The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, PC, MP
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON, Canada K1A 0A6

Subject: Federal Government Healthy Eating Strategy

Dear Minister,

We urge you to support your cabinet colleague the Honourable Jane Philpott, minister of health and her department in their efforts to improve the diet of Canadians through the federal government’s Healthy Eating Strategy. This strategy includes the revision of Canada’s Food Guide, restrictions on unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children and robust Front-of-Package (FOP) nutrition labelling.

As health organizations and professional associations concerned about the millions of Canadians living with diet-related disease we feel your support is critically important. The Healthy Eating Strategy is also consistent with the work your department is undertaking to develop A Food Policy for Canada. We applaud you for this.

Why is the Healthy Eating Strategy important?
- The cost of diet-related disease in Canada was $26 billion in 2015.
- Consumption of highly processed food has been associated with a higher risk of overweight and obesity.
- Purchases of ready-to-consume, highly processed foods have doubled in Canada over the past several decades, from 30 to 60% of the family food budget.
- The majority of adult Canadians (60%) do not eat the recommended amounts of vegetables and fruit.
- Children are bombarded on TV and online with marketing for unhealthy foods and beverages.

What will this strategy accomplish?
- Stimulate healthier reformulation and innovation by Canadian food/beverage companies.
- Encourage consumers to eat whole real foods, such as fruits, vegetables, fruit, pulses and low fat dairy products – foods produced by hard-working Canadian farmers.
- Reduce the incidence of diet-related disease/illness in Canada.
- Provide greater savings to the healthcare system and the economy.

In particular, FOP nutrition labelling is important to ensure Canadians can quickly read information about the composition of food products, so that they can make healthier choices more easily. A mandatory FOP labelling system is consistent with global health recommendations to decrease the prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases. Canada’s food regulations exist for the protection of consumers and to ensure labels are not misleading. However, current regulations only allow for voluntary claims on food packages about nutrient content.

The proposed mandatory FOP system would ensure transparency, requiring food products with high levels of sodium, sugar and/or saturated fat to display that information in a quick and easy-to-find format. We believe the use of a simple, highly visible FOP symbol will be more effective at drawing consumer attention than replicating the information from the Nutrition Facts table on the front of pack (as has been proposed by some food manufacturers).
Minister, we urge you to support your colleague the Honourable Jane Philpott and her department to improve the diet and health of Canadians through the Healthy Eating Strategy. This is consistent with your work to promote A Food Policy for Canada. This is also an opportunity to promote a healthy and sustainable food system in Canada, encourage food manufacturers to innovate/develop healthier products and to support hard-working Canadian farmers.

Sincerely,

Lynne Hudson
CEO
Canadian Cancer Society

Dr. Larry Levin
President
Canadian Dental Association

Dr. Granger Avery
President
Canadian Medical Association

Craig Larsen
Executive Director
Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada

Rick Blickstead
President and CEO
Diabetes Canada

Marsha Sharp
CEO
Dietitians of Canada

Yves Savoie
CEO
Heart and Stroke Foundation

Corinne Voyer
Director
Quebec Coalition on Weight-Related Problems

cc. Ms. Andrea Lyon, Deputy Minister, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Honourable Jane Philpott, PC, MP, Minister of Health
Mr Simon Kennedy, Deputy Minister, Health Canada
Honourable Navdeep Bains, PC, MP, Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development
Mr. John Knubley, Deputy Minister, Innovation, Science and Economic Development
Honourable Bill Morneau, PC, MP, Minister of Finance
Mr. Paul Rochon, Deputy Minister, Finance Canada
Honourable Francois-Phillippe Champagne, PC, MP, Minister of International Trade
Mr. Timothy Sargent, Deputy Minister, International Trade
Honourable Melanie Joly, PC, MP, Minister of Canadian Heritage
Mr. Graham Flack, Deputy Minister, Canadian Heritage
Mr. Justin To, Deputy Director of Policy to the Prime Minister
Mr. Tyler Meredith, Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister
Mr. Dominic Barton, Global Managing Partner and Chair of the Advisory Council on Economic Growth
Ms. Marsha Sharp  
Chief Executive Officer  
Dietitians of Canada  
604-480 University Avenue  
Toronto ON M5G 1V2

Dear Ms. Sharp:

Thank you for your letter concerning food policy and the Healthy Eating Strategy. I appreciate the signatories’ perspectives and welcome the interest of health stakeholders in advancing the health of Canadians through improved nutrition. I also appreciate the recognition of the role that farmers and food processors play in providing healthy food choices.

As you know, the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau has asked me to develop a food policy that promotes healthy living and safe food by putting more healthy, high-quality food, produced by Canadian ranchers and farmers, on the tables of families across the country. I am proud to be leading an initiative that will establish a long-term vision that addresses a range of environmental, economic, and social objectives and includes improving health and food safety.

To help design A Food Policy for Canada, we are consulting Canadians and stakeholders, including academic experts; Indigenous groups; agriculture and food industry organizations; non-government organizations with interests in health, food security, and environmental sustainability; and representatives of provincial, territorial, and local governments. Officials from Health Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and the Public Health Agency of Canada are participating in intergovernmental working groups to help develop this food policy.

In order to encourage a range of diverse inputs into the food policy, consultations are taking several forms. For example, an online survey has been developed to ensure that all Canadians have an opportunity to participate. It is accessible at www.canada.ca/en/campaign/food-policy.html, and I would appreciate it if the survey was circulated within your networks. The results from the online survey will also be carefully considered in the development of A Food Policy for Canada.
While the content of the food policy will not be determined until we have heard from Canadians and stakeholders, I certainly appreciate the importance of helping to create a food environment that makes healthier eating choices easier. Additionally, I recognize that efforts to promote healthy eating through nutritious and safe food choices support the objective of helping to improve the overall health of Canadians and reduce the rates of diet-related chronic diseases. Further, I am supportive of efforts by Health Canada to undertake broad and comprehensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, so that a variety of perspectives are heard, and a thorough understanding of the implications of the Healthy Eating Strategy is enabled before programs and their timing are finalized.

As Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, I also note that the food industry can contribute to the goal of supporting healthy eating. For example, the industry has made progress toward reducing the amount of trans fat and sodium in Canada’s food supply, and more can be done to make the food supply healthier. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada supports an innovative and competitive food processing industry able to develop new value-added products that reflect changing tastes and market opportunities. This, I believe, has the potential to help put more healthy food on tables across the country.

Let me take this opportunity to affirm that I appreciate the work of my colleagues the Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, Minister of Health, and that of her predecessor, the Honourable Jane Philpott, as well as their officials in developing the Healthy Eating Strategy. I consider the Strategy’s objectives to be consistent with those of A Food Policy for Canada.

Again, thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

Lawrence MacAulay, PC, MP

c.c.: The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, PC, MP