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Structural Constraints and Enablers to Community Food Security in Nova Scotia, Canada

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ABSTRACT

As one output of a large participatory action research project, this article presents an empirically grounded analysis of constraints and enablers to community food security (CFS) in the province of Nova Scotia, Canada. Our objective is to lay the groundwork for identifying strategic intrasectoral and cross-sectoral opportunities to further CFS. Theoretically, our research is informed by neo-Gramscian theories of the forces that enable sociopolitical change in the political economy of food systems and is grounded in the principles of participatory action research. The analysis is based on 41 interviews and a stakeholder gathering with people representing public sector, private sector, and civil society organizations working on food, poverty, health, agriculture, and fisheries issues in Nova Scotia.

KEYWORDS
Community food security; food policy; participatory action research; political economy

Introduction

This article is a product of the Policy Working Group (PWG) of Activating Change Together for Community Food Security (ACT for CFS), a 5-year Community University Research Alliance led by the Food Action Research Centre at Mount Saint Vincent University and the Nova Scotia Food Security Network along with over 70 partner organizations in Nova Scotia and across Canada. Guided by participatory action research methodology, ACT for CFS aimed to enhance understandings of community food security (CFS) in concept and practice while strengthening capacity for policy change at multiple levels. Building on the literature on CFS and that on sustainable food systems, we define CFS broadly as food security for all within just and sustainable food systems. The purpose of the research was to better understand the sociopolitical context that affects the realization of CFS in Nova Scotia, Canada.
Situated on Canada’s Atlantic shore, Nova Scotia is Canada’s second smallest province, in both area (55 284 km\(^2\)) and population (921 727 people in 2011). The province’s population is both relatively rural and elderly (There are more people over the age of 65 [16.6%] than in any other Canadian province). These demographic trends have implications for various aspects of CFS. For example, they affect the ability of the province to meet the demands of increasing health care and social assistance costs with a small tax base. They also place upper limits on the potential market for locally grown foods and fish harvested off the coast of this maritime province. At the same time, a small population living on a significant land base may offer opportunities for community gardening, wild harvesting, and other household and community self-sufficiency strategies in an economy still largely based on natural resources.

Our goal in undertaking this research was to understand the constraints and enablers for realizing CFS in Nova Scotia in some depth. Our approach was to draw on the experiential knowledge of key stakeholders in Nova Scotia’s food system (civil society, industry, and government). This approach allows us to begin identifying strategic opportunities around which alliances can be built or strengthened among these stakeholders both within and across sectors in order to inform how public policy and community-based actions can be shifted in the direction of increasing CFS.

Research conducted in Nova Scotia will be of interest to other multistakeholder teams working on integrated food policy planning, such as food policy councils, especially those working at the state (in the context of the United States), provincial, or national level. As Allen has argued, working at these levels requires careful thought to community-based and entrepreneurial initiatives as well as the strengthening of social safety nets. This work may also be valuable to others working in rural contexts.

**Methodology**

ACT for CFS is grounded in the principles of participatory action research (PAR). PAR is “a process of producing new knowledge by systematic inquiry with the collaboration of those affected by the issues being studied, for the purposes of education and taking action or effecting social change.” For us, PAR has meant close collaboration between university researchers, community activists, and individuals and communities who experience household food insecurity as well as others currently marginalized by the global food system such as small-scale farmers, fishers, and Indigenous communities. Community members were engaged in all stages of the research: defining research questions; developing data collection tools; data collection; analysis and interpretation; and knowledge sharing and uptake. The Policy Working Group was one of 5 working groups of the ACT for CFS project.
initiated in 2010. The PWG’s members came from civil society and community-based organizations, provincial and federal governments and organizations, as well as collaborating universities.

The analysis of the Nova Scotia context is based on 41 interviews conducted by PWG members or graduate student research assistants from 2011 to 2013. We also reviewed materials and websites from government, non-government, academic, and media sources related to CFS to better understand the context and aid in interpreting the results of the interviews (including correcting interviewee misconceptions in a few cases). When selecting research participants, we endeavored to represent a range of health, antipoverty, agricultural, fisheries, and government stakeholders, as well as organizations that have broad sectoral mandates related to food (Table 1). Building on existing partnerships of the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing projects, particular effort was made to include groups usually marginalized in policy processes, including those working in agriculture and the fisheries, as well as minority groups (eg, First Nation and Acadian) as well as those working with or advocating for those living in lower socio-economic circumstances.

The interviews focused on how stakeholders involved in food governance in Nova Scotia understand this system, what they are seeking to change, and what they are doing to move their agendas forward. An in-depth semistructured interview style was employed to ask these questions. Members of the PWG analyzed interview transcripts in relation to the conceptual framework and drew out key themes to help understand the provincial context with a focus on constraints and enablers to CFS. Interim results were shared in a variety of formats (eg, summary report, webinar) and with the stakeholders interviewed as well as other policy actors in Nova Scotia at a stakeholder

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*aSome people/organizations fit into more than one category.*
gathering in the summer of 2013. At the gathering, interactive processes for deliberation were used to analyze the research and plan for action. The gathering was in keeping with the principles of PAR and was used to strengthen our analysis.

Though this article draws extensively on all interviews, interviewees remain anonymous and are only cited by number when directly quoted.

The article begins with an introduction to the theoretical concepts that underpin the research: CFS and political economy. We then present constraints and enablers to achieving CFS within 3 broad domains: (1) material/economic; (2) discursive; and (3) organizational. The subsequent section presents a discussion of our results, including our response to tensions evident in the food policy landscape in Nova Scotia. Finally, we draw on the analysis to present ideas for strategic opportunities for intrasectoral and cross-sectoral engagement and conclude with reflections on our approach and next steps in our research.

**Theoretical framework**

The research presented here is informed by 2 core concepts: CFS and political economy, specifically a neo-Gramscian approach to political economy that examines material, discursive and organizational “relations of force.”8(p171) We argue that studying the relations of force impacting CFS can help address the minimal attention to structures of power in the literature on CFS.

We understand CFS as seeking to bridge the goals of food security and sustainability within food systems. Though food security research and interventions traditionally focus on hunger and food access for vulnerable populations at the household level9,10 as a process for achieving food security, CFS highlights forms of food provisioning that are more just and sustainable: ecologically, socially, and economically.11

In our view, the CFS approach has much in common with the growing literature on (re)building place-based, sustainable food systems.12–14 Ensuring equity of access to food for those who are food insecure is one of the core aspects of the social sustainability of any food system. Further, both CFS and the concept of sustainable food systems emphasize the need to have greater democratic control over food systems at the local level.15,16 This shared interest has led to a growing literature on community-based decision making through food policy councils, as well as on the role of municipal governments in increasing food access.17–19 In this article, we thus frame the need for increased environmental, social, and economic sustainability within the Nova Scotia food system as a necessary component, or prerequisite, for achieving CFS. Our project’s simplified definition of CFS provided above (“food security for all within just and sustainable food systems”) is meant to
reflect this essential goal of SFS within the larger goal of efforts to realize CFS province-wide.

In framing our work in this way, we recognize that tensions can, and do, emerge between efforts to enhance the environmental and economic sustainability of certain sectors and the need to ensure widespread access to healthy, locally produced food. In fact, one of the most common criticisms leveled against those who work to advance CFS is to challenge the assumption that it is possible to build constructive and equitable links between smaller scale local producers (farmers, harvesters, and fishers) utilizing more sustainable production methods and low-income consumer populations. The problem with this assumption is that it does not match what appears to be happening on the ground in many of the alternative food networks (eg, local, organic, and fair trade food networks) that have emerged to try to ensure that our food systems are more environmentally sustainable and fair in how we reward food producers. In industrialized countries, food networks that support smaller scale, local food producers are increasingly differentiating themselves by providing high-value products for high-end markets. In throwing their support behind some alternative food networks, advocates of CFS may thus be “unwittingly recreating a two-tiered food system differentiated by class.”

How to address the potential contradictions between strengthening local food production and harvesting and the need to ameliorate access to healthy foods for food insecure households is thus central in our analysis.

Another critique of both CFS and many sustainable food system efforts is that the solutions proffered by its advocates, directed toward the individual and community, may be incommensurate with the scale of the problem these movements seek to address. Guthman points out the dangers of individualizing the problem of food security; for example, leading to the “responsibilization” of individuals, rather than directly challenging the dominant systems that govern food and agriculture or those responsible for the inequitable distribution of resources needed to acquire food. This criticism encourages advocates of food systems change to pay greater attention to structures of power beyond the community level of control as they envision solutions.

These critiques have had a significant impact on our work and influenced our choice to examine CFS at the provincial level. As our findings demonstrate, this level of analysis brings focus to the roles of federal and provincial governments (largely responsible for the social safety net in Canada) in addition to the roles of municipalities, and the non-profit and private sectors. We also adopted a neo-Gramscian political economy lens to analyze constraints and enablers as a means to focus on relations of power and highlight structural, rather than individual, problems and solutions.

Critical political economy approaches, rooted in Marxism, position economics as particularly influential in political decision-making in liberal democracies.
Where Gramsci's (p184) and his followers differ from "economistic" Marxists is in their questioning of the assumption that the economic base necessarily defines the ideological "superstructure." Instead, neo-Gramscians encourage the analysis of three sets of "relations of force" (material, organizational, and discursive) (p181–184) and their interplay across 3 levels of political activity: civil society, the state, and global order.25

To examine material forces means to pay attention to the dynamics of finance, production, distribution, consumption, and the material dimensions of technological change. Discursive forces refers to the power of ideas, assumptions, and ideologies that shape both what the public holds as common sense as well as public policy. Organizational forces refers to the ways in which people organize within civil society, in the private sector, and through public institutions (for a detailed analysis of these 3 categories and the way they shape one another, see Andrée 2007).27 For neo-Gramscians, it is the interplay of these 3 types of forces that together constrain and/or enable opportunities for social and political change.

Exemplifying how the interplay of material, discursive, and organizational forces shapes political decision making, recent studies in critical political economy point to the impacts of neoliberalism on capitalist economies. As an ideology, neoliberalism generally eschews government intervention and privileges economic rationalities, free trade, and market-based interests over environmental and social problems.28 As the process of neoliberalization has played out in food-related sectors in Canada in recent decades, led by agrifood (and increasingly financial sector) capital and supported by favorable governmental policies at the federal and provincial levels, food systems have become restructured around the industrial production of cheap commodities for export.

In the production and sales of food, control has become concentrated among a small number of companies in the business of providing inputs and distributing, processing, and retailing food, often at the expense of both smaller scale food producers and low-income consumers, among others. At the same time, Canadian health and social safety nets, initially designed to ensure a certain degree of universality of access to having basic needs met, have been shrinking and inequalities are growing. In response, a number of social movements are pushing back and actively working to build healthier, more just, and sustainable food systems that meet the needs of all.29–31 It is with these movements that CFS initiatives—such as those described below—are generally aligned.

The concepts of community food security and a neo-Gramscian political economy analysis informed our analysis in four ways. First, we paid attention to relations of power by organizing our data in terms of constraints and enablers to CFS, using the categories of material, discursive, and organizational forces as our rubric. Second, our analysis highlights modalities of both
food supply and food access, while remaining attuned to the tensions between them. Third, we examined community-based and entrepreneurial solutions, while also paying attention to the necessary role of local, provincial, and federal governments. Finally, this conceptual approach allowed us to set the stage for identifying strategic opportunities to further CFS—ones that take both constraints and enablers into account—across sectors and scales of governance in Nova Scotia, while also providing insights for work on CFS in other jurisdictions.

**Material constraints and enablers**

In political economy terms, *material forces* are the physical and economic resources or structures (including environments) that determine the prosperity and wellness of individuals and communities. We categorized the material forces constraining and enabling CFS identified through our interviews into 5 thematic areas: (1) poverty and its influence on access to healthy food; (2) agriculture; (3) fisheries and aquaculture; (4) the food retail sector; and (5) the economic capacity of civil society and governmental organizations to make changes that support CFS.

**Poverty and its influence on access to healthy food**

At the heart of CFS is the idea that everyone should be able to access healthy, sustainably produced food. There are a range of material constraints to the realization of this vision in Nova Scotia, though a few enablers can be seen as well. First among the constraints is poverty.

Nova Scotia had a per capita gross domestic product (GNP) of CAN$38,475 in 2010. This figure is significantly lower than the national average of CAN$47,605. When using the market basket measure, this province’s rate of poverty is the highest in Canada: 15.8% of people live on a low income, compared to a national average of 12.9%.\(^{32,33}\) Consistent with previous analyses from Nova Scotia,\(^ {34,35}\) low or declining incomes relative to rising living costs were identified in many of the interviews as factors affecting the ability of people relying on the minimum wage or provincial income assistance (“welfare”) programs to afford a nutritious diet. A representative of an organization working to eliminate poverty explained how food insecurity is intimately tied to the rising cost of living; for example, “people are using their personal allowance [portion of income assistance] for housing, because they don’t get enough funds for housing” (INT#14).

Interviewees also identified rural poverty as a significant problem in Nova Scotia and one that is different from poverty in urban areas. One respondent shared that in rural areas, there are fewer people living on the streets, but “couch surfing” and other forms of transient housing are common (INT#13).
There are also differences between urban and rural populations in terms of food access and in the level of local resources available for school fundraising and food programs. In addition, there are particular food access challenges for some First Nations and Aboriginal people in Nova Scotia (about 3% of the population), who face barriers to nutritious diets due to low incomes and limited access to food retailers. A stakeholder working for First Nations and Inuit Health in the Government of Canada noted that First Nations reserves are mainly located in rural areas where residents may be forced to buy food from local convenience stores where prices are higher and variety is limited. Many Aboriginal and First Nations people have lost traditional food sources and skills. Revitalization of these food sources and skills is now taking place among many First Nations and Aboriginal people in Nova Scotia and elsewhere across Canada.

A number of stakeholders noted that Nova Scotia imports high volumes of (relatively) inexpensive food from other parts of the country and the world. Though this reliance on imports is not consistent with self-sufficiency, an interviewee in the food processing sector stated that it has kept food relatively affordable for those with adequate incomes. Nonetheless, it was widely recognized that the inability for many Nova Scotians to afford a nutritious diet remains a primary constraint to CFS, particularly for people relying on income assistance or minimum-wage jobs, as well as for some lone seniors on low incomes. Research in Nova Scotia consistently shows that households relying on the minimum wage or income assistance are not able to afford a basic nutritious diet once other essential needs are met. Furthermore, recent changes to (un)employment insurance programs have made it more difficult for seasonal workers to access this income source, particularly in rural communities, where seasonal work is often all that is available.

Despite this daunting picture when it comes to food access in Nova Scotia, some stakeholders also pointed to positive changes to some aspects of the social safety net for Nova Scotians in recent years, at least those within provincial jurisdiction. Improvements have included a 79% increase in minimum wage from 2002 to 2014 and a 48% increase in the personal allowance component of income assistance rates over that same period. Changes within the federal jurisdiction in Canada have been more limited and in many cases resulted in major cuts to, or stagnant funding for, programs and departments that help to address food insecurity in Canada in the face of increasing demands. Emphasis has been on programs that provide tax relief for eligible working low income individuals and families; (for example, Working Income Tax Benefit that was introduced in 2007) and upper income families (eg, Universal Child Care Benefit). The National Child benefit, a joint initiative of the federal, provincial, and territorial governments introduced in 1998, is in part intended to “help prevent and reduce the
depth of child poverty.” Though lauded for its positive effects on poverty reduction, a lack of further investment in this program has been highly criticized. A few provincial and federal programs also provide funding support for healthy eating and related initiatives including the provincial breastfeeding policy, program standards related to pre- and postnatal health, and programs specifically targeting First Nations (eg, the federal Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative and the Aboriginal Head-Start Program). Despite the potential of these government programs to help create some level of income redistribution, income inequality has been growing in Canada since the 1980s with a general trend toward a shrinking of the social safety net.

**Challenges and new directions in agriculture**

A thriving, diverse, and sustainable agricultural sector that meets the needs of local populations first is central to the realization of CFS, and Nova Scotia has many of the ingredients for such a sector. However, our interviews also raised questions about how economically robust the sector is and how equitably the specialty products it increasingly produces are distributed.

The dominant trends in agriculture in North America—monocultural crop and livestock production and conglomeration among agrifood enterprises—appear less pronounced in Nova Scotia. The province has a range of producers of commercial vegetables (375) and small fruits (1248) whose main crops include cabbage, potatoes, onions, lettuce, tomatoes (greenhouse), strawberries, and blueberries. It also has successful orchard (especially apples) and cottage wine industries. In addition, dairy is Nova Scotia’s largest agricultural industry, making up 22.9% (2010) of total gross farm receipts. All milk consumed in the province is supplied by Nova Scotia producers (with the exception of organic milk), and the system is regulated by supply management, which ensures that dairy farmers earn a fair price for their product.

In terms of constraints, Nova Scotia farmers report they have faced increased hardship due to high production costs and low market prices in recent years. One producer said, “We don’t make enough money to support ourselves, and we have a pretty frugal lifestyle, so we end up doing other work outside the farm” (INT#10). Rising costs of production included labor and feed grain, communication costs (Internet and cell phones), and food auditing, traceability, and environmental “best management” practices (as imposed by buyers and governments). As in other parts of Canada, Nova Scotia’s beef industry was hit hard in the early 2000s by public fears about bovine spongiform encephalopathy or “mad cow” disease (INT#16). The difficult situation facing farmers was confirmed in the 2013 interim report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy. Drawing on genuine progress index (GPI) Atlantic statistics, the report noted that net farm income in Nova Scotia dropped by an average of 91% between 1971 and
2007. Department of Agriculture data also show that between 2009 and 2010 alone farm employment fell by 9.1%, from 6600 to 5800 jobs. Further, agricultural revenues declined in 2010 to a level 4.3% below revenues generated in 2005.45

What do farmers do in light of the enormous economic challenges facing them, and what impact do current policies and practices have for the potential to realize CFS? A number of farmers interviewed spoke of new production or distribution strategies they were adopting to increase their revenue or reduce costs. These strategies included direct sales, selling into local markets, targeting emerging niche markets (such as organically certified cheeses, grass-fed beef, and pharmaceutical crops), and regional branding initiatives. Interviewees also listed a variety of different types of certification, brands, or labeling that support their aims and add value to their products. These include eco-certification, organic certification, and gluten-free products.

Despite many challenges in agriculture, Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada to show an increase of farmers in the most recent 5-year census. In keeping with the above trends, most of these new farmers work at smaller scales of production targeting niche markets. A representative of the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture explained that many new entrants into farming in the province choose “cottage-scale” agriculture rather than commercial commodity farms because these represent the only real opportunities in agriculture (INT#18).

Entrepreneurialism in local and niche markets appears to be vitally important as an enabler to the future success of Nova Scotia’s agricultural communities and in many cases supports more sustainable forms of agriculture. However, several interviewees pointed out that the products supplied into these markets are often not accessible to low-income populations, thus complicating the implications for CFS. Further, growth in these niche markets may come at the expense of the loss of medium-scale farming operations (which tend to sell through larger retail outlets) that currently provide food at a lower relative cost to consumers across Nova Scotia.46

A strategy being adopted by some producers to overcome financial constraints is to invest in infrastructure to strengthen their roles in processing and distribution. Cooperatives were noted as a way to “recapture the middle of supply chains.” One farmer noted that “cooperatives play a consolidating or wholesaling role, where 30 farmers bring their product into one area so there is a quantity that is sufficient to interest buyers” (INT#18). Insofar as this strategy strengthens rural communities and builds new links between producers and local consumers, it may become an enabler for CFS, but that outcome will depend on how equitably products of these co-operatives will be distributed.
In terms of government investment in agriculture, though the trend is toward lower levels of agricultural subsidies in general, there continues to be support for agricultural diversification. For example, the Nova Scotia government has been actively supporting the branding of local grass-fed beef and the branding of Nova Scotia products in the province’s restaurants (through the “Taste of Nova Scotia” program). The provincial government has also implemented an innovative Community Economic Development Investment Fund (CEDIF). CEDIFs are funded by individual investors but supported by the provincial government through a generous tax incentive. One CEDIF called the FarmWorks Investment Coop has led to over $1 million being invested in new or expanding farm and food businesses in Nova Scotia since it was created in 2011. The Canadian government also supports agricultural diversification through its Canadian Agricultural Adaptation program (and previous versions of similar programs). To the extent that these government initiatives strengthen the agricultural sector, they may be important enablers for CFS. However, if the types of businesses and innovation they support are not ones that produce food that will be widely available to all or that do not increase local employment opportunities, the relationship between them and the realization of CFS becomes more difficult to gauge.

A final constraint to the vitality of the agricultural sector in Nova Scotia (and thus by extension to its ability to contribute to CFS) to be raised by a number of stakeholders concerns the question of farm succession. Notwithstanding the new entrants to farming noted above, the average age of farmers in Nova Scotia was 55 in 2011, slightly higher than the Canadian average. Agricultural stakeholders talked about the challenges this places on the transfer of farms between an older generation and a new generation of producers who do not have land in their families. Challenges for new farmers include the cost of land and other startup costs, the costs of complying with regulations, as well as more general distribution and marketing challenges. One young farmer stated: “There are a lot of young people who want to get into growing food, but they don’t have the money to buy land” (INT#10).

**Challenges and new directions in fisheries and aquaculture**

The fishing industry is a major employer in many parts of coastal Nova Scotia, with direct and indirect employment in the industry amounting to around 30 000 people. The success of this sector thus has implications for CFS, whether directly through the food it provides to the local population or indirectly through jobs and income. However, the industry is in the process of a significant transition, and it is not entirely clear how these changes will impact efforts to realize CFS.
A representative of the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture noted that the 1980s and 1990s were the “overfishing era” when regulation and policy related to fisheries were loaded toward exploitation rather than conservation.” (INT#4). Further, “the whole framework in the world related to managing fish is changing very rapidly toward one that emphasizes precaution, safety, and sustainable harvesting (INT#4). However, the perception is that there remains much work to be done and that even with the development of new regulations in this industry, smaller scale harvesters remain precariously “beholden to international markets.”

In principle, the shift toward conservation and more precautionary management practices is positive from the point of view of enhancing sustainable food production, which we define as a precondition for realizing CFS. This shift appears to be driven by 2 long-term trends: the depletion of (some) wild fish stocks from overharvesting (resulting in the need for new management regimes) and the desire of many consumers (and other players in the supply chain, notably retailers) to access sustainable food supplies. One interviewee emphasized the trend of many consumers “to know the origin of where the product is coming from” (INT#15), Wheres others emphasized eco-certification, traceability, and animal husbandry concerns raised by buyers in European markets as key drivers in the industry.

Unfortunately, fisheries is often a sector of conflict and mistrust, whether between harvesters and processors, small operators and large fleets, or more recently between environmentalists and harvesters. On the current state of the industry, one fisherman summarized the sector in this way: “It’s a battle of David and Goliath. You basically have smaller harvesters working to put food on the table for their families, versus larger fishing fleets aiming to increase their profits. ... I don’t know how else to put it in a nutshell” (INT#15).

Several interviewees pointed to the ways in which globalization of the food system has left the Nova Scotia fisheries vulnerable to international forces. Because the population of Nova Scotia is less than 1 million, the fishing industry exports 80%–85% of products. Reliance on export markets means reliance on prices set in those markets. In the lobster industry, for example, the wholesale price set in Boston on the East Coast of the United States currently determines Canadian prices. An export orientation has led to a significant drop in fish prices during the economic downturn that began in 2008, as markets in Asia, Europe, and the United States reduced their consumption of high-value products like lobster, crab, and shrimp.

Stakeholders also discussed the implications of foreign investment in local production. One person noted, with a tone of irony, that “we used to talk about foreign ownership and it was a dirty phrase ...but now we call it foreign investment, or we drop the ‘foreign’ and just call it investment” (INT#1). They went on to explain that foreign investment means that
international companies hold a much higher stake in local businesses, such as fish processing plants, but they are disconnected from the local level. Decisions made at international levels do not take into account the repercussions for local communities, such as the way that local plant closures can effectively close down entire communities.

Another theme arising from the interviews was efforts to better organize fish harvesters. In one case, producers were linking up with particular supply chains, especially those that wish to maintain specific traceability requirements. In another, efforts were underway to bring better health and safety standards to what one interviewee described as “the most dangerous job in the world … a fish harvester” (INT#15). A representative of the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture noted that there are almost 4000 smaller fishers in Nova Scotia (with boats under 45 feet long) represented by 60 different organizations. He said, “It’s very fragmented and it’s just not standing up well in the face of a whole bunch of challenges that are coming up” (INT#4). With the recent downturn in the lobster industry, a focus on cooperation and working together has been stressed. There have been organizational efforts by some fishers to “take back” the fishery (eg, through quota reallocation) and develop a sustainable fishery (eg, through quota reallocation) and develop a sustainable fishery controlled by inshore fishers, drawing on examples from Quebec and elsewhere (INT#15).

A fairly recent trend in the fisheries has been the introduction of shellfish aquaculture (eg, scallops and oysters) and, more recently, finfish aquaculture (eg, salmon and halibut). Because the introduction of these new industries has been somewhat controversial, the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture has been actively encouraging Nova Scotians to sample their products, in order “to recognize that farmed seafood is healthy, sustainable, grown in NS and delicious to eat.” However, one concern for wild fish harvesters is that pollution from offshore oil and gas exploitation, as well as from both legal and illegal chemicals used in aquaculture, may be affecting wild fish stocks. These comments reveal conflict between fish harvesters and some types of aquaculture in Nova Scotia, as documented in other parts of Atlantic Canada. In relation to CFS, advocates have to consider the pros and cons of less expensive farmed seafood compared with more sustainable, but increasingly more expensive, wild-caught seafood.

Finally, several stakeholders noted that there were other Canadian markets for the Maritimes’ fisheries sector to tap into. A representative of the lobster industry suggested that the long-term strategy pointed out by market research is “to focus on Canada first … And it seems so simple. We have 30 million Canucks [Canadians] and we all know about lobster. Half of Calgary and Toronto and Vancouver are Maritimers [a term that encompasses citizens of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia]” (INT#20). It was also noted that fish harvesters are increasingly selling
directly to customers, as they are in agriculture, through local farmers markets and truck sales, in order to develop a viable small-scale business model. However, it is important to recognize that though these markets can work for some independent fishers and fish farmers, they can only accommodate a portion of the fish currently landed in Nova Scotia.

In sum, efforts to improve conservation, organize a sustainable fishery controlled by inshore fishers, and build stronger markets within Canada are important steps to building a sustainable fisheries sector. We see this as a fundamental piece of the CFS puzzle in Nova Scotia in terms of providing rural employment, access to a healthy and culturally important food sources, and local food production (even though most of the seafood produced is currently exported). Challenges are associated with dependence on export markets and conflicts and mistrust within the sector. Finally, it remains to be seen whether developments like the rapid uptake of aquaculture and the rise of foreign investment in the fisheries will have a net positive or negative effect. The fisheries sector exemplifies how Nova Scotia is beholden to global material forces.

A changing food retail sector

Many stakeholders pointed out that Nova Scotia’s food system is dominated by cheap food and large-scale distribution systems that are globally linked and controlled, a trend consistent with the neoliberalization of food systems. This model benefits most consumers with (relatively) low food prices but appears to be supported at the expense of all but the largest producers and processors. (Though we do not have statistics specific to Nova Scotia, Canadians spend, on average, 9.3% of their total expenditures on food. In the 1960s, Canadians allocated 18.7% of their expenditures on food.) A challenge identified in Nova Scotia was how “food producers or processors get enough revenue out of that food, especially when you have to compete with these foreign sources that are very cheap” (INT#3). Several interviewees pointed to the centralization of distribution systems in the supermarket sector as a major challenge, with 2 or 3 major chains controlling about 80% of food sales (INT#38). Some producers discussed the importance of working with these major retailers, stating that “central distribution is more economical and keeps prices lower” (INT#38). Others explained that the centralization of retailers excludes farmers who cannot meet their specifications or who cannot make a living at the prices the major retailers are willing to pay.

What is the net impact of these trends, from the point of view of enhancing self-sufficiency in Nova Scotia? A representative of a food processing industry association noted that although residents see the importance of purchasing food produced in Atlantic Canada, the region’s small population,
combined with export-oriented agriculture and fisheries industries and an import-dependent grocery industry, do not lend themselves to building a robust local food system. As testimony to the lack of self-sufficiency in the Nova Scotia food system at present, a joint report from the Ecology Action Centre and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture found that only 13 cents of every dollar spent on food in Nova Scotia in 2008 was returned to Nova Scotia farmers, down from 17 cents in 1997.\textsuperscript{57}

Unfortunately, new competition may actually make this situation worse for farmers and fish harvesters. In 2013, Walmart was planning to expand several of its Nova Scotia outlets to start selling groceries and by 2015 had 8 Supercenters in Nova Scotia that sold a full line of food. Walmart is said to have 10 times the buying power of the other chains currently operating in the province.\textsuperscript{58} In addition, both federal and provincial governments have actively supported the neoliberalization of the food system through subsidies. For example, both federal and provincial governments have subsidized port facilities, creating a situation where “it is both a negative and positive that transportation costs are artificially low. If we were paying the full cost of bringing lettuce from California into Toronto, well you wouldn’t be buying it” (INT#3). Transportation is a critical factor in both the sales and purchase of food.

\textbf{The economic capacities of civil society organizations and government departments}

Since the mid-1990s, the economic capacities of civil society organizations have been diminishing, as have the capacities of provincial and federal government departments responsible for files related to CFS (eg, ministries for agriculture, public health, fisheries, etc) as a result of cutbacks associated with neoliberalization. There has been an acceleration of this trend in the past decade due to a number of factors, including a reduction in the federal government’s capacity to generate revenue (eg, corporate tax cuts)\textsuperscript{59} and a shift to stringent austerity measures.\textsuperscript{60} The interviews contained many examples of both federal and provincial governments significantly cutting back on funding support for nonprofit organizations of all kinds. Antipoverty, agricultural, and aquaculture groups expressed concern about a lack of government funding to support their work on issues related to CFS. As a result, several organizations had closed their regional offices or were relying on the national level of their organizations to determine regional priorities. Interviewees also expressed concern about the lack of control by nonprofits over funding provided by governments, compromising their ability to advocate for more equitable food and other public policies.

Some health, antipoverty, and agricultural groups found success in supplementing government funding with private and corporate sponsorship.
Although not all civil society groups are comfortable with or able to garner industry support, some groups have found funders that line up with their goals. A representative from a farm organization stated: “Where government support seems to be dwindling, we can get some support from banks and businesses that are in the agricultural community to support our groups and programs” (INT#9). Similarly, though school breakfast programs receive provincial government funding, they also receive support from Loblaw Children’s Charities, the Nova Scotia Egg Producers, and the Nova Scotia Milk Producers, who donate products and educational materials. Civil society groups have also found other means of support; for example, one organization noted that it has registered with the Registry of Joint Stock Companies in Nova Scotia, which opens more possibilities for acquiring grant funding.

Some new resources have also come to the province to fund CFS-related work within the last decade. The Community–University Research Alliance under which this research took place represents a substantial infusion of national funds ($1 million over 5 years) for food security research and action in Nova Scotia. In addition, 2 projects being undertaken in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), Nova Scotia’s largest urban center, offer promise. The first is Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention (CLASP), a national project spearheaded by the Urban Public Health Initiative that is bringing public health practitioners into dialogue with planners at HRM by having a planner working at the local health authority. The second is the Community Food Centers of Canada’s pilot project in Dartmouth, across the harbor from Halifax, alongside the Dartmouth Family Resource Centre. Announced in early 2013 and launched in 2015, this partnership aims to provide advocacy support, a food distribution initiative, and community kitchens and gardens.

In summary, this section presented a range of shifts in the material/economic realm that have implications for the realization of CFS in Nova Scotia. The overall picture appears to have more constraints than enablers. Household food insecurity is on the rise. Access to healthy foods on First Nations reserves remains a major challenge. Farmers and small-scale fishers face significant economic hurdles, with implications for both food system sustainability and the ability of these sectors to contribute to CFS. However, new resources for initiatives that bring governments and civil society innovators together, such as FarmWorks, CLASP, and the Community Food Centre, are among potential enablers to CFS. The implications of some trends—such as the growth of foreign investment in the fisheries and aquaculture, the arrival of Walmart grocery stores in Nova Scotia, or the growing role of philanthropy in school food programs—are either uncertain or can be expected to have mixed results. Many initiatives benefit CFS in some ways (eg, improve the availability of affordable food or new jobs) but at the
expense of other dimensions of CFS such as community resilience or universality of access.

**Discursive constraints and enablers**

Key discursive constraints to realizing CFS identified in the analysis included misunderstandings and negative stereotyping of people living in poverty and of the agriculture and fisheries sectors. Another constraint was the relative absence of discussion of the fisheries in relation to CFS in the province, despite the critical role it plays in rural employment and food production. We also repeatedly heard about provincial and federal governments emphasizing neoliberal market-driven approaches over holistic thinking and long-term strategies.

Many stakeholders noted a lack of understanding of their own sector, often resulting in negative stereotypes, as a major constraint to their being able to advance goals related to CFS. One community organization representative stated that the resentment around people living in poverty, perpetuated by both media and in politics, limits the capacity to create strong drivers for change and cooperation. Individualizing assumptions came out strongly in some of the interviews; for example, the belief that individual behaviors and choices are at the root of poverty and poor nutrition.

Both fishers and farmers felt their respective professions were overly generalized and held unfairly accountable for issues related to animal rights and the environment. Representatives from these sectors felt that there was a lack of public appreciation for food producers and harvesters, with media and the general public focusing too often on industry failures rather than on the positive aspects of their socioeconomic or environmental contributions. These informants attributed this negativity to a lack of understanding or interest rather than ill will, noting that “the average person on the street really doesn’t pay much attention to food security, where their food comes from, or the quality of the food” (INT#2). The growth in direct marketing by producers to consumers discussed above may be helping to change some of these stereotypes, by strengthening producer–consumer ties. Another way we have identified for challenging stereotypes is to work together through research projects like this one. In this project (as articulated in our *Making Food Matter* report[64]) we seek to work together as citizens—and not just as consumers or producers—to improve CFS.

Another discursive constraint to a comprehensive approach to CFS in Nova Scotia is the fact that fish harvesting and aquaculture have been largely absent in discussions about CFS in the province. As one stakeholder noted, “Nova Scotia was founded on fishing, fishing communities and seafood and this continues to define its human and cultural geographies, yet much more focus [in CFS discussions] is put on terrestrial food production. . . . Our
seafood is treated not as food to be celebrated but a commodity to be traded" (INT#37). Fortunately, this trend is changing somewhat, as evidenced by the inclusion of fisheries in our analysis and as a key theme of the Food Secure Canada Assembly held in Halifax in 2014.

Both federal and provincial governments have adopted discourses associated with neoliberalization in their policies regarding fisheries and agriculture, making specific assumptions about scale, and the role of privatization that benefits larger players at the expense of smaller ones. For example, in 2012 the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans released a document intended to “modernize” the Atlantic fisheries by “streamlining” the rules to “better respond to changing market conditions.” Independent operators viewed the proposed policy direction as “reductionist in its framing of the issues” and “written in the ideological code of de-regulation” rather than as a sincere effort to support fisheries dominated by independent owner-operators.

In another example, a representative of the Rural and Coastal Communities Network explained that “all of the agricultural policies, federally, and then we fall in line provincially, over the past 30 years ... are essentially designed to consolidate ownership—larger farms, fewer products and less diversity, so that we can compete in terms of trading and exporting foods, instead of looking at local self-sufficiency and being able to feed ourselves” (INT#1). Some stakeholders felt that it was time for policy makers to revisit these assumptions about scale and to recognize the value of smaller scale production and local economies. We heard numerous mentions of the need for “scale-appropriate regulation,” which encompasses the idea that smaller scale producers and processors need regulations suited to the size of their businesses, so they are not overwhelmed by the expectations placed on businesses operating at larger scales. Scale-appropriate regulation does not challenge the existence of larger entities but creates space for how smaller ones can exist, and provide livelihoods, alongside them.

There are other discursive forces taking hold in Nova Scotia that appear to be enablers for enhancing sustainable food systems in particular. Many interviews mentioned the growing local food movement as an important development. An increasing number of farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture programs, etc, are leading to stronger connections between consumers and local producers and increased public awareness about food issues. The local food movement has also fostered the development of new projects and opportunities for businesses, farmers, and some fish harvesters. Stakeholders specifically drew attention to the “Taste of Nova Scotia” program sponsored by the provincial government and the Food Miles Project undertaken by the Ecology Action Centre and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture.
Interviews also illustrated widespread support for improving children’s health, suggesting a discursive enabler for CFS, and reflected broad support for healthy school food programs and breakfast programs. A farm organization representative explained that “people genuinely care about their children and grandchildren more than they do about their own health” (INT#12). She referred to the positive impact that Jamie Oliver’s “food revolution” (which prioritizes food in schools) has had on media and the mainstream as an example of how trends can be popularized to support local and nutritious foods.

A recent shift in both political and public perceptions from a more narrow understanding of poverty-based food insecurity to the broader conception of “food environments” has enabled a new set of stakeholders to get involved in developing creative CFS solutions. For example, the Nova Scotia government released the THRIVE! strategy in 2012, which places emphasis on creating environments that make it easier for Nova Scotians to eat well and be active. Though social policy is articulated as a foundational ingredient for healthy communities in THRIVE!, it is not clear what impact this has had on realizing CFS in Nova Scotia, especially considering evidence that household food insecurity, a marker of material deprivation, has been increasing in Nova Scotia.

A national event in 2012 brought the idea of the human right to food into the heart of debates over food policy in Canada. The official mission of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Food to Canada heard from Nova Scotia emissaries, along with other civil society organizations from across the country who offered testimony on the inadequacy of Canada’s social protection schemes, the plight of migrant farm workers, and the need for a “living wage,” among other topics. The report has helped to anchor discussions about CFS moving forward across Canada, including in Nova Scotia.

Though it is clear that certain discourses continue to curtail the realization of CFS in Nova Scotia, such as stigmatizing media representations of people living in poverty and food producers, we are also witnessing a number of encouraging discursive shifts. These include growing appreciation for local food, growing recognition of the need for scale-appropriate regulation (both of which are especially important for building more environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable food systems), widespread engagement by civil society organizations and governments in children’s health, the championing of strategies for improving food environments by pivotal players at the provincial level, and a growing recognition of the need for a Canada-wide food strategy rooted in the human right to food.
Organizational constraints and enablers

Organizational forces refers to the power of networks of people, including those embedded in formal state institutions, to determine how certain issues are addressed. This section begins with a discussion of the role of collaboration in moving forward on CFS in Nova Scotia. We then turn to constraints identified within formal institutions (including the lack of political will and follow-through by governments) and the lack of attention to local needs in policy making (especially at the federal level). We end by highlighting a range of state policies (at local, provincial, and federal levels) that advance various aspects of the CFS agenda as gleaned from the interviews.

The most common theme to arise with regards to organizational forces is the central role of collaboration as an enabler for community and policy action related to CFS, whether among government departments, within and between industries, within and between civil society groups, between government and civil society groups, between industry and civil society groups, between regions and provinces, or between universities and civil society organizations (as demonstrated in the current research collaboration). Developing collaborative approaches is a direct response to the widely held concern that many of the groups active on CFS-related issues in Nova Scotia are “working in silos” (INT#21; INT#18), thus contributing to a lack of coordination and communication and constraining progress.

A representative from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture emphasized that fragmentation limits civil society organizations’ abilities to achieve their goals, because small groups have less clout in their ability to create change as well as a weaker ability to withstand major change or challenges. Other stakeholders noted similar disconnects between various provincial departments. Although there have been some cases of interdepartmental collaboration, these connections tend to be case-specific and rarely represent systematic collaboration. It was widely recognized that collaboration “can help build communities” (INT#5), and the interviews revealed a strong desire among civil society representatives and government employees alike to both strengthen coalitions built in the past and form new collaborations.

However, collaboration is not always easy to achieve, because different perspectives on CFS-related issues can create tensions rather than cohesion. Interviewees provided several examples of difficult relationships. A representative from an antipoverty organization explained the frustration she feels when poverty seminars invite “people who are living in poverty to attend, but never really gave them a voice” (INT#13). In contrast, a representative of another antipoverty group commented on their organization’s shift from a charity model to an “empowerment model” (INT#13), stating that this change has allowed them to engage in more respectful ways with people on
income-related food insecurity issues. Several interviewees also noted that though Nova Scotia’s small population enables collaborative opportunities, the overlap of players can equally fuel conflict.

The importance of greater collaboration among those in the agricultural sector in Nova Scotia was another theme in the interviews. A representative of the co-op sector talked about how co-operatives have a strong history in the province and how this form of organization is reemerging in some food sectors. Informal collaboration was also noted: A lamb farmer who sells into local markets explained the value of seasonal meetings with retailers and abattoirs to discuss prices and profit margins. It was recognized that First Nations and other minority communities in Nova Scotia have a history of grouping together within their own communities for success, potentially representing a model for other communities to follow:

Because they have been under threat culturally, they have grouped together and become self-sufficient in the very way that I think we need throughout rural Nova Scotia . . . the Acadian [French descendants] and First Nations are great examples of cooperative and family-run businesses that have given resiliency to communities. (INT#1)

When it comes to formal political institutions in Nova Scotia, variations on the theme a “lack of political will” (INT#26; INT#2; INT#12; INT#13; INT#18) were identified by several stakeholders as limiting the realization of CFS. This lack of will may not be outright opposition to a proposed change but rather take the form of outright opposition. In other cases, stakeholders noted a lack of receptivity on the part of government bureaucrats to work with civil society groups to address issues of agriculture or poverty. The lack of government follow-through or enforcement of its own policies was also raised as an organizational limitation. For example, a representative from a farm organization explained that despite guidelines encouraging a certain amount of local product to be used in public venues, even the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture did not always uphold this policy when catering events. Similar concerns were voiced by antipoverty groups, with one representative noting that although the provincial government developed strategies to improve conditions for low-income groups (eg, the Nova Scotia Poverty Reduction Strategy), no reporting mechanisms or clear targets were developed to encourage follow-through.

Another common theme in the interviews was the view that federal policies are often out of touch with the needs of Nova Scotians. One interviewee stated: “policy is not something that is made by the bureaucrats at the regional level. It is political and done in Ottawa, at the federal level. We have no way of influencing those discussions. . . . [In contrast,] at the provincial level there are ways to be involved in creating policy” (INT#1). A representative from the provincial Department of Agriculture agreed with the need
for decentralized policy-making, noting that because Atlantic agriculture is different than the rest of Canada, federal policies do not always reflect the needs of Atlantic producers.

Specific federal and provincial policies, including the decision to negotiate certain trade agreements (eg, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement [CETA] with Europe), and food safety regulations (eg, regulations for on-farm slaughter) were identified as posing real or potential barriers to achieving sustainable food systems and thus by extension to CFS. While discussing the CETA, currently being negotiated by the federal and provincial governments of Canada with the European Commission, a representative from the Rural and Coastal Communities Network pointed out that such agreements often lead to the removal of tariffs “and what that does is undermine our ability to supply our own food … to have viable livelihoods” (INT#1). On food safety regulations (a joint responsibility of federal and provincial governments in Canada), a small-scale farmer stated that “a lot of the small people … can be forced out because of over-regulation of small producers, especially meat” (INT#10).

Stakeholders also brought to the fore examples of existing policies that provide support for various aspects of the CFS agenda. These include federal program standards around pre- and postnatal health, provincial food and nutrition standards for regulated childcare settings, provincial policies that support the development of new markets for Nova Scotia farm and fisheries products, provincial school food nutrition policies, recent provincial increases in income assistance benefits and child benefits as well as increases in the minimum wage (noted above under material enablers), the provincial affordability tax credit, and Nova Scotia programs for new entrants into agriculture. These policies can be seen as organizational enablers for realizing CFS. A number of civil society organizations and provincial government representatives also suggested minor alterations to existing policies and programs that would better support CFS. In other words, many stakeholders were not proposing radically new policies but instead recommending ways to expand the scope of existing policies to enhance CFS.

Several stakeholders identified an emerging opportunity for moving forward on policies related to CFS at the regional level and in the Halifax Regional Municipality (Nova Scotia’s largest municipality, containing half the population) in particular. A number of factores appear to have come together recently, creating a climate more amenable to expanding the role of regional governments and local health authorities in building supportive food environments. These factors include the election of a new mayor in HRM with a strong “healthy communities” platform in the fall of 2012, a review of the regional plan for HRM that provided opportunities for incorporating new measures to address food insecurity supported by the local health authority, and the appointment of a Medical Officer of Health for the local health
authority who conveys strong messages about the ways in which various levels of governments can work together with researchers and community-based organizations to improve CFS.

Though our interviews with civil society and government actors in Nova Scotia pointed to a number of ways that organizational forces may be constraining action on CFS, the overall outlook was fairly positive. Existing and potential collaborations among various actors bode well for the kind of integrative, holistic work that is necessary to realize CFS. A number of examples show that this effort is taking root, especially at the level of civil society, within municipal governance (at least in HRM—we did not interview municipal actors more broadly) and in the provincial government. Furthermore, some existing policies and programs, either as they are or with some adjustments, can improve support for CFS in the province.

**Discussion**

This section provides reflection on our research results in light of our conceptual framework and identifies key tensions identified through our work that we believe need to be addressed to improve CFS. The results reveal the complexity of forces shaping the food system in Nova Scotia—pulling it in different directions—some supportive of CFS, some not. Given the range of forces involved, it is difficult to assess the balance of relations of force in any specific domain, as neo-Gramscians propose, and even more complicated when thinking across the 3 domains.

Still, one pattern that is clear is that neoliberalism—as an idea with concomitant material, organizational, and discursive practices—continues to be a driving force across the domains. We see it in the increased entrepreneurialism practiced by farmers and fishers, the trend toward niche market production, the growing openness of the federal and provincial governments to encourage producers to compete on a global level with minimum financial supports (eg, CETA), and a deliberate shrinking of the social safety net. Canada’s conservative government (led by Stephen Harper since 2006) is an active proponent here. Nova Scotia governments (there have been 3 governments from across the political spectrum over the duration of this research project) have been expected to do more with less since the 1990s and have also turned to neoliberal strategies in that effort.

It is also clear that achieving progressive change (eg, the CEDIF program and FarmWorks) in this challenging climate is often dependent on collaboration between civil society and state actors. The close interdependence among these actors is consistent with Gramsci’s philosophy in which he states that it is the “extended” or “integral” state that governs, including “both the apparatuses of government and the judiciary and the various voluntary and private associations and para-political institutions which make up civil
Furthermore, our research confirms that a convergence of forces offers the best chances for the success of CFS initiatives. Convergence requires a supportive material base, an organizational structure of appropriate policies and programs, and strong ideological support among a range of actors who see these initiatives as fitting with their interests.

Several areas of tension related to the community food security agenda, and its advancement in Nova Scotia, came forward through the interviews. The most critical tension, from a social justice perspective is the tension between the financial struggles of many primary producers, including both fishers and farmers, and the financial struggles of the segment of the population that has insufficient income to purchase a basic healthy diet. To accentuate this tension, many local producers are seeking ways to increase the value of their production, which may mean that their products will cost more for citizens to access (albeit for a more specialized and possibly higher quality product). This tension is also evident in the CFS literature, which often assumes that it is possible to address the challenges facing local, often smaller scale, producers and low-income consumers together. Below we examine this challenge in theoretical terms and then in terms of the practicalities of building a CFS movement with a shared agenda in Nova Scotia.

In its focus on food supply, CFS advocates often stress the need for smaller scale, more sustainable, local or regional-based food systems as alternatives to the injustices and environmental costs of the global food system. Similarly, CFS scholars often highlight market-based alternative food systems and creative entrepreneurship as important components. When focusing on consumption, CFS pays particular attention to low-income groups seeking greater access to healthy foods.

However, in industrialized countries, alternative food networks are increasingly differentiating themselves by producing high-value products for high-end markets. As a result, the goals of ensuring accessibly priced food for consumers and fair wages for producers (including farm and fisheries workers) are not necessarily compatible and may even be contradictory. Recent debates over local food illustrate that CFS cannot be narrowly construed in terms of food system localization. Scholars caution against the “fetishization of local food” or “the local trap,” wherein a local food system is deemed de facto as more sustainable and socioeconomically stronger than “globalizing” food systems.

Notwithstanding the limitations of local and alternative food system efforts, we believe that it remains important to pay attention to them as market-based responses that may advance specific aspects of CFS. Polanyi posited that prior to the liberal era beginning in the late 1800s, markets were typically embedded in social and political structures that prevented or mitigated the negative effects of a pure market orientation. Contemporary scholarship drawing on his work has encouraged a careful assessment of
whether and how alternative food networks (e.g., organics, fair trade, and local foods) can serve to re-embed markets in ways that allow social and ecological values to be realized. These emerging alternative food networks are important because they continue to grow in an era when globalizing supply chains, and their values of placelessness and cheap prices, otherwise dominate. It thus remains important to consider developments in various alternative food networks within the scope of CFS but to retain a critical eye with regard to their impacts.

At a practical level, advocates of CFS should recognize that some of the short-term strategies that need to be adopted to support the livelihood goals of primary producers as they try to (re)build sustainable food systems may not meet the immediate needs of the whole population, at least not without further policy interventions. In other words, the various strategies for building a strong food system may be divergent in the short term. It then becomes the job of the wider movement, including policy makers at all levels, to devise strategies that ensure that local production as a whole is enhanced and that a significant portion of this production supplies local needs, including paying specific attention to the needs of vulnerable populations. Evidence does exist, from the United States and elsewhere, that shows these links being built and where further effort is required. Policy makers and activists alike should also pay close attention to the needs of medium-scale producers who serve local markets through the supermarket sector and not just to specialty farmers who may serve these same markets with less intensive production methods but at a premium price.

In terms of the growing food movement, our PAR project has shown that when you bring individuals representing divergent interests together in a room to discuss their challenges and ways forward, a shared interest can emerge through a critical analysis of the food system and by addressing issues through a CFS frame. In such contexts, a shared citizen interest emerges in food, agriculture, fisheries, and other policies that meet everyone’s needs. This was our experience when we shared the preliminary results of this research in various settings, including a provincial gathering, leading up to the release of the ACT for CFS provincial report, Making Food Matter.

One clear example where we see the tension between producer viability and access to food is in the milk supply system. Supply management in this industry means that dairy farmers are among the few Canadian farmers making a reasonable livelihood from a mid-sized farm. But there are costs. A 2001 study found that Canadians paid about 25% more for milk than Americans (though this percentage varies over time). Williams et al argued that this cost differential contributes to “milk insecurity” in low-income households. The milk supply may thus be an example of good public policy on the supply side, but what is missing is corresponding public policy on the demand side to ensure that all Canadians are able to access the supply. To
put it most simply, this tension would not exist if the Canadian State fulfilled its international obligations concerning the human right to food.40 (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer of our article for expressing this solution to the tension discussed in such clear terms.)

Another way the tension between food supply and food access emerged in our data is through perceptions of some producer stakeholders related to previous research undertaken by our research team. Research on the affordability of a basic nutritious diet in Nova Scotia has consistently shown that many people earning minimum wages and depending on income assistance cannot afford a healthy diet. However, despite evidence of the impact that this community–university PAR has had in creating change that supports CFS in Nova Scotia15,33,38,87 and the best efforts on the part of research teams to communicate its broader goals, some stakeholders noted that it appears at times to be targeting the wrong issues, drawing false conclusions, or not supporting system change. With a primary goal of understanding how to make healthy food more accessible to lower income groups, some producers have reacted negatively to this project, assuming that the goal of food access is synonymous with advocating for cheaper food, thus putting producers at a disadvantage. Others involved in the research admitted to believing in research’s ability to collect insightful data but less so in its ability to mobilize into action for systemic change. These observations point to the need to communicate the goals of CFS in ways that speak to a range of stakeholders and their interests, in order to ensure that our efforts do not result in exacerbating the tension between producer and consumer interests.

A second tension to arise from the research concerns the idea of self-sufficiency and what the appropriate balance of imports and exports should be. Though the definition of CFS formulated by Hamm and Bellows includes “community self-reliance,”11(p37) we have found resistance to the concept when it is interpreted too narrowly as the idea that all Nova Scotian residents eat only locally produced foods. Further, the idea that Nova Scotia producers should shift all production toward local markets is unrealistic, especially for export-dependent industries like the fisheries. Self-reliance in the context of CFS in Nova Scotia is perhaps better framed in terms of having the capacity (skills, infrastructure, economic links, etc) to support a vibrant and diverse food system that includes global trade to meet a variety of community needs (including income generation) but that also has strong local and regional links (including direct links between producers and consumers when mutually advantageous). Because the local and regional linkages have been systematically undermined in recent decades through an abundance of cheap fuel, supermarkets, and pro-globalization policies, the CFS agenda must include a strong focus on rebuilding them. However, this cannot be the movement’s sole focus.
In reflecting on the tensions that emerged in our research, we were mindful of the fact that the stakeholders we interviewed were not representative of all community perspectives on CFS. We did speak to many organizations who represent farmers, fishers, and some populations of Nova Scotians living on low incomes. However, we will want to reach out more diligently to specific groups, especially First Nations, African Nova Scotians, recent immigrants, and Acadians, in future research.

**Strategic opportunities for improving CFS**

Our objective in this research was to lay the groundwork for identifying strategic intrasectoral and cross-sectoral opportunities to further CFS. The interviews reported on above and sharing our analysis of them in stakeholder gatherings were critical steps in the process of defining those opportunities. Our research contributes to a larger PAR project that also included detailed participatory community-based food security assessments in 4 Nova Scotia communities, and we have included the results from these assessments in our deliberations regarding strategic opportunities for improving CFS. Below we present 3 broad areas of opportunity identified through our analysis, each reflecting areas of potential convergence of agendas and interests among many of the stakeholders interviewed, while also paying attention to both constraints and enablers at this particular historical moment. The 3 areas are opportunities for aligning initiatives across agriculture, fisheries, and health; opportunities for achieving accessible healthy food for all; and overarching cross-sectoral opportunities. Building on Allen’s point\(^3\) that CFS must involve both community-based entrepreneurship and a strong role for the state, each of these areas requires close collaboration within and across various levels of the state and civil society for more detailed strategies to be developed and implemented.

**Opportunities for aligning agriculture, fisheries, and health**

Within the food production and harvesting sector, a number of areas of potential synergy were identified from the interviews with producer organizations and others with an interest in supporting vibrant agriculture and fisheries sectors in Nova Scotia that contribute to population health.\(^{59,60}\) For example, there was a strong shared interest in community economic development focused on small- and mid-scale agriculture and fisheries, as well as activities that help to (re)build mechanisms for processing and distributing local and regional products. There was also interest in introducing supportive regulatory reforms in order to increase the percentage of fresh locally grown and harvested foods marketed in Nova Scotia or in the Atlantic region more broadly. Such reform would include defining scale-appropriate regulations
(in close consultation with the sectors implicated) that would not swamp small producers and processors with the same burden of demands and paperwork as larger actors. These strategies are complementary with production for export or production at larger scales, each of which serves different goals within the broad CFS agenda.

There was also a convergence of interest in seeing producers (or producers together with consumers) gaining further control over food processing and distribution, and we are beginning to see interesting opportunities (such as the provincial CEDIF program and the FarmWorks Investment Cooperative) to support this. This strategy holds the potential to increase and stabilize profits for producers and harvesters and may also give consumers greater say in what is produced for them.

Given the potential emergence of a 2-tiered market mentioned above, our research also suggests that it is important that strategies undertaken by producer organizations and their supporters, including government departments, are inclusive and that the fruits of this labor are as universally accessible as possible. An example of an integrated set of government strategies within this area supported by our analysis is reducing barriers for smaller scale producers using alternative production methods (e.g., free-range hens) in the supply managed sectors of milk and poultry, while still maintaining these systems for larger producers in the face of international pressures (e.g., trade negotiations) and also seeking to address universal access to the products of these supply-managed commodities (e.g., preventing milk insecurity). This type of multipronged policy approach would generate broad buy-in among many of the stakeholders we interviewed.

**Ensuring healthy and accessible food for all**

Among organizations actively working on food accessibility issues, we found the greatest opportunities for convergence around the goal of improving the health and nutrition of children and youth through creating conditions in the built and social environments to support healthy food initiatives. Community initiatives, such as Good Box programs, community gardens, breakfast in schools, and fundraising to support healthy food in schools, demonstrate growing civil society support across the province. Policy initiatives like CLASP and THRIVE! also demonstrate strong interest in the intersection between food environments and children’s health from various levels of government.

In addition, our research shows a strong convergence of interests around income-related policies that improve access to food for low-income populations. We recognize that these types of initiatives have not been viewed favorably by neoliberal governments, such as the conservative government in power (at the time of this writing) in Canada. However, civil society
campaigns around a living wage and a guaranteed annual income are becoming both increasingly vocal and increasingly sophisticated in their analysis and may thus offer the best opportunities for furthering the conversation on policies that ensure food access for all. When policy windows open up at municipal, provincial, and federal levels, these strategies have greater potential for impact.

**Overarching cross-sectoral opportunities**

Despite perceived tensions, our research shows that there is significant potential for organizations working on both food supply and food access issues and policies to work toward mutually beneficial goals. The cross-sectoral collaboration apparent in the emerging food alliance in the Halifax Regional Municipality is a good example of state and community organizations coming together to address CFS issues on a regional basis, with common goals setting the stage to move beyond jurisdictional boundaries. Other opportunities identified through the research for continuing to develop this collaborative approach include efforts to integrate CFS into existing cross-cutting government and community initiatives (eg, THRIVE!, the Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy); the integration of public health goals into municipal and regional planning (eg, CLASP); emergent discussions around targets for increasing the procurement of local and nutritious foods in schools, workplaces, and other public institutions, coupled with development of the associated educational opportunities that emerge; and growing interest at the community level in strategies that address income-related food insecurity as well as fair livelihood for primary producers (eg, ‘good food markets’ in low-income communities; the Community Food Centre model, and Food Box programs with the cost of food scaled according to income).

**Conclusion**

The analysis of 41 interviews with key stakeholders in Nova Scotia illustrates the ongoing challenges of realizing CFS in the context of neoliberalization, with its associated government cutbacks and a food economy that continues to globalize in ways that primarily benefit only the largest companies and higher income citizens. The broader societal challenges to CFS were also revealed, particularly at the discursive level where stigma and presumptions about different actors can inhibit a collaborative problem-solving approach. Our interviews bring to the fore the complex web of economic, organizational, and discursive factors that undermine CFS in Nova Scotia. They also reveal an existing patchwork of policies supportive of CFS, as well as a range of community-based and entrepreneurial activities that offer real
opportunities for advancing CFS. This research allowed our team to identify strategic opportunities that build on existing enablers while paying attention to the broader relations of force impacting CFS. When brought together with detailed participatory community food security assessments in 4 Nova Scotia communities in our PAR project and other related provincial level research, these data and our analysis contributed toward a more detailed analysis and report: *Making Food Matter*.  

In future research, we will continue to examine the power relations that enable or constrain CFS. In this endeavor, we can take guidance from a recent shift in the academic literature on food systems, where questions of food justice and food sovereignty are emerging. This literature is highly consistent with a neo-Gramscian analysis and participatory research principles, bringing to the fore questions of justice, livelihood, and inclusion and emphasizing that all food systems are underpinned by gender, race, class, and other inequities. By bringing these lenses more intentionally into our work, we hope to develop further insights into the forces at play in creating the conditions for CFS and the forces that must be overcome or harnessed to improve CFS.

**References**


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