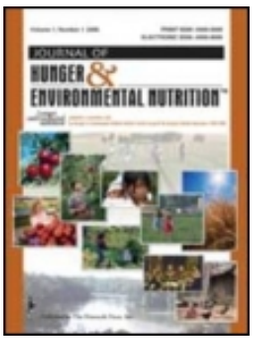

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Getting Civil About Food: The Interactions Between Civil Society and the State to Advance Sustainable Food Systems in Canada

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ABSTRACT. Canada has a long history of civil society involvement in food activism. While neo-liberal developments and deregulation since the 1970s were global in scope, Canada's political response was distinct due to its unique geography, social history, and system of governance. The first significant civil society collaboration to address food system inequities was the Peoples' Food Commission in 1978. The second wave of activism was precipitated by the need for civil society

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participation in the World Food Summits in 1996 and 2002 and led to the formation of Food Secure Canada-Sécurité Alimentaire Canada (FSC-SAC) in 2005. The current challenge for FSC-SAC is how to make an impact within the increasingly reregulated policy decision system. Several opportunities for civil society-state interaction are offered, including possibilities for new types of regulatory action toward greater food system sustainability.

KEYWORDS. Civil society, sustainable food systems, food security, Food Secure Canada, food policy, Peoples' Food Commission, food governance, regulatory pluralism

INTRODUCTION

Movement toward greater equity and sustainability in the food system has generally required advocacy and involvement from civil society.[1–4] Characteristics of a sustainable food system are diverse and comprehensive: they include sustainable production, harvesting, processing, and distribution methods that cumulatively deliver health, economic, environmental, and social benefits to the communities where food is grown.[5] Food activism in these areas has previously been termed "community food security," an expansion of the concept of "food security," which was primarily concerned with household hunger and poverty issues.[6] Thus, civil society activism on food issues has, since the early 1970s in North America, encompassed a broad set of systemic issues while being named differently over time and framed within various types of discourse.[7] For this analysis, the terms food security and community food security are subsumed under the term sustainable food systems.

In recent years there has been a new awareness regarding the lack of sustainability of current practices of production, distribution, and consumption of food and a new wave of social activism and citizens' involvement in food politics in Canada. By looking at historical events leading to the formation of a national collaboration for food security, Food Secure Canada-Sécurité Alimentaire Canada (FSC-SAC), we explore the political, economic, and social reasons for this new engagement and for the increased participation of nongovernmental organizations in service delivery, education, and capacity building. We also review current efforts

of civil society organizations to effectively participate in food policy networks with the federal government, looking particularly at the capacity of each party to participate in what some are calling new models of governance. A combination of structuralist and instrumentalist analysis can help us understand what the challenges are and allows us to identify both short-term and long-term transitional opportunities. In the first part of this article, we examine the post-war social and political context that led to the formation of FSC-SAC. In the second part, we explore regulatory shifts in the food system that are confronted by civil society organizations (CSOs) and some potential short- and medium-term strategies for dealing with the challenges of building a more sustainable food system.

POST-WAR RESTRUCTURING OF THE ECONOMY AND THE STATE

Many observers of the world economy have documented the social and policy changes coinciding with the intensification of global economic ties in recent decades—most of which were relevant, directly or indirectly, to the sustainability of food systems. In the post–World War II era, neo-liberal practices were characterized by the free movement of goods and services across borders, the shrinking role of the state in the economy, the dismantling of social programs, and changes in conditions of work, production, and consumption.[8,9] From the 1950s to the 1970s, many governments, including those in Canada, made changes to public policies, programs, and institutions that tried to regulate markets at national levels. In Canada, these included minimum wage laws, trade unions, environmental protection acts, unemployment insurance, public medicine, marketing boards, supply management, and cooperative structures.

Toward the latter part of the century, however, the intensification of global pressures led to the dispersion of some of the nation states' functions to supra-national formations such as the IMF, the World Bank, or multilateral or bilateral agreements (e.g., the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), World Trade Organization (WTO)) which defined global rules of conduct. At the same time, neo-liberalism increasingly envisioned a society based on a privatized and deregulated economy, where the state's interventions would be limited primarily to providing basic services and infrastructure for the private sector and maintaining law and order.

THE RISING PROFILE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

In the environment of neo-liberal restructuring in Canada, which saw increased privatization and undermined regulatory measures introduced in earlier decades, CSOs gained prominence. In recent usage, the term CSO has been used almost interchangeably with nongovernmental organization (NGO), referring to community-based not-for-profit organizations working for the public interest independently of governments and the market place. The discourse on the role of CSOs has emphasized their function as: vital drivers of change and the democratization process;[10,11] contributing to the transparency and accountability of policy-making; introducing new information, experiences, and perspectives; and contributing to the practical implementation of various initiatives.[12,13] This has included filling the gaps in service delivery unfulfilled by public programs.[14,15]

Several observers have also pointed out the limits to CSO functionality. Operating with limited financial resources and competing among themselves, yet expected to replace the eroding functions of the welfare state, CSOs have been left with a burden that they have not realistically been able to handle.[16,17] CSOs typically rely on volunteers and are pressured to deliver outcomes defined by funders as opposed to the communities they serve.[18,19] Moreover, critics have argued that without anyone directly electing or appointing them, CSO representatives lack legitimate political authority and can be dismissed as self-serving interest groups.[20,21] Despite these challenges, many CSOs have played a vital role in serving their targeted communities and advocating for their interests.[22] CSOs have steadfastly provided the backbone for social movements fighting against hunger, poverty, homelessness, and environmental degradation, often working in close cooperation with their global partners.[23] It is critical to the success of CSOs that they find ways to sustain their own functionality through adequate resources, effective organization, strategic planning, and political astuteness.

HISTORICAL FEATURES OF CANADIAN POLITICS AND FOOD POLICY

Canadian political activism has reflected multiple political tensions over time, including the social justice struggles of aboriginal peoples, ethnic minorities, new immigrants, farmers, fishers, and workers. Unified national action and collaboration have been challenging because

of Canada's unique geographic, social, and political features: a landmass of almost 10 million square kilometers, with a population spread thinly on a roughly 150 kilometer strip along the US border. The historical linguistic and cultural separation of francophone and anglophone communities has also set limits to social interaction between these two "solitudes."

Political activism in Canada must also be placed in the context of political power realities at various levels. For example, the ambiguity in the federal-provincial distribution of legislative powers has reflected the tensions between centralizing and decentralizing dynamics in Canada since its formation. Over the years, the federal government has expanded its jurisdiction over income tax, unemployment insurance, social welfare programs, and a national health care plan. Yet, the administration of many food-related levers such as education, labor, health care, agriculture, and social legislation have remained under provincial jurisdiction. Municipal governments were left to fund and govern their own public health (including food inspection and health education), water supply, urban and regional planning, housing, recreation, transportation, and social services—all of which were directly or indirectly relevant to food system sustainability. With their closer ties to the "grass roots" of the nation, municipalities have frequently exploited ambiguities in jurisdiction and become the source of major innovations. Canada's publicly funded health care system, for example, came out of the "municipal doctors" program adopted in remote rural communities in the province of Saskatchewan, eventually leading to the federal Medical Care Act of 1966.

Some important developments in Canadian food policy were shaped by outside influences or pressures. The Food and Drug Act of 1874, for example, was almost entirely based on similar British legislation.[24] The federal unemployment program, which indirectly influenced the nutritional status of Canadians, was created in response to pressures by the League of Nations following the Great Depression, to "develop national nutrition councils with the specific purpose of setting national standards."[24] Social activism in the food system, however, was complicated by fragmented political organization, varying priorities, and linguistic and rural-urban divides, making unified action difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, there has been a long tradition of farmer, fisher, and labor activism for social change that played a key role in establishing most of the social programs that have become "an integral part of Canadians' sense of identity, part of their conviction that they have created something different than their neighbours to the South."[25]

CSO ACTIVISM FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN CANADA

A significant attempt to improve the Canadian food system as a whole took place during the late 1970s. It was a moment of relatively unified action among a wide range of food activists with different priorities. Alarmed during the 1970s by increases in rates of inflation and unemployment, rising housing prices, and a decline in working conditions in the food industry and farming, about 125 Canadian CSOs including the Canadian Labour Congress, the National Farmers Union, the Canadian Union of Students, the YWCA of Canada, the National Indian Brotherhood and various national and provincial organizations joined together to hold a series of hearings from coast to coast. They documented how Canadians were dealing with deteriorating economic conditions, explored food system connections through case studies, and listened to proposed solutions. Thus, the People's Food Commission (PFC) was formed in 1978. The commission prepared its final report, *The Land of Milk and Money*,[26] in 1980, raising concerns about the lack of sustainability of the Canadian food system. Unfortunately, the report was shelved. Nevertheless, developments in the food system during the next quarter century demonstrated that the PFC had good reason to be alarmed.

As the impacts of corporate and governmental downsizing had increased unemployment and poverty in many parts of Canada during the 1980s, one of the first civil society responses was to create food banks. Assuming that the economic downturn was temporary, food banks began distributing surplus food to the needy with the cooperation of the food industry and philanthropic citizens. The first food bank opened in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1981. By 1992, food banks in Canada outnumbered McDonald's franchises 3 to one. In March 2006, 753,458 hungry Canadians received food from 649 food banks across the country. During 2000–2001, almost 15% of Canadians, or an estimated 3.7 million people, were considered to be living at some point in a food-insecure household.[27,28]

Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, food banks gained a significant profile in the front line fight against hunger, but they were criticized for not addressing the "root causes" and for their close relations with the food industry.[29–31] A unique CSO-government partnership took place during the mid-1990s in response to food insecurity among pregnant women: the Montreal Diet Dispensary, Healthiest Babies Possible in Toronto, and the Stop 103 Foodbank (Toronto) became models for the new Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, operationalized by Health Canada funding, local public

health staff, and community agencies in all provinces. Also during this period, CSOs such as FoodShare in Toronto and the Child Hunger Education Program (CHEP) in Saskatoon created alternative models such as co-operative food buying systems, collective kitchens, and community gardens that aimed to build longer-term capacity of individuals and communities. Advocacy directed to provincial and federal policy arenas was a key strategy of many such community food security organizations across Canada.

In the 1990s, local governments began to get involved in anti-hunger and community food security projects. Toronto, the largest and most ethnically diverse city in Canada, was hit by an economic downturn. As jobs in the city disappeared, the burden of dealing with the homeless and hungry was transferred to the local government while federal and provincial authorities continued to dismantle social assistance programs, downloading them onto the municipal property tax base. The Toronto Food Policy Council was formed in 1990 for the purpose of partnering with business and community groups to develop policies and programs that promoted equitable food access, nutrition, community development, and environmental health.[32] Vancouver followed suit in 2003 when the Vancouver Food Policy Council was accepted by their city council. Though operating with limited resources, food policy councils have become good examples of civic involvement in food policy at the local level.

Civic activism in food politics during the era of neo-liberal restructuring expanded to other systemic food issues. For example, many primary producers (farmers and fishers) organized and demanded policies to protect their livelihoods. These producer groups were often fragmented or defined by sectoral interests; they seldom made links with urban-based unions and were often seen as special interest groups by governments. Those representing smaller, family-based commodity producers were on the front lines of the struggle against market pressures and government indifference to their plight. In farming, there has been a persistent decline in real net farm income since the mid-1980s, falling below Great Depression levels by the early 2000s.[33,34] Organizations such as the National Farmers Union and the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters identified corporate control as the most significant factor behind the crisis in primary production.[35] These types of food justice issues have gone beyond producer groups and are now part of the agenda of many food-related CSOs in Canada.

Since the 1990s, environmental and health concerns about factory farms, trawl fishing, fish farms, agro-industrial inputs, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), hormones, antibiotics, and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

have broadened the scope of food policy debates. It also created new alliances between family farm and organic food coalitions and urban environmental and community food security movements. As farms increased in average size and pursued an ever more industrialized production approach, the problem of agricultural pollution became more urgent across Canada.[36] Food scares, such as mad cow disease on the Prairies and bird flu in British Columbia (BC) raised questions about food safety. More recently, awareness has grown about the role of agri-food systems and global commodity chains in the production of greenhouse gases. As a result of all these phenomena, agricultural sustainability emerged in the 1990s as a key issue for a wide range of CSOs.

Concurrently, the rise in obesity and food-related diseases in Canada, as in most industrialized countries, illustrates the health implications of highly processed diets as well as food environments dominated by fast food.[37,38] Canadian statistics are showing some consistency with international research that associates greater risk of obesity with populations of lower socioeconomic status.[39] This is especially true for Aboriginal populations in Canada who suffer food insecurity, obesity, and type 2 diabetes related to a decline in food sourcing from the land.[40,41] Professional associations representing nutritionists, dietitians, and public health workers have joined the campaign against obesity, food insecurity, junk food advertising targeting children, and other environmental issues affecting food intake.[42–44] In BC, recognizing the imminent unaffordable costs related to rising obesity, there has been a groundbreaking collaboration between all provincial government ministries, local governments, schools, employers, communities, farmers, and professional organizations to connect public health and food security with agriculture and the sustainability of the food supply.[45]

With these shifts in awareness of food system problems, and the diversification of CSO work on these themes, the stage was set for the new kinds of alliances among CSOs. But before looking more closely at these developments, we first review Canada's participation in the World Food Summit processes.

WORLD FOOD SUMMIT CONSULTATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP

The World Food Summit (WFS) in 1996 was presented as another promising arena to eradicate global hunger, to reform the food system, and to ensure food security for all. After World War II, food security

emerged as a global social objective defined as a "condition in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."[46] Although Canada was a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976), it had not taken any concrete action on food security.

Canada was, however, one of the signatories of the World Food Summit. The Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action in 1996 called for each nation to develop and implement a plan to achieve food security domestically and internationally. The goal was to reduce by half the number of undernourished people in the world no later than the year 2015. The FAO emphasized the importance of identifying the special needs of vulnerable groups, monitoring food security, and designing effective national policy and program options for food security.[47]

Following the World Food Summit, Canada developed the Action Plan for Food Security.[48] The plan recognized the important role played by civil society "in social, political and economic reform, through public education, advocacy and participation in public policy formulation." The plan envisioned a multisectoral approach involving the federal provincial and territorial governments, CSOs, and private institutions. It consisted of domestic and international initiatives to address food security. These initiatives included: defining the meaning of the right to food and ways to implement it; ensuring access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for everyone; finding economically and environmentally sustainable ways to increase food production; promoting health and sustainable development; and establishing a monitoring system for food insecurity. Consultations with CSOs during the drafting of the action plan were to reflect their priorities and contributions to food security in Canada and globally. However, the participation of CSOs at this level was indiscriminate and haphazard and was criticized by some civil society groups as ineffective, simply serving to legitimize the existing system.[19]

As part of its commitment to the World Food Summit, in 1999 the Canadian government created a Food Security Bureau (FSB) within Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). Observers were quick to note that, located under the Global Affairs Branch, the FSB had practically no domestic mandate. It was a virtual office with a Web site to permit downloads of Canada's action plan; it was understaffed and underfunded. In response to criticism, and in preparation for the next Food

Summit in Rome in 2001, AAFC reactivated an interdepartmental committee where representatives of different government branches would periodically meet with invited CSO representatives. The interdepartmental committee's only achievement was convincing the federal government to fund a food security conference to listen to CSO voices.

One underlying reason for federal inactivity on issues such as those identified in the Action Plan for Food Security is the broad and uncoordinated distribution of agriculture and food-related responsibilities among various branches of government. At the federal level, issues dealing with food production and processing are under the jurisdiction of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Industry Canada. Environment Canada often has a lead on sustainability files. When trade and foreign aid are involved, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Export Development Canada, and the Canadian International Development Agency are added to the mix. A similar complexity appears for nutrition-related matters, involving Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Yet hunger, poverty, local development, and equity concerns are handled by Human Resources and Social Development, Indian and Northern Affairs, Status of Women Canada, plus a variety of regional agencies. Since many of these portfolios are also the domain of provincial or municipal governments, the political system makes action on complex issues such as food security unmanageable. As well, it is very difficult for CSOs to stay abreast of developments at all these levels.

THE CREATION OF FOOD SECURE CANADA

Inspired by the World Food Summit that was planned for the fall of 2001, CSO representatives from all Canadian provinces and territories were invited for the first Working Together conference at Ryerson University in Toronto in June 2001.[19] It was held in a new spirit of civil society–government cooperation. The conference resolved that there was a need for a national food security network and that the organizing committee be given a temporary mandate to explore ways of facilitating it. Thus, the Canadian Food Security Network was established, with an electronic mailing list designed to inform Canadians concerned about ongoing issues of food security and sustainability.

After the events of September 11, 2001, however, the World Food Summit was delayed until the following summer. This had a dampening

effect on Canadian organizing, made worse by the FAO's recognition that its 2015 target for hunger reduction could not be met. The FAO projected that instead of 400 million undernourished people as predicted in 1996, there would be 610 million by 2015 and created a new target to reduce hunger to 440 million by 2030. In this new environment, many national action plans for food security, including Canada's, turned into plans with no action. Many CSOs felt that the failure to implement Canada's action plan was due to dysfunctional relations with governmental agencies. The absence of a strong national organization of CSOs, a paucity of data on community food systems issues and lack of political will hampered the federal government's international reporting capacity.

Despite these setbacks, the 2001–2004 period was generally characterized by a new dynamism in regional and national organizing efforts and global cooperation. The fledgling Canadian Food Security Network initiated the food-democracy list-serve hosted by Ryerson University to facilitate dialogue among food security advocates. The Canadian Food Security Policy Group (FSPG) was formed by several Canadian NGOs, all members of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), to promote food security as a priority in international policy. Regional food security networks such as the BC Food Systems Network, the Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador, Food Secure Saskatchewan, and the Food Democracy Network expanded regionally.

During this period, food charters were created as citizen-based vehicles to engage their public institutions and to develop a common approach for good food practices in their communities. The first food charter in Canada was adopted by Toronto City Council on March 6, 2001.[49] Since then, food charters have been developed and approved in Sudbury, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Kamloops, Merritt, Vancouver, and the province of Manitoba. Similar work is underway in Ottawa, Montreal, the Capital Region District (Greater Victoria, BC), and the province of Saskatchewan.

A second national conference, Growing Together, was held in Winnipeg on October 2004. Over 200 people representing a diverse group of Canadian CSOs, both domestic and international in focus, agreed to create a formal organization to promote and advocate for food security and sustainability issues. An interim steering committee was formed to initiate the organization's mission, structure, constitution, and bylaws. The conference unanimously agreed that the organization would be founded upon three pillars: zero hunger, a sustainable food system, healthy and safe food. That such broad goals could be held by one nascent organization was seen by many at the time as the culmination of activities from the 1970s to the 1990s.

The Third National Food Security Assembly was held in Waterloo, Ontario, in 2005, to ratify the new organization, to be called Food Secure Canada/Sécurité Alimentaire Canada (FSC-SAC).[50] A slate of officers was elected, with members from 6 major regions of Canada as well as an Aboriginal representative. The steering committee members also brought expertise from nine areas relevant to food security: international; food banks; sustainable farming and agriculture; small scale fisheries/sustainable aquaculture; health and nutrition; environment and sustainable development; community and school food projects; economic, social and cultural policy and programming; and labor. It is noteworthy that this conference was organized and partly sponsored by a municipal public health department (Region of Waterloo), which recognized the relevance of food security to community health as well as the value of civil society's engagement toward this end. FSC-SAC's goals and first year action plan were distilled from 27 facilitated workshops on the above-mentioned topics.[50] Federal and provincial political leaders spoke at the inauguration, including Ontario's senior medical officer of health, the director general of Health Canada's Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion, and a representative of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada.

THE FIRST YEARS OF FOOD SECURE CANADA

In the year following its inauguration, FSC-SAC was legally incorporated as a civil society organization. With a Web site, an electronic listserv, and a small budget derived mostly from membership dues, the organization has relied upon voluntary efforts to implement its initial work plan. Working papers and briefs were initiated on the following topics: Children's Food and Nutrition; Local Food Self-Reliance; Canadian Foreign Aid for Food Security; Food Security and Climate Change; and Fisheries Issues in Canada. A fourth national conference and the first FSC-SAC AGM were held in Vancouver in 2006, jointly with the American Community Food Security Coalition. Several members of FSC-SAC were involved in the creation of a new academic research group, the Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS), to share interdisciplinary information and enhance the evidence base for food systems work. Plans are currently underway to pursue the work of the original People's Food Commission.

That these diverse groups could collaborate at all, particularly after the tensions between sustainability advocates and food bank operators in

earlier periods, was likely a product of increased familiarity with each others' positions but also due to some flexibility in the FSC-SAC organizational form. It was decided that FSC-SAC would work for its members by facilitating their collaborative activities. FSC-SAC would only have a distinct voice when its members so decided through formal approval mechanisms. Projects would emerge from the members and, if consistent with the FSC-SAC mission, would be advanced by FSC-SAC with the involvement of those members participating in the initiative. Members could opt out of any campaign not in accord with their organization's wishes. Despite this novel form and the enthusiasm it generated, FSC-SAC has struggled to find its organizational feet and fulfill its operational mission. In its attempt to create national collaboration among a regionally, linguistically, politically, and ideologically diverse network of food security organizations, FSC-SAC faces formidable challenges. However, there are also unique political opportunities that give room for optimism.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CSO GROWTH AND FOOD POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The reasons for optimism regarding the potential of CSOs to influence food systems have to do with the general political and social climate in Canada and the increasing urgency of responding to global environmental crises through sustainable agriculture, distribution, and consumption strategies.[51,52] First of all, a powerful national sense of community persists. Despite the prevalence of a neo-liberal free market ideology in the public sphere, many of the more egalitarian traditions that flourished from the 1940s through the 1970s have endured. Support for Canada's universal and publicly funded medical system is unchallengeable, even by the extreme right. The same is true for basic standards of public education, public health, and public recreational facilities. Socially and environmentally, progressive and social democratic political parties fare well and often win elections in several areas where working people, farmers, and fishers form the majority, as has frequently been the case in Québec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. This indicates a favorable circumstance for CSOs, which champion issues that are publicly perceived as socially, economically, nutritionally, and environmentally healthy.

Secondly, the food security and sustainability movement in Canada has proven its ability to grow in a society with a high and consistent commitment

to egalitarian values and levels of public and governmental services. The social polarization and fragmentation often associated with neo-liberal economic changes has not definitively or negatively impacted the body politic. Nor has there been any significant or longstanding privatization or deterioration of energy or water utilities. Even when governments do not fund or otherwise enable progressive food organizations, the charitable, foundation, and nongovernmental fields have stepped in. As a consequence, Canada enjoys a wide range of respected, effective, engaged, and innovative (though often small and poorly funded) food security and sustainability organizations. Food policy councils and food charters exist in several cities and provinces, as noted above. NGOs such as Farm Folk City Folk, Foodlink Waterloo Region, Equiterre, Beyond Factory Farming Coalition, FoodShare, Local Food Plus, Kingston Food Down the Road, and the Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador rank among the leaders in grassroots policy innovation.[53] Farm- and fisher-based organizations such as the National Farmers Union, Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, Union Paysanne, Canadian Auto Workers (representing fishers in Newfoundland and British Columbia), and Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters provide world-class services and foster progressive food approaches to their rank-and-file members.

Thirdly, new opportunities for CSOs are possible due to changes in governance structures and regulatory mechanisms. In recent decades, a process of reregulation[54] resulted from the dispersion of some federal government functions to global institutions. At the opposite end, decentralizing tendencies shifted many other federal functions to provincial or municipal governments. This environment of reregulation hampers the ability of national/federal governments in the policy-making process. At the same time, however, it offers new opportunities for CSOs at the local and regional levels. As the example of Canada's national health plan demonstrated, local and provincial levels of governments can be more hospitable grounds for policy shifts within Canada's governance structure. However, this environment also requires closer cooperation, dialogue, and coordinated efforts among CSOs operating in different localities to carry local or provincial achievements to the national level.

In the current political climate, core systemic values such as equity, sustainability, and respect for diversity continue to be deeply rooted among the people at large, even though support for "alternative" methods of food production and distribution is limited to "early adopters" such as urban environmentalists and "social creatives." On certain issues—support for institutional purchases of local food, for example—these early adopters

can expand their ranks to become "an early majority."[2,55] In effect, the emerging food sustainability movement may move to its own version of reregulation rather than fighting to uphold obsolete forms of regulation or capitulating to neo-liberal deregulation. But clearly such interest in regulatory reconfiguration depends as well on the state. We turn now to a discussion of emerging governmental efforts to govern in this changed environment and how it can strategically inform CSOs in their efforts to improve food system sustainability.

GOVERNMENT–CIVIL SOCIETY RELATIONS UNDER REGULATORY RECONFIGURATION

In the neo-liberal era, governments are searching for new and effective regulatory instruments without unduly straining limited human and financial resources.[56] Food sustainability issues are acutely affected by this reality, by the complexities of the subject, and by larger shifts in the loci of the national state's decision-making. For their part, civil society, although looking for alternative approaches, has been slow to realize that shifts are underway within the state and have not necessarily recognized the opportunities and challenges inherent to government efforts to find next generation policy instruments. The next section explores these themes and possible changes for food-related CSOs and different levels of government to embrace.

Shifts in Loci of Decision-Making

Over time, several broad forces that determine how well the state operates have diminished its ability to take action on complex issues, including food systems sustainability.[57] We draw particularly on the work of Savoie[58,59] for this section.

Civil society has tended to define its role as an extra-parliamentary one, trying to influence political actors sufficiently to change voting patterns in legislatures. At one point this was a sensible strategy, given that the government is supposed to make policy and parliament's role is to hold government accountable for its activities. But parliament's capacity to do this has eroded in the era of neo-liberal restructuring (as discussed above), challenging the foundation of CSO strategy. The combination of increasing issue complexity, limited experience of members of parliament (MPs), insufficient MP staff resources, limited parliamentary instruments of scrutiny, the enhanced role of the Auditor General, televised question

period, and changes to media scrutiny mean that Parliament focuses primarily on embarrassing the government and less on substantive policy critiques and solutions. Government, in turn, spends an inordinate amount of time protecting against embarrassments and consequently less time on substantive policy positions. The latter is what food sustainability work requires; but to this point, the former concern has prevented such issues from entering serious debate in the policy arena.

Though it might be argued that parliament's historical power over government came from its ability to review proposed government expenditures, since the late 1960s, its ability to do this has been seriously reduced by changes to the rules around debates, timing, and construction of expenditure budgets. Now it is rare for parliament to significantly alter government expenditure proposals. Consequently, there are few real opportunities to challenge government expenditure priorities and shift them to other worthy endeavors.

It is now unlikely that complex, multidimensional, and multidepartmental food policy issues would undergo substantive parliamentary discussion, due to roadblocks at all levels. At the senior levels, such policy is unlikely to be a priority of the prime minister's office (PMO). Secondly, Cabinet participation in policy-making has been eroded, so that agriculture or health ministers are not likely to bring forward significant food security legislation without PMO approval.

At the parliamentary committee level, even if such a significant food systems–related bill were to be presented, changes would only be adopted with government support. In addition, committee capacity to review is compromised by the complexity of most bills and by the limited resources of the committee and individual parliamentarians. MP-bureaucracy relations are generally strained because many elected officials believe public servants now have too much influence over policy development. Some parts of the civil service are even under siege for being political liabilities, their actions perceived by elected officials as politically problematic. In turn, public servants question the competence of many elected officials, viewing them as adversaries.

In a neo-liberal economic environment, trade associations and business lobbies do have considerable influence on government priorities, though such influence is not uniformly applied.

Business lobbies are also affected by these changing dynamics, unable to present their case effectively when it is unclear to whom the case must be made. It is in these less "invaded" spaces that CSOs may have room to operate.

As an example, paradoxically, when a bill reaches the parliamentary committee stage, this creates one of the few significant opportunities for CSOs to influence parliamentary debate, by providing committee members with expert analysis to inform their participation. Even more oddly, it creates the conditions for new kinds of business–CSO collaborations to advance mutual agendas, since agreement from these normally adversarial sectors takes away one reason for government inaction, namely that no consensus has emerged among the stakeholders.

It is also important to recognize that many governmental bureaucracies tend to support the status quo, rather than tackling complex files in a substantive way. These change-resistant tendencies typically include: avoidance of contentious "out-of-the-box" initiatives; emphasis on crisis prevention; reluctance to allocate sufficient resources to programs; secrecy and confidentiality; and avoidance of public and parliamentary scrutiny.

The Search for New Policy Instruments to Deal with the Complexity of Food Security Issues

The older approach to regulation discussed above worked well for issues where the state had significant capacity, the issue was targeted, but the policy actors were recalcitrant.[60] Food sustainability issues, however, present challenges that are difficult to solve. This is because they are politically and programmatically complex, vast in scale, spread among multiple sectors that may face benefits or losses, and challenging to the competencies of government.[61] Nevertheless, these types of modern issues are the reason why next generation policy instruments are currently under development.

Gunningham[56] has described 5 somewhat intersecting categories of regulatory reconfiguration that have emerged as responses to the loss of traditional government regulatory capacity. As they are environmental, social, and economic in nature, they are of relevance to food system sustainability issues. They can also be viewed as opportunities to identify new roles for CSOs.

- Reflexive regulation: designs self-regulating social and business systems by establishing norms of behavior and organization (e.g., environmental management systems, HACCP-type systems, labor force performance).
- Regulatory pluralism: where governments facilitate the harnessing of resources of markets, civil society, and other actors to achieve

policy goals more effectively with greater social acceptance and lower government costs (e.g., local food certification programs). The challenge is to synchronize the diverse instruments (including some traditional regulatory ones) to make it all work.

- Environmental (and social) partnerships: steers a middle course between traditional regulation and total self-regulation and voluntarism (e.g., green business alliances or negotiated agreements between government and business regarding environmental performance, skills development, and training).
- Civil regulation and participatory governance: civil society sets the standard for business behavior and firms decide voluntarily whether to participate. Governments may be bypassed completely or may play a facilitating role.
- Ecological modernization and the "green-gold" hypothesis: Government intervention to promote ecologically sound capitalism, eco-efficiency, carbon-trading, and the development of green technologies.

At this stage of evolution, different government units are experimenting with these different models, attempting to determine which ones will produce the best results.

CONCLUSION: NEW DIRECTIONS IN CSO–GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

Shifts in decision-making authority and policy instruments have profound implications for the future of civil society–federal government relations in the sustainable food systems arena. In theory, both civil society organizations and government bodies have much to offer each other: creativity, cutting edge information, on-the-ground successes, and political legitimacy from civil society; and decision-making power, some financial resources, and scaling-up capacity from the federal government. In reality, it is not currently obvious that either has the knowledge, structures, will, or capacity to work in either formal or loose networks of collaboration. The earlier interactions between CSOs and the federal government surrounding the development of the Action Plan on Food Security can be understood as an early, but largely failed, effort to advance some of these models.

The challenge for organizations working toward structural changes in the food system, such as FSC-SAC, is how to get into the policy decision

system. A working presumption, based on the Savoie analysis described above, is that policy influence can arise more from interactions with middle and senior management and less from trying to influence parliamentarians. Given the level of federal inactivity on food security and sustainability implementation, how can FSC-SAC revitalize the agenda, serve its own organizational objectives, and help those federal civil servants who are committed to action to advance their internal agendas? Admittedly, the shifts in loci of decision-making and the next-generation approaches require different skill sets from civil society. Instead of a traditional focus on the parliamentary level, CSOs must display an ability to understand civil service realities, a detailed grasp of programs and regulatory instruments (down to the regulatory protocol and directive level), and a willingness to provide information and legitimacy to civil servants in a useful, politically sensitive manner.

Provision of high-quality information, creativity, and analysis is a starting place. In Canada, federal officials have been very dependent on CSOs to fulfill their reporting relationship to international bodies such as the FAO. CSOs, understandably, have been reluctant to assist, given how little they feel they receive in return and how minimal government activities have been. There are signs, however, that government would welcome a highly functional food security and sustainability umbrella organization, partly because of government-wide imperatives to advance the next generation policies and partly because officials are aware that much of the expertise lies outside their own organizations. Once federal officials find significant value in CSO-generated information and analysis, the regeneration of some advisory committees and processes might be in order. Such committees would provide points of constant contact and ready access to middle or senior managers.

For both sectors, effectively embracing regulatory pluralism will likely be essential. Moving in the direction of more sustainable food systems will require an eclectic policy mix, including some traditional regulatory instruments, in support of newer approaches. It may be that pressing issues related to food system sustainability, such as global warming, fossil fuel cost and availability, environmental and health crises, land use disputes, and obesity, will serve as opportunities for the sustainability movement, necessitating improved cooperation between CSOs and the state. For this to happen, the movement itself will have to be sustained with independent funding, improved political skills and knowledge, an organizational framework that facilitates individual member action, and strategies that enhance its value to government.

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