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June 24, 2015

GPC 2015 platform background paper

*Canada needs an innovative forward-thinking food strategy – one that promotes food security, food safety, and healthy food. We must protect the soil we depend upon. **The Green Party believes strong national leadership is required to promote agricultural sustainability, energy efficiency and support farm families.** This means encouraging the localization and diversification needed to stabilize the food economy without expensive government subsidies. It means thinking local, building soil capacity, encouraging economic diversity, reducing farm debt and increasing the number of young farmers. **It means stronger food safety regulations, and an end to pesticide contamination in our food and water.***

Food production in Canada must reconcile the need for affordable food with that of adequate income for farmers. These issues are not in conflict. **We must stop encouraging farmers to go into debt, apply pesticides freely and use techniques which degrade the soil in order to pull off bumper crops which have little value.** 40% of farm production is wasted because food is cheap and proper storage and handling are expensive. Another 20% of agricultural produce is fed to cars as bio-fuel or turned into non-food products.

Agriculture policies must stop the waste. **The Green Party calls for an end to subsidies for any biofuel that returns less energy than is used to produce it.** We want investment in soil building techniques to return life to the land and restart its natural productive capacity. We want to save energy, reducing the cost and waste of long distance transportation of agricultural products back and forth across the country. We can do this by rebuilding local food processing businesses and keeping the jobs at home.

The Green Party wants to put opportunity back into food production. We support rural economies by encouraging all farmers to add value to their products through local, direct sales. Through such measures we can decrease poverty and increase food access, trading food for work by supplying garden plots and teaching food growing and processing techniques.

The Green Party approach to Canadian agriculture policies is clear: reduce the dependence on chemical inputs, rebuild and protect natural soil fertility, value quality produce and support local economies, reduce waste and increase the number of farm families.

Measures to encourage responsible agriculture would include diversification in the field, on the farm and in communities. Agriculture must be economically sustainable, not

propped up by tax dollars through Business Risk Management schemes which reward specialization and instability.

Responsible farming includes humane treatment for animals at all times, including transportation and meat processing. Voluntary codes of practice should be made mandatory.

The current government's food policy has been to encourage farms to produce bumper crops with little regard to quality, to pay farmers little or nothing, and either to allow the excess produce to be wasted or to dump it on the export market where it undercuts farmers' produce in other countries. In secretive trade and investment negotiations, insufficient attention has been given to a coherent national food strategy that supports our rural economies.

Years of encouraging farmers either to expand or get out of the business have also resulted in a massive and unsustainable farm debt. Policies which allow outsiders, such as pension plans, to buy land on speculation have priced farmland beyond the financial means of young farmers. Farms are being consolidated and farmed badly by temporary workers with little knowledge and no attachment to the land. We should be encouraging small-scale farmers to get out of debt and rebuild a strong, resilient farming community. In this connection, we should consider imposing a limit on non-resident land ownership to ensure that farmers do not have to compete with land speculators.

Credible Canadian food policies must involve the federal government working collaboratively with provincial governments. Under the *Constitution*, responsibility for agriculture is explicitly shared between two levels of government, with provincial legislation required to coordinate with federal laws in the event of a conflict. So national leadership is required not to create further bureaucracy, but to establish national standards where appropriate and to clarify the provincial and federal jurisdictions. At the federal level, the Minister of Agriculture must always work in close collaboration

with his or her counterparts in Health, Natural Resources, Water Stewardship and Rural Development.

Cooperation is key in farming and agricultural cooperatives should be encouraged in order to allow farmers to receive fair compensation for their efforts. The Green Party would restore investment in cooperatives. In the aftermath of the unfortunate sale of the Canada Wheat Board, we will also review the options for small farms to market products at a fair price within a reasonable distance.

The Green Party is firmly opposed to widespread pesticide use and to the Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) seed developed to be pesticide-resistant. The Green Party will protect and promote the farmer's right to save and use non-GMO seed without cost. We will make GMO labels mandatory to give the public a choice when considering the source of the food they buy.

Food is life. The federal government cannot continue to muddle along without sound policies or strategies for sustainable agriculture. Leaving our food system to the mercy of predatory market forces is not an option. Canadians want to know that the production of their food is in the hands of capable farm families who care about quality, care about their animals and care about the environment. We need a government which values farmers, food security, and food safety.

With respect to food safety, the Green Party supports strengthening the mandate and funding of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). Over-reliance on the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) self-inspection system has failed. The federal government decision in the spring of 2008 to reduce meat-packing inspections in favour of greater self-regulation and self-monitoring through the Compliance Verification System was tragically followed by a listeriosis outbreak in the summer that led to more than 20 deaths. Despite the announcement in

June 2012 of planned improvements to food inspection, including bigger fines for violations, no further action has been taken. The Agriculture Union, among others, notes that the number of Canadian food inspectors has even declined. In addition to other initiatives, the Green Party supports the development of effective, affordable food safety protocols for small processors, and an increase in the number of on-site inspectors for large processors.

In remote communities, we must also improve and increase the monitoring of indigenous food sources (e.g. caribou and salmon) to ensure Inuit and First Nations are not over-exposed to persistent organic pollutants and heavy metals. We must also address issues of food security and unacceptably high prices of food for Canada's northern peoples. Extractive industries must not be permitted to dump toxins or destroy water or food sources.

Water and agriculture are inextricably linked. The Green Party demands clear national leadership to establish world-class regulatory standards for drinking water safety, and to ensure adequate funding of municipalities and indigenous communities to ensure safe water. Over fourteen years after the Walkerton tragedy in which seven people lost their lives after drinking water tainted with E. coli, we still await long-promised national water standards. In the meantime, inadequate standards result in a steady stream of boil-water advisories and health scares, most recently on the Aboriginal reserve of Attawapiskat. Across-the-board cutbacks in the 2012 federal budget did not inspire confidence that the Conservative government is interested in approaching health and safety regulations in any effective way. **The government should greatly expand national scientific capacity and build up collection and analysis of the most up-to-date scientific and technical information on water, soil, and air quality.**

Sustainability and responsibility must be our fundamental guiding principles for an effective food strategy. Over the long-term, this means greater focus on strengthening the viability of smaller farms, increasingly the only option for a growing number of younger farmers.