

Majority (52%) Says Price of Basic Food Staples 'Not Affordable' For Average Canadian

Canadians Choose Production of Food over Energy

Public Release Date: Tuesday, February 12, 2008, 6:00 AM EST



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Toronto, ON – A new Ipsos Reid poll conducted exclusively for Global National and CanWest News Service reveals that a majority of Canadians (52%) believe that 'the price of basic food staples in Canada is rising to levels where the average Canadian cannot afford them'. However, despite the fact that the United Nations says that the rising price of food means that many of the world's citizens will not be able to afford even the most basic of food staples, nearly one half (48%) of Canadians do not believe that this is the case in Canada.

More specifically, six in ten (59%) believe that prices are 'more costly than what is fair', while just 2% think that prices are 'less costly than what is fair'. Three in ten (30%) are of the opinion that the price for basic food staples is 'just about right', while one in ten (10%) are not sure.

Thinking about the root causes of the recent increase of food prices, four in ten (43%) blame it on 'bad weather and spoiled crops', while one third (32%) says 'a sagging economy from the world's top producers' is to blame. Three in ten (29%) believe that there are 'not enough farmers to plant staple crops', and one quarter (22%) suggest that it is 'increased demand by developing countries' that is the cause of this price increase.

Canadians Choose Food Supply over Energy Supply...

The data reveals an interesting dichotomy between Canadians' opinions on food production in Canada and the move of some farmers to change their crops to the growing of grains to be used in the production of biofuels like ethanol.

While on the surface it appears that most (66%) Canadians support the notion of Canadian farmers switching to the 'production of grains to be used in the production of biofuels like ethanol because it will be better for the environment', when suggested that the increase in supply of this type of energy portends a decrease in supply of basic foodstuffs resulting in higher prices, they are less supportive.

To this effect, six in ten (59%) agree (strongly 19%/somewhat 40%) that 'Canadian farmers should *not* switch to harvesting crops to be used in the production of biofuels like ethanol because Canada and the world cannot afford to lower the supply of food'. Four in ten (41%) disagree (9% strongly/33% somewhat) with this notion, in effect agreeing that this transition should be made.

Similarly, just four in ten (42%) agree (strongly 7%/somewhat 35%) that they would 'be willing to pay more for foodstuffs like bread, milk and meat' if it meant a higher supply of ethanol and other biofuels that are better for the environment'. Six in ten (58%) disagree (24% strongly/35% somewhat) that they would be willing to do this.

Thinking about the production of crop-based fuels, six in ten (61%) believe that they are better for the environment when powering cars. However, one third (33%) are of the opinion that 'they have the same net effect on the environment because they require more energy to produce in the first place'.

Two in ten (16%) think that ‘they contribute to higher grain prices and therefore make food more expensive’, while some (12%) adopt a more sceptical approach, believing that ‘ethanol is providing a windfall for American farmers who are taking advantage of subsidies and soaring demand to produce maize, the basic ingredient in ethanol’.

In terms of what the best way would be to increase the world’s food supply, one third (34%) of Canadians think that ‘ending American subsidies to produce ethanol so that those farmers can produce food instead’ would do the trick. Two in ten (20%) believe that ‘making fertilizer available to farmers who would otherwise not have access to it’ would be the best way to solve the shortage, while 14% say that ‘investing in technology like genetically modified and cloned food’ would address this issue.

Just 4% would suggest that we ‘harvest more land, even if it means the loss of forests’. Three in ten (28%) do not believe that any of the aforementioned methods would be the best way to increase the world’s supply of food.

One Half (50%) Say Eliminate Taxes to Make Basic Foodstuffs more Affordable...

Asked to reflect on what the government should do in order to help keep the price of food affordable for all Canadians, fully one half (50%) believe that the Government of Canada should ‘completely eliminate taxes on basic foodstuffs to make them more affordable’, while two in ten (17%) say that the government ought to ‘control exports of grain to protect our supply’. Nearly one quarter (22%) believe that the government should do ‘nothing because the government should not be setting prices or interfering with market supply or demand’. One in ten (11%) do not know what should be done.



Finally, thinking about how Canadians themselves might contribute, three in ten (29%) simply do not know. A similar proportion (28%) believes that they will most likely do 'nothing because the market will eventually balance itself out', while one quarter (25%) says that they would be most likely to 'purchase a hybrid vehicle that uses less fuel'. Two in ten (18%) indicate that they would be most likely to 'eat less grain-based products and meat, and eat more fruits and vegetables' in order to keep the price of food in check.

These are the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of CanWest News Service and Global Television from January 24 to January 28, 2008. For the survey, a representative randomly selected sample of 3219 adult Canadians was interviewed via the Ipsos I-Say Online Panel. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 1.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult population of Canada been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were weighted to ensure that the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Canadian population according to Census data.

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