ENOUGH FOR ALL

Household Food Security in Canada.
Preface

All Canadians should have access to enough safe and nutritious food to sustain them, keep them healthy, and enable them to lead productive lives. However, nearly 2 million people in Canada (about 7.7 per cent of Canadian households) self-report being “food-insecure.” Household food insecurity is influenced by a household’s ability to pay for food, physical access to adequate food resources, health requirements for nutritious food, and preferences for culturally appropriate food. 

Enough for All: Household Food Security in Canada analyzes the current state of food security in Canada; explores key risk factors associated with food insecurity; highlights current efforts to address food insecurity in Canada; and recommends strategies to alleviate Canada’s household food security challenges.
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The findings and conclusions of this report are entirely those of The Conference Board of Canada. Any errors and omissions in fact or interpretation remain the sole responsibility of The Conference Board of Canada.

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR FOOD IN CANADA

The Centre for Food in Canada (CFIC) is a three-year initiative of research and dialogue to help address one of the mega-issues facing our country today—food. Food impacts Canadians in an extraordinary range of ways. It affects our lives, our health, our jobs, and our economy.

The twin purposes of the Centre for Food in Canada are to:

- raise public awareness of the nature and importance of the food sector to Canada’s economy and society;
- create a shared vision for the future of food in Canada—articulated in the Canadian Food Strategy—that will meet our country’s need for a coordinated, long-term strategy for change.

The Centre is taking a holistic approach to food. It focuses on food in Canada through three interrelated but distinct lenses: safe and healthy food, food security, and food sustainability. These lenses ensure that the Centre focuses on the full range of important issues facing the food sector.
The work involves a combination of research and effective communications. The goal is to stimulate public understanding of the significance of the food sector and spur the demand for collaborative action. To achieve its goals, the Centre is working closely with leaders and partners from Canada's food sector, governments, educational institutions, and other organizations.

Launched in July 2010, CFIC actively engages private and public sector leaders from the food sector in developing a framework for a Canadian food strategy. Some 25 companies and organizations have invested in the project, providing invaluable financial, leadership, and expert support.

For more information about CFIC, please visit our website at www.conferenceboard.ca/cfic.

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Executive Summary

Enough for All: Household Food Security in Canada

At a Glance

- About 7.7 per cent of Canadian households self-report being “food-insecure.”
- Food insecurity is associated with inadequate nutrition and a number of health problems.
- Members of at-risk population groups, including Aboriginal peoples, lone-parent families, women and children, immigrants, and the elderly, are more likely to be affected.
- Key risk factors of food insecurity are income, the costs of food and non-food essentials, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and food literacy.

All Canadians should have access to enough safe and nutritious food to sustain them, keep them healthy, and enable them to lead productive lives. Such access is acknowledged as a universal right and would serve the health, social, and economic interests of our society. While most Canadians do not need to worry about where their next meal will come from or how they will pay for it, a substantial minority are less fortunate. About 7.7 per cent of Canadian households are “food insecure.”

Household food insecurity has serious health implications. People who are food-insecure tend to have a less varied diet, a lower intake of fruit and vegetables, micronutrient deficiencies, and even malnutrition. And, they are more likely to consume processed foods, thus ingesting higher levels of sodium, trans fat, and sugar, which can lead to health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Adults living in food-insecure households with lower nutrient intakes are more likely to suffer from poor health and develop more chronic diseases and mental health disorders. Food insecurity can lead to negative psychosocial outcomes in children, while teenagers are at risk of suffering from depression, social anxiety, and suicide.

Enough for All: Household Food Security in Canada analyzes the current state of food security in Canada; explores key risk factors associated with food insecurity; highlights current efforts to address food insecurity in Canada; and recommends strategies to alleviate Canada’s household food security challenges.

Food security exists “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs.

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1 United Nations, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”
3 Gorton, Bullen, and Mhurchu, “Environmental Influences,” 2.
and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”7 Correspondingly, food insecurity is a term used to define a state where nutritious food is unavailable or inaccessible or the supply is unstable. Food insecurity ranges from “the fear of not being able to provide or obtain food, to hunger due to food shortages.”8

STATE OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY IN CANADA

In 2007–08, the Canadian Community Health Survey found that 961,000 Canadian households, or 7.7 per cent, self-reported as food-insecure. This translates to about 1.92 million people in Canada aged 12 or older, including 228,500 children aged 12 to 17, living in food-insecure households.9 Areas experiencing the highest levels of food insecurity in 2007–08 were Nunavut (32.6 per cent of households), Northwest Territories (12.4 per cent), Yukon (11.6 per cent), and Prince Edward Island (10.6 per cent). The lowest levels of food insecurity were seen in Alberta (6.4 per cent), Saskatchewan (6.3 per cent), and Quebec (6.9 per cent).10 Households in which social assistance or workers’ compensation/employment insurance was the main source of income were much more likely to be food-insecure (55.5 and 25.3 per cent, respectively) than those in which salary/wages or pensions/seniors’ benefits (6.1 and 4.8 per cent, respectively) were the main source of income.11 Results from the same survey reveal that, overall, food insecurity was higher in households with children (9.7 per cent) than in households without children (6.8 per cent).12 Also, “the prevalence of food insecurity among households led by female lone parents (25 per cent) was two times greater than among households led by male lone parents (11.2 per cent) and four times that of households led by couples (6.3 per cent).”13

KEY RISK FACTORS OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY

Household food insecurity is influenced by a household’s ability to pay for food, physical access to adequate food resources, health requirements for nutritious food, and preferences for culturally appropriate food. Key risk factors in household food insecurity are income, the costs of food and non-food essentials, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and food literacy. Those in at-risk populations, including Aboriginal peoples, lone-parent families, women and children, immigrants, and the elderly, are more likely to be affected by one or more of the other key risk factors.

Key risk factors in household food insecurity are income, the costs of food and non-food essentials, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and food literacy.

The greatest socio-economic predictor of food insecurity in Canada (and developed countries in general) is household income. Some low-income households lack the financial means to obtain a balanced diet that includes healthy and fresh foods. Households that rely on social assistance tend to have higher rates of food insecurity, and households with high levels of debt and an inability to access credit are also more prone to food insecurity.14

Lower-income consumers are more sensitive to rising commodity prices because they spend a larger share of their household income on food than higher-income consumers (although higher-income consumers do spend substantially more money on food). Some food cost research in Canada has shown that it is difficult for many low-income families to consume a nutritious diet based on the Canada Food Guide.15 The proportion of household expenditure allotted to food and shelter is roughly double for those at the lowest income level than for those at the highest. Further, the lowest income group spends over two-thirds of its entire household

7 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Canada’s Action Plan, 9.
8 Willows and others, Associations Between Household Food Insecurity.
9 Health Canada, Household Food Insecurity.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
15 Engler-Stringer, “Food, Cooking Skills, and Health,” 143.
expenditure paying for food, shelter, transportation, health care, and clothing. This compares with just over 40 per cent for those at the highest income level.

Transportation costs of delivering food to rural and remote regions are a key contributor to higher food prices in these areas. When transportation and other distribution costs are too high for a reasonable return, some foods are simply not made available to residents in remote and rural locations. The highest rates of food insecurity in Canada are found in its three territories.

As a factor in food security, access to transportation is related to geographic location and income. Without access to transportation to reach food retail outlets, some households rely on less nutritious or more costly options that are closer to hand (e.g., convenience stores or fast food outlets) or go without sufficient food supplies.

If household shoppers lack the knowledge of what constitutes a healthy diet, they may not choose foods that meet their nutrition and dietary needs.

Consumers’ food literacy—the skills, knowledge, and behaviour of how to choose and prepare nutritious food—also affects their food security. If household shoppers lack the knowledge of what constitutes a healthy diet, they may not choose foods that meet their nutrition and dietary needs. In the same vein, not knowing how to budget adequately for sufficient nutritious food to meet dietary needs may render households financially unable to pay for food they need.

STRATEGIES FOR FOOD SECURITY

Household food insecurity is being addressed on several levels. Governments, community groups, private organizations, and individuals run programs to help address the immediate needs of affected individuals and families. Long-term solutions to address food insecurity exist at the national, regional, and community (including provincial/territorial and Northern programs) levels. Short-term solutions include free access programs; public access programs; and comprehensive programs that address a range of factors.

Substantial efforts to improve the state of food security in Canada continue. Government, business, and community policies and programs address the many factors influencing household food insecurity. Yet, more needs to be done. Overall, strategies to alleviate food insecurity for the long-term must take multiple issues into account. Recommended long- and short-term strategies for addressing household food insecurity include the following:

◆ Implement a pan-Canadian school nutrition program.
◆ Support collaboration between industry, government, and communities to make food more accessible to food-insecure households.
◆ Increase support for outreach efforts to the isolated and at-risk.
◆ Encourage volunteerism and engagement in food security initiatives.
◆ Improve food literacy levels.
◆ Make public transportation more affordable for low-income households.
◆ Ensure agricultural policies have a household food security lens.
◆ Invest in strategies to address low income/poverty.
◆ Track, study, and evaluate household food security initiatives to find effective programs to support and replicate.

16 Interview findings.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 24.
Developing the Canadian Food Strategy

This report is an important research input into the development of the Canadian Food Strategy. It is one of a series of 20 research reports that are being conducted by the Conference Board’s Centre for Food in Canada (CFIC). Each report addresses an important issue or theme relating to food; the findings will figure in the completed Strategy when it is released in March 2014.

The principal goal of the Centre for Food in Canada is to engage stakeholders from business, government, academia, associations, and communities in creating the framework for the Canadian Food Strategy to meet the country’s need for a coordinated long-term strategy.

The Strategy is taking a comprehensive approach to food. It covers the full range of themes relating to industry prosperity and competitiveness, healthy food, food safety, household food security, and environmental sustainability, encompassing both economic and social dimensions.

The Strategy will include a framework of outcomes that we want to achieve, and actions that will solve the challenges facing the food sector and food stakeholders. It will also suggest which group—businesses, governments, communities, and others—could lead on implementing them.

The process for creating, disseminating, and implementing the Strategy involves research, analysis, and synthesis; consultation and a high level of collaboration; the development of shared understanding and common goals among stakeholders; broad dissemination through many communications channels; and the commitment of key players to take action.

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH

The process to develop the Strategy starts with conducting research that develops empirical findings and potential solutions to the challenges facing the food sector. The research findings from the 20 research studies are a key input into the Canadian Food Strategy. The findings are used to develop the content of the draft Strategy, and are the basis for dialogue and consultation with CFIC investors and other major food stakeholders.

CFIC research aims to:
- understand the current reality of Canada’s food system, including its impact on GDP, health, trade, environment, and other major economic and social factors;
- define a desired future state for food and the food system;
- suggest workable solutions for moving Canada from its current reality to the desired state.

The solutions will take into consideration the realities of economic activity, market forces, environment, policies, laws and regulations, and the social conditions and health needs of Canadians.

KEY STEPS AND TIMELINES
- Begin CFIC research studies—July 2010
- Develop initial draft of Canadian Food Strategy—April 2012
- Begin dialogue and consultations—May 2012
- Review second draft of Canadian Food Strategy—April 2013
- Release the Canadian Food Strategy—March 2014

CANADIAN FOOD STRATEGY EVENTS: LAUNCHING THE CANADIAN FOOD STRATEGY

CFIC is hosting three major food summits as part of the Strategy development process. Each summit brings together food system leaders and practitioners from business, government, academia, and communities to discuss the latest research, share insights, and consider how to address Canada’s major food challenges and opportunities through a national strategy:
- The first Canadian Food Summit, in February 2012, focused on issues and challenges and explored international perspectives on how to address them.
- The second Canadian Food Summit, in April 2013, focused on moving from challenges to solutions.
- The third Canadian Food Summit, in March 2014, will feature the public launch of the Canadian Food Strategy and will focus on moving from strategy to action.
Résumé

Assez pour tous :
La sécurité alimentaire des ménages au Canada

Aperçu

- Environ 7,7 % des ménages canadiens déclarent être en situation d’« insécurité alimentaire ».
- L’insécurité alimentaire est associée à une mauvaise alimentation et à un certain nombre de problèmes de santé.
- Les membres des populations à risque, notamment les Autochtones, les familles monoparentales, les femmes et les enfants, les immigrants et les personnes âgées, sont plus susceptibles d’être touchés.
- Les principaux facteurs de risque de l’insécurité alimentaire sont : le revenu, le coût des produits alimentaires et non alimentaires de première nécessité, l’isolement géographique, le manque de moyens de transport et le degré d’alphabétisation alimentaire.

Tous les Canadiens devraient avoir accès à des aliments sains et nutritifs, en quantité suffisante, pour subvenir à leurs besoins, demeurer en bonne santé et mener une vie productive. Cet accès est reconnu comme étant un droit universel1 et sert les intérêts de notre société sur les plans social, économique et de la santé. Alors que la majorité des Canadiens n’ont pas à se préoccuper de la provenance de leur prochain repas, ni de la manière dont ils pourront le payer, une minorité importante n’a pas cette chance. Environ 7,7 % des ménages canadiens déclarent être en situation d’« insécurité alimentaire »2.

L’insécurité alimentaire des ménages a de graves répercussions sur la santé. En effet, les personnes qui vivent dans l’insécurité alimentaire ont tendance à avoir une alimentation moins variée, à manger moins de fruits et de légumes, à présenter des carences en oligo-éléments et même à souffrir de malnutrition3. En outre, elles sont plus susceptibles de consommer des aliments transformés et, ainsi, d’ingérer des taux élevés de sodium, de gras trans et de sucre, ce qui peut engendrer divers problèmes de santé, dont le diabète, les cardiopathies et l’obésité4. Les adultes qui vivent dans un ménage aux prises avec l’insécurité alimentaire et dont les apports nutritionnels sont inférieurs à ceux conseillés courent davantage de risques d’être en mauvaise santé et développent davantage de maladies chroniques et de troubles de santé mentale5. L’insécurité alimentaire peut

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1 Organisation des Nations Unies, « Déclaration universelle des droits de l’homme ».
3 Gorton, Bullen et Mhurchu, « Environmental Influences », p. 2.
mener à des comportements psychosociaux négatifs de
la part des enfants, et suscite un risque de dépression,
d’anxiété sociale et de suicide chez les adolescents6.

*Enough for All: Household Food Security in Canada*7 analyse l’état actuel de la sécurité alimentaire au
Canada; explore les principaux facteurs de risque
associés à l’insécurité alimentaire; met en évidence les
efforts déployés actuellement pour soulager l’insécurité
alimentaire au Canada; et recommande des stratégies
pour atténuer les problèmes liés à l’insécurité alimenta-
taire des ménages au Canada.

Il y a sécurité alimentaire lorsque « tous les êtres
humains ont, à tout moment, un accès physique et éco-
nomique à une nourriture suffisante, saine et nutritive
leur permettant de satisfaire leurs besoins énergétiques
et leurs préférences alimentaires pour mener une vie
saine et active8 ». Par conséquent, on emploie l’ex-
pression *insécurité alimentaire* dans toute situation où
l’accès à des aliments nutritifs est impossible ou trop
couteux, ou lorsque l’approvisionnement en aliments
nutritifs est instable. L’insécurité alimentaire peut signi-
fier la « crainte de ne pas pouvoir obtenir de la nourri-
ture, pour soi-même ou pour d’autres, ou encore la faim
qui résulte d’une pénurie de vivres9 ». 

**ÉTAT DE L’INSÉCURITÉ ALIMENTAIRE
DES MÉNAGES AU CANADA**

En 2007-2008, l’Enquête sur la santé dans les col-
lectivités canadiennes a révélé que 961 000 ménages
canadiens (7,7 %) déclaraient être en situation d’insé-
curité alimentaire. Cela signifie qu’environ 1,92 mil-
lion de personnes âgées de 12 ans ou plus, dont
228 500 enfants de 12 à 17 ans, vivaient dans des
ménages en situation d’insécurité alimentaire10. Les
régions qui présentaient les plus hauts taux d’insécurité
alimentaire en 2007-2008 étaient le Nunavut (32,6 %),
les Territoires du Nord-Ouest (12,4 %), le Yukon
(11,6 %) et l’Île-du-Prince-Édouard (10,6 %). On
observait les plus faibles taux en Alberta (6,4 %), en
Saskatchewan (6,3 %) et au Québec (6,9 %)11. Les
ménages dont la principale source de revenu provenait
de l’aide sociale, des indemnités d’accident du travail
ou de l’assurance-emploi étaient beaucoup plus sus-
ceptibles d’être en situation d’insécurité alimentaire
(55,5 et 25,3 % respectivement) que ceux où le salaire
ou les prestations du régime de retraite des aînés (6,1 et
4,8 % respectivement) constituaient la principale source
de revenu12. Les résultats de l’Enquête ont révélé éga-
lement que, dans l’ensemble, l’insécurité alimentaire
était plus fréquente dans les ménages avec enfants (9,7
%) que sans (6,8 %)13. En outre, la « prévalence de
l’insécurité alimentaire chez les ménages monoparen-
taux ayant une femme à leur tête était deux fois plus
 élevée (25 %) que chez les ménages monoparentaux
ayant un homme à leur tête (11,2 %) et quatre fois plus
elevée que chez les ménages ayant un couple à leur tête
(6,3 %) »14.

**FACTEURS DE RISQUE CLÉS DE
L’INSÉCURITÉ ALIMENTAIRE DES MÉNAGES**

L’insécurité alimentaire des ménages est déterminée
par la capacité d’un ménage donné d’acheter des ali-
ments, son accès physique à des ressources alimenta-
taires adéquates, ses besoins en aliments nutritifs et
ses préférences pour des aliments adaptés à sa culture.
Les facteurs de risque clés sont : le revenu, le coût
des produits alimentaires et non alimentaires de pre-
mière nécessité, l’isolement géographique, le manque
de moyens de transport et le degré d’alphabétisation
alimentaire. Les membres des populations à risque,
notamment les Autochtones, les familles monoparen-
tales, les femmes et les enfants, les immigrants et les
personnes âgées, sont plus susceptibles de cumuler des
facteurs de risque clés.

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6 Zamecnik, « Canadian Women and Children » p. 3.
7 Seul le résumé est traduit en français sous le titre Assez pour
tous : La sécurité alimentaire des ménages au Canada.
8 Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada, Plan d’action du Canada, p. 11.
9 Willows et al. Liens entre l’insécurité alimentaire du ménage et les
résultats pour la santé.
10 Santé Canada, Insécurité alimentaire des ménages.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.

Pour obtenir ce rapport et d’autres du Conference Board, consultez [www.e-library.ca](http://www.e-library.ca)
Le plus important facteur socioéconomique prédictif de l’insécurité alimentaire au Canada (et dans les pays développés en général) est le revenu des ménages. Certains ménages à faible revenu n’ont pas les moyens financiers nécessaires pour maintenir une alimentation équilibrée composée d’aliments sains et frais. Les ménages qui dépendent de l’aide sociale ont tendance à présenter des taux d’insécurité alimentaire plus élevés que les autres, tout comme les ménages aux prises avec un niveau élevé d’endettement et dans l’impossibilité d’accéder au crédit. 

Les principaux facteurs de risque sont : le revenu, le coût des produits alimentaires et non alimentaires de première nécessité, l’isolement géographique, le manque de moyens de transport et le degré d’alphabétisation alimentaire.

Les consommateurs à faible revenu sont plus vulnérables à la hausse des prix des produits de base, car ils consacrent une plus grande part du revenu de leur ménage à l’achat de denrées que les consommateurs à revenu supérieur (même si ces derniers dépensent somme toute beaucoup plus d’argent pour leur nourriture). Selon certaines études sur le coût des denrées alimentaires réalisées au Canada, de nombreuses familles à faible revenu ont de la difficulté à observer un régime alimentaire nutritif fondé sur le Guide alimentaire canadien. La proportion des dépenses consacrées à la nourriture et au logement est environ deux fois plus élevée chez les familles les plus nécessiteuses que chez les mieux nanties. De plus, les familles les plus démunies financièrement dépensent plus des deux tiers du revenu du ménage pour la nourriture, le logement, le transport, les soins de santé et l’habillement. Chez les ménages de la tranche de revenu supérieure, cette proportion dépasse à peine 40 %.

Le coût d’acheminement de la nourriture jusqu’aux régions rurales et éloignées est un des principaux facteurs qui contribuent aux prix élevés des denrées alimentaires dans ces régions. Lorsque les frais de transport et d’autres coûts de distribution sont trop élevés pour produire un bénéfice raisonnable, certains aliments ne sont tout simplement pas accessibles aux régions éloignées et rurales. C’est d’ailleurs dans les trois territoires canadiens qu’on enregistre les plus hauts taux d’insécurité alimentaire.

L’accès aux moyens de transport, en tant que facteur de sécurité alimentaire, est tributaire de l’isolement géographique et du revenu. Comme ils ne jouissent pas de cet accès pour se rendre chez des détaillants en alimentation, certains ménages se tournent vers des aliments moins nutritifs ou vont dans des endroits qui se trouvent davantage à proximité et où on vend les produits plus cher (p. ex. les dépanneurs ou les restaurants-minute), ou encore ils composent avec un approvisionnement alimentaire insuffisant.

Le degré d’alphabétisation alimentaire des consommateurs, c’est-à-dire leurs compétences, leurs connaissances et leur comportement quand vient le temps de choisir et de préparer des aliments nutritifs, a aussi une incidence sur la sécurité alimentaire. Si les ménages ne savent pas en quoi consiste une saine alimentation, ils ne seront peut-être pas en mesure de choisir des aliments qui répondent à leurs besoins nutritionnels et alimentaires. Dans le même ordre d’idées, s’ils ne savent pas comment établir leur budget de façon à couvrir adéquatement l’achat d’aliments nutritifs en quantité suffisante pour répondre à leurs besoins alimentaires, certains ménages peuvent se retrouver incapables financièrement d’acheter la nourriture dont ils ont besoin.

15 Gorton, Bullen et Mhurchu, « Environmental Influences », p. 5.
17 Conclusions tirées d’entretiens.
18 Gorton, Bullen et Mhurchu, « Environmental Influences », p. 18.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p. 24.
STRATÉGIES POUR LA SÉCURITÉ ALIMENTAIRE

La lutte contre l’insécurité alimentaire des ménages est menée sur plusieurs fronts. Les gouvernements, de même que des groupes communautaires, des organismes privés et des particuliers offrent des programmes visant à répondre aux besoins immédiats des personnes et des familles touchées. Il existe également des solutions à long terme de portée nationale, régionale et communautaire (dont des programmes à l’échelle des provinces ou des territoires, et du Nord). Quant aux solutions à court terme, elles comprennent des programmes à accès libre, des programmes accessibles au grand public et des programmes complets portant sur tout un éventail de facteurs.

D’importants efforts pour améliorer l’état de la sécurité alimentaire au Canada continuent d’être déployés. Les politiques et programmes des gouvernements, des entreprises et des collectivités abordent les nombreux facteurs qui influent sur l’insécurité alimentaire des ménages. Mais il faut faire davantage. Dans l’ensemble, les stratégies visant à atténuer l’insécurité alimentaire à long terme doivent tenir compte d’une multitude de questions. Diverses stratégies à long et à court termes ont été recommandées pour soulager l’insécurité alimentaire des ménages, dont les suivantes :

- Mettre en œuvre un programme pancanadien de nutrition à l’école;
- Favoriser la collaboration entre l’industrie, les pouvoirs publics et les collectivités pour faciliter l’accès des ménages en situation d’insécurité alimentaire aux denrées alimentaires;
- Accroître le soutien aux efforts de sensibilisation auprès des populations isolées et à risque;
- Encourager le bénévolat et la participation aux initiatives de sécurité alimentaire;
- Améliorer les niveaux d’alphabétisation alimentaire;
- Rendre les transports en commun plus abordables pour les ménages à faible revenu;
- S’assurer que les politiques agricoles sont formulées dans l’optique de la sécurité alimentaire des ménages;
- Investir dans des stratégies de lutte contre le faible revenu ou la pauvreté;
- Assurer le suivi, l’étude et l’évaluation des initiatives de sécurité alimentaire des ménages afin de trouver des programmes efficaces pour ensuite les appuyer et les reproduire.

Élaboration de la Stratégie alimentaire canadienne

Le travail de recherche présenté ici est un apport important à l’élaboration de la Stratégie alimentaire canadienne. Il fait partie d’une série de 20 études menées sous la direction du Centre pour l’alimentation au Canada (CAC) du Conference Board. Chaque étude porte sur un sujet ou un thème important ayant trait aux aliments; les résultats figurent dans la stratégie complète qui sera publiée en mars 2014.

Le CAC a pour principal objectif de faire participer les intervenants des entreprises, administrations publiques, universités, associations et collectivités à la création du cadre dans lequel s’inscrit la Stratégie alimentaire canadienne, afin de donner au pays la stratégie coordonnée et à long terme dont il a besoin.

La Stratégie repose sur une approche globale de l’alimentation. Elle recouvre tout l’éventail des thèmes concernant la prospérité et la compétitivité de l’industrie, une saine alimentation, la salubrité des aliments, la sécurité alimentaire des ménages, et la durabilité environnementale, en incluant les dimensions aussi bien économiques que sociales.

La Stratégie comprendra un cadre des résultats que nous voulons obtenir et des mesures susceptibles de résoudre les défis auxquels sont confrontés le secteur de l’alimentation et ses intervenants. Elle proposera aussi un groupe — entreprises, administrations publiques, collectivités ou autres — pour prendre la direction de la mise en œuvre.

Le processus de conception, de diffusion et d’exécution de la Stratégie nécessite des recherches, des analyses et des synthèses ; des consultations et un niveau de collaboration élevé ; l’élaboration d’une vision et d’un objectif communs aux intervenants ; une large diffusion à l’aide de nombreux modes de communication ; et la ferme volonté d’agir de la part des acteurs clés.
Élaboration de la Stratégie alimentaire canadienne (suite)

RÔLE DE LA RECHERCHE
Le processus d’élaboration de la Stratégie commence par des travaux de recherche visant à obtenir des résultats empiriques et des solutions propres à résoudre les défis affrontés par le secteur de l’alimentation. Les résultats des 20 études sont un apport clé à la Stratégie alimentaire canadienne. Ils viennent enrichir le contenu de l’ébauche de la Stratégie et servent de base aux dialogues et aux consultations avec les investisseurs du CAC et d’autres intervenants importants du secteur de l’alimentation.

Les travaux de recherche du CAC ont pour objectif :
- de se faire une meilleure idée de l’état actuel du système alimentaire canadien, notamment de ses incidences sur le PIB, la santé, le commerce, l’environnement et d’autres facteurs économiques et sociaux importants ;
- de déterminer le virage que nous souhaitons faire prendre à l’alimentation et au système alimentaire ;
- de proposer des solutions viables pour faire évoluer le Canada de la situation actuelle vers celle que nous désirons.

Les solutions doivent prendre en considération la conjoncture économique, les forces du marché, l’environnement, les politiques, les lois et règlements, ainsi que la condition sociale et la santé des Canadiens.

ÉTAPES CLÉS ET CALENDRIER
1. Début des études du CAC — juillet 2010
2. Élaboration d’une première ébauche de la Stratégie alimentaire canadienne — avril 2012
3. Début des dialogues et consultations — mai 2012
4. Examen de la 2e ébauche de la Stratégie alimentaire canadienne — avril 2013
5. Publication de la Stratégie alimentaire canadienne — mars 2014

ÉVÉNEMENTS ACCOMPAGNANT LE LANCEMENT DE LA STRATÉGIE ALIMENTAIRE CANADIENNE
Dans le cadre du processus d’élaboration de la Stratégie, le CAC a prévu d’accueillir trois grands sommets de l’alimentation. Chaque sommet doit réunir des dirigeants et praticiens du système alimentaire dans les entreprises, administrations publiques, universités et collectivités, afin de débattre des derniers travaux de recherche, d’échanger des idées et de décider de la marche à suivre pour faire face, au moyen d’une stratégie nationale, aux vastes défis et possibilités du Canada en matière d’alimentation :
- Le 1er Sommet canadien de l’alimentation, qui a eu lieu en février 2012, était axé sur les défis et possibilités et a exploré les moyens d’y faire face sous une perspective internationale ;
- Le 2e Sommet canadien de l’alimentation, tenu en avril 2013, est passé des défis aux solutions ;
- Le 3e Sommet canadien de l’alimentation, prévu pour mars 2014, aura pour événement vedette le lancement de la Stratégie alimentaire canadienne et passera de la stratégie à l’action.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Chapter Summary

- About 7.7 per cent of Canadian households self-report being “food-insecure.”
- Household food insecurity is influenced by issues of household ability to pay for food, physical access to adequate food resources, health requirements for nutritious food, and preferences for culturally appropriate food.
- Addressing food insecurity helps to improve the health of food-insecure individuals, enabling them to attain higher levels of education, find better jobs, and work for longer periods of time.

All Canadians should have access to enough safe and nutritious food to sustain them, keep them healthy, and enable them to lead productive lives. Such access is acknowledged as a universal right and serves the health, social, and economic interests of our society.

While most Canadians do not need to worry about where their next meal will come from or how they will pay for it, a sizable minority of the Canadian population does. About 7.7 per cent of Canadian households—nearly 2 million people—self-report being “food insecure.”

Affected individuals often cannot access healthy food options, such as milk, chicken, fish, and fresh fruit and vegetables. As a result, their diets tend to rely more heavily on calorie-dense, processed foods, which are cheaper to buy and fill their stomachs.

Food insecurity can lead to serious health implications. People who are food-insecure tend to have a less varied diet, a lower intake of fruit and vegetables, micronutrient deficiencies, and malnutrition. Instead, they are more likely to consume processed foods with higher levels of sodium, trans fat, and sugar, which can lead to health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Adults living in food-insecure households with lower nutrient intakes are more inclined to suffer from poor health and develop more chronic diseases and mental health disorders. Food insecurity can lead to negative psychosocial outcomes in children, while teenagers are at risk of suffering from depression, social anxiety, and suicide.

Households living at or near poverty levels are more likely to experience food insecurity.

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1 United Nations, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”


3 Gorton, Bullen, and Mhurchu, “Environmental Influences,” 2.


While the economic costs of food insecurity in Canada have not been calculated, they can be roughly estimated, based on U.S. findings. A 2007 estimate of the costs of childhood poverty in the U.S. (a sum of forgone earnings and productivity, high crime rates, and poor health associated with adults who grew up in poverty) was “equal to nearly four percent of GDP, or about $500 billion per year.” In 2005, the economic cost burden of food insecurity in the United States was estimated at approximately $90.4 billion per year. This figure was calculated by estimating and adding the costs associated with charitable food-giving programs ($14.4 billion), hunger-related illnesses and psycho-social dysfunction ($66.8 billion), and the impact of less education and lower productivity ($9.2 billion). The rough ratio of poverty costs to food insecurity here is 1:0.18 (i.e., the ratio of $500 billion compared with ($14.4 + $66.8 + $9.2 billion) = $90.2 billion).

Domestically, poverty costs federal and provincial governments between $8.6 billion and $13 billion annually in lost income tax revenue. The combined social costs of poverty in Canada (which take into account increased costs of health care, crime, intergenerational costs, lost productivity, and transfer payments) were estimated to be $24.4 to $30.5 billion in 2007. Using the same 1:0.18 ratio of the United States’ social poverty costs to food insecurity, the annual economic cost of food insecurity in Canada can be roughly estimated at $4.4 billion to $5.5 billion. Although this is a very simple estimate, the results point to the overall high cost implications of household food security.

Addressing food insecurity helps to improve the overall health of food-insecure individuals, enabling them to attain higher levels of education, find better jobs, and work for longer periods of time. Thus, improving on the current state of food security in Canada could have a substantial impact on reducing social support and health care costs.

**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

This report analyzes the current state of household food security in Canada and examines current efforts and potential solutions to reducing food insecurity. It also examines the impacts of existing models that aim to reduce food insecurity.

The report’s empirical findings are being used in developing the Canadian Food Strategy, which will be released in March 2014. (See box “Developing the Canadian Food Strategy.”) Its second goal is to identify innovative models and programs that can be implemented by government, business, and civil society to help enhance food security. In particular, the report:

- examines the current state of food security in Canada;
- explores key risk factors associated with food insecurity;
- highlights current efforts to address food insecurity in Canada;
- recommends strategies to alleviate Canada’s food security challenges.

This report examines food security in Canadian households in three stages. It first discusses the current state of food security in Canada and introduces key risk factors associated with household food insecurity. It then identifies current types of food security enhancement strategies and programs. Finally, it presents recommendations for action by governments, industry, civil society, households, and individuals to improve food security.

**FOOD SECURITY DEFINED**

Defined at the World Food Summit (1996), food security was said to exist “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and
Developing the Canadian Food Strategy

This report is an important research input into the development of the Canadian Food Strategy. It is one of a series of 20 research reports that are being conducted by the Conference Board's Centre for Food in Canada (CFIC). Each report addresses an important issue or theme relating to food; the findings will figure in the completed Strategy when it is released in March 2014.

The principal goal of the Centre for Food in Canada is to engage stakeholders from business, government, academia, associations, and communities in creating the framework for the Canadian Food Strategy to meet the country's need for a coordinated long-term strategy.

The Strategy is taking a comprehensive approach to food. It covers the full range of themes relating to industry prosperity and competitiveness, healthy food, food safety, household food security, and environmental sustainability, encompassing both economic and social dimensions.

The Strategy will include a framework of outcomes that we want to achieve, and actions that will solve the challenges facing the food sector and food stakeholders. It will also suggest which group—businesses, governments, communities, and others—could lead on implementing them.

The process for creating, disseminating, and implementing the Strategy involves research, analysis, and synthesis; consultation and a high level of collaboration; the development of a shared understanding and common goals among stakeholders; broad dissemination through many communications channels; and the commitment of key players to take action.

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH

The process to develop the Strategy starts with conducting research that develops empirical findings and potential solutions to the challenges facing the food sector. The research findings from the 20 research studies are a key input into the Canadian Food Strategy. The findings are used to develop the content of the draft Strategy, and are the basis for dialogue and consultation with CFIC investors and other major food stakeholders.

CFIC research aims to:
- understand the current reality of Canada’s food system, including its impact on GDP, health, trade, environment, and other major economic and social factors;
- define a desired future state for food and the food system;
- suggest workable solutions for moving Canada from its current reality to the desired state.

The solutions will take into consideration the realities of economic activity, market forces, environment, policies, laws and regulations, and the social conditions and health needs of Canadians.

KEY STEPS AND TIMELINES
- Begin CFIC research studies—July 2010
- Develop initial draft of Canadian Food Strategy—April 2012
- Begin dialogue and consultations—May 2012
- Review second draft of Canadian Food Strategy—April 2013
- Release the Canadian Food Strategy—March 2014

CANADIAN FOOD STRATEGY EVENTS: LAUNCHING THE CANADIAN FOOD STRATEGY

CFIC is hosting three major food summits as part of the Strategy development process. Each summit brings together food system leaders and practitioners from business, government, academia, and communities to discuss the latest research, share insights, and consider how to address Canada’s major food challenges and opportunities through a national strategy:
- The first Canadian Food Summit, in February 2012, focused on issues and challenges and explored international perspectives on how to address them.
- The second Canadian Food Summit, in April 2013, focused on moving from challenges to solutions.
- The third Canadian Food Summit, in March 2014, will feature the public launch of the Canadian Food Strategy and will focus on moving from strategy to action.

nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) uses this definition to help countries around the world achieve a state where “people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives.”

11 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Canada’s Action Plan, 9.
12 Food and Agriculture Organization, About FAO.
Correspondingly, the term food insecurity defines a state where nutritious food is unavailable or inaccessible or where the supply is unstable. It ranges from “the fear of not being able to provide or obtain food, to hunger due to food shortages.”\textsuperscript{13} In Canada, household food insecurity results from three variables interacting—income; the cost of food; and the cost of non-food essentials, such as housing and transportation. As household income declines and/or food prices rise, more money must be spent by households on fixed costs of non-food essentials, leaving less for food.\textsuperscript{14} These three variables reveal different directions for solutions to food insecurity.

Health Canada identifies several degrees or levels of household insecurity, using measures of quality and quantity of food consumed. Moderately food-insecure households have “had indication of compromise in quality and/or quantity of food consumed,” while severely food-insecure households have “had indication of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns.”\textsuperscript{15} Food-insecure households often lack the money to purchase fresh and healthy foods, and tend to rely on cheaper food options that are calorie-dense and heavily processed (e.g., dry pasta, canned goods, etc.).

**FRAMEWORK**

This report looks at the issue of food insecurity through an analysis of the key risk factors shaping the ability of individuals to afford and access sufficient safe and nutritious food. Food security can be examined at a number of different levels: global, national, regional, community, household, and individual. The report focuses on the level of household food security in Canada.

Household food insecurity is influenced by issues of household ability to pay for food, physical access to adequate food resources, health requirements for nutritious food, and preferences for culturally appropriate food. Key risk factors are income, the costs of food and non-food essentials, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and food literacy. Members of at-risk population groups, including Aboriginal peoples, lone-parent families, women and children, immigrants, and the elderly, are more likely to be affected by one or more of the other key risk factors.

How do people access food? What barriers prevent them from accessing sufficient safe and nutritious foods? What determines the availability of subsidized and free food? What options are there for improving availability? Exploring these questions provides a basis for examining efforts to curb food insecurity and for recommending new solutions and models for action.

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**Food insecurity is influenced by ability to pay for food, access to food resources, health requirements for nutritious food, and preferences for culturally appropriate food.**

Key factors shaping the supply of food in Canada are examined in a CFIC report on the viability of the food sector. (See box “Food Supply in Canada” for a brief discussion of the food sector’s ability to feed the population.)

In this report, we explore:

1. **The state of household food insecurity in Canada**

   Estimates of the extent of household food insecurity in Canada are explored to provide context to the issue. Knowing how many households are affected helps in developing solutions of the right size and scale. Demographic factors associated with household food insecurity are also examined to identify more precisely where help is needed most. Finally, outcomes and impacts of household food insecurity are discussed as justification for intervention strategies.

2. **Key risk factors in household food insecurity**

   The relationship between risk factors and individuals’ ability to afford and access sufficient safe and nutritious food is examined. Household food security varies by income level, the price of food, and the cost of non-food essentials. The economic weakness

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\textsuperscript{13} Willows and others, *Associations Between Household Food Insecurity*.

\textsuperscript{14} Dachner and others, “Food Purchasing,” e52; Trostle, *Global Agricultural Supply*, 25.

\textsuperscript{15} Health Canada, *Household Food Insecurity*, 11.
Food Supply in Canada

Less than half of the respondents (46.2 per cent) to the Conference Board’s Centre for Food in Canada household survey believe that Canada will be able to feed its population over the course of their lifetime.1 Yet, an examination of industry trends shows reasons for greater confidence. Canada produces and imports more food than its population needs. On a per capita basis, it produces excesses of cereals, pulses, vegetables, and imports more food than its population needs. On a per capita basis, it produces excesses of cereals, pulses, vegetables, and imports more food than its population needs.2 The country is also one of the world’s largest importers of food. It was the sixth-largest importer of food in 2009 after the EU, the U.S., China, Japan, and Russia. In 2009, fruit, vegetables, and associated products such as fruit juice represented more than one-quarter of Canadian agriculture and agri-food import sales.3 The sustainability of Canadian food supply industries will require identification of short- and long-term priorities for environmental management and the associated impacts of food creation, processing, and distribution.4 Connections between food and the environment as well as recommendations for environmental management are discussed in a companion CFIC report.

1 The Conference Board of Canada, CFIC survey data 2011.
2 Riches, Right to Food, 18.
3 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, An Overview, 31.
4 Interview findings.

The supply side of the market for food is shaped and characterized by a number of factors. The supply and availability of wholesome and nutritious food is partially a function of the viability of the industry. The food industry interacts with consumers on different levels, presenting multiple opportunities for food companies to influence consumer behaviour. The market-based system has a variable capacity to supply based on consumer demand and need. The market functions quite well for people at the middle and higher-middle income levels, who are less price-sensitive. (See the CFIC’s report The Sky’s the Limit: The Viability of Canada’s Food Economy for more information on Canada’s food industries.)

However, the gaps and limitations in the system limit the ability of lower-income households to access and afford sufficient safe and nutritious food. Respondents to the CFIC household survey with annual incomes of less than $40,000 showed the most concern over Canada’s long-term ability to feed its population. In this group, 62.4 per cent were somewhat or very concerned, as compared with about 42 per cent for respondents at each of the higher income levels.5 Their concern about the food supply might well be a reflection of their own personal challenges with affording and accessing food.

Food Security in Context

Food security can best be understood in relation to other issues that affect the food system and people’s ability to acquire safe and nutritious foods. These include how food security relates to health, food safety, and food literacy. In this report, we do not discuss these issues in detail as they are covered in other reports published by the Centre for Food in Canada. CFIC reports entitled Improving Health Outcomes: Addressing Chronic Disease Through Food and Improving Food Safety in Canada: Toward a More Risk-Responsive System were recently published. A report on food literacy entitled What’s to Eat? Improving Food Literacy in Canada will be published in 2013.

of some households means that many people are not getting enough safe and nutritious food in their diets. Other risk factors also have a negative impact; these include geographic location, lack of transportation, and poor knowledge of safe and nutritious food. For instance, some rural and remote residents do not have access to the types of food they need. Similarly, some city dwellers with limited access to transportation cannot access the types of food they need. Finally, the risk of being food-insecure and belonging to one or more at-risk population groups is analyzed.

3. Solutions and strategies to address household food insecurity

Existing solutions for reducing food insecurity in Canada, as well as their impacts, are profiled. Recommendations for short- and long-term strategies for governments, organizations, communities, and other stakeholders to address the risk factors of food insecurity are presented.
**METHODOLOGY**

The research for this report involved a multi-faceted methodology, including:

- a review of academic, business, and government literature focused on household food security;
- analysis of data gathered through the Center for Food in Canada’s surveys (see box “About the Centre for Food in Canada’s Surveys”);
- interviews with experts in industry, government, and other stakeholder organizations.

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**About the Centre for Food in Canada’s Surveys**

A key mandate of the Centre for Food in Canada is to generate insights about the food system from the perspective of industry, consumers, and households. Achieving this mandate requires the Centre to gather proprietary data on the specific challenges facing Canada’s food industry and Canadian households’ food-related skills, attitudes, and behaviours.

To this end, we designed and executed, first, a business survey of the Canadian food industry and, second, a survey of Canadian households. These surveys were conducted by Forum Research, a Toronto-based survey company.

For the industry survey, Forum Research randomly surveyed 1,186 food companies during the period of June 23 to July 22, 2011, using questions prepared by The Conference Board of Canada. Companies were sampled according to the following three-digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes: 445 (retail food distribution), 311 (food processing), 111 (crop production), and 112 (animal production). Of the surveys, 1,177 were telephone surveys conducted by trained interviewers, and 9 were filled in by hand and submitted in hard-copy form. Aggregate survey findings are considered accurate +/- 2.85 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

For the household survey, Forum Research randomly surveyed 1,056 Canadian households from September 8–11, 2011, using questions prepared by The Conference Board of Canada. In this case, aggregate survey findings are considered accurate +/- 3.02 per cent, 19 times out of 20. Subsample results have wider margins of error for both surveys.
Chapter 2

The State of Food Security in Canada

Chapter Summary
- Nationally, 1.92 million people aged 12 or older are food-insecure, including 228,500 children aged 12 to 17.
- Food insecurity is associated with inadequate nutrition and several health problems, including adult obesity, Type 2 diabetes, anemia, and poor mental health.
- Members of at-risk population groups, including Aboriginal peoples, lone-parent families, women and children, immigrants, and the elderly, are most likely to be affected.

1 Cummins and Macintyre, “Food Environments,” 100.

Although Canada is one of the most advanced nations in the world, not all Canadians are able to access sufficient safe and nutritious food. Within our borders, a significant minority of individuals—represented by one-third of a million households—are severely food-insecure. Nearly twice as many households are moderately food-insecure.1


This chapter examines the current state of food security in Canada and illustrates the ability of households to access sufficient safe and nutritious food in the realistic context of everyday life. Understanding the context of access to food is necessary to developing relevant and useful strategies or solutions to food access issues. This chapter also discusses the outcomes and impacts of food insecurity, particularly on children.

FOOD SECURITY IN CANADA

National statistics on the number of food-insecure households are not produced often or regularly, and there is a dearth of research that accurately defines the extent of food insecurity in Canada. However, self-reported data and related measures of food relief program measures indicate that it is a growing issue.

In 2007–08, the Canadian Community Health Survey found that 961,000 Canadian households, or 7.7 percent, self-reported as food-insecure. This translates to about 1.92 million people in Canada aged 12 or older, including 228,500 children aged 12 to 17, living in food-insecure households. Among these households, about 331,900 (2.7 percent) were severely food-insecure (i.e., characterized by “reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns”; the other 629,600 (5 percent) were moderately food-insecure (i.e., where the “quality and/
or quantity of food consumed was compromised").

At some point during the year preceding the study—in some cases throughout the year—food-insecure households experienced uncertainty that they would have enough food or were unable to acquire enough food to meet the needs of all their members due to inadequate financial resources.

Food insecurity may vary among individuals within households. For example, adults will often protect children in food-insecure households by sacrificing their own dietary needs. Individual food security is characterized by nutritional inadequacy, insufficient food intake, a lack of food choice and feelings of deprivation, and disrupted eating patterns.\(^3\)

Levels of self-reported food insecurity vary significantly among the provinces and territories. Those with the highest levels in 2007–08 were Nunavut (32.6 per cent of households), Northwest Territories (12.4 per cent), Yukon (11.6 per cent), and Prince Edward Island (10.6 per cent). The lowest levels of food insecurity were seen in Alberta (6.4 per cent), Saskatchewan (6.3 per cent), and Quebec (6.9 per cent).\(^4\) (See Chart 1.)

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Results from the survey revealed that, overall, food insecurity was higher in households with children than in households without children.

Households in which social assistance or workers’ compensation/employment insurance was the main source of income were much more likely to be food-insecure (55.5 and 25.3 per cent, respectively) than those in which salary/wages or pensions/seniors’ benefits (6.1 and 4.8 per cent, respectively) were the main source of income.\(^5\) (See Chart 2.) Also of note were the higher rates of food insecurity for Aboriginal households compared with non-Aboriginal households (i.e., 20.9 and 7.2 per cent, respectively) and for recent immigrants (i.e., less than five years in Canada) compared with non- or non-recent immigrants (i.e., 12.6 per cent compared with 7.5 and 7.8 per cent).\(^6\) Those reporting food insecurity in their households were also far less likely to own their own home (17.2 per cent versus 3.5 per cent who owned their dwelling).\(^7\)

Results from the same survey revealed that, overall, food insecurity was higher in households with children (9.7 per cent) than in households without children

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2 Health Canada, *Household Food Insecurity*. The number of food-insecure conditions reported—that is, the number of questions in the survey that were answered affirmatively on behalf of the household in each of the adult and child scales—determines the food security status at the adult and child level, respectively. Once adult and child food security status is known, the food security status of the household is determined. Among households without children, adult food security status is also household food security status. Depending on the question, a response is considered affirmative if the respondent indicated “yes”; “often” or “sometimes”; or “almost every month” or “some months but not every month.”


4 Health Canada, *Household Food Insecurity*.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.
(6.8 per cent). Of the 1.92 million aged 12 or older who reported living in food-insecure households, 228,500 were children aged 12 to 17. Food insecurity was slightly more prevalent in households with at least one young child aged five or younger compared with those without any young children (10.8 per cent compared with 9 per cent). Also, households led by female lone parents (25 per cent) were twice as likely to be food-insecure as households led by male lone parents (11.2 per cent) and four times as likely as households led by couples (6.3 per cent).“

**FOOD BANK USAGE**

Food Banks Canada conducts its HungerCount survey annually to measure food bank usage in Canada. In 2012, the survey found that 882,188 individuals, or 2.5 per cent of the Canadian population, were assisted by food banks across Canada during the month in which the survey was conducted. Usage in 2012 was 20 per cent higher than it had been a decade earlier, in 2002. While food banks are an important part of the emergency food relief system, not every community has a food bank, and not all households experiencing food insecurity use food banks. A 2003 study found that “only about one-third of food-insufficient households ... reported receiving food from a food bank, soup kitchen or other charitable agency in the past year [suggesting that] charitable food assistance utilization is a relatively poor marker of food insufficiency, underestimating its true prevalence.”

Among those who received assistance from food banks in 2012, 52 per cent reported that social assistance was their primary source of income. Other characteristics of food bank users in 2012 include the following:

- 48 per cent were female;
- 38 per cent were children and youth under age 18;
- 11 per cent were immigrants or refugees;
- 11 per cent self-identified as Aboriginal;
- 4 per cent were seniors (over age 65);
- 3 per cent were post-secondary students.

Rising numbers of food bank users suggest that the number of food-insecure households is also increasing, and that the issue is growing in Canada. However, while commonly used as a measure of food insecurity, food bank usage is only one indicator of emergency relief sought rather than a true measure of overall need. There is a dearth of research that measures the true extent

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8 Health Canada, *Household Food Insecurity*.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
13 Vozoris and Tarasuk, “Household Food Insufficiency,” 123.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
of the problem—we can only infer from self-reported data and rising usage of food relief programs that food insecurity is a growing challenge for Canada.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS OF FOOD INSECURITY

The impacts of food insecurity in our society are many and significant. Food insecurity is associated with poor health. Inadequate nutrition increases both short- and long-term health issues, including chronic diseases. Individuals who are food-insecure tend to have a less varied diet and a lower consumption of fruit and vegetables, and suffer from micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition. The link between low income and an insufficiently nutritious diet was made in a review of literature on diet and socio-economic status by Darmon and Drewnowski. They found that the consumption of whole grains, lean meats, fish, low-fat dairy products, and fresh vegetables is consistently associated with higher socio-economic groups; and consumption of fatty meats, refined grains, and added fats was associated with lower socio-economic status groups.

Food insecurity is associated with many health problems in developed countries, including adult obesity; Type 2 diabetes; anemia; poor mental health (including stress and depression); impacts on medication adherence (i.e., postponing both medication and necessary medical care); poor academic development; and behavioural and psychosocial problems (in children). A 2003 Canadian study found that individuals in food-insufficient households had significantly higher odds of having restricted activity and poor functional health, suffering from multiple chronic conditions, having major depression and distress, and having poor social support compared with those in food-sufficient households. They were also “significantly more likely to report having heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and food allergies.” The result of food insecurity in Canadian households is increased social and health costs to individuals, families, communities, and the country.

Health issues resulting from food insecurity can become productivity and performance issues on the job. Adults with insufficient diets are less able to obtain and maintain employment. Poor job performance can result in missed opportunities for promotion or job performance bonuses; reprimands on performance records; or outright job loss due to absenteeism, errors, or performance and productivity issues. Job loss and unemployment may start or restart a vicious cycle of low income levels that exacerbate household food insecurity.

A 2003 Canadian study found that individuals in food-insufficient households had significantly higher odds of having restricted activity and poor functional health.

Children in low-income households are vulnerable to food insecurity. The relationship between low-income households and food-insecure children reveals far-reaching negative impacts on their education and health. Nutrition of pregnant mothers and young children is critical to healthy growth. Nutrition of pregnant mothers and young children is critical to healthy growth. Nutrition of pregnant mothers and young children is critical to healthy growth. Research has demonstrated that “nutritionally deprived children experience more health problems including anemia, weight loss, colds, and infections, and have more school absences and learning problems than food-secure children.” Diet-deprived children are less able to concentrate and perform well at school, thus threatening their opportunity to gain an education and vital skills for life.

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19 Cummins and Macintyre, “Food Environments,” 100.
22 Ibid.
23 Fox, Hamilton, and Lin, Effects of Food Assistance, 12.
from low-income households “consistently fall behind their peers in test scores, graduation rates, college enrolment, and other measures of academic success.”

CONCLUSION

Almost 1 million Canadian households (7.7 per cent) self-report as being food-insecure. Patterns of socio-demographic characteristics of food-insecure households clearly point to strong relationships between food insecurity and low income levels (i.e., dependence on social assistance, workers’ compensation, or employment insurance) and belonging to one or more at-risk population groups, such as Aboriginal peoples, recent immigrants, women, and children. The next chapter analyzes these and other characteristics as key risk factors in food insecurity.

26 Carey, Education Funding, 1.
Chapter 3

Key Risk Factors of Food Insecurity

Chapter Summary

- Key risk factors of food insecurity are income, the costs of food and non-food essentials, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and food literacy.
- The strongest socio-economic predictor of food insecurity in Canada (and developed countries in general) is household income.
- It is difficult for many low-income families to consume a nutritious diet based on the Canada Food Guide.
- While many government assistance programs aid lower-income households in providing food, some households still struggle to afford and/or access sufficient safe and nutritious food.

Several socio-economic and other factors are linked to food insecurity. Key factors include income, the costs of food and non-food essentials, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, food literacy, and belonging to an at-risk population group, including Aboriginal peoples, lone-parent families, women and children, immigrants, and the elderly. These factors increase the likelihood of food insecurity and challenge the ability of individuals and families to access sufficient safe and nutritious food. Some individuals or households face only one factor, others two or more. The complexity of finding viable, practical solutions to food insecurity challenges rises with the number of factors involved in each case.

INCOME LEVEL

The strongest socio-economic predictor of food insecurity in Canada (and developed countries in general) is household income. Low-income households may lack the financial means to obtain a balanced diet that includes healthy and fresh foods. Households that rely on social assistance have higher rates of food insecurity, and households with high levels of debt and an inability to access credit are also more prone to food insecurity.\(^1\) As Chart 3 illustrates, the households with the lowest incomes self-report higher levels of food insecurity: 32.5 per cent of the lowest income decile compared with 0.3 per cent of the highest.\(^2\)

Low household income limits food purchasing power and food choices. While there is no national consensus on definitions of low income, poverty, or income adequacy, “definitions of income adequacy are implied from the poverty measures [used by Statistics Canada]: proportional to average household spending levels on food, clothing, and shelter (low-income cut-offs, or LICOs); proportional to the median household income

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(low-income measures, or LIMs); and proportional to the cost of ‘essential’ goods and services (market basket measures, or MBMs).”3

LICOs “convey the income level at which a family may be in straitened circumstances because it has to spend a greater proportion of its income on necessities than the average family of similar size.”4 In 2009, 9.6 per cent of Canadians were below the LICOs level.5 Not all households below the LICOs level are food-insecure, but there is a strong correlation between the two. A previous Canadian Community Health Survey found that 48.3 per cent of households in the lowest income group were food-insecure, while 29.1 per cent of households with low incomes were food-insecure.6 (See Chart 4.) While the results are not directly comparable with those of the 2007–08 Canadian Community Health Survey due to methodological differences,7 the links between low income and household food insecurity are clear in both sets of results.

The CFIC household survey results showed that respondents at the lowest income level were the most price-sensitive concerning food purchases: 60.4 per cent said that price was a very or extremely important factor in deciding which food to buy. In comparison, 39.4 of those at the highest income level felt the same way.8 However, 64.3 of respondents at the lowest income level stated that nutritional value was a very or extremely important factor in their food purchase decisions, while 84.1 of those at the highest income level agreed.9 These findings suggest that individuals with low income levels may be trading-off nutrition for price, or at least are trying to get “the best bang for their buck” when it comes to shopping for food.

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3 Hay, Poverty Reduction, 2.
4 Statistics Canada, Low Income Definitions.
5 Ibid.
6 Health Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 21.
7 Health Canada, Household Food Insecurity.
8 The Conference Board of Canada, CFIC survey data 2011.
9 Ibid.
COST OF FOOD

For several decades, food price inflation was similar to overall consumer price inflation. However, in recent years this has not been the case. For example, in 2009, food prices rose at an average annual rate of 4.9 per cent, while overall prices rose only 0.3 per cent. In 2009, the retail prices of beef, pork, and fresh fruit and vegetables were substantially higher than in 2008.10

The cost of food commodities such as wheat, corn, sugar, and vegetable oil have increased from 50 to 100 per cent since spring 2010.11 In 2011, prominent baked goods producers and manufacturers of processed meats announced price rises.12 Such price increases, even when relatively small, strain the tight budgets of low-income Canadians.

Lower-income households are more sensitive to rising commodity prices because they spend a larger share of their household income on food than higher-income consumers (although higher-income consumers spend more money on food). For example, in 2009, the lowest income quintile of Canadian households, with an average household expenditure of $23,859, spent $3,888 on food annually—16.3 per cent of their total household expenditures. The highest income quintile had an average household expenditure of $147,088 and spent 7.5 per cent ($11,091) of this on food.13

Research has shown that many low-income families find it difficult to consume a nutritious diet based on the Canada Food Guide.14 Lean meats, fish, and fresh fruit and vegetables tend to be more costly per calorie than processed foods that have added fats and sugars.15

The National Nutritious Food Basket (NNFB) is a national health measure developed by Health Canada. The NNFB “describes the quantity (and purchase units) of approximately 60 foods that represent a nutritious diet for individuals in various age and gender groups.”16 Since food costs are collected differently across provincial, territorial, and regional levels in Canada, the cost of the NNFB across the county is not monitored. However, individual jurisdictions do calculate the cost of a comparable measure—a Nutritious Food Basket (NFB)—enabling them to monitor the cost of a nutritious diet in their jurisdiction.

Comparison of NFBS in three locations indicates that some households in each area will struggle to afford sufficient safe and nutritious food:

- The cost of an NFB in Toronto in 2011 for a family of four was $748 per month, an increase of 4.6 per cent from 2010.17 If the same family of four received social assistance, they might have been eligible to receive up to $448 per month to cover basic needs (including items such as food, clothing, and personal needs).18
- The cost of an NFB in Nova Scotia in 2010 for a family of four was $771.19 If the same family of four was on social assistance, they might have received up to $428 per month to cover basic personal needs (including food and clothing).20
- The cost of an NFB in Vancouver in 2006 for a family of four was $653 per month.21 If the same family of four was eligible for income assistance, they might have received up to $401 per month.22

Table 1 shows the differences in these costs and assistance levels, with amounts adjusted for inflation to today’s costs.

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10 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, An Overview, 58.
11 Weeks, “Any Way You Slice It.”
12 Ibid.
13 Statistics Canada, Spending Patterns, 11.
14 Engler-Stringer, “Food, Cooking Skills, and Health,” 143.
15 Darmon and Drewnowski, “Does Social Class?”
16 Health Canada, National Nutritious Food Basket. The quantity of food in the basket was considered acceptable when the food goals were achieved and when the amounts of nutrients reached at least 95 per cent of the goal amounts (i.e., Dietary Reference Intakes [DRIs] values).
17 City of Toronto, Board of Health Report 2011, 1.
18 City of Toronto, Employment and Social Services.
20 Ibid.
22 British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, BC Employment and Assistance Rate Tables.
In addition to the costs of the food items, households face other food-related costs such as infrastructure (e.g., to provide refrigeration, cooking, and storage of food items) and functional items (e.g., cooking utensils or packaging of food items for freezing or storage).

### COST OF NON-FOOD ESSENTIALS

The cost of food is often the only discretionary part of household spending. Food budgets are determined by the amount of money left over after paying other bills such as rent, hydro, and heat. A comparison of costs in three geographic areas shows that covering the costs of non-food essentials is often a struggle for low-income households, especially those on social assistance. The cost estimates discussed here are based on families living in private accommodations, not subsidized dwellings:

- A Toronto family of four pays, on average, $900 per month for shelter (rental dwelling) costs. In Ontario, all households paid an average of $961 per month ($11,531/12) in transportation costs in 2010. Lower-income families may be eligible to receive up to $668 per month in social assistance to cover shelter costs (2011 estimates).
- A Nova Scotia family of four on social assistance pays, on average, $822 per month for shelter. In Nova Scotia, all households paid an average of $797 per month ($9,566/12) in transportation costs in 2010. Lower-income families may be eligible to receive up to $620 per month in social assistance to cover shelter costs and $300 per month to cover transportation costs (2010 estimates).
- A Vancouver family of four pays, on average, $828 per month for shelter (rental dwelling) costs. In British Columbia, all households paid an average of $922 per month ($11,067/12) in transportation costs in 2010. Lower-income families of four may be eligible to receive up to $700 per month in social assistance to cover shelter costs.

Table 2 shows the differences in these costs and assistance levels for shelter and other costs, with prices adjusted for inflation to today’s costs.

### The lowest income quintile is spending proportionately much more on food and major non-food essentials, including shelter, transportation, health care, and clothing.

A broader comparison of household expenditure on food and shelter by income level shows that the lowest income quintile is spending proportionately much more on food and major non-food essentials, including shelter, transportation, health care, and clothing. As Table 3 shows, the proportion of household expenditure allotted to food and shelter is roughly double for the lowest income quintile than for the highest. Two-thirds of their entire household expenditure is going toward paying for

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23 Dachner and others, “Food Purchasing,” e52.
24 Statistics Canada, Toronto Central Health Integration Network.
25 Statistics Canada, “Average Household Expenditure (Ontario).”
26 City of Toronto, Employment and Social Services.
28 Statistics Canada, “Average Household Expenditure (Nova Scotia).”
29 Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project, Can Nova Scotians, 12.
30 Statistics Canada, Vancouver Health Services Delivery Area.
31 Statistics Canada, “Average Household Expenditure (British Columbia).”
32 British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, BC Employment and Assistance Rate Tables.
food, shelter, transportation, health care, and clothing. This compares with just over 40 per cent for those at the highest income level.

While many government assistance programs aid lower-income households in providing food and other essentials (see box “Government Efforts to Help Offset Living Costs for Lower-Income Households”), some households still struggle to afford and/or access sufficient safe and nutritious food.

**GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION**

Geographic location or environment is a potential factor in household food insecurity, as remote, rural, or isolated environments can limit access to food or food choices and result in higher food prices.

In 2009, the Heart and Stroke Foundation shed some perspective on the discrepancies in the price of food across Canada. (See Table 4.) The price of food can vary significantly from one city to another. For instance, in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, six apples cost on average $7.64, whereas in Toronto they could be purchased for $1.00. Similarly, four litres of 1 per cent milk in Rankin Inlet cost $11.89, while in Vancouver and Delta, B.C., the cost was approximately $3.49.33

**RURAL, REMOTE, AND NORTHERN LOCATIONS**

Many of those living in rural (7.3 per cent of households in rural areas)34 and remote locations in Canada face food security challenges. Transportation costs of

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33 Heart and Stroke Foundation, *Heart and Stroke Foundation Report 2009*.

34 Health Canada, *Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009*.
food delivery to rural and remote regions are a key contributor to higher food prices in these areas. When transportation and other distribution costs are too high for a reasonable return, some foods are simply not made available to residents in remote and rural locations. The highest rates of food insecurity in Canada are found in its three territories. Families there are particularly challenged to provide sufficient safe and nutritious food for their households due to high food prices, a lack of food options, and other challenges that are unique to their areas.

35 Interview findings.

### Table 4
Food Prices Across Canada
(adjusted to 2013 costs; $)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>National average</th>
<th>Cost in Rankin Inlet, NU</th>
<th>Cost elsewhere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apples (6)</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>1.00 (Toronto)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes (2.7 kg)</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>8.19</td>
<td>1.50 (Toronto)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown rice (1 kg)</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>11.99</td>
<td>2.19 (Toronto)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1% milk (4 L)</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>11.89</td>
<td>3.49 (Vancouver)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut butter</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>8.49</td>
<td>2.99 (St. John’s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*prices adjusted using the Bank of Canada Inflation Calculator
Source: Heart and Stroke Foundation.
Communities in remote and northern parts of the country pay higher prices for food. The price of food in the North is often very high due to transportation costs by ship and air.\(^{36}\) Fresh foods have the highest prices in remote areas because they spoil more easily and are more likely to require “a greater degree of ‘soft food handling’ and storage to ensure [arrival] at [their] destination in a reasonable condition.”\(^{37}\) They can often cost up to three times as much in remote areas as in major Canadian cities.\(^{38}\)

The need to cover high fixed costs of non-food essentials makes it increasingly difficult for Northern households to dedicate enough money to purchasing healthy foods.

Processed foods are available more cheaply than fresh foods in the North. They have a longer shelf life, do not require delicate handling, and cost less to transport and maintain.\(^{39}\) However with recent changes to the government-subsidized Food Mail program, the cost of some foods has increased. One recommendation from program users is to “allow various food and non-food items to be eligible for the subsidy under the new program, especially those related to child care products (e.g., diapers, baby food); traditional hunting and related food supplies (e.g., gasoline and ammunition, food items high in fat for protection in extreme weather conditions); and various dried goods that serve as affordable and convenient complements to traditional meals (e.g., rice, noodles, soup mixes, pasta).”\(^{40}\)

Further, many Northern households have lower incomes, due to unemployment, seasonal employment, or low wages,\(^{41}\) which makes it difficult for them to pay for the foods they need. Additionally, because non-food essentials such as housing materials, fuel, and other household items must also be transported from other regions, the costs of housing, heating, and transportation are typically higher in the North.\(^{42}\) The need to cover high fixed costs of non-food essentials makes it increasingly difficult for Northern households to dedicate enough money to purchasing healthy foods—assuming they are available.

Traditional Northern diets based on foods obtained through hunting and fishing are threatened due to the high costs of participating in these activities. Aboriginal communities are finding it harder to hunt for their own food (e.g., wild game and fish) due to rising costs. Increasing costs stemming from the need to travel extensive distances to find game and the need for a gun licence, as well as gas, ammunition, boats, and vehicles, are limiting the ability of Inuit communities to access traditional foods.\(^{43}\) The Nunavut Harvester Support Program (NHSP) estimates that operating costs for a weekend hunt exceed $200, including gas, ammunition, and food.\(^{44}\) The prohibitive costs of following a traditional diet are leading to increased reliance on shipped-in or imported foods in the North.

Changing tastes among the younger generations of Aboriginal peoples further contribute to the erosion of traditional diets in the North and the desire of residents to hunt and fish for themselves. Some young people in the North are beginning to prefer processed foods and are not developing the skills and knowledge they need to procure and prepare traditional or country foods.\(^{45}\) Some larger Northern communities lack ready access to traditional foods. Climate change has led to a thinning of ice conditions, altered animal migration routes, and changed weather patterns, creating further challenges in the harvesting of country foods. Some Northerners are also concerned about the safety of country foods due to environmental pollutants in the Arctic food chain.\(^{46}\) Limited desire for and access to traditional foods are

\(^{36}\) Butler Walker, Kassi, and Eamer, *Food Security in Times of Change*.


\(^{38}\) Wingrove, “Grocery Bills Spike.”

\(^{39}\) Chan and others, “Food Security in Nunavut.”

\(^{40}\) Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, *From Food Mail*, 23.


\(^{42}\) Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Designing*.

\(^{43}\) Boult, *Hunger in the Arctic*, 8.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.


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also resulting in a higher demand for foods to be transported into northern regions of Canada in order to sustain the population.

**URBAN AREAS**

Geography is also a problem in urban centres, although isolating the geographic determinant from income and the cost of other non-food essentials determinants is challenging. Results from the 2004 Health Canada survey revealed that approximately 9.6 per cent of households in urban areas are food-insecure, compared with 7.3 per cent of households in rural areas.\(^{47}\) One reason is that some urban areas contain distressed districts where many residents have limited access to affordable, fresh, and healthy foods—areas sometimes referred to as “food deserts.”\(^ {48}\) Households in these areas are isolated from easy access to larger supermarkets or retail grocery stores. They may elect to shop at smaller food stores or corner stores for the sake of convenience, often sacrificing nutrition and choice\(^ {49}\) and paying higher prices.\(^ {50}\) Also, households located in areas that are isolated from larger grocery store outlets may turn to fast food restaurants that offer convenient meals but questionable nutrition.

Poor urban areas are less likely than suburban or wealthier neighbourhoods to include larger grocery store outlets.\(^ {51}\) Although research on food deserts in Canada is limited, indications of food deserts can be seen in Toronto, Ontario. In 2011, the City of Toronto produced the map that identifies the proximity of the city’s high poverty areas to supermarkets. (See Exhibit 1.) The red areas indicate “all areas of Toronto of high poverty [having 150 or more persons with low income] that are also 1,500 metres or more (walking or driving distance, not as the crow flies) from a medium or large supermarket.”\(^ {52}\) The map demonstrates that many areas with high poverty rates have very limited access to larger grocery stores (marked with black dots) in their neighbourhoods. Residents in some of Toronto’s high priority areas have often voiced their need for more grocery stores within walking distance.\(^ {53}\) It is important to note that the map only identifies larger supermarkets and does not account for smaller stores, local markets, farms, or stands that could be providing fresh produce to some of these areas. Other urban areas in Canada face similar challenges with food deserts and the availability of fresh, healthy food.

**LACK OF ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION**

Access to transportation affects access to food.\(^ {54}\) As a factor in food security, access to transportation is related to geographic location and income.\(^ {55}\) Some food retail outlets provide local delivery services for patrons, and meal delivery services (e.g., Meals on Wheels) are available in some regions to those who qualify. However, most people must travel to a food retail outlet to obtain food supplies themselves. Unless individuals happen to live close enough to walk to reach a food retail outlet, they must use some form of private or public transportation to access food. If they cannot afford their own vehicle, they likely rely on public transit systems to take them to and from food retail stores.

Isolated urban residents face much the same challenge as rural residents. The challenge of access is getting there: a transportation issue. The urban-isolated are not cut off from grocery stores, but must travel a greater distance than most to reach a supermarket. Households with lower incomes and no vehicle typically use public transit systems to reach food retail outlets in other neighbourhoods. Rural and remote residents do

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47 Health Canada, *Canadian Community Health Survey*, 23.
48 Larsen and Gilliland, “Mapping the Evolution.”
52 City of Toronto, *Resources*.
53 City of Toronto, *Summary*.
54 Cummins and Macintyre, “Food Environments,” 100.
not have as many options, as public transportation is often limited or non-existent in these areas. Without access to transportation to reach food retail outlets, households may rely on less nutritious or more costly options that are closer to hand\textsuperscript{56} (e.g., convenience stores or fast food outlets) or may go without sufficient food supplies.

\section*{LOW FOOD LITERACY}

Consumers’ food literacy—the skills, knowledge, and behaviour of how to choose and prepare nutritious food—affects their food security.\textsuperscript{57} Household shoppers who lack knowledge of what constitutes a healthy diet—food literacy—may not choose foods that meet their household’s nutrition and dietary needs. Recognizing the importance of food literacy, educating

\textsuperscript{56} Gorton, Bullen, and Mhurchu, “Environmental Influences,” 18.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 24.
and guiding Northerners in the pursuit of healthy eating was seen as a key success factor for the Nutrition North Canada program. The ability to read and understand food labels is part of food literacy. Without the knowledge and skills to store, handle, and prepare food safely, individuals may waste otherwise good food. Similarly, not knowing how to budget for sufficient nutritious food to meet the household’s dietary needs may render that household financially unable to pay for food. Food literacy and its connection to food security are examined in detail in an upcoming CFIC report, What’s to Eat? Improving Food Literacy in Canada.

**AT-RISK POPULATIONS**

Within Canada, socio-economic groups, which are disproportionately more likely to be food-insecure, include lone-parent families, women, children, Aboriginal peoples, recent immigrants, and the elderly. These groups are more likely to be affected by one or more of the above factors—i.e., low-income, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and low literacy.

Lone-parent households in 2007–08 accounted for 22.9 per cent of all food-insecure households, compared with 6.3 per cent of couple-led households with children. In many cases, lone parents bear the burden of family spending on a single income. As a result, they sometimes struggle to find money in the household budget for sufficient nutritious food. Single women’s households are especially prone to food insecurity: At 25 per cent, their households are twice as likely to be food-insecure as households led by male lone parents (11.2 per cent) and four times as likely as households led by couples (6.3 per cent). On average, women earn about 36 per cent less income than men in Canada. Female lone parents represented 20.9

per cent of persons living with low income, compared with 7 per cent of male lone parents and 6 of couples with children.

Children and youth from households with lower incomes are at greater risk of experiencing food insecurity. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that more than one in seven Canadian children live in poverty. In 2011, children and youth under the age of 18 made up almost two-fifths (38 per cent) of Canadian food bank users.

Aboriginal peoples have high rates of food insecurity in Canada. About one in five (20.9 per cent) Aboriginal households living off-reserve is food-insecure—three times higher than the rate in non-Aboriginal households.

Their high rates of poverty contribute to the challenge of being able to afford and access sufficient safe and nutritious food. In addition, individuals living in remote or Northern regions face high transportation and food costs.

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58 Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, From Food Mail, 27.
59 Health Canada, Household Food Insecurity.
60 Ibid.
61 Williams, Women in Canada, 6.
62 Ibid., 21.
64 Food Banks Canada, HungerCount 2012.
65 Health Canada, Household Food Insecurity.
66 Power, “Conceptualizing Food Security.”
According to Health Canada, 12.6 per cent of recent immigrants were food-insecure in 2007–08, compared with 7.5 per cent of non-immigrant households and 7.8 per cent of non-recent immigrant households. Recent immigrant arrivals commonly face struggles that affect their food security. These include “unavailability or high costs of foods used in traditional diets, changes in lifestyle and working conditions, and pressures for integration to a new culture.” As a result, they often must change their diets, which can negatively affect their health.

The elderly population is at an increased risk of hunger and food insecurity because of “low incomes, poor health and limited mobility.” Elderly people suffering from health disabilities may be especially limited in their ability to travel (either by their own power or through private or public transportation) to food retail outlets.

CONCLUSION

Food insecurity continues to be a problem for a significant minority of Canadians. Almost 1 million Canadian households are unable to acquire the foods they need to maintain a healthy diet. Food insecurity is a function of ability to pay and the need to pay for the costs of food and non-food essentials. In addition, several socio-economic and other risk factors are linked to food insecurity. Each factor in itself is an indicator of an individual’s or a household’s likelihood of being food-insecure. When multiple factors are involved, the likelihood of food insecurity is multiplied for that individual or household. Consequently, addressing food insecurity challenges requires strategic solutions that are based on the everyday realities for those affected. The following chapter discusses current initiatives that are already working to reduce food insecurity in Canada.

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67 Health Canada, Household Food Insecurity.
68 Koç and Welsh, Food, Foodways.
69 Brink, Lack of Food Security, 15.
Chapter 4

Solutions to Improve Food Security

Chapter Summary

- Provincial and territorial efforts to address food security typically involve more than one government department and are multi-pronged, ranging from funding support for school-based feeding programs for children and youth, to support for community-based approaches that provide emergency relief and collective gardens and kitchens with an educational component.

- Comprehensive community efforts simultaneously provide emergency food supplies to people in need, education on healthy eating, community-building environments, and spaces for growing and harvesting healthy foods. They also advocate for policy changes to reduce poverty.

- Success in reducing poverty in Canada would lead to increased food security in affected households by increasing the amount of disposable household income and/or decreasing the costs of non-food essentials.

Household food insecurity is being addressed in several ways, and on several levels, in Canada. National, provincial, and territorial governments, as well as regional and municipal governments, contribute funding, research, information, and advice on addressing food security issues. Food industries also help by contributing food supplies, research and expertise, and funds for a wide variety of food security programs.¹ This chapter examines long- and short-term solutions to address food insecurity at the national, regional, and community levels. International efforts to stem domestic food insecurity are also highlighted for comparison purposes.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

NATIONAL LEVEL

Federal government efforts to address domestic and international food security issues on several fronts are summarized in Canada’s Action Plan for Food Security. (See box “Canada’s Action Plan for Food Security.”)

Success in reducing poverty in Canada would increase food security in affected households, by upping disposable household income and/or decreasing the financial burden of non-food essentials. In 2007, the National Council of Welfare recommended a national, long-term strategy for addressing poverty in Canada that included:²

- a national anti-poverty strategy with a long-term vision and measurable targets and timelines;

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¹ Interview findings.
Canada's Action Plan for Food Security

Canada's Action Plan for Food Security is Canada's response to the 1996 World Food Summit. At the Summit, the international community committed to achieving food security for all and eradicating hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing by half the number of undernourished people no later than 2015. The Action Plan committed Canada to six commitments: an enabling environment; access to food; sustainable agriculture; trade; emergency prevention and preparedness; and promoting investment.

Four progress reports on the Action Plan have been published, the last in 2006. In the fourth progress report, domestic household food insecurity issues are primarily addressed in the discussion of Commitment Two, access to food. Policies connected to realizing Commitment Two are aimed at eradicating poverty and inequality and improving physical and economic access by all, at all times, to sufficient, nutritionally adequate, and safe food and its effective utilization.

At the national level, initiatives such as the National Child Benefit and the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program serve lower-income families and vulnerable populations. Research projects on health indicators and development approaches to enhance food safety were also in the works at the time the fourth progress report was being published. Provincial, territorial, and civil society initiatives were under way with federal government funding and advice. These programs work at the grassroots level to address the risk factors of food insecurity. For example, Participatory Food Costing workshops were held in 2004 to support research that would address issues of food insecurity in Nova Scotia. Many of the programs listed were initiated in the year or two preceding publication of the last progress report (i.e., in 2004–05), and their long-term impacts are unclear.

Source: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

- a plan of action and budget that coordinates initiatives within and across governments and other partners;
- a government accountability structure for ensuring results and for consulting Canadians in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the actions that will affect them;
- a set of agreed-upon poverty indicators to plan, monitor change, and assess progress.

In recent decades, Canadian and U.S. governments have explored the idea of providing consumers with a Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI). Based on the idea of a negative income tax or refundable tax credit, a GAI strategy has the potential to reform social security systems. A test of the GAI concept was conducted in Dauphin, Manitoba, in the 1970s ("the Mincome experiment"). The Mincome experiment saw education completion rates increase and local hospitalization rates and physician claims decline, while the fertility rate remained stable. Although the participants received an income whether or not they worked, "the work disincentive evidence was found to be relatively insignificant." Due to high inflation and unemployment rates of that time, the Mincome experiment project’s budget fell short. The funds originally allocated for data analysis were largely spent on administering the project and providing the participants with income. As a result, much of the data collected during the four-year experiment were never analyzed. In the absence of compelling data, policy-makers did not pursue a GAI strategy in Canada.

A number of non-profit and civil society organizations are also working to stem food insecurity in Canada. These organizations contribute research and expertise, education, networking opportunities for stakeholder organizations, advocacy, programming support, and fundraising assistance. For example, Food Secure Canada (FSC) is a Canada-wide alliance of civil society organizations and individuals that strive to address food security through a wide range of approaches. FSC's purpose is to improve food security by engaging and supporting Canadians in creating a more sustainable and just food system.

REGIONAL LEVEL

Many of the programs that address food insecurity are available across Canada. In addition to these, various regional programs operate within Canada. These regional programs are customized to address factors

4 Ibid., 297.
5 National Council of Welfare, The Dollars and Sense, 35.
7 Segal, Guaranteed Annual Income," 49–51.
8 Food Secure Canada, Vision & Mission.
9 The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, Food Secure Canada.
that are especially relevant to the area. Examples of regional programs that address food insecurity are provincial/territorial programs and Northern programs.

Provincial/Territorial Programs

Each province and territory operates programs to address food security for its citizens. Multi-pronged approaches are typically used, involving more than one government department. Initiatives range from funding support for school-based feeding programs for children and youth, to support for community-based approaches that provide emergency relief, collective gardens and kitchens with an education component, and other innovative approaches. Selected examples follow.

In British Columbia, a multi-dimensional approach to addressing food insecurity issues was adopted as part of the ActNow BC healthy eating strategy. The British Columbia Ministry of Health supports food security in the province through community, regional, and provincial plans and activities to provide increased access to safe, culturally acceptable, and nutritionally adequate diets through a sustainable food system. Funding for several innovative programs aims to improve access to healthy foods for all members of the community while specifically striving to improve access for people with low incomes.10

Nova Scotia has one of the highest rates of food insecurity in Canada. To combat it, the Department of Health Promotion and Protection has developed long-term strategic initiatives, including several school-related policies to promote healthy eating and local foods.11 The Government of Nova Scotia has further committed to building food security through financial support to the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Security Projects, now the Nova Scotia Food Security Network, and by implementing Healthy Eating Nova Scotia.12 Ontario’s Northern School Fruit and Vegetable School Program, initiated in 2006–07, promotes awareness to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables by elementary school-aged children in parts of Northern Ontario. The program—a partnership of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), the Porcupine Health Unit, schools and local school boards, and the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion—provides fruit and vegetable snacks for 12,000 students in 61 schools.13

Other provincial initiatives focus on reducing poverty and major household expenditures. Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, launched in 2008, focuses on reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25 per cent over five years. Efforts in its first year moved 20,000 children out of poverty, a decrease of over 4 per cent in the number of children living in poverty.14 In addition, poverty rates for lone, female-parent households decreased from 43.2 per cent in 2008 to 35.2 per cent in 2009.15 Ontario’s Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (launched in 2010) aims to enable a more efficient, accessible provincial housing system. One tactic is to simplify the rent-geared-to-income assistance calculation process to leave tenants with more disposable income.16 In addition, a partnership has been established with Aboriginal communities to generate capital funding for Aboriginal-designed, -delivered, and -administered off-reserve housing programs in Ontario. The program will help about 880 families.17

10 Provincial Health Services Authority, and ActNow B.C. Perspectives, 11.
11 Epp, Provincial Approaches, 45.
12 Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, Healthy Communities.
13 Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association, Northern School Fruit and Vegetable Program.
14 Government of Ontario, Breaking the Cycle, ii.
15 Ibid.
16 Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Long-Term Affordable Housing.

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The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to helping residents achieve food security, driving its efforts primarily through programs to assist households with low income and provide low-income housing. In addition, Saskatchewan’s Child Nutrition and Development Program (CNDP) provides funding to “promote good nutrition practices for children, help develop independent living skills and provide opportunities for communities to take ownership of local food security initiatives.” In 2010–11, $2.3 million of CNDP funding went to community-based organizations and school divisions. Saskatchewan’s Ministry of Health also addresses food insecurity through its Population Health Promotion Strategy (2004), whose long-term food security objectives are to:

- increase opportunities for people to enjoy more nutritious food in homes and community settings;
- reduce the economic, geographic, social, and cultural barriers that limit healthy eating habits;
- advocate for food policies that promote and protect the health of Saskatchewan residents.

**Northern Programs**

Income assistance programs in the North are funded and delivered by national and territorial governments, private organizations, not-for-profit organizations, and charities. Their goal, in part, is to provide Northern residents with improved access to healthy food.

The Nutrition North Canada (NNC) program, funded by the federal government, replaced the Food Mail program in 2011. Nutrition North Canada subsidizes a variety of foods in remote Northern communities. The subsidies are offered to food retailers in specific communities to enable them to reduce their prices. The program mainly subsidizes three categories of food:

- perishable foods (most nutritious options get a higher subsidy, such as fruit, vegetables, milk, eggs, meat, and cheese);
- country or traditional foods commercially processed in the North;
- direct (or “personal”) orders.

The Nutrition North Canada program has substantially reduced participants’ food costs in participating communities. For example, the cost of an NFB in Iqaluit for a family of four in 2006 was $1,100 per month (i.e., $275 per week). However, the cost of a Revised Northern Food Basket for Iqaluit was $400 as of March 2012, due to subsidies from the Nutrition North Canada program.

Harvester Support programs provide Northern Aboriginal communities with financial assistance in the form of hunting equipment, including snowmobiles, boats, and motors. These programs are offered in collaboration with government and other regional organizations.

**Income assistance programs in the North are funded and delivered by national and territorial governments, private and not-for-profit organizations, and charities.**

Harvester Support efforts facilitate the harvesting of wild species. In the Northwest Territories, this program assists with over 60 per cent of the eligible costs of hunting and harvesting activities, up to a maximum of $3,000. With better access to hunting equipment, Aboriginal populations can acquire more traditional foods that are high in nutrients.

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18 Government of Saskatchewan, *Child Nutrition*.
19 Ibid.
21 Nutrition North Canada, *About the Program*.
22 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, *Northern Food Basket*.
23 Nutrition North Canada, *Cost of Revised Northern Food Basket*.
24 Northwest Territories Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, *Programs and Services*.
**SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS**

Governments, community groups, private organizations, and individuals have established programs to help address the immediate needs of affected individuals and families. Several types of programs to address food security in the short term are already employed in Canada. The following types are examined below:

- free access programs;
- public access programs;
- comprehensive programs that address a range of factors.

**FREE ACCESS PROGRAMS**

Programs that provide free access to food include food banks, school feeding programs, and food rescue programs. They are delivered with the assistance of community members, as well as public and private funding.

**Food Banks**

Food banks are a major source of assistance for food-insecure Canadians. Food bank programs distribute free food, typically through food pantries, soup kitchens, and other community agencies. Canadian food bank usage is at a record level, suggesting a higher need for assistance with obtaining food, or greater awareness of food banks as a resource. Food Banks Canada’s annual usage survey showed that 882,188 individuals, or 2.5 per cent of the Canadian population, were assisted by food banks across Canada during one month in 2012.25

Food banks rely on food producers, processors, retailers, and individuals to donate supplies.26 Demand typically exceeds supply.27 And their already limited supplies are declining: 55 per cent of Canadian food banks had to reduce the amount of food provided to each household last year, and 14 per cent actually ran out of food.28 In addition, their supplies are often of a limited variety and not fresh,29 since non-perishable and heavily processed foods keep for longer periods on the shelf. It is more difficult for food banks and users to access fresh and nutritious food items such as milk, chicken, fruit, and vegetables for a healthy, balanced diet. Although food banks answer demands for immediate food insecurity relief, their resources are often not sufficient to meet the requirements for a nutritious diet.

In a study of one of the largest food banks in Ontario, the amount and nutritional content of food hampers provided was compared with Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs)30 and Eating Well With Canada’s Food Guide.31 The results showed that only grain products among the food groups met the recommended number of daily servings.32 Further, “the micronutrient content of the food hampers, per person per day, varied widely and sufficient DRIs were available for only 36 per cent of the micronutrients analyzed.”33

While food banks are important community resources that provide immediate and emergency relief for food-insecure households, they are not structured to remedy long-term food insecurity or to provide for all of an individual’s or family’s food needs. Instead, they are localized, short-term stop-gap solutions to food insecurity. The food bank model does not contribute substantially to sustainable change or to improving income levels, or to other means of helping users become food-secure on their own.

**School Food Programs**

School meal programs provide students with free food (or in some cases, subsidized food) within elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as in churches and other community centres. The food is provided through government subsidies and by local organizations and individuals and is organized within the schools (or other settings) by volunteers and teachers. While some programs offer free food to students, others provide nutritious meals to students for a subsidized fee. In some cases, the fees are determined on a sliding scale.

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27 Ibid., 177.
30 For more information, see Health Canada at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/reference/index-eng.php.
32 Irwin and others, “Can Food Banks Sustain,” 18.
33 Ibid.
in accordance with the family income. Parents or guardians then pay fees according to their ability. However, all students receive the same meals, regardless of how much was paid.

Organizations that implement school meal programs at a national level include the Breakfast Clubs of Canada, Farm to School, and Breakfast for Learning. In 2010–11, the Breakfast Clubs served over 107,000 children in 1,034 different schools across Canada. Farm to School is a national school-based program that connects schools (K–12) and local farms to ensure children have access to fresh, local, nutritious, safe, and culturally appropriate foods while at school. Part of the broader Farm to Cafeteria movement, Farm to School’s many initiatives currently serve over 20,000 students in British Columbia alone. Breakfast for Learning provides grants to other organizations and programs to facilitate feeding programs in schools at a community level. In 2011–12, Breakfast for Learning “funded 4,431 breakfast, lunch and snack programs operating within over 2,400 school/community sites, supporting more than 430,000 children and youth with the provision of over 67 million nourishing meals and snacks.”

Provinces and cities also fund programs for school meal programs:

- The City of Toronto offers a number of grants each year to assist organizations and schools with establishing feeding program in schools.
- Newfoundland and Labrador supports the Kids Eat Smart Foundation. This charitable organization provides funding for communities to run their own school nutrition programs. In 2012, 216 school feeding programs gave some 52,000 students access to nutritional programs.
- The Department of Health of Prince Edward Island provided the Healthy Eating Alliance with $300,000 to develop school nutrition policies and support school breakfast feeding programs between 2007 and 2009.
- The Ontario Student Nutrition Program provides up to 15 per cent of funding to local program providers for purchasing nutritious food for children and youth. Programs may be for breakfast, lunch, or snacks, but must meet qualifying criteria such as universal accessibility for children.

School food programs are found most often in disadvantaged areas with a higher-than-average proportion of food-insecure households.

School food programs are found most often in disadvantaged areas with a higher-than-average proportion of food-insecure households. They provide children and youth with access to nutritious food, in order to improve or maintain their health as well as increase their ability to learn and do well in school. However, they are vulnerable to shortages, as they rely heavily on contributions from the community and government. Also, the food offered does not always provide the best nutritional value. Moreover, such programs are rarely assessed for effectiveness in reducing food insecurity among recipients. Some studies have linked school meal programs to negative consequences, including “perpetuating inequities, stigmatizing participants, disempowering and excluding families [from meal choice decisions], and creating dependent clients.” Given the

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34 Breakfast Clubs of Canada, Activity Report, 6, 9.
35 Public Health Association of BC, What Is Farm to School?
36 Breakfast for Learning, About Us.
37 Ibid.
38 City of Toronto, Healthy Schools.
39 Kids Eat Smart Foundation, About Us.
40 Centre for Science in the Public Interest, A National Nutritious School Meal Program.
41 Ontario Student Nutrition Program, Eligibility Requirements.
42 The N.B. Common Front, Food Banks, 7.
43 Williams and others, “The ‘Wonderfulness,’” 163; McIntyre and Dayle, “Exploratory Analysis”; McIntyre, Travers, and Dayle, “Children’s Feeding Programs.”
44 Williams and others, “The ‘Wonderfulness,’” 168; McIntyre and Dayle, “Exploratory Analysis”; McIntyre, Travers, and Dayle, “Children’s Feeding Programs”; Hay, School-Based Feeding; McIntyre, Raine, and Dayle, “The Institutionalization.”
Second Harvest: A Model for Managing Excess Food

Second Harvest is the largest organization in Canada to redistribute food to people in need. It works with Toronto-based grocery retailers, food manufacturers, food distributors, the Ontario Food Terminal, the St. Lawrence Market, event planners, hotels, and restaurants by picking up donated and excess food that would have otherwise been thrown out. The food that is rescued is primarily perishable: fruit, vegetables, meat, cheese, juice, milk, and more. Everything delivered is edible food that has been donated because it is close to expiry and likely will not sell; is part of overstock; has been mislabelled, discontinued, or discounted; or has damaged packaging. Second Harvest then delivers the rescued food to 215 social service agencies across Toronto, including food banks, meal programs, children’s breakfast programs, community centres, drop-in centres, summer camps, women’s shelters, homeless shelters, and centres for addiction and mental health treatment.

Second Harvest represents a model of managing and using food otherwise destined to be wasted. The programs developed by this organization shift food distribution mechanisms to meet the needs of food-insecure households. Through its programs, Second Harvest has been able to:

- provide more than 18,000 meals to people in need in Toronto;
- help foster community engagement;
- deliver 6.8 million pounds of food to people living in vulnerable neighbourhoods;
- collaborate with Maple Leaf, which donated 680 turkeys in 2011 for the annual turkey drive.

Some of the rescued food is distributed through agencies that provide short-term, emergency food supplies, such as food banks. Other Second Harvest programs address multiple food insecurity factors such as low income, geographic isolation, and lack of transportation. For example, Second Harvest’s SHOP (Second Harvest Outreach Program) initiative is a partnership involving community groups such as food banks and health centres that distribute excess fresh fruit and vegetables in a farmers’ market-style environment. Registered food recipients are invited to shop for quantities of produce based on the size of their families. Those in need can register through their local community agency or food bank. All the produce is free to recipients and is donated by the Ontario Food Terminal, along with other food donors, and delivered by Second Harvest.

Reliance on donations is Second Harvest’s biggest challenge to sustainability. The organization does not depend on government support. Calls for food, time, equipment, and services, to maintain and raise awareness of the programs and needs, are ongoing.

1 Second Harvest, 2010-2011 Gratitude Report.

General feeling of altruism that surrounds school food programs, it is difficult to measure their overall impacts as compared with their goals.

Food Rescue Programs

Food rescue and food recovery initiatives are programs that redistribute food that would have otherwise gone to waste. Edible food is gathered from, or donated by, producers, wholesalers, grocery stores, restaurants, and hotels and then redistributed for free to people in need. Food rescue programs distribute food through food banks and other localized settings. In Canada, food rescue programs are typically delivered by community members on a volunteer basis. In addition, some organizations collect food on a larger scale for redistribution. For example, Second Harvest is a Toronto-based organization that redistributes food to community agencies in Toronto.  

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1 Second Harvest, 2010-2011 Gratitude Report.

Quest is British Columbia’s largest not-for-profit food exchange program. The Quest Food Exchange is a food rescue organization that operates out of a Vancouver warehouse. Donated food is collected on a daily basis from local restaurants, hotels, dairies, bakeries, grocers, and wholesalers and then redistributed to those in need through food banks, community kitchens, over 300 social service providers, and to Quest’s own mini-chain of low-cost grocery stores. The grocery stores are not open to the public. Instead, individuals

45 Second Harvest, Home.
46 Quest Food Exchange, About Quest Food Exchange.
are referred to the outlets by social service agencies.\textsuperscript{47} While only good-quality food is approved for redistribution, much of the food on hand is close to its expiry date or perishable.

Quest’s efforts to stem food insecurity address risk factors of low income, geographic isolation, and lack of transportation. The organization is challenged by its dependence on volunteers and donations of food, equipment, and services. Moreover, rising food prices in general are increasingly causing restaurants and other food outlets to cut costs and reduce excess food, thereby reducing the amount of food they have available for donation.\textsuperscript{48}

\textbf{PUBLIC ACCESS PROGRAMS}

Many food assistance programs in Canada provide public access to food. They offer food at a reduced cost, made possible through grants from government or organizations. These programs are delivered with the assistance of community members and government funding. Key examples of these programs include community gardens and kitchens, community greenhouses, Good Food boxes, community shared agriculture, and Meals on Wheels.

\textbf{Community Gardens and Kitchens}

Many types of food assistance programs have been developed through community initiatives. Well-known examples include community kitchens and community gardens. These kinds of programs bring together members of the local community, who pool their resources. In community gardens, individuals, families, and organizations contribute time, skills, labour, and resources such as seeds, fertilizer, or tools to create and manage a common garden. Community kitchens bring together individuals, families, and organizations who donate time, skills, labour, and resources such as utensils or food supplies to collectively prepare meals. (See box “The Urban Aboriginal Intergenerational Community Kitchen Garden” for an example.)

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\textbf{The Urban Aboriginal Intergenerational Community Kitchen Garden}

The Urban Aboriginal Intergenerational Community Kitchen Garden is an example of a community kitchen/garden combination developed for and by Aboriginal people. The project offers First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people living in an urban area of low employment levels, high levels of disease, and a legacy of intergenerational residential school effects with the opportunity to grow and prepare their own fresh produce. Transportation to the garden is provided for the Eastern Vancouver participants who plant, tend, and harvest the garden produce. During each visit, participants share a meal in the on-site community kitchen. Crops grown include fruit, vegetables, and herbs—the latter used for cooking, traditional medicine, and ceremonial purposes. In addition to providing access to culturally acceptable food, the project has demonstrated strength in building community and social support, and in educating users about gardening, food processing, preservation, and knowledge of food system issues. The project also creates a safe space for Elders and youth to interact, to promote healing through gardening.

Sources: Vancouver Native Health Society, Garden Project, Public Health Agency of Canada, Urban Aboriginal Community Kitchen Garden Project.

Due to their grassroots nature, it is difficult to establish how many people community gardens and kitchens serve. A recent estimate put the number of community kitchens in Canada at 2,500.\textsuperscript{49} Community gardens and kitchens address food insecurity factors of low income, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and low food literacy. Such initiatives allow people to combine their resources with other local community members to provide healthy and nutritious meals. They also facilitate cooperation and social interaction among community members and contribute to a sense of social well-being.\textsuperscript{50} In addition, community gardens and kitchens provide opportunities to improve food literacy, as children and adults work together to learn about, grow, and prepare their own food.

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\textsuperscript{47} Quest Food Exchange, \textit{Not-for-Profit Grocery Markets}.

\textsuperscript{48} Shore, “Food Rescue Heroes.”

\textsuperscript{49} Engler-Stringer, “Exploring Food Security,” 75.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 80–82.
Community Green Houses

Building community greenhouses to provide local, fresh produce is an innovative solution to food insecurity that is being leveraged in different regions across Canada. For example, the Iqaluit Greenhouse Community Society was developed by area residents and is managed by the society’s members. The greenhouse acts as a local community garden that provides fresh produce in a physical environment that does not accommodate a traditional outdoor garden or growing season. The structure of the greenhouse was built with funding from the Government of Nunavut and the property was donated by the Nunavut Research Institute. The partnership with the Nunavut Research Institute ensures that the greenhouse is available for research purposes as well as a source of food for the community. Membership to the greenhouse society is $25 a month, plus a $65 fee to rent a plot each season. These fees are used to cover the cost of soil, garden supplies, and insurance. This model provides a framework for community and government collaboration.

The College of the Rockies in Cranbrook, B.C., operates the Community Greenhouse and has programs for children, families, and seniors. Support for the greenhouse comes from the federal government, the Government of British Columbia, Investment Agriculture, and the Columbia Basin Trust. Participants benefit from the opportunity to grow their own produce locally and for an extended growing season. They state that they also learn valuable techniques for growing, harvesting, and preparing fresh produce by participating in the community greenhouse. Initiatives such as these address food insecurity factors of low income, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, and low food literacy.

GOOD FOOD BOXES

“Good Food Boxes” are the products of community-based programs where containers of food are made available to households on a regular basis for a subsidized price. These boxes typically include fresh produce from local farmers and producers. They encourage community members to take advantage of locally grown fresh produce and offer food-insecure households with access to nutritious foods for less than they would pay at a retail outlet. Examples of Good Food Box programs in Canada include the following:

- The Community Kitchen Program of Calgary operates a Good Food Box program that buys bulk quantities of fresh produce directly from farmers and distributors. Standard-sized boxes of produce are delivered according to a city-wide and surrounding-areas schedule to 160 centralized depot locations such as churches, community centres, senior centres, and apartment complexes. Participants preorder their boxes of produce from their community depot. Once a month, the boxes are delivered by Community Kitchen staff and volunteers to each depot. With a goal of addressing the needs of marginalized Calgarians, the program helps participants budget their finances and access cost-effective, healthy, nutritious food.

- Toronto’s FoodShare operates a Good Food Box program as a non-profit fresh fruit and vegetable distribution system. It operates similarly to a large buying club with centralized buying and coordination. Individuals place orders for boxes with volunteer coordinators in their neighbourhood and receive a box of fresh produce on a weekly, biweekly, or monthly cycle. Customers benefit from the cost savings of bulk buying and the time saved by this distribution method.

- Saskatoon’s Good Food Box program is the second-largest in Canada, offering up to 2,000 boxes a month of fresh, nutritious foods at an affordable price. Individual families, as part of neighbourhood-based groups, each with a volunteer coordinator, pay for and order food boxes ahead of time. Program

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51 Rogers, “A Greenhouse Grows in Iqaluit.”
52 College of the Rockies, Community Greenhouse.
53 College of the Rockies, Winter Harvest Research Project.
54 Community Kitchen Program of Calgary, Good Food Box.
55 Community Kitchen Program of Calgary, About Us.
56 FoodShare, Good Food Box.
staff purchase foods in bulk from local producers and wholesalers. Volunteers and staff pack the boxes, which are then delivered to the neighbourhood depots. The boxes also contain recipes and information about food and the food system.57

A 2004 study of the Saskatoon Good Food Box program asked participants about its effectiveness. The results indicated that the value for money was good and that household consumption of healthy, nutritious food (e.g., fresh produce) had increased through the program.58 However, a lack of transportation to pick up the boxes was an issue for some.59 The high dependence on volunteer neighbourhood coordinators was also noted.60

Community Shared Agriculture

Good Food Boxes are a variation on the Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) approach to growing and purchasing food. In the CSA model, producers and consumers work cooperatively: The producer grows food for a predetermined group of consumers who enter into an agreement of purchase with the grower prior to the start of the season. The producer gains a guaranteed market; the consumer gains high-quality, fresh food as it becomes available.61 CSA farms “usually offer weekly delivery or pick-up of vegetables and/or meat. Sometimes CSAs can also include flowers, fruit, herbs and eggs.”62 The producer-consumer relationship is strengthened through the increased involvement of consumers volunteering on the farm.

Meals on Wheels

Meals on Wheels is an international system of food preparation and delivery to people who are faced with mobility constraints or are unable to cook food. Delivering ready-made meals is especially helpful to the elderly, the infirm, or those otherwise unable to prepare a nutritious meal. The program is highly dependent on volunteers, especially for delivery services. In many cases, the service caters to the low-income elderly. Offered throughout Canada, the program is available in urban and rural locations. While most Meals on Wheels programs deliver meals hot and ready-to-eat, some also deliver frozen meals in microwavable containers. The cost of meals provided varies depending on the organization providing the service. Examples of Canadian service providers, and their meal prices, include the following:

- The East York (Toronto) Meals on Wheels: A three-course dinner meal costs $4.25.63
- Meals on Wheels of Winnipeg: A three-course meal costs $6.00.64
- Meals on Wheels of Calgary: The cost of meals depends on an individual’s income level.65

Meals on Wheels provides healthy food options, largely by including fresh produce. Programs such as this encourage food-insecure households to proactively budget for meals and to develop healthy meal plans.

COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMS

Food insecurity is often a multi-dimensional issue calling for a comprehensive approach. Many factors interrelate, such as low income or geographic isolation and lack of transportation. It makes sense, then, to address multiple factors through efforts to simultaneously provide an emergency food supply to people in need; education on healthy eating; community-building environments; spaces for growing and harvesting healthy foods; and advocating for policy changes to reduce poverty. Two examples of comprehensive models that address a range of factors are Community Food Centres Canada and FoodShare Toronto.

Community Food Centres Canada

Community Food Centres Canada provides ideas, resources, and a partnership approach to partner organizations across Canada that wish to establish community food centres (CFCs).66 CFCs bring people...
The Stop Community Food Centre

The Stop Community Food Centre is a CFC operating in Toronto, Ontario. It develops programs and activities for community members and provides them with food assistance, education on nutrition, and a social environment. Revenue sources for the Centre include foundations, individuals, corporations, special events, donated food, and government funding. The projects and services it provides address several factors associated with food insecurity:

- **A drop-in:** where members can enjoy nutritious foods.
- **A food bank:** that provides three-day support of food every month.
- **An urban agriculture initiative:** that includes an 8,000 square foot garden, a community garden, and a greenhouse.
- **A community cooking program:** where people prepare nutritious meals together and socialize.
- **Bake ovens and markets:** where people bake together. The Centre also hosts a year-round farmers’ market.

An after-school program: that engages children ages 8 to 12 in fun activities, teaching them how to cook and grow food.

- **Sustainable food systems education:** that teaches school children where their food comes from and provides them with cooking and growing skills through fun activities.
- **Community action:** that supports community members to speak out against hunger and poverty through activism.

The Centre assesses the impact of its programs annually through qualitative and quantitative analysis. Data collected include information on how many people were served, how much food was distributed, how many volunteers and volunteer hours were involved, etc. In addition, an annual survey of program participants is conducted about program effectiveness and general feedback about the Centre. In 2011, 92 per cent of survey respondents reported that the Centre played an important role in helping them cope with their hunger and food insecurity. Further, 51 per cent of participants indicated that coming to the Centre had a positive impact on their health.

FoodShare Toronto

FoodShare Toronto is a not-for-profit community organization in Toronto that has focused on helping people acquire healthy and nutritious foods for over 25 years. The organization provides a sustainable and comprehensive approach to food insecurity through a diverse range of programs. FoodShare Toronto impacts over 145,000 people each month through its programs. The organization’s objectives are to:

- decrease hunger through improving access to affordable food;
- promote health through the consumption of nutritious, safe food;
- increase the sustainability of the food system by supporting local, safe farming;
- build community capacity and self-determination by promoting collective activities;
- provide scalable participatory models to solve food access problems;
- offer support around the production, distribution, and consumption of safe food.

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1. The Stop Community Food Centre, Frequently Asked Questions.
2. The Stop Community Food Centre, Why The Stop Matters.

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67 Community Food Centres Canada, What Is a Community Food Centre?

68 Community Food Centres Canada, The Local Community Food Centre and The Table Community Food Centre.

69 FoodShare, 2011 Annual Report.

70 FoodShare, Strategic Plan 2009–2011.

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FoodShare Toronto offers the following programs:

- **Good Food Box**: This program enables families to purchase boxes of fresh produce from local farmers for a subsidized fee. Customers pay between $13 and $34, depending on the size of the food box.

- **School programs**: FoodShare supports student nutrition programs in the City of Toronto. Through its partners, FoodShare helps serve 141,000 meals and snacks to children and youth in schools and community sites each school day.

- **Community gardens**: FoodShare has developed many community gardens in low-income neighbourhoods, city parks, schools, and community sites. Members living in low-income and urban areas can use these gardens to grow their own plants, fruit, and vegetables.

- **Community kitchens**: FoodShare operates a number of collective kitchens. It has also helped set up community kitchens with First Nations families in a public school. Family and community members are able to come together to cook large quantities of food that is shared through these kitchens.

- **Food policy programs**: FoodShare advocates for innovative and just food policies that target poverty, health, and environmental issues that will improve the state of food security.

- **Training centre**: FoodShare developed a training centre that provides community members and organizations with the tools and knowledge necessary to develop their own food security programs. It delivers workshops, publishes newsletters on the topic, runs a resource library, and provides interactive resources through its online “toolbox.”

In 2011, FoodShare Toronto:

- provided 43,000 Good Food Boxes to 7,000 families;
- delivered affordable fresh vegetables and fruit to 285 Student Nutrition, school, and community programs—feeding over 67,000 children weekly;
- delivered 36 hands-on workshops, networking, and training events to 1,600 people on 17 topics related to community gardens, community kitchens, and good food markets;
- facilitated four new community gardens working with community groups and Toronto Community Housing;
- led 60 community kitchens, providing training and community development opportunities for 700 individuals;
- taught 113 workshops reaching 1,166 parents in Mandarin, Spanish, Tamil, and English on how to make healthy, cost-effective baby and toddler food;
- delivered hands-on food literacy activities and workshops to 3,147 students across Toronto, and shared dynamic resources and lesson plans with 782 teachers and community leaders.

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**Programs that bring members of the community together generate a sense of togetherness and raise awareness of food insecurity issues in each respective community.**

Through its varied programs, FoodShare Toronto addresses a number of factors associated with food insecurity. By offering several options for residents in local communities to access cost-effective food, it speaks to the factors of low income, geographic isolation, and lack of transportation. In addition, opportunities for children, families, and youth to learn about what constitutes healthy food, and how to budget for and prepare healthy food, improves food literacy. Programs that bring members of the community together generate a sense of togetherness and raise awareness of food insecurity issues in each respective community. Through community-building efforts, the programs empower local neighbourhoods to strive for sustainable solutions to food insecurity.

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**INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES**

Canada is not alone in experiencing food insecurity issues within its borders. Other countries have implemented innovative models from which Canada might learn:

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71 FoodShare, Program.

72 FoodShare, 2011 Annual Report.
The U.S. departments of Agriculture, Treasury, and Health and Human Services combine resources to increase access to healthy, affordable food through various programs. Thus, the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) uses a coupon system to provide fresh, locally grown fruit and vegetables; health care referrals; and nutrition education at no cost to low-income pregnant women, new mothers, and young children who are at nutritional risk. In addition, the U.S. federal government announced the $400-million Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) in 2010 to provide funding to support food access projects in underserved communities.

The National School Lunch Program in the United States provided 31.8 million school children with free or low-cost lunches at a cost of $11.1 billion for the 2011 fiscal year.

Food 2030 articulates the United Kingdom’s first comprehensive food strategy in over 50 years. It provides guidance to farmers, the fishing industry, food processors, retailers, the food service industry, government, local and regional bodies, consumers, research and education bodies, and third-sector (civil society) organizations on how to achieve a sustainable and secure food system by 2030.

The Australian government is developing Australia’s first-ever national food plan to “foster a sustainable, globally competitive, resilient food supply that supports access to nutritious and affordable food.”

CONCLUSION

Throughout the years, numerous programs have been established to alleviate food insecurity. Many of these were intended to provide better access to food for food-insecure households. They all have helped to some degree by providing hungry Canadians with food options. Yet, many of them are limited in reach. Some programs serve only certain population groups in specific geographical locations. In other cases, they offer emergency relief without a more sustainable and long-term approach to alleviating food insecurity.

In addition, many programs do not explicitly measure the effects, outcomes, or impacts of their efforts on reducing food insecurity. While data capture is not always reasonable or realistic, the absence of such information makes it hard to determine program effectiveness and where to make further investments of money and resources.

Despite all the efforts being made, some 2 million Canadians are still food-insecure. The next chapter discusses what more could be done to improve the state of household food security in Canada and provides recommendations for action.

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73 United States Department of Agriculture, WIC Farmers’ Market.
74 U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Obama Administration Details.
75 United States Department of Agriculture, National School Lunch Program.
76 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Food 2030.
77 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, National Food Plan.
Chapter 5

Recommendations

Chapter Summary

- A comprehensive approach to food insecurity should include short-term solutions that address immediate needs and long-term solutions to build a sustainable food-secure state for Canadians.
- A pan-Canadian school meal program should be established to help ensure that children and youth have access to sufficient safe and nutritious foods in their everyday settings.
- Governments can collaborate with and encourage more businesses to participate in efforts to bring fresh food to local communities at affordable prices.
- Governments and businesses should collaborate to further reduce food costs in Northern regions and improve the availability of food to residents in the North.

Substantial efforts have already been made to improve the state of food security in Canada. Governments, businesses, community organizations, and other groups have enacted policies and programs to address the various factors influencing household food insecurity. Yet, 2 million people in Canada are still food-insecure. Multiple issues still need to be resolved before universal food security can hope to be reached. Overall, strategies to alleviate food insecurity for the long term should be holistic, taking multiple issues into account. Governments, industry, communities, and individuals all have roles to play in ensuring that all households in Canada are food-secure.

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

NEEDS OF LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

Households with low income levels struggle with the basic necessities of life, including shelter and food. Low income is a key factor in food insecurity, as a lack of funds prevents individuals from accessing and purchasing food for their households. Many of the programs and initiatives that focus on reducing food insecurity provide households with easier access to food, but do not address the long-term problem of an ongoing shortage of household funds for essentials. There are a number of government subsidies, tax credits, and other means of assistance available to qualified individuals and households. These efforts help households, with low income levels, provide for the basic necessities, but also fall short of being long-term strategies for change.

NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Children and youth are over-represented among food-insecure individuals in Canada. Despite the efforts already being made to provide better access food to families, some children continue to suffer from food insecurity and malnourishment. Although there are several good school-feeding programs operating in
Canada, it is the only G8 country without a national school-feeding program. A national school nutrition program would help to improve nutritional outcomes for food-insecure children.

NEEDS OF NORTHERN POPULATIONS

The costs of food and hunting in the North remain very high, even after existing subsidy programs are taken into consideration. Those living in remote locations with an extreme climate are vulnerable due to a very short local growing season and high transportation costs for non-local foods. Further, some foods that were formerly subsidized by the Food Mail program are no longer included under the Nutrition North Canada program. As a result, the price of some important food items has risen significantly. For example, in Arctic Bay, it costs $27.79 for margarine and $19.49 for a brick of cheese.\(^1\) Costs have also risen for cheese spreads, jam, honey, and pastas, and other products that are no longer on the list of subsidized food.\(^2\) In addition, since the subsidies are directed at retailers, market prices can vary significantly.

STRATEGIES FOR FOOD SECURITY

Achieving food security depends on removing barriers that make it difficult for households to access sufficient safe and nutritious food. Canadians need a systematic and sustainable approach to alleviating domestic household food insecurity. A comprehensive approach should include a mix of short-term solutions that address immediate needs and long-term solutions to build a sustainable food-secure future for all Canadians.

A successful model for improving food security in Canada will address the roles of food supply and demand in resolving food security issues. Roles and responsibilities for governments, civil society, consumers, and industry should be clear and acceptable to all parties in order to obtain their needed participation. A comprehensive, national approach to improving household food security should consider the following recommendations for short- and long-term solutions:

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS

While working toward the long-term goal of eradicating food insecurity in Canadian households, short-term measures will be needed to fill food security gaps.

Efforts will continue to be needed to provide immediate and emergency food supplies to food-insecure households; easier access to affordable and nutritious food; and households with the tools and ability to acquire their own food. Expanding on successful models of food security programs and adopting innovative approaches will lead to higher success rates in the future. Specific recommendations include the following:

1. Implement a pan-Canadian school nutrition program.

Ensuring that children and youth have access to sufficient safe and nutritious foods in their everyday settings is critical to reducing food insecurity for this vulnerable population group.

National school meal programs are used in each of the other G8 countries as a practical means of reaching food-insecure school-age children directly to offset hunger and insufficient nutrition.

Provincial and territorial governments should implement a pan-Canadian school nutrition program comprising provincial- and territorial-wide school nutrition programs in each of the 13 jurisdictions in order to address food insecurity for children and youth. The program should provide and manage funding for each school or school board to develop a nutrition program for its students. Payment for school meal programs should be based on the income level of each individual participating family. Households or families with lower incomes should be required to pay only a minimal amount at most, so that all children in need have the opportunity to receive the same type of nutrition at a cost their families can afford. Ongoing assessments should be part of the program design, to determine the real impacts of the school nutrition programs on reducing food insecurity for children and youth.

1. Wingrove, “Grocery Bills Spike.”
2. Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, From Food Mail.
2. **Support government/industry/community collaborations to make food more accessible to food-insecure households.**

Collaborative efforts can resolve many of the large and complex challenges of food insecurity. Governments, industries, and community organizations should collaborate with resources and knowledge to develop sustainable ways to make food accessible to food-insecure households.

Governments can contribute funding for community programs and tax credits for businesses that participate in community programs. Governments can also provide support, such as expertise or assistance with marketing or managing community food security efforts. This would help to expand the scale of local programs with a track record of success in improving food security. Community groups, organizations, and agencies are well-suited to organize and operate food security programs because of their local knowledge of food needs and potential food suppliers. Excellent models of community programs, such as community gardens and kitchens, greenhouses, food rescue, and others, should be expanded or replicated in communities that could benefit from food security interventions.

**Excellent models of community programs should be expanded or replicated in communities that could benefit from food security interventions.**

Comprehensive food supply or access models work well in lower-income communities with sufficient resources. They offer a range of options for those experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity. Ensuring emergency relief food supplies is a fundamental requirement in a community where severe food insecurity is prevalent. Other avenues to obtain free or low-cost food—including community gardens and kitchens, food rescue operations, and others—afford users the ability to make choices around their food budgets and meal planning. Having options is important to preserve the dignity, independence, and self-confidence of people experiencing food insecurity.

In addition, comprehensive food supply models often incorporate efforts to improve food literacy, such as through the inclusion of recipes in a Good Food Box or growing food in a community garden or greenhouse. When families and children improve their food literacy, they improve their knowledge and understanding of how to budget for, choose, and prepare nutritious meals as part of a healthy lifestyle.

The excess supply of edible food that is found in most communities could be better managed for redistribution to those in need. Businesses such as restaurants, hotels, caterers, and retail food outlets should be approached about volunteer participation in community food security efforts, such as food rescue or markets for lower-income shoppers. Raising awareness of the benefits of participating in local food security efforts will help businesses see how they can make a difference. A better understanding of why some businesses decline to participate in community food security initiatives would also help in creating more effective marketing messages for them. Further research on effective models of community programs should be conducted and the results widely shared with potential organizers and supporters.

Governments can work with industry to reduce food insecurity.

- Governments should collaborate with and encourage more producers to participate in efforts to bring fresh food to local communities at affordable prices, such as farmer’s markets and community-supported agriculture approaches.

- Governments and businesses should collaborate to further reduce the cost of food in Northern regions and improve the availability of food to residents.

- Governments and food sector businesses should explore innovative international models, such as food vouchers and coupons, for low-income households. Food vouchers could be provided by governments to enable low-income households to purchase healthy foods. Businesses, such as grocery stores and local markets, could work with community agencies to offer coupons to households in need.

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3 Local food strategies are discussed in another CFIC report.
This could increase a business’s clientele base and encourage people to buy from the participating business.

- Governments and industry leaders should consider developing more grocery stores and supermarkets in “food deserts” and remote or low-income neighbourhoods (as is done in the U.S.), consistent with profitable operation. One possibility is to implement “mini” grocery outlets. Food businesses could expand their reach while catering to the needs of some of the smaller communities.

- Similarly, governments should consider providing convenience stores with subsidies to offer fresh produce. In many low-income neighborhoods, residents have easy access to local shops and convenience stores, but these typically do not offer many healthy options. Providing these retailers with a “fresh produce subsidy” would enable them to sell fresh produce at a reasonable cost to residents in the area.

These programs create opportunities for businesses to reach larger population groups. Such efforts could provide whole neighbourhoods with better access to fresh, nutritious foods. Collaborative efforts to analyze and evaluate the best approaches to address the household food security issues in relevant jurisdictions are called for.

3. Increase support for outreach efforts to the isolated and at-risk.

Outreach to mitigate food insecurity for isolated and at-risk populations is especially beneficial. Some at-risk population groups, including Aboriginal peoples, lone-parent families, women, children, recent immigrants, and the elderly, already benefit concurrently from multiple food security programs. For instance, recent immigrant women and children who are part of single-parent households benefit from social assistance/income support programs as well as local community efforts such as food banks, community gardens, or good food boxes.

However, some individuals are not currently served by food security improvement efforts. Individuals and households experiencing food insecurity may be challenged by different factors, such as low income or a lack of access to transportation, even if they live in the same community. Food security efforts that address a single factor will not help all those in need in these cases. Instead, comprehensive programs are the most practical way of addressing multiple factors for multiple at-risk population groups. When comprehensive programs (i.e., that offer a range of options to address food security issues) are not feasible, programs that address the challenges affecting as many at-risk population groups as possible should be the priority.

Governments, businesses, and community organizations can help by researching and maintaining information on the food security needs of isolated or at-risk population groups in their jurisdiction. Citizens can help by educating themselves on the food security issues in their communities. Everyone can help by participating (through funding, supporting, donating, volunteering, etc.).

4. Encourage volunteerism and engagement in food security initiatives.

Individuals and organizations bring knowledge and needed skills to food security initiatives that benefit all participants. Governments, businesses, and community groups should all market the benefits of volunteering and participating in local food security initiatives. Creating more opportunities and incentives for people and organizations to participate in local food security programs is a key to expanding reach and impact.

Community initiatives to address food insecurity have the added benefit of building social capital by encouraging collaboration and camaraderie within neighbourhoods. Participating in collaborative activities—such as community gardens and kitchens, greenhouses, and subsidized markets—can help families in need overcome some of the negative psychological implications of food insecurity. It also allows them to learn from others facing similar challenges.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Canada’s long-term goal for domestic food security should be to eradicate food insecurity in Canadian households. Efforts to achieve this must address the key risk factors of household food insecurity, including low income levels, the costs of non-food essentials, and low food literacy levels. Long-term solutions will provide
households with the knowledge of how to choose, store, and prepare such foods and the means and ability to acquire sufficient safe and nutritious foods. The following are specific recommendations:

1. Improve food literacy levels.
Businesses, governments, and communities should help food-insecure people make the best possible food choices with their financial resources. To that end, governments and industries should increase their efforts to educate everyone on healthy eating, and give them tools to acquire fresh and healthy produce affordably.

Communities should consider how to provide members with tips on how to cook and buy the right food (i.e., ones that contribute to a healthy and nutritious diet). Community kitchens are one model for encouraging people to teach one another how to cook and develop strategies for acquiring food.

Governments and industries should increase their efforts to educate everyone on healthy eating, and give them tools to acquire fresh and healthy produce affordably.

Traditional Aboriginal or country foods are an important source of nutrients for Northern populations. However, throughout the years, the tradition of harvesting, hunting, and cooking these foods has been eroded across generations due to high costs of hunting, environmental issues, etc. Additional efforts by governments, industries, and communities to provide information and training in traditional ways of acquiring and preparing foods would help preserve the skills and knowledge of maintaining a self-sufficient healthy diet. Further, education on how to make healthy food choices from “western” food options would also be beneficial for communities that are less familiar with non-healthy foods.

2. Make public transportation more affordable for low-income households.
Several factors associated with food insecurity are related to the costs of non-food essentials such as transportation. Strategies to improve food security should address these, as they influence household funds available for food. Governments and businesses should consider “working upstream” to meet these challenges. In other words, they should look beyond the immediate issue of access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to other contributing factors. A comprehensive food security strategy might recognize and address influencing factors, such as the costs of transportation, that are part of everyday life.

Governments should consider providing low-income households with public transportation passes. People who live in isolated areas or who must travel a distance, either by car or public transportation, to reach a supermarket or grocery store are especially tied to paying transportation costs. Providing more low-income households with subsidized transportation would allow people in need to allocate more money toward food, and facilitate their access to grocery stores and fresh, nutritious foods. Efforts to increase the use of public transportation also help to encourage increased physical activity (i.e., through increased walking and less automobile dependency), mitigate the impact of traffic congestion, and improve air quality.

3. Ensure that agricultural policies have a household food security lens.
Agricultural policy can work toward alleviating household food insecurity by ensuring that food insecurity issues are reviewed as part of the policy development process. For instance, policies that increase the affordability of fresh produce for low-income populations would assist those at-risk groups in obtaining more fruit and vegetables. Policy options to explore include providing commodity subsidies for fruit and vegetables, subsidized crop insurance for fruit and vegetable farmers, and transportation subsidies for farmers to transport produce from farm to market.

4. Invest in strategies to address low income/poverty.
Household food insecurity is linked to ongoing challenges with low income or poverty. While many programs offer subsidies and tax cuts to low-income households, they do not prevent low income: rather, they act to
reduce the effects of low income. A forward-thinking strategy would be to create a more integrated approach to address low income and poverty issues.4

For example, the National Council of Welfare’s proposed strategy includes developing a long-term vision and measurable targets and timelines, a coordinated plan of action and budget, a government accountability structure, and a set of poverty indicators.5 Another approach to consider is a Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI), as explored in the Mincome experiment in Dauphin, Manitoba, in the 1970s. Providing a basic income floor was shown to have positive results in Dauphin in terms of education and health outcomes. A GAI has the potential to reduce poverty levels, thereby cutting food insecurity in low-income households.

5. Track, study, and evaluate household food security initiatives to find effective programs to support and replicate.

Large information gaps exist concerning the effectiveness of household food security improvement efforts in Canada. Many household food security programs cite anecdotal evidence of success, but do not track quantifiable data over time. Identifying specific goals and measurement metrics in the early stages of program development will improve the focus of household food security initiatives and provide important information concerning the most effective aspects of the program. Assessments should include both qualitative and quantitative data. Tracking and evaluating program results will therefore ensure that policy-makers and industry partners have the evidence they need to justify continued investments in household food security programs that improve the lives of Canadians.

Longitudinal studies of household food security levels in Canada, especially of isolated and at-risk population groups, would help policy-makers determine how successful our domestic programs are, as well as where future investments and improvements would be most effective. To fill data gaps, literature reviews of successful household food security initiatives must often turn to international data to find evidence of longitudinal data.

CONCLUSION

Although food insecurity affects only a minority of the Canadian population, it is a particularly tenacious problem and requires a strategic approach if it is to be eradicated. Efforts already being made are commendable and are having positive, if short-term, effects. Only by addressing the root causes of, or factors associated with, food insecurity, will long-term success be achieved. Commitment to address the factors of food insecurity, by governments, businesses, community organizations, and citizens, will be required before Canada can boast that all of its citizens are food-secure.

4 Robson, The Cost of Poverty, 5.
5 Hay, Poverty Reduction, 20.

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Appendix A

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