Breakfast CLUB of Canada™

A better start for every child.



PROVIDING CHILDREN NUTRITIOUS FOOD AT SCHOOL

FROM FARM TO CLASSROOM

Brief submitted to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as part of the Public Consultation on the Bio-Food Sector in Quebec

June 2024

Introduction

At Breakfast Club of Canada, “From Farm to Classroom” is more than just a slogan — it’s the philosophy at the heart of everything we do.

For many years now, BCC has been working actively with stakeholders along the entire bio-food supply chain as part of our mission to help children achieve their full potential and support the communities where they live.

We believe that our efforts need to extend beyond breakfast. After all, healthy people, and healthy children, ultimately depend on healthy communities and a healthy environment.

Incorporating best practices at every stage of the bio-food supply chain, from where food is produced to where it is consumed, is essential to maximizing the nutritional value of food, boosting food self-sufficiency and reducing the environmental impact of our supply and distribution operations. All of this will have a direct and meaningful influence on the health and development of our children, and lead to positive, lasting and comprehensive change in line with their needs.

By taking decisive action today, Quebec can ensure that schools provide healthy, locally sourced and sustainable foods to students and do it more effectively than ever before.

In this brief, we outline several recommendations that take into account the realities of stakeholders in the bio-food sector and government institutions (including schools, school boards and school service centres), as well as children and their parents.

Establishing long-term food security to fuel children’s potential will benefit Quebec as a whole and should be the guiding thread of the government’s updated bio-food policy.

By embracing this bold vision, our province’s bio-food sector can establish a lasting legacy for future generations of Quebecers. Let’s sow the seeds for this future today.



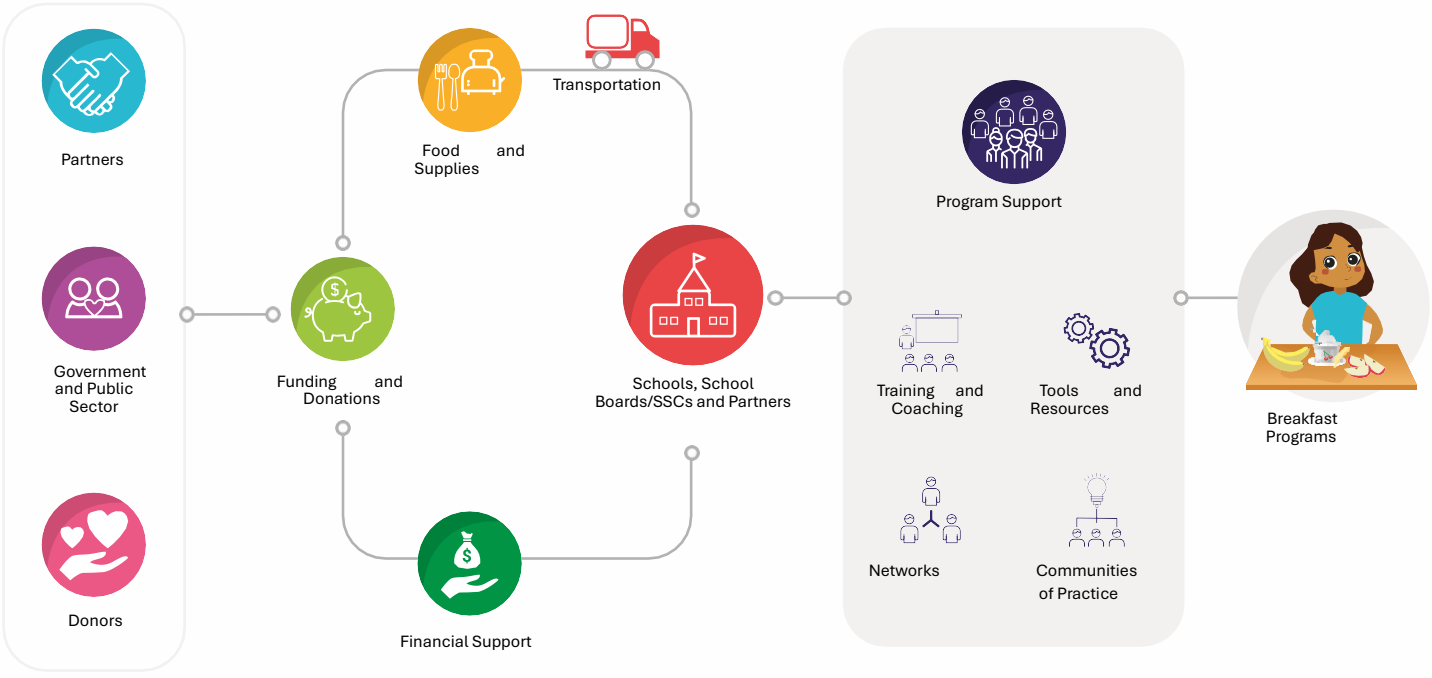
Senior Food Strategist and

Reflective Process Facilitator for Breakfast Club of Canada



ABOUT BREAKFAST CLUB OF CANADA IN QUEBEC

Since 1994, Breakfast Club of Canada has been working with partners from all sectors to help children access a nutritious breakfast and reach their full potential. Accredited by Imagine Canada for its effective governance and recognized by Aliments du Québec for its promotion of local food products, Breakfast Club of Canada helps reach almost 80,000 children through 550 breakfast programs across the province. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that all children attending schools in low-income communities start their day with a nutritious, wholesome breakfast, so that they have the fuel they need to learn and grow.



Executive Summary

Quebec's bio-food policy is the foundation for the development of a prosperous and sustainable bio-food sector. It is a roadmap for the province to achieve food self-sufficiency and ensure that everyone has access to high-quality nutrition.

Breakfast Club of Canada is pleased to be contributing to this public consultation, as the updated policy will be vital to realizing our vision of a Quebec where all children can access nutritious food at school.

As an authority in school nutrition, BCC is a key player along the entire length of the bio-food supply chain, from farm to classroom. We seek to source food as locally as possible and encourage our partner schools to do the same. We also develop authentic relationships with local communities and regional food systems with a view to promoting public health and sustainable development.

In this brief, we outline four recommendations aimed at helping the government in its efforts to maximize its budget while improving Quebecers' quality of life and developing a dynamic bio-food sector in the province. Our recommendations will also help the government reach the various targets it has set, including those in the **Stratégie nationale d'achat d'aliments québécois** (SNAAQ), the cornerstone of a viable local food system.

As always, we would be happy to work hand in hand with the government by leveraging our expertise in school nutrition to assist with the drafting and implementation of the updated policy.





Breakfast And Beyond

How School Breakfast Programs Change Lives

Studies show that children who participate in school breakfast programs consume a greater number of healthy foods at breakfast and have higher nutrient intake levels.

School breakfast programs have numerous other benefits as well, including:

- Boosting learning capacity and academic performance
- Meeting basic dietary needs and reducing hunger
- Improving overall well-being, mood and behaviour
- Increasing youth engagement and promoting general skills development.

We could have limited our work to providing breakfast in schools, which, on its own, would create conditions favourable to children's academic success. However, we want our contribution to society to be as comprehensive and cross-cutting as possible and are constantly refining our model to achieve this. Our commitment to the communities we serve goes far beyond food per se, extending into our economic, environmental and social ecosystems.

Breakfast Club of Canada: More than just breakfast!

BCC is a major economic player, **driving local and regional economic development** through the **purchase and promotion of local products** as part of its operations.

We not only support local small- and medium-sized businesses, but also collaborate closely with them to research and develop healthy foods tailored to the needs of schools.

We favour partnerships with Quebec-based suppliers, thus directly strengthening the food self-sufficiency of communities across the province.

We believe that it is crucial for our **involvement in a given community to be positive and sustainable**, while also driving the **socioecological transformation of the food supply chain**. For this reason, in 2023, we undertook a process to reflect on sustainable nutrition. We are more determined than ever to ensure children get the very best in every regard (see Appendices I and II).

A Local, Healthy and Responsibly Sourced Food Supply

At Breakfast Club of Canada, we work closely with the Quebec government and other public- and private-sector stakeholders, making us an important player in the bio-food sector.

Breakfast Programs in Quebec

We are proud that BCC's menus have been recognized by Aliments du Québec au Menu, thanks to the Commun'assiette program, an initiative of Équiterre supported by the Institut de tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec.

As part of our partnership with Aliments du Québec, we are involved in a number of communities of practice to which numerous public-sector stakeholders from spheres related to our mission, such as early childhood development and education, belong.

We strive to use local products and encourage our partner schools to do the same. As a result, more than A menu composed of more than 70% of "Aliments du Québec" (Quebec-sourced foods), with 32% being Quebec foods, 23% prepared in Quebec, and 16% either originating from or processed in Quebec.

BCC also supports local agriculture, thereby helping to strengthen regional economies.

Healthy Breakfast

BCC monitors the food supply chain from the farm to the classroom in order to ensure that breakfasts served to school-aged children in low-income communities encourage the adoption of healthy eating habits while supporting our local bio-food sector (see Appendix III).

The foods we make available to children are varied and nutritious, and meet the recommendations of the most recent version of Canada's Food Guide. The quality of these foods is inextricably linked to the success of every breakfast program.

We are very proud of the fact that our approach (which we often refer to as the "Club Recipe") inspires schools to serve the best possible foods using the most nutritionally complete ingredients.

In some schools, this means replacing foods with "Club Recipe" friendly alternatives. In other words, we play the role of both gauge and compass when it comes to school nutrition. While we are quite versatile when it comes to local sourcing and willing to adjust to schools' existing food delivery arrangements, we will not compromise on the quality of the food served. We are determined to ensure that the conditions are in place so that every student gets the nutrition they need to thrive.

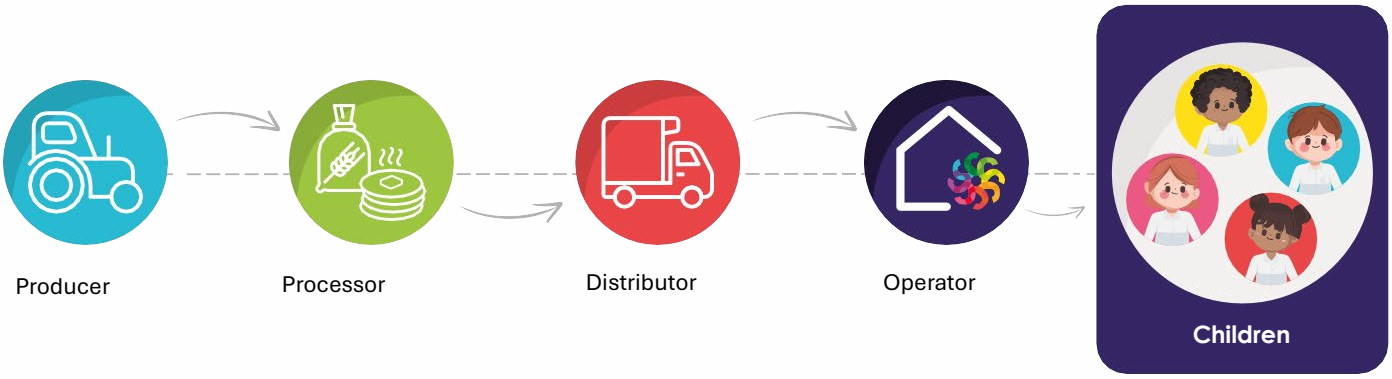
Responsibly sourced foods

In addition to prioritizing locally sourced nutrition, BCC is committed to responsible sourcing.

We are determined to find solutions to feed children sustainably and are constantly thinking of new ways to strengthen our commitment to driving the socioecological transformation of the food supply chain (see Appendix I).

Guided by this pledge to continuous improvement, we have put down strong roots in local communities and the bio-food sector, and developed business partnerships focused on initiatives such as reducing food waste (see Appendix II).

FROM FARM TO CLASSROOM



Challenges Facing The Bio-Food Sector

Having actively contributed to the success of many of the actions and objectives set out in the 2021 version of the Plan d'action 2018–2023 pour la réussite de la Politique bioalimentaire, we anticipate certain challenges ahead that could hinder the bio-food sector's agility and self-sufficiency with regard to feeding the population.

We Need To Be Better At Tracking The Origin And Monitoring The Quality Of School Food

We believe that school food procurement should be consolidated in order to ensure that purchased foods are locally sourced and of high nutritional value.

The lack of a proper tracking tool means that there are problems related to the predictability and supply of healthy, sustainable, local foods for schools. A system is needed to regulate sourcing and assess the nutritional content of foods purchased directly by schools.

We Need To Increase Access To Plant-Based Foods From Quebec

Access to plant-based foods from Quebec requires particular attention, from the point of view of both availability and affordability.

Without measures to improve access to local plant-based foods, the entire local, sustainable food supply chain will be at risk. Conversely, implementing such measures would help children enjoy better health and allow them to reach their full potential.

Our Recommendations

To ensure that the next bio-food policy serves as a comprehensive roadmap for the healthy development of both our children and the bio-food sector that nourishes them daily, Breakfast Club of Canada would like to make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1 — Take Action At The Ministerial Level To Coordinate And Optimize School Nutrition

Breakfast Club of Canada recommends that the Quebec government establish a permanent intersectoral and interministerial school nutrition committee.

This committee should bring together all government actors involved in school nutrition so that the strengths of each can be leveraged to support children's access to food programs.

We recommend that the committee comprise representatives of at least the following government ministries:

- Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation
- Ministère de l'Éducation
- Ministère de la Famille
- Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale
- Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux.

This recommendation was also made by the members of the Chantier pour un programme d'alimentation scolaire universel au Québec during the Bien manger à l'école forum.

The concerted efforts of government officials, who have a high-level perspective of local food systems, healthy lifestyle habits, educational success, early childhood development and poverty, are essential to the development of a provincial school food program. Such a program would benefit public health, reduce social inequalities, increase the likelihood of academic success, boost the economy and protect the environment, all while considerably alleviating parental stress.

The committee could also ensure that the funds allocated in the federal government's spring 2024 budget are distributed quickly and efficiently through the existing structure of Quebec schools.

The approach we are recommending requires close consultation with the community and the involvement of all stakeholders who can make a difference in children's daily lives.

Recommendation 2 — Create A Special Section For Healthy School Nutrition Within The Quebec Food Directory

BCC recommends incorporating a section in the existing Quebec Food Directory dedicated to healthy, sustainable food for all public schools in Quebec, using input from experts in childhood food security, producers, processors and distributors.

As a leader in school nutrition with various initiatives in place to feed school-aged children, BCC has built a vast repository of knowledge over the years. Our organization has experience guiding schools in purchasing local, responsibly sourced and nutritionally complete foods.

We already refer to the existing **Quebec Food Directory**, but we believe that it would be worthwhile to build on this tool and develop a system that is better suited to schools. Certain foods in the existing guide need to be adapted in order to align with **Pour un virage santé à l'école**, a policy framework that sets out guidelines for school nutrition.

Over the years, we have developed expertise in adapting such solutions. We believe that it would be beneficial to tailor this knowledge to meet the specific needs of schools and their students.

The initiative we are recommending could help increase the number of schools purchasing Quebec products and thus contribute to the achievement of SNAAQ objectives.

The administrators of this centralized tool would be able to use a dashboard to monitor how much healthy food is being consumed at each school.

Lastly, BCC encourages the government to fund projects that promote access to and consumption of plant-based products from Quebec in public schools. We call for mechanisms to be put in place to ensure the availability of sufficient quantities of affordable plant-based products.

Recommendation 3 — Integrate School Nutrition Into Regional Food Supply Systems

BCC recommends integrating school nutrition into regional food supply systems as a way of promoting engagement and local/regional coordination between producers, processors, distributors and operators.

Implementing this recommendation would help children eat food from their own communities and help form lifelong dietary habits that revolve around nutritious, sustainable foods.

BCC considers this a worthwhile way to continue improving school nutrition.

- Though more than 70% of food procured by BCC is certified by Aliments du Québec, schools do not necessarily serve food from their own region.
- By working with their local food systems, schools could help increase demand, thereby supporting numerous businesses and creating local jobs.
- Some schools are already able to do this, as they have willing partners in their communities.
- Collaborating with local food systems promotes engagement and encourages stakeholders to develop healthier menus.
- Students who can connect the food on their plates with local places, people and organizations develop a sense of regional pride and identity and are exposed to local successes and opportunities.

The sheer number of children in every community justifies integrating their needs into local food systems.

Recommendation 4 — Support The Provision Of Culturally Appropriate Food In Schools In Indigenous Communities

Breakfast Club of Canada recommends that the next bio-food policy help support culturally appropriate menus in schools in Indigenous communities.

Our organization has been collaborating with Indigenous nations in Quebec since 2005. Our aim at all times is to work with and for Indigenous populations, in both urban and community settings.

Today, we operate programs in 65 First Nations and Inuit elementary and high schools in Quebec, reaching a total of 14,430 students. Every day, on average, 10,979 of these students have their first meal of the day at their school.

We acknowledge Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and are committed to being a strategic ally of the various organizations involved in order to implement a culturally adapted menu that helps Indigenous children achieve their full potential.

Conclusion

Breakfast Club of Canada is a well-established organization with strong connections to Quebec's bio-food supply system. We would like to extend our expertise in every aspect of the food chain, from the farm to the classroom, to the Quebec government and join forces to achieve the objectives of both the current and the future bio-food policy.

As we have explained in this brief, providing children with access to local, healthy and sustainable food is contingent on a dynamic bio-food sector in Quebec.

In conclusion, Breakfast Club of Canada is eager to cooperate to help Quebec achieve food self-sufficiency and become a place where every child, regardless of their background or circumstances, has access to nourishing food.

Working together, we can make it happen.

Appendices

APPENDIX I — Reflective Process

With the help of experts, we undertook a reflective process to critically evaluate Breakfast Club of Canada's actions from a food sustainability perspective.

The following individuals took part in brainstorming meetings in 2023:

- Isabelle Marquis, Senior Food Strategist, Reflective Process Facilitator
- Catherine Houssard, International Reference Center for Life Cycle Assessment and Sustainable Transition (CIRAIG)
- Renée Michaud, Institute of Nutrition and Functional Foods (INAF)
- Jordan Lebel, Professor of Marketing, Concordia University
- Éliane Brisebois, Environmental Transition Research Chair, Université du Québec à Montréal
- Sophie Langlois Blouin, RECYC-QUÉBEC
- Jean-Claude Dufour, retired former Dean, Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences, Université Laval
- Sophie Perreault, Québec Produce Marketing Association (QPMA)
- Annick Van Campenhout, Conseil de la transformation alimentaire du Québec (CTAQ)
- Vincent Galarneau, Vivre en Ville
- Vincent Galarneau, Vivre en Ville
- Isabelle Vendeplas, Système alimentaire local et intégré à Montréal (SALIM) and Collectif Récolte
- Amina Baba-Khelil, Maison de l'UPA



APPENDIX II — Tackling Food Waste

Still Good fights food waste.

Breakfast Club of Canada is proud to partner with Still Good, a company that not only helps feed children, but also upcycles surplus food that would otherwise be thrown out.

Still Good gives a second life to various ingredients that are still edible and nutritious, and transforms them into convenient breakfast foods. Their delicious cookies, made of malted barley residue and fruit and vegetable pulp, are a good source of energy for many students in our programs.



APPENDIX III — From Farm to Classroom

With the help of its community partners in regions across Quebec, Breakfast Club of Canada is turning the fight against food waste into an opportunity to transform unsold agricultural and retail products into healthy foods for kids.



Exploratory project with Groupe d'Entraide en Toute Amitié and the Conseil de développement bioalimentaire de Lanaudière



Exploratory project with Collectif Champs d'action en sécurité alimentaire in Sherbrooke



Exploratory project with Cultive le partage in Mauricie



Pilot project to prepare and process unsold foods in collaboration with the Projet de Hub Agroalimentaire in Montérégie-Ouest



Project to recover unsold foods and agricultural surplus in collaboration with Récup. alimentaire Haute-Gaspésie



Project to recover unsold foods in collaboration with Complices Alimentaires in Montérégie

This Is How Breakfast Club Of Canada Brings The Farm To The Classroom:

A CREATOR OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

- Promotes a sense of belonging among youth
- Encourages social involvement
- Helps with skill building, leadership and self-esteem
- Provides a safe, welcoming environment
- Promotes healthy lifestyle habits

A RELIABLE GOVERNMENT PARTNER

- Possesses significant expertise
- Has a flexible approach
- Took swift action throughout the pandemic (e.g., setting up an emergency fund, providing lunches as soon as schools reopened, redistributing food)

A LOCAL PLAYER IN AGRICULTURE

- Supports local producers in all regions
- Aspires to supply 100% Quebec-sourced food
- Committed to becoming accredited by Aliments du Québec
- Helps increase food self-sufficiency throughout Quebec
- Works to mitigate the impacts of food deserts

A DRIVER OF LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Prioritizes and promotes the purchase of local products
- Provides tailored support to local SMEs to encourage their growth
- Establishes respectful, long-term relationships with communities

AN ALLY OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

- Develops culturally appropriate menus
- Supports communities in meeting their own needs

AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY ORGANIZATION

- Reduces transport by favouring local suppliers
- Remains committed to reducing its environmental footprint
- Promotes environmentally friendly practices (e.g., recycling, composting)