

PRINCE  
EDWARD  
ISLAND



*Food Security Network*

**Submission Regarding a Food Awareness Act for Prince Edward Island  
November 30, 2018**

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

The depth of food insecurity in Prince Edward Island, even though it's not exactly news, always stands out. The fact that one child in five lives in a household affected by food insecurity is a sobering statistic. As a society we have failed to address the root cause, which is lack of income.

We were also struck by what was not included in the discussion paper:

- The inequality associated with food insecurity – the greatest impacts being felt by families where the sole parent is a woman, by Newcomers to Canada, and by Indigenous individuals and families.
- The precarious situation of some of our Island food producers. The level of debt carried by our farmers, collectively must be calculated into any expression of how well the sector is doing.
- Any mention of the stresses on our land, soil, water and air caused for the most part by industrial agriculture, which has become the predominant model of farming in PEI. The yearly fish kills, the loss of soil and the degradation of soil quality are indications of how serious the problem is.
- The important role migrant workers who come here from the Philippines, Mexico, China, Guatemala and Jamaica every year play. There is little recognition of their contributions, and the ways in which they are made vulnerable by rules such as tied work permits, inadequate access to healthcare coverage, and limited availability of other services in their first language.
- Reliance on food banks and soup kitchens and other charitable efforts – the fact that communities are doing amazing things to help people stave off hunger, and they are doing this in the absence of long-term solutions that address the root cause of food insecurity, which is lack of income.

Finally, the Food Security Network strongly supports the idea of a Local Food Act that would require PEI institutions to procure locally produced food. It seems to us that this should be the focus of the act, and we wonder why the emphasis has been placed on Local Food Awareness.

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

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
We all live close to people who are producing our food, and to people involved at all stages of its processing and distribution.	Food awareness in the form of campaigns such as Burger Love and Fall Flavours are limited to people who can afford to participate. That means people affected by food insecurity often do not benefit.	Community interest in making connections with food producers – commitment to CSAs and shopping at farmers' markets.
An engaged and active community sector, and there is overlap between groups working on environmental protection and groups working on livable income, as well as on food security and other issues.	Glamorization of food . . . focus on culinary experiences and not food as a foundation for good health.	Farm Day in the City and Open Farm Day – events that bring farmers and consumers even closer together.
People in the community who are happy to share their food growing, preparing and preserving skills with others. (PEI Food Exchange, for example)	Hidden (or not-so-hidden) costs: The devastating effects of a model of agriculture that is reliant on chemical inputs, and practices which deplete the soil.	Poverty Reduction Strategy, recently released by Department of Family & Human Services – acknowledgement of unacceptable levels of food insecurity.
A tradition of excellence in food production, skilled and experienced farmers and fishers, opportunities for mentoring new generations.	When so many people are struggling to feed themselves and their families “food awareness” could be seen as a luxury.	Multi-layered, recently developed National Food Strategy, could be a focus for conversations around food.
A new generation of food producers committed to farming sustainably and on a smaller scale using alternative markets (farmers' markets, CSAs) that connects them with consumers.	People working in the system – from migrant and other workers in fish processing and in agriculture to grocery store clerks – are often in precarious, poorly paid positions.	Charlottetown Food Council – bringing together passionate people with different interests in and expertise with the food system.
A strong history of home economics in PEI, centred at UPEI, led by forward-thinking women. (Department of	Focus on production for the export market above all else, resulting in over-reliance on industrial-scale production,	School foods initiatives, conversations with students, who are excited about possibilities for healthier

Applied Human Science, presently).	monoculture and heavy doses of chemicals.	more locally produced food in their schools.
	Trade agreements that weaken supply management by allowing more imported dairy products, with negative effects on Island dairy farmers, and may interfere with our ability to put into place policies re: institutional procurement	

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

This is a good question!

Food awareness should encompass the whole system, from the ways in which food is produced or harvested, and its effects on the land, water, wildlife and soils, through its processing, distribution and consumption. The whole food system, including waste and disposal. Also included, all of the people who provide the labour and the conditions under which they work.

Food awareness should include awareness of the negative impacts of a system dominated by a small number of multinational corporations. And the contribution that the food system makes to GHG emissions worldwide and therefore climate change. Especially the significant impact of industrial agriculture, and a system that is so focused on producing food for export to countries around the world.

Food awareness should take into account all of the traditions of all of the people living in PEI and recognize that food has spiritual and cultural meaning in all of our communities. Our vision for food awareness would respect the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaw people, the ways in which this land has been used to gather, cultivate and hunt for food.

Food awareness is about recognizing and striving to understand the root causes of food insecurity. It is also about developing strategies to reduce food insecurity, based on social justice, not charity.

Prince Edward Island undoubtedly produces very high quality, healthy food. And celebrating that fact is a great idea. Also celebrating workers, and the producers who are making substantial efforts to preserve soil, water, forests – the ecosystem in general, would be a great idea. The vision should include celebrating the small farmers who make healthy, often sustainably produced food available in farmers' markets and through community-supported agriculture. As well as the people in our communities who, often as volunteers, support farmers' markets in so many Island communities. And those small general stores in rural communities that provide an essential service.

BUT maybe we could shift the discussion, to a *Local Food Act*, the vision of which would be a more sustainable, locally based food system. In which every person regardless of where they live, has access to healthy, food, provided by local producers who themselves have a livable income. A vision which accepts that food is sacred, is at the centre of many of our cultural traditions and in many ways at the centre of our communities.

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

Public consultation. While we welcome the opportunity to complete an online survey, we are aware that this type of consultation is quite exclusive. The subject deserves a thorough process for meaningful community consultation. Perhaps a series of kitchen table talks, where people can talk to one another. This is so important, the opportunity not just to share ones' ideas, but also to hear what is important to others.

Achieving the vision for improving food awareness in PEI has less to do with creating legislation and more to do with talking to people – providing opportunities for people to gather and to learn together. Farm Day in the City and Open Farm Day do this to some extent, but deeper conversations need to be had – chances to explore together possibilities for a stronger local food system.

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

- Eliminate poverty, so that everyone can afford a healthy diet. Increase social assistance rates and the minimum wage to a livable level.
- Make support for family-sized farms the centre of agriculture and economic policy.
- Eliminate the loopholes in the Lands Protection Act that seem to be making it possible for large corporate farms to control far more land than the Act allows for. This puts small farms, which are big contributors to rural economies, at a disadvantage.
- When trade deals are negotiated, PEI should strive to protect the ability of the provincial government to create policies around local food & procurement. And speak up against provisions in trade agreements that interfere with supply management.
- Develop and implement targets for procurement of locally produced food by all public institutions.
- Create a universal school nutrition program based on locally produced food.

### **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?**

Our food system is fundamental to the economy of PEI and the health of all Island residents. It intersects with labour, social services, education and many other “departments”. A week of events or activities seems, on one hand, a little much. Is there a risk, in designating a week, that for the rest of the year, PEI food-related topics get little attention? Would it be better to spread events and activities out over the course of the year? Whatever the topic, activities should take place at the grassroots, in community halls instead of restaurants, with local community food producers, instead of celebrity chefs.

**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?**

An annual celebration of efforts to promote local food seems reasonable. Topics could be different each year. Successes in school food programs; a day celebrating 4H or Women's Institute (the original promoter of Local Food).

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

Absolutely, this needs to happen, and schools, colleges, universities, corrections centres, nursing homes and hospitals need to be included. But it needs to go beyond "encouraging". We would like to see targets – a requirement that each institution purchase a specific proportion of their food locally.

This is important for several reasons – as a secure market for local producers, and as a means of ensuring that students, patients and others have access to good quality, healthy food.

It should include a universal school nutrition program that provides healthy breakfasts and lunches to students. When calculating the costs of such a program, its benefits in terms of health and impacts on student learning should be taken into account.

Requiring institutions to purchase certain amounts of locally produced food may require public investment in infrastructure to process some of the food that currently would only be available on a seasonal basis.

The PEI government should aim to protect its ability to implement policies and targets for local procurement when trade agreements such as the CETA and USMCA are negotiated.

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

Do we have baseline data? The first step might be to determine how much local food is currently purchased by institutions. (And make this information public.)

Has there been research to determine the capacity of local producers, and processors to supply our institutions?

How do food suppliers fit into a plan to increase purchasing of local food?

The goals would depend on these things. In the end, the goals should be developed with producers' input as well as input from institutions and food suppliers or distributors, and the goals should be high enough to offer some security (to producers).

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

