



## **NOTES FOR REMARKS**

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## **FOOD SECURITY SYMPOSIUM – OPENING REMARKS**

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Good morning everyone and welcome – on behalf of the entire board of the Maple Leaf Centre for Action on Food Security, a very heartfelt thank you for investing the time to participate today, and for your ongoing conviction to resolve one of Canada’s most critical social issues.

Let me begin by highlighting why I feel it is important for us all to be here today. We have a shameful problem in our society, rooted in brutal facts all too well known to most of you.

Four million Canadians face food insecurity, or 12% of our nation. That’s one in every six, or 17% of Canadian children. Over half the children who live in Nunavut live with hunger, the highest rate in Canada. Of food insecure households, 62% rely on marginal wages that don’t meet the very basics of life.

Facing this challenge, I don’t believe anyone in this room has a complete answer, least of all Maple Leaf or me personally. But, I do believe that we can find answers together, through dialogue, sharing, innovating, learning and advocating. Together. And, that’s why we are here.

Our primary goal in organizing this symposium was to bring a spectrum of stakeholders together – industry associations, government, academia, civil society, advocacy groups and the private sector.

We urgently need broader engagement, and we need more collaboration on this pressing national issue. And this needs to be translated into action. Our hope is today gives all of us the opportunity to expand networks and knowledge towards that end.

I would like to tell you a short story of the evolution of Maple Leaf Foods. In our belief system, the business of business is NOT just business.

Several years ago, Maple Leaf began a concerted process of redefining our company – to tackle the complex juxtaposition of being a large protein company that also aspires to be a sustainable enterprise...one which advocates for a new social contract between business and society.

We are acutely aware of the role our industry plays in both shaping and addressing the challenges facing the global food system.

Our commitment to advancing food security is interwoven with a broader strategy that sets out aggressive targets which span improving the nutrition, health and affordability of our products, dramatically reducing our environmental footprint, and implementing leading animal care practices.

This has evolved to an aspiration to be the most sustainable protein company on earth. It demands that we accelerate change and progress on all fronts...and we are!

I think this is important context, because food security cannot be seen in isolation from a sustainable food system, in all its manifestations.

The Maple Leaf Centre for Action on Food Security was the culmination of years of consultation with people deeply engaged in advancing food security, many of whom are here today. Our aim was to develop a strategy that reflected insights from experts on how a big food company like ours could collaborate to drive meaningful change.

We believed that we could bring resources and an important voice to the table, working collaboratively with the thousands of people already committed to this journey. The Centre evolved from your counsel and support, and the opportunity you provided us to build trust.

One thing we heard repeatedly from our many discussions was the need for the private sector to step up in non-conventional ways – to move beyond food charity and cheque writing to participate in the dialogue, in advocacy, in multi-stakeholder efforts to advance a more sustainable, just food system.

We also heard that we need more inclusive efforts that bring civil society, business, academics and government together, so that we may better understand our respective interests and advance more bipartisan cooperation and action. Pursuing independent, ideological positions has not, and will not, deliver the extent or pace of progress needed.

That was the genesis of the Centre for Action on Food Security, and a large part of what we hope to advance through hosting this symposium.

Gathered today we have people from all sectors that have a vested interest in seeing real change happen:

- people who want to increase the impact of programs that serve and empower people who live with food insecurity;
- government officials with a mandate to enact policy reforms that address poverty and a failing food system;
- and others in the private sector who aspire to marshal our considerable resources to achieve better, more enlightened outcomes than we have in the past.

Hopefully we reflect a broader sense of responsibility and desire to act on this issue, and share the weight borne too often by civil society.

I feel a sense of shame that a country as prosperous as Canada has not been able to harness our considerable national resources, and social and political will to address this fundamental issue.

However, I do feel that there is reason for optimism!

I am inspired by the breadth of innovation that is happening in civil society to develop more resilient food systems that use the power of food to build capacity and empower change.

I am encouraged by my peers in the private sector, many of whom are here today, who want to move beyond charitable models of giving to create sustained social value.

And importantly, I am optimistic that policies under development that aim to reduce poverty and advance an integrated, sustainable food system for Canada will provide the framework and mandate for change.

The board and staff of the Centre have put a lot of thought into today's agenda; how we can bring other perspectives and knowledge to inform our thinking and increase the collective impact of our work.

First up is Nick Saul, President and CEO of Community Food Centres Canada. Nick and I go back a few years, and while we don't always share the same views, with many a heated but constructive debate, I continue to learn a great deal from Nick and I have much regard for his vision and his actions.

We'll then hear from Trish Kelly, an inspiring leader who has gone from lived experience to leading organizational efforts to drive innovation – at the Greater Vancouver Food Bank and now at Potluck Cafe. We value Trish's perspective, because we need to foster awareness and empathy – hearts and minds – to fuel our sense of urgency and collective action.

We'll then move on to two panel discussions that dig into the concept of scaling for impact – from theoretical frameworks to three diverse on-the-ground examples of organizations that are scaling up and out. We are immensely grateful to our panelists, many of whom have travelled far to be here today to share their goals, progress and challenges.

This will be followed by a panel of business CEOs who are vested, personally and professionally, in focusing resources on advancing food security. This includes Sarah Davis, President, Loblaw Companies Ltd. and Barry Telford, President and CEO of Sodexo, along with myself. It's a perspective we don't hear from enough in forums such as this, and these are senior executives who are committed to leading change.

After lunch, we'll get into the public policy side of the discussion. Don Buckingham, President and CEO of the Canadian Agri-Policy Institute will provide his perspective on the right to food as a legal and social framework for advancing food security and related public policy.

This will be followed by a panel of practitioners and leaders who are deeply engaged at all levels of government, who will share their insights on policies that advance or impede progress.

We will conclude the day with informal discussions with important public-sector change agents: Tom Rosser, Assistant Deputy Minister, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada responsible for developing the food policy for Canada and Karen Glass, Assistant Deputy Minister for the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy Office.

While it's a full day, we have built in generous breaks and opportunities for you to engage in all the sessions and network with each other. When the sessions are over, there'll be more chance to meet over a glass of wine, which in my experience is always good for stimulating more discussion!

On a personal note, I have much to learn from you and I feel incredibly fortunate to be with you today. So many of you have invested your lives to addressing this issue. Your vision for what a just Canada must stand for, your tenacity to prevail, and your efforts to reach Canadians who face the hard edge of food insecurity, push me and all of us to step up, to engage and to act.

Failure is not in our vocabulary and we cannot fail here.

Thank you and with that, I welcome Nick to the stage.

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