

## Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

### Pre-budget consultations 2012

## Food Secure Canada

### Responses

#### 1. Economic Recovery and Growth

*Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?*

Please note that all of our recommendations have been drawn from Resetting the Table: A People's Food Policy for Canada, which is available on our website, along with more detailed background papers: [www.foodsecurecanada.org](http://www.foodsecurecanada.org). Unfortunately, due to the fact that we were only made aware of this consultation in the midst of summer holidays, we were unable to undertake a more in-depth consultation with our members. However, we would be happy to provide more details, or to suggestions from our membership across the country, as well as to testify before the Committee at hearings prior to the next budget. Food is a vitally important issue to Canadians and policy coherence would require careful thought amongst several federal departments (Health, Agriculture and AgriFood, Environment, International Trade, Fisheries and Oceans, etc). Ultimately what is required is a national food policy, which of course cannot be initiated strictly through a budget consultation. However, it would be appropriate that the next federal budget allocate some resources to bringing different stakeholders together to determine a process by which such a national food policy could be adopted in collaboration with the provinces and territories, as well civil society organizations interested in these questions. Some of the measures we suggest for economic recovery: -enact a federal poverty prevention and elimination strategy featuring a guaranteed livable income for all Canadians. -ensure viability of local economies by encouraging local and sustainable food choices and eliminating administrative and bureaucratic barriers to market entry for small-scale producers and businesses -less dependence on international trade in agricultural policy and more focus on local and national food needs and markets. -offer federal incentives for local and fairly produced food at through procurement policies at public institutions such as schools, hospitals, federal offices. -support indigenous food sovereignty and move to justly resolve land claims as well protect land allocations for traditional hunting, gathering and fishing activities by indigenous peoples.

#### 2. Job Creation

*As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?*

-stimulate viable local economies in food including by increasing access and support to urban agriculture -reform the attractiveness of farm-sector jobs by supporting small farms (where young farmers and new farmers often start out); providing farmer training programs in rural and urban communities along with measures such as partial student loan forgiveness for those going into farming; work with new immigrants who have farming and food production experience to help them find a place on the land; and implement a retirement savings plan for farmers. Also, policy should provide effective "carrots and sticks" to promote the uptake of ecological, sustainable agriculture. -prevent the current decrease in small-scale, sustainable fishing jobs by prioritizing independent family fishers, owner-operator fleets, and fishing with the lowest impact gear type. Where quotas exist, especially quotas that

are meant to be sold to the highest bidder, measures should be taken to develop strict transferability clauses that protect fisheries and marine ecosystems and ensure that these are kept within coastal communities. -greater support for civil society organizations involved in food education, advocacy, justice and sustainability.

### **3. Demographic Change**

*What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?*

-tackle dwindling number of family farms and ensure that opportunities are created for new young farmers and that appropriate financial support is available, in collaboration with organizations working to support new and existing farmers. (see above). -Strengthen rural economies with supports for sustainable and innovative economic development (green energy, local living) and identify food as a priority sector for small business development and employment training -policy success on agriculture should be defined by net farm income rather than by level of exports and farmers need a retirement savings plan. -ecological agriculture provides the best long-term guarantee of being able to meet the nutrition needs of an aging population. -building a secure food future requires that we begin early: the federal government should create a nationally-funded Children and Food Strategy (including school meal programs, school gardens and food literacy programmes) to ensure that all children have access to healthy food.

### **4. Productivity**

*With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?*

Increased productivity in the agri-food sector cannot come at the expense of environmental and social sustainability. Therefore, the government should

- provide infrastructure and support for research and post-secondary training in food production that reflects the diversity of rural and remote bio-regions and is inclusive of a range of food sources (e.g., traditional or forest food) and non-industrial production methods.
- Strengthen rural economies with supports for sustainable and innovative economic development initiatives (e.g., green energy, local living economy initiatives).
- GM crops should be phased out and no further approvals should be awarded.

### **5. Other Challenges**

*With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?*

(1) Family farms and new farmers. It is simply very difficult to make ends meet due to the lack of sustained support for new farmers, organic farmers and small family farms --all of which are vital to our ongoing food security as well as to viable rural communities. Specific programmes need to be designed, in full consultation with representative organizations and experts, to meet the needs of farmers. (2)Low-income Canadians. Roughly two million Canadians are food insecure -- an unacceptable situation in a country as wealthy as Canada. Appropriate income supports and a guaranteed minimum income are essential to ending this situation. (3) Small and medium enterprises and coops that are seeking to use sustainable and local food face unfair competition from international trade and large conglomerates. These SMEs play a vital economic role that deserves more federal support and attention.