



BC Food Systems Network

A project on Tides Canada's Shared Platform
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Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Service
Government of British Columbia
Victoria, BC
Submitted by email: financecommittee@leg.bc.ca

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Re: 2016 Budget Consultation

To the members of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Service:

The BC Food Systems Network appreciates this opportunity to contribute to the development of the next provincial budget. The Network works in partnership with farmers, fishers, Indigenous people, and others in community working to rebuild their food systems from the ground up. We seek to develop balanced policy proposals that adhere to sustainability principles and reflect the needs and interests of people and communities across the province.

The Budget consultation paper lauds the fact that BC has a budget surplus and a high credit rating. In light of this and low interest rates, it is clearly a good time to invest in infrastructure and conserve the bio-cultural heritage¹ that will ensure that those who reside in the province are well nourished and thus able to participate and contribute to the long term sustainability of their communities.

We recommend that the 2016 Budget allocate more resources for food policy and programs, beginning with increasing the annual budget of the Ministry of Agriculture to meet the national average for per-GDP funding over a five-year period.² Further, we recommend the allocation of additional funding across several ministries, including Health, Education, Environment, and Social Development, to expand existing food security programs and establish new, targeted inter-ministerial programs. Such programs should also enhance the cultural and ecological scope of food policies to affirm and promote Indigenous food and cultural strategies in the forests, fields and waterways.

Many Indigenous communities across the province have sub-standard housing conditions and lack potable water – both core human rights that must be addressed immediately. We recognize that solutions to these are not the singular responsibility of

¹ Bio-cultural heritage refers to the knowledge and practices of indigenous peoples and their biological resources that have long contributed to food security around the world and are increasingly important in the face of climate change. See www.biocultural.iied.org

² In 2010, the Ministry of Agriculture's budget of \$126 million was just 4.2% of the agricultural sector's GDP compared to a national average of 11.3%. Meeting the national average means increasing the Ministry's budget to \$340 million based on 2010 data.

the province but urge you to “think outside the box” to identify creative interventions that can foster healthier individuals and communities in this vital population.

The BC Treaty process is highly contentious and does not adequately address the unresolved land claims issues that are causing economic uncertainty in BC. Indigenous peoples are forced into debt to engage into the BC Treaty process. We urge the government to work with Indigenous nations to identify a process and funding program that is more holistic and socially responsible.

Given local and global trends, food insecurity will continue to adversely affect an increasing number of British Columbians. Over the past decade, British Columbians have been impacted by sharp increases and instability of food and energy prices combined with already high housing costs and several decades of stagnant wage growth. Increasingly, many are finding it difficult to access healthy and affordable food, with food bank use becoming far more prevalent in recent years and growing public health concern over the increasing prevalence of diabetes and obesity. The disparities between Indigenous peoples and mainstream society present yet another layer of complexity to the food security issues, concerns and situations.

We strongly urge the government to establish a poverty elimination and prevention program with food affordability as a central measure for program targets. Raising the minimum wage to at least \$15/hour would make a significant contribution to that end. A related recommendation is to provide support for and expand school meal, school gardens, and food literacy programs to ensure that all children at all times have access to the food required for healthy lives. We also encourage expanded programs and policies to address issues, concerns and situations of new immigrants and other vulnerable populations.

Canada has an aging farm population and BC has amongst the oldest in the country. Given the pending retirement of many of the less than 2% of our population that farms, we are in desperate need of a fulsome succession program. Many of those who are now starting to farm do not come from farming backgrounds and so need support to address the complex demands and knowledge reservoirs necessary to successfully farm. We therefore urge the BC government to reinstate regional research and extension services to farmers targeting small-scale agriculture, organic production, and urban agriculture. Such services would provide marketing assistance, climate adaptation strategies, as well as business management and production training.

The BC Food Systems Network recognizes the many demands on government coffers and the challenge of balancing them. Food is foundational to the health and well-being of BC residents and so warrants special consideration on budget deliberations.

Thank you for considering our recommendations,



Abra Brynne
Director, Engagement and Policy