

# 1. NURTURING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN CANADA

Nettie Wiebe and Kevin Wipf

The evening news coming into Canadian homes may carry stories of food riots in Mozambique, flooding of farmland in Pakistan or hunger in war-torn Sudan. But there are seldom any stories on domestic food shortages, food related street-riots or major problems with Canadian food supplies. We may occasionally come across news about how many Canadians are now lining up at food banks, but instead of being a story about hungry kids or anxious families suffering food insecurity, these stories are usually framed as economic hardships, rather than as failures in the food system.

The sporadic stories specifically about our food are usually about food safety issues or production problems caused by adverse weather or diseases. The former, such as the 2007 incident where listeriosis-tainted meat from a Maple Leaf plant caused twenty-two deaths, evoked a flurry of interest in that brand and that plant. It was handled with a recall of the contaminated meat, explanations of official regulatory protocols and reassuring publicity about the efficacy of those protocols. It didn't provoke widespread critical examination of the Canadian food system or even of the specific dangers posed by a highly concentrated meat-processing industry in Canada. Food production failures due to droughts, early frosts, too much rain, or diseases are not so much about food as about farm economic hardships, where it is clear that the lost production will be replaced from elsewhere and farmers will deal with their losses. The un-wary eater might well be lulled into believing that all is well in the current Canadian food system.

A more careful consideration reveals a much more complex and troubling story behind the headlines. While the glowing reports of massive and increasing food exports from Canada indicate that we are producing far more food than is needed here, the data from food banks and social agencies reveal that there are growing numbers of citizens who are experiencing food shortages and food insecurity. Food Banks Canada (2010) records an increase of ten percent in food bank use since 1999 with provinces such as Alberta experiencing a 61 percent increase in food bank use since 2008; almost 2.5 million Canadians are classified as food insecure (People's Food Policy Project 2011: 1).

There are other signs of a system in trouble as well: while agrologists,

researchers and farmers proudly publicize increasing crop yields and production efficiencies, on-farm revenues continue to trail behind expenses so that the majority of Canadian farms rely on off-farm income to support the farm family and its food producing operation. Furthermore, although the supermarket shelves are loaded with a vast variety of products, the biological diversity of agricultural production is rapidly diminishing (ETCgroup 2009). Also troubling and a key characteristic of the current Canadian food system is the fact that much of what is actually eaten by Canadians comes from elsewhere in the world. Our dinner plates are loaded up from a global smorgasbord.

The global nature of our food system is illustrated in a practical and revealing way by an exercise that we invite you, the reader, to undertake. The assignment is simply to choose some item, or at most a few items, from your everyday diet and research information about its origins, travel, farm-gate pricing, production, processing and retail price. This may appear to be a small, easy task but it invariably turns out to be complex, time-consuming and indeed, almost impossible to complete. Most foods have travelled long and circuitous routes between field and plate; these routes are very difficult to trace. Grapes from Chile, frozen lamb from New Zealand or broccoli from Mexico have travelled thousands of kilometers, often making stops in various warehouses along the way, before arriving on a Canadian dinner table. Such a research project will yield many insights and a good deal of largely fragmented information; it will clearly demonstrate that our food system is complex, opaque and part of a global system.

Because large parts of the Canadian food system are thoroughly integrated into a global food system, the challenges and vulnerabilities of that global system are inescapably ours as well. The sudden spikes in food prices that provoke riots elsewhere create damaging price vicissitudes and real hardships for low-income families here. Although food costs represent less than 12 percent of the average Canadian family income (CFA 2011), food insecurity is a real and growing problem in Canada as food prices rise while incomes stagnate, jobs become less secure and even middle-class household financial security is threatened. In this context, increases in the grocery bills often force changes to food choices, affecting health and well-being.

Foreign commodity and currency speculation and trade disruptions can make or break whole sectors of our agriculture system, displacing food production, processing and farm families in their wake. For example, the increased value of the Canadian dollar compared to its U.S. counterpart, combined with an increase in feed grain costs and changes in country of origin labelling regulations in the United States, have contributed to the collapse and/or consolidation of much of the western Canadian hog industry. As elsewhere in the world, climate change threatens to affect weather and water in the food-growing areas of Canada. Meanwhile, shortages of oil are

projected, which certainly cannot be ignored by production systems that rely as heavily on oil as Canadian agriculture does.

Many of the looming threats to human life on the planet are linked to and aggravated, if not generated, by the global food system. The most obvious is the suffering and death due to hunger, malnutrition and attendant diseases. The increased food production garnered from high-input, monocultural agricultural production systems and liberalized trade regimes is failing to resolve this human tragedy, with over one billion people in the world still suffering from hunger (FAO 2010). At the same time, industrialized, export-oriented agriculture, which characterizes much of the Canadian food system, is degrading soils, polluting water, denuding forested areas and undermining biodiversity in fundamental and life-threatening ways.

Our recent book *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature and Community* describes and analyzes some of the key problems of the current global food system and explores the important alternative of food sovereignty (Wittman, Desmarais and Wiebe 2010). Food sovereignty offers a radical alternative to our current Canadian food system. In this second volume, like its predecessor, we invite citizens not only to better understand the complexities, dangers and challenges confronting Canadians at our own dinner tables but also to understand the potential for solutions. Our objective is to provoke everyone who eats not only to grapple with the destruction that our menus are visiting on our communities, our environments, Canadian farming families and our physical and cultural health, but also to actively engage in the exploration of food sovereignty as a viable and sustainable, life-giving alternative.

### Initiating Food Sovereignty

The concept of food sovereignty evolved out of the experience and critical analysis of farming peoples. The inclusion of agriculture in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations, articulated in the World Trade Organization (WTO), put official government stamps on decades of economic policies based on the globalization of a neoliberal, industrial, capital-intensive and corporate-led model of agriculture. This brought rural communities' widespread loss of control over food markets, environments, land and rural cultures into sharp relief. As an alternative to this neoliberal model, peasants, small-scale farmers, farm workers and Indigenous communities formed the transnational agrarian movement, La Vía Campesina (LVC). The National Farmers Union of Canada (NFU) was among the founding members of La Vía Campesina and remains active in the growing movement that now represents 148 organizations from sixty-nine countries.

The term "food sovereignty" was coined at the Second International Assembly of La Vía Campesina in Tlaxcala, Mexico (1996a) to recognize the

political and economic power dimensions inherent in the food and agriculture debate and to take a proactive stance by naming it. Food sovereignty, broadly defined as the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and environments, has emerged as a critical alternative to the dominant neoliberal models for agriculture and trade. The commonly used food security language, which describes “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 2001), ignores the defining power relations that determine production, distribution and consumption patterns within the food system. In order to ensure that sufficient quantities of food are available, the focus shifts to increasing food production and food imports. Not only does this emphasis serve to justify higher-input, more intensive production methods, it discounts who owns and controls (and profits from) those methods. For example, African governments that objected to shipments of genetically modified (GM) corn as food aid during famines in 2002, expressing concerns about contamination of their own seed varieties and about their food safety, were successfully pressured to accept them. Peasant concerns about corporate control over their future seeds, as well as self-sufficiency, affordability and the long-term viability of their Indigenous food production systems, were dismissed in favour of more immediate food security considerations (Manda 2003, Bhatia 2010, Mulvany 2004).

Governments (including Canada’s) and agri-business corporations have pursued food security by promoting increased agricultural trade liberalization and the concentration of food production in the hands of fewer, and larger, agri-business corporations. As Qualman (Chapter 2) illustrates in his discussion of Canadian agriculture and trade policies and their outcomes, Canada has adopted the neoliberal, market-driven agenda for the food system with few modifications or exceptions. Excess production is exported, and often “dumped” — an international trade strategy that places food in targeted export markets at prices below the cost of production with government subsidies covering the producers’ costs. Although Canada has largely opted to saddle farmers with the costs of selling food below the costs of production rather than subsidizing farm incomes, the outcomes in the international arena are the same: market prices are depressed and volatile, and domestic agricultural systems are devastated as farmers cannot compete with the influx of low-priced commodities saturating their local markets. Far from ensuring food security, these policies create widespread food insecurities and vulnerabilities.

These contemporary policies aimed at food security offer no real possibility for changing the existing, inequitable, social, political and economic structures that peasant movements believe are the very causes of food inse-

curity and the social and environmental destruction in the countryside in both the North and the South. To counter these structures and policies, La Vía Campesina (1996a) proposed a radical alternative, one “directly linked to democracy and justice,” that put the control of productive resources (land, water, seeds and natural resources) in the hands of those who produce food. The Tlaxcala Conference defined eleven principles of food sovereignty, all of which were then integrated into La Vía Campesina’s (1996b) Position on Food Sovereignty, presented at the World Food Summit in Rome in November 1996.

Subsequently, La Vía Campesina has worked with other organizations and civil society actors to further elaborate the food sovereignty framework. The concept continues to be broadened, deepened, refined and disseminated widely, as it provokes and shapes debates in important international civil society and international governing agency forums. Strategies and mechanisms for implementing food sovereignty are under ongoing and vigorous discussion. Canadian member organizations of La Vía Campesina, the NFU and L’Union Paysanne in Québec, along with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations and agencies, have participated in these international fora.

As the premise of food sovereignty is that sustainable food production and genuine food security are a function of community-based control over the food system, local, regional and national analysis and strategies are absolutely necessary. This is true for every region and locale around the world. No single global food sovereignty model can be designed and imposed from elsewhere. Indeed, it is the attempt to institute a global management system by transnational corporations, using economic and trade levers, along with the active collusion or imposed acquiescence of governments, that has provoked the urgent need for reorienting policies and reasserting local control, i.e. food sovereignty. Food sovereignty, by definition, must be “home-grown.”

Food sovereignty in Canada requires developing appropriate strategies for change within our own array of unique political, cultural and ecological domains. The vast expanse of Canada entails a great variety of local growing conditions, cultures, political and economic circumstances. Farming and farm policies in Prince Edward Island vary a great deal from those of the Yukon, the Peace River region of Alberta, southern Québec or even its geographically closer region, the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia. It is impossible to describe all of this rich regional and local diversity as well as all of the many rapidly evolving and changing food projects in this one book. Instead, the writers and activists offer a sampling of food sovereignty initiatives that serve as a lens on Canada’s diversity. Their thoughtful and vigorous discussions about food sovereignty, along with the diverse examples of practical initiatives currently underway in Canada, demonstrate the power and potential of a radical and transformative food sovereignty framework.

### Food Sovereignty in Canada: Barriers and Pitfalls

The context for food sovereignty in Canada is particularly challenging on several counts. Firstly, unlike most other regions of the world, much of Canada does not have a long and deeply enscinded history of farming that predates export agriculture. Indigenous food systems were complex, ranging from intensive agriculture in some regions, to mixed farming, hunting and gathering, and intensive fishing in others. These systems were marginalized by the arrival of predominantly European immigrants, who built farming communities, introducing varieties of seeds and domesticated animals from Europe. The vast majority of these communities, with the exception of the very earliest settlements in eastern and central Canada, were created after agriculture was already oriented to providing a limited range of agricultural commodities for export. This history not only shapes what “traditional agriculture” means in our context but also informs the rate and processes of change. Because farming other than for export has relatively shallow roots in much of the country, the shifts to increasingly industrialized forms of production occurred very rapidly. There were fewer deeply rooted histories, traditions and methodologies to overcome.

Second, the rapid and continuing industrialization of agriculture in Canada has run parallel to an equally rapid displacement of farm families. Increased mechanization makes it possible to produce larger volumes of agricultural commodities and to work more land with less labour. Because this requires greater capital investment, the resultant debt loads have increased the financial vulnerability of farm operations. As well, a long-term decline in prices for some of the key grain, meat and horticultural commodities grown in Canada has created a serious cost/price squeeze for Canadian farm families,<sup>1</sup> resulting in a decline in farm numbers. Thus there are fewer and fewer people whose lives and livelihoods are committed to growing food; those who remain have to focus primarily on survival, leaving less time and energy and fewer resources for political participation or resistance. Because of their diminished numbers, farmers’ electoral importance is also diminished and their political clout is thereby greatly reduced.

Third, the migration of people from the land, along with immigration from elsewhere into Canadian cities, has led to an overwhelming population balance in favour of urban Canadians. In 2006, 80 percent of Canada’s population lived in an urban environment, as compared to 62 percent in 1951 (Statistics Canada 2010). This change means that the vast majority of Canadians is entirely reliant on store-bought food with little direct connection to the production of that food. This disconnection from the sources of their food, combined with the distances and complexity of processes which that food has undergone and reinforced through uninformative and sometimes misleading labelling, leaves grocery shoppers with an acute lack of knowl-

edge about their food. In so far as knowledge is power, the preponderance of power in this food equation lies with the corporate players who process and market the items that line grocery store shelves.

A further impediment to Canadian food sovereignty is the dominant self-image that has been perpetuated about our food system. Because of our history of sending shiploads of grain, most notably high quality milling wheat from the prairies, into war-needy Britain or hungry nations elsewhere, we tend to view Canada as “the breadbasket of the world.” Current agriculture export data support the view that Canada’s food system is characterized by high productivity and efficiencies due to our cutting edge technologies (NFU 2003). Each innovation, from new technology such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) for field operations to a new line of chemical inputs or new genetics such as genetically modified canola, is effectively marketed as a potential boost to productivity, with the suggestion, as an added incentive, that failure to adopt it will result in a loss of our competitive advantage in the global marketplace. The fact that the ownership of machinery, seed and chemicals is increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer, consolidated companies is seldom even noted by proponents of these “advances,” let alone critiqued (Qualman 2001).

This relentless pressure to adopt new technologies and increase production in order to protect Canada’s “global leader” reputation is coupled with an equally virulent drive to protect and increase the Canadian agriculture trade advantage. The Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (CUSTA) in 1989 led the way in demonstrating how liberalized agricultural trade could be inscribed into trade agreements designed to increase such trade. These prescriptions for opening borders and decreasing barriers to agricultural trade were extended when Mexico was included in NAFTA (NAFTA 1994) and when they were adopted globally as the blueprint for the WTO (1995). In recent years, a myriad of bilateral trade agreements have also been signed: another fifty such deals are currently under negotiation, including a major Canada-European Trade Agreement (Harris 2010). Key parts of our agriculture system, such as the beef-packing industry, are already out of our hands, while the struggle to hold onto other parts, such as the supply-managed poultry, egg and dairy industries and the marketing of wheat and barley exports, is intensifying. Recent investments in Canadian agricultural land by foreign interests presents another direct challenge to building food sovereignty here (NFU 2010). As foreign and corporate ownership becomes steadily more deeply embedded in all components of our food system, it becomes increasingly more difficult to even imagine taking back control over these resources, markets and policies.

Achieving food sovereignty in Canada hinges on making some fundamental changes in our domestic and trade policies, our diets, our “food cul-

tures,” our view of our place in the wider world, and many of our relationships to each other and our environments. The forces arraigned against Canadian food sovereignty are powerful and wide-ranging. However, as many of the writers in this book demonstrate, the possibilities and momentum for radical transformation are also powerful, and have the added strength of being connected to local, regional, national and global communities.

### Food Sovereignty: Making New Meal Plans

Achieving food sovereignty in Canada must begin with a genuine appreciation of the sources, potential and limits of the living food systems which we inhabit. The Indigenous peoples in all regions of Canada have a deep knowledge of local climates and these living food systems, gleaned from thousands of years of living in these places. Despite being initially discounted and systematically destroyed by immigrants into Canada, the knowledge and practices of Indigenous food systems are crucial for the long-term sustainability of erstwhile abundant but now fragile and threatened ecosystems. As Dawn Morrison demonstrates in Chapter 6, Indigenous perspectives on the place of humans within ecosystems offer invaluable insights into the kinds of transformations in values, behaviours and worldviews that food sovereignty demands.

Furthermore, although the history of farming in Canada is relatively briefer than in many other parts of the world, we nevertheless have a rich experience of small-scale, ecologically appropriate farming in most regions of the country. Pioneering families have left a large legacy of information, experience, stories and wisdom about ways of living in the many unique contexts and climates that characterize Canada. Locally-produced and controlled food provisioning was the norm in most communities for most of our history. Many of the prescriptions of food sovereignty, from local control over markets, to sustainable production of culturally and seasonally appropriate food are rooted in the current and historical practices of many of Canada’s agrarian communities.

It is obvious that population, and technological and cultural changes prohibit a wholesale return to earlier practices. However, traditional knowledge about seed varieties, growing patterns, appropriate and sustainable scale, waste management, cooperation and ways of living successfully in particular locations offers a rich trove of information and examples for current food sovereignty initiatives. While the dominant trend is pushing monocultures (growing a single crop over wide areas) and a decreasing variety of corporate patented seed, there is a countervailing interest in propagating farm and garden-saved seed varieties. Seed and plant exchanges, including so-called “Seedy Saturdays,” where heritage and locally produced seed varieties are sold and exchanged, are expanding in many parts of the country (Wiebe 2003). As well, despite the overwhelming dominance of a few kinds of chickens, pigs



and cows in the commercial markets, a variety of heritage breeds continue to be propagated on farms.

Food traditions open another vital avenue for food sovereignty, in Canada as elsewhere. In sharp contrast to the industrial model of food as a commodity, the food on the kitchen table within households often has complex, multi-layered meaning and associations. Beyond being necessary nutrition, food expresses cultural identity and evokes personal, familial and community memory. The frequently used advertisement of “home-cooked meals” to entice customers into restaurants, although clearly not quite credible, works because of positive memories and myths associated with that ascription. Most significant holidays, festivals and community events are demarcated by specific foods. From bannock at prairie pow-wows to the Thanksgiving turkey to the moon cakes at a mid-autumn Chinese festival, our cultures are rich with the variety and deep associations that foods evoke and signify. Culinary monocultures can be as threatening to our cultural resilience and community survival as agricultural monocultures are to biological diversity.

Despite the industrialization and attendant standardization of food, preparing food uniquely suited to occasions, tastes, cultural traditions and seasons remains a very important part of the quality of life for many Canadians. For most, living well and eating well are inextricably bound together in the same way as physical and psychological/spiritual health are linked, although these connections may not always be apparent or acknowledged. Although women continue to have primary responsibility for food in many households and hence play a large role in protecting and enhancing food cultures, there is a growing interest in food varieties and food cultures across genders and generations. Food movements, such as the Slow Food movement, the “hundred mile diet,” farmers’ markets, community shared agriculture projects, recipe exchanges and food tourism (built on the pleasures of experiencing local food customs), are all aspects of the growing interest in alternative sources, varieties and cultures involved in the cooking of food. This challenges the notion that food is just another standardized commodity where unit price determines customer choice. It represents a key alternative perspective on the meaning, role and importance of food.

The importance of changing perspectives on food should not be underestimated. While it is problematic that the number of family farms is falling, there is a growing coincidence of perspectives and values between those who engage in family farming and those who live in urban Canada but defend family farming on the grounds that it is linked to their own possibility of eating well and having access to sustainably produced food from a known source. Building relationships and understanding between farmers and urban eaters enhances power on both sides of this food equation. Furthermore, as the demand for more local, ecologically and culturally appropriate food grows

stronger, the number of small-scale farms where that kind of production is feasible will also grow.

Another important positive trend in the struggle for Canadian food sovereignty is the growth of urban agriculture. As the chapters by Yolanda Hansen (Chapter 9), Harriet Friedman (Chapter 10), Hannah Wittman and Herb Barbolet (Chapter 11) attest, food-conscious urban Canadians are working to reintegrate food production into their cities and regions, as well as their own backyards and roof tops. These initiatives are not only significant in terms of decreasing reliance on food from far away, they also increase understanding of, and control over, food sources and systems. The upsurge of interest in food issues is translating into different research perspectives and priorities, as nutritionist Rachel Engler-Stringer explains in Chapter 8, and into more widespread engagement in food policy work, as Cathleen Kneen demonstrates in Chapter 5. Urban food charters, food coalitions and food policy councils are all positive signs of this trend.

The ongoing, well-funded media barrage touting the benefits and competitive advantages of new technologies in agriculture, combined with the economic pressure on farmers to produce more, has been effective on many fronts. For example, when Monsanto introduced its first commercial variety of GM canola into the Canadian prairies in 1996, the uptake was rapid. However, with experience and more information, resistance to the environmental impacts, costs and corporate control of genetically engineered seeds has grown. Monsanto's attempt to introduce rBGH (bovine somatotropin) into milk production met with strong broadly-based public opposition, which brought about its failure in 1998. The experience of having GM-contaminated Canadian flax rejected by European buyers has been costly for Canadian farmers. There is also mounting opposition to GM alfalfa and wheat from farmers, marketers and consumers. Meanwhile, the growing demand for organically-produced foods shows that more Canadians are seeking alternatives to chemical-dependent agricultural production. As progressive farm leaders Terry Boehm and Hilary Moore clearly articulate in interviews conducted by Naomi Beingessner (Chapter 3), alternative modes of production, less reliant on the transnational corporate giants, are a key part of the strategy to achieve food sovereignty.

Perhaps the most daunting concrete barrier to Canadian food sovereignty is the array of neoliberal trade agreements that dictate the terms for Canadian agricultural exports and food imports. However, there are signs that this trade regime is less robust than it once was. For example, resistance to the agriculture components in the WTO draft agreement has stalled the negotiations, making it unlikely that an agreement will be reached in the foreseeable future. As Andre Magnan describes in Chapter 7, farmers and farm organizations continue to fight for the protection of our remaining domestic

marketing agencies such as the supply-managed industries and the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB). It is becoming clear to Canadians that the benefits of increased trade from these trade agreements have largely accrued to transnational agri-business corporations, bypassing farmers, rural communities and most Canadian citizens: growing awareness of this reality has strengthened citizen resistance politically. The increasing number of community-shared agriculture units and farmers' markets thriving in Canadian cities, towns and many smaller communities also provide evidence of effective grassroots forms of resistance to the trade-driven corporate-dominated food system of supermarkets.

The radical project of food sovereignty is sweeping in its breadth and complexity. An overview of some of the key impediments to its implementation illustrates the immensity of the problems we encounter in the struggle to wrest control over food back into the hands of citizens and their communities. However, as the foregoing also illustrates, public engagement, resistance and nurturing of alternatives are occurring everywhere. Most importantly, we have our own lively and growing discourse on food sovereignty here in Canada, including a People's Food Policy Project (PFP) that involves over 3,500 Canadians discussing and debating the principles of food sovereignty (People's Food Policy Project 2011 and Chapter 5). National food policies, including some references to food sovereignty, figured in some of the party platforms of the May 2011 federal election campaign.

### A Paradigm Shift in Agriculture and Food Policy

Are the conditions right for a policy paradigm shift in Canadian agriculture? Since the Second World War, Canadian agricultural policy has been anchored on two governing paradigms. A core premise of the state-assistance paradigm (early 1940s to late 1980s) is that, because agriculture is a unique sector due to its importance for national food security and economic development, it is therefore entitled to special attention by governments. Various regulatory and expenditure instruments were used in an attempt to both give farmers more market power and shield them from market forces. In contrast, the neoliberal paradigm (late 1980s to the present) holds that agriculture is an economic sector no different from any other, and farmers should therefore be reliant on the market alone for their incomes. Consequently, many regulatory and expenditure mechanisms that supported Canadian agriculture and food systems were either changed or terminated, and attempts have been made to eliminate others that still remain. For example, the Western Grain Transportation Act was terminated; some farm subsidies were changed from commodity-specific price supports to decoupled direct payments; and, in the area of food safety, there was a shift to "regulation for competition." Despite the prescriptions offered by each paradigm, both have failed to resolve problems

that have plagued the Canadian agriculture sector since the 1930s.

Public policy is formulated within a framework of assumptions, values and power structures that broadly define the problems to be resolved, the goals to be achieved, who should be involved and what kinds of policy instruments are appropriate (Hall 1993: 279). The framework or paradigm eventually becomes embedded in governing institutions and societal discourse to the point where it is taken for granted and largely unexamined. However, paradigms can and do get challenged and changed. First, a paradigm change can occur in the event of crises caused by policy failure, where unanticipated developments contradict the paradigm's core assumptions and destabilize it. Such developments can arise from contradictions within the paradigm itself, structural change within the economy, or both. Adaptive reforms to the paradigm will be attempted, but, if they cannot be made or do not work, a window opens for a new paradigm to take hold — redefining the problems, objectives and instruments used to reach the new goals. Second, paradigm change depends on the existence of a persuasive rival paradigm that offers an alternative interpretation of policy problems and their solutions. The alternative interpretation must also correlate with evidence, experiences of the public and societal values; essentially, the viability of the alternative paradigm is determined by its political, economic and administrative practicality. Third, paradigm change requires either a change in the policy making process and/or a transition in political power where new actors with new ideas are involved in authoritative decision making. A final impetus for policy change is a function of the historical conjuncture created by the moment when an event takes place, the event's position in a particular sequence of events, and the context in which the event takes place. These accidents of history can determine whether an opening for policy change is created and what its impact on policy development may be (Thelen 1999: 388–92).

As Darrin Qualman clearly demonstrates in Chapter 2, farm incomes in the export-oriented agricultural sectors remain chronically low, and depopulation of rural areas continues at a rapid pace. Hunger persists for many Canadians, despite the production of an overabundance of food. Finally, environmental degradation continues as land, water systems and wildlife are stressed from the intensive conventional agricultural production process. The new rival paradigm, food sovereignty, is emerging in response to these crises. We argue, based on the challenges to food sovereignty outlined above, that the adoption of a food sovereignty paradigm in Canada requires the implementation of four important policy pillars: 1) the incorporation of agriculture policy into a broad and comprehensive national food policy; 2) an inclusive and bottom-up policy development process; 3) the constitutional entrenchment of the right to food; and 4) a new agriculture policy oriented toward local food systems and environmental sustainability.