

PREPARED BY



STRATEGY FOR EARNING PUBLIC TRUST IN FOOD AND FARMING IN NS

FEBRUARY 2021

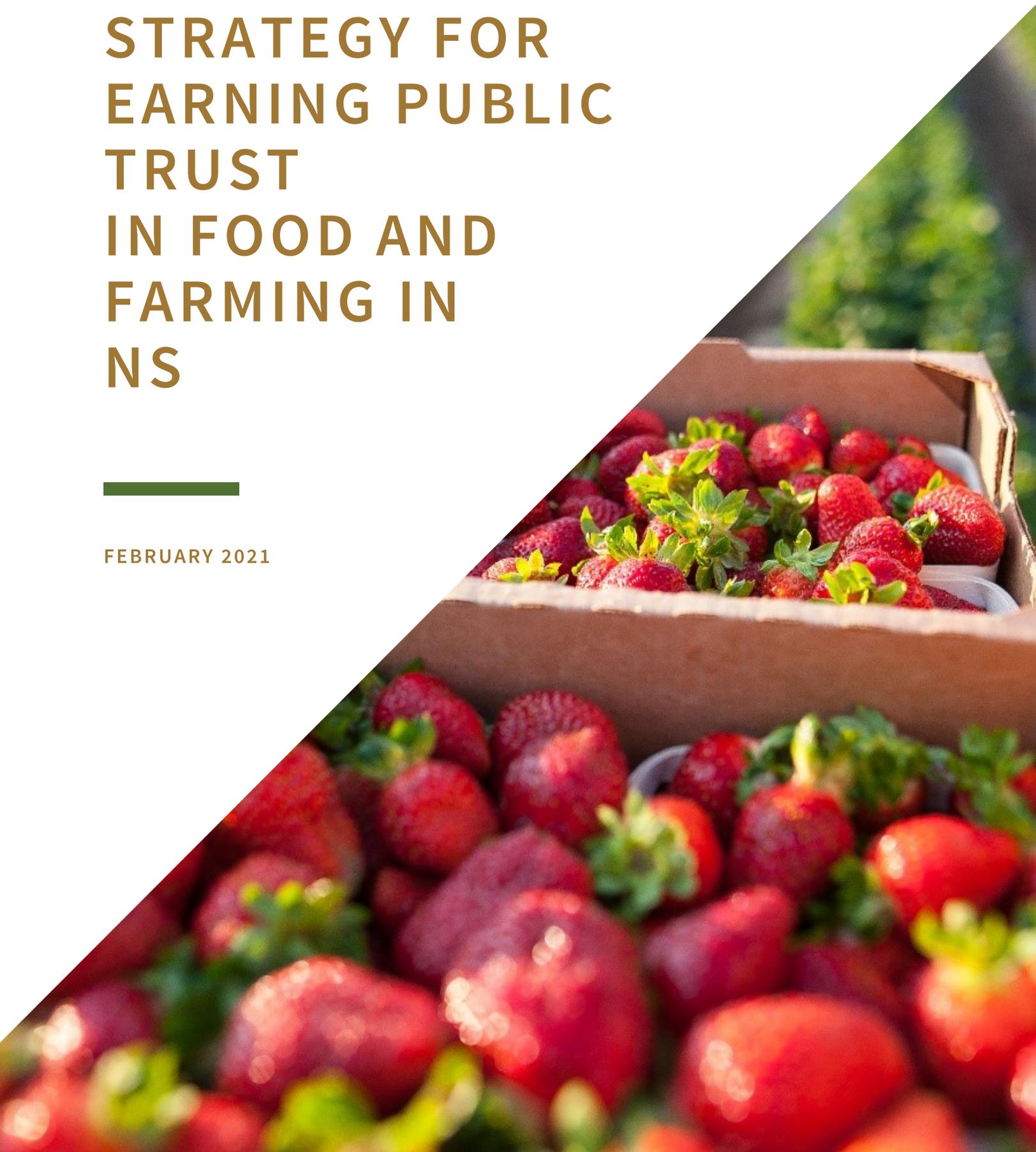


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WHAT IS PUBLIC TRUST?

Oxford Languages defines trust as the firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.

“Trust is the most important business and brand asset you manage, especially in relationships with customers, clients, employees, and stakeholders.” Aespire

The best way that we can describe public trust is: When people believe in and have peace of mind in food and farming in Nova Scotia. Public trust in this space is about connecting on shared values and trusting a whole system that gets food to fork.

Food and agriculture’s ability to innovate, grow and thrive in the future depends on the foundation of public trust. It is a business risk and opportunity that needs strategy, investment and resources with a long-term commitment. Trust is the currency of the future.

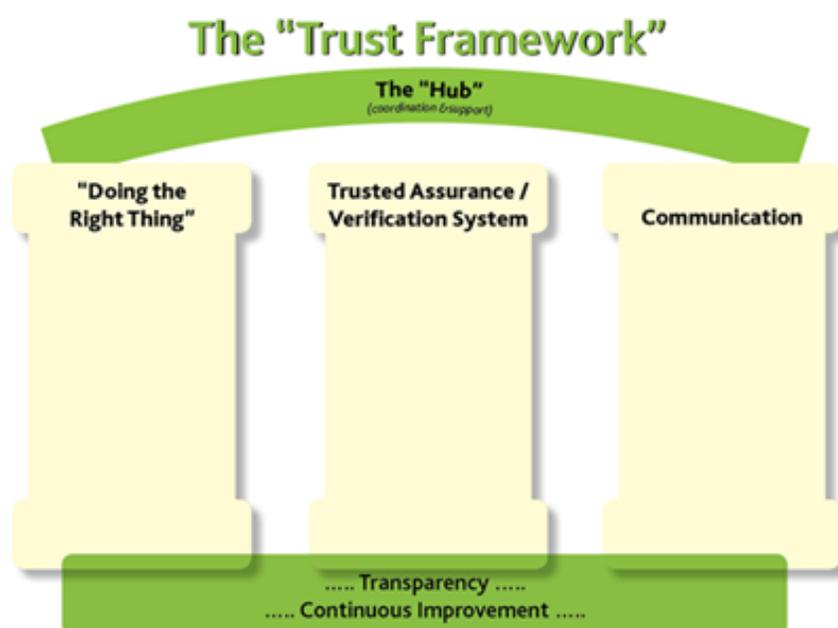
Why is Public Trust Important?

The trends on erosion in public trust in food and farming come from the European Union, to the United States into Canada. The timelines vary from five to twenty years for an issue to move from the EU to Canada and is increasingly getting shorter. When studying issues, concerns and loss of public trust related to food production in other countries, the answers are always unanimous. Get ahead, be proactive and collaborate. Do not take public trust for granted.

Canada is a world leader in collaborative thinking and efforts related to earning trust in food and farming. In 2016, some forward thinking provincial Deputy Ministers brought together a small group of leaders from various sectors and across the food supply chain to discuss what is needed to earn trust in our food system. That effort multiplied to gather input at sessions across the country as the ‘journey to earning public trust’ with hundreds of industry, NGO, academia and government taking part. The same year, the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI) was launched with the vision to help the food system earn trust through research, forums and resources.

The Trust Framework

The Trust Framework was developed to demonstrate what is needed to earn trust. This is not a short-term public relations campaign. It is grounded with a strong base of 'do the right thing,' with a commitment to continuous improvement and transparency. The food system works diligently every day and invests millions of dollars to ensure we are doing the right thing, the first pillar. The middle pillar illustrates the need for trusted assurance systems and regulations.



These systems and processes help us verify we are doing the right thing. The third pillar is about the need for communications and coordination. All three pillars are needed to successfully earn trust.

With great input from Nova Scotia stakeholders, this strategy was developed to focus on the coordination and communication needs related to earning trust in the food system, with a commitment to transparency. There is a strong base of doing the right thing, trusted assurance systems and regulations already with many food system partners. The biggest gap to be addressed is the need to communicate and connect with the public about those aspects effectively.

Nova Scotia Here and Now

Recent studies from the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (2016-2019) highlight the following:

- In Nova Scotia, the level of concern around most food issues is higher than the national average. 74% of Nova Scotians are concerned about keeping healthy food affordable compared to 63% of Canadians overall.
- When it comes to the direction of the food system, Nova Scotians are split. 32% right direction, 39% unsure and 28% wrong track. That means almost 400,000 people are unsure in Nova Scotia.
- The opportunity is now, while the impression of agriculture in Nova Scotia is higher than the Canadian average at 61% compared to 55%. On the report card scale, this still ‘needs improvement.’
- Canadians hold food processors and government ‘most responsible’ for topics like food safety and providing information about food. They also rank them the ‘least trusted.’
- When asked about transparency about food information, farmers got the highest marks with only a 34% in the 8-10 rating. Retail and restaurants rated lowest.
- On average, 93% of Canadians say they know little or nothing about farming. There is no difference in knowledge between rural and urban populations, or between Nova Scotia and the rest of Canada. Almost two-thirds say they want to ‘know more’. They do not want to ‘learn more’.
- Farmers are rated with a warm impression and credible overall on most topics related to food and farming, along with researchers. However, on animal welfare, farmers have lost ground and fall behind humane societies, veterinarians and animal scientists.



This strategy was drafted with input from many Nova Scotia food system partners, through a workshop, a webinar, conversations and online surveys. With sincere appreciation to all who have contributed their time and thinking towards this effort to date.

This strategy should be viewed as a work in progress and the first stepping stone towards a larger movement. It will be stronger with input and buy-in from more people from across the Nova Scotia food system with different views and different channels to engage with the public.

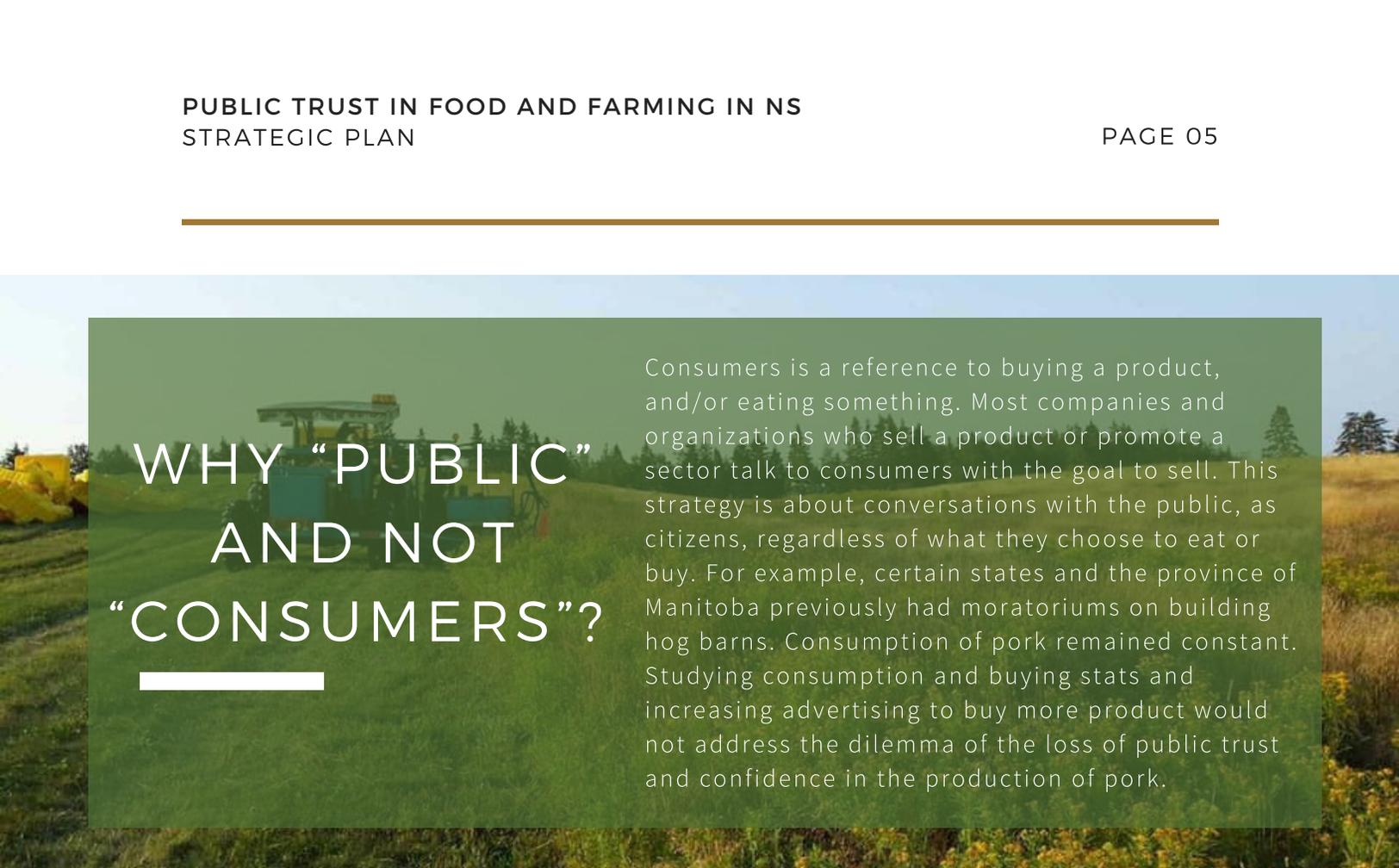
Total Population: 971,395

300,000 in Halifax

60% Rural

93% English Speaking





WHY “PUBLIC” AND NOT “CONSUMERS”?

Consumers is a reference to buying a product, and/or eating something. Most companies and organizations who sell a product or promote a sector talk to consumers with the goal to sell. This strategy is about conversations with the public, as citizens, regardless of what they choose to eat or buy. For example, certain states and the province of Manitoba previously had moratoriums on building hog barns. Consumption of pork remained constant. Studying consumption and buying stats and increasing advertising to buy more product would not address the dilemma of the loss of public trust and confidence in the production of pork.

The Process

This strategy was originally drafted by Loft32 with input from many Nova Scotia food system partners, through an in-person workshop, a webinar, conversations and online surveys. It should be viewed as a work in progress and the first stepping stone towards a larger movement. It will be stronger with input and buy-in from more people from across the Nova Scotia food system with different views and different channels to engage with the public.

Workshop

A unique group of 30 people came together in Truro on February 5, 2020 to provide valuable input into developing a public trust in food and farming strategy for Nova Scotia. Hosted by the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, attendees included farmers, government, associations, academia and restaurants. The workshop provided attendees with content related to public perceptions of food and farming, and existing work related to earning trust and demonstrating transparency. Attendees then provided their input and ideas, including a SWOT analysis of risks and opportunities related to earning trust; insights on what’s already working well and honest feedback on what’s needed for the future.

We asked the participants at the Truro workshop to rate,
'How well do you think the agriculture and food sector is
doing when it comes to public perception and trust in
Nova Scotia?'

On a scale of 1 to 20 with 1 being awful and
20 being amazing.

The average score was 11.3

Surveys

The strategy development process included the opportunity for people to provide feedback and input through online surveys. Nova Scotia food system partners, including farmers, provided their ideas, including what is already working well and what is needed to be successful in the future. We also surveyed those who are working on earning public trust in food and farming or related areas locally and nationally. Specifically:

- Agriculture in the Classroom – NS, Canada
- AgMoreThanEver (Farm Credit Canada)
- Canadian Centre For Food Integrity and US Center for Food Integrity
- Farm & Food Care – PEI, ON, SK

The following are some highlights of the many insights we received from both surveys and in workshops:

WHAT'S NEEDED?

- More coming together, collaboration across supply chains and with government.
- Recruit more ambassadors, provide training and coaching
- Increase reach and frequency of positive media, social media
- Evaluate existing efforts (e.g Open Farm Day) with a public trust lens

WHAT WILL PREVENT SUCCESS?

- “Division and competition within the sector”
- An agriculture industry not willing to listen to the public’s concerns
- Lack of resources to spend to reach the masses needed

WHAT TO DO?

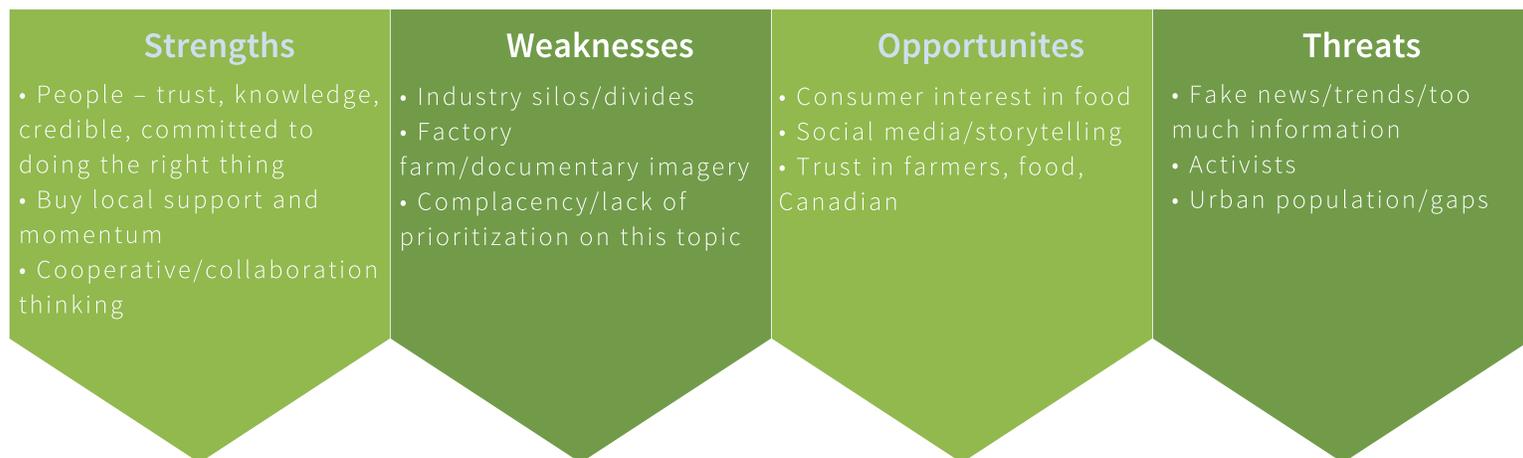
- Partner, collaborate, work together
- Create a big enough vision a whole food system can support
- Plan for long term commitment to be successful
- Leverage and multiply existing efforts

WHAT NOT TO DO? DO NOT...

- Skip strategy and move immediately to tactics.
- Let politics or government funding or specific corporate interests drive the bus
- Make it just about farming and facts

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

What are the key SWOT factors related to trust in the food system in Nova Scotia?



The strategy and related workplans will take these factors into account. What needs to be overcome? What are the existing opportunities that can be utilized to jumpstart success?

Vision

A CONNECTED AND
TRUSTED FOOD SYSTEM IN
NOVA SCOTIA

There are many sections and moving parts to our food system. Strengthening our existing relationships and building new, a connected food system that is wired for communication and the ability to deepen trust with each other and with Nova Scotians.

Mission

CULTIVATING
RELATIONSHIPS THAT BUILD
TRUST IN FOOD AND
FARMING

To achieve our vision, we will be working on strengthening relationships, with each other in the food system and with Nova Scotians, that are built on a foundation of trust.

The Food System

It is imperative that the people who are involved in food are working together to build trust. Who is that in Nova Scotia? We developed the graphic below to show who the individuals, groups, businesses and supporting organizations are. Each of the stakeholder groups below, engage with Nova Scotians on varying levels already. This graphic depicts the need to connect the food system partners around Nova Scotians.

Food System Partners



Collaboration

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. This work is not a sprint. Building trust is an intentional act that happens continuously. There is no end point. Connecting to one another in the food system is the foundational step to a connected and trusted food system.

Priorities

- Precompetitive thinking – food systems partners need to come together early on as collaboration is the key to success in earning trust for the future of food and farming.
- Work in progress – this strategy and its execution is better with your input and energy. This work is building a movement not a campaign or a new organization. The work will always be in a state of “in progress”
- **What’s in it for me? – together and collectively, we have better reach and effectiveness than any individual effort or budget could achieve. Together, we hold more credibility than commercial interests or advocates. Working with others on trust will benefit you and your organization by breaking down barriers that would be hard to do on your own. We are greater together.**

But what about?....

Government

The government should be viewed as a valued partner in this work but food system partners will lead directly, with government at the table. The food system needs to be willing to invest in public trust as a business risk to be managed or the true vision and purpose will not be achieved.

According to CCFI data, the public holds the government as one of the key parties responsible for food safety and for sharing information on food transparently, yet gives government a poor report card on both. Nova Scotia has the highest percentage of the population in the country with values-based views that the role of government is really important to ensure trust in food.

Academia

Researchers and institutions play such an important role in the Public Trust Framework. They help determine the basis for the pillars – particularly doing the right thing, trusted assurance systems and regulations. Researchers are also viewed as very credible sources of information on most food system related issues. With the earlier mentioned principles for earning trust, they are not trying to sell a product or lobby for a position. They are viewed as experts genuinely trying to help people understand. However, most do not have a very large reach to public target audiences. Creating opportunities for academic experts to help increase their volume and confidence is a key strategy for success and credibility.

Educators and Students

Both groups are rated very highly as important partners and audiences by stakeholders in Nova Scotia. This emphasizes the importance of the work lead by Agriculture in the Classroom with the Department of Agriculture and related efforts. This strategy will focus on post-secondary education adults, with the strong recommendation for the need for collaboration and alignment with efforts directed to students and educators in schools.

Objectives

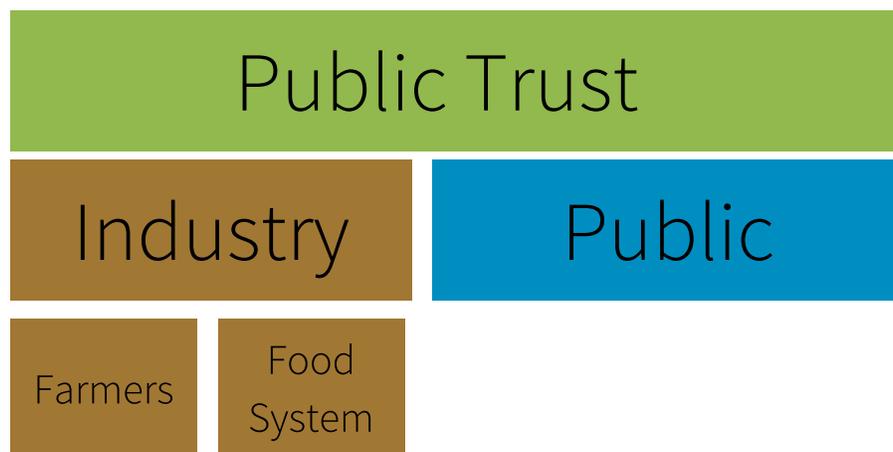
What do we want to accomplish in this work? The following are the big-picture goals to help us fulfill our mission.



Strategic Priority

To reach our vision of “a connected and trusted food system in Nova Scotia” the strategic priority is public trust. There are two distinct groups that stem from this work: industry (specifically farmers and food systems partners) and the public. We will explore how each of these groups will be captured in this work through long- and short-term tactics.





Industry

This is the internal work that needs to be done. It's farmers and the food system working together to understand public trust, identify values and get their homework done.

Short term (1-2 years):

Vision Champions- those folks that believe deeply in the work and are ready to roll up their sleeves. Within each food system partner group, we will identify a well-respected leader who could serve as a champion for the vision to their peers; starting with a small group, and building concentric circles of larger groups.

Public Trust Network Development- increasing the diversity and size of the group dedicated to working on public trust in food and farming to ensure it's truly a whole food system effort and groups are connected.

Training- Providing opportunities and resources for food system partners to learn more about public trust and how to join the work of the collaborative.

Shared key messages- Simple points that are representative of the whole food system for partners to use in their communications

NS Food and Farming Digest- A Nova Scotia made magazine that highlights all things farming and food right here.

Long term (3+ years):

Event coordination and evaluation- Organizing all the events attended and making sure to measure the impact and gather data. As a system, we attend a lot of events. Let's make sure we are making the biggest impression we can.

Communication plan with media strategy- Developing a road map for getting our message delivered to our audience. It's an essential tool for ensuring we send a clear, specific message with measurable results.

Collaborative metrics and tracking- The saying "you can't manage, what you don't measure" applies here. Together, we need to create intuitive metrics that will show us how we are moving the needle on public trust.

Public

This is the external work and connections farmers and the food system will make with the public (remember- not just consumers!).

Short term (1-2 years):

Identify target audiences- Using data from CCFI and NS Quality of Life, and research from universities.

In-person and online events- Connecting with the public at events is very important. Hosting and attending public events to talk and share our stories will continue to be a priority.

Social media- A strategy to build followings and share profiles and stories from across the food system to reach Nova Scotians is a cost-effective way to reach a large audience.

Long term (3+ years):

Interactive displays and features- Working with other groups to create interactive displays and exhibits.

Focus groups- a research method to bring together the public to gather feedback regarding on food and farming in NS.

Metrics and testing- Tracking performance and assessing activities to ensure key messages, events, and on-going work is building trust and creating connections.

Pulling it all Together

Vision, mission, objectives, priorities, and tactics... what's the bucket to hold all pieces? A program model gives shape to the work. It will be the brand, the look, the recognition for connecting food and farming to Nova Scotians.



Program Model

A unique, made in Nova Scotia approach, has the opportunity to be very successful. There is already a lot of good work happening to build trust in Nova Scotia. With clear feedback during the strategic planning process, on the sentiment, “too many groups already”, this work can run as a collaborative program with the support of multiple funding partners and organizations, instead of creating another association.

A Public Trust Coordinator or a few part-time coordinators can be hired to work as program managers through a key partner organization for administration. Several smaller contracts for coordinators with varied backgrounds can achieve specific goals (ie. organization and strategy, event presence, social media stakeholder buy-in). For example, one person to manage public events and coordination, another to manage data and metrics, etc. Partner organizations could also assign a dedicated staff person to work on public trust initiatives and take on work that may be considered normally outside their organization.

Launching off a recognized brand will help to create success. Meet Your Farmer has been an initiative of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture for more than 10 years. Responsible for organizing events like Open Farm Day and Meet Your Farmer at the Mall, the brand has recognition with the public in Nova Scotia. To build continuity and expand, the brand could be expanded to other food system stakeholders such as:

- Meet Your Farmer- Let's Get Cooking!
- Meet Your Farmer- Let's Talk Nutrition
- Meet Your Farmer- Markets & Hubs

Collaboration between collective groups (e.g. chefs) for events, key messages, social media content, etc. could be very effective in build trust without the need for another organization to be created.



NSFA- Meet Your Farmer

Industry Organizations

Government and Academia

Funding

Of course, success will also depend on steadfast funding. There is a need to create a clear and simple funding model that will fuel the strategy implementation. A budget with base funding for core operations, and additional funding for communications tactics and reach needs to be established. There is opportunity for everyone to be funders: individuals, associations, small to large companies, associations, government, etc. The bigger and wider the funding base for this work, the more successful the effort will be. A non-funding partner option for NGOs or those with small budgets could be created as we know there are groups who would add value to the effort.

Five types of funding options:

1. Partners – projects and operations
2. Government grants
3. Donations
4. Sponsors
5. Membership

Charitable Contributions

Establishing a charitable option allows for many to contribute, which builds funds and credibility. In this way, individuals receive charitable receipts for their donations as this work fits in the educational pillar of charity. There are several options for collecting charitable funds, including local community foundations as an example. There maybe other options with other organizations working in public trust across the country.

Final Thoughts

Collaboration, cooperation and working toward a common vision of “A connected and trusted food system in Nova Scotia” will help to bring success to our farms and food industry in Nova Scotia. Building on strengths, working on weaknesses and capturing opportunities that exist- we can ensure that Nova Scotians trust food and farming in Nova Scotia.

