



## Platform Note: Achieving a healthy, sustainable food system

### Commitment

- We will phase out the prophylactic use of antibiotics in animal farming.
- We will support initiatives to increase consumption of plant-based foods, as recommended by Canada's Food Guide and other expert publications.
- We will promote initiatives to reduce animal protein consumption, for the benefit of human and planetary health.

### Background

There is overwhelming and compelling evidence to support a shift away from a high animal protein diet to one that is primarily plant-based for reasons of public health, environment, and animal welfare.

Meat and dairy do not provide nutrition in an efficient or sustainable way. While meat and dairy provide just 18% of calories and 37% of protein, they use 83% of farmland and produce 60% of agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup> Industrial animal agriculture is a primary contributor in what many scientists consider the three most serious human health threats: climate change, antibiotic resistance, and the rise of noncommunicable diseases.<sup>2</sup>

Experts agree that without drastic reductions in global meat consumption, agriculture will continue to degrade and destroy natural habitats, contribute to species extinction and consume the entire world's carbon budget necessary for keeping global temperature rises under 2°C by 2050.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

Agricultural intensification is responsible for over 50% of infectious diseases from animals since 1940.<sup>6</sup> Increasing demand for animal-source foods stimulates the intensification and industrialization of animal production. Animals used in industrial agriculture are genetically similar, making them more vulnerable to infection than genetically diverse populations because the latter are more likely to include some individuals that better resist disease. Conditions on these farms are crowded, facilitating disease transmission.

Approximately 75% of the world's antibiotics are used for farm animals, increasing the public health threat of anti-microbial resistance (AMR). Reducing antibiotic use requires a reduction in the number of animals raised for food and a reduction in global meat and dairy consumption.<sup>7</sup>

### Public and stakeholder support

A 2019 poll commissioned by World Animal Protection shows 89% of Canadians believe the overuse of antibiotics in farm animals is wrong, 82% believe antibiotics should only be used to treat sick animals and 88% said governments should increase farm animal welfare laws.

Reducing meat and dairy consumption in favour of more plant-based foods aligns with Canada's new food guide<sup>8</sup> and would help address climate change. Recent data shows Canadians are thinking more about the consequences of their eating habits and are making changes for the better. Most Canadians have reduced meat consumption,<sup>9</sup> and appear ready for an 'eat less meat' message.<sup>10</sup>

## Polling results

An EKOS Research Associates' nationally representative online survey of 2,143 Canadians conducted in July 2021, demonstrated that Canadians are concerned about the harmful effects of industrial animal agriculture on human health and the environment, and support policies to transition to healthy and sustainable food systems.

### Key findings

- **94%** identified health and education, **84%** identified climate change and **82%** identified pandemic prevention as somewhat or very important issues leading into an election.
- **Sixty percent** agreed with many experts who have identified antibiotic use in farming as contributing to a rise in antibiotic resistant "superbugs" and said they would support phasing out the prophylactic use of antibiotics in industrial farming. The strongest support for this came from women (65%) and BC residents (68%).
- **Sixty-two percent** support providing financial incentives to farmers to transition away from the industrial model of farming to alternative, more sustainable, systems.
- **Seventy-six percent** say water quality is the most important reason for regulating industrial animal agriculture. Support is highest among women (80%) and Canadians over 65 (80%).
- **Seventy percent** believe animal protection and welfare are somewhat or very important issues when deciding who to vote for, particularly women and Green Party voters.
- **Almost half (47%)** of Canadians are very concerned about the possible environmental effects of animal consumption, such as the increase in biodiversity loss and the increase of greenhouse gas emissions associated with animal agriculture. More women (53%) expressed concern compared to men (40%), as well as Canadians under 35 (61%), British Columbians (56%) and Quebecers (52%).
- It is worth noting that **35%** of Canadians report reducing or eliminating their consumption of animal products over the past 12 months with the two main reasons cited for this as: 1) to improve their health (41%), and 2) to reduce the impact on climate change (31%).

## Precedents

- Maple Leaf Foods, Canada's largest food processing company, and Loblaw, Canada's largest retailer, are steadily expanding their plant-based inventory to meet market demand.
- New York's mayor has called upon residents to eat less meat to fight climate change impacts.<sup>11</sup>
- The European Union has banned the prophylactic use of antibiotics as of 2022.<sup>12</sup> Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and the Netherlands – already have prohibitions on using antibiotics to prevent disease in groups of animals.<sup>13</sup>

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Poore J, Nemecek T. Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers. *Science*. 2018;360:987-992. Retrieved from: <https://josephpoore.com/Science%20360%206392%20987%20-%20Accepted%20Manuscript.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2817%2931358-2>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02409-7>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2817%2931358-2>
- <sup>5</sup> Food System Impacts on Biodiversity Loss: three levers for food system transformation in support of nature. Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2021. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/02/food-system-impacts-biodiversity-loss>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/preventing-future-zoonotic-disease-outbreaks-protecting-environment-animals-and>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://cddep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The-State-of-the-Worlds-Antibiotics-in-2021.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://abacusdata.ca/a-meatless-revolution-or-a-temporary-fad/>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://abacusdata.ca/a-meatless-revolution-or-a-temporary-fad/>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://plantbasednews.org/news/environment/nyc-mayors-offices-urges-public-to-reduce-meat-intake-fight-climate-crisis/>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/25/european-parliament-approves-curbs-on-use-of-antibiotics-on-farm-animals>
- <sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antibiotic\\_use\\_in\\_livestock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antibiotic_use_in_livestock)