



# Strategies to increase access to affordable, nutritious food

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# Cost is a barrier to nutrition



- Food costs influence purchasing and diet quality
- **Healthier diets, on average, tend to cost more**
- Affordability of food contributes to socioeconomic inequalities in diet, nutrition, and health

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# Gap between nutritious and currently consumed diets

- Linear programming studies have shown it is possible to **model diets that are low-cost, and that optimize key nutrition parameters** (and palatability, ecological sustainability, etc.)
- Cost → food choices available x diets chosen
- Examining expenditure patterns and consumed diets shows magnitude of change needed
- Choices + cost sensitivity vary by social **drivers**



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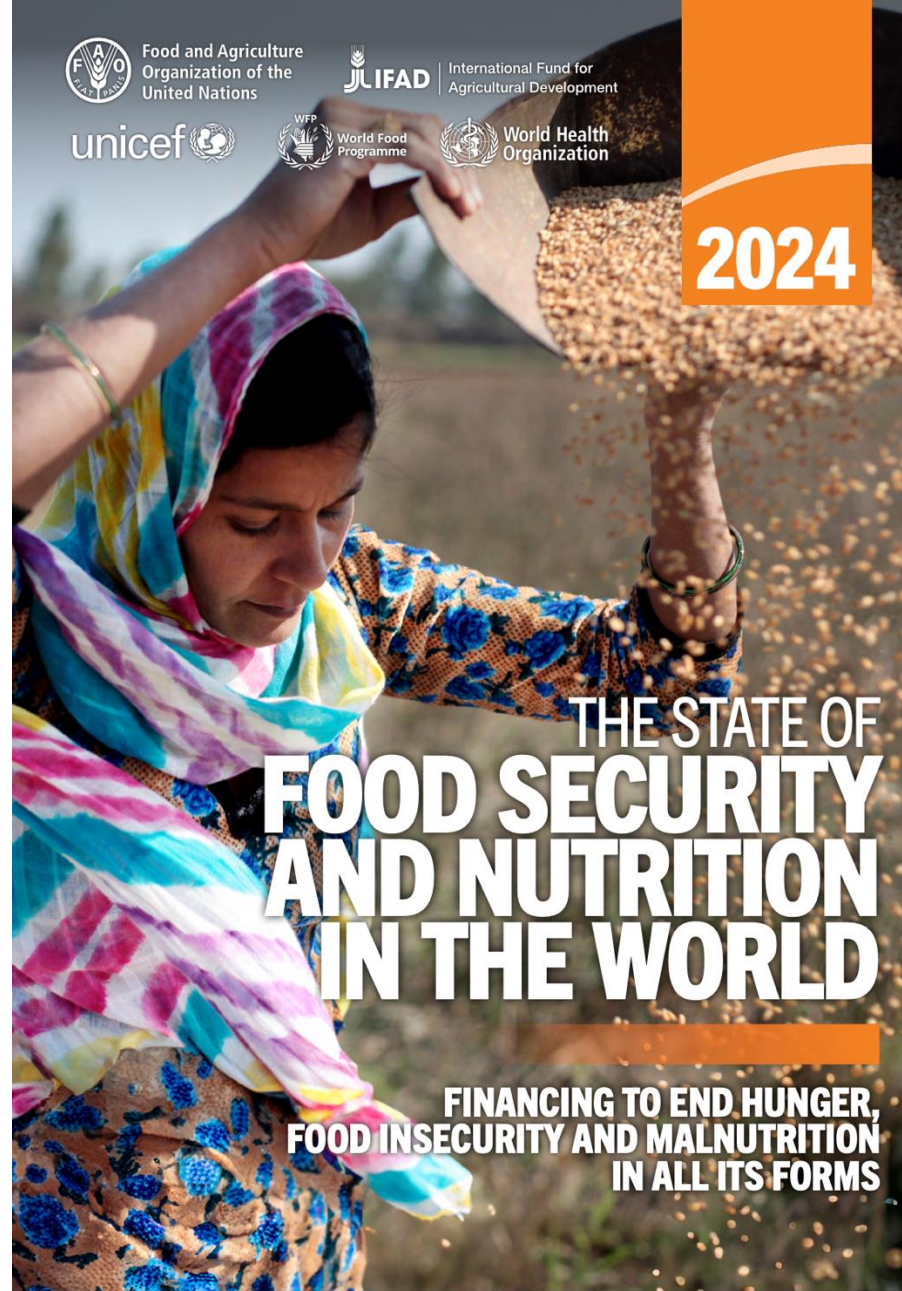
# How retail food sector describes the problem



- Food retailing is a low margin industry sector (i.e., narrow range of potential margins)
- Food is an essential need, but retail provides food across varied **societal values linked to food choice**, and the **social/socioeconomic differentiation** in price ceilings (value growth)
- Post-2008 and post-COVID inflation have shifted what average consumers can pay, and are willing to allocate budget toward (e.g., ‘downtrading’)
- Personalized merchandising is the new norm but there is tension in rising social atomization



# Governments are at a crossroads



After a period of investment and regional increases in standards of living, progress has stalled or declined.

**“Food security and nutrition are complex multidimensional concepts that do not neatly fit into a sector-defined financing framework” –SOFI report 2024**



# Policy area 1: High-quality objective information

Purposeful public investments in the **security, quality, objectivity, and transparency** of digital food cost information with nutrition in mind.

**Economic monitoring is not currently nutrition-sensitive.**

EXAMPLES (\*\*caution in politicization):

- Consumer Price Indices using scanner data
- Acceptability and feasibility of reference diets given food supply, capturing heterogeneity
- Robust nutritional (dietary) surveillance surveys with food cost component
- Secure public microdata sources for research

1. Luongo G, Tarasuk V, Yi Y, Mah CL. Feasibility and measurement error in using food supply data to estimate diet costs in Canada. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2022 Jun;25(6):1607-18.
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## Policy area 2: Retailing for nutrition

Retailing influences social and place-based norms for nutritious foods. **Merchandising is not currently nutrition-sensitive.**

### EXAMPLES:

- Value chain approaches to stem harms from least nutritious foods, e.g., aggressive discounting
- Targeted public investments to reduce dietary impacts of retail inequalities—reducing emphasis on behaviour change communication and leveraging social value of retailers: incentives; regionally sensitive social protection; neighbourhood-level (e.g., planning, licensing, development)
- Researcher cooperation on data and metrics; attention to data quality and objective measures

See references on next slide →→→



## Policy area 2: Retailing for nutrition

Retailing influences social and place-based norms for nutritious foods. **Merchandising is not currently nutrition-sensitive.**

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## Policy area 3: Resetting the social contract

Poverty reduction, household food insecurity reduction, reduce economic inequality, and invest in a healthy labour force. **Prosperity is not currently nutrition-sensitive.**

### EXAMPLES:

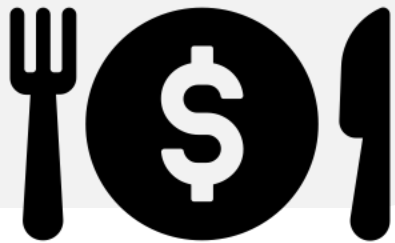
- Economic precarity is growing across social axes, and household food insecurity is rising. Life-course approaches to social insurance, cash and tax transfers, and strengthening labour force attachment remain key instruments for improving population nutrition.

1. Idzerda L, Corrin T, Lazarescu C, Couture A, Vallières E, Khan S, Tarasuk V, McIntyre L, Garcia AJ. Public policy interventions to mitigate household food insecurity in Canada: a systematic review. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2024 Jan 15:1-21.
2. Men F, St-Germain AA, Ross K, Remtulla R, Tarasuk V. Effect of Canada child benefit on food insecurity: a propensity score– matched analysis. *American journal of preventive medicine*. 2023 Jun 1;64(6):844-52; for numerous other examples within Canada's welfare state please see also: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>



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# In conclusion



- Nutritious food affordability is not a good game for financial speculation
- Nutritious food can be prioritized in merchandising beyond a consumer segment; food affordability need not be a race to nutritional bottom
- Attention to the social contract underpins organizations' and governments' capacity to make further gains in nutrition