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Advisory Council on the
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**PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women
Input into the Food Awareness Act
November 20, 2018**

1. What information about food stood out to you the most and why?

“Food awareness” is a strange phrase, and we are not confident we know what it means. However, we would note that people are never more aware of food than when it is lacking and when they are hungry.

The information that more than 15% of Islanders experience some level of food insecurity stands out to us from this report. We know from research by the PROOF research team led by Dr. Valerie Tarasuk that consistently over the last number of years, between a fifth and a quarter of Island children live in households that worry about having enough food. This is a shocking statistic and should be our first concern. We also know that a high percentage of Prince Edward Island food bank users are workers who do not make enough income to make ends meet (low-income workers, sometimes referred to as the “working poor.”)

If children are food insecure, it is because the adults in their households have insufficient income to meet basic needs. We know that food security, work, wages, and income are all affected by gender and that there are differences in income between women as a group and men as a group on Prince Edward Island. The contrast is most stark when we look at lone-parent families. In 2011 in PEI, woman-led lone-parent families made up 13% of all Island families. Women led 80% of lone-parent families. The median income for all census families in PEI for 2013 was \$70,27, compared to \$77,400 for couple families and just \$37,230 for lone-parent families. (For this and more data, please see https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/women_in_pei_2015_2.pdf.)

Canada's "Food Island" can only wear that brand with any amount of accuracy or pride if all Islanders have food security first.

2. What are PEI's greatest strengths, challenges and opportunities for improving food awareness on PEI?

Strengths	Challenges	Opportunities
Proximity to farms and gardens and to waterways and ocean for fish and seafood harvest.	Widespread food insecurity.	Measures proposed in the new Poverty Reduction Strategy that could reduce food insecurity.
Prominence of agriculture, fisheries, and food production.	Unequal access to adequate nutritious and healthful food.	Social and physical infrastructure could be expanded to support local food systems.
Cultural and familial traditions strongly associated with food.	Corporatized food systems that challenge local food systems.	Being an island, we can be an incubator for new ideas and use our separation from the mainland as an advantage. In the past, the seed potato industry used our <i>islandness</i> , as did experiments with bio-secure livestock production. In the future, it could look like an all-organic Island or a dairy-producing region with specific controls that can't be achieved in a larger, more integrated region.
Very high-quality restaurants and culinary sector for those who can afford it.	High level of export of food means that people think of food grown here as being not for Islanders.	
Commitment in many households and communities to maintaining or learning traditional food skills such as canning and preserving, home cooking, and more.	Sandy soil prone to erosion and challenging to enrich with organic materials to keep it healthy and productive.	

Strengths	Challenges	Opportunities
Food as a significant historical and contemporary way of integrating newcomers (prominence of restaurant and catering businesses and corner stores as traditional first businesses for first-generation immigrants to PEI).	Reliance on groundwater for both human use and for agriculture use.	
Few "food deserts" where people are unable to access food in their neighbourhoods or communities	Exposure to industrial pesticides and other pollutants associated with food production with negative health and social effects.	
	Lack of sufficient protection (especially policy protections and enforcement of protections) of the land and waters that grow or sustain food.	
	Short growing and harvesting season increasingly unpredictable as a result of climate change and changing weather patterns (for example, late frosts in June and heavy rain throughout October and November).	
	Reliance of food distributed from off-Island hubs to grocery stores just in time for sale, leaving us vulnerable to food shortages if anything closes the Confederation Bridge for more than a few days.	

3. What is your vision for food awareness in PEI?

We envision a Prince Edward Island...

- where calling ourselves a "Food Island" follows everyone achieving food security;
- where food banks and soup kitchens are not required because everyone has enough to eat and the means to prepare and store the food they need;
- where we recognize the value of food beyond its economic value: food's role in socialization, community-building, and celebration and ceremony;

- where access to adequate healthful and nutritional food and time and resources to prepare it are part of population health initiatives;
- where food producers (farmers and fishers) are able to earn a livable income from producing food;
- where we value and protect the land, sea, water, and air that sustain the growth of healthy plants and animals;
- where the first priority is a sustainable local food system and imports and exports follow and flow from that; and
- where Mi'kmaw food knowledge and tradition and Mi'kmaw understanding of the ecosystem that sustains humans inform decision-making about the environment and food's sacred place within it.

3.1 What steps are needed to achieve your vision for improving food awareness in PEI?

- The most important cornerstone of improving food awareness is reducing poverty in PEI. A secondary goal would be to reduce income inequality: a community where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer is a place where food inequality also creates divisions and inequity.
- A population health approach that includes food and is rooted in the social determinants of health and principles of health equity will help to prevent and address chronic disease. The Chief Public Health Office can be usefully engaged in food awareness.
- Valuing food means valuing the environment that produces it and the humans that eat it. An integrated vision for food on PEI would break down silos between people and environment, would acknowledge and address inequality among groups of people, and would provide for the present and the future.

4. How can we ensure continued thriving and resilient food economies in PEI?

Here, we will mention two things that are central to the key points we have raised above about the relationship between food and income:

- Social assistance food rates that meet or exceed the real, research-based cost of a basket of basic nutritious foods.
- Higher wages in all sectors, built up from the base of a higher minimum wage that is indexed to the cost of living.

5. What are your thoughts on designating a week to celebrate, promote, and create awareness about PEI food-related topics? What topics should be focused on during the week?

A full week to celebrate, promote, and create awareness about food seems a bit much and could use resources that might be better spent on meeting the needs outlined above.

6. What are your thoughts on designating a specific day to celebrate, promote, and create awareness about PEI food-related topics? What topics should be focused on during the day?

A specific day to celebrate food seems more reasonable than a week, but there was variety of Council opinions on this point. One suggestion was that if there is a food awareness day, the day should connect with and enhance a day with existing food traditions: Thanksgiving, for example, or Mothers' Day when many Islanders traditionally celebrate local food with a lobster supper. On the other hand, tying a food awareness day to an already existing celebration could result in people who are food secure going about their festivities as usual while those who are food insecure have their marginalization doubled, by being excluded from a food tradition and from a Food Awareness Day connected to the food tradition. Instead, this Council member would prefer to see a stand-alone day where initiatives and the challenges faced by food insecure people are the sole focus.

If there is a food awareness day added to the calendar of locally recognized events, the excellent and ground-breaking work of the PEI Women's Institute to initiate a buy-local campaign before these were common should be celebrated on the first food awareness day.

7. What are your thoughts on encouraging PEI organizations to purchase and serve local food?

The Province, municipalities, and publicly funded institutions should all work on local procurement policies and, additionally, scrutinize trade agreements we are party to ensure they do not limit our ability to put priority on buying local food.

The PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women strongly supports the work of the PEI Home and School Federation to press for an Island-wide free school lunch program for all students in public schools, with hot and healthful meals based on fresh local ingredients.

7.1 What types of goals could the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries establish for organizations to increase their purchasing of local food?

In support of local procurement, the model of a community food hub has come up as something worth exploring for PEI. We would like the Department of Agriculture to explore the feasibility of a pilot project **food hub**.

A huge part of food security is knowing how to **grow your own food**. Balcony gardening and a seed bank (vegetable seeds for free) were two elements of success for a project by the Native Council CPEI project. This could be done island-wide to ensure access to healthy food right at home.

The Department of Agriculture could also support food awareness through transformative and visionary changes:

- by expanding the understanding of “agriculture” to include local foodways as well as, and in some cases ahead of, agribusiness;

- by ensuring widespread access to land and sea for food gathering and food production for all Island residents;
- to explore creative ways of using of marginal or underused land for small-scale food production; and
- by funding and supporting programs that are year-round or multi-year rather than short-term or one-off, to allow for evaluation of results and develop sustainability for successful projects.

A Council member raised the example of a City of Charlottetown initiative worth watching as a possible model that could spread: planting of a “foraging wall” of 150 food plants in an unused corner of Orlebar Neighbourhood Park. The food that grows will be harvested by people in the neighbourhood. This initiative expands the successful municipal project of establishing neighbourhood vegetable planters in municipal parks.

Finally, the Department of Agriculture has done an admirable job of integrate **gender and diversity analysis** into planning, programs, and policy. We commend this work and would like to see it continued and built upon.

8. If your comments are part of a group discussion, please identify the group, region, and how many individuals participated in the discussion.

This is a response from the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women, a nine-member arms-length from government agency appointed by government to provide advice on issues that relate to the status of Prince Edward Island Women. Seven members and three staff members from communities across PEI participated in an email discussion to contribute to this submission.