

Canada Can Feed the World. So Why Are So Many Canadians Struggling to Eat?

A Between the Lines Special Report

Written by Leni Spooner Between the Lines (BTL) © 2025 1

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Canada Can Feed the World. So Why Are So Many Canadians Struggling to Eat?

Why Food Insecurity Is Surging in a Food-Rich Canada

A Country Built on Abundance, Now Living on Scraps

If you spend any time in a small Canadian town these days, the grocery store tells the whole story before you even reach the produce aisle. The shelves are full — Canada’s food system is nothing if not efficient — but the baskets people carry are lighter. Two or three items instead of six. A quick mental tally before something goes back on the shelf. The quiet apology that slips out when someone’s card declines even though the debit machine doesn’t judge.

It’s the kind of moment you see more often now in places that used to feel insulated — the prairie towns, the farm belt communities, the places where food isn’t just a product but an identity. If any region should be protected against runaway food costs, you’d think it would be the places that grow the country’s meals. But the numbers tell a stranger, more unsettling story.

In 2024, according to new data from [PROOF](#) based on Statistics Canada’s survey work, **Alberta and Saskatchewan had the highest household food insecurity rates in the entire country** — roughly **31%** in each province. That means nearly one in three households struggled to afford basic food. Meanwhile, Quebec — not a major food-exporting region — sat at **15.7%**, *less than half* the rate.

That gap isn’t just a statistic. It’s a signal. And it tells us something bigger than geography.

When provincial income supports fail to keep pace with the cost of living, it doesn’t matter how much food passes through local fields or elevators. Proximity to production doesn’t protect families; **income policy does**. Quebec’s stronger social protections blunt the shock. The Prairies absorb it head-on.

That’s part of what pushed me to start digging into this more seriously. Dr. Sylvain Charlebois’ recent piece on [Canada’s “protein orphans”](#) captured how sharply food habits are shifting

under pressure — not by preference, but by necessity. His work, alongside PROOF's, made it clear that something deeper is changing in Canada's food landscape, and it's time to unpack it.

Because the question isn't, "Why are families struggling?"

The real question is, "**How did a country built on abundance design a system where abundance doesn't reach the kitchen table?**"

The Prairie Disconnect

If you look at a map of Canada's food economy, the Prairies are the engine room. Alberta and Saskatchewan don't just grow food — they anchor global supply chains. Beef, wheat, pulses, canola, oats, pork, barley, protein crops for the international supplement industry — these are not marginal sectors. They are pillars of both provincial identity and national export power.

Which is why the latest food insecurity numbers hit like a contradiction in plain sight.

In 2024, PROOF's analysis of Statistics Canada's Canadian Income Survey showed that **Alberta (30.9%) and Saskatchewan (30.6%) topped the country in household food insecurity**. Manitoba wasn't far behind. Three Prairie provinces — collectively responsible for feeding entire continents — now contain some of the highest rates of people who cannot reliably feed themselves.

And the more you sit with that number, the more it starts to feel like a crack in the foundation of the national story.

Because this isn't just about grocery prices, or even about inflation. If it were, all high-cost provinces would look the same. But they don't. Quebec's rate sits at **15.7%** — half the Prairie rate — despite not having Prairie-level food production or Prairie-level wages.

That contrast tells us something essential:

Food insecurity isn't a problem of supply.

It's a problem of systems.

tracking whether provincial income policy keeps up with real living costs. The Prairies have some of the fastest-growing living expenses in the country, but the slowest-moving income supports. When wages don't stretch, when rental markets overheat, when provincial benefits stay frozen for years at a time, it doesn't matter that the highways are lined with grain elevators. Families fall through the cracks anyway.

And beneath that policy gap sits another layer — one that rarely makes headlines but shapes daily life in smaller towns.

Over the last thirty years, rural Canada has quietly lost much of its local food infrastructure. Independent grocers, local butchers, regional distributors, family-run processing plants — many have disappeared under the combined weight of consolidation, razor-thin margins, and competition from national chains. The result is a landscape where entire regions depend on:

- a small handful of grocery chains,
- a small handful of processors,
- and a small handful of distribution hubs,

...all tied into national pricing models that have little to do with what a family in Kindersley, La Ronge, or Swift Current actually earns.

In that world, abundance becomes oddly inaccessible. Food moves through Prairie towns in staggering volume — railcars, trucks, container loads — but affordability doesn't stay behind. Local production leaves; national pricing returns.

It's the structural irony of this moment:

the closer you are to Canada's food wealth, the less protection you actually have from food insecurity.

That's the **Prairie Disconnect** — the widening gap between what a region produces and what its households can reliably afford. And once you see it, the pattern doesn't stay put on the Prairies. It starts to show up, in different ways and different degrees, across the country.

Because what's happening there isn't an anomaly.

It's a warning.

Boom-Bust Households: The Structural Drivers

If the Prairie Disconnect is the outcome, the next question is: *What's driving it?* Because families aren't suddenly making worse choices, and Prairie towns didn't forget how to feed themselves. Something upstream shifted — quietly, steadily, but decisively — and households are now carrying the weight of decisions made far away from the kitchen table.

1. Commodity Cycles That Don't Care About Household Budgets

Life on the Prairies has always moved to the rhythm of commodities — oil, wheat, barley, canola. When global prices dip or drought hits yields, household budgets tighten fast. But what makes this squeeze uniquely harsh today is the absence of a reliable safety net.

Canada has no automatic policy cushion that links commodity downturns to household support.

Benefits don't rise when the economy contracts. They rise years later, if they rise at all — long after families have absorbed the hit.

But this is only half the story.

Prairie households are being squeezed from two sides.

Where national policy is slow to respond, *provincial* policy determines whether families fall through the gaps — and Alberta and Saskatchewan have not kept their income supports aligned with real living costs.

Even when federal transfers increase — including equalization and targeted social transfers — provinces ultimately decide:

- whether benefits are indexed to inflation,
- whether rent and utility supports reflect actual market conditions,
- whether low-income thresholds match the real cost of basic needs.

Pragmatically, this is where Quebec's numbers diverge from the Prairies: Quebec adjusts its supports more consistently; Alberta and Saskatchewan adjust slowly or not at all.

National systems set the limits of protection.

Provincial decisions decide the depth of the fall.

That twofold failure — a federal framework that lacks automatic stabilizers and provinces that don't use the tools they have — leaves Prairie families exposed even in regions surrounded by abundance.

2. The Erosion of Local Food Infrastructure

For decades, rural Canada has been quietly losing the very infrastructure that used to buffer households from national pricing. Independent grocers, family-run butchers, small-scale processors, local bakeries — these weren't just businesses; they were stabilizers. They kept relationships with local producers. They stocked what a community could afford. They softened the blow of national price swings.

But consolidation changed all of that.

Across Canada today:

- **A handful of grocery chains control over 80% of retail food sales.**
- **Three major processors dominate most beef and pork volume.**
- Many packaged foods — cereals, breads, proteins — funnel through just a few multinational players.

Consolidation severs community ties and replaces them with national pricing models that rarely match local incomes. When rural towns lose their last independent grocer or butcher, they don't just lose choice — they lose the last buffer between themselves and national prices.

In many Prairie communities, the shelves are still full, but the price tags reflect a reality the town's wages can't meet.

3. A Cost-of-Living Spiral Without Matching Policy Tools

StatsCan has been blunt in recent years: the cost of simply *existing* — renting, heating, fueling, insuring — has risen faster than household incomes across most provinces. On the Prairies, the mismatch is especially sharp.

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When supports are not indexed, when utilities spike, when rents climb faster than wages, food becomes the only flexible line in the budget. That's how families fall into food insecurity even when they earn what used to be considered decent incomes.

This is the driver behind the stark numbers PROOF has surfaced:

Quebec's food insecurity rate is roughly half that of Alberta and Saskatchewan because its income supports track closer to real costs.

Policy design, not household decisions, is what shapes the gap.

4. Consolidation in Processing: The Value Leaves, the Costs Stay

The Prairies export staggering volumes of agricultural product — but nearly all the *value-add* work takes place elsewhere. Prairie-grown lentils, peas, oats, beef, and canola leave the region to be processed in far-off facilities, often by multinationals who price for global markets, not local incomes.

A striking example is Canada's pea crop.

The Prairies produce **the majority of the world's yellow peas**, but the high-value transformation — the extraction of pea protein used in plant-based milks, protein powders, and global health products — overwhelmingly happens outside Canada. The raw product leaves the Prairies at commodity prices; it returns to Canadians as expensive packaged goods.

This pattern repeats across commodities:

- Prairie beef is butchered and packaged in plants owned by a few multinationals
- Prairie oats become value-added cereals manufactured elsewhere
- Prairie canola is crushed or refined in facilities tied into global distribution chains
- Prairie pulses are cleaned and shipped abroad for processing, then imported back as finished foods

Here's what that means on the ground:

- processing jobs migrate outward
- local reinvestment disappears

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- price flexibility shrinks
- supply chains lengthen
 - and households pay retail prices set in boardrooms far removed from community wages

Prairie families buy food grown next door but priced through systems designed somewhere else — often, half a world away.

5. Rural Logistics: The Invisible Surcharge

Finally, rural distribution adds an unspoken surcharge — not itemized, but always present. Diesel, trucking contracts, winter routing, distance from distribution hubs — all of these add pennies and dollars that compound into unaffordable totals at the till.

Even when fuel prices drop, retail prices barely budge because the logistics contracts governing deliveries rarely adjust in real time.

Put all of these forces together — commodity volatility, policy lag, provincial under-protection, consolidation, lost local infrastructure, and the rural surcharge — and you get exactly the landscape PROOF and Dalhousie have been mapping:

A food-rich region where households are living food-poor.

A booming export economy paired with shrinking household resilience. A country overflowing with abundance — while many families quietly scale back meals.

This is the engine behind the Prairie Disconnect.

And it won't reverse on its own.

Canada's Protein Class System

If you want to understand the real shape of food insecurity in Canada today, don't start with grocery flyers or basket sizes. Start with protein. Because protein has quietly become the clearest marker of who is thriving, who is coping, and who is beginning to slip under the line.

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Dr. Sylvain Charlebois' recent work captured this shift with an unsettling phrase: **“protein orphans”** — households that have begun to ration or abandon the core proteins that once anchored Canadian diets. Not out of preference. Out of cost.

And to be clear, this isn't a debate about the nutritional merits of one eating pattern over another. **This article isn't weighing the value of omnivorous, vegetarian, vegan, paleo, or flexitarian diets.** The mounting evidence shows something more universal: **every dietary preference in Canada — from meat-forward to plant-based — is feeling the financial squeeze, and families are being pushed into hard choices no matter what they believe about food.**

The Fall 2025 Food Sentiment Index shows that omnivorous diets — still the majority — have dropped more than seven percentage points in a single year. Flexitarian eating is up. Paleo is up. Vegetarianism is *down*. Beneath those dietary labels is something more structural: families aren't choosing these patterns; **price is choosing for them.**

1. Protein Inflation Hits Families Hardest

Among households that had to dip into savings just to buy food, more than half followed a standard omnivorous diet. Among households with three or more children, that figure jumps to **65%**. In other words: the larger the family, the harder protein inflation punishes them.

But this isn't just about meat. Milk, eggs, legumes, yogurt, nuts, tofu — almost every protein category has absorbed some combination of:

- global commodity pressure

- corporate consolidation
- transportation and storage costs
- climate disruptions
- and demand-side shocks

The result is a quiet sorting of households into nutritional classes.

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2. The Global Pull of Prairie Protein Crops

Nowhere is this more visible than in the pulse sector. The Prairies produce the bulk of the world's yellow peas, but as we explored earlier, the value-added transformation — pea protein extraction for powders, ready-to-drink shakes, plant-based milks — happens almost entirely elsewhere. Global manufacturers buy Prairie peas at commodity prices and sell protein products back to Canadians at a premium.

This means Prairie households are surrounded by the raw building blocks of global nutrition, yet increasingly unable to afford the finished product.

3. Processed Foods Rise, Quality Declines

When protein becomes expensive, cheaper calories rush in to fill the gap. This is the old story of food insecurity — but it is now happening in households that never expected to be vulnerable.

Families do what families have always done when budgets tighten:

- more starches
- more fillers
- more discount brands
- fewer fresh proteins
- fewer nutrient-dense staples

But this time, the shift has a twist: the cheapest calories often come from multinational packaged foods, priced low enough to outcompete fresh options but high enough to lock families into long-term nutritional decline.

Canada's missing-middle processors — the small and midsized firms that once offered mid-priced, high-quality food — are nearly gone.

4. Protein as a Proxy for Stability

Protein isn't just food. It is a proxy for household stability. When families can no longer maintain stable protein access:

- health outcomes worsen,
- childhood nutrition declines,
- stress escalates,
- medical vulnerability increases,
- and long-term costs shift back onto public systems.

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Protein access is one of the earliest measurable indicators of social strain.

5. The Shift from Choice to Necessity

For years, plant-based diets were framed as lifestyle categories. Today, for many households, they're simply the most affordable path. The same is true on the other end of the spectrum: meat frequency is down not because people want it to be, but because it is the only movable line in the budget.

This is how Canada drifts into a **protein class system** — gradually, through a thousand quiet trade-offs at kitchen tables across the country.

The Psychological Cost of Survival Mode

By the time families make it to the checkout line, the hardest part isn't the bill — it's the mental math that led up to it. In conversations across small towns, suburban plazas, Prairie cities, and northern communities, you hear the same quiet refrain: *"We're making it work... but it's getting harder."*

Canadians have always been resourceful. We've always known how to stretch, substitute, make do, improvise. But something has shifted in recent years, and you can feel it in the tone of people's grocery conversations. There's a weight to it now — a mix of vigilance and fatigue — that isn't about personal budgeting, but about living in a system that chips away at stability one small decision at a time.

The research backs up what families are saying. Charlebois' team found that **nearly half of Canadians now actively chase sales, discounts, and store brands**, not as a strategy, but as

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a survival skill. People talk about planning whole meals around what's reduced, not what they want. They've cut restaurant meals to almost nothing — spending less than \$50 a month, if that. And when dining out disappears, the ripple effect extends much further than restaurants. People also pull back on the rituals that depend on shared food: Sunday dinners with family, potlucks with neighbours, casual evenings with friends. Social eating shrinks right alongside the budget.

It's the psychological load of constant adaptation that wears on people — that sense of being one price jump away from another hard choice.

1. Constant Vigilance Is Exhausting

When every grocery trip requires:

- comparing unit prices,
- recalculating weekly menus,
- deciding which proteins to skip,
- travelling to multiple stores for savings,

- and watching for promotions that vanish within hours...

...it becomes hard to feel secure no matter your income.

Even middle-income households — people who never saw themselves as vulnerable — are now budgeting like students again, stacking loyalty points, and cutting back on little pleasures because the essentials take precedence.

2. Food Anxiety Replaces Food Culture

Food has always been cultural. It marks celebrations, family identities, and seasons. But under pressure, that culture erodes into something thin and brittle.

People stop experimenting.

Stop buying the cut of meat their grandmother used.

Stop inviting people over for dinner.

Stop baking on a whim.

Stop hosting the Sunday meals that once held families and communities together. 14

In many Prairie households — and increasingly across Canada — the weekly grocery shop has become something closer to risk management than nourishment.

3. Parents Absorb the Stress First

One of the hardest truths behind the statistics is that adults, especially parents, are quietly rationing themselves to protect their kids. They skip meals, shave portions, swap out proteins for cheaper calories — all while ensuring children never see the strain.

PROOF's data tells us this bluntly: **food insecurity in a household often appears first in the adults long before the children show signs.** Parents absorb the blow privately, in silence, one skipped meal at a time.

4. The Shame Spiral — Even When It Isn't Their Fault

Shame is one of the quietest costs of food insecurity, even in middle-class families. People

blame themselves for circumstances shaped by:

- global commodity cycles,
- provincial support lags,
- multinational pricing,
- rural logistics,
- and the collapse of the missing middle.

They internalize a systemic design flaw as a personal failing.

But the truth is simple:

No household can budget its way out of a system not built for household stability.

5. “Normal” Has Drifted So Far We Hardly Recognize It

The most sobering part of the current moment is how quickly Canadians are normalizing scarcity. Not famine-level scarcity — but the quiet erosion of flexibility. The sense that choices are narrowing. That there is less room to breathe between paycheque and plate.

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What used to be exceptional — using savings to buy groceries — has become routine. What used to be a temporary measure — stretching proteins, substituting cheaper goods — has become the baseline.

And people carry this in their bodies:

the tightness in the chest when a card might decline,
the hesitation before grabbing the better option,
the way you glance into the basket and calculate backwards.

This is the psychological cost of survival mode.

And it's happening in a country that feeds the world.

What Canadians Still Believe

For all the strain in the system, something else is happening quietly across the country — something that deserves just as much attention as the stress. Even under extraordinary pressure, Canadians have not abandoned their values. In some ways, they're leaning into them more strongly than before.

This is easy to miss if you only follow inflation headlines. But when you look closely at the behavioural data, and when you listen to people talk about how they're adapting, a deeper pattern emerges: Canadians are trying to solve a structural problem with personal ethics and community-minded choices.

And that matters.

It might even be the most important signal in all of this.

1. A Sharp Rise in Buying Local — Even When It Costs More

According to the Fall 2025 Food Sentiment Index, the number of Canadians who say they “always” or “often” choose local foods jumped from **33% to over 50%** in just a single year. That's extraordinary, especially in a period when household budgets are stretched to the limit.

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People are choosing local not because it's cheaper — it often isn't — but because it feels like the one part of the system they *can* influence. Buying local becomes a small act of sovereignty: keeping dollars in the community, supporting farmers directly, and resisting the feeling of helplessness that comes with distant corporate price-setting.

It's as if Canadians are reaffirming, through everyday choices, the idea that food should first serve the people who live here.

2. Sustainability Isn't Slipping — It's Strengthening

You might expect financial pressure to push environmental values to the margins. But the opposite seems to be happening.

More than half of Canadians now say they:

- check labels more carefully,
- try to reduce waste,
- compost consistently,
- and look for foods produced with transparency.

This is the quiet backbone of Canadian civic culture: the belief that even when life is hard, we can still try to do the right thing. And Canadians are doing this without preaching, without fanfare — just as part of the daily rhythm of being a good neighbour in a shared system.

3. Near-Universal Consensus on Food Being Tax-Free

It is rare for Canada — a country of strong regional cultures, differing priorities, and lively debate — to offer consensus on anything. But on food taxation, the national voice is unmistakably unified.

More than **86% of Canadians** support keeping all food tax-free. Every province. Every generation. Every political stripe.

In a fractured political moment, that level of agreement is almost unheard of. And it tells us something important: Canadians still see food not as a commodity, but as a basic right —

something that should remain outside the reach of political gamesmanship or revenue experiments.

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4. Trust Is Shifting — But Not Disappearing

Trust in the food system has softened. Farmers remain the most trusted actors — though even their scores dipped slightly. Trust in institutional bodies (Health Canada, CFIA, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada) has declined. Trust in manufacturers and retailers is weakening.

But this isn't the collapse of trust.

It's the **redistribution** of trust.

Canadians are recalibrating:

- trusting people over institutions,
- local over distant,
- transparent over opaque.

This shift is rooted in experience, not cynicism. Families are trying to build a map of who is actually on their side.

5. Under Pressure, Canadians Don't Turn Against Each Other

This is something we rarely name, but it's visible everywhere.

Even as costs rise, Canadians aren't scapegoating neighbours. They aren't blaming other families for struggling. They aren't turning food insecurity into a moral judgment. Instead, they're offering strategies, swapping tips, sharing discounts, recommending markets, and helping each other navigate a system that feels harder than it should.

There's something quietly noble about that.

A country can weather a lot if it keeps this impulse alive.

6. Values as Data — A Foundation for Change

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When analysts look at food systems, they tend to track the supply chain. When economists look, they track inflation. But when you look at the behaviour of ordinary people, a different dataset emerges:

- affection for local food,
- commitment to sustainability,
- consensus on tax fairness,
- and an instinct to help rather than judge.

This is a remarkable base for national change. Canadians are already doing their part —

adapting, supporting local, sticking to principles even when budgets tighten.

The question is no longer whether Canadians are willing to act with integrity.

They already are.

The real question — the one this article is moving toward — is whether the people who shape Canada's food system will finally meet them halfway.

The System Won't Change on Its Own

By now, the pattern is unmistakable. Canadians are making honest, disciplined, often painful adjustments to keep food on the table. They're buying local. Stretching protein. Cutting back on restaurants and social meals. Pairing coupons with loyalty points. Doing everything a reasonable person can do.

But households cannot fix what households didn't break.

And if there's one hard truth we need to say out loud, it's this:

the system won't correct itself out of goodwill or market pressures.

Not when the incentives run the other way.

- Multinational processors don't voluntarily give back market share.
- Grocery oligopolies don't spontaneously lower margins.
- Provinces don't index supports without public pressure.

- Missing-middle processors don't reappear without coordinated investment. ●
- Export-first systems don't suddenly pivot toward domestic affordability. ●
- Consolidated supply chains don't loosen just because families are struggling.

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These things change only when the public — the people living the consequences — demand visible, measurable action from the people with power.

And here's the part that makes this moment more hopeful than it looks:

Canadians are positioned to do that.

We have the civic values, the regional awareness, and the shared frustration to push for structural change in a way that is both pragmatic and deeply Canadian.

1. Food Security Is No Longer a Niche Issue – It’s a Cross-Portfolio File

What used to be siloed in “agriculture policy” is now spilling into:

- health
- child development
- seniors’ welfare
- rural economic development
- competition law
- small business and industrial policy
- interprovincial trade
- Indigenous food sovereignty
- and even international trade

Food has become the quiet intersection of everything.

Which means elected officials at *every level* now have a stake — and a responsibility — to act.

2. Provinces Have Real Levers – and Some Are Not Using Them

The PROOF–StatsCan data makes something very clear:

- When provinces index supports to real costs, food insecurity drops.
- When they don’t, households fall.

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Alberta and Saskatchewan have been slow to adjust supports even as living costs rise sharply. Quebec adjusted more aggressively — and its food insecurity rate is half the Prairie level. That’s not ideology. That’s policy design.

And Canadians deserve to tell their governments — politely, clearly, firmly — that the gap is unacceptable.

3. Federal Leadership Matters Too

Ottawa controls:

- competition law,
- food safety regulation,
- national transportation policy,
- export strategy,
- and funding streams for processing infrastructure.

Those are the levers that rebuild the missing middle, increase domestic processing, create regional resilience, and push back against oligopoly.

But federal tools rarely move without public scrutiny.

And historically, food security hasn't had a strong civic lobby.

That's changing now — and your readers can help accelerate that shift.

4. The Civic Moment We're In

Canadian households have already demonstrated their values through their behaviour:

- choosing local when it's not cheaper
- sticking to sustainability under strain
- treating food as a right, not a luxury
- supporting neighbours quietly
- refusing to blame each other for a structural problem

These are not small things.

They're the civic equivalents of rolling up your sleeves.

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What comes next is using that same instinct to speak directly to the people who set policy. Not confrontationally. Not theatrically. Just firmly and persistently — the way Canadians have always done when something is clearly out of balance.

5. Why Public Pressure Works

In Canada, the political calculus is simple:

- MPs respond to organized, informed citizen pressure.
- MPPs and MLAs respond to district-level concerns.
- Ministers respond to signals that cut across ideology and region.
- Premiers respond to issues that show up in every newspaper.
- Municipalities act quickly when residents push for local processing and zoning reform.

Elected officials can ignore think-tank reports.

They cannot ignore dozens, then hundreds, of well-informed constituents asking the same clear question:

“What is your office doing to stabilize food affordability and rebuild local supply chains?”

That’s what shifts the political energy around a file.

That’s what forces updates, transparency, timelines, and money on the table.

That’s what turns a quiet crisis into a public priority.

A Food Superpower That Forgot to Feed Itself

If you step back from all of this — from the Prairie Disconnect, the missing middle, the protein divide, the strain inside households, and the values Canadians still cling to — a simple truth comes into focus:

Canada didn’t end up here by accident.

We ended up here by design, drift, and delay.

We built a food system that moves extraordinary wealth across borders but leaves too many families rationing the basics behind their own front doors. We built an export powerhouse that

forgot to build the domestic resilience underneath it. We allowed consolidation to hollow out the middle of our food economy. We let provincial supports fall out of alignment with real living costs. And we assumed that a country rich in farmland could never feel poor at the table.

But here we are.

In a food superpower where millions are living food-poor.

And yet — this might be the one place in the story where hope still has firm footing.

Because Canadians haven't lost themselves in the strain. They haven't turned cynical or fatalistic. They haven't abandoned their values. They haven't turned against each other. If anything, they've doubled down on community instincts:

- buying local even when it costs more,
- reducing waste with intention,
- supporting neighbours with quiet dignity,
- refusing to shame families for struggling in a system that is structurally unfair,
- and treating food as the basic right it is — not a privilege to be earned.

These behaviours matter. They tell us something essential about the national character:

Canadians still believe food should ground us, nourish us, and anchor our communities.

And if that's true — and the data says it is — then the next chapter belongs to us.

Not in a dramatic, torch-waving way.

Not in a partisan way.

But in the everyday Canadian way: steady, clear, persistent, neighbour to neighbour, one kitchen table to the next.

Demanding better from a system that we know can work differently.

Expecting more from the people who design it.

Insisting that a country capable of feeding the world must first be capable of feeding its own.

This moment is not a dead end.

It's a turning point.

A chance to rebuild the part of the food economy we lost — the middle, the regional, the resilient.

A chance to insist on supports that rise with real living costs.

A chance to shift policy from export-first to people-first without abandoning our global strength.

A chance to make food security a national project rather than a household burden.

And Canadians are already halfway there — through their choices, their values, their quiet acts

of care.

All that's left now is to turn that instinct outward.

To ask our elected representatives — firmly, respectfully — to meet us at the kitchen table and begin the work of rebuilding a food system worthy of the country we are.

Food security is now a nation-building file, and it won't move unless Canadians push it forward. If this piece speaks to you, I'm asking you to take one concrete step: write your elected representatives — and encourage your friends, family, and neighbours to do the same. When enough of us speak with steady, united clarity, the system has to respond.

Citizen Letter Template: Stabilizing Canada's Food System

Subject: Request for Action on Food Affordability and Local Food System Resilience

Dear [MP / MPP / MLA / Mayor / Councillor] [Last Name],

I am writing as a constituent concerned about food affordability, rising household food insecurity, and the decline of Canada's local processing capacity. Families in our community — and across the country — are being pushed into difficult choices no matter their income, and the latest national data shows the situation is worsening.

Recent findings from **PROOF** (using Statistics Canada data) show that food insecurity has reached **record levels**, with Alberta and Saskatchewan approaching **31%** of households while Quebec sits at **15.7%**, largely because its income supports track more closely with real living costs. At the same time, the **Fall 2025 Food Sentiment Index** from the Agri-Food Analytics Lab highlights that more than half of Canadians are now buying local whenever they can — even under financial pressure — and that “protein insecurity” is rising across all dietary patterns.

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Households are doing everything they can.

But households cannot fix structural problems on their own.

I am asking your office to take visible, public action on the following priorities:

1. Strengthen income supports so they track the real cost of living.

Food insecurity drops sharply when benefits are indexed properly. Where supports lag, families fall.

2. Increase provincial and federal investment in small and mid-sized food processors.

Rebuilding the “missing middle” is essential. It keeps food dollars local, creates jobs, and reduces dependence on multinational pricing.

3. Improve competition and pricing transparency in grocery retail and processing.

Canada’s high level of consolidation leaves families with little price protection. Stronger competition enforcement is urgently needed.

4. Remove interprovincial barriers that restrict the movement of food, beverages, and regional products.

These barriers limit choice, suppress regional producers, and keep prices higher than necessary.

5. Develop a clear plan for regional food resilience, especially in rural and northern communities.

Local distribution and processing capacity should be part of Canada’s national food security strategy, not an afterthought.

6. Report progress publicly.

Canadians deserve to know what steps are being taken — and what timelines we can expect — to rebuild a system that supports households.

These are practical, non-partisan measures that would make an immediate difference in people’s lives. I would appreciate a response outlining the actions your office is taking, or planning to take, on these issues.

Thank you for your time and service to our community.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]

[Your City & Postal Code/ Riding]

[Your Email]

Thank You for Reading

About the Author

Leni Spooner is a Canadian writer and publisher exploring how Canada's food systems, civic structures, and economic choices shape everyday life. She writes longform essays at *Between the Lines* (BTL), connecting policy to the kitchen table with clarity, warmth and evidence-driven storytelling.

Publications & Platforms

Between the Lines (BTL): <https://between-the-lines.ca>

Substack: <https://lenispooner.substack.com/>

Medium: https://medium.com/@leni_las

Buy Me a Coffee: <https://buymeacoffee.com/lenispot>

Social

Bluesky: https://bsky.app/profile/leni_spooner

X https://x.com/leni_las

community. Together, we can help move Canada's food conversation forward.

Original Publication: <https://between-the-lines.ca/canada-can-feed-the-world/>

Document Title: Canada Can Feed the World — So Why Are So Many Canadians Struggling to Eat?

Author: Leni Spooner

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Subject: Canadian Food Insecurity and Domestic Food System Analysis

Keywords: Canada food system; food insecurity; Prairie provinces; missing middle processors; domestic food supply chain; food politics; protein insecurity; PROOF; StatsCan; Charlebois; Canadian agriculture; export economy; inflation; affordability; civic engagement; national food policy; food sovereignty; Canada food report.

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Description: A comprehensive, evidence-driven analysis of why food insecurity is rising in Canada despite being a global food superpower. This report examines structural drivers—including Prairie affordability gaps, missing-middle processors, income support disparities, and domestic vs. export design—and offers a national call to action.

Language: en-CA