



20 Years of the Canadian Association for Food Studies

A Snapshot &
Directions for
the Future

L'Association
canadienne des études
sur l'alimentation



Canadian
Association
for Food Studies



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20 Years of the Canadian Association for Food Studies: A Snapshot and Directions for the Future

report prepared by Diana Chu, Erik Chevrier, Finn Meyer Cook & Robbie Solway
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Overview

There’s a common saying that when one door closes, another opens. The story behind the founding of the now twenty year old Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS) is emblematic of this. As one founding member Professor Emeritus Mustafa Koç aptly shares in his reflections, CAFS emerged from an April 2005 meeting of university and community-based researchers at Toronto Metropolitan University (then called Ryerson University). The meeting was organized to discuss next steps after an unsuccessful grant application to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to create a Canadian University Research Alliance (CURA). While unsuccessful in the initial application for CURA, the process had revealed agreement and recognition within this early network of food studies scholars of the need for research to examine social concerns and implications arising from the food system. Issues such as the causes of hunger, the impacts of industrial farming, and climate

change, were becoming more pertinent (Koç, 2025). At the time, these research areas were not topics or issues mainstream funders or journals were necessarily interested in, which necessitated the establishment of a stand-alone association now known as the Canadian Association for Food Studies (Koç, 2025).

Much has been accomplished since its initial founding (see Figure 1)—from formalizing its role as a scholarly association and joining the Federation for Humanities and Social Sciences, to incorporating as a non-profit organization, and creating the journal, *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur L'alimentation* (CFS/RCÉA). Since CFS/RCÉA's initial publication in May 2014, there have been twelve volumes, including over four hundred distinct articles about food studies in Canada.

Through the annual conference and CFS/RCÉA, CAFS's flagship programs, the field of food studies has

CAFS ORGANIZATIONAL MILESTONES

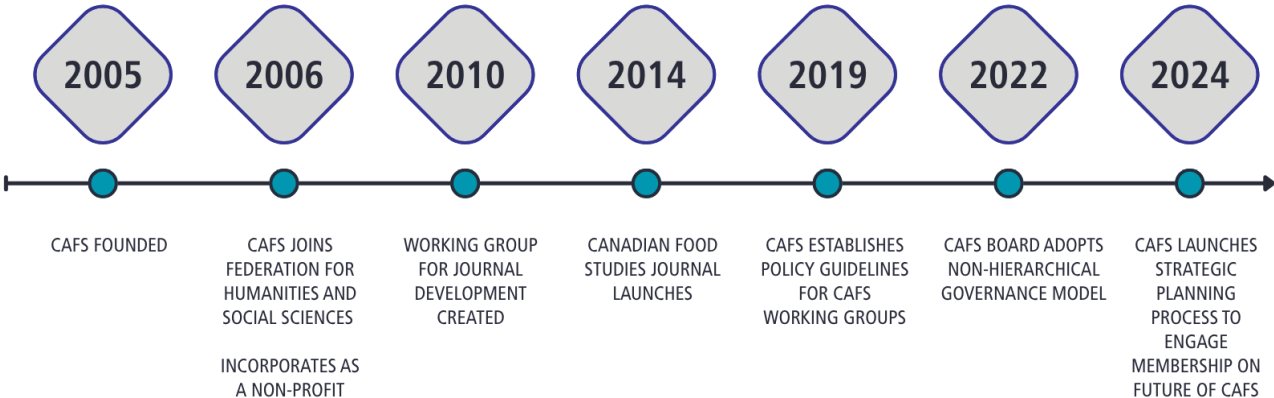


Figure 1: Organizational Milestone Timeline

evolved into a distinguished space known for its inherent interdisciplinarity, systems approach, and critical inquiry. The nature of and home disciplinary backgrounds of the CAFS membership has evolved over time to reflect and include broadening representation from across the social sciences and humanities. This, in turn, has unlocked and expanded perspectives on food systems issues. Today, food studies researchers doing work in Canada and Indigenous territories are well equipped with a nuanced and critical understanding of food systems, including how they are informed by and contribute to societal issues of our time.

The 20th year anniversary of CAFS presented a timely opportunity to reflect on its organizational accomplishments, assess the current state of operations, and establish future directions. 2025 was not only a year that marked this significant milestone, it also reflected a period of transition out of a global pandemic. Within an ongoing climate crisis and a rising tide of geopolitical conflicts, the period revealed deep fractures in the food system globally and domestically. Many food system challenges that had been studied and known for decades took centre stage as the cracks in Canada's highly industrialized and globalized food system were felt nationally. This was seen in skyrocketing food prices, rising rates of household food insecurity, use of food banks (Dalhousie University et al., 2025), atrocious working conditions of migrant farm workers (Allahdua & Dunsworth, 2023), a mass exodus of hospitality workers (Metcalf Foundation, 2023), and the continuing ecological impacts of a heavily corporatized food system (te Wierik et al., 2025). Importantly 2025 also marked the tenth year anniversary of the publication of the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final Report, along with the report's 94 Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Many of these above themes were integral to CAFS members' concerns and ongoing works.

Within CAFS, there were also some internal changes and pressures that presented a need for a deeper look at the association's functioning. The Board's adoption of a non-hierarchical governance model, ongoing volunteer burnout and imbalanced workloads, Board turnover, and a desire for greater organizational continuity and institutional memory are some examples. It was within

this context that the CAFS Board established a Strategic Planning Committee in 2024 to undertake a review.

Through this report, the Committee presents the findings from the first phase of work undertaken from October 2024 to March 2026. This phase draws on three primary research components: a survey, interviews, and a World Café conducted with the CAFS community. First, we present our guiding research questions and methodology. Second, we present the findings from our analysis. Finally, we discuss strategic insights and recommend directions and priorities for future phases of strategic planning.

Research Questions

At the onset of the process in October 2024, there was consensus from the Strategic Planning Committee that developing a baseline understanding of the association's history, accomplishments, membership, and internal and external strengths and challenges, would be crucial to developing a strategic plan relevant and useful to CAFS. As such, the purpose of the first phase of strategic planning was to undertake research to develop this understanding.

The guiding research questions were:

1. Who is the CAFS community, and how does it engage with the association? This includes understanding membership composition, areas of interest in food studies, patterns of engagement, motivations for participation, and barriers to involvement.
2. How is CAFS experienced and perceived by its members and potential members? This includes perceptions of membership value and benefits, the perceived impact of CAFS, communication and outreach practices, and feedback on the association's current work and role.
3. How do CAFS's structures, activities, and resources shape its current and potential impact? This includes governance and decision-making processes, organizational strengths and challenges, finances, human/labour, alignment on priorities, and opportunities for improvement in delivering value to members.

Our Research Methods



Figure 2: Graphic Summary of Research Methods

Methodology

The Committee used a mixed-methods approach designed to engage members in multiple ways. Three complimentary methods (illustrated in Figure 2) were used between January and June 2025:

- member Survey (67 responses) to capture broad perspectives across the country
- follow-up Interviews (5 participants) to explore key themes in greater depth
- world Café Sessions (45 participants) held at the annual CAFS conference to facilitate collaborative dialogue and priority setting

Together, these approaches allowed members from across the country to contribute at different levels of engagement—from accessible survey input to in-depth conversations and collaborative discussions.

The following sections describe each purpose and process.

Survey

Purpose: The survey gathered initial feedback on members' experiences with CAFS and ideas for its future development. Key ideas explored:

- experiences with CAFS activities and offerings
- membership benefits and communications
- suggestions for improving the association
- member roles, affiliations, and food study area research interests

Process: The survey included 30 questions with an estimated completion time of 20 minutes. It was open from January 28 to February 27, 2025 and received 67 responses. It was distributed through:

- the CAFS listserv
- direct emails to current and former board members
- outreach to individuals engaged in CAFS activities

At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they wanted to opt-in to a follow-up interview. Five respondents opted to participate.

To encourage participation, respondents could enter a draw for a \$30 prize. A winner was randomly selected on February 28th, 2025.

Interviews

Purpose: The interviews provided an opportunity to explore survey themes in more detail, while also allowing for the inclusion of additional themes and reflections that the original survey did not capture on the future of food studies and the role of CAFS.

Process: Five one-hour semi-structured individual interviews were conducted virtually through Microsoft Teams in April 2025. Participants were asked six guiding questions exploring:

- their connection to food studies
- how they thought the field may evolve in the next five years
- the role CAFS might play in that evolution
- how CAFS can remain relevant to members
- the association's current strengths and areas for improvement
- additional insights for the strategic planning process (optional)

All interviews were recorded, anonymized and transcribed for analysis, to highlight similarities and additional post survey themes. Interviews were later re-analysed in relation to findings from the World Cafés.

World Café Sessions

Purpose: World Café sessions provided an opportunity for collective dialogue and collaborative in person idea generation amongst members during the CAFS annual conference.

Process: The first session was held immediately after the Annual General Meeting and included some food and refreshments. The second session was held during lunch on the last day of the conference. Each session lasted approximately 1.5 hours.

The World Café began with a short presentation outlining the strategic planning process and preliminary findings from the survey and interviews.

Participants then broke out into separate facilitator supported discussion groups organized around five key themes, which explored:

- CAFS future impact and role in food studies (over the next five years)
- strengthening member engagement and broadening participation
- expanding the value and impact of CAFS activities and benefits
- fostering stronger connections and collaboration among members
- advancing CAFS' work within existing resources and constraints

Each group focused on a single theme. Facilitators used discussion prompts and recorded key ideas. After twenty minutes of discussion, each facilitator shared their group's ideas with the larger plenary.

The first session was attended by 38 participants and concluded with a 'dotmocracy' exercise where participants were each given five stickers and ten minutes to identify the ideas that resonated most strongly with them across the theme areas. This exercise allowed the committee to quickly visualize collective priorities and identify ideas which had the strongest support.

The second session was attended by seven participants. Due to lower attendance, the second session was hosted as a single group discussion.

Data analysis

Survey and interview responses were analyzed using a hybrid (deductive-inductive) thematic approach. Responses were first reviewed according to the thematic areas included in the survey (deductive analysis), while leaving room for emerging content-driven codes (inductive analysis).

Open-ended comments from interview transcripts and emerging themes from the World Café were then

reviewed and coded to identify additional themes and ideas that emerged from the participants' input. Interview themes were reviewed independently by at least two committee members to ensure consistency and to confirm that the interpretations accurately reflected the participants' input. Facilitators took notes during the World Café, capturing key themes across groups. Results from the dotmocracy exercise were tallied by aggregating participant sticker votes assigned to each theme, generating a ranked indication of collective priorities.

Action-oriented comments and ideas (see Appendix A) were aggregated from the survey, interview, and World Café, coded thematically and examined using frequency analysis to identify which ideas, topics, trends, or recommendations appeared most often across all methods. Together, these hybrid methods allowed the committee to identify commonly shared priorities, as well as less frequent and emerging perspectives.



Results

The results section is organized into three parts. First, it presents findings from the survey, which capture broad patterns in member perspectives. Second, it presents findings from the interviews, which provide more in-depth insight into key themes. Finally, it outlines the results of the World Café sessions, highlighting collectively generated priorities and areas of emphasis.

Survey Results

Who is the CAFS Community?

A total of 67 individuals responded to the survey. Most were current or former CAFS members or had served in official roles (e.g., Board members, founding members,

journal contributors), with only 12% identifying as list-serv-only subscribers. Nearly half (48%) reported substantial involvement in CAFS governance or programming, including Board service (n = 22), working groups or committees (n = 10), and roles such as founding member (n = 8), conference co-chair (n = 8), or journal editor (n = 8). Respondents were predominantly tenured faculty (25%), followed by PhD students, practitioners, and researchers; no undergraduate students participated. Overall, the sample was largely academic, though the institutional location of practitioners was unclear. Geographically, respondents were concentrated in Central Canada (Ontario 55%; Quebec 13%), followed by British Columbia (10%) and Alberta (10%), with smaller representation from Saskatchewan (3%) and Nova Scotia (3%). No respondents were based in the Territories, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, or Manitoba. Most (79%) were affiliated with post-secondary institutions, and 9% with not-for-profit or community-based organizations.

What are the Areas of Interest in Food Studies of the CAFS Community?

Respondents identified food sovereignty, food systems, food security, food justice, and sustainability as the top five areas of interest in food studies (see Figure 3 for the full list of the top 10). Emerging trends and pressing concerns included food sovereignty, climate change, food insecurity, and Indigenous rights and decolonization. Table 1 summarizes the top 20 trends and concerns identified by participants.

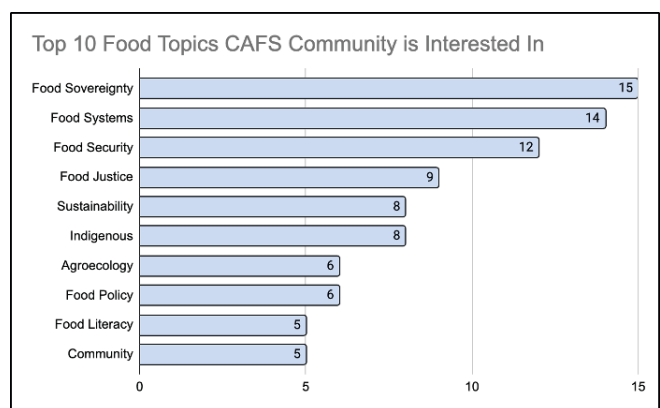


Figure 3: Topics of Interest

term	freq.	example phrases
food sovereignty	8	Indigenous sovereignty, decolonial land justice
climate change	7	Climate chaos, resilience, biodiversity impact
food insecurity	7	Rising rates, weaponization, accessibility
Indigenous	6	Landback, Indigenous food systems
corporate control	5	Corporate power, agrifood monopolies
sustainability	5	Environmental/social sustainability, regenerative
agroecology	4	Sustainable agriculture, scalable solutions
food systems	4	Decolonization, pedagogy, urban systems
land justice	3	Land access, Landback movements
food security	3	Policy, climate-linked risks
seed activism	2	Seed saving, enclosure resistance
urban agriculture	2	Peri-urban farming, local response
decolonization	2	Decolonial thinking, practices
food pedagogy	2	Education, youth literacy
social movements	2	Responses to crises, corporate resistance
ultra-processed food	2	Nutrition transitions, health impacts
geopolitical disruption	2	Trade tariffs, food as weapon
food labour	2	Exploitation, migrant workers
alternative food movements	2	Grassroots initiatives, local networks
biodiversity	2	Impact of food production

Table 1: Top 20 Emerging Food Trends/Concerns

How Does the CAFS Community Engage with CAFS?

CAFS currently facilitates a range of activities that support scholarly exchange and community engagement in food studies. These include an annual conference that brings together members and others interested in the field; webinars and online sessions; the open-access journal *Canadian Food Studies*; a biannual newsletter; ad hoc committees and working groups addressing issues

relevant to CAFS and its community; and an active listserv with over 1000 users as of 2025, which supports ongoing communication among members.

The vast majority of respondents participated in reading the journal (88.1%) and CAFS newsletter (88.1%). Many respondents have attended the annual conference (73.1%) or other online events (58.2%). A smaller, but still large number, engage with CAFS through the email listserv (65.7%), and contribute to the journal (52.2%).

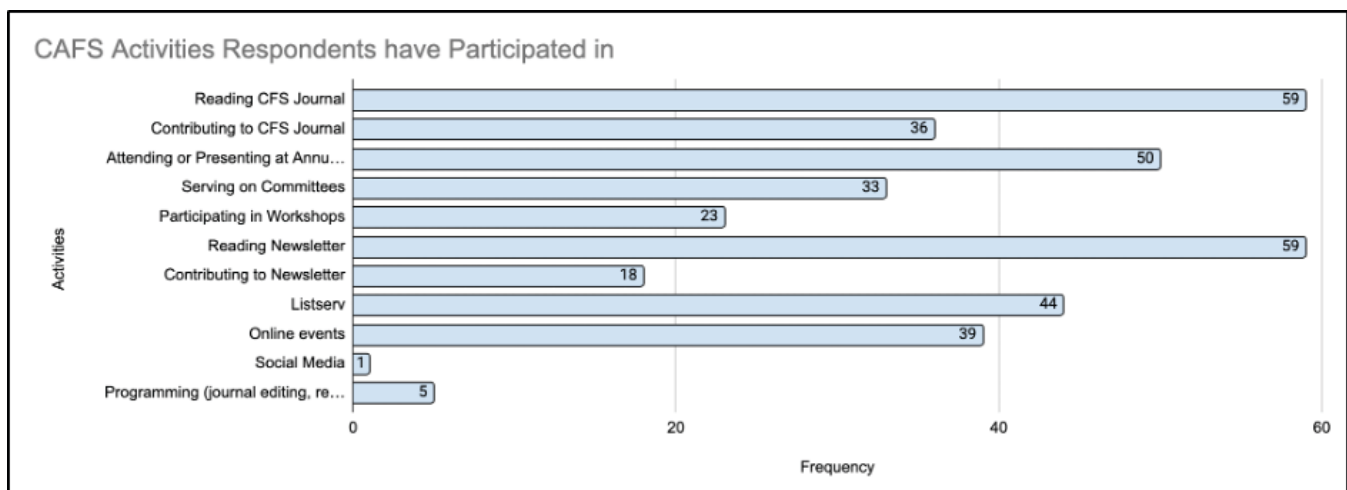


Figure 4: Activities respondents have participated in

Barriers to Participation

The most frequently cited barrier to participation was lack of time and competing priorities, including work, research, teaching, and seasonal commitments. Limited capacity and energy, particularly for unpaid labour (e.g., conference planning, workshop facilitation, coordination and administration on behalf of the association), were also common constraints. Financial and travel costs restricted conference attendance for some to once every few years. Concerns about relevance and accessibility were noted by 14% of respondents, who questioned the alignment of their work with CAFS, expressed interest in more applied content, or identified limited opportunities to engage in French. Additional barriers included lack of childcare, perceptions of insularity within Canadian scholarship, and simple forgetfulness or limited awareness of opportunities (see Figure 5 for Key Barriers to Participation).

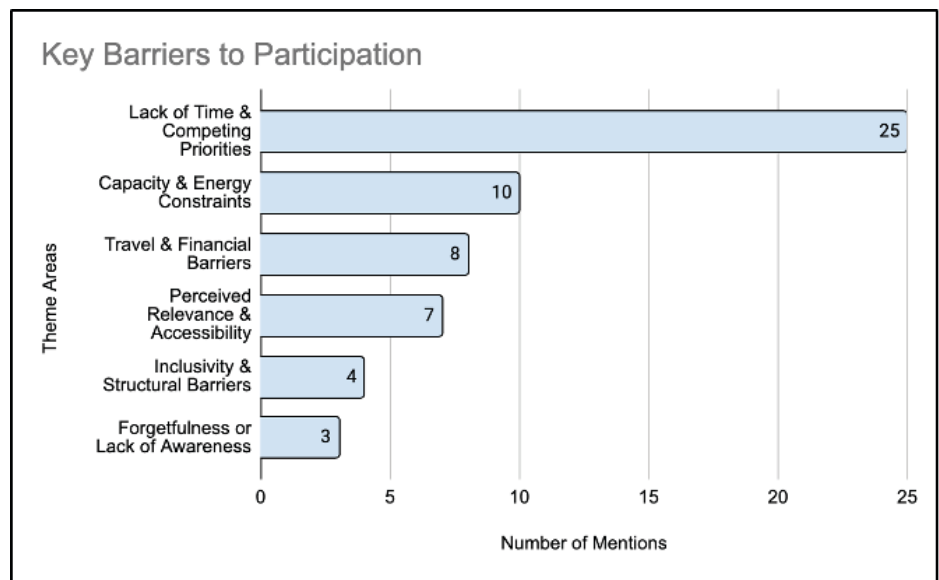


Figure 5: Barriers to Participation in CAFS

Priority Areas for CAFS Community and Membership

The annual conference emerged as the top priority, highlighting its central role in networking, learning, and community building (See Figure 6). The journal was also frequently cited as an important resource for scholarly

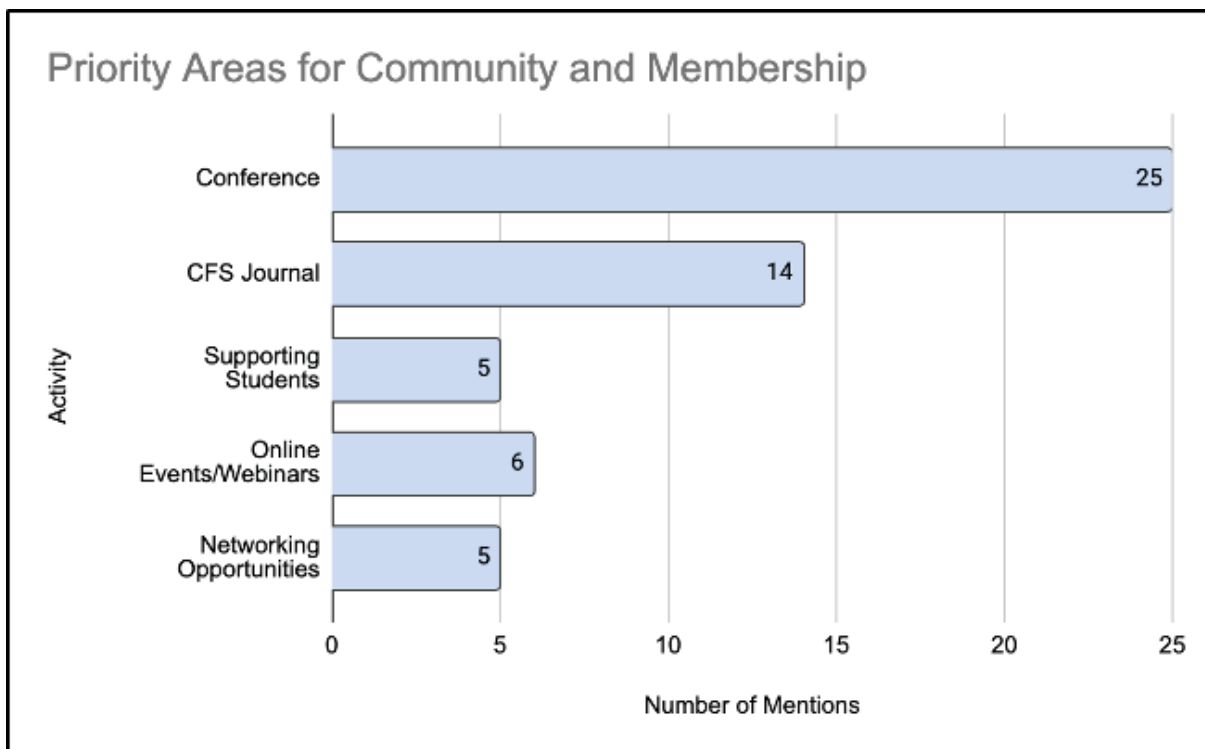


Figure 6: Priority Areas for Community and Membership

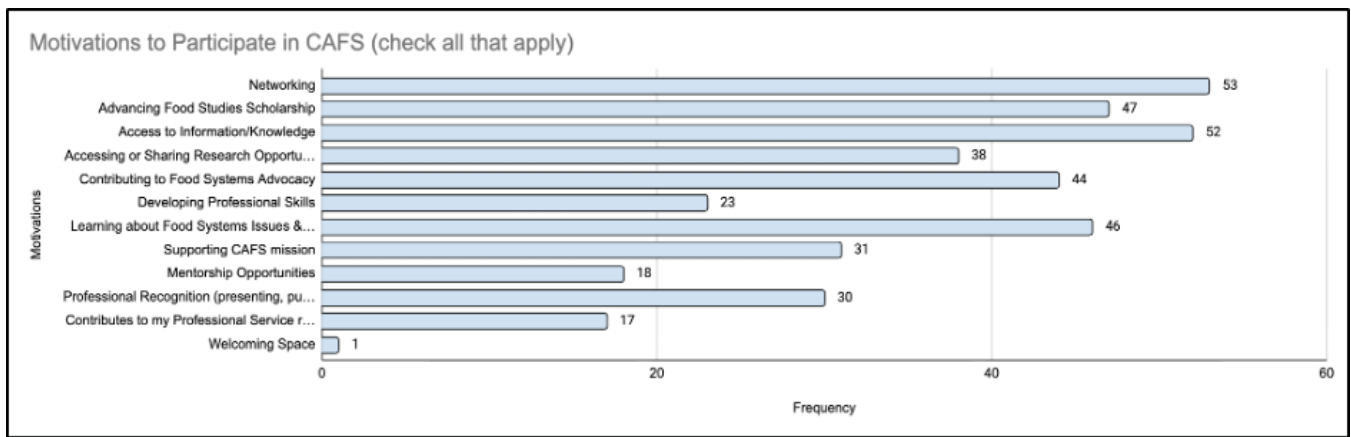


Figure 7: Motivations

exchange. Other priorities included online events and webinars, student support initiatives such as scholarships, career forums, and workshops, and expanded networking opportunities through local meet-ups and collaborative or field-based activities. Responses emphasized strengthening community connections, enhancing accessible professional development opportunities, and increasing support for students through a combination of in-person and virtual formats.

Motivations for Participating in CAFS

The most commonly cited motivations for participating in CAFS activities were networking with other food scholars and practitioners (79.1%), access to information and knowledge (77.6%), and advancing food studies scholarship in Canada and on Indigenous territories (70.1%). See Figure 7 for a detailed breakdown of motivations.

CAFS Membership and Benefits

Of the 67 respondents, approximately half reported being current paid members of CAFS. The majority (73.1%) of respondents reported that the fee was accessible. To understand members' capacity to provide additional revenue to CAFS, respondents were asked about their ability or willingness to make a donation. Most (68.7%) indicated they are not currently able to contribute. Among those who could or would consider donating (21%), 28% were unsure of the annual amount they could provide. Only nine respondents elaborated, emphasizing the importance of transparency in how

funds would be used, support for part-time positions, tax deductibility, and ensuring CAFS activities remain accessible to all members.

Respondents also identified additional benefits they would like CAFS to offer, which clustered into four key areas: professional development and member support; connections and partnerships; advocacy and policy engagement; and journal development and knowledge exchange.

Within the category of professional development and member support, respondents emphasized mentorship opportunities, practical guidance for implementing food studies initiatives, and greater recognition of volunteer contributions. Within the category of connections and partnerships, they highlighted the importance of fostering interdisciplinary networking, establishing collaborative memberships with related associations, developing provincial or regional groups, and supporting coalition-building for advocacy. Within the category of advocacy and policy engagement, respondents underscored the value of direct engagement with policymakers and contributing to systemic responses to food insecurity and inequities. Finally, within the category of journal development and knowledge exchange, respondents pointed to expanding open-access initiatives, developing joint special issues, and facilitating the sharing of best practices.

Respondents also expressed general satisfaction with existing CAFS initiatives, particularly the annual conference, journal, and listserv, while highlighting the potential for dialogue sessions with policymakers to connect research with real-world impact.

Impact of CAFS Membership

The primary benefits reported by respondents with higher levels of CAFS engagement were networking and professional connections (n = 13), followed by learning and skills development (n = 8), research visibility and dissemination (n = 5), and career advancement (n = 4). A smaller number of respondents noted mixed or neutral impacts (n = 3) or no/minimal impact (n = 2). These findings highlight the central role of CAFS in fostering community, providing professional development opportunities, and supporting scholarly visibility within the field (see Figure 8).

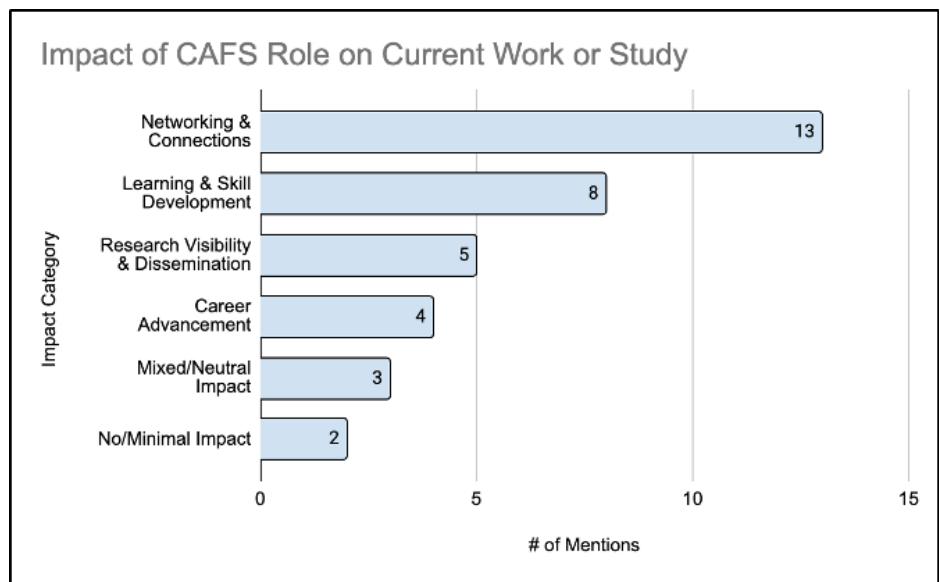


Figure 8: Impact of CAFS

Communication and Outreach

Respondents generally rated CAFS communications positively: 45% indicated that communications are effective and 33% rated them as somewhat effective, while 15% expressed neutral views, suggesting some room for improvement (see Figure 9). Strengths included the listserv, which was widely described as informative and well-used; the newsletter, valued for keeping members updated on publications and opportunities;

and the website and journal. Several respondents also noted recent improvements in social media.

When asked about areas for enhancement, members highlighted a desire for greater transparency and more regular updates on CAFS operations, as well as more engaging visual content on social media and increased opportunities for dialogue, user-generated content, and policy-related engagement. At the same time, respondents recommended reducing email volume, avoiding repetitive visuals, and limiting overly long or detailed communications. Figure 10 shows the communication channels CAFS members currently engage in.



Figure 9: Views on Effectiveness of Communications

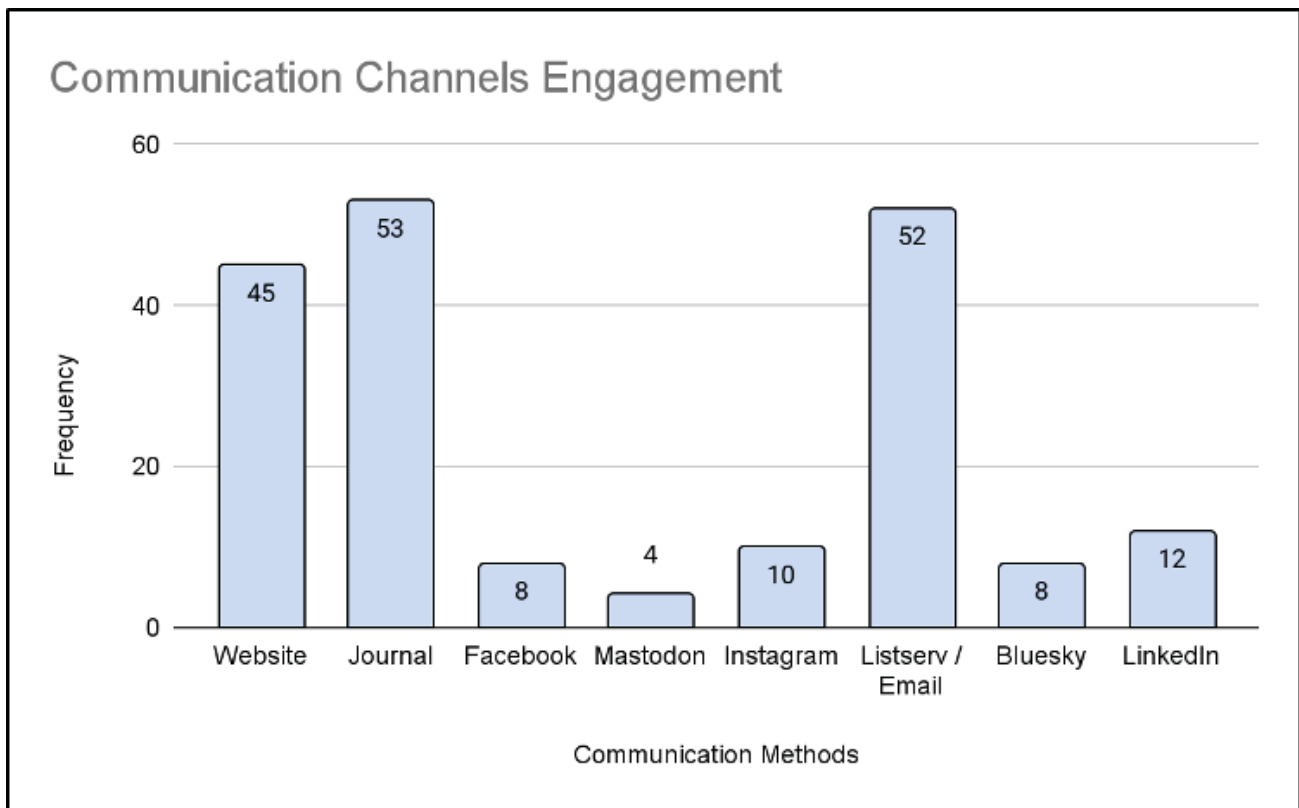


Figure 10: Engagement with CAFS Communications

CAFS Governance and Decision-Making

Strengths and Challenges

Analysis of board member responses revealed several strengths and challenges in CAFS governance (see Table 2). Members were generally positive about the energy, commitment, and willingness of participants to collaborate. However, recurring challenges included lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, limited onboarding, reliance on a small group of active members, and insufficient strategic focus. Role ambiguity was frequently noted, with respondents reporting inefficiencies, unrealistic expectations, and limited opportunities for strategic engagement, though some also valued the learning experience associated with these roles.

Respondents raised concerns about knowledge transfer and organizational continuity. Frequent turnover, combined with the absence of formal mechanisms to retain and transmit institutional memory, contributed to duplicated efforts across successive cycles of work and a perception of “reinventing the wheel.” They also identified labour imbalances and burnout as ongoing issues,

Strengths
Collegiality and goodwill among members
Opportunities for learning and growth
Recent improvements in leadership and organization
Commitment to democratizing structure
Enthusiasm from new and emerging scholars
Challenges
Lack of role clarity and onboarding
Poor knowledge transfer and institutional memory
Over-reliance on a small group of active members
Confusion from unclear or overly flat structure
Lack of strategic focus beyond conference planning

Table 2: Strengths and Challenges in Board Governance

particularly where responsibilities—such as conference organization—were concentrated among graduate students or a small number of highly active members. Some respondents further critiqued the board’s collective, non-hierarchical structure, finding it confusing or, at times, silencing.

Despite these challenges, members highlighted positive experiences, including collegiality, skill development, and opportunities to build community, especially among newer or first-time board members.

Areas for Improvement for CAFS Governance

Board member respondents identified several areas for improvement in CAFS governance, programming, and community engagement. They frequently highlighted equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) concerns, calling for increased engagement with under-represented groups, including Indigenous and Black communities, grassroots activists, and international voices. They also emphasized the need for improved communication and transparency, noting unclear governance structures and calling for more consistent, professional communications across newsletters, website content, and social media platforms.

Respondents further prioritized programming and engagement, recommending more workshops, webinars, and virtual networking opportunities, along with expanded content on topics including food security, academic freedoms, and food systems advocacy. Community building and membership development emerged as another key theme, with suggestions for mentorship programs, targeted recruitment efforts, and stronger collaboration with practitioners and grassroots organizations. They also raised concerns about financial sustainability and organizational capacity, particularly the need

for funding to support paid positions and reduce reliance on volunteer labour, in order to mitigate burnout. Finally, respondents offered recommendations to enhance the conference experience, including improving food provisioning, reducing no-shows, and better showcasing local food systems and field-based work (see Figure 11). Many respondents also shared positive feedback noting that CAFS is doing well with its limited resources.

Feedback for CAFS

Participants shared feedback highlighting both appreciation and areas for improvement. Many recognized CAFS' role in fostering a supportive food studies community and connecting students and researchers. Challenges included sustaining a primarily volunteer-run association and clarifying the association's focus, with some suggesting that CAFS should prioritize research that informs advocacy rather than engaging in advocacy directly. Respondents also emphasized continued attention to food justice, global perspectives, and long-term solutions to food insecurity. One respondent positively acknowledged CAFS' efforts to address anti-Black racism and broader social issues.

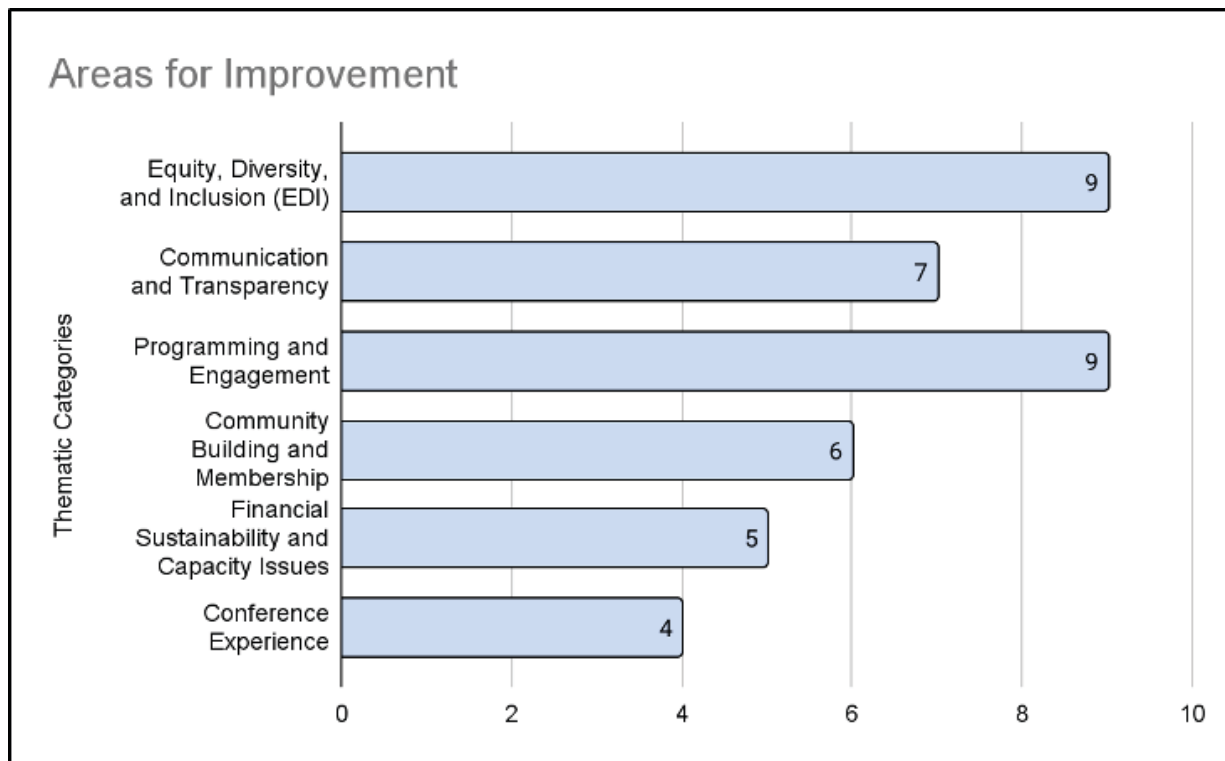


Figure 11: Feedback on Areas for Improvement

Interview Results

Thematic Summary from Question 1 – How does your work or research intersect with food studies?

Applied and engaged food systems work

Interviewees reported that applied food systems work was central to their professional activities. They engaged with food systems through education, nonprofit work, policy analysis, and community-based programming. They emphasized the close relationship between theory and practice, often combining academic research with applied initiatives.

Equity, justice, and community engagement

Equity, justice, and food access emerged as central concerns shaping this work. Youth and community engagement also appeared as key areas of focus, particularly through educational and skill-building initiatives aimed at fostering empowerment and participation.

Program evaluation and policy impact

Interviewees discussed the growing importance of program and policy evaluation in their work. They explained that food studies frameworks inform policy analysis, support cross-sector collaboration, and help assess the impacts of community-based food initiatives.

CAFS as intellectual and professional community

Interviewees described the Canadian Association for Food Studies (CAFS) as a space that supports both intellectual engagement and a sense of professional belonging. They represented a wide range of roles, disciplinary backgrounds, and geographic contexts, underscoring the importance of maintaining CAFS as an inclusive space for both academics and practitioners.

Thematic Summary from Question 2 – How do you hope food studies will evolve in the next five years?

Policy relevance and engagement

Interviewees expressed a desire for food studies to increase its policy relevance. They argued that scholars and practitioners should engage more directly with decision-makers and policy processes and move beyond academic critique to play a central role in shaping public policy, particularly around food security, corporate power, and systemic inequities.

Politically engaged scholarship

Food emerged as a powerful lens for examining systems such as colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. Interviewees encouraged scholars to confront these systems in concrete, non-performative ways while continuing to bridge theory and practice through engaged research and activism.

Geographic integration

Interviewees highlighted the need for stronger geographic integration within Canada's food studies landscape. Scholars and institutions often work in regional silos; a stronger national network could foster cross-regional dialogue, reduce isolation, and better reflect the diversity of food systems across eastern, central, western, northern, and rural regions.

Community-based and interdisciplinary collaboration

Community-based research and interdisciplinary collaboration emerged as defining strengths of the field. Interviewees encouraged the continuation of projects co-created with communities and the prioritization of work that advances the public good. They highlighted research models that align scholarly practice with social justice values and directly support communities and practitioners.

Advancing critical theoretical work

Interviewees expressed appreciation for the role food studies plays in advancing critical theoretical work, particularly around settler colonialism. Scholars in the field often make these ideas accessible and relevant to other disciplines and practical contexts, and interviewees encouraged continued support for theoretical innovation with strengthened pathways connecting insights to policy, community initiatives, and applied practice.

Thematic Summary from Question 3 – What do you envision as CAFS's role in this evolving space?

Knowledge mobilization and policy engagement

Interviewees identified knowledge mobilization and policy engagement as central roles for CAFS. The association was described as well positioned to bridge academic research and decision-making spaces, translating research into accessible formats that reach policy audiences.

Convener role and network building

Beyond knowledge mobilization, CAFS serves as a key convener within the field. Interviewees highlighted conferences, webinars, the journal, and regional gatherings as key spaces for engagement and knowledge exchange. Events that bring together academic and non-academic participants, including practitioners, community organizers, and policymakers, were particularly valued. The journal and webinar series were also seen as important for building connections across disciplines, regions, and social movements while strengthening intellectual exchange and professional relationships.

Community and Indigenous partnerships

Interviewees emphasized CAFS's role in cultivating relationships with communities and Indigenous partners. Ethical engagement and long-term collaboration were described as essential for ensuring that food studies remains relevant, accountable, and socially just. Partnerships with Indigenous and community organizations were highlighted as a core feature of the association's activities.

Diversity and inclusivity

Diversity and representation also emerged as central to CAFS's effectiveness. Interviewees described the association as most impactful when it includes participants from different regions, sectors, and generations, maintaining an inclusive space for early-career scholars, practitioners, and those working across academic and community contexts.

Intellectual home and inspiration

Finally, CAFS was described as more than a professional association. Conferences, journal publications, and community gatherings were often cited as energizing experiences that strengthen commitment to the field and connect members to a broader values-aligned community.

Thematic Summary from Question 4 – How can CAFS stay relevant in your work?

Expanding impact beyond academia

Interviewees emphasized the importance of extending CAFS activities beyond academic spaces. Engagement with policy and public issues was seen as critical for demonstrating societal impact. One respondent noted that research and conferences alone do not ensure relevance: "Excellent research and getting researchers together... isn't enough. It needs to be making a difference somehow."

Early-career and student support

Students and early-career scholars raised participation barriers, including membership fees. Supports such as student-focused pre-conferences, writing workshops, and mentoring were described as important for building professional capacity.

Informal and iterative engagement

Interviewees valued informal spaces for sharing research and ideas while projects remain in development. Pre-conference gatherings were highlighted as particularly helpful for networking, feedback, and skill development. Virtual research-in-progress sessions, informal working groups, and webinars connecting scholars and practitioners across disciplines and sectors were suggested as additional opportunities.

Communication and information sharing

Communication tools were recognized as important. The CAFS listserv facilitates opportunity sharing and connection, though some interviewees expressed interest in more interactive or

targeted formats, including curated newsletters, themed discussions, and sub-listservs organized around research interests, regions, or professional roles.

Conference as central gathering

The CAFS conference was described as essential for community-building, interdisciplinary exchange, and engagement between scholars and practitioners. Maintaining diverse speakers, rotating locations, supporting practitioner participation, and offering hybrid access were identified as key features for sustaining engagement.

Thematic Summary from Question 5 – Strengths and weaknesses of CAFS

Welcoming and inclusive culture

CAFS was consistently described as a welcoming, inclusive scholarly community. The association creates space for students, early-career scholars, and researchers working from marginalized perspectives. Encouraging diverse voices, creative research formats, and interdisciplinary or activist approaches was highlighted as a defining strength, helping build trust and long-term engagement.

Communication channels

The email listserv and other communication channels were identified as important strengths. They provide opportunities, information, and professional connections, particularly for members less active on social media, and expand access to association networks.

CAFS journal

The journal was frequently cited as a major asset. Its open-access model, editorial quality, and focus on Canadian food studies were praised. Interviewees described the journal as strengthening both visibility and credibility while making scholarship accessible to researchers, practitioners, and community partners.

Social justice and community engagement

CAFS's grounding in social justice and community engagement emerged as a central value. The association was described as values-driven, supporting scholarship that addresses activism, equity, and food system transformation.

Capacity and geographic challenges

Interviewees noted resource constraints, including limited funding and reliance on volunteer labor, which affect programming and sustainability. Geographic representation was also a concern; those from western provinces highlighted barriers such as time zones, travel distances, and limited board representation, which can reduce participation and engagement opportunities.

Thematic Summary from Question 6 – Additional insights about CAFS

Mentorship and early engagement

Interviewees highlighted the importance of strengthening connections between students and academic mentors. Personal and professional relationships were described as critical for encouraging participation and building long-term capacity. One respondent explained that pre-conference activities helped them feel more connected after initially feeling like an outsider.

Showcasing regional work

Interviewees encouraged CAFS to highlight regional food systems initiatives across Canada. Digital platforms or collaborative knowledge-sharing tools were suggested to increase visibility, strengthen connections among researchers and practitioners, and communicate the broader impact of food studies.

Technical concerns

Finally, a few interviewees noted technical issues with the CAFS journal, including problems with references and DOI links, emphasizing the importance of maintaining reliable digital access to published work.

World Café Results

Theme Area 1 focused on CAFS' purpose and guiding principles and asked: What kind of impact would you like CAFS to have over the next five years?

Participants highlighted three main themes: CAFS as a force for policy change, moving from theory to action through public statements, policy briefs, and advocacy; CAFS as a connector, community-builder, and interdisciplinary leader, fostering collaboration across disciplines and advancing critical food studies nationally; and CAFS as a practitioner of its own values, embedding its mission into tangible practices such as conference food provisioning and alternative food initiatives.

Theme Area 2 focused on membership and engagement and asked: Who are we, how do we better engage current members, who is missing, and how do we bring them in?

Participants emphasized the need for broader representation across regions, languages, sectors, and industries, and identified opportunities for stronger cross-sector collaboration. Improving engagement involved expanding beyond traditional conference formats while maintaining scholarly research presentations, including events that connect scholars with practitioners and community actors, such as exhibitions, experiential food-based events, student summits, and collaborations with aligned movements like climate justice groups.

Theme Area 3 focused on the “What” of CAFS and asked: How could we deepen the impact of CAFS activities and benefits?

Participants valued the listserv for resource-sharing, in-person gatherings like the Assembly for relationship-building, and the *Canadian Food Studies Journal* for its inclusivity. They expressed interest in more regional and local in-person events, informal networking opportunities, and increasing CAFS' public profile through media engagement. A key opportunity was encouraging members to use existing networks, such as the listserv, to organize collaborations and regional events that extend CAFS' impact.

Theme Area 4 focused on fostering connections among CAFS members and asked: How can we instigate more connection points between members?

Participants emphasized reimagining conferences and events as spaces for community-building, mentorship, and cross-regional and cross-disciplinary engagement. Participants strongly supported regional conferences to increase accessibility and strengthen local networks, while proposing a biennial national conference to build anticipation. Suggestions included improving event design (e.g., reducing overlapping sessions, hybrid formats, better logistics), exploring alternative models such as assemblies or gatherings in community-based spaces, and ensuring CAFS maintains autonomy in event planning rather than co-hosting the 2026 conference through Congress.

Theme Area 5 focused on expanding CAFS' impact with limited resources and asked: How can CAFS deliver more while working within its constraints?

Participants emphasized rethinking the conference model, including a biennial national conference complemented by regional meetings and virtual programming, shorter events, strategic partnerships, and multi-year planning to secure funding and student involvement. There was support for separating the CAFS conference from Congress, rotating hosting among faculty to access institutional resources, and leveraging grant-writing, journal fees, and membership structures to strengthen revenue streams. Participants also highlighted partnerships beyond the social sciences, auditing existing networks, and optimizing underutilized resources to work more strategically, collaboratively, and intentionally to maximize impact.

Discussion of Findings

Several interrelated themes emerged across the survey, interviews, and World Café sessions. These findings address CAFS's perceived role, its potential contributions to food studies and food systems change, and the organizational conditions that shape its capacity to act. Together, they highlight CAFS as a valued scholarly community that functions primarily as a connector and convener, while also operating within significant structural and resource constraints. Taken together, these findings respond directly to the research questions by clarifying CAFS's current role, its potential for impact, and the key challenges shaping its future direction.

How is CAFS perceived by current and potential members?

CAFS is consistently perceived as a welcoming, inclusive, and intellectually generative community. Respondents described the association as an "intellectual home," particularly for scholars whose work is interdisciplinary or marginal to their home institutions. This sense of belonging is reinforced through CAFS's core activities, including its conference, journal, listserv, and webinars, which together form a central infrastructure for knowledge exchange and professional connection.

The annual conference and Canadian Food Studies journal emerged as the most valued institutional pillars. The conference, in particular, plays a central role in networking, mentorship, and informal knowledge

exchange, while also serving as a key site for community-building across disciplinary, geographic, and career-stage differences. Early-career participants highlighted the importance of pre-conference activities and informal spaces for feedback and professional development.

At the same time, perceptions of CAFS are shaped by uneven participation and accessibility. While many members emphasized the association's inclusivity, others identified barriers related to geography, language, time constraints, and financial costs. These findings suggest that CAFS is widely valued as a scholarly and relational space, but access to its benefits is unevenly distributed across its membership base.

What roles could and should CAFS play in food studies research, policy, and community engagement?

A central finding across the study is that CAFS is expected to play a dual role: as a scholarly convener and as a more active contributor to food systems change. Respondents consistently expressed a desire for CAFS to increase its policy relevance and knowledge mobilization activities, particularly in relation to food insecurity, corporate power, and systemic inequities.

However, the findings also reveal ambiguity and divergence regarding the extent and form of this role. While there is strong support for greater engagement

with policy and public discourse, respondents differ on whether CAFS should directly engage in advocacy or instead focus on enabling research, partnerships, and knowledge translation. This indicates an ongoing tension between CAFS as a neutral scholarly association and CAFS as a more explicitly engaged actor within food systems transformation.

Despite these differences, there is broad consensus that CAFS is well positioned to strengthen its role as a bridge between academic research and applied practice. Interview and World Café participants highlighted opportunities to expand engagement through policy dialogues, practitioner collaborations, and more accessible dissemination formats.

How do CAFS’s current structures and resources shape what it is able to deliver?

The findings highlight a strong awareness among members of CAFS’s structural and financial constraints and how these shape its capacity to deliver programming and sustain organizational continuity. CAFS is widely recognized as a volunteer-driven association operating

with limited and unstable revenue streams, primarily tied to membership fees and conference-related income.

These constraints contribute to several interrelated organizational challenges. Governance structures are often described as unclear, particularly following the shift toward a non-hierarchical model, which has created ambiguity in roles, decision-making processes, and accountability. Respondents also identified heavy reliance on a small group of active members, uneven distribution of labour, and recurring issues of burnout, particularly in relation to time-intensive activities such as conference organization.

Knowledge transfer and institutional continuity represent another structural challenge. Frequent turnover without formal mechanisms for documentation or onboarding has led to inefficiencies and duplicated efforts across time, reinforcing perceptions of limited organizational memory.

At the same time, respondents consistently emphasized that CAFS has achieved a substantial amount given these constraints. This recognition suggests that current limitations are not viewed as failures of intent, but rather as structural conditions that shape what is feasible within the association.

Recommendations for Future Directions

Based on the findings from the first phase of work, the following strategic directions and priorities are recommended for the CAFS Board to consider in the development of a Strategic Plan. These directions aim to strengthen CAFS’s role as a connector, convener, and contributor to food systems change, while addressing organizational capacity and sustainability. In some areas, the association is already undertaking work to implement some of the priorities, which are discussed in the next section.

Strategic Direction 1: Reimagine CAFS’ engagement model to improve accessibility, reach, and sustainability across its core activities, including the annual conference.

Priorities:

- Review and evaluate the CAFS conference model, including the feasibility of a biennial national conference complemented by regional gatherings and/or virtual programming to improve accessibility and reduce organizational burden (underway, see discussion on “Conference Structure” in next section).
- Pilot and assess place-based or local chapter models to support year-round engagement and strengthen regional networks (underway, see discussion on “Local Chapter Pilot Initiative” in next section)
- Expand hybrid and low-barrier participation options (e.g., virtual events, asynchronous engagement) to address geographic, financial, and time constraints.
- Strengthen mentorship, networking, and informal engagement opportunities, particularly for students and early-career members.

Strategic Direction 2: Clarify CAFS' role across the knowledge-to-action continuum, including its approach to advocacy, knowledge mobilization, and impact.

Priorities:

- Facilitate structured dialogue with members to clarify CAFS's role in policy engagement, including the spectrum between direct advocacy and enabling research-informed action.
- Define CAFS' value proposition in knowledge mobilization, including its role in connecting research, practice, and policy.
- Identify strategic partnerships that align with CAFS' mission and expand its influence across sectors.

Strategic Direction 3: Strengthen CAFS' organizational foundations by formalizing governance, planning, and operational processes to support continuity and sustainable growth.

Priorities:

- Clarify governance roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes to improve efficiency and accountability (underway, see "Board Governance" in next section).
- Strengthen onboarding, documentation, and knowledge transfer practices to support continuity and reduce duplication of effort (ongoing).
- Develop a multi-year strategic and operational planning framework aligned with organizational priorities.
- Establish a comprehensive financial plan, including:
 - Annual and multi-year budgeting processes;
 - Enhance financial planning, accounting, and transparent reporting practices for the Board and members;
 - A diversified funding strategy (grants, partnerships, sponsorships, memberships);
 - Strengthened financial oversight and governance mechanisms.
- Explore options for paid roles or administrative support to reduce reliance on volunteer labour and mitigate burnout.

Strategic Direction 4: Focus CAFS' programming and activities by establishing clear priorities and aligning them with organizational capacity and member needs.

Priorities:

- Engage members in identifying priority areas for programming and areas where CAFS can have the greatest impact.
- Make intentional trade-offs to focus resources on high-value activities (e.g., conference, journal, networking, knowledge exchange).
- Expand targeted programming in areas identified by members, including professional development, mentorship, and practitioner engagement.
- Strengthen coordination across existing activities (conference, journal, communications) to enhance their collective impact as an integrated system.

Strategic Direction 5: Enhance member value, inclusion, and communication to strengthen engagement across a diverse and distributed community.

Priorities:

- Improve transparency and consistency in communications related to governance, decision-making, and organizational priorities.
- Expand inclusive engagement strategies to better reflect linguistic, regional, and sectoral diversity, including increased French-language and non-academic participation.
- Develop targeted outreach strategies to engage underrepresented groups, including practitioners, community organizations, and Indigenous communities.
- Review and refine communication channels (listserv, newsletter, social media) to balance clarity, frequency, and engagement.

Strategic Direction 6: Continue a participatory and iterative approach to strategic planning and evaluation.

Priorities:

- Continue engaging CAFS members through participatory and action-oriented approaches in future phases of strategic planning (ongoing, see “Conference Structure” in section below).
- Undertake additional strategic analyses (e.g., SWOT, SOAR, or PESTEL) to inform decision-making.
- Establish clear strategic goals and measurable objectives (e.g., SMART goals).
- Develop an evaluation framework to monitor progress and assess outcomes on an annual basis.

Recommendations Implemented to Date

Work in several priority areas is already underway.

Board Governance

In 2023, the Board adopted a non-hierarchical model, which included re-framing the president and vice-president roles as co-chairs. This change was intended to denote distribution of decision-making influence and power across the Board with the co-chairs functioning as facilitators of working groups and committees. In Spring 2025, governance changes were introduced to address concerns about unclear roles and decision-making processes following the transition to this model. Particularly, the Board adopted a formal committee structure and introduced a requirement for all board members to participate in at least one committee, helping to clarify responsibilities and strengthen accountability. Additional steps have been taken to improve financial sustainability, including the incorporation of budgeting best practices and the creation of a reserve fund to support multi-year planning. The development of an MOU with *Canadian Food Studies* also reinforced a financial commitment to food studies scholarship. This helps ensure the long-term stability of an important knowledge mobilization and exchange asset for Canadian research and community practice.

Conference Structure

CAFS is exploring models to ensure ongoing national food studies exchange and collaboration. For 2026, CAFS is working alongside three other Canadian food networks to deliver a collaborative Food Forum. This

creates an opportunity to foster more participatory, and relationship-based exchange among members and partners. CAFS is continuing to explore models and strategies to support long-term sustainability while strengthening cross-sector and community engagement, and networking. One such approach is the development of local chapter events to help advance these goals.

Local Chapter Pilot Initiative

The association has begun piloting more place-based approaches to engagement. In 2026, local chapter pilots were launched in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Edmonton to test models for building regional networks. These chapters are entirely volunteer-led and operate without dedicated financial resources. While resource constraints were broadly understood across the community, contributors identified a range of tools and supports that could nonetheless strengthen local engagement and benefit members. These ideas and suggested actions are documented in Appendix 1 of this report.

Membership Model and Fees

To address concerns about equity and accessibility, the membership model was changed in Spring 2025 prior to the Assembly. Membership fees were restructured using income-based levels in order to reduce financial barriers to participation and better reflect members’ varying financial circumstances. This shift was intended to make engagement with the association more accessible and to support broader, more inclusive participation across the CAFS’ community.

Concluding Remarks

This strategic planning process brought together the perspectives of 67 survey respondents, 45 World Café participants and additional insights from a handful of in depth interviews. Together these offer a grounded snapshot of members' current priorities, concerns, and hopes for the organization's next phase. Overall this process reflects a membership that is engaged, thoughtful and looking for ways to strengthen both connection and impact in food systems work.

As CAFS enters its next decade of work, one thing is clear: there is a growing appetite for food systems change. Canada's adoption of a National Food Policy Framework in 2019 and more recent examples like tri-government investments in a National School Food Program, and Toronto City Council's recent decision to explore the feasibility of four public grocery stores are steps in this direction. George Brown Polytechnique's recent launch of Canada's first ever Bachelors of Food Studies program is also indicative, signaling alignment in post-secondary institutions and industry on the continued need for future generations to engage in critical inquiry about our food systems.

As an association, CAFS has been part of this movement, whether it be through building greater awareness of issues through its open-access journal or the facilitation of knowledge exchange and networking opportunities through the annual conference. The work of CAFS members has individually and collectively pushed for changes and programs for a more just and sustainable food system for all.

The insights gathered from our membership over the last year serve as the foundation for CAFS' next chapter, and the strategic directions and priorities provide a framework for our future. The doorway to the next decade has emerged and the pathway is full of opportunity.



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Appendix: List of Ideas and Actions from Community Engagements

The following table captures a range of participant-generated, preliminary ideas for transformative action. Ideas were identified by individuals and groups through the strategic planning community engagement processes.

#	Suggested Idea or Action	Source (Survey, Interview, or World Café)
1	Relating to Conference and Regional Gatherings	
a	Host a national convening (virtual or hybrid) to build stronger East–West–North collaboration and knowledge exchange.	Interviews
b	Expand Regionally Inclusive Collaboration: increase collaboration between scholars and institutions across rural, northern, and western areas, especially to overcome silos between East, Central, West, and North. A national network that fosters cross-regional dialogue and shared initiatives would reduce isolation and reflect Canada’s regional diversity in food systems.	World Café
c	Grow Regional Gatherings: Support region-specific events or collaborations to reflect local food systems challenges and enhance accessibility.	Interviews
d	More regional gatherings; smaller conference to increase engagement across Canada alternated with a bi-annual national conference	World Café Theme 3 and 4
e	Regional & Virtual Engagement: Offer more local meetups or hybrid events to accommodate those who cannot travel.	Survey Summary (Barriers to participation)
f	Reimagine the conference model to serve not just as a site for presenting research, but as a key mechanism for community-building, mentorship, and engagement across regions, disciplines, and career stages.	World Café Theme Area 5
g	Alternate in-person and virtual conferences and provide virtual networking opportunities	Survey Summary (Areas for Improvement)
h	Improving the conference experience, particularly with regard to food provisioning* that reflects CAFS’ mission and reducing no-shows at professional events	Survey Summary (Areas for Improvement)
i	Use conferences as an opportunity to showcase local food systems and fieldwork	Survey Summary (Areas for Improvement)
j	Decouple annual conference from Congress to enable more independence and autonomy and expand reach beyond scholarly communities	World Café Theme Area 5

#	Suggested Idea or Action	Source (Survey, Interview, or World Café)
k	Empower CAFS members to organize informal gatherings within their own networks and regions, to broaden the impact of the organization	World Café Theme 3 and 4
l	More opportunities to meet other members in formal and informal settings	World Café Theme 3 and 4
m	Provincial/Regional Offshoots: Interest in forming local or provincial groups to enhance regional connections.	
2	Ideas for Broadening CAFS Role as Convener / Connector	
a	Showcase case studies of engaged work from members	Interviews
b	Support Multi-Modal Engagement: Continue to host webinars, consider special journal issues, and publish from virtual events.	Interviews
c	Map and connect food studies hubs across the country to support more coordinated collaboration and mentorship	
d	More opportunities for peer learning and informal knowledge sharing	
e	Interdisciplinary Networking: Suggested engaging scholars from different disciplines to promote new perspectives and interdisciplinary collaboration.	Survey
f	More Networking Opportunities: Create structured spaces for members to connect, especially for newer and international members.	Survey Summary (Barriers to participation)
g	CAFS is valued for its interdisciplinarity, conference, and connections. To stay relevant and grow, CAFS should expand informal peer spaces, create targeted communications, build policy impact pathways, and remove student access barriers.	Interviews
h	Supporting practitioner-academic collaboration	Interviews
i	Providing evaluation tools and training	Interviews
j	<p>Informal, iterative spaces to workshop research and share ideas mid-process, rather than only showcasing finished products at conferences. Pre-conference noted as especially valuable and appreciated by students.</p> <p>This can be action by hosting virtual research-in-progress sessions; creating informal forums or working groups, and having more webinars that bring in people from different fields to talk to each other about food studies was suggested.</p>	Interviews

#	Suggested Idea or Action	Source (Survey, Interview, or World Café)
k	More workshops, webinars, and learning opportunities to enhance member engagement, especially virtual programming for those outside the GTA. More relevant programming on issues like food security, academic freedoms, and food systems advocacy	Survey Summary (Areas for Improvement)
3 Relating to Broadening the Table and/or Inclusion and Accessibility		
a	Increase collaboration between scholars and institutions across rural, northern, and western areas, to overcome silos	Interviews
b	More thoughtfully connect scholars, practitioners, and community members across disciplines to generate impact on food systems.	World Café
c	Strengthen connections between students and academic mentors to encourage participation and build capacity.	Interviews
d	Strengthen Inclusivity: Continue making space for early-career scholars, non-academic practitioners, and those working at the intersections of food and justice.	Interviews
e	Expand our relations by bringing people who aren't in the room to the table (e.g., Regional diversity and representation, industry, BIPOC)	World Café - Theme Area 2
f	Improve opportunities for French language connections	World Café Theme Area 2
g	Multilingual Inclusivity: Expand opportunities for French-language engagement	Survey Summary (Barriers to participation)
h	More consistently focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) in CAFS programming and governance. Increase engagement with underrepresented groups, including Indigenous and Black communities, grassroots activists, and international voices.	Survey Summary (Areas for Improvement)
i	Remove barriers to participation like conference attendance costs (travel, accommodation, childcare)	Survey Summary (Barriers to participation)
j	Flexible Engagement Options: Offer more asynchronous opportunities, such as recorded webinars, discussion boards, and online networking spaces.	Survey Summary (Barriers to participation)
k	Thought leadership (e.g., infuse critical food thinking across Canada in applied culinary programs)	World Café
l	Coalitions and Partnerships: Building coalitions with other sectors for social movement actions and policy advocacy.	Survey

#	Suggested Idea or Action	Source (Survey, Interview, or World Café)
m	Travel & Conference Support: Explore travel bursaries or virtual conference options to help members attend events.	Survey Summary (Barriers to participation)
4 Relating to CAFS Programming (incl. Content of)		
a	Special Issues of the Journal with other open-access journals to share best practices and explore joint special issues (e.g., on topics like food and carceral systems).	Survey Summary (Other Benefits Members Would Like to See)
b	CAFS Journal is a flagship strength. The journal positions CAFS as a leader in Canadian food studies, enhances its scholarly legitimacy, and broadens public impact. Sustain and support the journal team, with recognition and infrastructure to maintain quality and accessibility.	Interviews
c	Foster Theoretical Innovation with Practical Application* There is strong appreciation for food studies as a space where critical theoretical work—particularly around settler colonialism—is not only being done well but is also accessible and translatable to other fields and practices. Future growth should ensure that food studies remains a hub for such innovation, and that these insights are supported, shared, and applied in real-world settings.	Survey Summary
d	Diversify Programming: Ensure activities appeal to both academic and non-academic members (e.g., more practitioner-focused content).	Survey Summary (Barriers to participation)
e	Prioritize food justice and youth engagement	Interviews
f	“CAFS is not just a conference-making body; we need to question the inherent value of the conference and whether it serves our other objectives. Is there room for something else that meets the same goal?”	World Café - Theme Area 3
g	Opportunities for dialogue, user-generated content, and policy-oriented work	Survey Summary (Feedback and Areas for Improvement)
h	Conduct survey to learn which conferences and events members currently attend to align its programming more strategically and identify potential opportunities for collaboration	World Café Theme Area 5
i	Collaborative Memberships: Some respondents proposed joint memberships with related academic associations (e.g., geography, history, Indigenous studies).	Survey

#	Suggested Idea or Action	Source (Survey, Interview, or World Café)
j	What kinds of issues and topics should CAFS newsletters/workshops/events focus on? Respondents prioritize issues of food sovereignty, climate change, food insecurity, and indigenous rights and decolonization	Survey Summary (Emerging Trends and Issues in Food Studies)
k	Establish a recognition or funding stream for community-engaged research partnerships.	Interviews
l	Support Community-Engaged, Interdisciplinary Public Scholarship Food studies is recognized as a leading space for community-based research and interdisciplinary collaboration. Respondents want this to remain a core feature, encouraging projects that are co-created with communities and that center public good over institutional prestige. This includes amplifying models where research practice aligns with social justice values and directly supports communities and practitioners.	
m	Members directory so others know who's in the association and can reach out to connect	World Café Theme Area 5
n	Mentorship Opportunities: Several respondents emphasized the value of mentorship and suggested that CAFS could be more active in supporting these relationships.	Survey Summary (Other Benefits Members Would Like to See)
o	Guides and Resources: Suggestions included creating guides to help implement food studies initiatives (e.g., starting food coalitions) and sharing pedagogical resources.	Survey Summary (Other Benefits Members Would Like to See)
p	Increased Benefits for Volunteers: A call for ensuring that board members and volunteers gain more tangible benefits from their service.	Survey Summary (Other Benefits Members Would Like to See)
n	More community building among members through mentorship opportunities, recruitment efforts to grow membership, and more engagement with practitioners and grassroots organizations	Survey Summary (Areas for Improvement)
5 Communications		

#	Suggested Idea or Action	Source (Survey, Interview, or World Café)
a	Instagram posts should use more variety of imagery and more of an appealing design scheme	Survey
b	More engaging visual content on social media	Survey Summary (Feedback and Areas for Improvement)
c	Optimize existing activity areas to reduce risk of email overload, repetitive visuals, long or overly detailed communications	Survey Summary (Feedback and Areas for Improvement)
d	Proactive Communication: Develop targeted reminders about CAFS membership benefits and event opportunities	Survey Summary (Barriers to participation)
e	CAFS Listserv - appreciated but could be more interactive and segmented by interest areas	Interviews
f	Continued investment in well-curated digital communications and expansion to other channels	Interviews
g	More marketing of CFS to raise awareness that this publication exists	World Café Theme Area 3
h	Improve the quality and consistency of CAFS' communications, including newsletters, website content, and professional presentation.	Survey Summary (Areas for Improvement)
6	Governance (including challenges with internal operations)	
a	Clarify Board and organizational roles and responsibilities	Survey Summary (Feedback and Areas for Improvement)
b	Improve knowledge transfer processes for greater organizational continuity	Survey Summary (Feedback and Areas for Improvement)

#	Suggested Idea or Action	Source (Survey, Interview, or World Café)
c	Improvement Board Structure and Decision-Making Processes (while democratic intent of current collective or non-hierarchical structure was appreciated, many found it confusing and even silencing).	Survey Summary (Feedback and Areas for Improvement)
d	Better communicate CAFS' structure and leadership processes for transparency	Survey Summary (Areas for Improvement)
e	More consultation with members - one respondent was upset about no consultation in advance of a CAFS boycott at the Solidarity Food Forum	Survey Raw Data
f	More regular updates and transparency about CAFS operations and challenges	Survey Summary (Feedback and Areas for Improvement)
g	Improve labor balance to reduce burnout	Survey Summary (Feedback and Areas for Improvement)
h	Better succession planning in case administrator leaves	Survey Raw Data
7 Funding and Other Resources		
a	Micro-Volunteering: Provide smaller, time-limited roles for members who want to contribute but have limited availability.	Survey Summary (Barriers to participation)
b	Improve financial planning by developing a long-term sustainability strategy	Survey Summary (Areas for Improvement)
c	Ideas for additional funding streams and strategies: tap into grant-writing capacity of existing CAFS faculty, increase journal fees, align membership fees with biennial conference schedule to reduce administrative burden and provide CAFS with two-year membership forecast	World Café Theme Area 5
d	Explore ways to raise funds for paid part-time positions to prevent burnout rather than volunteer-only	Survey Summary (Areas for Improvement)

#	Suggested Idea or Action	Source (Survey, Interview, or World Café)
e	Fee structure should have an even lower tier- graduate students don't make anywhere near \$50k.	Survey Raw Data
f	Look for partners beyond social sciences and academia to access mutual aid opportunities and increase organizational visibility	World Café Theme Area 5
g	Leverage resources available within CAFS - rotate responsibility for conference planning among faculty members who have access to institutional resources	World Café Theme Area 5
h	Invest in Ethical Partnerships: Prioritize funding and frameworks for equitable community and Indigenous partnerships.	Interviews
8 Relating to CAFS Role in Broader Food System Impact		
a	Move beyond foundational principles and values, to embody them through action.	World Café - Theme Area 1
b	Deepen Policy Engagement and Influence: Food studies should evolve to have stronger policy relevance by actively engaging with decision-makers and policy processes. Scholars and practitioners are calling for food studies to move beyond academic critique and position itself more centrally in shaping public policy, especially on issues such as food security, corporate power, and systemic inequities.	Interviews and World Café Theme 1
c	Create a policy brief or working group that translates food studies research into policy recommendations.	Interviews, World Cafés
d	CAFS as a force for policy change to transform food systems: Participants raised points that reflected a desire for CAFS to move from theory to action through work that advances policy-level changes. Examples include releasing statements on current issues and events, policy briefs with recommendations, participating in legislative processes through deputations, petitions, and in forms of protest.	World Café Theme 1
e	Expand Knowledge Mobilization: Develop policy briefs, plain language summaries, and targeted outreach efforts to government and advocacy groups.	Interviews
f	Act as a bridge between academic and decision makers	Interviews
g	Influence systemic change through policy advocacy and application through CAFS activities.	World Café - Theme Area 1

#	Suggested Idea or Action	Source (Survey, Interview, or World Café)
h	Direct Advocacy: Building relationships with policymakers and engaging in advocacy for food system-related issues.	Survey Summary (Other Benefits Members Would Like to See)
i	Contribute to cohesive, systemic solutions for food insecurity, inequality, and marginalized communities.	Survey Summary (Other Benefits Members Would Like to See)
j	Host dialogue sessions with policymakers to connect research with real-world impact.	Survey Summary (Other Benefits Members Would Like to See)
k	Support or facilitate more action focused research	Survey Raw Data
l	Examine long-term solutions to food insecurity and continue engagement with social justice issues	Survey Summary (Additional Feedback)
m	CAFS should support research that informs advocacy rather than engage in advocacy directly	Survey Summary (Additional Feedback)
n	Develop guiding principles or a framework to uphold anti-oppressive and decolonial approaches across food studies programs	Interviews

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