

## COMMENTARY

# ▶ WHY AREN'T CADETS AND RANGERS FED FRESH FOOD?

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**IN 2013, A REPORT** by the DND Chief Review Services revealed a significant level of mismanagement in the annual budget of over \$300 million allotted to the Cadet and Junior Rangers Programme. Now that COVID-19 has also brought into sharp focus the need for Canada to become more self-sufficient in matters of critical supplies and food security as well as to promote domestic production of such key items, the time has come for government to review, the current \$12.7 million procurement contract for the supply, warehouse and delivery of 500,000 field rations, known as Meals Ready-to-Eat (MREs) to feed our young pre-teens and teenage Cadets and Junior Rangers. This review should consider the utility, if any, of relying on MREs to feed our Cadets and Junior Rangers rather than using existing Canadian field rations (IMPs) or fresh foods.

## Meals Ready to Eat (MREs)

MREs are self-contained individual shelf-stable meals contained in flexible



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foil laminated pouches. MREs were first designed for use by the US military in field conditions but are also sold to the general public in Canada and the USA. MREs are presently prepared and packaged by USA military contractors. In 2018, Procurement Canada authorized the purchase of these MREs for consumption by our 52,000 Cadets and 3,700 Junior Rangers dispersed in 133 remote and isolated communities, as well as by 7,000 Reserve Force officers

*“Canadian Cadets and Junior Rangers are provided processed ration packs known as MREs.”*



serving in the Canadian Cadet Organizations Administration and Training Service (COATS) organization.

Oddly, while previous foods contracts for Cadets and Junior Rangers have included a standard clause for Canadian content (minimum 80% of Canadian origin), the current procurement contract does not follow suit and the current supplier of MREs sources 100% of its food products from outside Canada. We will return to this point later.

Records obtained under the access to information (ATIA) from DND, Procurement Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency indicate that the nutritional

value of those MREs is also uncertain. Moreover, this contract also does not reveal the presence of any analysis of the nutritional content of food samples performed by a laboratory independent from the supplier(s). This is significant since the purpose of foodstuffs is to meet the minimum dietary requirements of Cadets and Junior Rangers who are generally aged 12 to 19.

## Experts are always needed for advice on their respective field

Possessing unequalled specialized expertise and experience in the provision of food services to CAF personnel and expertise in managing the National Combat Ration Programme, the Director of Food Services at NDHQ appeared to have played no role in the award of this multi-million-dollar MRE contract. Oddly, their intervention in the procurement contract was limited to the early stages of the Request for Proposal and no other advice was requested.

## Food sovereignty

In times of crisis, it becomes crystal-clear why countries should encourage and prefer local manufacturers for certain critical items critical to the health and safety of its citizens; let's recall the distress felt by Canadian citizens when the major American mask manufacturer, 3M, claimed the United States government had asked it to stop exporting US-made N-95 respirator masks to Canada and Latin America in order to keep all US-made resources for the exclusive use of the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic.


*“Canada should not rely on foreign manufacturers of MREs to meet the basic needs of Cadets and Junior Rangers or other members of the armed forces.”*

In today's world, a mask is as much of a necessity as food and water. Similarly, Canada, including the military commander overseeing Canada's current vaccine distribution, has had difficulty obtaining shipment of the vaccines approved for coronavirus because manufacturers Pfizer and Moderna appear to restrict exports of their products to Canada, as Europe and the United States are, understandably, primarily concerned with having enough supplies for their local populations.

Throughout military history, nutrition has always been a matter of concern to commanding generals who plan for the daily feeding of their soldiers. As a matter of pride and national policy as well as a requirement to ensure food safety and an uninterrupted food supply chain, historically each national military normally feeds its own military. On the main, this policy is based on the need to have a guaranteed and secure source of supply but also to respond to national tastes and preferences.

### Conclusion

The philosophical underpinnings of such a policy should apply in a wholesome manner to the feeding of Cadets and Junior Rangers. Therefore, Canada should not rely on foreign manufacturers of MREs to meet the basic needs of Cadets and Junior Rangers or other members of the armed forces. Should the supply of such ready-to-eat meal kits be deemed necessary for the training of Cadets and Junior Rangers they should be sourced from our capable home-based food industry. 🍁



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