

Between excess/food waste, transport emissions, and pesticide use, the food industry is one of our major climate affectors.



Photo: Peter Wendt

A New Food Guide

Earlier this year Canada released a new food guide. It was years in the making. Among the guidelines for building the foundation for healthy eating, there is a section on the environmental impacts of food choices.

Food production is one of the most significant contributors to climate change. A shift towards more sustainable diets can result in positive health and environmental impacts, particularly in high-income countries such as Canada.

Research suggests that significant strides towards a more sustainable food system can be achieved through a shift toward diets that consist largely of “vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and unsaturated oils, includes a low to moderate amount of seafood and poultry, and includes no or a low quantity of red meat, processed meat, added sugar, refined grains, and starchy vegetables”.⁸

Updating national dietary guidelines to reflect this evidence is one way of spurring change.⁹ The new guide explains the “potential environmental benefits to improving current patterns of eating” including diets “higher in plant-based foods and lower in animal-based foods”.¹⁰ The integration of sustainability principles into Canada’s food guide is a much-anticipated change.

For the first time, the guide explicitly recognizes the environmental implications of dietary choices, creating an opportune moment to build coherence with Canada’s first-ever national food policy,¹¹ which has seen a renewed commitment from the federal government in the 2019 Budget.¹²

Action on Plastics

Single-use plastics remain a part of our everyday lives, and plastic bags have become a key target for governments looking to regulate their use.

Provinces in Atlantic Canada are leading the way in recent demands for bans on plastic bags. On July 1, 2018, Prince Edward Island became the first province in Canada to ban plastic bags when the *Plastic Bag Reduction Act* officially came into effect. The new law bans the use of single-use plastic checkout bags and requires minimum charges for the sale of paper bags and reusable bags.¹³

This year, Newfoundland and Labrador announced plans to become the country’s second province to implement a ban. The announcement came after public consultations indicated overwhelming support for such a ban.¹⁴

In provinces and territories without plastic bag bans, municipal governments are taking the lead. In Quebec, several municipalities have passed bylaws banning plastic bags. Starting with the town of Huntingdon in 2008, dozens of municipalities have joined in, with most of them taking effect in the last two years.¹⁵

In early 2019, Halifax Regional Council voted yes to the single-use item reduction strategy. It includes a motion to collaborate with the ten largest municipalities in Nova Scotia and to draft a bylaw for council’s consideration as soon as possible to eliminate the distribution of single-use plastic bags.

Plastics now find their way into our water and soil, even our bodies. The volume of recyclable plastic is so high, we are unable to process it all at this time.

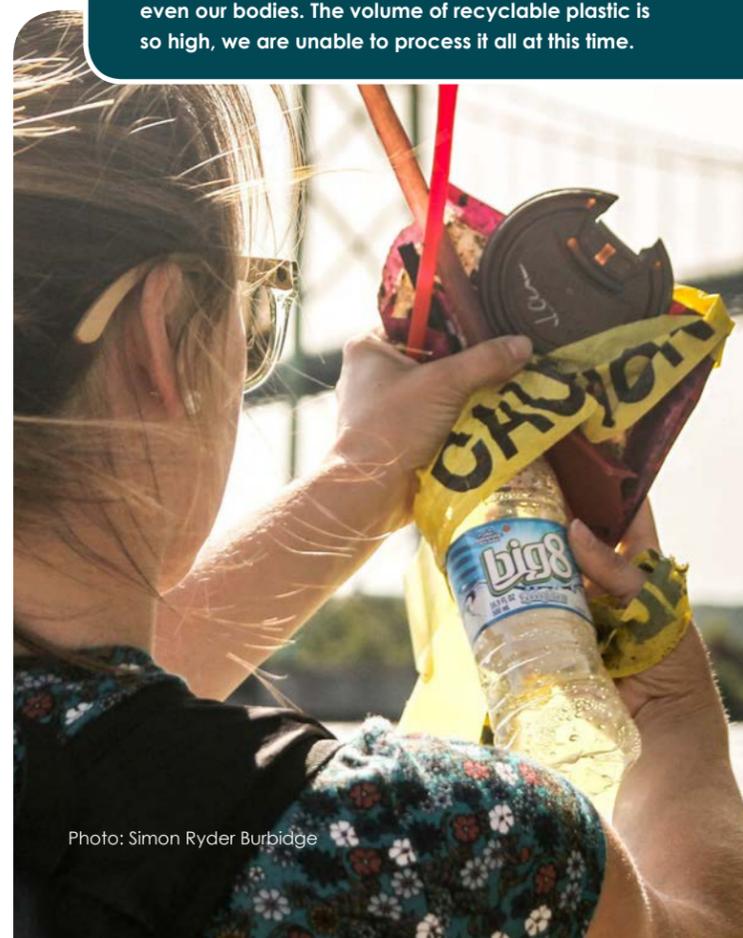


Photo: Simon Ryder Burbidge

Is it enough?

Much progress has been made across the country—at all levels of government—in developing policies, laws, and regulations that more adequately address human impacts on the environment. While there is value—and undoubtedly necessity—in determining whether these changes will be enough to spark a transition toward a more sustainable future, it is important to recognize the possibility of intense disagreement that looms at each step.

To some, carbon pricing measures are too strict; there is concern that it may have negative economic impacts by decreasing the competitiveness of certain stakeholders.¹⁶ For others, Canada’s carbon pricing plan and overall climate policy fall short of what is needed to produce meaningful change.¹⁷ Regarding the food industry, Canada’s meat and dairy producers have expressed strong opposition to the emphasis on plant-based foods in the new food guide.¹⁸ Others argue that the re-vamped food guide falls short and needs an even greater emphasis on sustainable options. It also fails to address cultural and social barriers to food.¹⁹

In an era where the environmental movement continues to gain momentum, it remains to be seen if current efforts will satisfy a growingly dissatisfied youth, who are expressing their dissent against a status quo characterized by capitalism.²⁰ While not transformative, the progress being made might be considered stepping stones towards more sustainable levels of production and consumption. Perhaps making small steps toward sustainability is the most promising solution until we are ready to make a grander transformation.



Photo: Stephen Thomas

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