

CKX Solutions Lab

Discussion Guide

FOOD SECURITY

The challenge:

How can we increase access to healthy, affordable food for low-income people in urban areas?

Why is this a problem?

Food insecurity can be experienced in a range of ways: it is about a lack of access to healthy food, it's about running out or worrying about your food, compromising what you eat, and reducing or regularly going without food.

While food insecurity looks different in different communities, it is consistent in that it happens to Canadians across the country.

Overall:

- Almost 4 million Canadians experience food insecurity
- 1.7 million households (1 in 8)
- 1 million children under 18 (1 in 6)

Income insecurity:

- 62% of food insecure households reliant on wages from employment
- 12% of food bank users are employed
- 48% are on social assistance
- Food bank users expected to spend 70% of their income on rent/utilities

30 years of food banks:

- 840,000 Canadians use food banks on average in a month
- 37% of those are children
- 6 out of 10 provinces have seen an increase in food bank use - which is a 1% increase nationally
- Research: 1 out of 4 food-insecure households actually use food banks
- Food bank users spend 70% of their income on rent and utilities leaving approximately \$6 a day for everything else

Health consequences:

- \$7 billion spent in Canada on poverty related illnesses
- *"...poorer self-rated health, poorer mental and physical health, poorer oral health, greater stress, and are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and mood and anxiety disorders. Food insecurity also makes it difficult to manage existing chronic conditions such as diabetes and HIV."*

Addressing the challenge:

If we were to address food security in a meaningful way, we would see the following outcomes:

- Canadians would be able to cover their housing/shelter expenses and still have sufficient income for a healthy diet;
- Canadians would have reasonable access to healthy fresh produce within their income - or would have access to supports so they could get to healthy food options without a debilitating impact on their income, or an unreasonable amount of travel time/distance;
- Locally grown produce would be accessible and affordable through a combination of market value and subsidized outlets including: farmer's markets, good food markets, market gardens;
- Canada would have reduced the \$7 billion of our health care budget dedicated to poverty related illness.

Understanding the opportunities:

If we address food insecurity by thinking about the whole food system, we address a range of serious concerns because food issues are not discreet and isolated - but systemic. For example, with a policy direction focused on the importance of "local food" (i.e. In setting benchmarks for procurement policies; increased capacity for local growing/gardens/markets) we would see the following benefits:

- The closer to market, the healthier the food since it does not need to be transported long distances, picked early etc.
- Positive environmental impacts if there are fewer fossil fuels being used to transport food to market.
- More capacity to monitor and be assured sustainable agricultural practices are being supported when buying local.
- Local economic development - supporting local food is supporting local economies. For example: The Stop's weekly farmer's market generates \$2million in sales for farmers/vendors annually.

Data from Toronto's Vital Signs Report 2014:

Food insecurity is a growing problem in most parts of the country, creating daily hardship and the lifelong risk of diminished physical and mental health:

- In 2008, 11.3% of the Canadian population was identified as food insecure. In 2012 the figure was 12.6%—4 million people, including 1.15 million (1 in 6) children.
- In 2012, 1 in 5 food insecure households in Canada were *severely* food insecure. Severe food insecurity means:
 - That the food bought for the household runs out and there is no money to buy more;
 - Feeling hungry, cutting the size of meals, and/or losing weight, because there isn't enough food;
 - Depending on a narrow range of low-cost food items to feed children; and
 - In nearly half of households, not feeding children enough.
- The primary cause of food insecurity is lack of money to buy food. Not surprisingly, it is strongly linked to household income levels. The majority of food insecure households (62.2%) were reliant on wages or salaries from employment, but food security was also experienced by:
 - 69.5% of households whose primary income source was assistance; and
 - 38.4% of households relying on Employment Insurance or Worker's Compensation;
- Almost 1 in 10 households in the Toronto Region (9.5%) were food insecure in 2011-12.

The cost of a Nutritious Food Basket in May 2013 for a family of four in Toronto was \$792.82 per month (a 4% increase since 2012):

- Food insecurity puts families and individuals at higher risk for many poor health outcomes including reported poorer physical and mental health and a range of chronic diseases.

For the fifth year in a row, GTA food banks have seen over one million visits:

- There were 1,120,000 visitors to GTA food banks between April 2012 and March 2013, down 3,500 from the previous 12 months.
- Toronto residents accounted for 937,500 of those trips, down from almost 950,000 in 2012.
- The median length of time those in the city core use a food bank is two years, and one year for those in the inner suburbs and 905 region.

While visits to food banks in the central core of Toronto are now back to pre-recession levels, visits to food banks in the inner suburbs have skyrocketed since 2008:

- There has been no reported overall increase in food bank use in the city core (the former municipalities of Toronto, East York and York) since 2008, but visits to food banks in Toronto's inner suburbs (the former municipalities of Scarborough, Etobicoke and North York) have grown by 38% over that time.
 - Visitors to food banks in the inner suburbs are more likely to be newcomers (38% have been in Canada less than 5 years, compared to only 28% of food bank users in the city core) and families (48% are single parents or couples, in contrast to food bank users in the city core where 59% are single people and only 32% are single parents or couples).
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Issue	Drivers
Income insecurity - whether working on social assistance, low income Canadians experience income insecurity that leads to food insecurity.	Minimum wage not tied to poverty line - FTE (Full Time Equivalent) does not guarantee a life above poverty line.
	Social Assistance (Ontario Works/ODSP) - not indexed to inflation, or tied to poverty line; does not include sufficient support for healthy diet, transportation etc.
	A lack of national affordable housing investments/strategy means increasing number of Canadians devoting higher percentage of income to shelter costs
Lack of access to healthy food / Lots of access to unhealthy food	In low-income communities there may be little or no access to a grocery store option. The costs of public transit may make it prohibitive for low-income people to travel to another neighbourhood to buy groceries, or access food programs.
	Local stores stock unhealthy, culturally inappropriate food. Marketing drives consumers to less healthy, processed choices; businesses don't have incentives to address the issues of healthy food - without incentives; or broad consumer demand.
	The most affordable food is invariably the least healthy - most processed, sugary, salty, refined, empty calories that lead directly to chronic health issues.
Power of food - in policy, purchasing, community building - unrealized	Too many barriers to opening up green spaces for community gardens/allotments.
	Restrictions on market gardens (selling locally grown produce by growers)
	Food power in procurement - bulk buying
	Lack of focus on local sources - support for local and sustainable producers
	Not included in city planning - development decision making
	Barriers for farmer markets, other healthy food outlets

Innovation	Description	Link/reference
Policy, System Change - Leadership on Food		
Local Food Procurement Policies	Procurement policies (government agencies, sites; anchor institutions) prioritize local produce and products; support broader local economies; target sustainable farm practices	http://democracycollaborative.org
Healthy Taxes	Increased taxes on unhealthy food - to discourage purchase and production of unhealthy foods. (Different applications either focused on distributors or - others on consumers.) Raises awareness of issue, generates support for nutrition & public health programs; reduces consumption.	http://www.berkeleyvsbig soda.com http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303801304579407322914779400
Healthy Corner Grocery Stores	City of Toronto, Public Health has piloted a project to support conversion of corner stores to stock more fresh produce, culturally appropriate food, or healthy prepared foods (i.e. muffins vs. chips). Support includes capital for refrigeration; public awareness to support consumer behaviour change. NYC has financial and zoning incentives for stores that are set up in low-income underserved areas.	http://www.healthycorner stores.org/the-healthy-bodegas-initiative-bringing-good-food-to-the-desert http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nancy-biberman/south-bronx-food-desert_b_3133817.html
Brazil's National Food Policy in Belo Horizonte	"Brazil has had a national food policy since 2004. In Belo Horizonte that policy – coupled with an investment of 2 percent of the city's budget in food-access and farmer-support programs – has reduced poverty by 25 percent and child mortality by 60 percent, and provided access to credit for 2 million farmers, all within a decade."	http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-a-national-food-policy-could-save-millions-of-american-lives/2014/11/07/89c55e16-637f-11e4-836c-83bc4f26eb67_story.html
Community Based Initiatives		
Good Food Markets	Established or mobile food markets stocking fresh produce, healthy food - sold at cost. Subsidized program; though bulk buying increases access. Most successful when anchored with community agencies. Builds community as well as food access.	http://www.foodshare.net/good-food-markets
Farmers Market Subsidies	Vouchers/subsidies for low income residents to be used at farmer's markets. In US provided through public health to individuals or community groups; Increases access to healthy food, and supports	http://www.grownyc.org/greenmarket/ebt/healthbucks

	local economy by supporting farmers	
Market gardens	Local garden spaces (parks, rooftops etc) where food grown by targeted group (students) or local gardeners. AND sold locally either at garden or other local markets; benefits local community who can purchase AND is income supplement for gardeners.	http://www.foodshare.net/news/bendales-market-garden-growing-students-minds/
Community gardens	The Stop Community Food centre - Earls court Garden run for 15 years in public park; 8000square feet; produces approx. 1000 pounds of food every year; food split between gardener volunteers and The Stop for use in food bank, kitchen programs	http://thestop.org/home
Bulk purchasing - community sector	Community based food-buying represents millions of dollars (\$29 million in Toronto). Consolidated purchasing, and storage could reduce overall costs, create opportunity or collaboration among agencies/groups and with local procurement policies, support local economies/farmers.	https://parkdalecommunityeconomies.wordpress.com/2014/11/04/hihlights-of-food-flow-accomplishments/
Hybrid		
Alternative Grocery / Bulk Buying Options	A number of not for profit organizations have developed alternative models, either member based, co-op/sweat equity models. These increase access for moderately food insecure people - but not the extreme food insecure who don't have any meaningful income for food. In the US - there has been substantial public investment in large scale "fresh food retail development", including non-profit grocery models.	http://www.foodcoop.com/go.php?id=32 http://www.questoutreach.org http://thefoodtrust.org/what-we-do/supermarkets
Family Health Vouchers	UK grocery chain Tesco piloted a food stamps program in NE England. Families in social housing with young children register through local public health for vouchers. Up to 25% off some produce, baby foods etc. for fixed periods. Tracked by local public health for impact on health/obesity rates.	