



CANADA'S FOOD SYSTEM²
(& its share of the national workforce)

Food Facts

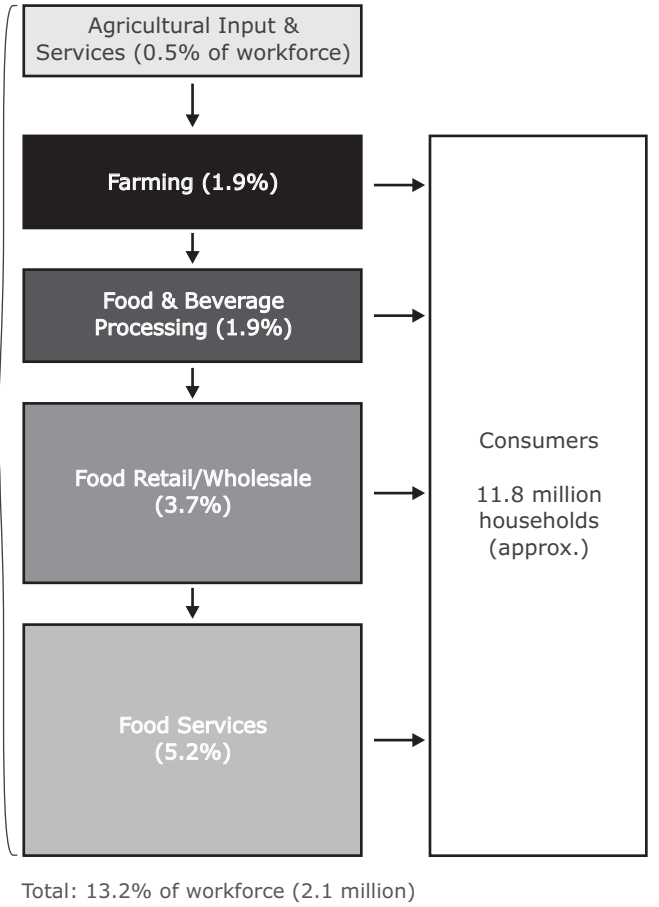
How are Canadians experiencing the Food Wars?

BY FRANK MORELAND & SANDRA MARK

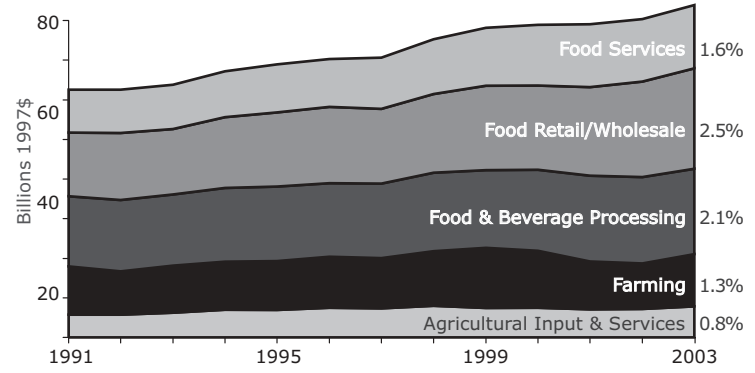
1. *Although vast & complex, Canada's food system is controlled by a small number of players.*

The long chain of production and distribution that we use to feed ourselves and others is a major employer and contributor to the Gross Domestic Product. The food system's growth since 1990 has been primarily due to value-added production: to the preparation of food, especially by retailers and wholesalers. But every link on the chain is increasingly controlled by a smaller number of firms:

- Large farms (one-third of the national total) accounted for nearly 88% of farm production – and 20% of agricultural program payments – in 2001.
- Canada's five largest food retailers now account for about 60% of grocery sales, up from 50% in 1995.
- Large food and beverage processors (5% of the total) accounted for 52% of the shipments, by value, in 2002.
- In 2002, the top 50 foodservice companies accounted for 53% of commercial foodservice sales, up 7% from 1994.¹



The Food System as a portion of GDP, 1991-2003²
2003 Total: \$83.9 billion (8.3% of GDP)



“Economically, colonialism programmed African countries to produce what they do not consume & to consume what they do not produce.”
Bade Onimode, *A Future for Africa*, 1992.

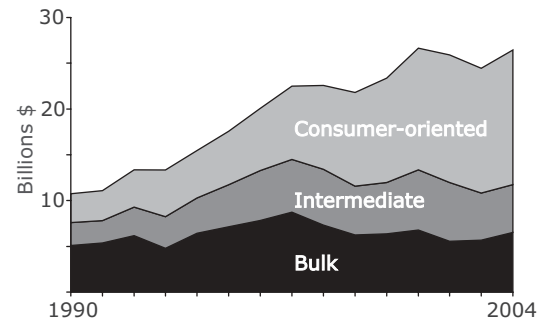
2. *The Food Swap: our food production is increasingly focussed on exports, while our consumption is focussed on imports.*

In 2003, Canada was the fourth largest exporter of agricultural and agri-food products in the world, with exports at \$26.6 billion. At the same time, Canada was the fifth largest importer of agriculture and agri-food products in the world with imports of \$19.2 billion.

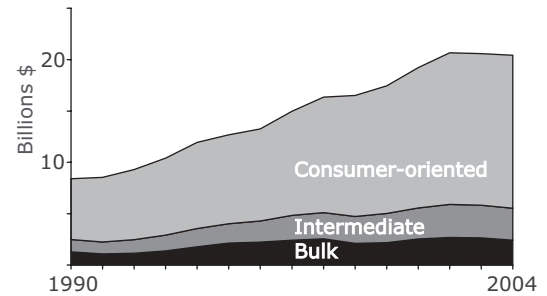
Canada's agriculture and agri-food exports and imports have vastly increased since 1990, largely because of consumer-oriented products (i.e. things basically ready to be consumed). In 2004, the value of these products made up more than one-half of agriculture and agri-food exports, and 73% of imports, far exceeding both intermediate and bulk commodities.³

Redundant trade is "the simultaneous exporting and importing of the same product to the same region, regardless of the season. For example, in tomato season in Ontario (July, August, and September 2005), Ontario exported \$69 million worth of fresh tomatoes. During those same months, Ontario also imported \$17 million worth of fresh tomatoes."⁴

Agriculture & Agri-Food Exports 1990-2004³



Agriculture & Agri-Food Imports 1990-2004³



3. *A large & growing number of Canadians are hungry. This demand is well beyond what our charity food system can supply.*

About three million Canadians (one in ten) in 1998-99 lived in households that were food-insecure, i.e., at any point in the past year they had lacked sufficient money to buy food. This situation was particularly common among low-income households, lone-mother families, off-reserve Aboriginal households, and children. Only about one in five are likely to have used a food bank, soup kitchen, or other charitable agency.⁵

- Number of people using a food bank in one month of 2005: 823,856
- Number of meals served by food banks in one month: 2.72 million
- Food bank use since 1989: +118%; since 1997: +24%; since 2004: -0.1%
- Full-time equivalent jobs provided by food bank volunteers in one month: 4,922
- Percentage of food banks with difficulty meeting demand: 38.8%
- Percentage of food bank clients for whom employment is the primary source of income: 13.1%⁶

This is a charity food system, not an emergency food system. Supplies are constantly inadequate to the demand. What food is available does not meet the criteria for a healthy diet specified in Canada's food guide, nor does it provide for culturally appropriate diets or for people facing health challenges who need to eat nutritious food.

¹ Eileen Krakar and Kim Longtin, *An Overview of the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food System* (Ottawa: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2005), pp. 45, 50, 55, 75.

² 2003 figures; 1997 dollars. Note that farming includes produce destined for non-food uses, and processing figures include tobacco. Krakar and Longtin, *An Overview*, pp. 2, 6.

³ Agriculture & Agri-food exports/imports 1990-2004 from Krakar and Longtin, *An Overview*, pp. 12-13.

⁴ Judy Maan Miedema, "A Study of Redundant Trade in Waterloo Region" (Region of Waterloo Public Health, 2006), p. 3.

⁵ This data excludes people who did not live in households at this time. Janet Che and Jiajian Chen, "Food insecurity in Canadian households," *Health Reports*, 12,1 (Statistics Canada, 2002): 11-22. 15 August 2006 <<http://www.statcan.ca/english/studies/82-003/feature/hrab2001012004s0a01.htm>>.

⁶ Canadian Association of Food Banks, *Hunger Facts 2005*, 15 August 2006 <<http://foodbank.duoweb.ca/documents/hungerfacts-eng05.pdf>>.

4. A large & growing number of Canadians are getting sick on account of what they eat or don't eat.

Research into the nutrient content of 43 fruit and vegetables, based on data gathered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture 1950-99, shows "reliable" (i.e., statistically confirmed) declines in six nutrients. Phosphorous, iron, and calcium declined 9-16%, protein 6%, riboflavin 38%, and ascorbic acid 15%. (Seven other nutrients showed no reliable changes.) The researchers suggest that the declines may be attributable to changes in cultivation that trade off nutrient content for yield.⁷

Although *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* calls for 5-10 servings daily of fruit and vegetables (and 44% of Canadians know that recommendation), only 30% of Canadians actually meet it in their eating habits.⁸

One in two adults and one in three children were considered overweight or obese in 2001. Obesity has a propensity to lead to such diseases as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and several types of cancer, as well as premature death.⁹

Food insecurity is associated with both problems in both physical and emotional health. The 1998-1999 National Health Population Survey indicated that members of food-insecure households are far more likely than others to experience poor or fair health (17%), multiple chronic conditions (21%), obesity (15%), distress (31%), and depression (14%).¹⁰

"Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical & economic access to sufficient, safe & nutritious food to meet their dietary needs & food preferences for an active & healthy life."

World Food Summit 1996

⁷ Donald Davis, et al. "Changes in USDA Food Composition Data for 43 Garden Crops, 1950 to 1999," *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, 23, 6 (December 2004): 669-682.

⁸ *Canadian Produce Marketing Association*, "5 to 10 a Day for Better Health," 15 August 2006 <http://www.5to10aday.com/en_about_main.asp>.

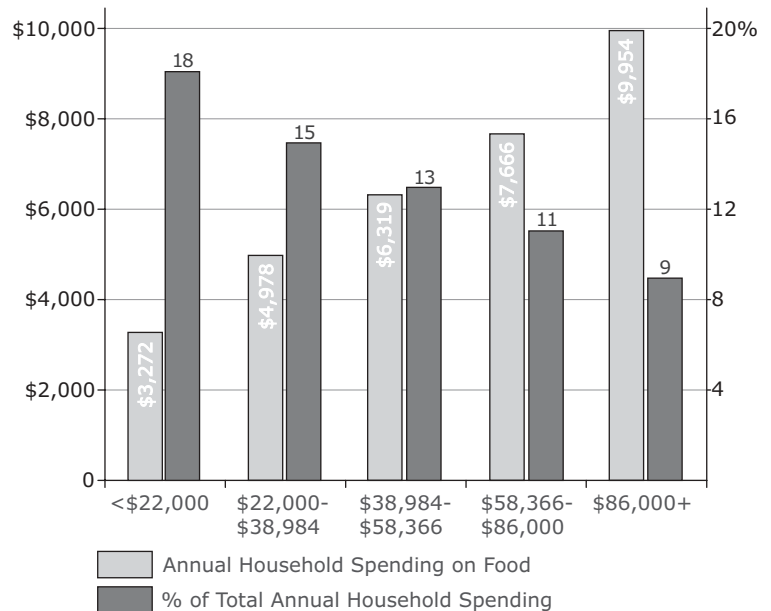
⁹ Serecon Management Consulting Inc., "Canadian Food Trends To 2020: A Long Range Consumer Outlook" (Ottawa: Agriculture and Agri-Food

5. Food is cheap for many Canadians. For others, it's very, very expensive.

For most Canadians, food is cheap and has been getting cheaper for years. In 1997, Canadian consumers spent an average of 10% of their personal disposable income on food (1974: 13.6%; 1983: 10.9%). Compare that to folks in France, Germany, and Italy, who spend nearly 15% of their personal disposable income on food. Only the U.S. and the Netherlands record lower shares (8.1% and 9.7%, respectively).¹¹

While low-income Canadians spend less on food per capita, the cost of food eats up a much greater portion of their disposable income.¹²

Food Spending & Income¹¹



Canada, 2005), pp. 6-7.

¹⁰ Che and Chen, "Food insecurity in Canadian households," pp. 18-19.

¹¹ *Food Value Chain Bureau*, "Canadian Consumers: Spending on Food and Beverages," Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 15 August 2006 <http://www.agr.gc.ca/misb/fb-ba/index_e.php?s1=cons&s2=cancons&page=intro>.

¹² From Statistics Canada, "Survey of Household Spending 2001," cited in Serecon, "Canadian Food Trends," p. 42.

6. *The growing & preparation of food are becoming marginal to Canadians' lives. We rely more & more on others to make our meals.*

In the average week, Canadians are spending only 6% of their time on food-related chores.¹³

In 2001 Canadian households spent an average of \$124 a week on food – \$86 in food stores and \$38 in restaurants. Almost 60% of that restaurant spending took place in table-service restaurants, 26% in fast food restaurants, and 10% in cafeterias, snack bars, and chip wagons.¹⁴

The total number of farm families in Canada continues to fall: from 216,420 in 1996, to 187,770 in 2001, and to 135,490 in 2003.¹⁵

In 2000, nearly 45% of farmers relied to some extent on off-farm employment. On average, net farming income contributed only 18% to total family income. Figures from 1998 show that even on large farms (i.e., with sales of \$100,000 and over), about one half the family income is earned off the farm.¹⁶

In short, the Food Wars have turned Canada into a colony, & a colonialist. Our agriculture has intensely specialized to satisfy the demand & supply of foreign markets, as adjudicated by a handful of corporations. Yet growing & preparing domestic food is becoming increasingly marginal to mainstream Canadian consumers. We rely more & more heavily on people inside & outside the country to do it for us.



FRANK MORELAND and SANDRA MARK are principals of Edible Strategies Enterprises Ltd. Photos courtesy of Laura Berman, GreenFuse Images.

¹³ Statistics Canada, *General Social Survey on Time Use*, 1998.

¹⁴ From Statistics Canada, 2003, cited at *Ropin' The Web*, "Understanding Consumer Trends Can Present New Opportunities" (Government of Alberta: Agriculture, Food and Rural Development), 15 August 2006 <[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/sis8735](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/sis8735)>.

¹⁵ Statistics Canada, Agriculture Division, "Statistics on Income of Farm Families 2003," 15 August 2006 <<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/21-207-XIE/21-207-XIE2006001.pdf>>, and *2001 Census of Agriculture*.

¹⁶ Krakar and Longtin, *An Overview*, p. 72, and *Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada*, "Challenges Facing the Canadian Agricultural Sector: Overview of the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Sector," p. 6, 15 August 2006 <http://www.agr.gc.ca/cb/apf/pdf/bg_con_overvu_e.pdf>.

