



This brief is connected to the [sustainable food systems policy brief](#) one of a series produced by the [Building Back Better Post-COVID-19 Task Force](#), a group of experts affiliated to the [Canadian Commission for UNESCO](#) and its UNESCO Chairs Network. Their goal is to bring together sustainable economic recovery ideas to make our communities stronger in a post-COVID-19 world. The series highlights how responding to the COVID-19 crisis through adaptive and strategic infrastructure investments can preserve critical ecosystems, increase the use of green infrastructure, and protect regional resources and distribution systems. These infrastructures can meet basic human needs and improve human health, while fostering long-term community resilience, well-being and sustainable employment. The suggestions offered in this series support Canada's commitments to the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and position the country as a world leader in developing new economies based on environmental sustainability.

INTEGRATED GOVERNANCE: SUPPORTING FOOD POLICY GROUPS IN CANADA

In this policy brief, we consider the opportunities for coordinated policy within and across food policy groups to enable a sustainable recovery after the COVID-19 crisis and to improve Canada's ability to respond to future shocks. Food policy groups provide the structures needed to encourage post-COVID recovery strategies that work for communities,

families and grassroots organizations active on the front lines of hunger. This brief therefore aligns with the federal government's development of a [Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council](#), by highlighting the importance of models that encourage place-based, collaborative decision making.

Canada's food systems are complex and the links that connect eaters with growers are not always easily understood. Making nutritious food accessible for [the millions of Canadians that experience food insecurity](#) can therefore be difficult. To create structures that foster healthy environmental outcomes, resilient ecosystems, and fair working conditions, communities have come together to form local food policy groups (including food policy councils, food strategies, food plans, etc.). From coast to coast to coast, food policy groups have become important spaces where cities and members of civil society come together for collaborative and place-based governance. They generally serve [four key functions](#):

- to convene discussions on food issues;
- to create space for collaboration across sectors and geographies;
- to inform and advance policy; and
- to support enabling structures for new or existing programs.

Food policy groups range from autonomous bodies to those embedded in municipal or regional governments, all working to create space for policy innovation that acknowledges the need for community-led solutions.

... Food policy groups provide the structures needed to encourage post-COVID recovery strategies that work for communities, families and grassroots organizations active on the front lines of hunger

The Centre for a Livable Future, based out of Johns Hopkins University, supports the Food Policy Networks, which comprises [over 350 food policy councils across the US and Canada](#), and since March

2020, Canadian food policy groups are supported by the [Food Communities Network](#), a pan-Canadian organization that supports knowledge-sharing, innovative policy spaces, and local food champions. By tackling questions of both systemic reform and immediate action, food policy groups act as a collaborative space to deal with issues of food insecurity, community development and urban/peri-urban/rural planning through a food systems lens. Throughout the pandemic, food policy groups in [the United States](#) and [Canada](#) have partnered to create responsive solutions to local demand. To build a more robust network of Canadian food policy groups, the following elements must be considered:

REPRESENTATION

Every individual will have unique lived experiences with food based on their race, ethnicity, religion, income, age, gender, and sexuality, among other aspects of identity. The representation of a food policy group needs to reflect all parts of the community and food system, ensuring there is diverse representation across identities and geographies (e.g. communities, neighborhoods, boroughs).

Examples of Representation	
The Gathering and the Toronto Youth Food Policy Council	For example, the Toronto Food Policy Council works to empower youth through meaningful inclusion and provides a dedicated communications platform, the Gathering . The Toronto Youth Food Policy Council, as an entity of the Toronto Food Policy Council, is a space for the next generation to shape and lead food systems.
Cultivating Change with Food Secure Canada	Food Secure Canada advances transformative food systems thinking and advocates for food policy groups, with representative leadership on its board from across Canada. Food Secure Canada's Indigenous Circle space and recent conference, Cultivating Change , highlight the intersections between food systems, anti-racism, decolonization, and environmental

	justice movements as well as the need for action.
--	---

Those most affected by food systems should be central to food governance discussions at all scales, including workers, youth, Indigenous Peoples and racialized communities. Vulnerable, racialized workers continue to occupy essential roles across the food system (from fields to food processing plants to retail and service sectors). Their protection must be seen as essential and a priority in governance discussions. Youth can also play a critical role in policy development and building governance structures that support their inclusion and empowerment is necessary. Food policy groups must connect with and support Indigenous food sovereignty actors to work as allies to ensure co-governance wherever possible.

Making sure a local food system responds to the needs of its community is no easy task. The recent development of Montreal's Food Council shows the [multitude of factors](#) (including transportation, income disparities within and across communities, and land use planning) that must be considered when crafting responsive policy. While there are multiple interconnected opportunities, there are also [significant gaps within policy planning](#), namely addressing systemic and historical structures within community food planning. Deeper solutions to these challenges can be enabled by exploring barriers to access, creating space and agency for marginalized voices, and actively seeing food policy as a central element in urban-peri-urban-rural planning.

... Food policy groups must connect with and support Indigenous food sovereignty actors to work as allies to ensure co-governance wherever possible

With respect to membership, determining the scope and length of each member's mandate from the start and re-evaluating regularly helps build continuity and clarity for those involved. Eaters, land use planners,

urban/peri-urban rural/ growers, food workers, distributors, retailers, and community providers should all be part of planning food landscapes.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND MULTI-SCALAR CONNECTIONS

The work of food policy groups at local, provincial, and national levels can be integrative, breaking the siloed approach to policy development. These groups can bridge differences in geographic and jurisdictional divides to connect urban/ peri-urban/ rural systems to [the broader foodshed](#) and local planning. Multi-scalar and collaborative efforts are key to reducing the theoretical and practical distance between urban, peri-urban, and rural food production and governance spaces.

Intergovernmental and Multi-Scalar Connections Examples	
Proposing a Pan-EU Food Policy	A proposal by the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES) shows the complexity and interconnectivity of food policy with all areas of government. The proposal calls for a pan-European Union food policy council.
Joined-Up Food Policy for Canada	The Joined-Up Food Policy team outlines ideas and challenges for creating more equitable, just, sustainable and connected food systems in Canada.
Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration	Launched in December of 2020, the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration brings sub-jurisdictional governance partners together to create local action of food systems and climate change.

Healthy food and equitable access to nutritious diets is the responsibility of various levels and departments across scales of government. These efforts could be linked to and support local food policy groups to help create a foundation of collaboration and connectivity to achieve more sustainable outcomes. The interlocking of initiatives

that are seen as independent will allow for resilience in both practice and policy. In Canada, there are several examples of mutually reinforcing policy:

- implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals,
- development of the national Climate Change Strategy,
- recent revamping of the Canada Food Guide,
- announcement of a Food Policy for Canada,
- renegotiation of the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, and
- preparation for post-COVID recovery plans.

The Ministers of Infrastructure and Communities, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; Indigenous Services; Economic Development and Official Languages; Diversity and Inclusion and Youth; Health; and Intergovernmental Affairs all have roles to play in integrating policy at the federal level, along with their provincial colleagues, and municipal counterparts. The [Joined-Up Food Policy](#) team at York University, outlines ideas and challenges for creating more equitable, just, sustainable and connected food systems in Canada.

Recognizing the potential for active collaboration at the federal level, in 2019, the government announced its [Food Policy for Canada](#), including a new national governance body – [the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council](#). Ideally this body will be supportive of the Food Communities Network, and provincial and territorial networks (currently supported by Food Secure Canada). Scholars have argued for [a truly pan-Canadian network](#), and Food Secure Canada has illustrated that in order to be effective and equitable national policy processes need to represent all of Canada, not just a single or dominant narrative. With the announcement of [Canada's national food policy council](#), the federal government should reflect these

... Multi-scalar and collaborative efforts are key to reducing the theoretical and practical distance between urban, peri-urban, and rural food production and governance spaces

ideas of inclusion in both decisions and forums for discussions.

RESOURCED AND RESILIENT

Resilience requires a multi-level set of resources that can amplify the experiences of locally integrated food policy groups through allocated support (e.g. funding for local capacity-building and integrated planning) as well a responsive, sustained commitment to the network by provincial, territorial or national partners. In so doing, building on the information and resources that exist 'on-the-ground' offers innovative directions for planning and coordination.

Resourced and Resilient Examples	
Food Communities Network	Establishing a network of community-led governance groups that connect to representative and responsive policy frameworks at the provincial and national level is not easy. It will take time, persistence, and sustained resources to develop the infrastructure necessary to build a strong Food Communities Network .
Lande and the Réseau des fermiers de famille	Lande , in Montreal, draws on available land-use data at the municipal level to identify vacant lots and provide support for transforming these spaces into community gardens and growing initiatives. Information on local farms and interest in local purchasing contributed to the success of the Réseau des fermiers de famille (Family Farmers Network), which enable urban residents to order directly from and connect directly to farmers located in local rural areas.
Butler Urban Farm	In Kamloops, British Columbia , a private landowner has come together with local food advocates and the Kamloops Food Policy Council to create an urban garden that provides a bounty of fresh produce for the community. The

	project has also given new life to a previously underused plot of urban space – making it a place of hope for many and a vibrant food landscape for others.
--	---

As part of the renegotiations of the Canadian Agricultural Partnership and the development of post-COVID recovery plans, governments can consider providing explicit financial and human resource support for the continued operations of food policy groups and the supporting network. Local food policy groups rely on a multiplicity of available tools, data, and information resources that foster resilience through networked online resources. And these, in turn, foster innovative solutions on the part of local and regional partners. These initiatives can inspire, connect, or scale-out to work with other communities, regional, provincial, or national partners to foster a collaborative, sustained policy environment.

SUMMARY

There is much work underway, and more to do, in the building of a better tomorrow. From inclusive governance to sustained investment, there must be a commitment at all governance levels to create this collective vision. This includes working to build more resilient regional food infrastructure, creating stronger social support programming, and harnessing the power of public procurement for change. With a significant amount of investment up for negotiation, now is the time to leverage the expertise and community experience behind our food policy groups. Innovative and collaborative solutions have shown to have incredible impact on communities. By building collaborative governance systems, Canada can support a more resilient future and a more robust recovery that fosters an equitable and representative future.

... now is the time to leverage the expertise and community experience behind our food policy groups

CONTRIBUTORS

Johanna Wilkes, PhD Candidate, [Balsillie School of International Affairs](#), Wilfrid Laurier University

Anna-Liisa Aunio, Professor, [Department of Sociology, Dawson College](#), Dawson Food Justice and Sustainability Research Hub

Patricia Ballamingie, Professor, [Geography and Environmental Studies](#), Carleton University

Claire Perttula, M.I.P.P. Graduate, [UNESCO Chair in Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies](#), Wilfrid Laurier University

Heather Reid, Researcher, [UNESCO Chair in Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies](#), Wilfrid Laurier University

Alison Blay-Palmer, [UNESCO Chair in Food, Biodiversity and Sustainability Studies](#), Wilfrid Laurier University