

Nova Scotia Food & Farming Survey 2023 Results Report

March 2024



Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture

7 Atlantic Central Drive
East Mountain, NS, B6L 2Z2
meetyourfarmer.ca
(902) 893-2293

Background

The [Strategy for Earning Public Trust in Food and Farming](#) in Nova Scotia published in February 2021 identified the need for metrics and data specific to Nova Scotia. To monitor our efforts to earn and build trust, it is important to measure the sentiments of the public regularly.

In 2021 the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture commissioned a consultant to develop a Nova Scotia Food & Farming Survey. This survey has been promoted through our Meet Your Farmer channels and has collected three years of data. The survey questions are reviewed annually, and adaptations can be made to the survey in response to changes in the food system landscape. As an example, a question about the rising cost of food was added in 2022.

Each year, the Nova Scotia Food & Farming Survey is promoted on Meet Your Farmer social media pages, newsletters, online advertising, and at in-person events. The survey closes on December 31st and responses are then reviewed, analyzed, and shared with food systems partners.

The Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI) conducts annual surveys across Canada on public trust. The Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture supports CCFI to increase the sample size of survey respondents in Nova Scotia every two years. We expect to see this in CCFI's 2024 survey results report due out in fall 2024.

2023 Results and Three-Year Trends

Results of the Nova Scotia Food & Farming Survey show a high level of trust in farmers, and the food system. We also saw a significant jump in the number of people who feel very positive about agriculture in Nova Scotia today. Respondents also feel more positively overall about the food systems' commitment to a local, abundant, and sustainable food supply, and that modern farming practices can help fight climate change. Farmers' commitment to a healthy, affordable, and safe food supply is also being noticed.

Nova Scotians are also showing a high level of concern on many topics. In the NS Food & Farming survey results, we see an increase in the number of people reporting that the cost of food has changed their buying habits. Results from the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity 2023 survey were released in October 2023. Ashley Bruner highlighted some key areas of that data highlighting Nova Scotian data at the Digital Harvest Symposium in February 2024. This data showed that Nova Scotians tend to have higher levels of concern than national results. Topics including the cost of food, health care, energy costs, keeping healthy food affordable, having enough food to feed people in Canada, and global warming and climate change are all showing higher concern for Nova Scotians than the Canadian average.

When looking at the weighted average we see that Nova Scotians have high levels of trust in farmers (9.9 out of 10), and Nova Scotia's food system overall (8 out of 10). Grocery stores and governments rank lowest on this question at 5.1 and 5.0 out of 10.

Respondents had the opportunity to send questions or messages to Nova Scotia farmers. There was lots of gratitude and encouragement. Other comments included suggestions included:

- getting more local products in grocery stores,

- the need for farmers of all sizes in Nova Scotia,
- requests for more organic production,
- to know more about how farmers focus on the environment and climate change,
- and a desire for more local products in retail stores.
- increased government support,
- concerns about land use regulations
- agricultural land being used for development.
- more information on farming methods and the use of pesticides and GMOs,
- support for farmers who lose crops due to extreme weather,
- more direct purchasing options for consumers who want to shop farm-to-table.

Nova Scotia Food & Farming Survey Questions and 3-Year Results

Overall, would you say that the food system in Nova Scotia, including how food is grown, produced, and sold, is moving in the right direction or the wrong direction?

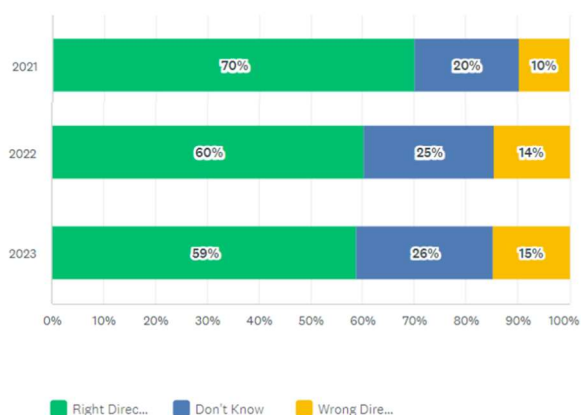


Figure 1: Is the food system moving in the right direction or wrong direction?

In 2023, 59% of respondents indicated that the food system in Nova Scotia was moving in the right direction. 26% responded that they did not know and 15% felt the food system was moving in the

wrong direction. When comparing results to 2021 we see a drop in confidence that the food system is moving in the right direction to more respondents who are unsure or who feel it is moving in the wrong direction. As illustrated in Figure 1, in 2023 we see these numbers shifting very slightly from the previous year.

Nationally we see a similar percentage of people responding that the food system is moving in the wrong direction. Rising food costs and decreasing trust in grocery stores and government bodies may be a factor in the decline from 2021 trust levels. In Nova Scotia we have a higher proportion of respondents who feel things are going in the right direction than what is seen at the national level.

What would you say is your overall impression of agriculture in Nova Scotia today? Would you say your impression is...?

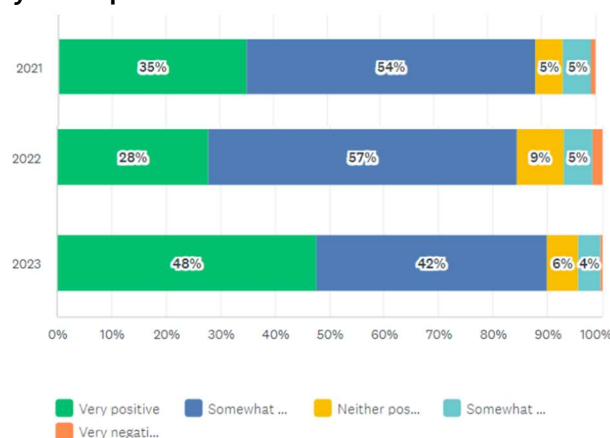


Figure 2 – Overall impression of agriculture in Nova Scotia

We have seen slight fluctuations over the past three years, including a dip in 2022, but overall sentiment is positive.

This year 90% of respondents reported a positive, or very positive, impression of agriculture in Nova Scotia.

Thinking of the food system in Nova Scotia, how would you rate your trust in the following groups?

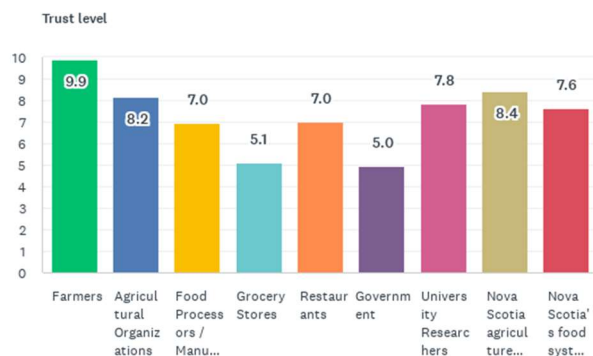


Figure 3– Trust rankings of various groups

Respondents were asked to rank their trust in groups in the food system in Nova Scotia. They used a scale from 0-10 where 0 is a low level of trust and 10 indicates a high level of trust. Using a weighted average, results are listed in the table above.

Farmers continue to hold the highest level of trust. We continue to see high levels of trust in agricultural organizations, Nova Scotia agriculture overall, university researchers, and Nova Scotia’s food system overall with each achieving a ranking of eight out of 10 with no change from the previous year.

We have seen a decline in trust levels of grocery stores from six in 2022 to level of five in 2023. Food processors and manufacturers along with restaurants land in the middle each scoring 7 out of 10 in this weighted average.

Please explain why you rated your level of trust the way you did for Nova Scotia’s food system overall.

This open-ended question invites a wide range of responses. Although local agricultural goods are seen as being of high quality and diverse, there are issues with accessibility, cost, sustainability, and environmental impact. For small farmers to embrace sustainable farming methods, they need greater

encouragement, less government interference, and support. Some indicated a lack of understanding of the system. Others feel that the government should offer additional programs to ensure sustainable and secure food production. There was a theme of a lack of transparency and knowledge about the food system in Nova Scotia but also a belief that there is great quality control in the food system.

Responses to this question included statements related to the availability of local food, possibilities of lowering the cost of local food to make it more attainable, government bureaucracy getting in the way of farmers, and the imbalance in Nova Scotia’s food system. We also heard from people who felt government and large-scale institutions doing very little for small-scale agriculture, and that there are too many middle-management people in government agencies.

Rising food costs are a common theme as well. There is a sentiment that large corporations have too much influence and that large retailers are marketing that they sell local produce, but the shelves contain products from outside the country, and that large retailers consider the bottom line to be more important than buying local.

Food insecurity is another topic that is mentioned throughout the comments. We see comments about the availability of food in the aftermath of severe weather events and comments related to sustainability and environmental concerns.

I care about safe, healthy, affordable, and readily available food.

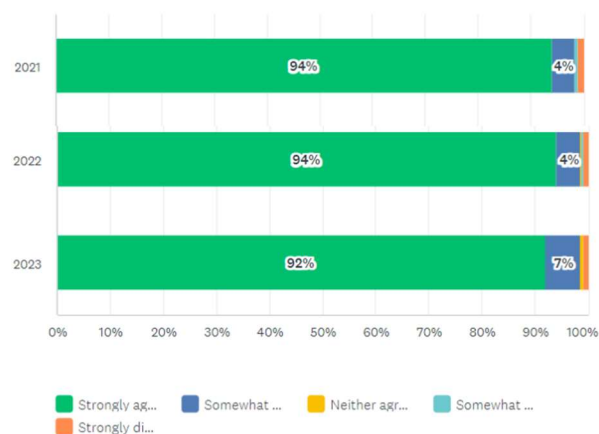


Figure 4 – Safe, healthy, affordable, and readily available food

We saw a very slight decrease in the number of people who strongly agree that they care about safe, healthy, affordable, and readily available food. However, there was no change in the categories of strongly disagree or somewhat disagree. This topic remains one that Nova Scotians and Canadians generally agree upon.

I have the information needed to make informed decisions about my food choices.

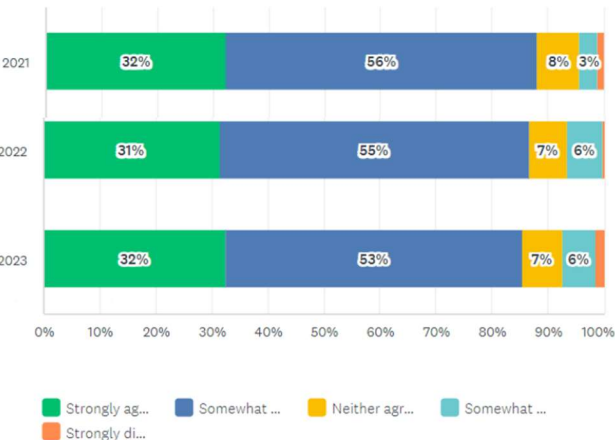


Figure 5 – Ability to make informed choices

In general, Nova Scotians feel that they have the information they need to make informed decisions about their food choices. We see very little shift in this question over the past three years. In 2023 85%

of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this sentiment.

The most recent results in the national survey show that over 50% of Canadians are concerned about misleading labels or descriptions in marketing materials related to food and food production. What initially appears to be a contradiction in these two statements may indicate that Nova Scotians feel informed enough to question labels and marketing when they feel there may be an issue with accuracy or truthfulness.

Food and agriculture play an important role in my personal health and wellness.

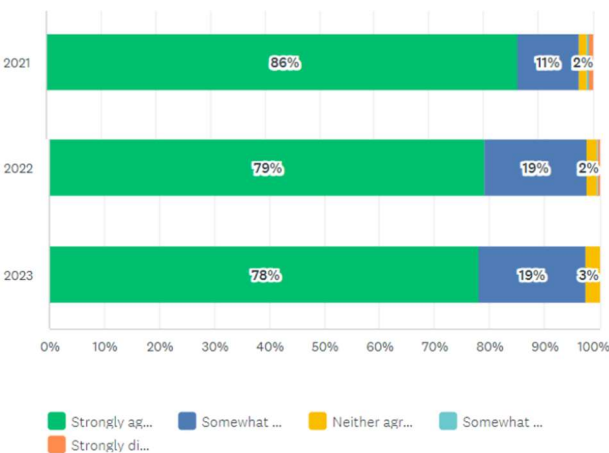


Figure 6 – Food & agriculture role in personal health & wellness

When asked about the role food and agriculture play in relation to health and wellness, 98% of respondents agreed that food plays an important role in their personal health and wellness.

The rising cost of food has caused me to change how I shop at the grocery store, get take-out, meal kits, or dine at a restaurant.

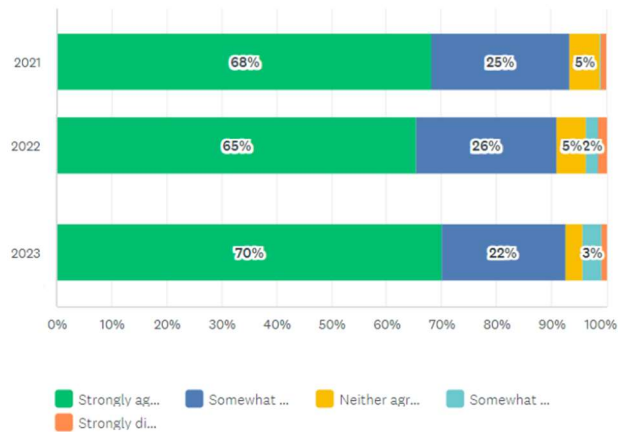


Figure 7 – Changes to shopping habits in response to the rising cost of food

CCFI has identified that food costs continue to be a top concern for Canadians. Nova Scotians share that sentiment. A strong majority of Nova Scotians continue to adjust how they shop and purchase food, whether that be at a grocery store, through subscription meal kits, or at restaurants.

Modern farming practices help reduce greenhouse gases and fight climate change.



Figure 8 – Modern farming practices fight climate change

We see a slight growth in 2023 among respondents who strongly agreed that modern farming practices do help to reduce greenhouse gases and fight climate change. However, we also saw an increase in the number of people who are unsure and neither agree nor disagree. On a positive note, fewer people disagree with this sentiment than in previous years.

There is an opportunity for our public trust communications to support heightened understanding of what modern farming practices are, what they include, and how those practices impact greenhouse gas emissions and climate change as well as yield and food pricing.

Farmers are committed to providing a local, abundant, sustainably driven food supply.

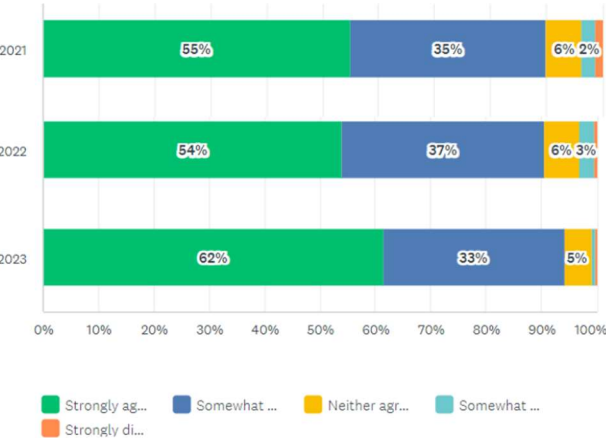


Figure 9 – Farmers commitment to local, abundant, and sustainable food supply

95% of respondents agree that farmers are committed to providing local abundant and sustainably driven food to Nova Scotians. This very much aligns with the high level of trust Nova Scotians have in farmers. Growth in this positive sentiment between 2022 and 2023 is encouraging.

The food system in Nova Scotia is committed to providing a local, abundant, sustainably driven food supply.

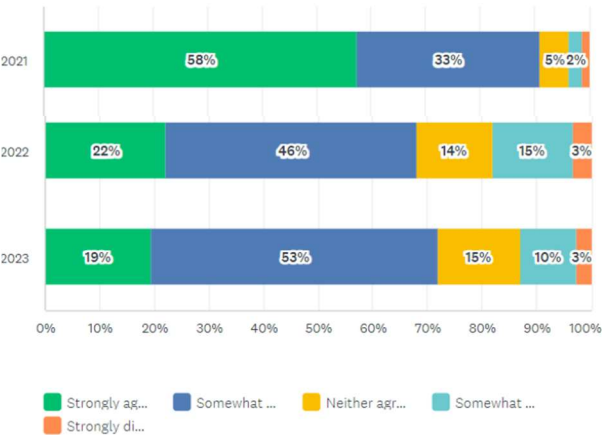


Figure 10 – Food system commitment to local, abundant, and sustainable food supply

Shifting the question of providing a local, abundant, and sustainably driven food supply to the food system, respondent sentiment shifts. Uncertainty around the commitment of the Nova Scotia food system as a whole to providing local abundant and sustainably driven food may be reflective of the decrease in trust and some aspects of the food system.

Our 2023 survey did show an increase in the number of people who strongly or somewhat agree with this statement after significant decreases in 2022.

Demographics

The demographics of the respondents are not reflective of the Nova Scotia population but may be reflective of social media users, main household food purchasers, etc.

The data presented in this report includes only the responses from those who identified Nova Scotia as the province they live in. 99% of respondents were

from Nova Scotia. 1% were from other Canadian provinces (mainly PEI).

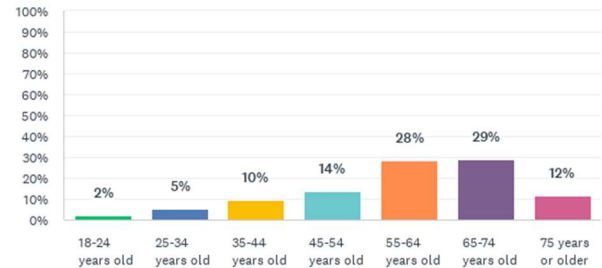


Figure 11 – Age breakdown

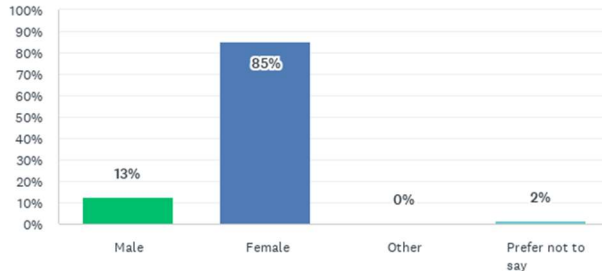


Figure 12 – Gender identity breakdown

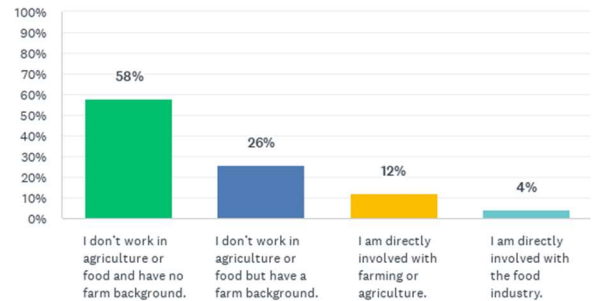


Figure 13 – familiarity or knowledge of the agriculture or food industries.

Conclusions and next steps

Trust in food and farming in Nova Scotia is high. The results of these annual surveys remain very encouraging even though there were slight

reductions in some areas. Transparency and honesty throughout the whole system continue to be very important in communicating with the public.

Farmers continue to be the most trusted members of the food system in Nova Scotia with 87% of respondents reporting a high level of trust in farmers. Grocery stores and governments are the least trusted. Even though many people believe that they have enough information to make informed decisions on their food, more information on product labeling, environmental impacts, climate change, production methods, and regulations could be helpful.

With three years of survey data now available to us we can begin to see trends, and we also see areas of opportunity for improvement. We will look to these survey results for inspiration as we plan our communications and consider topics for our Meet Your Farmer program to cover on social media and the website. Comments from respondents were wide-ranging and provided ideas for messaging in 2024.

We will continue our public trust efforts and focus on areas identified as opportunities for improvement in this survey. Highlighting the work of farmers and producers who are utilizing best practices or participating in our living labs program will be part of our work plan for 2024. Insights into modern farming practices, production methods, and environmental sustainability, or addressing questions about transparency in labeling and marketing are some of those areas where further messaging can be helpful. Addressing all the various elements that factor into retail food prices is another topic that can be valuable to discuss through our communications platforms.

Sharing information and messaging through Meet Your Farmer will continue to be the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture's main method of communicating with the public about Nova Scotia's farm and food system. Farmers and producers are

encouraged to support this work. Farmer participation in events, interviews, blog posts, profiles, videos, and photos will be helpful to our goals of increasing public trust in food & farming.