

Canadians spend less proportionately on food today than they did in the past. In 1913, in 60 cities, staple foods made up more than half a family's weekly budget.⁷³ Since then, food has become relatively less expensive, and spending on other goods and services has increased. In 1961, spending on food, including restaurant meals and alcoholic beverages made up 28% of total consumer spending in Canada. By 2007, this figure had declined to 17% (Chart 1.1).

Canadians spent \$75 billion on food and non-alcoholic beverages from stores in 2007. The largest shares were spent on meat and fish products and fruits and vegetables (16% each). Bread and cereals and dairy products (including eggs) were next at 12% each.⁵ Spending on beer, wine and liquor bought from stores totalled \$17 billion.

Buying organic food is becoming a popular practice. In 2007, 45% of households reported that they often or sometimes bought organic food products, and 5% bought organic food all of the time.⁷⁴ Forty-eight percent of households rarely or never bought organic.

Organic food products are grown or produced using organic production methods. While there are many requirements that must be followed, in general organic agriculture avoids the use of chemical fertilizers, synthetic pesticides and veterinary drugs, genetically modified organisms and certain food processing and preservation substances.⁷⁵ Organic producers are also required to keep strict records to document organic integrity. Canada's organic principles emphasize the importance of protecting the environment, minimizing soil degradation, erosion and pollution, optimizing biological productivity, and ensuring the humane treatment of animals.

See note(s) at the end of the section.

Over 15,500 farms, or 6.8% of all farms in Canada, produced organically grown food products in 2006. The highest proportion was found in British Columbia, where 16.3% produced food using organic methods (Table 1.13). Not all farms were certified organic—meaning that their organic production methods and products were verified by a certification body. Just over 3,500 farms were fully certified in 2006 and 640 farms were making the transition to full organic certification.

Certain provinces require goods carrying the label 'organic' to be certified. The new national *Organic Products Regulations*, which come into force June 30, 2009, require that all organic products imported, exported or sold in other provinces be certified by an accredited certification body. While only farms that are certified will be able to use the term 'organic,' other farmers may choose to follow some or all of the organic principles for stewardship or business reasons, and must follow an array of regulations safeguarding health, the environment and animal welfare.

Eating out in restaurants or calling for take-out is a regular social activity for many. In 2007, Canadians spent \$41 billion on restaurant meals and \$9 billion on alcoholic beverages in licensed establishments, the equivalent of over \$1,500 per person.⁷⁶ In 2007, 95% of households bought food from restaurants.⁷⁷

Cooking at home and eating out in restaurants are not highly polluting activities. However, the broader impacts of these activities, resulting from energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, food waste and other garbage which must be disposed of, should be recognized.