

[Rick Doucet hopes local food survey will shift culture](#)

Agriculture department launched a online survey asking people for their views on buying local food

By Daniel McHardie, [CBC News](#) Posted: Jul 18, 2015



Customers lined up to purchase locally-made food at Fredericton's Real Food Connections. The New Brunswick government is asking citizens for their views on buying local food. (Dylan Hacket/CBC)

The New Brunswick government is hoping to get a better understanding of people's views on local food as it builds a strategy to get people buying more food that was produced in the province.

The Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries launched an online survey this week, asking citizens to share their local buying habits and their opinions on the issue.



Agriculture Minister Rick Doucet said he wants people to respond to the survey so they can influence the province's local food strategy. (CBC)

Agriculture Minister Rick Doucet said the online survey is designed to give consumers a chance to express their views on the importance of supporting local producers or what can be done to improve accessibility of local food and beverages.

"To me, this isn't about building a PR campaign. This is how to change a culture. How do you get people to buy local food?" Doucet said.

"The impact [of the survey results] is crucial to this. I certainly want to have the views of everyone involved. It is not only the stakeholders, but it is also the consumers."

The Liberals promised to create a local food and beverages strategy in last year's election campaign. Doucet said this survey will be used to help shape that strategy.

Levi Lawrence, a co-founder of Real Food Connections, said he believes the survey could help start a larger discussion in the public about the value of local food.



Levi Lawrence, a founder of Real Food Connections, said the survey could get people talking about buying local food. But he said many of the largest problems the industry face are unknown to consumers. (CBC)

But Lawrence said many of the hurdles that local food producers face in getting their products into stores and onto dinner tables are invisible to consumers.

For instance, he said there are problems with inter-provincial trade barriers, a lack of collaboration with industry sectors and there are shortcomings regarding standards and labeling.

"While we work on these issues, we need to keep enthusiasm building with the consumers and always be working towards more education on our food system," Lawrence said.

"I see the survey and other efforts from the government of New Brunswick working on this."

Coon: Food security bill would have helped

Green Party Leader David Coon said he's skeptical of whether the survey being released by the provincial government will have any influence over public policy decisions surrounding local food decisions.



Green Party Leader David Coon introduced his Local Food Security Act earlier this year, which was defeated. Coon said he's skeptical about whether this survey will actually influence the government's future local food policy. (CBC)

"I have not seen a survey in recent years that influenced public policy, the only thing that influences public policy is public outcry, such as over the sale of NB Power," he said.

"If they are serious about this, and they said they wanted to have more engagement, then let's have them put out a white paper."

By releasing a so-called white paper, Coon said the provincial government would outline their strategy and then get the public to respond to it.

The Fredericton South MLA proposed a Local Food Security Act in the spring, which was ultimately defeated by the Liberal government.

The bill would have required the provincial government to give preference to local food providers when supplying nursing homes, schools and hospitals.

Coon said the bill would have also set up clear targets for reducing food imports and growing the amount of local food that is purchased by New Brunswickers.

He said this would help the local economy because it would put money back into the hands of local farmers.

"If they are serious about pursuing binding targets about import replacement around food to create jobs here, then they need to get on with it," he said.

The province's agriculture minister, however, said Coon's strategy was premature.

He said he doesn't believe it made sense to put in place a law before the public was consulted.

"The whole objective is to develop a strategy and a framework and if legislation is needed, then we'll talk about it. But to put in place legislation, is premature," Doucet said.

"Do we really need a law to tell people to buy local? What we need is a culture shift."