At the farm level, governments began to change Mill’s paradigm during the 1930s. Along with the implementation of Keynesian principles in the 1930s and subsequent decades, governments began to accept that direct intervention was needed in the event of “market failure.” Direct governmental involvement in marketing, grading and inspection, income support, and risk management, became common. It continues today, consistent with the more general policy of the government’s obligation to ensure “an ample supply of safe, high quality food at reasonable prices for all Canadians...” However, governments have maintained Mill’s dictum with regard to the food consumer. While policies have been established for food safety and quality, food additives, packaging and labeling, weights and measures, advertising and false claims, buyers’ and sellers’ competitive behaviour, and trade agreements affecting Canadian consumers, the food choices made by consumers have been beyond the normal scope for governmental action. In general, governmental action has been taken on the supply side, but not on the demand side for consumer food choices.

More generally, governments have only recently begun limiting consumer choice or providing information campaigns to alter the choices of consumers. Clearly many addictive drugs have been banned from sale in Canada, and other legal products have been increasingly restricted for production, sale, and use. Examples are the growing limitations on the sale and use of tobacco and tobacco products, and information campaigns on alcohol abuse. Less rigorous examples include the

new food guide in Canada, combining information on nutrition and diets with the role of exercise in healthy life styles. Another example is the accelerating attention given to the impact on the environment of consumer choices. While the traditional concern of product attributes remains, increasing attention is directed to the environmental and health effects of the processes by which products are generated.

The governmental actions on such products as tobacco and alcohol stem from the growing body of evidence linking the deleterious effects on human health and safety with use of these products, and the recognizable costs to individuals and society arising from their use. For food products, however, information campaigns have been the preferred course for governmental action so far. Nonetheless, there is growing evidence that consumers' food choices can be linked to obesity, heart disease and stroke, aging processes, and physical and mental childhood development. More sketchy evidence suggests linkages between food choices and various forms of cancer.<sup>4</sup> On the environmental side, considerable change has already begun in food packaging and processing, both directly for consumers as well as food processors, to limit or reduce the environmental impact of food and food products.

### **Why consider change?**

For governments whose health care costs are the largest growth item in budgets, the emerging linkage between food choices and health care costs cannot be ignored. As well, the costs of consumer food choices extend beyond government treasuries. In addition to the budgetary cost, the effects on overall economic growth, human welfare and labour force productivity in an aging society compound the problem through lower growth and lost productivity in the economy. Such costs are increasingly important in a globalizing world. Finally, many of the costs associated with consumer choice fall on individuals, beyond the reach of current governmental programming, damaging the human condition in general and harming some individuals and groups in society specifically.

The recognition of these linkages and costs stems from the accelerating evidence from the physical and biological sciences. While traditional research lines largely held human, animal, and plant sciences in separate realms, the convergence of biological science research across all life forms and its integration with societal behaviour have rapidly augmented the frontiers of knowledge

about the health and environmental choices made by consumers. As well, societal concern on several fronts, based in part on science and discovery, and in part on myth, has been translated into campaigns for action by private industry as well as government. Although responses have been slow in coming, several changes in industry can be noted. Nestlé, for example, has changed its selling habits for baby formula in most of the developing world. School lunch programs in the USA are venturing into placing limitations on the availability of high calorie, low nutrition food products in schools. Soft drink manufacturers are starting to limit their sales of high sugar/energy products in schools. Fast food providers are changing packaging methods and materials to demonstrate greater environmental friendliness.

Governments have remained extremely reluctant to regulate or restrict consumer food choices. Nonetheless, information campaigns by governments stress improved nutrition in combination with exercise. The reason behind these campaigns is that knowledge and awareness levels in Canadian society about food-nutrition-environmental linkages are highly variable and differ greatly across age groups, life style, region, ethnic background, and work place environments.

One of the factors contributing to the rapid changes in consumer choice of foods has been the increased pace of our society both at work and at home. Evening meal time preparation now is 30 minutes or less in most households; workplace pressures mean eating on the go. Both these situations demand ready to eat and highly processed foods, chosen on the basis of taste and convenience. The great difficulty is that taste is often associated with sugar, salt, fat, alcohol and chocolate, the ingredients often cited as problematic in health considerations!

### **Issue and institutional complexity**

From the political economy point of view, an issue is why – when faced with the growing weight of evidence linking food with health and environment – governments have been so hesitant to wade into the field of limiting consumer choice. One of the dilemmas for all governments is the widely dispersed mandates of government agencies. A brief listing demonstrates this dispersion:

- Health Canada: food safety and quality regulations; human health protection; food and drug regulation
- Agriculture and Agri-food Canada: food supply chain development; animal and

- plant research; export promotion
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency: food safety implementation; animal and plant health regulations and implementation; food import and export inspections and testing
- Environment Canada: environmentally friendly production and processes regulation; hazardous chemicals; pesticides
- Industry Canada: consumer protection; biotechnology
- International Trade Canada (in conjunction with several federal departments): international trade agreements; *Codex Alimentarius*; animal and plant health
- Indian and Northern Affairs: health and welfare of native peoples
- Provincial governments: health care; education; social services; agricultural development; rural development
- Medical research: universities; private sector research; government research through the National Research Council, Medical Research Council

There is no traditional or current common institutional arrangement linking the institutions which share responsibility for the range of issues involved in regulating consumer choice in food, food products, and production processes. As an example, such issues would need to be managed by at least three Cabinet committees in the federal government: social affairs, economic affairs, and foreign affairs and national security. As well, few issues rest within one order of government. While federal-provincial meetings of ministers are common in Canada, such meetings tend to have a restricted scope within similar mandates. Examples include the regular meetings of health ministers, agriculture ministers, or environmental ministers. However, joint meetings of health and agriculture ministers, for example, are rare or non-existent. The consequence is that there are exceedingly limited opportunities for joint action across ministerial mandates and orders of government to deal with the breadth of scope involved in the food-health-environmental linkages.

Such horizontal issues facing governments are not new. However, creating and sustaining the horizontal efforts within and across governments has proven very challenging, requiring significant political courage and persistence. Examples include the creation of the rural secretariat, domiciled in

Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC), in order to bring together more than 25 departments and agencies within the federal government to tackle the cross cutting issues facing rural and remote communities. This effort also involves encouraging the relevant groups and agencies at both provincial and municipal levels to participate in coordinated action. As well, the biotechnology secretariat, located in Industry Canada, brought together a number of departments and agencies directly involved in the development, regulation and implementation of biotechnology, including an external advisory committee. Progress on issues in these circumstances tends to be agonizingly slow and extremely difficult, unless one or more Ministers – who are already overloaded in most portfolios – take the time and effort to breathe urgency into sustained progress.

### Recent progress

The Agricultural Policy Framework (APF),<sup>5</sup> established as an agreement between federal and provincial governments for the period 2003 to 2008, has made some progress in linking food safety and quality, environment, business risk management, renewal, innovation and trade. This agreement marks a number of firsts in the food and agriculture policies for Canada. Within the scope of the framework, the federal government provides equity in its responses across regions, commodities, and markets for farmers. It is also the first time that major federal provincial agreements have gone beyond income stabilization and business risk management, linking these measures to environmental and food safety and quality concerns. As well, as part of the agreement, joint funding arrangements were created across AAFC and Health Canada regarding food safety and quality, and between AAFC and Environment Canada for strengthening environmental sustainability in the farm and food sectors. The underlying purpose of the agreements was to brand Canada as the source of the most environmentally friendly and safe food in the world. Nonetheless, the agreements are entirely “supply side” driven, and do not enter the realm of modifying or regulating consumer choice regarding food and food products.

Putting the APF in place was a lengthy, difficult, and politically challenging exercise that took more than three years. However, the APF covers only the agriculture and food sectors from the supply side, and, only deals incidentally with the man-

dates concerning health and environment. Even then, it does so within the federal government and not the provincial mandates in health and environment. To consider the wider policy scope suggested by this conference on the demand side, with the direct linkage to consumer choice of food and diet coordinated with human health and the environment, implies a gargantuan task of horizontal and vertical coordination across all three orders of government in Canada.

### **Where do we go from here?**

In summary, governments' role has been concentrated historically on the supply side of the food and agriculture continuum. Only recently have government actions begun to enter the realm of consumer choice, and in these instances, outside the food sector. In general, the governmental roles in food and agriculture have stopped just before the consumer makes the choice of what to eat, where to eat, and how to eat it. Nonetheless, the clear and growing recognition of the costs to individuals and government treasuries of the "freedom of consumer choice paradigm" poses serious questions about continuing on this track. If the government were to assume a role in directly affecting consumer choices it would face immense coordination difficulties within and across governments. As well, government regulation of food must be consistent with science based trade rules.

Based on Mill's dictum, a "food policy" is in place in Canada! However, to go further than the supply side issues, there are some basic questions which Canadians and policy makers face:

Q: Do we want governments to help manage our dietary food choices?

A: Doing so would represent a major change in policy direction and governmental role. Canadians would need to be broadly convinced of the need for such a change before policy makers begin venturing into this territory.

Q: Can governments afford not to take such actions?

A: Again, the costs to individuals and governments associated with not taking action are increasingly known and large. The issue is whether governments and society accept that "market failure" has occurred, requiring direct intervention.

Q: What would be the appropriate information, program, and regulatory tools

for government to employ?

A: There is little guidance based on historical roles of government to offer clear paths for action within Canadian societal norms. The way forward lies in unfamiliar territory.

Q: What role should industry play?

A: To some extent, industry is already ahead of government in a range of areas of strengthening food safety and environmental conduct beyond the minimum rules and guidance of governments and trade rules. These efforts have been in response to specific consumer concerns as well as potential liability limitation, over and above governmental regulation. Nonetheless, industry has a significant role to play in addition to governments in linking food, human health and environment.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Opening presentation at the conference: *What Are We Eating? Towards a Canadian Food Policy*, 15-17 February 2006, Montreal, Quebec.

Douglas Hedley is a private consultant located in Ottawa, following many years with Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, as well as several years working in international agriculture and food policy development in South America, Africa, and South East Asia.

<sup>2</sup> This statement – or very similar wording – can be found as far back as the 1960s and in many policy reviews since that time and well into the 1980s.

<sup>3</sup> Mill, John Stuart. 1965. *Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy. The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, volume III, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 800.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, <[http://www.disability.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcArticles.nsf/pages/Cancer\\_and\\_food?OpenDocument](http://www.disability.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcArticles.nsf/pages/Cancer_and_food?OpenDocument)>.

<sup>5</sup> The Policy Framework Agreement and the implementing agreements with provinces and territories are available at: <[http://www.agr.gc.ca/cb/apf/index\\_e.php?section=info&page=frame](http://www.agr.gc.ca/cb/apf/index_e.php?section=info&page=frame)>.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Aline Dimitri, Inspection Analyst, Food Safety Directorate, Canadian Food Inspection Agency.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Hélène Goulet, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Health Products and Food Branch, Health Canada.



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Marc Fortin, Assistant Deputy Minister, Research Branch, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

See <http://www.misc-iccm.mcgill.ca/conf2006/programmeen.html> for presentations.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, MP, Former Minister of State, Public Health.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Marie Marquis, Université de Montréal, and Rod MacRae, Food Policy Analyst.

# NUTRITION POLICY AND FOOD SECURITY TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN CANADA:

## Lessons for Food and Nutrition Policy Today



### ABSTRACT

Canada lacks a “joined up” food and nutrition policy in which nutrition and nutritional health concerns are empowered relative to food and agricultural policy making. Uni-dimensional education campaigns targeting mothers and their infants were the bedrock of policy to improve nutritional health up to the Second World War. These campaigns were sometimes at cross-purposes with food marketing efforts by agricultural department officials. There is no evidence that these uni-dimensional campaigns worked, and when conducted outside the framework of a joined up food and nutrition policy, may have simply blamed mothers for the difficult nutritional situation of their families. To better promote the health of the population, nutritional health and food and agricultural policy must be developed and conducted holistically and jointly.

### RÉSUMÉ

Le Canada n’a pas de politique alimentaire et nutritionnelle « intégrée » permettant d’adresser les préoccupations en matière de nutrition et de santé nutritionnelle dans le cadre du processus d’élaboration des politiques alimentaires et agricoles. Jusqu’à la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, les politiques visant l’amélioration de la santé nutritionnelle de la population reposaient essentiellement sur des campagnes d’information unidimensionnelles centrées sur les mères et leurs enfants. Ces campagnes étaient parfois même en contradiction avec les stratégies de marketing alimentaire des fonctionnaires du ministère de l’Agriculture. Or, l’efficacité de ces campagnes unidimensionnelles n’a pas été démontrée. Non encadrées par une politique alimentaire et nutritionnelle intégrée, elles ont eu pour effet de faire porter aux mères le blâme pour les problèmes nutritionnels des familles. Aussi, dans le but de favoriser la santé de la population, il importe d’élaborer et de gérer une politique regroupant les questions de santé nutritionnelle, d’alimentation et d’agriculture dans une perspective holistique.

### Introduction

While Canada has a long history of nutrition policy making, this history has not been systematically researched, synthesized, or published. In consequence, the public, academics, and policy makers have little information on past nutritional health policies (Ostry, 2005, 2006a) and lessons from the past are not well known and therefore not used to improve current policy making. The purpose of this article is to describe some of the main nutrition and food security issues in Canada from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Second World War in an effort to fill this gap.

### The Establishment of a System of Food Safety in Canada

Food adulteration legislation was passed in Britain in the 1860s and 1870s (Fallows, 1988; Jukes, 1987). Canada adopted this legislation when establishing its food safety system in 1874 (Curran, 1954; Davidson, 1949). Canada was an innovator in food standards legislation between 1884 and the 1890s, but the food safety service had limited ability to capitalize on these legislative advances because of an under-trained and under-equipped inspectorate as well as a lack of funds to conduct the research and development to establish food standards. This began to change in the decade following passage of the 1906 Pure Food Act in the United States when

**ALECK OSTRY** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Care & Epidemiology at University of British Columbia.

the Canadian government adopted many of the new American food standards (Davidson, 1949).

Over the next 15 years, civil service support for the food safety system was upgraded, culminating in the passage of a modern Food and Drug Act in 1920, the responsibility for which was placed under the control of the new Federal Department of Health. Shifting the act to the health department was more than symbolic as it foreshadowed a health protection as opposed to a policing approach to food safety, as well as an expansion of the mandate of the food safety system (Food and Drug Act, 1920).

The discovery of vitamins in 1912 and the ensuing vitamin mania among the general public in the 1920s and 1930s provided manufacturers and retailers with new opportunities for adulteration. An expansion of laboratory infrastructure in the 1920s was needed to detect and handle the resulting increases in vitamin-based false health claims. As well, by the 1920s, mis-labeling and mis-advertising of mass produced food items began to take the lion's share of food inspectors' efforts (Davidson, 1949).

At this time, while the federal system of food safety was national in scope, the public health system was an uncoordinated patchwork of provincial and municipal regimes. The federal food safety system was responsible for regulating food that was traded across provincial and national boundaries and for the integrity of some bulk and most processed canned and packaged foods, while the various public health systems regulated local food producers, distributors, and retailers, giving central government partial control over food safety.

The disjointed constitutional and organizational structure governing food safety meant it was difficult to develop a coordinated strategy to improve the food supply. This, in turn, limited the federal government's efforts to address the serious issue of persistently high infant mortality in the 1920s, just as the beginning of a major secular shift away from breastfeeding caused federal officials to focus on cleaning up the national milk supply in order to mitigate the negative impacts of this development.

### **Infant Feeding and Infant Mortality in the Inter-war Years**

In the 1920s, particularly for poor women living in less than ideal sanitary conditions, artificial feeding was very dangerous for their babies (Baumslag and Michels, 1993). The efforts of

reformers to provide pasteurized or certified milk in urban milk depots and child welfare clinics, which were established in many Canadian cities prior to World War I, and the efforts of municipal public health officials to clean up local milk and water supplies, were one of the keys to reducing infant mortality (Chandler, 1929; Comacchio, 1993).

The other solution to the problem of persistent infant mortality – a problem more directly the responsibility of the Federal Department of Health's Children's Division, was to provide authoritative advice to slow or stop the move away from breastfeeding (MacMurchy, 1923). However, while the new federal health department had the constitutional authority to develop national campaigns to improve child health, during the inter-war years it steadily lost its authority to directly promote nutritional health messages to mothers. This was due to the steady growth, over the decade, of the scientific and moral authority of physicians, most of whom were uninterested or actively opposed to breast feeding (Ostry, 2006a).

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century had witnessed the popularization of relatively expensive artificial infant formula, particularly in the United States (Goldbloom, 1924). The promotion of artificial infant feeding among paying patients was central to the evolution and popularity of pediatrics and family practice in that country and, later, in Canada (Spohn, 1920). These infant formulas, prior to the discovery of vitamins, were extremely dangerous because when given as the exclusive diet for infants they ensured vitamin deficiency.

As the safety of the milk supply improved in the 1920s and 1930s, at least in some municipalities, public health officials who had earlier vilified milk increasingly touted it as an ideal protective food for children. This about-face undermined some of the traditional public health and medical support for breast feeding. After all, if the milk supply was safe (as it was in some locations by the 1920s) and if, as the new vitamin discoveries indicated, milk was a very good supplier of vitamins, calcium, and calories, then the traditional arguments against artificial infant feeding were blunted.

It was during this time of transition in infant feeding practices in Canada that Helen MacMurchy (director of the Children's Division in the Federal Department of Health) developed and widely disseminated her national breast feeding guidelines through the Canadian Mothers' Book (CMB). The instruction to mothers that they

absolutely must wait until their infant reached the age of nine months or more before giving them cow's milk, as well as the strict and dire admonition not to feed this dangerous liquid to younger infants and to keep physicians and nurses at arms' length during the nursing process, demonstrated that federal officials were well aware both of the antipathy of physicians toward breast feeding and that the milk supply remained unsafe (MacMurchy, 1923).

New attitudes toward artificial feeding among public health officials in conjunction with its increasing promotion by family physicians and pediatricians left federal officials such as MacMurchy with few medical allies in the fight to promote breast feeding. At the same time, many women in Canada actively sought out physicians who would help them artificially feed their babies (Myres, 1979), and this contributed to fading active medical support for breast feeding.

Given the massive secular move away from breast feeding, the focus on exclusive breast feeding in the CMB (with its defensive moral denial of the existence of artificial infant feeding) rendered it increasingly irrelevant. While this correct and courageous health promotion stance taken by the Children's Division was ineffective in promoting breast feeding among women in the 1920s and 1930s, it may have acted as an authoritative standard that slowed down the flight to artificial feeding in the inter-war years.

### **Agriculture and Industry Trumps Nutrition and Health in the 1920s**

The federal government's ability to develop policy to reduce infant mortality was also hindered by its complex relationship with industry. As early as 1911, the Canadian Manufacturers Association was heavily involved with the federal government in developing food standards (Davidson, 1949). With the discovery of vitamins and the growing realization by many manufacturers that they could use vitamin-based health claims to boost their sales, the relationship between the agency and industry became strained (Department of Pensions and National Health, 1937).

Intra-governmental confusion occurred, too, because the federal department of Agriculture discovered the marketing potential for vitamins in the 1920s. In conjunction with industry, the department promoted Canadian food products (particularly beef and milk), often using highly targeted campaigns based on generalized vitamin-based

health claims (Department of Agriculture Report, 1927, 1931).

By the mid-1920s, the Division of Child Health's cooperation with the Department of Agriculture's Milk Utilization service in marketing cow's milk to mothers was at cross purposes with its own breastfeeding guidelines warning about the dangers of cows' milk. As well, because the marketing strategy of the Department of Agriculture was founded on general vitamin-based health claims, particularly for protective foods, the Food and Drug Division's efforts to stop manufacturers' adulteration of food with vitamins and the proliferation of vitamin-based false health claims was compromised.

The basis for the aggressive marketing promotion of dairy and beef by the Department of Agriculture was the increasing predominance of animal production (in relation to grain and vegetables) in Canada (Bicknell and Fowkes, 1962). Expansion of herds created pressure to improve sales of animal-based foods by increasing exports or by changing Canadian food purchase and dietary habits through marketing campaigns (Drummond et al., 1966). While foods other than milk and meat were rich in vitamins (e.g. leafy green and orange-coloured vegetables, and whole wheat cereal products), these less economically important foods were not promoted in the same way as dairy products and meat.

### **Nutrition, Health, and Agriculture in the 1930s**

All these policy disjunctions were exacerbated by the Depression. As noted in the Health Department reports from this time, sharpened economic competition during the 1930s increased the incidence of adulteration, mis-labeling, and mis-advertising. The Department of Agriculture and Canada's farmers also felt the pressure of sharpened competition as, following passage of the Smoot-Hawley Act in 1930, borders were closed with the United States, increasing the glut of food on the Canadian market (Britnell and Fowkes 1962).

The health status of the population improved dramatically during the Depression (Statistics Canada, Series B35-50, 1983; Ostry, 2006b). Both Apple (1987, 1995) and McKeown (1976) postulated that food security mediated the relationship between changes in socioeconomic conditions and health. The peculiar agri-economic situation of the Depression led to a stable or improved domestic food supply for most basic commodities, at least at the national level, and historically low food prices

for the entire decade in spite of severe economic dislocation.

From the few dietary surveys, conducted at the end of the Depression, the evidence is limited but clear that although wealthier families ate better than poorer ones, and though men had better diets than women and children within poor working families, individuals in such families had sufficient calories in their diets (McHenry, 1939; Pett, 1942, 1944; Young, 1941). Given the abundance of cheap food available at this time, the stability of nutritional deficiency-related disease mortality, and the rapid decline in rickets mortality it is likely that the dietary conditions faced by the poor and unemployed improved as the 1930s unfolded relative to the 1920s.

Given the continuing high agricultural production through the 1930s, lack of income was the main factor preventing access to food by the unemployed (Struthers 1983, 1991). This, in turn, depended on the relief rate which, particularly in the early 1930s, varied widely across municipalities. Thus, the relief rate was central to the food insecurity experienced by the unemployed.

In this situation of good food supply, obtaining more money for the unemployed (a key success of reformers) was therefore also key to reducing the very high proportions of income spent on food by families on the lowest economic rung in the 1930s. The combination of cheap food in good supply and constant upward political pressure for direct food aid and increases in relief payments ensured that those in the margins did not become malnourished. The situation for the marginally food secure remained, however, precarious, with little room for maneuverability.

The role of leading nutrition scientists in improving the lives of Canada's unemployed at this time was more ambiguous (Struthers, 1991). First, many of the nutrition scientists who conducted the dietary surveys in Canada at the end of the 1930s were convinced at the time that malnutrition was widespread in the population (McHenry, 1939; Young, 1941, 1964). Yet, they reverted to "blame the mother" strategies calling for the education of mothers to help them use their existing funds more wisely in the purchase and preparation of food, instead of initiatives that would increase the incomes of the unemployed.

## Conclusions

From this historical overview, there are three main lessons for food security and nutrition policy

making today in Canada. First, Canada lacks a "joined up food and nutrition policy" in which nutrition and nutritional health is empowered relative to food and agricultural policy (MacRae, 1999; Riches, 2004; Rideout et al., 2006; Ostry, 2006a). Canada did develop nutrition policies in the 1920s and 1930s but these were dominated by the promotion of dairy and meat. In other words, nutrition policy was driven by the needs and concerns of food and agricultural policy.

This lack of a coherent health promotion message for milk was exacerbated by the disjunction between nutrition policy makers operating within the federal government and locally-based public health officials. As well, less than ideal nutrition education messages were developed, and these were shaped more by the needs of the agricultural economy than the issue of stubbornly high infant mortality. This was exacerbated by the relative weakness of the Federal Department of Health in comparison to Agriculture as well as the lack of a strong federal public health voice. In the 1920s, nutrition policy was subordinate to food policy. The dominant, and most coherent and effective policy developed in the inter-war years, was the aggressive promotion of milk and meat.

Second, uni-dimensional initiatives directed at educating mothers have been the bedrock of policy to improve the dietary and nutritional health of the population since the 1920s. There are two problems with this approach. First, there is no evidence that narrow education promoting changes in eating and shopping habits actually work. As was demonstrated, in the 1920s and 1930s, nutrition education campaigns were compromised by the domination of food policy concerns (i.e., they were countered by marketing campaigns designed to promote the sale of foods). Thus, nutrition education, conducted in isolation from other strategies and outside the framework of a joined up food and nutrition policy, was overwhelmed by the market.

This approach also essentially blamed mothers for both the difficult nutritional situation of their families and their failure to fix the problem. Through the inter-war years, mothers were blamed by their physicians for not being able to breast feed, and by MacMurchy and her officials for not breast feeding enough as well as for working outside the home. Mothers, through the inter-war years, were the primary targets for all nutrition marketing campaigns by industry and agriculture. Poor mothers were told by nutrition scientists in

the 1930s that they should make do with their limited incomes and learn instead to shop and cook more efficiently.

The third lesson for modern policy makers is that the impact of future economic crisis on dietary status and nutritional health may be much more severe than what was observed during the Depression. The steady roll back of the welfare state, the rise of food banks, the likelihood that the next economic slump may involve both unemployment and inflation, and the decline in the number of people who can grow their own food, suggest more dire conditions than existed in the 1930s. In other words, with greater urbanization of the population and increased dependence on highly concentrated markets, the ability of poor Canadians to cope with prolonged food insecurity associated with any future economic crisis may be highly compromised.

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# Conscience gourmande ou inconscience dirigée ?



## RÉSUMÉ

Dans une réflexion personnelle sur la culture de la nourriture au Canada, Robert Beauchemin examine les changements gastronomiques qui eurent lieu depuis les années 70. Conscient depuis sa jeunesse qu'il existait un royaume de produits et de plats sains et au bon goût (« je n'étais pas dupe, je préférais les pâtes que faisait ma mère... toujours plus savoureuses »), il s'aperçoit que le choix du consommateur est dirigé et limité par l'industrie agro-alimentaire. L'auteur affirme que bien que les Canadiens furent certainement témoins d'importants changements et d'améliorations concernant la disponibilité d'une variété de produits, ils doivent cependant reconnaître et être vigilants de la résistance farouche de l'industrie agro-alimentaire, ainsi que de son manque de vision et de son refus du compromis.

## ABSTRACT

Reflecting on food culture in Canada, Robert Beauchemin thinks back to the gastronomic changes that have taken place in Canada since the 1970s and his own reaction to them. Conscious from a young age of the realm of healthy and delicious food products in existence (I wasn't duped, he writes, I preferred my mother's pasta, always the more tasty), he eventually realizes that the choice of the consumer is directed and limited by the food industry. Certainly Canadians have borne witness to significant changes and improvements in the way that a variety of products have become available, yet Canadians need to be wary of the situation, he cautions, specifically of the food industry's obstinance, lack of vision, and refusal to compromise.

Il y a vingt cinq ans, je rentrais d'Australie (où je venais d'habiter deux ans) via l'Europe et si on me demandait aujourd'hui de décrire ce que les frigos et les placards canadiens de l'époque contenaient, je dirais ceci : du surgelé, des boîtes de conserves, des bouteilles et des pots. Il y avait très peu de variété de produits frais dans les épiceries et les super marchés, quelques espèces de pommes de terre non identifiées; presque aucun fruits et légumes tropicaux à part les agrumes de base, orange, pamplemousse, citron. Il fallait aller dans le quartier italien pour boire un espresso, la bière et le pain étaient entièrement (enfin presque) industrialisés, et les goûts étaient standardisés : l'agro-alimentaire avait le gros bout du bâton, ce qui me fait dire, contrairement à ce qu'entendait Brillat-Savarin un siècle et demi plus tôt, que vous n'êtes pas ce que vous mangez mais bien ce que l'on VOUS fait manger.

Car la grande majorité des Canadiens achetaient toute leur nourriture dans les grandes surfaces, qui avaient été présentées comme l'utopie socioculturelle avant-gardiste au début des années 60. Elles allaient révolutionner – et forcément améliorer – nos vies, nous laissant plus de temps libre que jamais, libérant les femmes des corvées domestiques, permettant aux voitures de se stationner dans de larges espaces ouverts au lieu d'étouffer la circulation des centre-ville. *The future was very bright indeed.* Nous avions une nouvelle reine, nous lancions des satellites dans l'espace, nos voisins contrôlaient la bombe et inventaient le fast-food, les cartes de crédit, et nous, nous nous déplaçons dans d'immenses banlieues nouvellement fondées ce qui nous permettaient – du moins à la classe dites moyenne – de devenir propriétaires et dans mon cas à tout le moins, de grandir dans ma propre chambre

ROBERT BEAUCHEMIN  
est critique gastronomique au journal *La Presse*.

à coucher. Parallèlement à ces très importants changements, nos mœurs alimentaires ont aussi été radicalement métamorphosées : d'excellentes cuisinières qu'elles étaient, nos grands-mères et nos mères sont devenues des consommatrices. Alors qu'autrefois, et comme c'est encore le cas dans les pays en voie de développement, tout ce qui se mangeait était produit à la maison ou à tout le moins, surtout en vertu de notre climat ingrat, tout près de la maison. Le passage – ou j'ajouterais la dépendance – à l'agro-alimentaire s'est fait un peu sournoisement. À coup de marketing et de publicité, habile, souvent mensongère et ignorante. Mais ce n'était pas important puisque TOUT le monde était ignorant. Ma mère qui a toujours eu un intérêt marqué pour la cuisine (et pour la bouffe, je n'ai pas appris tout ça fortuitement) a commencé par acheter des légumes en boîtes qui n'étaient pas disponibles frais en saison: rappelez-vous les petits pois, les champignons, les betteraves, le maïs. Et il y a eu peu à peu une disparition des variétés chez nous. Puis elle a adopté le *TV dinner*, quelques fois par mois, pour se sauver la corvée d'un repas et se permettre un film au Ciné parc avec toute la famille. Et les biscuits industriels, et le pain dans les sacs en plastique, et le café lyophilisé, et plus tard les boîtes de pâte précuites (de Kraft dinner pour ne pas le nommer) vendues avec un sachet de poudre de couleur suspecte et certainement impossible à retracer dans la nature, qu'on saupoudrait dessus. Les enfants en étaient fous. C'était bien meilleur, parce que proposé dans une boîte, et puis, ça n'était pas la cuisine maison. Bien plus tard, l'une de mes amies qui s'était installée à Paris me demandait de lui en rapporter quelques boîtes chaque fois que j'étais de passage dans la capitale française. Ça lui « rappelaient son enfance » disait-elle!

Pourtant, je n'étais pas dupe et je préférais les pâtes que faisait ma mère, en bonne italienne, toujours plus savoureuses. Nous allions aussi de plus en plus au restaurant, parfois le dimanche mon père nous amenait manger au **Saint-amable** ou **Chez Bardet**, des restaurants de grande cuisine française classique, mais des restaurants réservés alors à une clientèle sophistiquées et surtout, en moyens. J'y ai appris à me tenir et à me comporter de manière civilisée. Parfois, nous allions à l'hôtel Mont-Royal où l'on trouvait un étrange restaurant polynésien du nom de Kon Tiki qui servait des boissons auxquelles je n'avais pas droit à mon âge, mais qui émettait de la fumée (étrange aujourd'hui quand j'y pense mais ce phénomène

existait en Floride, en Californie et certainement partout dans les grandes villes canadiennes). Un autre restaurant où nous allions à l'occasion servait de la nourriture dites « continental », un mélange de français, italien et nord-américains sans grande spécificité, mais qui avait la particularité de proposer une cuisine présentées par des serveurs habillés en légumes: il y avait la jeune dame en pois vert, le jeune homme en épi de maïs, avec un chapeau qui imitait le feuillage, puis l'autre jeune homme en tomate bien rouge. Comment ils arrivaient à servir de la nourriture ainsi caparaçonnés, je ne l'ai jamais su, mais ça ne devait pas être facile. Là aussi, quand nous buvions du vin (on m'en permettait un tout petit verre allongé d'eau) il avait souvent le goût et le parfum, et parfois la couleur, du Kool-Aid. Quand j'y songe aujourd'hui, je me dis que nous vivions une vie pleine de risques!

Je suis un enfant de cette époque. J'ai grandi dans les années 70 avec ce genre de vie gastronomique : un désert. Et c'est peut-être ce qui explique ma rébellion. Quand j'étais invité chez des voisins calabrais dont la mère préparait, elle, une cuisine toute simple, sans ornements, mais au goût exceptionnel, j'ai vite pris conscience que je mangeais de moins en moins bien chez moi. Et tout était frais chez eux. Et chez moi, tout était transformé, empaqueté, additionné de produits aux noms insolites. Et il y avait tant de végétaux que je ne connaissais pas: des aubergines, des courgettes, des figues, des kakis. La prise de conscience a donc eu lieu ici, à force de fréquenter des Français et des Italiens, et surtout des pieds-noirs arrivés d'Algérie dans les années 60, dont la famille de mon ami José était propriétaire d'une pâtisserie. Chaque fois que je m'y présentais, on me donnait des gâteaux, mais pas ceux au crémage bleu et rose, au froufrou de robe de mariée des gâteaux des grandes surfaces, mais des brioches anisées, des pains doux parfumés à l'eau de fleurs d'orange, des douceurs qui m'apparaisaient d'une singulière finesse. Je commençais déjà à voyager chaque fois que j'allais chez José. Mais au Québec, les parents de mes amis se plaignaient sans arrêt (vous connaissez les Européens, quand il est question de nourriture) qu'il n'y avait pas assez de variété de légumes, de fromages, de vin, même, et que tout – absolument tout – était hors de prix. Et de plus, que les laitues, les pêches, les poires et même les fromages ne goûtaient absolument rien. En bon Canadien que j'étais, je rouspétais un peu mais concrètement, la réalisation qu'ils

avaient bien raison commençant à prendre forme dans mon inconscient. Ironiquement, je suis parti à l'aventure en Iran, en Afghanistan, et finalement en Inde, à l'âge de 17 ans avec un sac sur le dos, et avec mon ami José. J'ai découvert les épices, les fruits tropicaux comme la mangue et les litchis, les variétés de riz, d'aubergines, de haricots, la cuisine indienne, la cuisine vietnamienne et la cuisine thaïlandaise, virtuellement inconnus chez nous en 1978! J'avais vite compris qu'ici, à cette époque, on n'avait pas exactement la diète la plus saine et la meilleure au monde. Et plus ça allait, plus les gens engraisaient.

L'ouverture radicale sur le monde des produits, des techniques, des styles de cuisines, s'est produite à mon retour, sous mes yeux. Je peux presque identifier le moment précis. Depuis ce temps, je ne cesse de m'émerveiller des changements, de même que je continue de m'alarmer de la résistance farouche de l'industrie agro-alimentaire, par son manque de vision, de leadership (c'est un mode à la mode semble-t-il), et son refus de tout compromis à moins d'y être systématiquement obligés par des lois fermes. Et je ne m'explique toujours pas le manque de volonté, de courage, et de vision des gouvernements qui se sont succédés au centre comme à la périphérie et dont les instances, comme le Département de la santé et celui de l'agriculture, n'ont pas réagi assez vite à des produits que nous imposait partout l'industrie et dont on sait (publiquement aujourd'hui et secrètement alors) qu'ils empoisonnaient lentement mais sûrement nos compatriotes. Agents chimiques, additifs de toutes sortes, sel nitrites, colorants artificiels, les produits transformés de nos super marchés s'apparentaient bien plus à des nourritures pour cosmonautes soviétiques abandonnés sur une station spatiale qu'à des habitants d'un pays prospère, éduqué, paisible et envié par le reste de la planète.

Si la situation alimentaire au Canada s'est améliorée grandement depuis les années 80, il nous faut rester vigilant : les couches moins favorisées (et les moins informées) mangent toujours aussi mal. Des produits transformés, traités chimiquement, colorés artificiellement, traités aux antibiotiques ont tous un impact direct sur la santé humaine, bien entendu, mais aussi sur l'environnement, et la biodiversité. Cet engrenage de toxicité accrue est directement lié à des facteurs socio-économiques, ne nous le cachons pas. Et

ceux qui décident du contenu de notre frigo de l'époque sont les mêmes qui voudraient imposer la diète contemporaine : l'industrie, qui a énormément profité de l'anémie et de l'incompétence des gouvernements d'une part, et du manque de volonté de légiférer d'autre part. Ces choses-là changent vite : gras trans, dioxines, substituts de produits laitiers, substances additionnées, produits illicites et ou artificiels, colorants et ersatz de tout ordre. Il était devenu possible, dans les années où j'ai grandi, de croire que l'on mangeait quelque chose alors qu'on mangeait tout le contraire. Puis sont apparues les substances qu'on appelle les Techno food : entre autres l'olestra, sorte de gras non digestible, le sucre ersatz, les aliments transgéniques, brrrrr. Tout ça donne froid dans le dos, non? Vous aimez manger un brownie dont la liste d'ingrédients, imprimés toujours plus petit, ce qui les rend presque impossible à lire, est aussi longue que celle d'une bombe nucléaire? Pourtant, on arrive bien à faire un petit gâteau au chocolat avec 6-7 ingrédients, en 20 minutes. Que nous est-il arrivé pour qu'on se refuse même ce petit hiatus dans nos vies très très active?

### **Bonne tendance tout de même**

Je ne tiens pas à être un prophète de malheur alors je dois reconnaître que le chemin parcouru en 20 ans est étonnant, celui parcouru en 10 ans seulement encore plus remarquable. Par exemple, dans le cas des fromages depuis cette rocambolesque proposition du gouvernement Chrétien où, imitant les Américains, on a interdit les fromages au lait cru et, par conséquent, causé un phénomène contraire : l'industrie du fromage artisanal a décuplé depuis 1995. De quelques caillés indigènes insignifiants qu'on nous proposait localement au Québec il y a vingt ans, nous sommes passés à plus de 330 variétés de fromages. Oh! Tous ne sont pas excellents bien sûr, mais le fait de produire à partir de lait d'animaux qui paissent tranquillement dans nos champs a quelque chose de réjouissant. Un autre exemple concerne le pain: celui qu'on nous proposait alors dans les boulangeries il y a 20 ans était un bien pauvre exemple de la nourriture de base de tout l'Occident, qu'on appelle « staple food » en anglais : il s'effritait, n'avait plus de goût ou si peu, et se conservait des jours et des jours... je me demande encore comment. De nos jours, les boulangeries artisanales, ou à prétention artisanale, poussent dans toutes les régions du Québec

et pas seulement à Montréal. Plusieurs sont excellentes. La plupart rejettent les gras hydrogénés, et font le pain comme il faut le faire : en prenant le temps. La bière est un autre exemple. C'est une industrie dominée entièrement par les grandes brasseries. Aujourd'hui, une part qu'on dit négligeable en termes quantitatifs mais importants pour le symbole, des bières québécoises sont artisanales. Le choix de vin s'est multiplié. Nous en produisons même au Canada, et de très bonne qualité. La variété des fruits et des légumes augmente, leur qualité aussi, et on les cueille de plus en plus mûrs. La traçabilité des produits augmente également – il est de plus en plus facile de localiser un producteur, une industrie ou un fabricant. De plus, la vente des produits agricoles certifiés biologiques s'intensifie et est prise au sérieux. Quand j'étais adolescent, on en riait. Les Marchés publics (au nombre de 5 à Montréal uniquement) connaissent aujourd'hui une popularité inégalée depuis leur fondation. Les livres de recettes, les émissions de télé sur la cuisine, se multiplient – pour de bonnes et de moins bonnes raisons – et les médias exposent plus que jamais les Canadiens à une science renouvelée, rafraîchie et surtout critique. Les végétariens ne sont plus perçus comme des habitants d'une autre planète, aux cheveux gris et marchant pied nus. Les enjambées apparaissent partout, les préoccupations nutritionnelles aussi, et les diètes (pour notre malheur ou non) sont un mot quotidien.

Les nutritionnistes qui nous conseillent n'opèrent plus que dans un centre hospitalier pour nos mères atteintes de maladie cardio-vasculaires. Elles et Ils travaillent dorénavant pour prévenir plutôt que pour guérir et n'entendent pas nous priver du plaisir de manger mais veulent encourager le plaisir de mieux manger. Toutes ces tendances ne sont pas fortuites, cela EST une réaction. D'une part, nous avons l'industrie agro-alimentaire dont le but EST l'augmentation de la marge de profit pour les investisseurs et rien d'autre. Pour y arriver, toutes les méthodes sont bonnes, c'est bien connu: couper le temps de production, les coûts de transport, de cueillette, d'entreposage, créer de gros et puissants lobby pour contrer toute réglementation, rationaliser – même si c'est tout sauf rationnel – la chaîne de production pour la rendre plus efficace. Tout ça impose un coût pour la santé des Canadiens qui dépendent de cette industrie. La réponse des rebelles est *No way*.

Les menaces sont belles et bien réelles et elles sont légions. Si seulement les Canadiens savaient qu'ils pourraient régler une bonne partie de leurs problèmes de santé, de surpoids, en évitant toute nourriture transformée (enfin, le plus possible). Car dans cette nourriture se cachent les pires de nos ennemis : les gras, les sucres et les sels qui contaminent notre alimentation.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Elizabeth Baird, Canadian Living.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Louise Lambert Lagacé, dietitian and author.

# COMMENT LE CONSOMMATEUR S'Y RETROUVE-T-IL DANS L'ENSEMBLE DES MESSAGES EN MATIÈRE D'ALIMENTATION ET DE SANTÉ ?



## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine les médias et l'alimentation autour des questions suivantes : comment les médias véhiculent l'information sur l'alimentation, qui en sont les porte-parole, quelles sont les représentations sociales de l'alimentation dans les téléromans québécois, et comment les consommateurs se retrouvent à travers cet éventail de messages ? En utilisant plusieurs sources d'information et dispositifs de recherche, nous trouvons que d'un côté, les participants des entretiens indiquent qu'ils reçoivent beaucoup d'information en matière d'alimentation, et d'un autre côté, notre analyse de contenu de *La Presse* et de la *SR*, ainsi que l'analyse des téléromans montrent qu'en réalité les messages sur l'alimentation véhiculés sous l'angle de la protection, de la prévention, et de la promotion de la santé, sont peu nombreux ou peu évoqués. Plusieurs hypothèses sont émises.

## ABSTRACT

This article examines the following questions concerning food and the media: how do media convey information on food; who are the spokespersons; what are the social representations of food in Quebecois television reporting; and how do consumers react when subjected to this range of messages? By using several sources of information and research methods, we find that, on the one hand, the interviewed participants receive a substantial amount of information on food. On the other hand, our analysis of the content of the newspaper *La Presse* and the *SR* as well as of television reporting shows that food messages are actually rarely conveyed through the notions of protection, prevention, and health promotion. Several hypotheses are proposed.

## 1. Introduction

Chaque jour, les différents médias<sup>1-5</sup> bombardent l'individu d'informations traitant d'alimentation. Diverses théories, dont celles de l'approche culturelle « *cultivation theory* »<sup>6,7,8</sup> et de l'apprentissage social<sup>9</sup> considèrent que les médias sont porteurs de messages susceptibles de façonner les comportements et les opinions individuels, voire même les normes sociales<sup>10,11</sup>. Elles font aussi état de l'impact des médias sur la culture et sur les habitudes de vie.

D'où proviennent ces messages ? En partie de l'industrie agro-alimentaire qui exerce une présence constante dans les médias, via la publicité. Au Québec, l'ensemble de la publicité occupe environ 65 % de l'espace médiatique<sup>12</sup>, et les dépenses publicitaires de l'alimentation au Québec arrivent au troisième rang, toutes industries confondues<sup>13</sup>. Par ailleurs, depuis les années 1980<sup>14</sup>, la préoccupation de l'alimentation est partagée par plusieurs agents de divers domaines : ministères, les organismes communautaires, les ONG (notamment la Fondation des maladies du cœur et la Société canadienne du cancer), etc. Cette multitude d'agents proposent des discours et diffusent des images qui complexifient les représentations de l'alimentation dans les médias<sup>15</sup> puisque, d'une part, chacun offre sa propre interprétation en matière d'alimentation aux lecteurs, auditeurs, téléspectateurs et internautes, et, d'autre part,

**LISE RENAUD**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, Université du Québec à Montréal  
**MONIQUE CARON-BOUCHARD**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf  
**MARIE-CLAUDE LAGACÉ**, Groupe de recherche média et santé  
**DANIELLE MAISONNEUVE**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, Université du Québec à Montréal  
Chaire en relations publiques de l'UQAM  
**LYNE MONGEAU**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, Institut national de santé publique du Québec  
**LAURETTE DUBÉ**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, McGill University  
**KARL MOORE**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, McGill University

chacun la diffuse dans des formats différents (bulletins de nouvelles, émissions de services, cahier spécial, chroniques, etc.). Les informations distribuées dans les émissions de divertissement, les publicités, et les bulletins de nouvelles, présentent des pratiques alimentaires et des images corporelles décrivant un espace social alimentaire spécifique. Elles dictent aussi des normes, – c'est-à-dire qu'elles établissent ce qui est collectivement acceptable et valorisé par les instances de production<sup>5,16</sup>.

Les interactions du lecteur ou du téléspectateur avec les médias lui permettent de s'appropriier ou de construire sa représentation des normes sociales en matière d'alimentation, telles que l'étiquette à table et la composition d'un repas.

Dans le cadre des études exploratoires menées ici, nos questionnements furent nombreux : quelle information en matière d'alimentation les médias de masse véhiculent-ils ? Et plus spécifiquement : comment les médias véhiculent-ils l'information sur l'alimentation ? Qui en sont les porte-parole ? Les journalistes, les nutritionnistes, les médecins ou les spécialistes ? Quel contenu les médias de masse diffusent-ils ? (effets sur la santé, trucs, données scientifiques, témoignages ?) Dans quel type de rubrique traite-t-on d'alimentation : dans les chroniques, et/ou les bulletins de nouvelles ?

Par la suite, nous avons tenté d'examiner la manière dont les consommateurs s'y retrouvaient dans cet éventail de messages en matière d'alimentation. Se pourrait-il que ces informations émises par des agents différents engendrent une certaine confusion chez eux ? Nous regarderons également si la réception en parallèle de messages d'éducation à la santé (manger santé, manger sans cholestérol) et de publicités commerciales (manger des croustilles sans cholestérol) pourrait semer le doute quant aux comportements alimentaires à privilégier.

## 2. Méthodologie

Pour répondre à ces questions, plusieurs sources d'information et plusieurs dispositifs de recherche ont été utilisés : 1- une analyse de contenu d'articles écrits et d'émissions télévisées ; 2- une analyse de contenu de fictions québécoises ; 3- des entrevues de groupes.

### 2.1 Articles de journal et émissions télévisées

D'abord, une analyse du contenu des articles du quotidien montréalais francophone *La Presse* a été menée en parallèle avec une recherche sur les

émissions francophones télédiffusées entre 1985 et 2005 par la *Société Radio-Canada (SRC)*. Dans cette analyse, l'alimentation est abordée sous l'angle de la santé publique. Nous avons retenu pour fins d'analyse tout discours lié à la protection (par exemple, ajout de vitamine D au lait), à la prévention (par exemple, la consommation des aliments réduits en matière grasse), et à la promotion de la santé (par exemple, manger 5 fruits et légumes par jour).

Le choix de ces deux médias (l'un écrit, et l'autre, électronique) repose sur la complémentarité de leurs caractéristiques. En effet, ils sont comparables au niveau de leur portée auprès de la population québécoise, c'est-à-dire qu'un large public est susceptible d'être rejoint par ces deux médias. Ils sont aussi comparables au niveau de l'étendue de leur lieu de distribution/diffusion, c'est-à-dire que ces médias sont partout sur le territoire québécois.

Des critères de sélection identiques ont été appliqués aux deux types de médias pour constituer les corpus d'analyse. Quelques 558 descripteurs d'extraits d'émissions (excluant les téléromans) et de nouvelles diffusés entre janvier 1986 et mars 2005 par la *SRC* ont ainsi été retenus. Un descripteur d'émission de télévision de la *SRC* comprend les renseignements suivants : la date de l'extrait, le titre de l'émission, la numérotation du segment, le thème, la description sommaire de l'émission incluant généralement le nom du journaliste, la durée de l'émission, l'identification des segments visuels et des personnes interviewées, le lieu des reportages et un certain nombre de renseignements à propos des supports techniques d'archivage. Un cinquième des descripteurs ne permettait pas d'identifier les porte-parole.

La banque de données *CEDROM-SNi*, qui contient les articles des principaux journaux du Québec publiés depuis 1945, a servi de ressource pour repérer les articles du journal *La Presse*. Les articles numérisés de ce quotidien ne sont disponibles que depuis 1987, alors que la banque de données de la *SRC* a permis de colliger les données depuis 20 ans. Quelque 736 articles de *La Presse* ont été relevés et l'analyse a porté sur un échantillon de 217 articles publiés entre 1987 et 2005. Nous avons chaque fois considéré les articles au complet.

Pour constituer le corpus d'analyse sur la nutrition, nous avons utilisé les termes suivants :

- nutrition et (santé publique ou exercice physique)

- alimentation et (prévention ou promotion ou protection)
- alimentation et (santé publique)
- obésité et (prévention ou promotion ou protection)
- obésité et (santé publique)

## 2.2 Téléromans

En parallèle, nous avons procédé à une analyse de contenu des fictions québécoises (téléromans) en ondes les 3 et 4 février 2004 sur les principales chaînes francophones : SRC, TVA, TQS, et *Télé-Québec*. Il s'agit d'un prélèvement systématique de séquences issues de treize trames fictives offertes, au cours de ces deux soirées, dans le paysage télévisuel entre 18:30 et 22:00. Nous n'avons retenu que les séquences où des traces (indicateurs) dont le lien avec l'alimentation étaient manifestes. Seules les séquences où les protagonistes consommaient des produits alimentaires ou parlaient d'alimentation, [et / ou] se trouvaient dans un lieu de consommation alimentaire ou encore à proximité de denrées alimentaires perceptibles, ont été examinées.

## 2.3 Groupes de discussion

Enfin, des entrevues de groupes ont été réalisées entre 2003 et 2006 auprès de 71 personnes, hommes et femmes, provenant de divers milieux socio économiques et issues des régions ou des grands centres urbains. Lors de ces séances, la perception des participants de l'information véhiculée en matière d'alimentation a été examinée.

## 2.4 Limites

Notre étude a volontairement omis l'analyse des publicités de l'industrie agro-alimentaire et des agences de santé. De plus, elle ne tient pas compte des articles et des émissions (ou portions d'émissions) proposant des recettes culinaires.

## 3. Résultats

Cette section est consacrée à l'examen des contenus traitant d'alimentation et de santé diffusés par *La Presse* et la *Société Radio Canada*. Puis, elle fait brièvement état de la place réservée à l'alimentation dans les téléromans. Nous confrontons, enfin, les données colligées avec les perceptions des participants aux groupes de discussion sur l'information reçue en matière d'alimentation.

## I- OFFRE MEDIATIQUE EN MATIERE D'ALIMENTATION ET DE SANTE

### 3.1 Discours médiatique francophone en matière d'alimentation et de santé

Le contenu abordant l'alimentation en relation avec la santé n'a pas occupé le même espace, au fil des 20 dernières années, à *La Presse*<sup>18</sup> qu'à la SRC<sup>17</sup>. Pour cette dernière, en effet, le traitement de ce sujet a été constant de 1986 à 2005, puisqu'elle proposait une moyenne annuelle de 33 segments de 9 minutes chacun, sauf pour l'année 2004 où elle en a présenté presque trois fois plus. À l'inverse, le discours sur l'alimentation et la santé de *La Presse* ne fut pas linéaire et a connu d'importantes variations : on a noté une progression remarquable de 14 articles en 1987 à quelque 73 articles en 1993, suivie d'une phase de stabilisation s'échelonnant de 1993 à 1996 (58 à 73 articles), puis une période d'oscillation de 1997 à 1999 (répertoriant 30 articles en 1997, 70 articles en 1998, et 29 articles en 1999). Enfin, la période allant de 2000 à 2003 montre une courbe ascendante (passant de 48 à 70 articles). Une hausse d'intérêt caractérise l'année 2004, alors qu'elle a produit autant d'articles en trois mois que durant toute l'année 1993 – soit 73 articles. Le contenu des articles parus dans *La Presse* s'avère très dense, avec une moyenne de 12,3 items par document traité.

### 3.2 Contenus les plus récurrents

Les articles de *La Presse* sont écrits par des journalistes québécois, et couvrent des enjeux locaux, provinciaux et nationaux. *La Presse* consacre 61,9% de l'ensemble de son contenu à 4 sujets sur l'alimentation :

- a) L'avis émis par des professionnels (19%). Les professionnels prennent position au sujet de l'alimentation en général, de l'obésité, des régimes, des viandes et substituts, du gras, des maladies, des vitamines, des breuvages, des produits laitiers, de la santé (promotion et prévention) et cela pour la population en général (mais aussi plus spécifiquement pour les enfants et les personnes âgées).
- b) Les conseils pour être en santé sous forme de recommandations succinctes (16%). Le quart des conseils se rattache à la nutrition en général; le reste concerne les gras, les produits céréaliers, les breuvages, les viandes et substituts,

les vitamines, les régimes, etc. Certains de ces conseils s'adressent spécifiquement aux personnes âgées.

- c) Les informations scientifiques (14 %). Il s'agit d'informations issues de recherches statistiques ou de renseignements à caractère scientifique. L'information scientifique divulguée ici se rattache surtout aux enfants, aux maladies, à la nutrition, à l'obésité, aux gras, aux viandes et substituts, aux breuvages et aux vitamines.
- d) Les effets positifs ou négatifs de l'alimentation (11 %) font référence à l'impact de la nutrition en général, mais aussi plus spécifiquement, à celui des vitamines, des gras et des breuvages.

À la télévision de la SRC, 68,4% des extraits analysés abordaient quelque cinq sujets précis, à savoir :

- a) Les effets de l'alimentation sur la santé (16,1 %); ceux-ci sont abordés via les vertus des fruits et légumes, les inquiétudes à propos de la viande et des gras, les incidences sur les maladies (le cancer plus particulièrement, et le déficit d'attention ou l'obésité chez les jeunes).
- b) L'information à caractère scientifique liée à l'alimentation (14% des extraits) est davantage présente dans les émissions spécialisées (*Découverte, L'épicerie...*), de services (37,5...), et dans les productions intégrant nouvelles et affaires publiques comme *Le midi*.
- c) Les comportements face à l'alimentation (13% des extraits) sont surtout abordés dans des émissions comme *Montréal ce soir* et *Édition magazine*.
- d) Les conseils pour s'alimenter adéquatement (13% des extraits) sont majoritairement dispensés dans l'émission *Édition magazine*.
- e) L'avis des professionnels (12% des extraits) porte, dans un ordre décroissant, sur les sujets suivants : le gras, l'alimentation, les régimes, l'obésité, les femmes, la promotion de la santé, le cancer, les vitamines, les jeunes, les glucides, les breuvages, le cholestérol, la prévention, les fruits et légumes, et les allergies.

### 3.3 Genres de documents et types de professionnels invités à se prononcer

Dans le journal *La Presse*, ce sont majoritairement les chroniques et les actualités qui abordaient les questions de l'alimentation et de la santé. Quelque six articles sur dix provenaient de l'un ou l'autre des cahiers spéciaux. Les articles étaient signés dans une proportion de 81 % par des journalistes et des chroniqueurs, tandis que ceux des professionnels de la santé (surtout les médecins et les nutritionnistes) ne comptaient que pour 19 %.

Pour sa part, la SRC abordait surtout le thème de l'alimentation et de la santé lors d'émissions de service (38,7 %) comme *Liza, Tous les matins, 37,5, et La vraie vie*. Par ailleurs, un peu plus du quart (27 %) des informations sur l'alimentation provenaient des bulletins de nouvelles (*Téléjournal* et *Montréal ce soir*) alors qu'environ 16 % du contenu était diffusé dans des émissions d'affaires publiques (*Le Point, Zone libre, Bon matin, L'épicerie*). Deux émissions sur trois laissaient la parole aux invités, surtout des nutritionnistes, des personnes du public témoignant de leur expérience, et des médecins.

### 3.4 Téléromans

Au Québec, les téléromans sont majoritairement des productions locales offrant un miroir de notre société, et dans lequel se projettent les téléspectateurs. Tous les téléromans québécois analysés<sup>19</sup> référaient de manière constante à l'alimentation, et cela, quels que soient les contextes et milieux mis en scène. Tantôt, on y parlait concrètement de l'alimentation, tantôt on la présentait visuellement. Nous avons relevé 127 denrées alimentaires évoquées en présence d'un protagoniste : il s'agissait essentiellement du café (36 %) et des boissons alcoolisées (24 %), alors que les fruits et les légumes ne comptaient que pour 10 % des aliments observés. Certaines denrées figurant pourtant dans le *Guide alimentaire canadien* furent peu ou pas représentées (notamment, les produits céréaliers, les viandes et substituts). De plus, on notait une faible diversité d'aliments dans une même catégorie de denrées.

Le lieu à connotation alimentaire le plus fréquemment évoqué fut la cuisine/salle à manger, et cela, dans tous les téléromans. Par ailleurs, rarement avons-nous assisté à la préparation des repas dans une cuisine. Après la cuisine, les lieux de consommation publique (5 émissions sur 13), suivi par le milieu du travail, sont les lieux à con-

notation alimentaire les plus fréquemment évoqués. Les séquences où il fut question de nourriture se retrouvaient dans une proportion de 64,4 % dans des endroits traditionnellement associés à la consommation alimentaire : la cuisine, la salle à manger, le restaurant, le café, etc. Au total, nous avons relevé quelque 169 évocations de lieux en lien avec l'alimentation.

Les conversations autour de la nourriture furent peu fréquentes en plus d'être brèves (20 répertoriées seulement, dans les 169 séquences analysées). Ces conversations suggéraient le plus souvent de consommer un produit alimentaire (« *Veux-tu un café?* »), ou émettaient un commentaire ayant une connotation morale ou de reproche (« *Tu ne devrais pas...* »).

## II- LA RÉCEPTION : LA PERCEPTION DES PERSONNES RELATIVEMENT À L'INFORMATION REÇUE EN MATIÈRE D'ALIMENTATION

Les groupes de discussion<sup>20,21,22</sup> menés dans différents contextes et auprès de publics variés nous permettent de dégager les constats suivants. Les personnes interviewées affirmaient que les médias diffusent beaucoup d'informations en matière d'alimentation, mais que celles-ci sont peu variées, peu approfondies et sensiblement toujours abordées sous un même angle. À leur avis, les médias offrent un simple survol de la question traitée, livrent des généralités déjà connues et répétées par nombre d'autres canaux de communication. Ces personnes ont l'impression que les médias leur permettent de développer un vocabulaire, mais sans pour autant bénéficier d'une réelle compréhension et explication du sujet abordé. Ainsi, malgré le fait que les médias traitent régulièrement le thème du « gras », les gens affirment ne pas savoir encore distinguer le bon du mauvais cholestérol, les gras poly-insaturés, mono-insaturés, insaturés, et le gras trans. De plus, les émissions ou articles convertissant les informations alimentaires dans un contexte de vie facilement décodable et traitant un sujet avec suffisamment de détails pour le transposer dans son quotidien sont rares (*L'Épicerie*). Enfin, les participants auraient tendance à censurer certaines informations ou à neutraliser les informations contradictoires avec leur style de vie, de manière à demeurer cohérents avec eux-mêmes.

### 4- Discussion

Nos résultats indiquent deux constantes : d'une part, il y a peu d'information sur l'alimentation sous l'angle de la prévention, de la promotion et de la pro-

tection de la santé, et d'autre part, il y a une redondance de celle-ci. Nous présenterons nos interprétations des données au niveau des sources, puis des médias eux-mêmes et, enfin, au niveau du consommateur.

Les agents des domaines agro-alimentaire, gouvernemental, et scientifique familial – pour ne nommer que ceux-ci – offrent un discours parcellisé sur l'alimentation (plaider et contre plaider) et produisent une fragmentation de plus en plus marquée en regard de l'information alimentaire. Si le savoir sur l'alimentation se construit en partie par la mise en circulation de ces informations, quelles conclusions peuvent en déduire le consommateur qui est confronté à ces points de vue parfois contradictoires? De plus, si l'un des agents occupe davantage la sphère publique – comme c'est le cas de l'industrie agro-alimentaire, dont la fonction manifeste est de modéliser les comportements dans un objectif de vente – et que cette dernière récupère les messages santé en sa faveur en publicisant leur aliment, se pourrait-il qu'elle joue sur cette ambiguïté des messages et de ce fait génère de la confusion? Se pourrait-il qu'elle crée volontairement cette confusion tel que le suggère Marion Nestle?<sup>23</sup>

La provenance du contenu des messages médiatiques serait en fait composée d'informations reçues de sources externes avec pour résultat que les médias seraient accaparés à quelque 90 % des initiatives de ces sources.<sup>24</sup> Par conséquent, les professionnels des médias doivent synthétiser l'information reçue sans l'obligation de bien la comprendre. Ce transfert d'information ne permet peut-être pas toujours une vulgarisation adéquate pour les consommateurs et il est souvent général et non ciblé pour les différents publics. Se pourrait-il qu'il produise une difficulté à la rétention et la compréhension du message de la part des consommateurs?

Les constantes références alimentaires véhiculées dans les téléromans qui sont vus dans certains cas par plus d'un million de téléspectateurs chaque demi-heure renvoient à des attitudes et des comportements alimentaires spécifiques et renforcent l'imagerie alimentaire, voire les normes sociales de l'alimentation dans une proximité de la vie quotidienne. Ces protagonistes évoquant l'alimentation et mangeant dans des lieux contribueraient-ils à renforcer une information alimentaire déjà donnée et véhiculée par la radio, l'Internet, les magazines télévisuels, les journaux, et les magazines écrits?

Les médias offrent, d'une part, des nouvelles.

La nouvelle fait état de données scientifiques récentes et d'événements ponctuels. Or, [si] dans les cas où les données scientifiques mettent en lumière un facteur contributif ou nuisible à la santé, rarement la recherche tente d'expliquer de façon globale, par exemple, les modèles alimentaires associés à tel ou tel état de santé (par exemple, celui qui est atteint de diabète ne reçoit pas l'information de la même manière qu'un individu en santé). Ceci a pour conséquence d'offrir aux consommateurs des informations parcellaires, fragmentées, isolées d'un contexte de vie. De plus, les conseils diététiques de base qui demeurent constant depuis 50 ans sont sans attrait pour la nouvelle.<sup>23</sup> Les médias diffusent fréquemment de l'information utile sans que la recommandation soit rattachée à un contexte de compréhension globale du phénomène. Ainsi, on peut penser que le consommateur peut acquérir une information parcellaire, c'est-à-dire, en pièce détachée. Ceci pourrait-il engendrer une confusion si le consommateur n'a pas les ressources pour en saisir les dimensions importantes au maintien de sa qualité de vie?

Les conséquences liées à cette fragmentation de l'information, à cette redondance, et à cette confusion des messages au niveau du consommateur sont de deux ordres : l'atteinte d'un seuil de saturation chez le consommateur, et la négation liée au processus de consonance.

Le seuil de saturation est dû, d'une part, au matraquage fréquent d'une même information, c'est-à-dire, une information qui aborde le même contenu, qui est issue des mêmes sources, et interroge les mêmes protagonistes. Le seuil de saturation est dû, d'autre part, à l'uniformisation du discours – à l'absence de diversité et de complémentarité de l'information. Si le seuil de saturation est atteint, cela peut engendrer chez le consommateur soit la non appropriation personnelle de l'information – parce qu'il ne l'intègre pas de manière cohérente dans sa vie – et soit le retrait parce qu'il se dit que cette information n'est plus une préoccupation pour lui.

La confusion des messages pourrait venir de la diversité des agents, des nombreuses sources médiatiques dans ce domaine qui offrent une multiplicité de points de vue. Que se passe-t-il chez le consommateur lorsqu'il y a confusion de messages? Selon la théorie de la dissonance,<sup>24</sup> l'être humain ne peut pas tolérer l'inconsistance psychologique. Face à elle, l'individu s'active afin de réduire la tension non désirable qu'elle engendre. L'inconsistance psychologique surgit lorsque deux ou

plusieurs éléments cognitifs sont en relation de désaccord, en relation d'accord, ou en relation neutre. Si les éléments cognitifs sont en relation de désaccord, on dira que ces éléments sont dissonants. Bien que l'individu puisse accepter un certain degré de dissonance, il va tenter de neutraliser cette tension intérieure et d'atténuer cette dissonance soit en changeant un ou plusieurs éléments dissonants, soit en ajoutant des éléments consonants, c'est-à-dire des raisons justificatives. Ainsi la personne va neutraliser les oppositions en puisant, dans les informations reçues, celles qui lui permettent de justifier son attitude ou son comportement. Par exemple, la personne est consciente que le cholestérol peut être nuisible à sa santé mais la publicité d'un produit camelote confirme qu'il ne contient pas de cholestérol. La personne possède, donc, l'élément nécessaire pour « calmer son for intérieur » qui lui dictait initialement que les aliments camelotes sont néfastes à sa santé. Cette nouvelle information lui dit, dont, que ce produit est adéquat à son bien-être.

Ces études exploratoires indiquent qu'il y a lieu de se questionner davantage sur les informations émises en matière d'alimentation et d'en cerner les perceptions du consommateur en regard de ces informations. Plusieurs hypothèses au niveau des sources, des médias, et des consommateurs ont été soulevées dans ce document, et nos études futures tenteront aussi d'y répondre. Nous sommes particulièrement intéressés à comprendre l'intégration des diverses informations que les consommateurs en font dans leur vie personnelle.

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# CAN WE IMPROVE NUTRITIONAL HEALTH AT AN AFFORDABLE PRICE?



## ABSTRACT

Today's global pandemic of obesity, in both the developed and developing world, is probably the current most significant consequence of an unhealthy diet. Many factors that affect food and physical activity related behaviours are known to contribute to the increasing prevalence of obesity and its co-morbidities. Recognizing that the mix of factors leading to the increasing prevalence of obesity and preventable chronic disease is complex would be a helpful step in the right direction, and a step away from the pervasive notion that there is a simple solution. Complex problems also demand specific types of solutions. By considering this complexity, we can identify and implement strategies to control and reverse the epidemics of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and many forms of cancer.

## RÉSUMÉ

La pandémie d'obésité qui touche à la fois les pays développés et en voie de développement est sans doute la principale conséquence actuelle d'une alimentation malsaine. De nombreux facteurs contribuent à la croissance de l'obésité et de son lot de maladies chroniques évitables au sein de la population. Reconnaître la complexité de ces facteurs serait un pas dans la bonne direction qui nous éloignerait de l'idée tenace qu'il existe une solution simple. En effet, les problèmes complexes demandent des solutions appropriées. En tenant compte de cette complexité, il est possible de définir et mettre en œuvre des stratégies pour maîtriser et renverser l'épidémie d'obésité, du diabète, des maladies cardiovasculaires et de nombreux types de cancer.

## Nutritional health

To address the question “can we improve nutritional health at an affordable price?,” we need to work toward understanding the meaning of “nutritional health” and what is meant by a “healthy” food. Drewnowski (2005) recently reviewed the common definitions of foods described as healthy, healthful, nutrient-dense or nutrient-rich. Although many different terms are used to describe energy-rich or nutrient-poor foods – including empty calories, junk food, low nutrient-density, energy dense snack or “bad” foods – there is a remarkable consistency in their meaning. The foods are largely made up of refined grains, added sugars, and visible or added fats. Nutrient rich foods with low-energy density tend to be considered healthy or “good for you,” but the specific meaning of healthy food is much less consistent. The category encompasses a large array of items including milk, vegetables, fruits, grains, protein, dairy products, juice, fish, nuts, pretzels, crackers, peanut butter, and olive oil. Unfortunately, unhealthy foods also tend to be cheap, easily accessible, highly profitable, and heavily marketed. One food company has classified these items as “fun for you” foods, as compared to their other products categorized as “better for you” and “good-for-you” (The Hindu Business Line, 2005).

Drewnowski (2005) has proposed the calculation of the naturally nutrient-rich (NNR) score based on 14 key nutrients used in past efforts to define healthy diets. The NNR score is a nutrients-to-calorie ratio which averages percent daily values for these 14 nutrients. Unfortunately, the relationship between energy density and nutrient density indicates that, in general, energy dense foods are also likely to be nutrient-poor. As a result, energy dense, nutrient-poor foods tend to be the least expensive, and nutrient-rich foods – which tend to have a low energy density – are often the most expensive (Drewnowski and Darmon, 2005).

**DIANE T. FINEGOOD** is Scientific Director of the Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes, one of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and a professor in the School of Kinesiology at Simon Fraser University.

Developing some consensus around an index of the “healthiness” of food has important implications for efforts aimed at increasing the nutritional health of a population. In complex systems, the individual matters and the tasks each individual needs to perform in relation to that system must match their capacity to engage and understand the system (Bar-Yam, 2004). A common and easily understood index of the healthiness of a food could be useful in the development of common messaging among food labels, consumer education materials, and dietary guidance regardless of the source of the message.

Reducing the difficulty of interpreting food messages can only serve to help consumers make the choices they would like to be making. Nutrition survey data suggests that the majority of consumers would like to change their eating habits to improve health, lose weight, decrease their risk of chronic disease, and to become more attractive (National Institute of Nutrition and the Canadian Food Information Council, 2004). However, mixed messages have left the public confused about what to eat (Goldberg, 1992; Wansink, 2006). Confusion stems not only from the complex and evolving nature of nutrition related messages, but also from the fact that various sectors and organizations send messages about nutrition, healthy eating and weight loss for different reasons, using different formats, and with different constraints (Goldberg, 1992; Nestle, 2002). In addition, most Canadians use product labels, magazines and newspapers, friends, relatives and colleagues, as sources of information even though they don’t consider them very credible sources, while only half use health associations, family physicians or other health professionals even though they are considered more credible (National Institute of Nutrition and the Canadian Food Information Council, 2004). One manifestation of the pervasiveness and diversity of messages about healthy food seems to be that everyone considers themselves an expert on the topic of obesity despite having the vague sense that they don’t know what to eat.

### **Obesity is a complex systems problem**

While it is clear that having a food supply where the most energy dense, nutrient-poor foods are also the cheapest contributes to the “obesogenicity” of the environment, many other factors also contribute to social, cultural, and physical environments that promote and support excess calorie intake and insufficient physical activity

(Poston et al., 1999; Swinburn et al., 1999).

The body weight of an individual is a consequence of that individual’s food and physical activity related behaviours. An individual’s behaviour results from a complex mix of biological and environmental determinants. Overall more than 600 genes, markers, and chromosomal regions have been associated or linked with human obesity phenotypes (Rankinen et al., 2006). Genes have been identified that encode neuropeptides involved in control of appetite, satiety, feeding behaviour, and energy expenditure. In addition to the brain, the pancreas, liver, muscle, and fat tissue all contribute to metabolism and body weight regulation (Schwartz and Porte, 2005). Despite the complexity of biological regulatory mechanisms, it is unlikely that changes to these systems could account for the rapid increases in obesity over the last 20-30 years.

While biology regulates body weight through a complex set of systems, the response of these systems to the social, cultural, and physical environments in which we live, learn, work and play, determine whether an individual or a population are obese (Kumanyika, 2001). Factors proximal to the individual that can influence food and physical activity behaviour include access to healthy food in cafeterias, worksites and lunch boxes, type and length of physical education classes, availability of services supporting active transport – including safe and affordable public transit, sidewalks and bike lanes, showers and changing room facilities at work – and the expectations of our employers, parents, and friends. At the national and international level, factors such as food and agriculture policies, media, and development and globalization of markets, shape the food and physical activity environments.

Given the complexity of the environment and the biology of body weight regulation, it is surprising that we persist in thinking that there is a quick fix to the problem of obesity. In part, this perception is likely due to the increase in media attention (International Food Information Council, 2006) and the tendency of media to reduce the problem to the factor or proposed solution being highlighted. The large and growing weight loss industry also contributes to and is a consequence of the perception that there is a simple solution (Katz, 2005). But these solutions are clearly inadequate and are unable to prevent or reverse the epidemic of obesity in the face of an increasingly obesogenic environment.

Complex problems often engender responses such as despair, belief that the problem is beyond hope, retreat, and an effort to assign blame (Bar-Yam, 2004). In the case of tobacco, demonizing the tobacco companies is thought to have helped in the public health effort to reduce cigarette consumption (Netemeyer et al., 2005). But while many have made comparisons between the fights against tobacco and obesity (Chopra and Darnton-Hill, 2004) it seems unlikely that demonizing food companies will produce the same result. In addition to the complexity of the biology of body weight regulation and the obesogenic environment, there is also a complex set of actors responsible for the fact that our food supply has an excess of heavily marketed, unhealthy, energy-dense, nutrient-poor, cheap food (Schoonover and Muller, 2006). These factors include agricultural policies, trade regulations, commodity markets, value chains, and consumer demand.

### **Farm to fork solutions**

Sometimes complex problems cause people to galvanize their collective efforts and invest significant dollars to tackle the problem (Bar-Yam, 2004). This seems to be the case in Canada, where considerable effort and investment has recently been directed at obesity. Governments at all levels are studying the problem, providing frameworks for action, implementing programs, and supporting research. Health charities and other non-governmental organizations are working together to support research and advocate for policy and program changes. Some are delivering programs that support a healthier environment. The food industry is responding to consumer demand for healthier products and some companies are looking inward at changing corporate policies

Complex problems demand specific types of solutions. Strategies that can be helpful in tackling complex problems include: setting functional goals and directions for improvement, measuring effectiveness in the field, distributing decision-making, action and authority, supporting individual initiative, forming cooperative teams, and creating rules that promote competition with performance feedback at the functional team level (Bar-Yam, 2004).

### **Setting functional goals and directions for improvement**

Within the health sector and across levels of government there has been a significant recent effort to set goals for improved health. At the inter-

national level the World Health Organization (2004) has articulated a Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. Its main objectives include reducing the risk factors for noncommunicable diseases, increasing overall awareness and understanding, and “to encourage the development, strengthening and implementation of global, regional, national and community policies and action plans to improve diets and increase physical activity that are sustainable, comprehensive, and actively engage all sectors, including civil society, the private sector and the media” (WHO, 2004).

In Canada, federal, provincial and territorial Ministers of Health committed to improving the health status of Canadians through a collaborative process. This led, in 2005, to the articulation of nine broad goal statements, including that “every person is as healthy as they can be” and “every person receives the support and information they need to make healthy choices” (Health Goals for Canada, 2005). Efforts by the Public Health Agency of Canada to develop an Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy included more specific goals relevant to obesity including to, “by 2015, increase by 20% the proportion of Canadians who make healthy food choices” (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2005). Across Canada many regional and local governments have set healthy living goals for their populations.

But the environmental changes needed to tackle the epidemic of obesity require the involvement of other sectors including agriculture, transportation, and trade. Outside of the health sector it is generally more difficult to identify efforts to set goals and directions for improvement that will improve public health through support of healthy eating. Although the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations acknowledges that obesity is a significant problem, especially in developing countries, it does little to set goals or directions for improvement within agricultural systems. The WHO Regional Office for Europe in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has initiated dialogue on the role of agricultural and trade policies in action against obesity (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2006). Outside of government, organizations like the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) have drawn links between agriculture policy and obesity, and call for efforts to emphasize the connection between public health, food, and farm policy (Schoonover and Muller, 2006).

Thus, while we have galvanized our collective interest in tackling the epidemic of obesity through the establishment of health goals at multiple levels of government, we have yet to translate these into functional goals outside of the health sector. Given the complexity of the problem, it is essential that the goal-setting process be extended into other sectors, such as agriculture, transportation, city planning, and public safety, which have important influences on health.

### **Measuring effectiveness in the field**

Without systems for measuring the effectiveness of policies, programs and practices, it is not possible to determine if goals and directions for improvement are met. Clearly, the complexity of the obesity problem demands a wide range of efforts to measure effectiveness, including surveillance systems not only of outcomes such as body weight, body mass, and waist-to-hip ratio, but also of food and physical activity behaviours, of policies and programs, of the quality and quantity of the food supply, and of many other factors such as business practices, food access, and food security. In Canada, national surveillance systems are limited. Height and weight are not measured at regular intervals, and there exists a nearly 35 year gap between surveys that indicated what Canadians were eating. Although national surveillance needs to be improved, considerable data are collected by a range of players at other levels of government, in academia, and in the private sector (CHSPR, 2004). Unfortunately, many of these players have no explicit mandate to support research and researchers have variable access to these sources of data.

To measure the effectiveness of specific interventions requires infrastructure and the capacity for population intervention research and evaluation. Recent efforts to assess the environment for population intervention research in Canada suggest considerable work must be done to accelerate the pace of this type of research (Di Ruggiero et al., 2006). The analysis suggests that a coordinated multi-level approach both within the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and through external partnerships will be needed to build researcher capacity and for the development of tools and data resources. Also called for are improvements in the peer review process, collaboration between the growing number of academic programs in public health, and new models for funding program evaluation.

Despite the need for significant new infrastructure to support the demand for intervention

research, CIHR has made progress in recent years by increasing funding to obesity-related intervention research through the Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes' (INMD) strategic focus on obesity and healthy body weight. INMD investments have increased the size of the obesity research community 6-7 fold, and have contributed to a yearly CIHR investment in obesity research reaching nearly \$20 million per year in 2005-2006 (Finegood, in press). Through this investment in research and evaluation, CIHR is supporting numerous efforts like the in motion program which assists communities in both setting goals for improvement and for evaluating the effectiveness of their initiatives (Saskatoon Health Region, 2006). INMD has also spearheaded the development of new models for intervention research as illustrated by the Canada on the Move project (Rose and Finegood, 2006). Improving the nutritional health of Canadians requires expansion of current efforts to measure the effectiveness of the policy, program, and practice changes that are undertaken to address the epidemic of obesity.

### **Distributing decision, action and authority**

Within the causal web of factors that influence an individual's food related behaviours are embedded a variety of subsystems that affect food environments including systems that impact food production, transportation, processing, marketing, distribution, and demand. Access and price are also affected by where a person lives and under what circumstances.

Despite the complexity of the systems involved in the food chains that begin on the farm and end at the fork, centralized control can have a significant impact. IATP has drawn a connection between U.S. farm policy and the excess availability of high energy dense foods (Schoonover and Muller, 2006). Farm policy, which supports a few commodities like corn and soybeans and provides little support for the production of fruits and vegetables, has led to large decreases in the cost of soft drinks, fats, oils, sugars and sweets, while driving up the price of fresh fruits and vegetables. Solutions suggested by IATP take into account the complexity of food systems and support the notion that a "healthier food system" is one that distributes decision, action, and authority. IATP recommends supporting local and regional food systems, encouraging school and government procurement policies that favor healthy foods, and keeping small farmers on the land.

## Conclusion

Given the rapid rise in co-morbidities associated with obesity, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer, it is essential that we seek solutions including approaches to improving nutritional health. In Canada, the direct and indirect costs associated with obesity exceed \$4.3 billion dollars per year (Katzmarzyk, 2004). With the prediction that one in three children born in 2000 will develop diabetes during their lifespan (Narayan et al., 2003), costs will overwhelm our health care system in the not so distant future. Hence the question “can we improve nutritional health at an affordable price?” needs to be reframed as “can we afford not to act now to improve nutritional health?”

In complex systems, individuals matter. Given the complexity of the systems affecting the food environment, many actions must be taken by individuals at many different levels working in different systems. Among populations the collective actions of individuals determine demand. In homes, schools, and worksites, individuals set the normative food environment based on what they purchase, what they expect of students, and what they make available to employees. In cities and communities, the environment is a function of individuals who work in food distribution and those who set policy, implement transportation systems, design the urban landscape, and collect taxes. In nations and around the world, individuals come together to determine trade policies and to create information systems to which many people have access. With a goal as big and complex as improving nutritional health, everyone must make the decision to help shift societal norms.

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# THE RIGHT TO FOOD: A RECIPE FOR ACTION



**GRAHAM RICHES** is Director of the School of Social Work and Family Studies at the University of British Columbia.

## ABSTRACT

This paper considers the role of the right to food in the development of an integrated food policy in Canada and the achievement of national food security. Prevailing high levels of household food insecurity constitute a hidden and neglected national crisis of food poverty unaddressed by a broken social safety net and an institutionalized reliance on charitable food banking. Evidence of the incidence, nature, and causes of food poverty is presented and Canada's domestic failure under international law to 'respect, protect, and fulfill' the human right to adequate food is explored. An agenda for a Canadian food policy and poverty reduction action plan is considered informed by the right to food.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine le rôle que joue le droit à l'alimentation dans l'élaboration d'une politique alimentaire intégrée et dans l'atteinte de la sécurité alimentaire au Canada. Le niveau élevé d'insécurité alimentaire au sein des familles constitue une crise nationale à la fois cachée et négligée qu'un système d'assistance sociale défaillant et une dépendance institutionnalisée aux banques alimentaires ne peuvent régler. Cet article examine la fréquence, la nature et les causes de la pauvreté alimentaire, ainsi que l'incapacité du Canada à remplir son obligation, en vertu du droit international, de respecter, de protéger et de mettre en œuvre le droit à une nourriture saine sur son territoire. Nous proposerons également un programme pour l'instauration d'un plan d'action s'appuyant sur le droit à l'alimentation et visant l'élaboration d'une politique alimentaire canadienne ainsi que la réduction de la pauvreté.

## Introduction

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, household food insecurity remains a troubling and politically neglected health and social issue in Canada. For the last 25 years, food poverty – the inability of low income Canadians to purchase nutritionally adequate and nutritious food to feed either themselves and or their families – continues to be denied by all levels of government of all political stripes. As a society we take for granted the abundance of the national food supply, domestically produced or imported – and its everyday market availability. Yet, what is hidden from sight is that, for many Canadians, their right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food – which was ratified in 1976 in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) – is no longer upheld by the state. Canada's domestic failure to comply with its international obligations to the right to food is particularly troubling given the recent strong economic growth and massive Federal Government budget surpluses.

What should be done to address food insecurity in Canada? Since 1981, feeding the hungry poor has become the primary responsibility of charitable food banks. Yet how morally supportable, legally just and effective is such institutionalized dependence on charity and the private sector? Should we not be adopting a national food policy and poverty reduction action plan informed by the human right to adequate food as a more effective, socially responsible and politically accountable response? In addressing this question, this article considers the incidence, nature and causes of food poverty in Canada, the meaning of the right to food, internationally and in the Canadian context, and its potential as a tool for action in informing a comprehensive and “joined-up” national food policy directed both at the optimal nourishment

of the population (MacRae, 1999) and poverty reduction. In other words, is food policy and food access to be informed by charity or justice?

### **Incidence and nature of food poverty**

In 2001, the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) found that 3.7 million Canadians (14.7% of the population) were having difficulty putting food on their plates: those who worried about not being able to feed themselves and their families (11%); those unable to purchase the foods of their choice (12%); and those unable to put food on the table (7%). In 2004, using a more restrictive instrument, CCHS reported 2.1 million people or 6.8% of the population struggling with different levels of food insecurity (Power and Tarasuk, 2006). In other words, despite Canada's cheap food policies, too many Canadians lack the necessary incomes to be able to feed themselves and their families. Indeed, as research makes clear, the problem of hunger and food poverty constitutes a hidden national crisis in Canada.

The fact of the matter is that Canada's social safety net is broken and has been for a quarter of a century (Robertson, 1990; Tarasuk, 1996; Riches, 1986, 1997, 2004). Charitable food banks have become the new markers of emergency relief for the hungry and testimony to inadequate and deeply flawed Employment Insurance and social assistance programs in all provinces and territories. 823,856 people turned to a food bank in one month of 2005, an increase of 24% since 1997 and 118% since 1989. The first food bank opened in Edmonton in 1981. Today they number 650 providing 2.7 million meals a month. 40.7% of food bank users are children and young people (CAFB, 2005).

Food banks are symptoms and symbols of a welfare state in crisis, with charity, rather than rights based income support and social programs, now established as the publicly accepted and institutionalized response to hunger in Canadian society. This, despite the fact that 38.8% of food banks report difficulty in meeting demand and 90% of Canadians regarding the problem of hunger as the responsibility of government (Heimann, 2004). Food banks offer no guarantee of food or nutritional adequacy and allow governments to look the other way with little regard for a failing welfare system. As Louise Arbour, former Supreme Court Justice and Current UN Commissioner for Human Rights, has observed in reflecting on Canada's hesitant approach to economic, social and cultural

rights (of which the right to food is elemental), 'There will always be a place for charity but charitable responses are not an effective, principled or sustainable substitute for enforceable human rights guarantees' (Arbour, 2005:3). In short, the food bank recipe is a stigmatizing and band-aid response undermining the rights of citizenship of Canada's hungry poor.

### **Causes of food insecurity**

Lack of access to food in Canada is the result of complex forces and springs from a number of interrelated causes. It is primarily rooted in poverty and inequality and the failure of public policy to address distributional market failures. There is a careless, if not deliberate, government neglect of vulnerable peoples – the socially excluded poor – seeking to exist outside the labour market.

In 2003, 4.9 million Canadians or 15.9% of the population lived in poverty, a welcome decline from 20.6% in 1996 but still higher than the 14% rate of 1989. In the same year, female poverty stood at 17.1% in 2003 and 1.2 million children (17.6%) were poor (NWC, 2006). In light of the fact that 40.7% of food bank users are children, it is instructive to note that the 2005 UNICEF review of child poverty in the rich member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reported a rate of 14.9% in Canada, placing it 19<sup>th</sup> out of 26 states (UNICEF, 2005: 6). The Scandinavian countries at the top of the league table (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) had rates of child poverty varying between 2.4% - 4.2%. Significantly, as the study states, "variation in government policy appears to account for most of the variation in child poverty levels between OECD countries" and "there is nothing inevitable or immutable about child poverty levels; they reflect different national policies interacting with social changes and market forces (ibid, 3)."

Despite the decline of poverty in Canada in overall terms since 1996, policy neglect between 1989 and 2003 is directly responsible for the expansion of the depth of poverty. The number of people living with incomes less than half the poverty line grew by 50% for two parent families, by 55% for single parent families; and by a staggering 70.6% for unattached individuals under 65 (NWCa, 2006). In 2005, welfare incomes of the 1.7 million people in receipt of social assistance (5% of the population) were woefully inadequate and in many cases at their lowest point since 1986 (NWCb, 2006: ix, 29). Between 2005-2006, five

provinces (Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia) recorded their lowest levels of welfare incomes (ibid, ix). In BC, which in 2006 recorded a provincial budget surplus in excess of one billion dollars, single “employable” adults on social assistance are expected to live on \$510 per month (rent and all living expenses) or \$6 a day. Harsh reductions in benefit levels have become the order of the day. Social assistance benefits which are thousands of dollars below accepted poverty lines are insufficient to meet housing costs and put food on the table, let alone ensure access to nutritious diets. And with charity leading the way, no longer can it be claimed that social assistance or welfare is the social safety net of last resort in Canada.

The ascendancy of neo-liberalism with its commitment to market ideology, minimal government, and social spending cutbacks has resulted in social policy falling off political agendas (in favour of health and education). The abandonment of the *Canada Assistance Plan* in 1996 and the introduction of block funding under the new *Canada Health and Social Transfer* confirmed political endorsement of U.S. style welfare reform. This resulted in the introduction of stringent eligibility for social assistance benefits based not on need but on labour market attachment and strict work requirements resulting in the screening out of those for whom paid (low-waged) work was not an option.

The lack of coordination within and between federal and provincial agricultural, environmental, health and social service departments (the perennial issue of jurisdictional disputes in Canada) has resulted in fragmented and disconnected food policy in terms of the need for both sustainable production and integrated health, nutrition, and social welfare programs.

At the same time the social construction of hunger in Canada as a matter for charitable relief and not publicly funded social security rooted in human rights and the claims of citizenship is continually advanced by the media, including the CBC, in their support of food bank drives. Given that hunger is a political question, it is useful to ask why the country’s public broadcaster would take sides in actively promoting hunger as a matter of charity rather than government accountability. No wonder politicians look the other way.

Most significantly, however, the leading cause of food poverty has been the glaring disconnection between Canada’s ratification of the ICESCR and its domestic failure to discharge its obligations in international law to “respect, protect and fulfill”

the human right to adequate food on behalf of its impoverished citizens. Unhappily, the courts in their interpretations of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Sections 7 and 15) have been reluctant to promote the justiciability of social and economic rights including the right to food (Riches et al, 2004; Arbour, 2005).

### **Food policy and the right to food**

If Canada is to adopt a national food policy directed at the optimal nourishment of the population and poverty reduction, the first objective must be to ensure that all citizens have access to affordable nutritious, safe, and culturally appropriate foods for themselves and their families. Furthermore, it should be anchored in the idea that food is a basic human need and a fundamental human right (ICESCR, 1966).

As Eide and Kracht (2005: 102) point out, “the right to adequate food is widely recognized in international law” with the most basic provision found in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 25.1 (UDHR, 1948). Beyond the UDHR, international human rights instruments and actions signalling Canada’s adoption of the right to food include the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR, 1966, 1976), the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC, 1989, 1992), two World Food Summits (1996 and 2002), *General Comment 12 of the UN Committee on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights* (1999), and the *FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food* (2004).

However, it was not until 1999 that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment 12, at the request of the 1996 World Food Summit, clarified the core content of the right to adequate food. It stated that this right “is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or the means for its procurement... the core content of the right to food implies the availability of food in quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, free from adverse substances, and acceptable within a given culture; [and] the accessibility of such food in ways that are sustainable and that do not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights” (GC 12, para. 3, 1999).

All States Parties to the ICESCR are enjoined progressively to realize the right to adequate food with ratification of the Covenant imposing three types or levels of obligations upon States parties “to *respect*, to *protect* and to *fulfill* (*facilitate and*

*provide*)” the right to food. “Facilitate” means the State must pro-actively engage in activities intended to strengthen people’s access to and utilization of resources and means to ensure their livelihood, including food security. Finally, whenever an individual or group is unable, for reasons beyond their control, to enjoy the right to adequate food by the means at their disposal, States have the obligation to *fulfill* (provide that right directly – GC 12, para. 15). In other words: hunger is not simply left to charity.

Four approaches to national implementation are set out: adoption of a *national strategy* to ensure food and nutrition security for all (compliant with human rights principles); the setting of *verifiable targets and benchmarks*; adoption of *framework legislation and remedy mechanisms*, and developing and maintaining *monitoring mechanisms* (see Eide and Kracht, 2005).

In 2004, as a practical directive to states to achieve food security, the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the FAO Council adopted Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. The VGs incorporate many of the recommendations of General Comment 12 that, while undoubtedly directed at countries of the South, also have important lessons for rich countries including Canada. One lesson in particular is the injunction that “the progressive realization of the right to food requires States to fulfill their relevant human rights obligations under international law” (Oshaug, 2005).

Certainly the Federal Government did respond to the 1996 World Food Summits call for national strategies with the release of *Canada’s Action Plan for Food Security* in 1998 which considered Canada’s role in relation to both domestic and international food security. However, the action plan attached no clear meaning to the right to food, set no clear targets, and was seemingly introduced without the knowledge or support of provincial governments. Moreover, it enjoyed little support from civil society and the developing Canadian food security movement. The demise of this report – it could hardly have been called a plan – should have been no surprise if one accepts Arbour’s premise that socio-economic rights (of which the right to food is elemental), as soft rights, have always played second fiddle to civil and political rights dating back to Canada’s initial reluctance to support their inclusion in the UDHR 1948

(Arbour, 2005:3). Indeed, of that time Arbour writes that “Canada’s position on socio-economic rights, in particular, varied from ambivalence to outright hostility” (2005:3). Today one may wonder whether much has changed.

Moreover, the UN Economic and Social Council in its 2006 five year review of Canada’s compliance with its ICESCR obligations regretted that most of its 1993 and 1998 recommendations had not been addressed in an effective manner, including the insufficiency of minimum wage and social assistance to ensure the realization of an adequate standard of living for all. It noted with concern that 51% of food bank users still had to resort to food banks because of the insufficient level of these benefits; and reminded Canada of its core obligation to fulfill (provide) the right to food when disadvantaged people are unable to meet this right for themselves (UNCESCR, 2006: 2-3, 5, 9).

In short, the evidence of continuing and widespread domestic food insecurity and Canada’s lack of compliance with its treaty obligations is a matter of international concern and opprobrium, yet the federal and provincial governments continue to turn a blind eye.

### **The right to food: a recipe for action**

What would a right to food recipe that focuses on food access imply for the development of a Canadian food policy?

- All levels of government should accept their obligations under international law (e.g. ICESCR, 1976; CRC, 1992) to recognize and act in compliance with the right to an adequate standard of living for all including the right to food and the right to be free from hunger.
- Social and economic rights, including the right to food, should be constitutionally recognized as justiciable rights under the protection of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as under federal and provincial human rights legislation. As Louise Arbour has stated “Ultimately, the potential to give economic, social and cultural rights the status of constitutional entitlement represents an immense opportunity to affirm our fundamental Canadian values, giving them the force of law” (Arbour, 2005).
- Canada, in conjunction with the provincial and municipal governments and the Assembly of First Nations, should adopt

a National Action Plan for Food Security and Poverty Reduction requiring the full participation of all relevant ministries – including federal and provincial justice departments – and with the full representation of civil society. The plan would set verifiable goals, indicators, benchmarks, timeframes and accountability, and comprise remedy and monitoring mechanisms. It would set as an objective the phasing out of charitable food banking.

- The erosion of Canada’s welfare state should be reversed, informed by the implementation of the proposed *Canada Social Transfer* that would earmark federal funds for provincial social safety net programmes with national conditions and federal monitoring, including adequate minimum wage incomes and social security benefits (including the real costs of food and housing).
- Food policy councils should be established and food policy charters adopted at the municipal level recognizing the human right to adequate food and the importance of developing just and sustainable local food systems.
- Civil society organizations working to advance food security within a framework of sustainability and social justice should be provided with adequate funding.

In conclusion, the human right to adequate food and nutrition is more than an act of charitable benevolence: it is an essential philosophy and springboard necessary to inform and shape an inclusive and comprehensive Canadian food policy. In light of Canada’s ambivalence about social and economic rights, this will not be an easy task. As Arbour reminds us “The reason that ‘rights talk’ is resisted by the powerful is precisely because it threatens (or promises) to rectify distributions of political, economic or social power that, under internationally agreed standards and values, are unjust” (op. cit., 2005). The question is whether there exists the political will to abolish hunger from our midst.

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# ALIMENTATION, MÉDIA ET MAINTIEN DU POIDS SANTÉ :

## Ce que pensent des gestionnaires de l'industrie agro-alimentaire de leur rôle dans la balance



**MARIE-CLAUDE LAGACÉ**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, Institut Santé et société  
**LYNE MONGEAU**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, Institut national de santé publique du Québec  
**LISE RENARD**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, Institut Santé et société  
**KARL MOORE**, Groupe de recherche médias et santé, Université McGill  
**DANIELLE MAISONNEUVE**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, Institut Santé et société  
Chaire en relations publiques  
**MONIQUE CARON-BOUCHARD**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf  
**LAURETTE DUBÉ**, Groupe de recherche média et santé, Université McGill

### RÉSUMÉ

Depuis trente ans, l'obésité n'a cessé d'augmenter dans la plupart des régions du globe. La réduction du temps d'activité physique et les modifications dans l'alimentation des individus comptent parmi les principaux facteurs contribuant à l'obésité. La courbe de croissance de l'offre de produits à haute teneur en calories et d'aliments associés au *fast-food* par l'industrie agro-alimentaire et la courbe d'incidence de l'obésité présentent de dangereuses ressemblances. Or, ces produits font l'objet d'une imposante promotion médiatique. Notre groupe de recherche s'interroge à propos de la contribution de cette industrie à la hausse de l'obésité et du niveau de pouvoir qu'elle exerce actuellement sur les normes en matière d'alimentation.

Nous avons rencontré 21 (n=21) décideurs du milieu de l'industrie agro-alimentaire canadienne dont la participation était volontaire. Nous avons eu recours à trois groupes de discussion et à huit entrevues individuelles pour connaître leur perception à l'endroit de l'alimentation et du maintien d'un poids santé de même que les facteurs clés dans les décisions corporatives liées au consommateur et au gouvernement.

Les gestionnaires discutent peu des normes diététiques si ce n'est pour vanter leurs produits. Ils croient que les normes descriptives ont changé notamment à l'effet que le consommateur ne cuisine plus. Ce dernier doit être éduqué relativement aux normes diététiques et c'est, selon eux, au gouvernement que revient cette tâche. Leurs relations avec le consommateur et les gouvernements sont majoritairement déterminées par les lois économiques mais sont également teintées de légitimité dans un contexte où la santé est une préoccupation de société.

Il est essentiel de poursuivre les recherches afin de mettre en place des outils et des mécanismes permettant à la fois la libre entreprise et la protection du consommateur contre le bombardement de messages promotionnels et contradictoires. Des études sociologiques sur la formation des normes alimentaires et sur les effets de l'accessibilité économique et géographique des aliments associés à la malbouffe contribueraient vraisemblablement à ces objectifs.

### ABSTRACT

The last three decades have seen a considerable increase in the prevalence of obesity worldwide. Contributors to this phenomenon include lack of physical activity and changes in diets. Increased availability of calorie-heavy as well as aggressively-marketed fast-food products may be somewhat responsible for changes in diets. This study aims to explore the contribution of the food industry to the incidence rate of obesity and its influence on actual social norms regarding food consumption.

Our sample was constituted of 21 (n=21) food industry senior managers who participated in the fall and winter of 2004 on a voluntary basis. Our main objective was to describe and understand their perception of the relationship between diet and the maintenance of a healthy weight and the key factors leading to their strategic decisions regarding consumers and the government. To do so, we used individual interviews and focus groups.

Managers tend not to discuss dietetic norms except to praise the virtues of the products they are marketing. They believe descriptive norms have changed through the last decades, and that consumers cook at home much less frequently than before. According to the participants, consumers need to be better educated regarding dietetic norms. However, they state that this is a government responsibility. Since public health is now an issue of increased social concern, a firm's relations with consumers and government are mainly dictated by economic laws, but also by every actor's legitimate claims.

In order to create and implement tools and mechanisms that simultaneously allow free market competition and consumers' protection against contradictory messages from advertising, we need to focus on research that seeks to understand the interests of all relevant actors. To attain these objectives, sociological studies should be conducted to understand the creation and adoption of nutrition norms and to evaluate the effects.

## Contexte et problématique

L'obésité est devenue un problème de santé publique dans presque toutes les régions du globe, d'aucuns parlant de « globésité », l'Organisation mondiale de la santé (OMS) qualifiant la situation de « pandémie » dans certaines de ses publications. Cela implique d'énormes coûts individuels et sociaux et, en entreprise, cela se traduit en coûts reliés à l'absentéisme et aux cotisations d'assurances<sup>1</sup>. Chaque jour, des chercheurs se penchent sur les facteurs déterminants de l'obésité et de la saine alimentation. Plusieurs éléments sont pointés du doigt : d'abord, des facteurs génétiques et physiologiques qui, selon les données probantes, ne suffisent toutefois pas à expliquer la croissance de l'obésité au cours des trente dernières années. Des déterminants importants d'ordre structurel contribueraient à l'augmentation de la surcharge pondérale : le développement des technologies au travail (robotisation, automatisation des tâches) et dans les foyers (lave-vaisselle, lessiveuse, tondeuse), l'utilisation de l'automobile comme principal (sinon exclusif) moyen de transport, l'augmentation des loisirs passifs (télévision, micro-ordinateur), l'augmentation de la consommation d'aliments préparés, un faible revenu, l'augmentation de la prise des repas hors foyer et la méconnaissance des normes nutritionnelles par la population<sup>1,3,4,5,10</sup>.

Parmi ces facteurs, la réduction du temps d'activité physique et les modifications dans l'alimentation des individus retiennent particulièrement l'attention<sup>1</sup>. Les changements dans les habitudes alimentaires sont imputables en partie à la modification du rythme de vie mais également à celle de l'offre alimentaire, c'est-à-dire à la composition nutritionnelle des aliments proposés par l'industrie agro-alimentaire, tout particulièrement dans le secteur de la restauration rapide (*fast-food*)<sup>6</sup>. Ce secteur a connu depuis trente ans une croissance de 900 %, sa courbe s'apparentant à celle de la croissance de l'obésité et du contenu calorique des portions offertes<sup>1,7,8</sup> au cours de la même période. En outre, l'accessibilité croissante des établissements de restauration rapide (notamment autour des écoles), la promotion orchestrée par les spécialistes du marketing, et le recours massif aux médias par l'industrie agro-alimentaire constitueraient de puissants incitatifs à la consommation d'aliments riches en calories et de faible valeur nutritive<sup>1,4,8,9,10,11,12,17</sup>.

Comme plusieurs acteurs en recherche, en politique et en santé, nous nous sommes donc inter-

rogés à propos de la contribution de cette industrie à la hausse de l'obésité et du niveau de pouvoir qu'elle exerce actuellement sur les normes en matière d'alimentation. La formation et l'adoption de normes constituent un phénomène multicausal et complexe que nous avons décrit lors de précédentes publications<sup>13,14</sup>. Sa compréhension, dans un contexte particulier comme celui qui nous intéresse, exige plusieurs étapes exploratoires qui permettent de construire graduellement les connaissances de manière systémique. C'est dans cette optique que se situe la présente étude. Nous avons cherché à saisir le discours de hauts gestionnaires de l'industrie agro-alimentaire à propos des relations entre leurs décisions stratégiques, l'alimentation des Canadiens et les exigences gouvernementales.

## Cadre conceptuel et méthodologie de recherche

Notre étude exploratoire portait sur la perception des normes en matière de santé, particulièrement relativement à l'alimentation et à l'activité physique par les décideurs de l'industrie agro-alimentaire (chaînes de restauration et de restauration rapide, distributeurs d'alimentation, associations de producteurs, entreprises de transformation et de production). Dans le cadre de cet article, nous avons choisi de décrire la perception des gestionnaires de l'industrie agro-alimentaire concernant l'alimentation et le maintien d'un poids sain même que les facteurs clés dans les décisions corporatives liées au consommateur et au gouvernement.

Parmi les approches permettant d'analyser les enjeux décisionnels des entreprises et leurs relations d'influence mutuelle avec les acteurs de leur environnement, la théorie des *stakeholders* ou *parties prenantes* tente de comprendre comment une firme prend des décisions congruentes entre ses activités économiques, les messages qu'elle émet (à travers ses décisions corporatives, mais aussi par sa publicité ou son implication communautaire), et les normes des systèmes sociaux dans lesquels elle évolue<sup>15</sup>. Selon cette théorie, un gestionnaire doit évaluer le degré d'importance des différentes parties prenantes et de leurs demandes en fonction de trois caractéristiques : 1) le *pouvoir* qu'exerce cet acteur sur la réalisation des objectifs de la firme, 2) la *légitimité* de sa relation avec elle et, 3) l'*urgence* de sa requête<sup>16</sup>.

La population à l'étude était constituée de hauts-dirigeants et de cadres supérieurs des trois

secteurs mentionnés. Pour constituer notre échantillon, nous avons eu recours à des listes de contacts personnels et professionnels et à une firme de consultation. Étant donnée l'importance des demandes dont fait l'objet ce niveau de décideurs, l'utilisation d'une méthode aléatoire faisait craindre un faible taux de réponse.

En 2004 au Québec, nous avons réuni les sujets en groupes de discussion. Treize (13) participants provenaient du secteur de l'alimentation. Dans le reste du Canada, nous avons obtenu huit (8) entrevues individuelles avec des dirigeants d'entreprises de production alimentaires, toutes filiales de multinationales américaines ou européennes, pour un échantillon total de 21 (n=21). Il y a deux raisons pour laquelle nous avons eu recours à des entrevues individuelles plutôt qu'à des groupes de discussion avec ce segment de notre population. D'une part, leurs horaires ne permettaient pas de les réunir simultanément, et d'autre part, ces entreprises sont avares des informations qu'elles diffusent, particulièrement auprès de leurs concurrents.

Pour procéder à l'analyse de contenu des entrevues, nous avons retenu huit variables issues des cadres conceptuels relatifs à la formation des normes et à la théorie des parties prenantes. Afin de répondre aux questionnements de cet article, nous avons choisi de présenter le discours des décideurs sur les *normes diététiques* établies à partir des connaissances scientifiques actuelles en matière de nutrition; leurs perceptions des *normes descriptives* qui renvoient aux croyances d'un individu à propos de la fréquence des comportements des autres membres d'un groupe; leurs relations de *pouvoir*, *légitimité*, et *d'urgence* avec le consommateur et le gouvernement (principales parties prenantes si on en juge par leurs propos); ainsi que la place des *médias* dans leur discours. Nous avons présenté dans un autre article les pratiques que ces entreprises mettent de l'avant pour promouvoir un mode de vie sain et pour contre-carrer l'épidémie d'obésité<sup>17</sup>.

## Résultats

### La perception des normes sociales par les gestionnaires

Nos résultats indiquent que lorsque les participants discutent des *normes diététiques*, ils insistent principalement sur deux points positifs : la réduction des portions et les améliorations ayant été apportées aux produits (réduction de sucre et

de gras, ajout d'éléments nutritifs tels le calcium ou les oméga-3). En dehors de cela, les répondants mentionnent exclusivement les fruits et les légumes à titre d'aliments sains. Dans le cas des *normes descriptives*, les répondants ont la perception que les normes individuelles ont changé. Selon eux, les ménages préparaient autrefois la nourriture à la maison alors qu'aujourd'hui, les mets déjà préparés sont de plus en plus utilisés par les consommateurs. Certains gestionnaires sont d'avis qu'une partie du problème réside dans le mode de vie sédentaire des individus. D'ailleurs, plusieurs croient que les adolescents et les enfants passent trop de temps devant des écrans de télévision et d'ordinateur et pas assez à faire de l'activité physique. Les participants croient enfin qu'il faut éduquer les consommateurs en termes de portion, d'activité physique et de modération ou d'équilibre (notions non définies par les répondants) dans la consommation. Ils croient que les consommateurs sont confus à ce sujet, qu'ils ne savent pas lire l'étiquetage des produits qu'ils consomment et que la tâche de les informer appartient aux gouvernements.

### L'influence des parties prenantes sur les décisions corporatives

Les décisions du consommateur exercent d'énormes pressions sur la compétitivité des entreprises agro-alimentaires. Les gestionnaires ont répété que les produits dont les consommateurs ne veulent pas ne font pas long feu sur les tablettes et que plusieurs produits associés à la malbouffe demeurent des grands favoris du public. C'est la «loi du marché» à laquelle ils doivent se plier pour maintenir leurs objectifs de rentabilité. Les demandes du consommateur ont donc beaucoup de *pouvoir* sur les décisions corporatives en plus de les rendre *légitimes*, nonobstant la valeur nutritionnelle des produits offerts. Par exemple, si dans les sondages, les gens affirment consommer de la salade au resto, il reste que dans les faits, les frites et les grosses portions se vendent davantage. C'est pourquoi les décideurs restent critiques quant au discours du consommateur et se fient plutôt à l'analyse des tendances du marché et aux résultats financiers de l'entreprise<sup>2</sup>.

Le sentiment d'*urgence* varie dans le temps; il suffit de penser à la réponse défavorable à l'offre de salades dans certaines chaînes de restauration rapide au début des années 1990. Certains changements ont récemment dû être effectués pour suivre ces tendances, telles l'addition d'oméga-3

ou l'utilisation d'huiles non-hydrogénées. Certains gestionnaires de la restauration rapide vantent leurs efforts de « promotion de la santé » à l'aide de commandite du sport amateur, en incitant la population (dont les enfants dans les écoles) à la modération et en évitant de promouvoir leurs gros formats (donc plus caloriques) auprès des jeunes lors de l'achat.

La relation que les entreprises entretiennent avec les gouvernements de tous les niveaux est inévitablement empreinte de pouvoir et de légitimité. Les gouvernements exercent des droits importants à l'aide de tout l'appareil législatif et fiscal et font parfois office de pourvoyeur. À ce titre, certains participants déplorent le « manque de cohérence » de la part du gouvernement qui réduit les subventions aux producteurs tout en exigeant le développement et l'offre d'aliments sains. Les gestionnaires se défendent cependant d'adresser de la publicité aux enfants et croient qu'il serait collectivement dangereux de ne blâmer que la publicité pour l'augmentation de l'obésité chez les jeunes. Paradoxalement, certains indiquent que c'est un puissant instrument de marketing et que les chaînes de télévision obtiennent jusqu'à 25% de leurs revenus publicitaires grâce au secteur de l'alimentation. Certains croient que la publicité ne fait que refléter les goûts de la population et quelques-uns reconnaissent qu'une diminution de la publicité entraîne inévitablement une réduction des ventes. La plupart d'entre eux ont recentré leur approche de marketing autour de la santé, d'autant plus si l'entreprise n'a pas un historique d'offre d'aliments sains. Cependant, plusieurs se plaignent des contraintes réglementaires sévères au Canada, ce qui les empêcherait de vanter les qualités nutritives de leurs produits.

Le fardeau de l'obésité est, selon la majorité des participants à cette étude, une responsabilité collective dont l'industrie agro-alimentaire refuse d'être la seule imputable. Bien qu'elle soit prête à faire des efforts en ce sens, l'industrie se questionne sur le rôle qu'elle peut jouer dans un processus de changements de comportements à un niveau macro-sociétal.

## Discussion et conclusion

Le discours sous-jacent des gestionnaires de l'industrie agro-alimentaire (production, distribution, restauration) permet de comprendre que l'aspect santé est actuellement privilégié et promu parce qu'il est une priorité du consommateur. De plus, cela a une incidence sur les profits – non

parce que les conseils d'administration se sont dotés d'une soudaine conscience à ce sujet, mais parce que l'offre de produits sains constitue une réponse de l'industrie à des changements dans les attentes individuelles. Il permet aux firmes de se distinguer de leurs concurrents sur une préoccupation à la mode. Bien que plusieurs se targuent d'éviter de promouvoir les portions larges, il reste qu'on continue de les offrir. Par ailleurs, les décideurs défendent l'avalanche de publicités sous prétexte que c'est au consommateur de choisir ou non d'y accorder du crédit. Le principe se défend, excepté qu'ils reconnaissent que la publicité a un lien direct avec le chiffre d'affaires. De plus, les producteurs d'aliments non transformés (qui sont souvent des producteurs locaux) ne possèdent pas les moyens pour faire compétition avec les multinationales ni même avec les chaînes d'alimentation ou de restauration québécoises.

Nous avons été étonnés de constater que les décideurs ne semblent pas encore faire de lien entre l'obésité et l'absentéisme au travail. Il serait d'ailleurs important de poursuivre des recherches à ce sujet. Que le mode de vie des individus soit désigné par les décideurs comme principal responsable de l'épidémie d'obésité actuelle n'est pas une surprise dans la mesure où il serait étonnant qu'ils s'avouent détenir leur part de responsabilité dans cette situation. Il n'est donc pas surprenant que les aliments riches en calories et ayant une faible valeur nutritive soient promus à l'aide de commandites d'athlètes ou d'événements sportifs. Cependant, il est permis de douter que les mascottes de restaurants de *fast-food* ou de céréales sucrées soient les mieux placées pour faire la promotion de la santé dans les écoles canadiennes.

Tel que d'autres études l'ont démontré<sup>3,5</sup>, les décideurs participants – à l'instar du consommateur moyen – ne s'aventurent qu'en terrain connu (les fruits et légumes) lorsqu'ils citent des aliments sains et les concepts auxquels ils font référence restent flous. Cela s'explique probablement parce que c'est le seul groupe reconnu par le Guide alimentaire canadien qui n'est pas – ou à peu près pas – l'objet de controverse dans un régime à la mode. Les gestionnaires n'ont donc pas tort lorsqu'ils suggèrent de mettre l'emphase sur des campagnes d'information pour démystifier l'ABC des principes d'une saine alimentation. Par contre, il serait presque tout aussi important de rendre l'étiquetage nutritionnel aussi éclairant, la grosseur des portions indiquées n'étant généralement ni évidentes ni réalistes. Les solutions proposées

spontanément par les décideurs demeurent donc essentiellement dans une perspective individuelle, liée au *comportement* de l'individu qui doit simplement se prendre en main en mangeant mieux et en bougeant plus. Toutefois, lorsqu'ils envisagent des actions à un niveau macro-sociétal, ils jugent que les solutions de santé publique relèvent de la responsabilité gouvernementale. La relation avec le gouvernement semble d'ailleurs soutenue entre les pouvoirs publics et l'industrie qui cherche à la fois à bénéficier de crédits, de subventions et de latitude promotionnelle, tout en faisant figure de bonne citoyenne. Il faudrait tirer partie de cette interdépendance (les entreprises forment peut-être les joueurs les plus importants dans les sociétés modernes) afin de mettre en place ou de modifier des politiques en matière de publicité (la France en est un exemple), et peut-être pour prélever des taxes sur les aliments transformés pour subventionner les petits producteurs ou favoriser l'achat d'aliments sains dans les milieux défavorisés.

Compte tenu de la petite taille de notre échantillon, il serait important d'approfondir cette recherche auprès d'autres décideurs afin d'obtenir un portrait du contexte décisionnel de l'industrie agro-alimentaire canadienne, de son rôle dans l'épidémie d'obésité et dans le rôle qu'elle pourrait jouer à l'enrayer. Il faudra donc chercher plus loin les réponses qui pourront mener à une collaboration entre les individus, les corporations et les pouvoirs publics pour l'enrayer. Nous souhaitons des actions durables pour réduire les déterminants de l'obésité et il n'est pas question de rejeter les efforts consentis par les entreprises agro-alimentaires pour offrir des aliments sains sous prétexte de motivations pécuniaires plutôt qu'éthiques. Personne ne songe à remettre en question les motifs économiques qui régissent ces firmes. Il est donc essentiel de poursuivre les recherches afin de mettre en place des mécanismes permettant à la fois la libre entreprise et la protection du consommateur contre le bombardement de messages promotionnels et contradictoires. Il faudrait poursuivre des études sociologiques sur la formation des normes alimentaires et sur les effets de l'accessibilité économique et géographique des restaurants de *fast-food*, entre autres autour des établissements scolaires. De plus, il est important de comprendre comment l'étendue et l'accessibilité de l'offre de ce type d'aliments (il n'y a qu'à se tenir devant un étalage de biscuits au supermarché) entre en compétition avec l'offre d'aliments en provenance directe des producteurs locaux qui sont favorisés

par les spécialistes de la nutrition. Tout est peut-être une question d'équilibre, sur le pèse-personne comme dans la répartition des messages entre les producteurs locaux et les transformateurs mondiaux.

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# OBESOGENIC ENVIRONMENTS



## ABSTRACT

Obesity and overweight have increased dramatically in recent times in Canada, as in many other countries around the world. The speed at which this increase has taken place means that it cannot be due to some genetic change in the population. More convincing are explanations that look at the everyday environments in which we live and work as well as at the strong social patterning to the way we eat and spend our leisure and work time for the increase in overweight and obesity. Any policy response to the rise of obesity and overweight that focuses only on individual interventions and does not recognize the roles of socially-patterned behaviours as well as routine environments is unlikely to produce the kind of population-wide changes needed.

## RÉSUMÉ

Depuis les dernières années, l'obésité a vu une croissance dramatique au Canada ainsi qu'à travers le monde. La rapidité de cette croissance indique qu'elle ne peut être causée par un changement génétique dans la population. Des explications plus convaincantes étudient l'environnement quotidien dans lequel nous vivons et travaillons ainsi que les tendances sociales d'alimentation et la façon dont nous occupons notre temps de loisir et de travail comparativement à la croissance de l'obésité. Les politiques répondant à la croissance de l'obésité et ne se concentrant que sur les interventions individuelles plutôt que de reconnaître le rôle des tendances de comportements sociaux et de l'environnement quotidien n'engendreront pas les changements globaux nécessaires.

There is consistent evidence that the prevalence of overweight and obesity are increasing rapidly around the world in both developing and developed countries, including Canada (Katzmarzyk and Ardern, 2004; Huot, et al., 2004; WHO, 2004; Torrance et al., 2002; WHO, 1998; Macdonald et al., 1997). The prevalence of combined overweight and obesity (BMI  $\geq 25$ ) in Canada increased from 48% to 57% among men and from 30% to 35% among women between 1981 and 1996 (Tremblay et al., 2002). This is worrisome because overweight and obesity are linked to serious health problems like heart disease, diabetes, some cancers and, depending on which of the large scale studies you believe from the United States, early death. The speed of the rise in obesity suggests that, rather than a shift in the genetic composition of the population, the root of the obesity pandemic in countries like Canada is an environment that supports obesity (Egger and Swinburn, 1997; Hill and Peters, 1998; Poston and Foreyt, 1999).

Obesity and overweight are caused by many factors, including genes, metabolism, food intake, and the level of physical activity. Further “upstream”, if you like, are socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors which influence behaviour and, in turn, weight gain. Consider, for example, the distribution of Canadian women’s body mass (as measured by the body mass index or BMI, calculated as body mass in kilograms divided by height in metres, squared) by education level (Figure 1). The distribution of BMI for women who did not graduate from high school peaks closer to 25 (the World Health Organization’s cutpoint for overweight) and bulges over to the right, reflecting higher proportions of women without high school education in the overweight and obese (BMI  $\geq 30$ ) ranges. By contrast, women with a post secondary education are much more likely to have a BMI in the normal range (18-24).

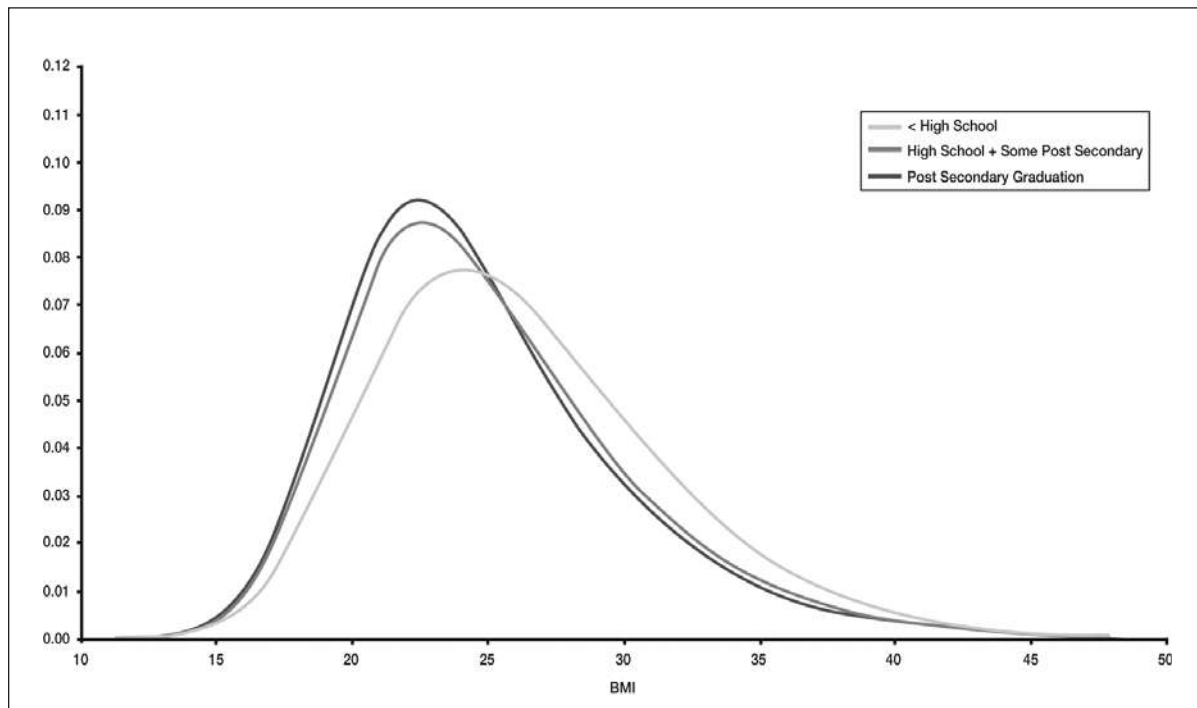
**NANCY A. ROSS** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography and Associate of the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at McGill University.

How is it that this one social characteristic has such a “pull” on a health outcome like body weight? What might be the mechanisms behind the association between education and overweight? It could be that teenage girls who have children before graduating from high school have the potential for more births and more weight gain over their life time. But the answer is probably far more complicated and likely has to do with mundane contrasts in the everyday lives of women with and without higher education. Food choices and body images reflecting social class identity, time and safe places for recreation are likely all implicated and the list could go on. Regardless of the precise mechanism, if we take the relationship between education level and body weight to be causal for women, and of course we are never supposed to infer that from cross sectional pictures like that of Figure 1, it would follow that an excellent population-level intervention for obesity and overweight is to keep girls in school. Make sure they finish high school and, better yet, it would be great if they went on to post-secondary education. This strategy, at a population level, would be better than promoting stomach-stapling surgery. This

would arguably be more effective than messages, aimed at individuals, to eat better and exercise more after they are already overweight or obese. It is notoriously difficult to change human behaviour and extremely hard to lose weight and keep it off. We know from a recent study that followed Canadians for eight years that a full 25% of us who had been overweight in 1994 had become obese by 2002. Only 10%, who had been overweight at the outset of the study were in the normal weight range eight years later (LePetite and Berthelot, 2005).

If we go even further upstream to look at some environmental roots of overweight and obesity we should begin to consider our taken-for-granted design features of contemporary urban environments. There are wide variations across neighbourhoods in the availability of recreational opportunities and access to fresh, healthy foods. There is an entire literature on “food deserts” or the systematic absence of affordable healthy foods in poor inner city neighbourhoods. Fast-food, however, tends to be cheap and plentiful, setting up a paradox whereby the predictors of food insecurity are often the same as the predictors of obesity.

**Figure 1:** Distribution of Body Mass Index (BMI) by Level of Education, Canadian Women aged 20-64 years, 2000/01 Canadian Community Health Survey



Graph produced, with thanks, by Saeeda Khan.

Modern suburban neighbourhoods characterised by work, school, and commercial land uses that are not easily accessible on foot or by bike restrict the amount of time people spend walking or cycling for utilitarian purposes. In fact it has been shown by several researchers that levels of physical activity among people living in sprawling neighbourhoods tend to be lower than those living in higher density, more-compact neighbourhoods (Ewing et al., 2003; Frank et al., 2003; 2005; Frumkin, 2002; Jackson, 2003; Saelens et al., 2003). Frank et al. (2004) demonstrated that the mean BMI for men went down significantly across neighbourhoods as land use mix, density, and street connectivity increased. While this research is mainly from the United States, we now know that the sprawl-obesity link exists for Canadian men as well (although the relationship is not significant for women). While the average male in urban Canada already has a BMI score in the overweight range (~26), an inactive, married man, under high stress and living in a sprawling metropolis has a hypothetical BMI over 27, inching ever closer to the obese range of BMI (Ross et al., 2006). Know anyone who fits that profile?

Historically, strategies to protect population health that have been most effective have addressed structural features of the environment. Consider the improvements in sanitation and housing conditions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial city that led to vast increases in urban life expectancy. Or, consider the broad sweeping changes in social norms and legislative changes restricting smoking in public places that were responsible for the decline in smoking rates in most jurisdictions across North America in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is time for the public health debate on obesity to learn from its past successes and better understand and respond to our obesogenic environments.

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**TOWARDS A CANADIAN FOOD POLICY  
POUR UNE POLITIQUE ALIMENTAIRE CANADIENNE**



Conférence annuelle de l'Institut  
d'études canadiennes de McGill  
Annual Conference of the McGill  
Institute for the Study of Canada

DU 15 AU 17 FÉVRIER 2006 / FEBRUARY 15, 16 AND 17, 2006

**Media coverage / Couverture médiatique :**

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|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>01. The Gazette</b>         | November 16, 2005 – “Myth of family dinner overdone”<br><i>Julian Armstrong, Food Editor</i>  |
| <b>02. Culinary Chronicles</b> | November 2-4, 2005 – “What’s for Dinner?<br>The Daily Meal through History”<br><i>Fiona Lucas, Editor</i>   |
| <b>03. McCord Museum</b>       | December 2, 2005 – “Qu’est-ce qu’on mange?<br>Le repas quotidien à travers l’histoire”<br><i>Amanda Kelly, Agente Communications</i>  |
| <b>04. The Gazette</b>         | January 4, 2006 – “Chewing the fat on Canadian food”<br><i>Julian Armstrong, Food Editor</i>  |
| <b>05. The Gazette</b>         | January 4, 2006 – “Eating: New whole-grain choices<br>take a slice off white-bread sales”<br><i>Julian Armstrong, Food Editor</i>   |
| <b>06. The Gazette</b>         | January 4, 2006 – “Educated Eating. The Food Mood<br>Is Changing: Society, Government And Industry Are<br>Working Toward Diet Reform”<br><i>Julian Armstrong, Food Editor</i> |

- 07. McGill University**      January 19, 2006 – “What Are We Eating  
McGill hosts conference on Canadian food policy  
Qu’est-ce qu’on mange? McGill organize une conference  
sur la politique alimentaire canadienne”  
*Cynthia Lee, Communications Officer*
- 08. The Gazette**      February 8, 2006 – “Tracing the Canadian menu evolution”  
*Julian Armstrong, Food Editor*
- 09. Montreal Mirror**      February 9, 2006 – “Generation food: Teacher-chef Paul  
Finkelstein hopes his students get hooked on freshness”  
*Patrick Lejtenyi, Columnist*
- 10. La Presse**      February 15, 2006 – « Pas de solution magique »  
*Diane Finegood, l’auteure est directrice scientifique  
de l’Institute de la nutrition*
- 11. The Gazette**      February 16, 2006 – “A taste of meals to come:  
At a conference in Montreal, food professionals are exploring  
what Canadians are eating, what we should eat for better  
health and a range of other mouth-watering issues”  
*Julian Armstrong, Food Editor*
- 12. The Gazette**      February 17, 2006 – “Kitchen skills may be vanishing art,  
nutrition experts warn: Widespread use of ready-to-serve  
foods raise fears about healthy family meal”  
*Susan Schwartz, Reporter*
- 13. The Gazette**      February 17, 2006 – “Nation’s profile: fatter, flabbier:  
Food industry wrestling with how to fix problem”  
*Julian Armstrong, Food Editor*
- 14. The Gazette**      February 18, 2006 – “Our daily pickle”  
*Susan Schwartz, Reporter, & Julian Armstrong, Food Editor*
- 15. Toronto Star**      February 18, 2006 – “Cheap-food addiction fuels fat of  
the land; Canadian obesity traced to desire for inexpensive  
processed foods. Snacking is now the ‘fourth meal’ of the  
day, conference is told”  
*Susan Sampson, Reporter*
- 16. Le Devoir**      February 19, 2006 – “Le Canada pressé d’adopter une politique”  
*Fabien Deglise*
- 17. The Medical Post**      February 21, 2006 – “Serving notice: Conference offers  
up reality check on excessive food consumption with  
revamped Canada Food Guide on the horizon”  
*Mark Cardwell*

- 18. The Gazette** February 22, 2006 – “Keep on cooking, Canada: Helping the hurried cook is a Canadian Living tradition, food editor tells conference”  
*Julian Armstrong, Food Editor*
- 19. The Gazette** February 22, 2006 – “Obesity: A tax on low-nutrition foods is one suggestion”  
*Julian Armstrong, Food Editor*
- 20. The Gazette** February 22, 2006 – “Our fat fight: We can ban smoking, but we can’t ban overeating. Canada needs a concerted campaign against obesity”  
*Julian Armstrong, Food Editor*
- 21. Toronto Sun** February 22, 2006 – “Batter up for Fat Tuesday”  
*Elizabeth Baird*
- 22. Toronto Star** February 22, 2006 – “The fat of the land”  
*Susan Sampson, Reporter*
- 23. Passeport Santé** February 23, 2006 – “Manger santé, un concept dépassé?”  
*Martin LaSalle*
- 24. Toronto Sun** February 23, 2006 – “Tax the fat: Sociologist” – *CP*
- 25. McGill Reporter** February 24, 2005 – “Sweet Scholarship : Conference satiates food lovers’ appetite”  
*Maeve Haldane, Editor*
- 26. Passeport Santé** February 24, 2006 – “Des consequences à nos choix alimentaires?”  
*Martin LaSalle*
- 27. Passeport Santé** February 24, 2006 – “Le savoir culinaire : en voie de disparition?”  
*Martin LaSalle*
- 28. Radio-Canada** February 25, 2006 – “Une Politique alimentaire, pour qui, pourquoi?”  
*Helene Raymond, Host*
- 29. McGill Reporter** March 2, 2006 – “Food for thought “  
*Maeve Haldane, Editor*
- 30. The Gazette** March 4, 2006 – “This chef’s got a cause – whipping school lunches into shape”  
*Sarah Musgrave, Author*
- 31. Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research** Summer 2006, Taking Food Seriously, In and Out of School, p. A4  
*Kathryn Graves and A. Murphey, authors*

# TASTE-TESTING CANADIAN FOOD OPTIONS:

## Media Coverage of the Conference and of Food Options in February 2006<sup>1</sup>



### ABSTRACT

This paper looks at Canadian media coverage of the conference in particular, and of food-related issues during the month of February 2006 more generally. It notes the emergence of two 'trigger' issues that captured the attention of the conference audience and media alike: obesity and the deskilling of the home food producer. Both discussions ultimately lay the burden of responsibility on the home food producer and consumer to make educated, conscious and responsible food choices. The question is, while a number of conference speakers focused on the responsibility of the government and industry to shape and better redirect consumer food choices, did media coverage ultimately place the onus for change on the shoulders of the individual consumer?

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article propose une analyse de la couverture médiatique canadienne de la conférence et de certaines questions d'ordre alimentaire au cours du mois de février 2006. Nous étudions deux sujets « chauds » qui ont attiré l'attention des médias et des participants lors de la conférence : l'obésité et la déqualification des personnes responsables de la préparation de la nourriture. Nous avons déterminé dans les deux cas qu'il incombait à la personne qui consomme ou qui prépare la nourriture de faire des choix alimentaires à la fois éclairés, consciencieux et sains. Certains conférenciers ont mis l'accent sur la responsabilité du gouvernement et de l'industrie dans la réorientation des choix alimentaires des consommateurs. Cependant, nous nous demandons si les médias, au bout du compte, n'ont pas placé la responsabilité du changement sur les épaules de chaque individu.

Judging from the media response to the conference, Canadians are deeply concerned about what they are eating.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, we received as much, if not more, media coverage for this conference than for our other annual conferences – despite some really hot and timely topics addressed in those other conferences (“Who Controls Canada’s Media?” in 2004 for example, or “Canada and the World” in 2005). This conference was the first time, too, that we have had organizations asking to come and film the event (rather than being asked, and being paid, by the conference organizers), as well as asking permission to post video clips on their website.<sup>3</sup> During the last days, our list of speakers expanded in scope. Aline Dimitri, from the Food Safety Directorate of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, joined the Friday morning panel, which included Marc Fortin (Assistant Deputy Minister of the Research Branch of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada) and Hélène Goulet (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister of the Health Products and Food Branch of Health Canada). In terms of industry representation, last-minute changes involved a shift towards greater seniority of representation: for example, Louis Frenette, President of Danone, was a substitute for his VP. In terms of government engagement, there were two changes: Carolyn Bennett, former Minister of Health, and Wayne Easter, former Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (to our delight) were both eager to remain part of the event and the discussion surrounding the shaping of food choices in Canada, even though they were no longer part of the newly appointed Federal Cabinet.

NATHALIE COOKE, Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts, McGill University

Significantly, the 2006 conference also garnered media attention despite the fact that it took place while journalists might well have had other things on their minds: the Winter Olympics and the scandals of its Hockey Team manager; Stephen Harper's selection of a controversial cabinet; and Quebec's announcement about its long-awaited position on the privatization of Health Care.

Why such pressing concern? Clearly, people do care about food policy in Canada. There's no Ministry of Food; instead food policy issues fall between what Carolyn Bennett called the "silos" of government – that is, Health, Agriculture, Education, even Environment, and Northern Affairs. Another reason Canadians are concerned is because, so far, there hasn't really been much statistical information about specifically Canadian (as opposed to US) food practices. In February 2006, we did not really know what Canadians were eating – something underlined by Mary Bush, Acting Director-General of Health Canada's Office of Nutrition Promotion and Policy, who was responsible for producing (and defending) the new Food Guide. What did we know? Heart and Stroke Foundation Canada, in early February 2006, released evidence that the Baby Boomer Generation will be the first "generation to turn back the clock and experience a decline in quality of life."<sup>4</sup> The new Food Guide, announced in 2002, was still very much on the drawing table at the time of our conference in 2006 despite promises of a release date going back to 2005. In fact, until March 24, 2006, one could participate in the consultation process of the Food Guide by going to the Health Canada website and completing a questionnaire. In other words, Health Canada's interactive website is one recognition of people's past and present concern with food policy and the reality that there are questions but few answers.

The media coverage of the conference privileged two trigger issues at the bottom of all this concern: namely, obesity and poor eating habits among Canada's youth. Who's to blame? Well, conference presenters, and vocal audience members, all pointed the finger in predictable directions: industry and government (and in that order). We didn't even approach Coke to participate in the conference; and it was the right call: Coca-Cola figured in many, many powerpoint presentations, which implicitly cast the product and effects of the most highly-sugared products in the company's product line in a negative light. McDonalds pulled out of the conference a week

before – having promised all along to send us a VP. However, Louis Frenette of Danone presented a credible case for the potential of industry to shift consumer behaviour for the better and remain profitable or, in other words, for industry to become part of the solution. He spoke of his company's counter-intuitive and, in hindsight, ingenious from the point of view of profitability, idea to bottle water; and he also articulated the specific benefits of Activia yoghurt, which has subsequently taken impressive market share in Canada.

Perhaps more surprisingly, in assigning responsibility, a significant number of participants pointed their finger directly at families – and specifically at the home food provider – whose deskilling, misconceptions about the unavailability of adequate time for food preparation, and lack of commitment to providing healthy food were seen to be symptomatic of our times. Of course, they are also symptomatic of decisions about educational curriculum. However, that blame was assigned to families rather than government supports recent findings by the Decima Group that "75% of Canadians said it was up to parents to make sure their children eat well, while only 22% favored government regulation."<sup>5</sup> And the proposed solution that got standing ovations was to reintroduce "homec" in the classroom, teach cooking skills to girls and boys, and go back to cooking simple, healthy meals in the home, and to eating them together. This was overwhelmingly the solution of choice, and one that continued to generate follow-up articles – as, for example, one printed in a journal distributed to all of Nova Scotia's 15,000 teachers.<sup>6</sup> When Nutritionist Christina Blais mentioned that we're not sure that there's a nutritional cost to whole meal replacement over home-cooked meals, the provocative comment went almost unheard.<sup>7</sup> When Ricardo Larivée, Quebec's answer to Jamie Oliver, said we shouldn't blame fast food industries, we should instead blame parents who model bad eating habits, everyone gasped. But he caught the attention of the Chagnon Foundation, who brought their TV cameras; and his conclusions were repeated throughout the conference.

Elbert van Donkersgoed mused: Who do consumers trust? His answers: Americans trust celebrities, English Canadians trust nutritionists, and French Canadians trust chefs.<sup>8</sup> At the conference, however, both chefs and nutritionists became the media darlings of the event: Ricardo (during the Wednesday evening public event), and later Paul Finkelstein (of the Screaming Avacado

Café in Stratford Northwestern Secondary School), Elizabeth Baird (*Canadian Living*), and Louise Lambert Lagacé. Without exception, they promoted the virtues of healthy eating and home cooking, a sentiment shared by the audience and, it appeared, by Canadians more generally.

For example, in an initiative endorsed by the former Canadian Prime Minister, as well as 2 provincial premiers, 7 Mayors, and one MPP, Canadians from coast to coast were asked to participate on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2005 in M&M Meat Shops' National Family Dinner Night. Families were not only challenged to dine together (and M&M did offer some suggestions about menu), but also to make dinner a symbolically worthwhile experience. M&M's tips for this include muting the sound on the TV or turning it off, smiling, talking, and that means (M&M Meats points out) with the kids too.<sup>9</sup> The motivation for this kind of initiative, not to mention high-level political support for it, was surely our concern for the disintegration of the tradition of the family meal in Canada and the corollary: our firm conviction that it is valuable. Wrote then Prime Minister Paul Martin in his endorsement: "This is a perfect occasion to promote the fundamental values that lie at the heart of Canadian communities, and that are essential to the well-being of our nation."<sup>10</sup> Recent studies from Columbia's National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse and from Elsie Taveras of Harvard's Pediatric Health Services (published in October's *Pediatrics* journal) cite the "family-dinner deficit" as a contributing factor to "childhood obesity, teen substance abuse, poor academic performance and increased household stress."<sup>11</sup> The reasons why families don't eat dinner together seem to involve lack of time (with so many two-career households in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and kids enrolled in oodles of after-school programs).<sup>12</sup> In the United States, Gallup Poll reported in October 2005 that "[a]ccording to the most recent Bureau of Labour Statistics, 78% of women with children between the ages of 6 and 17 work outside the home."<sup>13</sup> In February 2006, the NPD group reported that "65% of Canadian women were in the work force" and, at the same time, "in 80 per cent of households, women are the primary grocery shopper and in 81 per cent of households, they are responsible for meal preparation."<sup>14</sup> In short, it's a function of what Canadian journalist Misty Harris, in an article entitled "We don't eat together, and are paying for it," calls the reality of the "modern family."<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, according to January 2004 Gallup Poll data, there is a statistically significant discrepancy between food practice in Canada and that of the United States, and Britain – where a quarter of Britons no longer even own a dining room table, and 31% only use theirs for special occasions.<sup>16</sup> Whereas only 28% of Americans said they eat dinner together as a family 7 nights a week, 38% of British people and a full 40% of Canadians claimed to have such regular family dinners. In addition, another 40% of Canadians in 2004 said they ate dinner together with their family 4 to 6 nights a week. In summary, then, only 20% said they had fewer than 4 dinners with their family each week.<sup>17</sup> That's not as bleak as the 2005 newspaper byline, "We don't eat together" might suggest.

The NPD Group released data early in February 2006 that revealed similar findings. Working from a sample group of 1 300 "households reflective of the Canadian population" they found that "70 per cent of dinners are eaten at home" in Canada.<sup>18</sup> That "53 per cent of Canadian dinners included at least one prepared or semi prepared food item, such as pre-seasoned frozen chicken," suggests that the Canadian home food provider has found alternatives to restaurant fare. Statscan data, compiled from 8,400 households, confirms the figure in the NDP findings: 70% of the household food budget in Canada, during 2001, was spent on food purchased from stores; the other 30% was spent on food purchased from restaurants. In 1982, only 25% of the household food budget was spent on food purchased from restaurants.<sup>18</sup> The Achilles heel of my argument here is actually some research generated by conference steering committee member, Marie Marquis of the Department of Nutrition at Université de Montréal, which focuses specifically on eating habits of 534 ten year-old francophone Quebecers. She found that 25% of the boys and 18% of the girls regularly eat in front of the TV, with the boys making worse food choices than the girls, even though they were more likely to consider it important to choose foods that helped them to control their weight (40% to 31%), and almost as likely to consider it important to choose foods that helped them to stay healthy (70% to 77%).<sup>19</sup> But this is a very small and homogeneous sample group that does not seem to be indicative of Canadian food practice more generally.

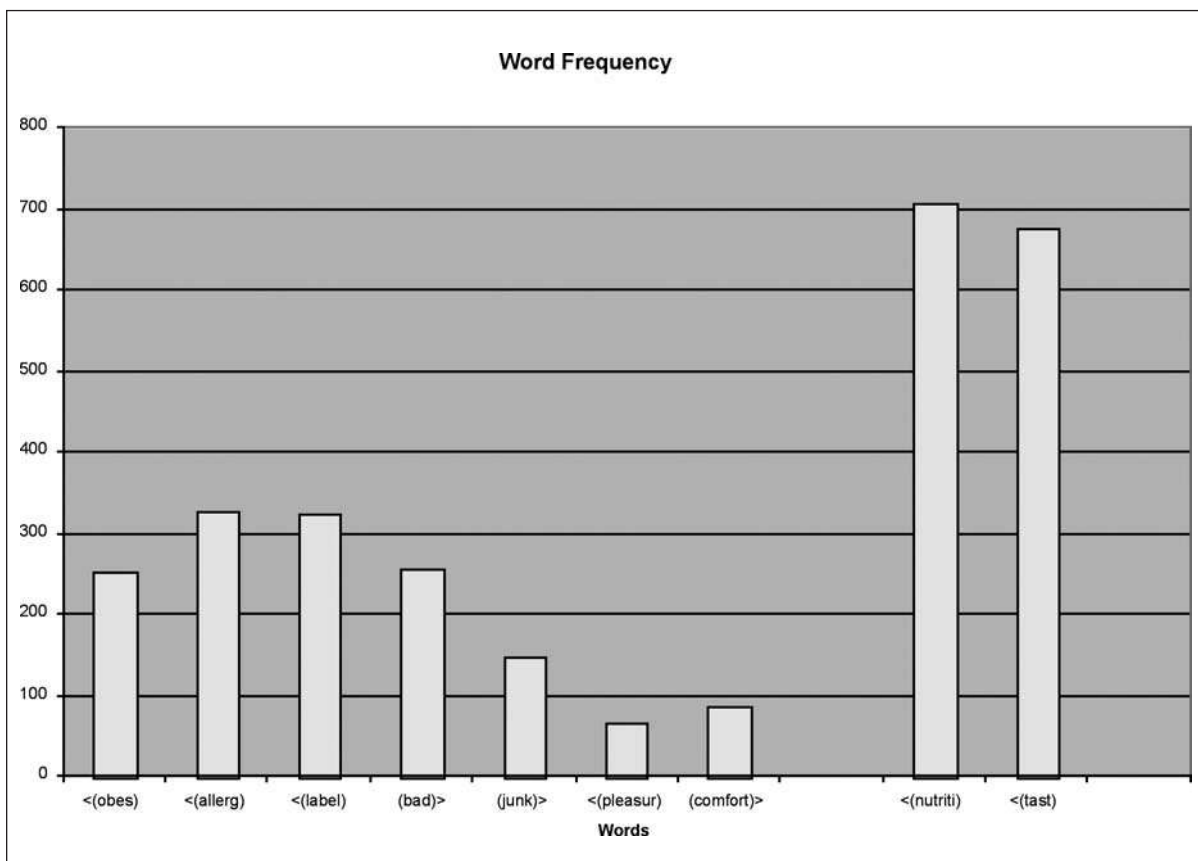
What is indicative of Canadians' perceptions of food practice, if media representation is itself

an indication, is a focus on the “afterlife” of food – that is, how it affects the body size, shape and health of Canadians. In an informal survey designed to find evidence of this emphasis on food’s “afterlife,” we surveyed (using the search engine Proquest) all articles appearing in the *Globe and Mail* during the month of February 2006. 310 contained the word “food” in the title; 343 contained the words “food” or “eating,” and 424 contained the word “food” or “eat.” Of these 424, we found that 76 linked these terms with “health” (21 articles if we eliminate repeats); 30 with “diet” (18 eliminating repeats); 23 with “labeling” (13 eliminating repeats),<sup>20</sup> 6 with “allergies” (5 eliminating repeats). In other words, the *Globe and Mail*, during February 2006 (a month that often privileges chocolate over other food groups), presented food as something that consumers should be concerned about, rather than something that might afford pleasure.

Using a different search engine (Infomart), which does not survey the *Globe and Mail* but does capture text from the CanWest papers, the *Toronto Star*, as well as CBC, CTV transcripts, magazines and all wires, we found 3426 hits for “food” or “eating.” Once again, concerns about obe-

sity (indicated by the search phrase obes\*) topped the list with 54 hits (25 eliminating repeats), followed by concerns about allergens (allerg\*) with 58 hits (22 eliminating repeats), and concerns about labeling (label\*) with 32 hits (3 eliminating duplication).

A slightly different search method produced a more finely-focused picture of the media portrayal of food fears and fashions.<sup>21</sup> We searched the full text of all articles from Infomart for particular words: one cluster of words was selected for its ability to signal concerns (obes; allerg; label); the other group of words was selected for its ability to signal the pleasurable associations with food (tast; nutrit; comfort). The words themselves are truncated in order that the search can find variations: for example “nutrit>” would include nutrition, nutritious, nutritive etc. The words “good” and “bad” proved to be ineffective; in particular, “good” proved to be a word used ubiquitously and in association with a wide variety of nouns, few of which were related to food or eating. The results appear below and reveal, very clearly, the media’s reliance on terms like “tasty” or “nutritional” as positive adjectives that have the potential to counterbalance fears about the negative



content (“junk”) and negative connotations of food (“bad”). The relative infrequency of words like “wholesome,” “comfort,” and even “pleasure” further conveys the level of concern about food. The pairing of “nutritional” and “tasty” suggests a Mary Poppins approach to food choice: an awareness of the necessity of the nutritional and a desire for something to make nutritional go down more easily.

Ultimately, then, a survey of the media coverage of conference and food-related issues during the month of February reveals an insistence on the consumer’s own role and responsibility in food selection. While conference presenters insisted on the ability of various sectors to shape and influence consumer decisions – and specifically on the responsibility of media to provide conscientious and comprehensive coverage of the issues, on government to insist on rigorous standards of production and labeling, and on industry to explore the benefits of best practices – the media looked to consumers to effect change. And the emphasis of food-related coverage on the afterlife of food, on its constituent nutritional elements as well as the pleasure and lifestyle benefits food can offer, reflected not only Canadians’ hunger to make informed food choices, but also the possibility of Canadians cooking their way to a healthy and tasty future.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Discussion of the media response to the conference formed part of a talk given at Harvard’s Weatherhead Center on 20 March 2006, “Beaver Tails, Bannock and Butter Tarts: Practices and Politics of the Daily Meal in Canada”; and this paper benefits from the very helpful feedback I received following that talk. I would also like to acknowledge the support of SSHRC in funding research related to Canadian food history; the Max Bell Foundation for its support of inquiry into Canadian food policy ongoing at McGill’s Institute for the Study of Canada; and Lorna Hutchison for her diligent and conscientious help with the copyediting of this article and the preparation of this issue more generally.
- <sup>2</sup> The Federal government is too. In fact, subsequent to February 2006, Jean-Denis Fr chet, Director of Research for the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, alerted the MISC that he was looking for witnesses to appear in front of the committee to discuss food policy issues. E-mail sent 14 March 2006, 3:38 p.m.

<sup>3</sup> <<http://www.passeportsante.net/fr/Actualites/Nouvelles/Fiche.aspx?doc=2006022310>>.

<sup>4</sup> See <<http://ww2.heartandstroke.ca/Page.asp?PageID=1613&ContentID=21437&ContentTypeID=1>>.

<sup>5</sup> This opinion relates specifically to questions about whether government should do more to regulate advertising of junk food aimed at children. “Kids Eating Habits Up To Parents, Not Government” based on a phone survey of 1,014 adult Canadians conducted between January 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. Decima News Release. <[http://www.decima.ca/en/pdf/news\\_releases/050125E.pdf](http://www.decima.ca/en/pdf/news_releases/050125E.pdf)>. Accessed March 16, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Kathryn E. Graves, “Taking Food Seriously In and Out of School,” *The Teacher*. 2006. See also detailed list of conference coverage in the media printed in this issue.

<sup>7</sup> It was mentioned in only one article by Julian Armstrong.

<sup>8</sup> Elbert van Donkersgoed is Strategic Policy Advisor, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Guelph.

<sup>9</sup> <<http://www.mmmeatshops.com/en/index.asp>>. Accessed October 28, 2005. Premiers of Nova Scotia and PEI, and MPP Mary Ann Chambers.

<sup>10</sup> <<http://www.mmmeatshops.com/en/aboutmm/media-room/pdf/Prime%20Minister%20Paul%20Martin.pdf>>. Accessed 28 October, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> “We don’t eat together, and are paying for it,” by Misty Harris, *The National Post*. 17 October, 2005; A2. See also Elsie Taveras, *Pediatrics*, October 2006, in which she calls for doctors to prescribe family dinner as a health initiative.

<sup>12</sup> Misty Harris, (“We don’t eat together, and are paying for it”) writes “A survey released this week by Decima Research for the Holmes Group (marketer of Rival and Crock Pot slow cookers) indicates more than half of Canadians believe they don’t have time to plan or execute a dinner event for family and friends. A full 30% cited dinner preparation as the most stressful element behind such a gathering.

A separate survey of Canadian women, released this week by Leger Marketing for Palm Canada, similarly found 21% of married mothers consider putting dinner on the table to be the most stressful activity in their day” (emphasis mine; see above for citation details).

<sup>13</sup> Heather Mason Kiefer, Contributing Editor, “Empty Seats: Fewer Families Eat Together.” *The Gallup Poll*, January 20, 2004. <<http://poll.gallup.com/content/default.aspx>>. Accessed October 28, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> “Canadians Embrace Eating in Moderation.” Release of the NPD Group, 1 February 2006. <<http://www.npd.com/dynamic/releases/press>>. Accessed 3 February 2006.

<sup>15</sup> “We don’t eat together, and are paying for it,” [National Edition] Misty Harris. *The National Post*. October 17, 2005, p. A2.

<sup>16</sup> “La table de salle à manger disparaît en Grande-Bretagne.” *La Presse* samedi 14 janvier 2006. This article expands upon results of a study conducted by the firm Mintel.

<sup>17</sup> Heather Mason Kiefer, Contributing Editor, “Empty Seats: Fewer Families Eat Together.” *The Gallup Poll*, January 20, 2004. <<http://poll.gallup.com/content/default.aspx?>>. Accessed October 28, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> “The Daily; Household Spending on Food” Friday, February 21, 2003. <[www.statscan.ca/Daily/English/030221/d030221a.htm](http://www.statscan.ca/Daily/English/030221/d030221a.htm)>.

<sup>19</sup> Marie Allard, “Malbouffe: les garçons pires que les filles.” *La Presse* 25-05-2005. See also Marie Marquis, *Revue canadienne de la pratique et de la recherche en diététique*. Printemps 2005.

<sup>20</sup> I am indebted to the industriousness of research assistants Gillian Jackson and Matt Doyle, and the research acumen of research assistant and library science student Jennifer Garland who directed them on this task.

<sup>21</sup> Truncations indicate a search using “wildcards.”



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Rory, McAlprine, Maple Leaf Foods; Gaëtan Lussier, Chair, Canadian Agri-Food Institute; Sally Rutherford, Executive Director, BioProducts Canada Inc.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Laurent Pellerin, Président général, Union des producteurs agricoles.



Photo credit: Owen Egan

Paul Finkelstein, Culinary Arts Teacher.

# SUMMARY: NEXT STEPS ON FOOD POLICY DEVELOPMENT

*"We have to think about food differently."*

*A comment from a participant in the MISC conference,  
"What are we eating? Qu'est-ce qu'on mange?"*

## ABSTRACT

On the surface, the Canadian food and agriculture system looks robust, but "What are we eating? Qu'est-ce qu'on mange?" laid bare the dissatisfactions and anxieties that now permeate the system. Many obstacles stand in the way of a food policy that promotes the individual and collective health of Canadians and these obstacles will require a number of different strategies to overcome them. How can one best move forward on a topic that involves multiple actors, many disciplines, and multiple orders of government? A novel process was proposed. It consisted of asking 15-20 people to draft a detailed national food policy and then circulating that proposal to secure input from all relevant stakeholders.

## RÉSUMÉ

Le système d'alimentation et d'agriculture canadien paraît superficiellement robuste. Cependant, «What are we eating? Qu'est-ce qu'on mange?» a révélé les insatisfactions et les anxiétés qui imprègnent le système. Plusieurs obstacles empêchent la création d'une politique alimentaire faisant la promotion de la santé individuelle et publique des Canadiens. Ces obstacles exigeront différentes stratégies pour les surmonter. Comment est-il possible d'aller de l'avant sur une question impliquant différents acteurs, plusieurs disciplines ainsi que plusieurs paliers de gouvernement? Un nouveau processus fut proposé—celui demander à 15-20 personnes d'élaborer une politique alimentaire nationale détaillée qui serait ensuite circulée pour assurer la contribution de toutes les parties prenantes pertinentes.

## Introduction

On the surface, the Canadian food and agriculture system looks robust, but "What are we eating? Qu'est-ce qu'on mange?" laid bare the dissatisfactions and anxieties that now permeate the system. The conference presenters, including those whose texts appear in this issue, addressed many of the subjects that currently confound our ability to take action to improve food, nutrition and agricultural policy. Participants were confronted with the tremendous complexity of a system of diverse actors and such a long and embedded history. Many questions were posed and few were truly answered, but there were some general areas of agreement, including some where new thinking is taking root.

## Supply, but what of demand?

Governments have traditionally intervened on the supply side of the food policy equation. Their intervention has produced many benefits, though many challenges remain. The demand side (what and how much people eat, why they eat as they do, how food tastes are shaped, and what it costs to eat well) has received, for a variety of reasons, decidedly less attention from policy makers. In fact, in some ways a focus on supply has historically compromised demand and health (see Ostry this issue). The significant costs for individuals and society of policy makers' failing to

intervene on the demand side are now becoming more apparent.

### **Food, health, taste and culture**

Food and health are closely intertwined and a food policy that contributes to the health of Canadians is one that promotes a secure and sustainable supply of safe and nutritious food at affordable prices, with adequate returns for farmers and food businesses. Although such goals are commonly stated by food system actors and governments,<sup>1</sup> clearly, some of the components of such a food policy – food security, food affordability, nutritious supply, low incidence of food-related diseases, farm financial health – are not being fully met. Although most Canadian consumers currently have access to a supply of safe and nutritious food at affordable prices, this is less likely to be the case for those who are poor, live in remote areas, and are Aboriginal. However, conference presenters and delegates reiterated that even with nutritious food within reach of the vast majority of Canadians, individually and collectively, Canadians often make food choices that do not contribute to and often undermine their health, both immediately and in the longer term. Rising levels of obesity are the clearest evidence of Canadians' failure to make healthy food choices, and diet is a significant risk factor in many cancers, in heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and low birth-weight births.

And what of taste and culture? As Beauchemin points out in this issue, much has been lost and some things have been (re)gained. Many conference stories highlighted how important food is to our social and community fabric, and this reality is often lost in the policy discourse about changing the food system.

### **Multiple actors with influence**

Conference participants (and the articles in this issue) identified at least six different sets of actors whose behaviour is implicated in addressing our current dilemmas: i) the food production, distribution and retail sector – from field to plate ii) governments who regulate the food supply system and whose public policies have an impact on the security, safety, nutritional quality and affordability of food; iii) consumers whose individual and collective food choices affect their personal health and the structure and financial viability of the entire food system; iv) educators, including health care professionals, who can inform and educate

consumers on their food choices; v) marketing/advertising agencies who shape consumer food preferences; and vi) the popular media (see Renaud et al. this issue). Each of these actors variously contributes to and/or frustrates the realization of food policy goals. As several authors in this issue highlight, these actors are not necessarily able or willing to identify their contributions to the challenges faced.

### **Consumer behaviour, individual freedoms and our collective needs**

A foremost question of the conference was the following: in the presence of an ample supply of safe, nutritious and affordable food, how can consumers be induced to make choices that contribute to their health? What is the role of consumer education and strategies to modify behaviour? How much responsibility does the food industry have to regulate itself to better achieve health goals? Do governments need to become more involved in regulating the food supply system – not just to ensure that food is safe but also that it is nutritious and widely accessible and affordable? Is there a need to regulate the media/advertising firms, and so on? These questions, as Hedley points out, get to the very heart of Canada's conception of liberal democracy, because such interventions might infringe on current perceptions of individual freedom. But in the face of health problems that threaten not only an individual's health, but also health care budgets and our collective economic productivity, a common implicit question in the conference discussions was: is it time to rethink our notion of individual freedom and entertain more aggressive interventions that favour our collective interests? As Riches proposes, is the implementation of "food rights" central to moving forward on a collective approach?

### **Moving forward in a complex environment**

The conference made clear, first, that there are a number of obstacles standing in the way of a food policy that promotes the individual and collective health of Canadians; and second, that these disparate obstacles likely require a number of different strategies to overcome them. How can one best move forward on a topic with multiple actors, many disciplines, and numerous orders of government? First, there is a clear need to better understand how the various food policy goals are inter-related; to know, for example, how one goal cannot be realized without simultaneous action on the

other. For example, if consumers are making poor food choices because they are poorly informed, then programs providing information and offering strategies to encourage behavioural change may be the most effective way to solve the problem. But if consumers are making poor food choices because they are poor and have limited access to affordable, nourishing food, then an educational policy is unlikely to be effective in the absence of a better labour market, improved social welfare, and / or a guaranteed annual income or food income supplements. One conference session addressed the main tradeoffs commonly associated with food policy development<sup>2</sup> and largely concluded that there are ways through them, though the path is somewhat treacherous.

Second, once the problem of a food policy is better understood, there is a need to build a consensus around the appropriate role of governments in achieving a food policy. Does it involve a larger government regulatory role, with governments interfering directly with the food industry's right to advertise foods and consumers' choices? Governments commonly believe that such a role can not be thrust upon them in the absence of a broad societal consensus that it is appropriate. But who, then, shall provide leadership on these complex matters? Who will animate that consensus-building process? Do governments actually want such a consensus to emerge, given their historic difficulties in working across departments on complex files? And this is a complex file, as Sally Rutherford identified in the final conference plenary, with 27 priority domains discussed by conference participants. As Carolyn Bennett explained, there is no "Ministry of Food," precisely because its mandate would consume numerous others – including the Ministries of Northern Affairs, Energy, Environment, and Heritage. Are we all tired of previous efforts to move forward in this area and don't actually know what will work? And what of the role of community-based efforts, one area in which there have been significant, though often small-scale, advances? The spirit of the conference indicated that change must be accelerated at both the policy and community levels.

### **Next steps**

To close the event, the participants tackled the question of next steps. Although many found it tempting to consider limited strategies addressing discrete problems in the food system, the dominant sentiment favoured a more integrated and

comprehensive approach to food policy development. As Hedley and Ostry stress in their articles this issue, some of our current problems can be seen as products of a historically limited approach to policy development in the food sector.

A more holistic approach, however, would require a demanding process. Some participants had been part of difficult efforts in the 1970s to create a national food policy. A few are currently involved in the federal/provincial National Food Policy Framework, the most recent attempt to move forward on these themes. Many had participated in numerous consultations on smaller, but related, topics that had ended in disappointment. Several thought we must attempt, once again, a long and thorough consultation with as many sectors as possible to seek a national consensus.

But, as one participant stated, an inclusive process would require a facility the size of Toronto's SkyDome. Given a strong desire expressed to move on to implementation, one that permits short term actions while the longer term plan is unfolding, would there be a different way of working? Could we put 15-20 people around a table to draft a detailed national food policy and then circulate and modify it in way that included input from all relevant stakeholders?

Variations on this approach have been used by commodity organizations and sectors to develop national-level strategic plans. For this purpose, a small group that covers a wide (but not complete) range of sectors and expertise would be funded to draft a national food policy that attempts to balance all the interests and potential tradeoffs. Their task would also include setting out the strategic interventions needed to move the policy forward. To make the effort substantial, they would have to highlight the changes to existing programmes, policies and regulations that would advance a comprehensive food policy. Then they would circulate their draft widely, actively solicit feedback, and revise. This might require numerous rounds, perhaps even a dozen drafts, until it appeared a consensus was emerging. Ultimately, if sufficient numbers of organizations and institutions were prepared to endorse it at the end, it would have life.

The task, then, is not just to think differently about food, but perhaps also to think differently about food policy development. During the final session, one participant laid a modest sum of money on the table to start the development process. Who will take up the challenge?

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, policy statements from Agriculture and Agrifood Canada.

<sup>2</sup> The session addressed the following 5 topics:

Can we improve nutritional health at an affordable price?

Can we produce sufficient food and protect the environment at the same time?

Can we improve domestic economic development opportunities in the food system without breaking international trade rules?

Can we better support farmers financially and keep prices reasonable for low-income consumers?

Can fish and seafood remain an important part of the diet without depleting the resource?

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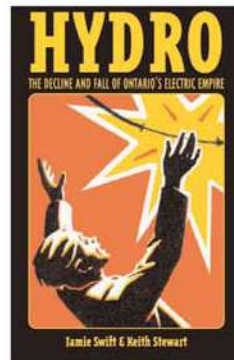
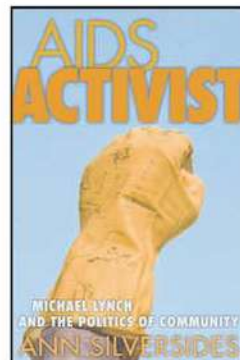
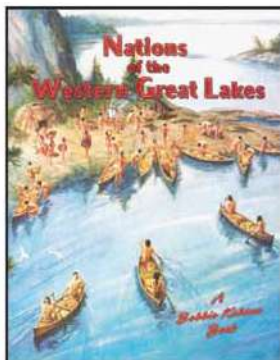
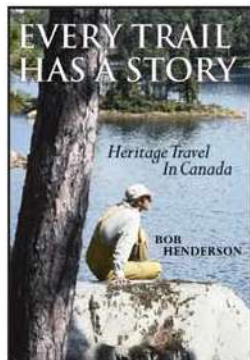
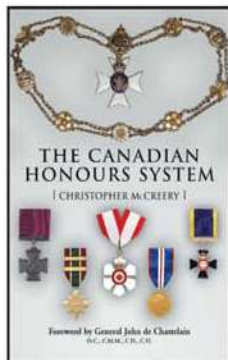


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POUR UNE POLITIQUE ALIMENTAIRE CANADIENNE



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