



Recommendations on
Country/Traditional
Food from the Northern
Policy Hackathon

The views in this document are those of the participants of the first Northern Policy Hackathon and do not necessarily reflect the view of The Gordon Foundation.

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Recommendations on Country/Traditional Food from the Northern Policy Hackathon

The Gordon Foundation undertakes research, leadership development and public dialogue so that public policies in Canada reflect a commitment to collaborative stewardship of our freshwater resources and to a people-driven, equitable and evolving North.

Our mission is to promote innovative public policies for the North and in fresh water management based on our values of independent thought, protecting the environment, and full participation of indigenous people in the decisions that affect their well-being.

Over the past quarter century The Gordon Foundation has invested over \$37 million in a wide variety of northern community initiatives and freshwater protection initiatives.



On 25–26 October 2017, The Gordon Foundation convened their first Northern Policy Hackathon in Nain, Nunatsiavut. The Hackathon brought together northerners from across the three territories and Inuit Nunangat, to develop innovative policy recommendations on country/traditional food. Participants were from a wide array of backgrounds, including hunters, elders, nutritionists, as well as representatives from government, and the not-profit sector. The Hackathon was not designed to merely be a vehicle of conversation, but an opportunity to create and recommend viable federal policy solutions.

The Gordon Foundation would like to extend its thanks to the participants of the first Northern Policy Hackathon and the community of Nain, Nunatsiavut for welcoming us.

The following should be kept in mind while reading this policy document:

SECURITY AND HEALTH

Country/traditional food is important for food security and general health in the Canadian North.

RECENT DECLINE

Due to various factors- including climate change, colonization, restrictions on wildlife harvesting, and rapid socio-cultural change- participation in harvesting activities and the consumption of country/traditional food has declined in northern Indigenous communities.

COMMUNITY

The sharing of food remains a key northern Indigenous cultural practice and is considered critical to community well-being.

IDENTITY

Country/traditional food is central to the identity and well-being of northern Indigenous peoples, despite the presence of market food in the contemporary northern diet.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

After two days of discussing, challenging and learning, the participants at the Northern Policy Hackathon came up with **three** policy recommendations.

Some are legislative/regulatory changes, while others are renewals or adjustments to existing policies or programs. These recommendations acknowledge that a collaborative approach is needed at all levels: from national, territorial, regional and Indigenous governments. It is important to note that all the recommendations come from a **pan-northern understanding** of the importance of country/traditional food in northern life.

01

NEW POLICY FRAMEWORK

Create a new Country/Traditional Foods Policy Framework to optimize all aspects of country/traditional food. Such a framework would be co-developed with Indigenous peoples and would include:

- ▶ **Legislation** that provides a statutory foundation for all matters affecting the gathering, harvesting, processing, sharing and selling of country/traditional food in the North.
- ▶ The creation of **Indigenous-led institution(s)** to support the administration of the statutory framework and support Indigenous communities in the exercise of their jurisdiction.
- ▶ The alignment of existing, or the creation of new, **programs** to support the harvesting, protection, hunting (including training skills), and sharing of country/traditional foods.

Legislation

New legislation (**Country/Traditional Foods Act**) would provide a statutory foundation for all matters affecting the gathering, sharing and selling of country/traditional food in the North. This Act would recognize Indigenous governments' authority to make regulations respecting the harvesting and selling of country/traditional foods. It would enable the creation of Indigenous-led institution(s) to administer the legislation and set standards for the regulation of the harvesting and sharing of country/traditional food.

The legislation would be opt-in and would apply to Indigenous governments that choose to exercise jurisdiction over the harvesting and sharing of country/traditional food.

Indigenous-led institution(s)

New institution(s) (**Country/Traditional Foods Management Board(s)**) would administer the overall statutory framework and support Indigenous governments in the exercise of their jurisdiction. The institution(s) would set standards for regulations, exercise authority to approve regulations and support capacity-building necessary to the administration of the framework by Indigenous governments.

Regulations could set realistic, appropriate and long-term standards associated with training requirements. These would reflect and incorporate Traditional Knowledge. For example, the implementation of a certification process based on local and Traditional Knowledge for country/traditional food inspection and federal research projects. The institution(s) would facilitate or manage elements described below, such as the database and provide training related to country/traditional food.

Programs

New, and where appropriate existing, programs would:

- ▶ Support the **development of infrastructure** in communities dealing with country/traditional food, by ensuring that when federal government buildings are designed or updated, small scale processing centers and community freezers are included in the design.
- ▶ Create a **national database** of country/traditional food available in community freezers across the north, facilitating the ability of communities to trade and share.
- ▶ Promote the **shipping of country/traditional foods** to northern communities when limited resources allow for finite food into communities.
- ▶ Establish a pan-northern **network of local food workers** (one in each community) who would manage country/traditional food storage, education and local food security networks.

The Northern Policy Hackathon participants also considered policy approaches that would work within the context of existing federal legislation, including the creation of a federal **Wild Foods Inspection Act** and support of **community-based education**.

02

WILD FOODS INSPECTION ACT

A Federal Wild Foods Inspection Act would enable Indigenous hunters to process and sell country/traditional foods that meet Food Safety Standards using Traditional Knowledge. Such an Act would:

- ▶ **Stand alongside** the Meat Inspection Act and Fish Inspection Act and fall under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.
- ▶ Create an **appropriate Indigenous Advisory Board** which would oversee the Act.
- ▶ Ensure an **Indigenous certification process** of local hunters based on local and Traditional Knowledge for country/traditional food inspection.
- ▶ Create a wholesome **list and definition** of foods eaten by northern Indigenous populations that would be included in the Act. The **definition and specific terminology** would be co-developed with Indigenous peoples.
- ▶ Better **represent the realities** of how food is processed in the North and in the wild.

03

ONGOING EDUCATION

The ongoing support of community-based education was emphasized. To ensure the success of such programs, it is recommended that the federal government:

- ▶ Support, promote, and increase flexible, multi-year, **community-based educational and training activities** related to country/traditional food to maintain and increase skills and knowledge of Indigenous language, cultural practices, and values.
- ▶ Focus on providing **additional programs related to traditional life skills** and training for youth at risk and those not in school.

The overwhelming
belief was that:



Strong northern
food policies must
incorporate
made-in-the-North
solutions



POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Government policies influencing country/traditional food are complex and shared across various levels of government. The federal government shares responsibility with the territories for creating, implementing and overseeing the laws, regulations, policies, and programs that affect country/traditional food. Specifically, the Devolution Acts of the Northwest Territories and Yukon as well as the establishment of the governments of Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut create a political context for the harvesting, sharing, and selling of country/traditional food that is largely inter-jurisdictional. At the same time, historic treaties and land claim settlements recognize Indigenous governments' jurisdiction over land and resource management as well as harvesting.

Throughout the event, it became apparent that these jurisdictional differences are important to understand when discussing country/traditional food policies, but it was also recognized there exists overarching legislature which impacts the North as a whole.

With this understanding, the first Northern Policy Hackathon focused on discussing country/traditional food laws and policies that are mainly the responsibility of the federal government. The recommendations are therefore directed at various federal ministries within the Government of Canada, with the understanding that there will also need to be wide-reaching recommendations.

It was noted, with frustration, that many federal laws are imposed on the North, without consideration for the unique conditions and circumstances of the people and communities who live there.

The current existing legislative and regulatory framework is an impediment to harvesting, selling and sharing country/traditional food.

For example, food safety regulations (which do not take into account an appropriate balance between food safety and country/traditional food

access) and practices (e.g. the unavailability of food inspection services in most northern communities) were considered to have a negative effect on access to country/traditional foods in communities.

The upcoming Arctic Policy Framework, Food Policy for Canada, and reworking of Nutrition North Canada were seen as opportunities to listen to northern voices and begin the successful process of the federal government's engagement with northern food policy. The guides for both the Food Policy for Canada and the Arctic Policy Framework recognize the importance of ensuring food security in the North:

“We need to do more to improve the affordability and availability of food, particularly among more vulnerable groups, such as children, Canadians living in poverty, Indigenous peoples, and those in remote and Northern communities.”

– Food Policy for Canada: Consulting with Canadians

The Arctic Policy Framework discussion guide flagged increased food security in Arctic communities as one of the “Proposed Outcomes” in the wider theme of “Strong Arctic Peoples and Communities”.

This recognition and the Government's commitment to achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship allow for hope in the co-development of northern food policy.

Country/traditional food has a critical place not only in the diet and health of the North, but also the maintenance of community, belonging, and inter-generational transfer of cultural practices and Traditional Knowledge and skills. Building strong northern food policy is also a step toward achieving various aspects of many of the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Ensuring strong northern-based policy on country/traditional food will undoubtedly have wide-reaching impacts.

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* Attendees were not official participants, but were available for support, advice, or logistics.

The Gordon Foundation would like to thank the following for their support:





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