

## Integrated health and agri-food strategy needed

OTTAWA, December 13, 2007 — Canada's dire human health issues must be addressed by an integrated health and agri-food policy, says a new study by the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute (CAPI).

"In Canada, obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases are approaching epidemic proportions," says the study, called *Finding Common Ground: Food for a Healthy Population and a Healthy Agri-Food Sector*.

"The social and economic costs of these diseases are staggering. Agriculture and food production have a huge role to play in population health. In Canada, policymakers are realizing that human health, and the agriculture industry, could both benefit significantly from an integrated agri-food policy framework."

CAPI is a non-profit corporation that provides an independent voice on agri-food policy issues. CAPI's objective is to identify initiatives that could provide Canadians with improved health benefits, while contributing to the economic well-being of the agricultural and food sector.

The project team, consisting of academic experts from across Canada, reviewed initiatives relating to food and health that have demonstrated an impact on the health of the population and the agri-food sector in Canada and other countries, or which could potentially do so in the future.

CAPI is now working on developing a framing paper to identify a possible vision and guiding principles for an integrated strategy, a step recommended by the study.

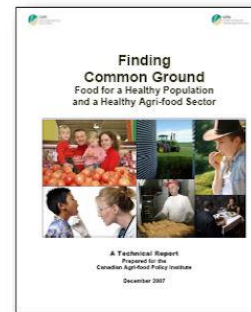
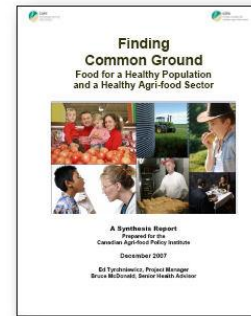
According to Statistics Canada, by 2004 Canada's total expenditure on health as a percentage of gross domestic product had ballooned to over 10% of gross domestic product.

The CAPI study suggests that the agri-food industry can contribute greatly to alleviating health problems and health-care costs. However, an integrated strategy will only be successful if it's based on strategic collaboration among industry, governments, and the health care community.

The federal government has endorsed the study, and mandated CAPI to produce the integrated health and agri-food strategy.

The study identified numerous projects abroad:

- In Finland, health agencies worked with the food industry to alter the food supply. During the 1970s-1990s, vegetable and fish consumption rose substantially, while the consumption of saturated fat declined. Mortalities from coronary heart disease plummeted. Dietary guidelines were developed for schools, which became a template for guidelines at other institutions, such as day cares, elderly homes, and military facilities;



- In Denmark, the government passed legislation in 2004 that prohibited the use of industrially produced fats and oils containing more than 2% of trans fat. Two years later, foods that were traditionally significant sources of trans fat were virtually free of it; and,
- In the U.S., the federal government is leading a project called Healthy People 2010, which is aimed at reducing obesity and encouraging people to maintaining a healthy body weight, increase their consumption of fruits, vegetables, and grains, and reduce their fat intake. The project has a strong educational component; the food industry is being encouraged to provide nutritional information in supermarkets, fast-food outlets, and restaurants, while nutrition education programs are being developed in schools.

"The findings of the first phase of this project both validate and enhance our understanding of the complex relationships that exist between food and health," said Gaëtan Lussier, CAPI Chair.

"We will use the findings and recommendations from this work to mobilize governments and a variety of other stakeholders in support of the development of an integrated agri-food and health policy for Canada and Canadians."

Eight other organizations participated with the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute in this project: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors, Dietitians of Canada, Health Canada, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.