

Centre canadien
pour l'intégrité
alimentaire



Canadian
Centre for
Food Integrity

PUBLIC TRUST SUMMIT

Fear, Facts, and Food: The Fight for Trust

PROGRAM

2025

October 28 & 29

The Westin Toronto Airport Hotel

AGENDA

DAY 1

8:00 am

Registration & Coffee

9:00 am

Welcome & Objectives of the Day

9:15 am

Opening Keynote | The Science of Misinformation: How Myths Take Root and How to Pull Them Out – *Dr. Joe Schwarcz, Director, McGill Office for Science and Society*

10:45 am

Nutrition Break

11:00 am

What Canadians Believe: 2025 Public Trust Research – *Ashley Bruner, Director of Research and Stakeholder Engagement, CCFI*

12:30 pm

Lunch

1:30 pm

Plenary Strategy Session (Part 1) | Disarming the Misinformation Machine: You Can't Out-Fact Fear – *Paul Hillier, Partner, TACTIX Risk Communications*

2:30 pm

Nutrition Break

3:00 pm

Plenary Strategy Session (Part 2) - Continuing the Discussion

4:30 pm

Nadine Durant, Vice-President, Head of Food Ecosystem Awareness, FCC

4:45 pm

Wrap up Insights

6:00 pm

Reception: Food Stations and Hors D'Oeuvres



DAY 2

AGENDA

7:30 am

Breakfast

8:30 am

Objectives of the Day

8:45 am

Consumer Insight Session | When Misinformation Crosses Borders: Emotion, Identity, and Trust in the Food System – *Dr. Mike von Massow, Professor, University of Guelph*

10:00 am

Nutrition Break

10:30 am

Closing Keynote | System Shock: Misinformation, Disruption, and the Battle for Credibility – *Jesse Hirsh, Futurist & Digital Strategist*

11:45 am

Wrap up Insights

12:00 pm

CCFI Members Only Lunch and Information Session





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SESSIONS

DAY 1 - 9:15 AM

Opening Keynote | The Science of Misinformation: How Myths Take Root and How to Pull Them Out - *Dr. Joe Schwarcz, McGill Office for Science and Society*

Fear-based food messaging is everywhere—from viral videos about seed oils to marketing campaigns that demonize ingredients without scientific basis. In this high-energy keynote, Dr. Joe Schwarcz will explore why food myths are so persistent, how misinformation spreads through emotion and repetition, and why simply stating the facts isn't enough to change minds.

Drawing on decades of experience as one of Canada's leading science communicators, Dr. Joe will unpack how trust is earned, how credibility is lost, and what it really takes to push back against confusion without becoming defensive or dismissive. Through real-world examples, a touch of humor, and a strong dose of science, this keynote will remind us that building trust isn't just about evidence—it's about connection, empathy, and storytelling.

This session sets the tone for the entire Summit and will leave participants energized, informed, and ready to tackle misinformation head-on.



SESSIONS

DAY 1 - 11:00 AM

Research Briefing | What Canadians Believe: 2025 Public Trust Research – *Ashley Bruner, CCFI*

What do Canadians really believe about food, farming, and the people behind the system? This session presents the latest findings from CCFI's national public trust research, one of the longest-running studies of its kind in Canada. Drawing on new data from thousands of Canadians, this briefing will highlight where trust is growing, where skepticism is taking hold, and which issues are shaping the national conversation.

From farming practices to food safety, sustainability to innovation, this research offers a clear picture of what matters most to Canadians today—and where the food system needs to pay closer attention. Whether you're shaping policy, leading communications, or planning future outreach, these insights will help you engage with greater impact and relevance in the year ahead.



SESSIONS

DAY 1 - 1:30 PM

Plenary Strategy Session | Disarming the Misinformation Machine: You Can't Out-Fact Fear - *Paul Hillier, TACTIX Risk Communications*

When misinformation takes hold, the consequences can be swift, public, and far-reaching. In the United States, the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) movement has become a powerful driver of public concern around food and health. By calling out ingredients and products it claims are unsafe—often without strong scientific evidence—MAHA has created a wave of uncertainty among consumers. That uncertainty has already led some major brands and retailers to change formulations, rework messaging, or pull products from shelves altogether. While the movement originated in the U.S., the narratives it promotes are starting to influence Canadian conversations. Food system leaders in Canada are already seeing signs that these messages are crossing the border and reshaping how consumers view safety, trust, and transparency.

In this high-level strategy session, Paul will explore how these emerging pressures create reputational risk for Canadian food organizations and what leaders can do now to prepare. Drawing on original research and interviews with sector stakeholders, the session will examine how misinformation affects not just public perception, but also internal dynamics and decision-making. Participants will consider what organizational readiness really looks like when trust is tested. The discussion will surface common gaps, such as unclear roles, conflicting priorities, and slow internal alignment, that can undermine a response before it even begins. Rather than focusing on messaging tactics, the session will focus on how leaders can build the internal clarity and confidence needed to respond with credibility when fear moves faster than facts.



SESSIONS

DAY 2 - 8:30 AM

Consumer Insight Session | When Misinformation Crosses Borders: Emotion, Identity, and Trust in the Food System – Dr. Mike von Massow, University of Guelph

Narratives around food and health are increasingly shaped by emotion, not evidence—and many of them aren't even homegrown. U.S.-based conversations about ingredients, processing, and “clean” eating are spilling into Canadian discourse, often without context or scientific grounding. From seed oil panic to demonization of processed foods, these stories are reshaping how Canadians think about food, risk, and the role of industry.

In this insight-driven session, Dr. Mike von Massow will explore how emotionally charged narratives gain traction, why fear often resonates more deeply than facts, and how public trust is shaped in the spaces between information and identity. Drawing on research in food economics, consumer behaviour, and public perception, he will unpack the deeper motivations behind consumer beliefs—and what this means for anyone communicating about food.

Participants will come away with a sharper understanding of how misinformation takes root, what drives skepticism, and what it takes to build trust in a landscape that rewards simplicity, emotion, and suspicion. This session is essential for anyone looking to connect with Canadians in a way that is credible, relevant, and lasting.



SESSIONS

DAY 2 - 10:30 AM

Closing Keynote | System Shock: Misinformation, Disruption, and the Battle for Credibility – Jesse Hirsh, Futurist & Digital Strategist

Traditional In an age of constant disruption, trust rules are being rewritten. Influencers, fragmented media, and algorithm-driven platforms are challenging institutions that once held authority. Credibility is no longer granted automatically—it is earned, negotiated, and sometimes undermined in real time.

In this provocative closing keynote, Jesse Hirsh explores how information architecture has changed, and what that means for sectors like food and agriculture. He'll examine how new voices and digital gatekeepers shape public perception, why polarization and performative narratives thrive online, and how traditional organizations can adapt without losing their core identity.

This session will push participants to think beyond messaging and into the broader dynamics of legitimacy, power, and visibility. It will raise hard but necessary questions: Who gets to speak with authority today? What makes a message credible when everyone has a platform? And how can food system leaders remain trusted when trust itself is under strain?

Jesse will close the Summit by challenging us to see the trust challenge not just as a communications problem, but as a systems problem—and to consider what long-term credibility looks like in a world where attention is short, skepticism is high, and disruption is the new normal.



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SPEAKERS

Dr. Joe Schwarcz

Author, Professor and Director of the
McGill Office for Science and Society



Dr. Joe, as he's widely known, is the Director of McGill University's Office for Science and Society and one of Canada's most engaging and trusted science communicators.

A longtime CJAD radio host, columnist for the Montreal Gazette, and author of more than 20 bestselling books—including Quack Quack, The Right Chemistry, and A Grain of Salt—he's spent decades translating complex science into plain language while debunking fear-based messaging and pseudoscience.



SPEAKERS



Ashley Bruner

Director of Research & Stakeholder
Engagement, CCFI

Ashley brings data to life, helping Canada's food system connect with Canadians on the issues that matter most. With over a decade of research and policy experience, she specializes in translating public opinion into meaningful insights that inspire action.

Before joining CCFI, Ashley was a Senior Research Manager at Ipsos Public Affairs, where she led hundreds of projects for clients across the public, private, and non-profit sectors. She holds a Master of Public Policy from Simon Fraser University. For the past five years at CCFI, Ashley has been a driving force behind building public trust in food. Her sharp eye for detail and deep passion for the food system shine through in every insight she shares.



SPEAKERS

Paul Hillier

Partner, Tactix Risk Communications



Paul is a Partner at Tactix Risk Communications, leading the firm's DeepLearning insights. He previously spent 10 years in the Canadian Forces, working on psychological operations and counter propaganda. Tactix' food and agriculture practice has, for 25 years, worked to protect Canadian's trust in innovative products, ingredients, and systems.



SPEAKERS



Dr. Mike von Massow
Professor, University of Guelph

Mike is interested in how people think about food, with recent work on labeling, novel food products, animal welfare, and antibiotic use. He is part of the Guelph Food Waste Research Project and studies how food value chains evolve in response to changing consumer preferences. Before joining FARE in 2016, Mike worked in the College of Business and Economics and held roles in the agri-food industry, consulting, and policy research. His industry experience shapes his teaching and research. A frequent media contributor, blogger, and speaker, Mike also hosts the FoodFocus podcast and writes on food-related topics for outlets like the Globe and Mail. He serves on the steering committee of the Campbell Centre for the Study of Animal Welfare.



SPEAKERS

Jesse Hirsh

Futurist & Digital Strategist



Jesse Hirsh is a futurist farmer who brings an outsider's perspective and literal critical distance, operating from his farm in rural Eastern Ontario. Yet this is no ordinary farm. Wired up with high speed fiber optic Internet, the Academy of the Impossible engages in a wide range of research regarding agriculture, media, technology, and culture. He has a Masters degree from Toronto Metropolitan University in algorithmic media, and his current work focuses on the rise of automated media, as well as the governance and ethics of artificial intelligence, data protection, and privacy. Jesse is also a co-founder of the Eco Punks, a trans-disciplinary agency that analyzes the ecosystems and communities that our clients operate in, helping us identify opportunities resulting from, as well as responses to the ever changing challenges that are imposed on us by an increasingly unpredictable and unstable reality. Jesse has an infectious energy that lifts spirits and enables creative critical thinking. He's always learning, sharing, and helping others to do the same.



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