

COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY IN PICTOU LANDING FIRST NATION

AUTHORSHIP AND CORRESPONDENCE

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BACKGROUND

The **objectives** of this 2013/2014 research project were to:

1. Better understand food security issues in Pictou Landing First Nation;
2. Provide direction for future CFS work in Pictou Landing and beyond;
3. Build capacity with the community for research and policy development;
4. Develop research models and tools for other Mi'kmaq communities.

The **research** consisted of four main components:

1. Compiling an inventory of resources available in the community;
2. Developing better understanding of food accessibility in the community;
3. Conducting qualitative research (through story-sharing and photovoice)
4. Further contribute to dissemination of healthy eating resources.

KEY FINDINGS

- Residents of Pictou Landing pointed to **Boat Harbour pollution** (coming from the Pictou County Pulp Mill) as a continued issue that permeates many aspects of their lives. In terms of food security, Boat Harbour pollution is perceived to severely limit both access to **traditional foods** (such as wild game, seafood, and berries) and ability to grow food on reserve (due to fears of soil contamination).
- **Physical access** to healthy food is problematic. There is only one convenience store in the community that carries mostly high-calorie, low-nutrient foods. The closest grocery stores are a twenty-minute ride from Pictou Landing. There is a pressing need for creative alternatives that can improve access to safe and nutritious foods.
- **Economic access** is also problematic. For those on income assistance in particular, it is not always easy to afford a nutritious diet, and this can be compounded by the need for transportation, limited budgeting skills, limited cooking skills, and/or limited access to traditional foods.
- Other concerns included: **limited physical activity, link between good nutrition and learning** (for school-aged children), **need for more community gardens, relative accessibility of “junk” food, and need for more skill-building/ skill preservation** in budgeting, shopping, growing, harvesting (e.g., hunting; fishing; mushroom, berry, and medicinal plant picking), meal-planning, cooking, canning, and so on.
- A number of **assets and resources** already exist in the community but the awareness and use need to be increased; e.g. The Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative, Pictou County Health Authority (including Community Food Mentor training); the school meal program (run very effectively on a limited budget); community gardens; the local knowledge embedded with elders and the school kitchen staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for consideration at local level:

- Bring back Tapitat Market (roadside stand with seasonal vegetables)
- More community gardens/ greenhouse/ raised bed gardens
- Partnering with a farm to grow produce
- Good food box program (bulk-buying of fresh produce)
- Food bank for emergency relief (interim solution)
- Budgeting classes
- Make greater use of the existing Food Mentoring Program
- More inter-generational events where youth can learn traditional foodways (e.g., hunting, fishing, mushroom/berry/medicinal plant picking, etc.) from elders
- Find ways to organize events such as regular cooking and canning classes, gardening workshops, and organized moose hunts for women and youth
- Food deliveries and/or meals-on-wheels for elders
- Shuttle service for grocery shopping
- More healthy foods in the existing store
- Community freezers/ storage (for wild game and bulk buying)
- Improved after-hours access to the gymnasium for youth
- More food education in the curriculum – e.g., hands-on garden work and visits to farms
- School food policy
- Involve all school kids in meal/snack preparation or menu planning
- School kitchen staff – utilize their knowledge without overworking them
- Continue disseminating information on existing resources about healthy eating

Recommendations for higher levels of government (Mi'kmaq, county, provincial and federal)

- There is a need for all levels of government to take food insecurity seriously – those in position of power rarely experience such challenges and there is a need to bring food (in)security more effectively to the forefront of social policy
- Offer programs that can support all of the above recommendations in Pictou Landing and in other Mi'kmaq communities
- Offer programs that can support greater access to physical activities
- Take the issue of Boat Harbour pollution seriously at all levels of government and start to remedy the environmental damage
- Adjust social assistance rates for lone parent families to allow for purchase of nutritious diet.