

Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries

Action Plan: Improving Food Self-Sufficiency in New Brunswick

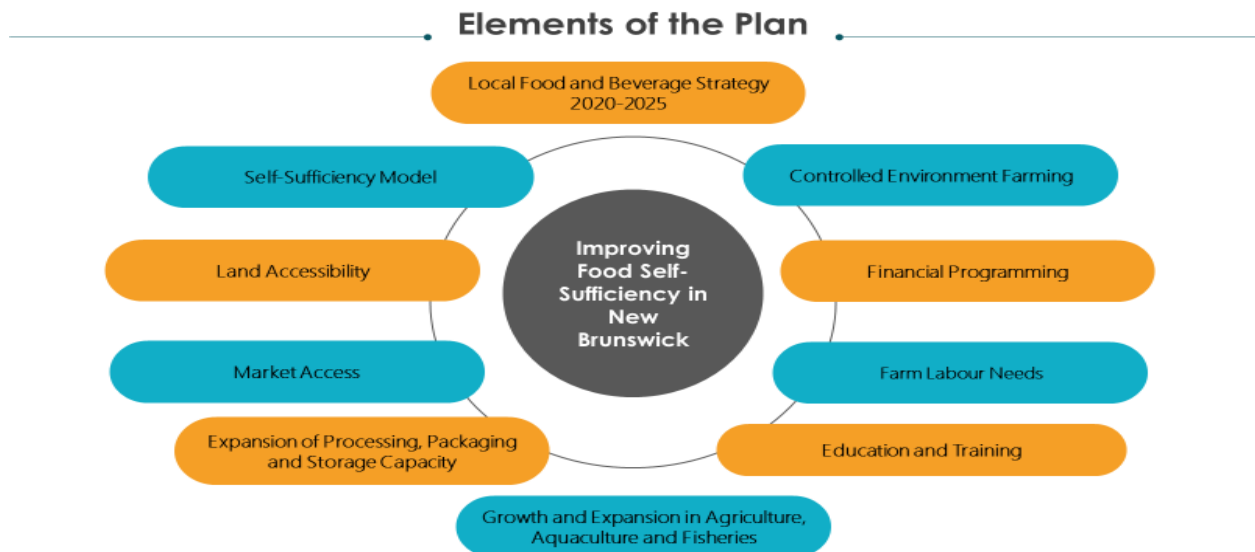
INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for resiliency in the province's food supply.

A common point of pandemics is their serious negative effects they can have on the global economy, including the food supply chain. COVID-19 has had an impact on the whole process of the supply chain from the field to the consumer; however, a recent threats, risks and vulnerabilities assessment completed confirmed that New Brunswick's supply chain is resilient. Although this is good news, there is still concern about food production, processing, distribution, and demand.

In order to address the need for resiliency in NB's food supply, GNB is identifying the risks to our food chain, recommending measures to decrease those risks and contribute to the province's goal of becoming more food self-sufficient. A number of Departments are involved, including the Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries; the Department of Public Safety; the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Opportunities NB; the Department of Health; and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

The Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries has developed this action plan identifying areas of focus to help facilitate improvements to New Brunswick's food self-sufficiency ratio and the stability and robustness of our food supply while supporting profitability and sustainability for our harvesters, producers and food manufacturers.



Pillar 1: Local Food and Beverage Strategy (LFBS) Renewal

NB's agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries sectors deliver over 30 commodities to local and export markets. They also independently employ over 17,000 New Brunswickers in primary production and processing and are significant contributors to Indigenous, rural and coastal communities and their economies. The continued growth and strengthening of New Brunswick's food system is central to the sustainability of the local food and beverages sectors. There is a growing interest in, and demand for, locally produced food and beverages; therefore, this sector is rich with opportunities for new entrants, existing participants, and First Nations communities to join and grow the industry. When more consumers purchase local foods, communities benefit with jobs and increased prosperity. When local, fresh, nutritious foods are readily available, healthier eating habits are encouraged, our environmental footprint is reduced, and New Brunswick's diverse culture and heritage are preserved.

GOAL:

Strengthen NB's food system by taking actions to **Grow NB, Buy NB and Feed NB**.

Pillar 2 – Self-Sufficiency Model

The NB Food Self-Sufficiency Model is the ratio of NB's food and feed production compared to levels of consumption. This model allows us to identify vulnerabilities and opportunities across sectors. "Self-sufficiency" is defined as the capacity to meet food consumption needs with domestic production. For the self-sufficiency ratio, 100% indicates full self-sufficiency. Where NB is not fully self-sufficient, we rely on interprovincial and international imports to meet domestic consumption needs.

The supply of NB's export commodities such as potatoes, blueberries, cranberries, maple syrup and seafood vastly outpaces demand within the province for these products. NB is also self-sufficient in dairy products, chicken and turkey and eggs, due to the supply management system. These products make up a significant portion of our diet. NB is also self-sufficient in some grains and oilseeds, such as grain corn, oats and soybeans; however, the province is not self-sufficient in beef, pork or lamb.

Overall self-sufficiency in fruit (including blueberries and cranberries) is 32% and self-sufficiency in vegetables (excluding potatoes) is approximately 7%, partly due to climatic limitations.

GOAL:

Maintain NB's self-sufficiency model with up-to-date statistics, production information and consumption data. This will help guide DAAF activities as well as provide a key measure for success.

Pillar 3 – Land

Access to suitable and available land (terrestrial or submerged) for food production is an essential need for our agri-food and aquaculture producers. There are opportunities for new entrants to farm and New Brunswick is known for good land at relatively affordable prices with access to water - three key areas required for expanding our agri-food sector. The Department has established new interactive maps to use as a guide for both prospective new entrants and existing farmers looking for insight into where to establish specific crops and where to focus their site investigation and research further. Data includes growing degree days, soil drainage, slope and frost risks.

GOAL:

Support the improvement of food self-sufficiency in New Brunswick through increasing and facilitating additional land access for farmers.

Pillar 4 – Market Access

Local food and beverages are available in some grocery stores, restaurants, farmers' markets, and farm stands; however, there are still a number of issues related to our food industry accessing both retail and food service. Today's consumers are more interested in what's in their food and where it comes from and are more aware of the health benefits of fresh nutritious local food. Other factors, such as climate change also contribute to the growing demand for locally produced food as a way to minimize our carbon footprint by reducing both food transportation requirements and food packaging. Market access is dependent upon the market readiness of the producer, the growth of opportunities through market development and increased promotional efforts to strengthen the awareness of customers. DAAF will lead a series of interdepartmental initiatives to accomplish increased local retail and food service sales for local food and beverages as well as support the growth of procurement opportunities within GNB public institutions.

GOAL:

Support the improvement of food self-sufficiency in New Brunswick through increasing and facilitating local retail and food service sales for local food and beverages and supporting the growth of procurement opportunities within GNB public institutions.

Pillar 5 – Expansion of Processing, Packaging and Storage Capacity

Availability of processing facilities and cold storage facilities can have an impact on the availability and quality of products in NB. It also impacts the ability of retailers and suppliers to stock local products (volumes) and to package according to retailer needs.

GOAL:

To increase processing, packaging and storage capacity in New Brunswick that will help contribute to improving food self-sufficiency in our province.

Pillar 6 – Education and Training

There is a need to educate New Brunswickers, young and old, about the agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries sectors. In addition, as stated previously, there is more and more emphasis being placed on where our food comes from and how it is grown. There is a need to educate our young people and promote the sectors as a desirable career path.

GOAL:

To support the improvement of food self-sufficiency in New Brunswick through education and promotion to ensure we have the next generation of farmers and producers prepared and ready to grow. Many of the actions are also tied to portions of the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick's Agricultural Workforce Development Plan 2020-2024.

Pillar 7 – Labour Needs

Challenges to source and retain qualified labour have been referenced in agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries sectors and is the largest issue according to many. This is happening not only in primary production, but in all areas of the supply chain. Demographics, perceived low wages, awareness and lack of succession planning indicates this risk will continue for the foreseeable future. Without qualified labour, it is feared many will not be able to meet the required demand. In addition, the demographics of our current farmers presents a risk to labour availability as the average age of farmers in the province is 55.6 years old. For seafood processing chronic labour shortages over the last decade and an aging workforce are huge challenges.

GOAL:

Work with Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (PETL) and, in the case of agriculture, the Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick (AANB) to initiate actions identified in AANB's New Brunswick Agricultural Workforce Development Plan 2020-2024, to assist farmers, aquaculturists and seafood producers in accessing the needed workforce that will help contribute to improving food self-sufficiency in New Brunswick.

Pillar 8 – Financial Programming

An enabling environment is required to grow our agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries sectors. Financial assistance programming can support new entrants, existing farmers and Indigenous communities to help minimize and address the potentially significant risks they could incur in the sectors.

GOAL:

To assist farmers, aquaculturists and seafood producers in obtaining and maintaining financial stability and profitability to pass their businesses down to successive generations

Pillar 9 – Controlled Environment Farming

DAAF recognizes that New Brunswick is not self-sufficient in fruits or vegetables; in fact, our self-sufficiency ratio for vegetables is approximately 7%. New Brunswick's climate does not allow for long growing seasons; therefore, there is a need to look at the expansion of indoor farming, including greenhouses, large indoor facilities and aquaponics facilities.

DAAF has viewed technology from the Netherlands and has completed several technical missions to gain insight and information on the potential of this sector for NB. DAAF has enlisted the help of experts to explore the feasibility, both financially and technically, on indoor farming opportunities in New Brunswick.

GOAL:

Increase the square footage of controlled environment farming in New Brunswick, with a particular focus on fruits and vegetables in order to improve food self-sufficiency in New Brunswick.

Pillar 10 – Growth and Expansion in the Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries Sectors

New Brunswick's agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and seafood processing industries deliver more than 30 commodities to local and export markets. They also independently employ over 17,000 New Brunswickers in primary production and processing and are significant contributors to Indigenous, rural and coastal communities and their economies. From local to export, the continued growth and strengthening of New Brunswick's food system and improvement of food self-sufficiency is central to the sustainability of our province.

GOAL:

To facilitate the growth and expansion (volume and value) of our agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries sectors to improve NB's food self-sufficiency.

GOVERNANCE:

A government - industry "Advisory Committee" will be formed to guide the activities of the Action Plan with representation as follows:

- **Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries** - Three (3) members (Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy Minister and Executive Director)
- **Aboriginal Nations** - One (1) member from each of the MTI and WWNB
- **Agricultural Alliance of New Brunswick** - One (1) member
- **National Farmer's Union of New Brunswick** - One (1) member
- **Conservation Council of New Brunswick** - One (1) member
- **Industry Stakeholder** - Two (2) member (La Recolté de Chez Nous and one Farming member)

Advisory Committee meetings will be scheduled on a quarterly basis, at a minimum, and ad-hoc meetings will be organized, as required. Sector specific representatives may be invited to attend meetings where required (e.g. aquaculture, fisheries and other agri-food commodity reps)