

Nova Scotia Food and Beverage Strategy

Public Engagement
What We Heard

May 2023

Nova Scotia Food and Beverage Strategy

The Government of Nova Scotia is developing a Food and Beverage Strategy to outline policies, programs and initiatives that help raise awareness of, improve access to, and increase the production of healthy local food. Healthy local foods are food and beverage products that are grown, produced, harvested, or processed in Nova Scotia and help meet nutritional needs.

The Nova Scotia Food and Beverage Strategy will guide the work of government, partners, industry, and stakeholders toward common goals for our food system:

- Nova Scotians have increased access to healthy local food;
- Promote more food and beverage production and encourage Nova Scotians to choose local;
- Support the agriculture and seafood sectors that are the cornerstones of many of our rural communities; and
- Create a more diverse and inclusive food system – including production, processing, transportation, and sales to arrive on our tables.

Engagement

We are taking a coordinated, whole-of-government approach and working closely with industry and community partners to create this Strategy. Interviews with key partners involved in the food sector were conducted to help identify potential opportunity areas for the Food and Beverage Strategy before we engaged the public.

We engaged with Nova Scotians in late 2022 to learn about their experience with healthy local food and what government could do to improve that experience.



How we Engaged

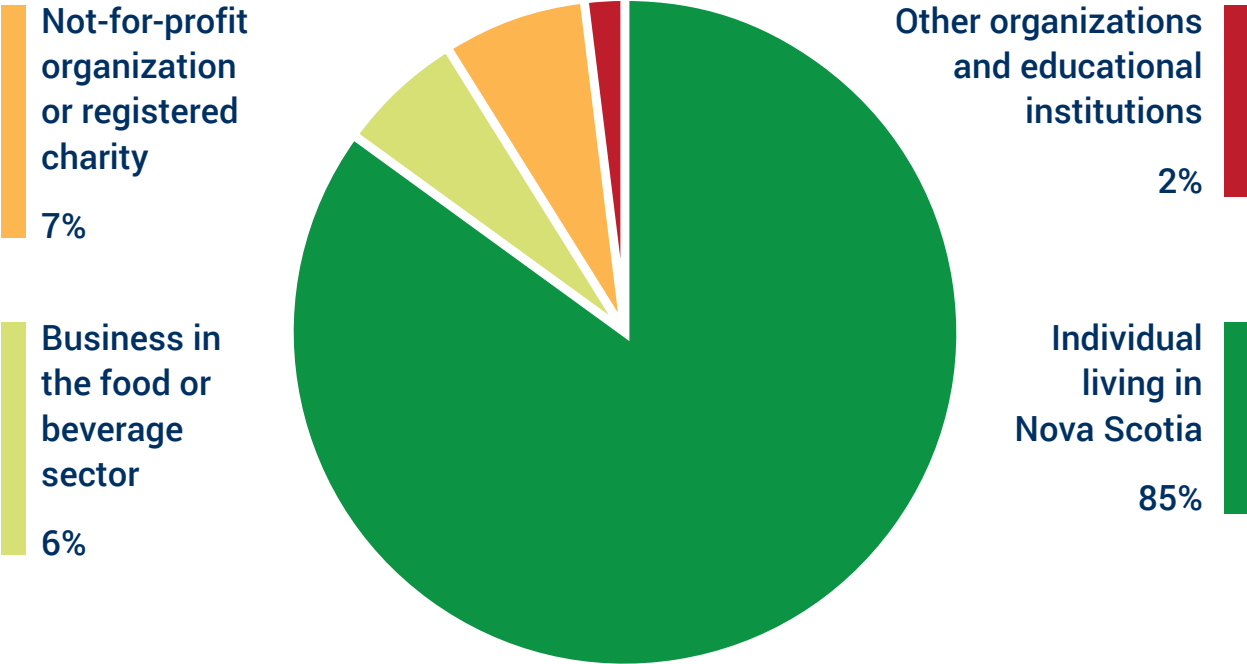
We provided all Nova Scotians with opportunities to engage on the Nova Scotia Food and Beverage Strategy through:

- An engagement website in both French and English novascotia.ca/food-and-beverage-strategy-engagement
- An online survey in both French and English that was available from November 25 to December 23, 2022
- An email address FoodStrategy@novascotia.ca and a phone line

Engagement opportunities were advertised through print and radio ads and social media.

Who We Engaged

Approximately 1,900 Nova Scotians provided input during the engagement period. We heard from many individuals as well as businesses and organizations that have an interest in the food and beverage sector:



What We Heard

Nova Scotians are finding it difficult to access healthy local food, especially as the prices of food, fuel and other necessities rise. Many participants expressed support for a Food and Beverage Strategy and want to see an action plan and targeted government initiatives. However, many also recognized that a Food and Beverage Strategy alone will not solve food insecurity, and that other supportive policies are required to address broader social and economic factors that drive inequities to accessing healthy local food.

Most participants thought it was important that the food they eat is from Nova Scotia but would also like to see a more detailed definition of 'healthy local food'. Many participants were confident that they have good awareness of healthy local food in the province but did not feel that they or their children receive adequate education on this topic.

An overwhelming amount of feedback and suggestions were provided in the identified opportunity areas, including:

Food Access Infrastructure

Nova Scotians would like to see more healthy local food offered in educational facilities, grocery stores, healthcare facilities, community spaces, restaurants, and other public spaces. However, providing healthy local food in these places presents many challenges for a Food and Beverage Strategy to address.

Facilities find it hard to get food from local producers that are in rural areas and don't have the individual capacity to meet needs for volume, variety, and year-round availability. Better transportation, distribution, and storage infrastructure is needed. Limited institutional budgets and increasing costs also make it difficult to purchase healthy local food.

“Each institution that has to buy some sort of food is given a certain budget and have invariably argued that they have no choice but to buy the very cheapest food on offer, which is always from somewhere else in the world.”



Food Security Initiatives

Participants were supportive of many existing food security programs such as school food programs, Nourishing Communities “Food Bucks”, Meals on Wheels, and Square Roots. Some programs need continued and increased government support.

People also want more support to help afford healthy local food and expand availability of healthy local food, especially at large retailers and in remote rural communities. More information about seasonal availability, preparation, and preservation of healthy local food would be helpful. The programs and support currently available should be broadly advertised and could better incorporate advice from nutritional professionals.

“While I recognize this is about local food production and distribution and building our capacity to feed ourselves with locally produced products, food security is an income issue that will only be effectively addressed through government policy to ensure adequate income to afford the basics: housing, food, heat.”

“All community initiatives should be connected and could support one another - community garden growers giving workshops on gardening, farmers market vendors providing uglies to be used in community kitchens, etc.”

Collaborative Food Networks

Communities would like to see more educational workshops that include knowledge sharing by community members. Community level food production, like community gardens and greenhouses, and food preparation, like community kitchens and communal storage space, were priorities for Nova Scotians. More farmers’ markets and year-round local markets should be offered in more communities. People also want to see connection and coordination of these initiatives and other food programming within their community.

Capacity Building for Underrepresented Groups

Participants thought ‘First Voice’ was very important, working directly with underrepresented populations to understand their needs and encouraging and empowering communities to lead initiatives. Partnerships with various cultural organizations, community groups, non-profit organizations, producers, and farmers’ markets were suggested. Promoting the different culturally diverse food that Nova Scotia has to offer and supporting diversity in food businesses will help our food system become more open and welcoming.



Underrepresented groups such as Mi'kmaq people require sovereignty over their food future. Newcomers to Nova Scotia need more information, provided in multiple languages and formats, on the food available here and how to access it. Nova Scotians stressed that while these groups deserve equal representation in the food system, access to food impacts everyone.

“Inviting individuals from underrepresented and diverse groups to sit at the table and take on leadership roles is essential. Valuing people’s time and providing compensation for their participation.”

Marketing of Local Products

“Education is the key, please take a few minutes to explore the Dutch model, we are as a province larger than the Netherlands and have the capacity to be as self sufficient as they are.”

Broad promotion of healthy local food and beverages was recommended, including labelling of local products, financial incentives to purchase local, and increased media presence. Government should work with large retailers to encourage them to carry and identify local products. Farmers’ markets were seen as another important way to promote local food.

Education on healthy local food in schools, from daycares to high schools, was identified to increase awareness. Education in schools should be linked to community gardens and local producers.

Targeted Production Support

Nova Scotians would like to see more healthy local food produced in all food groups. Increased production can be supported by technologies and methods to extend growing seasons, the sharing of resources through co-ops and food hubs, and increased support for small-scale farming. Government support was requested to help decrease the cost of production and reduce red tape.

More communication needs to be facilitated between local producers and institutions that want to procure healthy local food. Respondents suggested that government could help make these connections by having directories and matchmaking services, coordinating ordering and distribution through food hubs, and creating supportive policies. Financial incentives were also suggested to help institutions purchase local.

“We must make sure the farmer gets paid and supported and respected and that they aren’t being asked to donate when they more than most need funds to keep farming.”



Food Processing Expansion

Nova Scotians identified a need for more food processing in the province, including more abattoirs, federally inspected meat processing facilities, fruit and vegetable processing, value-added processing, and seafood processing for the local market. Financial support, such as no interest financing or assistance with start-up costs, was suggested. Government should ensure that Nova Scotia's infrastructure and regulatory standards are supportive to attract new processing businesses.

“Small scale ‘right-sized’ flexible infrastructure investments are needed. Processors can’t amortize investments in equipment that is only used a few weeks every year.”

Business support and training was also suggested, including support for navigating food safety requirements. Research and development can help processors automate, extend shelf-life, and reduce waste.

What's Next

The Government of Nova Scotia will continue to work with industry and community partners to develop initiatives under a Food and Beverage Strategy. The input provided in this public engagement will be used to ensure the strategy reflects the opinions and priorities of Nova Scotians.

Contact Us

For questions or more information, please email foodstrategy@novascotia.ca

Or visit our website at:

novascotia.ca/food-and-beverage-strategy-engagement

