



Community University
Research Alliance

**Activating Change Together
for Community Food Security**

Challenges and Opportunities for Community Food Security: The Policy Landscape in Nova Scotia

Prepared by the Policy Working Group of
Activating Change Together For Community Food Security (ACT for CFS)

<http://www.foodarc.ca/actforcfs>

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This report has been prepared by the Policy Working Group (PWG) of Activating Change Together for Community Food Security (ACT for CFS), a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada-funded project based in Nova Scotia. ACT for CFS is a Community University Research Alliance (2010-2015) being led by FoodARC - the Food Action Research Centre - at Mount Saint Vincent University (Co-Director, Dr. Patty Williams) and the Nova Scotia Food Security Network (Acting Co-Director, Rita MacAulay) along with over 70 partner organizations in Nova Scotia and across the country. ACT for CFS builds on a long standing university-community partnership in Nova Scotia that aims to “enhance understandings of Community Food Security (CFS) in concept and practice while strengthening capacity for policy change at multiple levels” (Williams, 2009). Food Security in a community means everyone has access to enough affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food that is produced in socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable ways. CFS is about creating healthy, vibrant communities where there is self-reliance and social justice for everyone.¹ CFS is simultaneously a goal, an analytical framework, a movement, and a tool for policy change (Gottlieb and Joseph, 1997). One of the key questions we are aiming to address in ACT for CFS is how can food systems be sustainable while both supporting local producers and facilitating access to healthy foods for low-income households?

The purpose of this report is to identify, better understand and amplify strategic opportunities and where alliances can be built between stakeholders in Nova Scotia’s food system (civil society, industry, and government), drawing on the experiential knowledge of these stakeholders, to move public policy in the direction of increased CFS. In order to identify these opportunities and potential alliances, the report draws on research analyzing how

¹ This definition has been adapted for ACT for CFS from the work of Hamm and Bellows (2002).

different stakeholders engaged in food politics and governance in Nova Scotia understand this system, and what they are doing to move their own agendas forward. The research then compares these activities with the broad goal of CFS in order to identify new openings for collaborative policy development and change. This work is intended to give a broad overview of Nova Scotia's food policy landscape, and thus does not provide detailed policy analysis. It is a starting point for further conversation and research.

This report draws from a series of interviews conducted throughout the fall and winter of 2011-2012 and builds on research carried out by the Policy Working Group throughout 2010-2012 that analyzed primary and secondary resources including government reports, news articles, and academic literature. When selecting participants for the research, the Group endeavored to represent a diverse range of health, anti-poverty, agricultural, fisheries, and government stakeholders, as well as organizations that have broad sectoral mandates. Particular effort was made to include specific marginalized groups. Previous research has shown that citizens from rural communities, those working in agriculture and the fisheries, as well as minority groups (First Nation and Acadian) and those living in lower socio-economic circumstances often feel excluded from participating in planning and policy processes that shape their future (RCIP Project, 2005; Langille et al. 2008; Van der Plaats & Barrett 2006; Williams et al. forthcoming). Further, to build on the partnerships of the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing projects,² this research sought to include more voices from rural and agricultural communities.³

Forty-one (N=41)⁴ participants were interviewed and can be generally categorized into the following groups (bearing in mind that some people/organizations fit into more than one category); 10 agricultural organizations or farmers; 4 fisheries groups; 2 youth agricultural groups; 2 alternative distribution groups; 3 processing, distributor, or retail groups; 1 rural organization; 4 health and nutrition groups (including the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council); 2 anti-poverty organizations; 2 minority or cultural groups; 1 representative from the Nova Scotia Food Policy Council; 3 representatives from the NS Department of Agriculture; 3 representatives from NS Department of Health and Wellness; 1 representative from the NS Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture; 2 representatives of Municipal governments, 1 representative from Capital District Health Authority and 1 representative from Health Canada, First Nations and Inuit Health. An in-depth semi-structured interview style was employed. This style of interviewing aims to "achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation" by using open-ended questions and probing techniques (Berry, 1999). The interviews were mainly conducted by telephone. With the exception of 3 participants in New Brunswick,⁵ all of the participants were located in Nova Scotia. Most of the interviews were undertaken by Emily Norgang, the Research Assistant for the Policy Working Group. Interviews were coded and analyzed by Emily Norgang along with the assistance of seven members of the Policy Working Group: Peter Andr e, Colleen Cameron, Chantal Clement, Lynn Langille, Kristen Lowitt, Marla MacLeod, Anne-Marie Smith, and Patty Williams. Reviewers of this report include Patty Williams, Colleen Cameron, Chantal Clement, Lynn Langille and the members of the Knowledge Mobilization Working Group of ACT for CFS.

While this report draws on multiple perspectives from stakeholders active in areas related to food policy from across Nova Scotia, it is important to recognize that the analysis presented herein remains partial. On some topics conflicting viewpoints are presented, revealing the complexity of the subject and the diverse experience of those interviewed. Finally, while efforts have been made to correct any factual errors shared with interviewers by

² The Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Projects (2001-2013) have been guided by participatory action research (PAR) processes to engage those who are marginalized with experience of income-related food insecurity to have their voices heard, and to build capacity at multiple levels for addressing food insecurity in Nova Scotia and across Canada. This model has led to several other local, regional and national projects which have employed a PAR methodology that were undertaken by the lead partner organizations and several other partners in ACT for CFS since 2001. See Williams et al. (2012) for more information on the Participatory Food Costing Model.

³ Notwithstanding these efforts, we recognize that we need to continue to reach out more to specific groups as we move forward on this research, including specifically African Nova Scotians, First Nations, and the fisheries sector. We revisit these ideas in our section on research limitations.

⁴ Unfortunately, material from two of our informants had to be removed from this paper just prior to publication because their consent forms were never submitted.

⁵ These were representatives of organizations with a national or regional mandate that included work in Nova Scotia.

the respondents, there remains the possibility of errors in this report. The ACT for CFS Policy Working Group welcomes feedback to address any such shortcomings in future drafts of this report.

The report is organized in three sections. The first section reviews geographic, political and economic factors that constitute the **broad context** for discussions about CFS in Nova Scotia. The second section presents **constraints and enablers** to realizing various elements of the CFS vision, including a vibrant and sustainable food production and distribution system, and equitable access to healthy food for all. This section contains three categories: **economic, ideational** and **organizational** constraints and opportunities for CFS. The third section presents a discussion of **key tensions** identified through this work, an initial list of **strategic opportunities** for achieving policy change that take into consideration identified constraints and opportunities, **reflection on limitations** of this research to date, and some **key lessons** learned by stakeholders interviewed from their efforts to change public policy that influences CFS.

Acknowledgements:

We would like to give our sincere thanks to the forty-one individuals (and their organizations) that gave us interviews for this research. We apologize for any errors and omissions, or if we misrepresented the words of any of our interviewees.

1.0 CONTEXT

This section presents some of the key contextual factors that shape Nova Scotia's food system. By context, we mean overarching conditions and long-term trends that help define how food is produced or harvested, distributed and accessed in Nova Scotia. By food system, we mean the resources to acquire and access food as well as the capacity to produce it sustainably. The stakeholder interviews pointed to many contextual factors that appear particularly relevant to issues of CFS. These include: Nova Scotia's population demographics; climate; the makeup of agriculture and fisheries in the province, and the structure of its food processing and distribution; issues affecting vulnerable populations (low-income, minority and elderly populations); and macro-economic conditions. This section demonstrates that although CFS is influenced by Nova Scotia's unique physical geography and demographics at the local level, these dynamics are also affected by economic, political, and ideological factors determined at provincial, national and international levels.

Demographics

CFS in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada must be understood in relation to the uniqueness of its demographics and geography in comparison to other Canadian regions. Although Nova Scotia faces many of the same CFS issues – in terms of agriculture, health, and poverty as the rest of Canada, and in terms of fisheries as in other coastal regions of Canada – its unique characteristics create conditions that present different challenges and opportunities than in other regions (Grant, J., 2011; Newman, D. 2012)⁶. Nova Scotia's population demographics include three key factors that influence the food landscape: size, age, and rurality. Nova Scotia's population is just under one million. An expert in organic farming explained that Nova Scotia's small population, and in turn its small tax base, is a problematic factor influencing provincial policy in both agriculture and health care (Patterson, A. 2011). From the perspective of food markets, this small population means that there is a limited local market for food produced in Nova Scotia. The executive director of the Atlantic Canada Food and Beverage Processing Association (AFBPA) noted that although Maritimers see the importance of purchasing food produced in Atlantic Canada "on the other hand, we only have a small population.....most of our food production is not for local, it is for export." He also added that although the local market is important to local farmers, it is less important to Atlantic fish processors because even the regional market (including Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick) is simply too small (Newman, D. 2012). Nova Scotia demographic trends also include an aging population. The province currently has

⁶ In accordance with the informed consent process associated with this research, individual respondents are referred to by name and/or organization in this report. An exception is made for a few interviewees who requested full anonymity.

the oldest population in Canada with approximately 15.4% of residents over the age of 65 (NSARDA, 2011). This trend has implications for various sectors. For example, an interviewee from the health sector pointed to the difficulties associated with meeting the demands of increasing health care costs with a small tax base (Poirier, L. 2011).

In terms of agriculture, the average age of the Canadian farmer continues to rise. The trend is similar in Nova Scotia, with the average farmer's age in 2011 at 55 (Statistics Canada 2012). As an example from one sector, the average beekeeper in Nova Scotia is estimated to be over 60 (Dickie, P. 2011). Several agricultural stakeholders outlined the challenges that this places on the succession of farms (Grant, J., 2011; Pick, A. 2011; Fulton, H. 2011). As an example, one said: "I will argue that the number one issue that we face in the industry is succession, getting young blood into the industry" (Newman, D. 2012). In response to this issue, one young farmer outlined the challenges that young people who do decide to enter agriculture face, from the cost of land and other start-up costs, to regulations, distribution and marketing challenges (Fulton, H. 2011). Another young farmer explained that "there are a lot of young people who want to get into growing food, but they never have the money to buy land" (Oommen, T. 2012). These quotes reveal that ensuring the next generation of farmers is not just a question of Nova Scotia having an aging population, but also one of the broader economic challenges facing this industry. In contrast to seeing these demographic trends in a negative light, at least one stakeholder noted the benefits of an aging population for local agriculture and pointed out that some members of older populations have more disposable dollars to spend on higher quality, local products (Hunter, F. 2011).

Although Nova Scotia population distribution is largely rural, this trend is increasingly shifting as the province is witnessing an out-migration of rural populations to urban areas in the region or to other parts of Canada (Newman, D. 2012; Hopkins, R. 2011; Knowlton, W. 2011; Austin, M. 2011). Over the next two decades the youth population (age 5-19 years) is expected to decline by 21.8%, and the next age group (20-24 years) is expected to decline from 6.6% in 2009 to 4.9% in 2034 (NSARDA, 2011). This shift has not only been attributed to economic decline and unemployment in rural areas, but also to cutbacks in government services that offer recreational, employment and educational resources to youth (NSARDA, 2011). As a result, many young people move to urban centres after graduating high school (NSARDA, 2011). This shift has severely affected the make-up of rural Nova Scotia and many stakeholders pointed to increased challenges faced by rural communities. Two issues related to this point are the distinctiveness of rural poverty (Lord, S. 2011; Knowlton, W. 2011), and the unique issues faced by minority communities such as First Nations, Acadians, and African Nova Scotians (Austin, M. 2011). Both of these issues are revisited below.

Agriculture

Efforts to improve CFS in Nova Scotia must take into consideration the (changing) makeup of the agriculture and fisheries sectors. This section looks at farming, while the next reviews the state of the fisheries. The first consideration is the relationship between climate and the types of agriculture practiced in Nova Scotia. In particular, stakeholders pointed to the short growing season and wet climate and how this influences the types of products that can be produced in NS (Grant, J., 2011; Newman, D. 2012). Some interviewees also noted the challenge that a changing climate is presenting to both Nova Scotia farming and fisheries (Brun, C. 2011; Grant, J., 2011). However, others pointed to benefits, such as the accessibility to good sources of water, which is increasingly becoming a challenge to farmers in other parts of Canada and the world, thereby giving Nova Scotia farmers an advantage in this regard (Newman, D. 2012).

The dominant agricultural trend in North America has been one of conglomeration, growth and monoculture. This trend has been praised for its productivity and accessibility in terms of prices, and criticized for issues relating to the environment, animal welfare, nutrition, equity and sustainability. However, much of Nova Scotia demonstrates a successful exception to this trend with its agricultural system's diversity being one of its biggest strengths. Respondents noted that Nova Scotia has a diverse range of commercial vegetable and small fruit producers, growing cabbage, potatoes, onions, lettuce, tomatoes (greenhouse), strawberries and blueberries (Thomas, B. 2011). Nova Scotia also has a very successful orchard (especially apples) and cottage wine industry (Thomas, B. 2011). In contrast, Nova Scotia's pork and beef industries have been hard hit in recent years. The downturn in the beef industry began with the discovery in 2003 of an Alberta cow with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), otherwise known as mad cow disease. This discovery shut down export markets to the US and other parts of the world, affecting beef prices across the country. In recent years, efforts have been

undertaken to develop a grass-fed beef industry in Nova Scotia, and this appears to be having a positive effect on the industry. The pork industry has also faced financial challenges, mainly because of the high cost of feed grain due to high grain commodity prices globally (Thomas, B. 2011). Unlike the beef industry, however, there appear to be more limited opportunities to develop alternative value-added markets for pork (like grass-fed beef). Nova Scotia's largest industry is the dairy industry, which makes up 24% (2011) of farm income (Thomas, B. 2011; NS Department of Agriculture, 2012). Nova Scotia's second largest farm gate income is fur farming. Notwithstanding the diversity of Nova Scotia's agriculture, these top 2 industries accounted for over 43% of farm-gate income in 2011. Nova Scotia's cooperatives and supply managed industries,⁷ such as dairy and poultry, represent a great strength in Nova Scotia's agriculture, with, at the high end, 100% of fluid milk (with the exception of organic milk) purchased in NS being supplied by Nova Scotian producers (Thomas, B. 2011; McClelland, J. 2011).

Although NS shows great strength in its diversity and the strength of certain industries, a report from the Ecology Action Center and the NS Federation of Agriculture states that only 13 cents of every dollar spent on food in Nova Scotia in 2008 was returned to NS farmers. This was down from 17 cents in 1997 (MacLeod, M., & Scott J., 2010). In participatory research examining the costs of Health Canada's (1998) nutritious food basket in Nova Scotia, Noseworthy and colleagues (2011) found that only 23% and 22% of food items available in Nova Scotia grocery stores in 2007 and 2008, respectively, were produced within the province. The data also revealed that there was variation (0%–43%) in availability according to food group. The relatively low level of availability of local products in Nova Scotia was a point of concern for many stakeholders interviewed. A representative from Perennia noted: "as far as a family going out and filling a basket once a week for staple foods, most of that is going to be coming from out of the province" (Thomas, B. 2011).

On the other hand, a representative of the Nova Scotia Dept. of Agriculture, explained that there are some new entrants into farming in the province, and that many of these are choosing 'cottage scale' agriculture rather than commercial commodity farms:

"They want smaller scale farms, some of them, with newer niche market types of products... some unique products that they find the market demanding... There is no one big great crop or commodity or type of livestock that everybody is going to be able to get into and make money at, but there is a lot of different smaller opportunities that people can get into if they find the localized market for it" (Pick, A. 2011).

Drawing attention to these same trends, the interim (2013) report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Our New Economy notes: "While primary agriculture has seen a decline... there is growing interest in local healthy food production and an increasing number of young people are interested in farm-based lifestyles. These trends, together with our soils and knowledge, present promising avenues for regenerating our agricultural sector (NSCBONE. 2013. P.26).

It is notable, however, that although the development of these local and niche markets appears to be vitally important to the future success of Nova Scotia's agricultural communities, several interviewees pointed out that these markets are not always accessible to low income populations but are instead mainly accessible to those with discretionary incomes (Hopkins, R. 2011; Thomas, B. 2011). Further, growth in these markets may actually come at the expense of the loss of medium-scale farming operations (who tend to sell through larger retail outlets) that currently provide food at a low relative cost to consumers (anonymous 2013).

Fisheries and Aquaculture

In the context of CFS, one interviewee noted that fisheries are rarely part of the picture, and thus fishers too rarely part of the discussion, despite the strong history of this sector in the province: "Nova Scotia was founded on fishing, fishing communities and seafood and this continues to define its human and cultural geographies, yet

⁷ Milk is a supply managed commodity in Nova Scotian (and Canada), meaning the supply of milk is limited to the demands of the market. Nova Scotian producers must hold a milk quota, called Total Production Quota (TPQ), in order to ship milk to a dairy in the province. TPQ is determined on a national basis for each province and the provincial quota is allocated to individual producers. Producers who wish to produce more milk must purchase quota from other quota holders through a quota exchange system.

much more focus [in CFS discussions] is put on terrestrial food production while our seafood is treated not as food to be celebrated but a commodity to be traded. As a result, the benefits of food celebration, with perhaps the exception of tourism advertisements, do not trickle down to empower fishermen or fishing communities” (MacLeod, M.; G. Chapman; S. Fuller. 2012). In an effort to correct this blind-spot, ACT for CFS deliberately includes the fisheries in all discussions of CFS. Despite the challenges of making sense of the complex fisheries and aquaculture policy realm, we recognize the need to consider these issues within the ambit of CFS policies. Fisheries and aquaculture governance is relevant to CFS in a number of ways, including in terms of sustainable rural livelihoods, local food consumption,⁸ as well as accessibility of nutritious food, ecological sustainability, and power within food systems.

The Nova Scotia fisheries are in the process of a significant transition. While there is not enough space to offer a detailed account of the history of fisheries in the province here, one representative of the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture noted that in the 1980s and 1990s “there was the ‘over fishing era’ when regulation and policy related to fishery were loaded towards exploitation rather than conservation.” (Reardon, C. 2011) This interviewee believes that now “the whole framework in the world related to managing fish is changing very rapidly” towards one that emphasizes precaution, safety and sustainable harvesting (Reardon, C. 2011), though for organizations encouraging this change, the perception is that there remains much work to be done (MacLeod, M.; G. Chapman; S. Fuller. 2012).

The shift towards conservation and more precautionary management practices appear to be driven by two trends: the depletion of (some) wild fish stocks from over-harvesting (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 supplies. One interviewee emphasized the trend of many consumers “to know the origin of where the product is coming from” (Brun, C. 2011), while another emphasized the eco-certification, traceability and animal husbandry concerns raised by buyers in European markets (Irvine, G. 2011) as a key driver in the industry.

Related to these issues, the fisheries has long been a sector of conflict, whether between harvesters and processors (LAMONT, S. 2011), smaller operators and large fleets (Brun C. 2011), or more recently between environmentalists and harvesters. On the current state of the industry, one fisherman summarized his 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.” (Brun, C. 2011) On the other hand, another interviewee pointed out that profits may be low in some sectors (e.g. Lobster) because of over-supply in general, rather than this being a question of scale of harvesting (Irvine, G. 2011).

Another important site of conflict remains between independent fish harvesters and governments, especially the federal government. This conflict has most recently been manifest in the debate over a discussion document released by federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans in 2012 intended to “modernize” the Atlantic fisheries by “streamlining” the rules and “better respond to changing market conditions” (DFO 2012). Independent operators view the proposed policy direction as “reductionist in its framing of the issues and, in some instances, simplistic in its understanding of best practices in fisheries management and science” (Independent Core, 2012). Further, they see it as “written in the ideological code of de-regulation” rather than as a sincere effort to support fisheries dominated by independent owner-operators. Debates such as this one, in addition to the early 2013 conflict between lobster fishers and fish plants over the price of their catch,⁹ show that many parts of the fisheries industry remains in a state of crisis in Atlantic Canada.

Several interviewees pointed to the ways in which the globalization of the food system has left the Nova Scotia fisheries vulnerable to international forces (e.g. Langille, L. 2011). A number of food production sectors in Nova Scotia are reliant on markets outside of the province with the ups and downs that international markets face. This is especially true for the fisheries. A representative from the Department of Aquaculture and Fisheries explained that because the population of Nova Scotia is less than one million, the fishing industry exports 80-85% of their products (Reardon, C. 2011). Reliance on export markets means reliance on prices set in those markets. In

⁸ For more on the relationship between fisheries livelihoods and food security (through a rights-based analysis), see (Charles 2011).

⁹ Lobster fishermen return to sea after standoff: Fishermen in N.S. are receiving between \$3.75 and \$4 per pound. May 13, 2013. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/story/2013/05/13/ns-lobster-fishermen-tiedup.html>

lobster, for example, the Boston wholesale price now determines Canadian prices (Irvine, G. 2011). This export orientation led to a significant drop in fish prices during the recent economic downturn, as markets in Asia, Europe and the United States reduced their consumption of high-value products like lobster, crab and shrimp (Independent Core, 2012).

Interviewees also discussed the implications of foreign investment in local production. One interviewee noted, with a tone of irony, “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” (Austin, M. 2011). He went on to explain the implications of this model, including the fact that foreign investment means international companies hold a much higher stake in local businesses, such as fish processing plants, but are simultaneously disconnected from the local scale. This model can be detrimental when decisions made at international levels do not take into account the repercussions on local communities, such as the way that local plant closures can effectively decimate entire communities.¹⁰

Another theme to arise from the interviews is the efforts to better organize fish harvesters, and this takes several different forms. In some cases, organization is about enabling producers to link in with particular supply chains, especially those that wish to maintain specific traceability requirements, as well as efforts to bring better health and safety standards to what one interviewee described as “the most dangerous job in the world... to be a fish harvester.”¹¹ A representative of the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture noted that there are almost four thousand smaller fishers (with boats under forty-five feet long) represented by sixty different organizations in Nova Scotia. “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” (Reardon, C. 2011). With the downturn in the lobster industry due to the global recession (see below), a focus on cooperation and working together has also been stressed (Irvine, G. 2011). There have also been organizational efforts by some fishers to “take back” the fishery (e.g. through quota re-allocation) to develop a sustainable fishery controlled by inshore fishers, drawing on examples from Québec and elsewhere (Brun, C. 2011)

Another important recent trend in the fisheries has been the introduction first of shellfish aquaculture (scallops, muscles and oysters), and more recently of finfish aquaculture (e.g. salmon and halibut). In fact, 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 Nova Scotia and delicious to eat.” (Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture 2010). 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 (Brun, C. 2011; 120). These comments show that there is also conflict between fish harvesters and some types of aquaculture in Nova Scotia, as documented in other parts of Atlantic Canada (Walters 2007).

Finally, several interviewees also noted that there remained more of a market to tap in Canada by the fisheries sector. For example, 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 and we all know about lobster. Half of Calgary and Toronto and Vancouver are Maritimers . . . A lot of Canadians, we know our lobster and it tells us to focus initially, playing a lot with the brand on Canada. So that’s what the studies say to do. Whether we do that remains to be seen” (Irvine, G. 2011). It was also noted by some interviewees that primary producers are increasingly selling directly to customers, as they are in agriculture, through farmers markets and truck sales, in order to develop a viable small-scale business model. However, it is important to recognize that while these markets can work for some independent fishers and fish farmers, they could only accommodate a portion of the fish catch currently landed in Nova Scotia.

Globalization, Cheap Food and Centralization

¹⁰ Canadian examples of this dynamic are explored from an interdisciplinary perspective in Oomer’s (2007) book Coasts Under Stress.

¹¹ There are also notable occupational risks associated with working in a fish processing plant, especially for those working with shellfish (Cartier et al. 2004).

A key theme that surfaced in the interviews was the idea that Nova Scotia's (and indeed Canada's) food system is dominated by an ideology that favours cheap food and large-scale, export oriented agriculture and fisheries, and large scale distribution systems, and that this model is supported at the expense of smaller-scale producers and processors. The belief that the import of food is hurting local producers came to the fore in discussions with beekeepers, pork, and blueberry producers, among others (Dickie, P. 2011; Hopkins, R. 2011). A representative of a food processing association explained that "a challenge we face as food producers or processors is how to get enough revenue out of that food, especially when you have to compete with these foreign sources that are very cheap"(Newman, D. 2012).

A representative of the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture explained, "we have had a very cheap food policy in Canada for a long time." Although this interviewee noted a trend towards niche marketing, he did not see this as a real shift, but rather as an addition to the current landscape that supports large-scale, export-oriented agriculture (Pick, A. 2011). The export model has also meant that any agricultural subsidies that are available tend to support large operations (Newman, D. 2012). Another stakeholder noted that governments indirectly subsidize this model by paying the costs of transportation infrastructure:

"Some costs of food and goods don't reflect the true cost of transportation. For example we will have heavily subsidized port facilities... and airports ... it is both a negative and positive that our transportation costs are artificially low. If we were paying the full cost of bringing lettuce in from California into Toronto, well you wouldn't be buying it. Instead what happens is that, because of an artificial cost structure, we can indeed bring that lettuce in from California, rather than consuming the local product. And it is not really reflected in the price" (Newman, D. 2012).

This interviewee refers to this system as "a double edged sword" because although these subsidies are artificially lowering the cost of imports, at the expense of local producers, they are also benefiting the consumer who is able to buy food in Atlantic Canada for less than if they had to pay the full infrastructure costs themselves. These issues are also related to Nova Scotia's processing and distribution systems.

A number of stakeholders interviewed, whether from agricultural, health, anti-poverty or other perspectives, pointed to the way that processing and distribution systems affect the food system in Nova Scotia. The most common theme was a concern around the centralization of distribution systems in the supermarket sector (Hopkins, R. 2011; Poirier, L. 2011, Newman, D. 2012). One interviewee noted that there are now only about half a dozen major retailers left in Canada as a whole (Newman, D. 2012). Food distribution in Nova Scotia is even more concentrated. It is dominated by two major chains, Sobeys and Loblaw, with these two chains controlling about eighty percent of food sales (Anonymous 2013).¹² Several local farmers discussed the importance of getting involved with these major retailers, stating that "central distribution is more economical" (anonymous 2011) thus keeping food prices lower. However, others explained that the centralization of retailers excluded many local farmers who cannot meet their specifications or make a living at the prices they are willing to pay (Hopkins, R. 2011).

Interviewees noted that limited competition in the supermarket industry gives a high degree of power to distributors, or "middle men" in the form of financial, legal, and marketing power (Poirier, L. 2011; Hopkins, R. 2011). One representative from an agricultural group expressed a frustration with the inability of citizens to raise concerns about supermarkets for fear of getting sued (Anonymous 2011). Referring to a desire to ensure that supermarkets adhere to honest marketing, this interviewee stated: "If we were to try to take a stand on that, they would probably sue us. We cannot afford to deal with people like them. They have expensive lawyers and deep pockets. We don't" (Anonymous, 2011). Similarly, a representative from the health sector felt that the lobbying power of large retailers gives them a high degree of influence over government policy (Poirier, L. 2011). A farmer agreed: "the problem behind every difficult thing is that big companies have so much power with politicians" (Oommen, T. 2012). This sentiment was also echoed (in confidence) by a government representative, who suggested that industry lobbyists have a powerful role in influencing government policy (Anonymous3 2011).

¹² Unfortunately, fresh competition may actually make this situation worse for farmers. In early 2013, Walmart was reported to be planning to expand several of its NS outlets to start selling groceries (CBC News. 2013). It is said that Walmart has 10 times the buying power of Loblaw-owned Superstores, thereby being able to access fresh food at an even lower cost than the 2 big chains currently operating in the province.

Despite the criticism of the supermarket chains by some interviewees, it is also clear from others that the chains continue to play an important role in the Nova Scotia food system, contributing to (relative) food security for many of their customers, and to the (relative) economic security of at least some primary producers. Because of their concentration, the supermarkets are critical buyers of the products of larger scale farms in the province. One farmer interviewed sells ninety percent of his vegetables through these two retail chains to stores throughout Atlantic Canada. The chain's stores then promote his product as grown in the Atlantic region. This farmer believes that the pressure exerted by supermarket customers to demand "local" food has made a difference to his sales, and to his bargaining power with the supermarkets to establish a more realistic price for his crop. The local food movement has thus been a bit of a counter-balance to the downward pressure on price created by globalization.

However, this farmer also notes that this counter-balance may be "too little too late" (Anonymous 2013) for a farm like his, when it comes to determining whether the farm will be taken on by another generation. "We feel like it's way better than it was 10-20 years ago, but is it enough?... we've been working for margins that have been too tight for too long in terms of sustainability and now you really need to fill the well. [You need...] quite a dramatic replenishment in order to encourage younger people, the next generation, to come on deck and run these sorts of operations. So even though we're kind of ticking away not doing too bad in one sense, it's still not good enough to jump the gap into another generation, a younger generation of ownership" (Anonymous, 2013). For this farmer, the question of whether farming and food processing operations earn enough from the supermarkets to attract a new generation of owners is the critical sustainability question, more so than whether or not his farm can get by with the prices that are currently offered by these players. And what might be this difference in price for a larger scale vegetable operation? "I'd say the difference between us being sustainable or not sustainable is about 5% the price of our goods" (Anonymous 2013). This issue of the economic challenges associated with farming, and the question of farm succession, are both revisited below.

The theme of the implications of centralization of distribution was also discussed in relation to food banks, which, through FEED NOVA SCOTIA, are becoming increasingly centralized (Knowlton, W. 2011). In the case of Nova Scotia's central food bank, Feed Nova Scotia, one participant felt that this centralization meant less fresh food and less local procurement (Knowlton, W. 2011). On the other hand, the FEED NOVA SCOTIA website indicates that in 2011-12 twenty-three percent of the food distributed by the organization was fresh produce donated by commercial farmers or wholesalers. Feed Nova Scotia also states, "Increasing donations from this sector is a top priority, especially those from the beef and dairy industries--two categories that are difficult to keep stocked on the shelves of food banks." (Feed Nova Scotia 2013)

Finally, it is important to note that the growth and conglomeration of distribution systems runs alongside, on the one hand, the loss of local processing infrastructure and, on the other hand, a counter movement for local producers and harvesters to regain some control of the distribution of their product by establishing locally owned distribution. One method for (re)gaining control is through community supported agriculture (CSA), farmers markets, truck sales, and community owned processing facilities (McMahon, B. 2011; McLelland, J. 2011; Hopkins, R. 2011).

Poverty and Food Access in Nova Scotia

A number of important issues came forward from the interviews on the shifting social context in Nova Scotia, and how these shifts affect the ability to realize CFS for all Nova Scotians, especially for identified vulnerable groups (e.g., people living in poverty, lone parent families headed by women, minority groups, etc.) (Tarasuk et al. 2013). Stakeholders identified decreasing incomes and rising living costs as challenges for those living in poverty to afford a nutritious diet. Industry collapse in urban and rural Nova Scotia (Lord, S. 2011; Knowlton, W. 2011), low minimum wages and social assistance rates (Poirier, L. 2011; McGrath, J. 2011) and a shift in the allocation of social assistance funds (Lord, S. 2011) were also identified as causes for an increase in poverty in Nova Scotia that have limited the ability of individuals and families to afford a nutritious diet. Some stakeholders noted that this lack of funds for healthy food was not a result of food costs being too high, but instead due to an increase in the cost of living, such as housing, energy, and communication (internet, phone, etc.), which are in many cases non-negotiable household expenses (Knowlton, W. 2011; Lord, S. 2011; Hunter, F. 2011). Food, on the other hand, is often perceived as a discretionary cost, being one of the few expenses that citizens can "cut-back" on (Hunter, F. 2011) and is often compromised due to increases in other non-negotiable living expenses (e.g. Williams et al, 2012c). Some of the key issues affecting poverty in First Nations and Acadian communities were also identified, such as

high rates of unemployment, out-migration of youth, and an increased number of foreign owned business that are not re-investing in local communities (McGrath, J. 2011; Robichaud, R. 2011). It also became clear that poverty looks very different in rural areas compared to urban centres, thus requiring difference approaches to economic and social inclusion in these areas (Knowlton, W. 2011; Lord, S. 2011).

For the most part, representatives of anti-poverty groups were dissatisfied with the provincial government's response to poverty. A representative of an anti-poverty organization explained that although the previous Progressive Conservative government produced a poverty reduction strategy in 2008, which is being continued to some degree by the current NDP government, the strategy lacks strong targets and reporting mechanisms (Lord, S. 2011). Some movement has been made under the NDP government to reduce poverty, including an increase in income assistance personal allowance, an increase in the NS Child Benefit and childcare subsidies, an increase in minimum wage, Affordable Living Tax Credit and Poverty Reduction Credit, and investments in Affordable Housing (Lord, S. 2011).¹³ However, the research of Williams et al. (2012a) shows the increases in income assistance, in particular, have not been enough to counter rising costs over the period 2002-2010.

Macro-Economic Conditions

Some of the shifts in agriculture, fisheries, processing, distribution, populations, and poverty in Nova Scotia described above reflect broader economic and political trends. Stakeholders interviewed showed concern with the overall economic status of Nova Scotia in recent years, with the representative of one health organization stating that the "instability of our economy is a big issue right now" (Poirier, L. 2011). Some respondents felt that this instability is visible in minimum wage levels that are inadequate for meeting basic needs (Lord, S. 2011; Knowlton, W. 2011; Poirier, L. 2011). While federal government statistics show that Nova Scotia actually has an above average minimum wage for Canada (HRDC 2013), it is widely recognized that these wage levels are still inadequate. In 2011, the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project reported that "families living on minimum wage or Income Assistance are not able to cover their basic expenses; in fact, if they were to purchase a nutritious diet, they would end up in debt at the end of each month" (p.29).¹⁴ As discussed above, there is also an increase in poverty in rural areas in particular with various industries closing and agriculture in decline (Knowlton, W. 2011; Poirier, L. 2011). This economic instability is not unique to Nova Scotia, but reflective of a broader financial crisis across advanced "developed" countries including the United States and the European Union.

Stakeholder interviews pointed to the global economic downturn in the economy since 2008 as presenting particular challenges to many of the facets of CFS. For example, the representative of a fisheries organization emphasized the negative effects that the economic downturn (in terms of declining sales in export markets) had on the lobster industry (Irvine, G. 2011), which is a major employer in coastal communities. The pork industry faced similar struggles when food prices spiked and led to an increased cost of grain, making it increasing challenging to farm economically. A representative of the food processing industry noted:

"The recession did a lot of damage because it made plants in the US more competitive... our companies in Atlantic Canada are getting hammered by competition from Ontario and Quebec. In turn, Ontario and Quebec are getting hammered by competition from the US. So that whole area- centralization, control, supply of our food is an issue" (Newman, D. 2012).

Notably, the dynamic described above was not just caused by the recession, but also by the fact that the value of Canada's dollar rose in relation to that of the US dollar in recent years. This rise was due, in part, to the high global demand for Canadian exports, especially oil and minerals, and a relative decline in global demand for US products.

¹³ The Affordable Living Tax Credit is a measure put in place to support Nova Scotians with an income of \$30,000 or less by giving them a tax rebate of at least \$240. This measure is expected to impact 225,000 households, specially supporting seniors and those living with disabilities.

¹⁴ The exception is a family that consists of a lone male earning minimum wage, who would be able to afford a basic nutritious diet (Williams et al. 2012a).

In any case, the recession and change in the value of the dollar has been hurting Canadian producers and processors.

Shifting Organizational Structures

A number of the stakeholders interviewed, whether government or non-profit, noted that their organizations had, or were, undergoing changes in how they delivered their mandates. While it is not clear what the net effect of these changes will be, shifts in organizational structures must be factored into the context for achieving CFS in Nova Scotia. As one example, the NS Department of Agriculture is increasingly contracting its agricultural extension as a for-profit service to Perennia. This is a not-for-profit Crown entity (similar to a crown corporation), receiving \$2.2 million annually to carry out research and extension services to farmers, on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, and at no cost to producers themselves (Thomas, B. 2011). In other cases, government departments have amalgamated. For example the former Department of Health Promotion and Protection and Department of Health have recently merged into the Department of Health and Wellness. This merger has presented challenges for staff, with one employee explaining that there is a lack of understanding of the new department's role (Murton, M. 2011). This representative felt that while their old department had a strong focus on food security, they are unsure if the new department's mission will reflect these values. Many civil society groups are also going through organizational transitions, collaborating more with national boards, and, although they retain some autonomy at local levels, they are seeing overall goals being set at national levels (Anonymous2 2011; Conrod, D. 2011; Shelton, E. 2011). There are various reasons for, and effects of, these transitions including, but not limited to, the goal of increasing efficiencies and cutting back on government and organizational spending. These will be expanded on in the next section of the report.

Conclusions

Section 1 outlined some of the key social, economic and political factors influencing Nova Scotia's food system. Although the ability to realize CFS is influenced by Nova Scotia's unique and shifting agriculture and fisheries sectors and population demographics at the local level, these dynamics are also affected by political and economic factors determined at provincial, national and international levels. This section began to demonstrate the complex web of factors that need to be considered when engaging in work that aims to advance CFS in Nova Scotia.

2.0 CONSTRAINTS AND ENABLERS

Interviews with key stakeholders in Nova Scotia's food policy landscape reveal a number of issues that are either constraining or enabling the realization of CFS in Nova Scotia. We have organized these factors into three categories: economic, ideational, and organizational. Within each category, there may be forces that hamper, but also others that are supportive, of the ability of citizens, civil society organizations and governments to further specific dimensions of CFS.

2.1 – ECONOMIC (MATERIAL) CONSTRAINTS AND ENABLERS

Efforts to improve CFS in Nova Scotia must take into consideration the economic landscape where there are strong forces both constraining and enabling the realization of CFS in Nova Scotia. The characteristics of the economic realm include the financial challenges faced by producers that limit their ability to make a living wage, challenges faced by low-income individuals and households that cannot afford a nutritious diet, and funding challenges faced by various organizations working to improve the food system. This section connects these challenges to the economic instability of Nova Scotia's economy. Despite these challenges, stakeholders also pointed to a series of economic enablers including relatively inexpensive food in NS (by global comparison), the current strengths of agriculture and fisheries in NS, the benefits of market-driven agriculture, the benefits of cooperatives and infrastructures, the development of new products and niche markets, and avenues to benefit from the shift in the allocation of funding and subsidies.

Nova Scotia currently faces a tension between the situation faced by farmers and other primary producers in the province, who often struggle financially due to low market prices and high input costs, and thus

turn to higher income crops and markets as a solution, and the situation facing low-income citizens, who cannot afford a nutritious diet. A representative from the Department of Agriculture explained that some farmers are increasingly producing for local markets in order to make a living, which requires a “willingness in the public to purchase local, not necessarily because it is the cheapest thing on the shelf” (Grant, J., 2011). However, producers’ attempts to specialize and identify niche markets has also meant that such products are not always accessible to low income populations (Thomas, B. 2011). Thus, a representative from the NS Department of Health and Wellness explained that “a lot of tensions are there in terms of the inability for some people to access a basic nutritious diet, including farmers in some cases” and “the desire to create agricultural markets that are high end and really profitable” (Langille, L. 2011). The discussion below starts with the challenges facing primary producers.

Economic constraint: The cost/demand squeeze on farmers

Farmers and fishers often face extreme hardship due to high production costs (labour, inputs, grain for livestock feed, etc.) and low market prices. One local farmer stated: “we don’t make enough money to support ourselves, and we have a pretty frugal lifestyle, so we end up doing other work outside of the farm” (Oommen, T. 2012). Another farmer explained that in Nova Scotia the cost of production is high, specifically pointing to the high cost of labour (Densmore, B. 2012). Farmers also pointed to the high cost of inputs in the province, including the high cost of bringing in grain due to increased transportation costs (Densmore, B. 2012). Echoing this comment, a representative of the organic industry, noted that Nova Scotia needs more certified organic grain growers so livestock producers can access reasonably priced feed” (Patterson, A. 2011). A representative of the grain industry expanded on this challenge, noting that “there are areas of Nova Scotia that don’t have any grain production and it is going to take a long time to get it because that capacity has been lost in the community” (McClelland, J. 2011).

The net economic impact of these trends is illustrated in the 2013 interim report of the Nova Scotia Commission on our New Economy. Drawing on GPI Atlantic statistics, the report notes that net farm income in Nova Scotia dropped by an average of 91% between 1971 and 2007. Further, the report cites Department of Agriculture data that between 2009 and 2010 alone farm employment fell by 9.1 percent, from 6000 to 5800 jobs, and that agricultural revenues declined in 2010 to a level 4.3 percent below revenues generated in 2005 (NSCBONE 2013. p. 54)

Economic constraint: Increasing costs associated with auditing and traceability

Another aspect of the financial challenges facing producers is increased attention paid by consumers and governments to food-borne illnesses. This attention has led to a culture of food auditing and traceability that has added new costs and burdens for local producers and processors. Food-borne illness outbreaks in recent years, such as H1N1 and Listeriosis, often seen to originate in large-scale facilities, have in turn led to increasingly stringent food safety regulations and auditing systems that are being filtered down to local levels and small-scale facilities. These food safety pressures have had serious impacts on small processors and producers, presenting barriers to their entry into markets (Hopkins, R. 2011; Thomas, B. 2011; Dickie P. 2011). From the point of view of owners of retail stores, however, ensuring that producers can meet these traceability expectations are critical (Anonymous2 2013).

Tighter regulations have also meant that it is very difficult to engage in cross-provincial trade, presenting barriers to increasing Atlantic collaboration. These barriers are a result of the tiered system for meat inspection in Nova Scotia that divides abattoirs into either provincially or federally inspected facilities. Although the majority of abattoirs in Nova Scotia are provincially inspected, only products from federally inspected facilities can cross provincial borders. The initial costs and day-to-day tasks that are required in federal plants are onerous and often unnecessary for facilities that are working on a much smaller scale, but by remaining at the provincial level, they are unable to sell their products across provincial borders. Increasingly, some of the provincial requirements are presenting barriers to small facilities and Nova Scotia is seeing a decrease in abattoirs, which in turn has affected the ability for small scale farmers to raise their own livestock.

Economic constraint: Costs associated with environmental “best management” practices

Farmers also discussed the extra costs that are downloaded onto producers and processors due to environmental best management practices. Agriculture Canada defines best management practices as “practical ways to ensure that risks to the environment are minimized without sacrificing economic productivity” (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2007). These practices are often specifically targeted to preserve the quality of soil and water through nutrient management, integrated pest management and controlling erosion and runoff (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2007). One farmer explained that although it is important to invest in best management practices to improve the environmental sustainability of agricultural production, these practices often involve very high costs with little or no financial return (Densmore, B. 2012). This interviewee further noted that “if we are buying food from other countries that don’t have the same criteria as far as food safety issues... why are we being penalized for following best management practices on our farms (Densmore, B. 2012)?”

Economic constraint: The inability of many to afford a nutritious diet

While primary producers face increasing costs, and this is an impediment to CFS, many citizens in Nova Scotia also face economic challenges which limit the ability to achieve CFS. The inability for Nova Scotians to afford a nutritious diet was discussed as a primary constraint to CFS by a number of stakeholders. A position statement of the NS Diabetes Association states “to support people in choosing healthy food, it must be affordable and readily available in the local community” (Diabetes Association, 2011). Unfortunately this is not the reality for many Nova Scotians, including those living on income assistance, those earning minimum wage, low-income seniors and more (Williams et. al. 2006; 2012a; forthcoming; Green et al. 2008; 2012). Due to a variety of factors, including rising living costs, many individuals and families are facing serious economic constraints when it comes to affording a healthy diet. Changes in the provincial economy, such as the closing of paper and mine industries, has led to an increase in unemployment (Lord, S. 2011). A representative from an organization working to eliminate poverty explained how food insecurity is intimately tied to other rising living costs, for example “people are using their personal allowance for housing, because they don’t get enough in the housing” (Lord, S. 2011). A local farmer discussed some of the living costs that have risen drastically over the past few years, such as communication costs (cell phone, internet), which leaves a smaller percentage of income is left over for food (Hunter, F. 2011). This challenge is not isolated to urban centers but is also found in many rural communities (Knowlton, W. 2011).

Economic constraint: The particularities of rural poverty

Stakeholders noted an increase in poverty in rural areas as industries have collapsed and the numbers of farms decreased. This is being influenced by increased out-migration, especially of younger populations from rural areas (Knowlton, W. 2011). These stakeholders emphasized the difference between urban and rural poverty and the different approaches needed to address poverty in different regions. One example given was how homelessness looks different in rural and urban areas. Although there are fewer people living on the streets in rural areas, there is still a great deal of homelessness in the forms of “couch surfing”, and insufficient shelters (Knowlton, W. 2011). Representatives from the NS Department of Health and Wellness further noted the differences between urban and rural populations in terms of food access, school fundraising, and the ability to run breakfast programs (Murton, M. 2011; Swinamer, T. 2011).

Economic constraint: Specific challenges in First Nations’ communities

Marginalized groups, such as First Nations, not only face barriers to nutritious diets due to low income levels, but also face access issues due to the isolation of reserves and a loss of traditional food skills. The isolation of reserves means that some First Nations communities are forced to buy food from convenience stores where prices are higher and variety is limited (McGrath, J. 2011). Furthermore, low-incomes, access issues and a loss of food preparation skills have meant that child obesity rates on-reserve have risen to 60% and diabetes rates are 3-5 times higher than mainstream society (McGrath, J. 2011). Although programs such as the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative have adopted the language of food security to address these issues, these programs often must compete for funding with other on-reserve issues, such as alcohol and drug abuse, which often take precedence (McGrath, J. 2011) Budgeting and funding constraints was a common barrier discussed by many stakeholders interviewed, not just in aboriginal communities.

Economic enabler: Canada perceived as “relatively” food secure

In contrast to these perspectives, however, some interviewees believed that, on the whole, and by international (rather than pan-Canadian) comparisons, Nova Scotia has a relatively high level of food security. A representative of the food processing industry explained that food in Canada and Atlantic Canada is actually quite cheap compared to other parts of the world (Newman, D. 2012) and points to the fact that Canadians only spend, on average, 9.3% of their total expenditures on food (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2009). This number represents a dramatic drop from 1961 when Canadians allocated 19.1% of their expenditures on food (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2009). While low income households may spend a much higher proportion of their income on food (or face food shortfalls), this individual was pointing out that the average percentage of income spent on food is quite low in Canada in general. This situation is brought about, in part, because Nova Scotia imports high volumes of (relatively) inexpensive food from other parts of the country and the world. While this reliance on imports may not help realize a vision of CFS based in self-sufficiency, it has helped to make food (relatively) affordable for those with adequate incomes, which for many people is a key dimension of how they define food security.

Economic enabler: Direct sales

In the face of the enormous challenges facing agriculture, a number of interviewees discussed strategies being adopted to ensure producer viability by marketing differently. These strategies included direct sales, selling into local markets, targeting emerging niche markets, and regional branding. The opportunity for producers to sell directly to their customers through farm gate sales, farmers markets or the CSA model has grown in recent years because of the high profile of “local” food in the media. One new farmer who recently moved to Nova Scotia discussed the high demand for local food: “People want local food... anybody who came here and wanted to grow and sell a bit extra could... there is a lot of demand” (Oommen, T. 2012). The growth of the local food market is evident in the increase of farmers markets in Nova Scotia, with Farmers’ Markets of Nova Scotia connecting 24 member farmers markets around the province,¹⁵ and an interest among producers in seeing more (Hopkins, R. 2011). The Manager of Regional Services at the NS Dept. of Agriculture pointed out that this trend has both its opportunities and its challenges for farmers:

“More consumers are understanding the importance of locally produced and they want to buy directly from the person that is growing the food that they are eating. So there are more farm markets and farmers markets organizations. I think that is a strength and it is an opportunity for some of these smaller farms to be able to find a market place to sell their product. But it is not an easy thing to be in when you are trying to grow and to market- to do everything in the value chain with your product. It is challenging because it is long hours and you have to have a lot of different skills to do that.”

Finally, it is important to recognize that while direct farmer-to-consumer sales are effective for small-scale producers, there is a lack of mid-scale distribution channels. A representative from a farm organization stated:

“We need alternative distribution channels somewhere between supermarkets and farmers markets. The middle sized farms are the ones that actually want to grow, or the farms that are already big, but they are tired of not making enough money through selling to supermarkets. There are almost no alternatives that exist. Farmers are stuck” (Hopkins, R. 2011).

Economic enabler: Niche markets

¹⁵ <http://www.farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca/>

Another strategy being adopted by primary producers is to produce for specific niche markets. As one producer explained, “agriculture is basically a commodity driven business. It is a price for your product... it is determined somewhere else rather than by you” (Hunter, F. 2011). Instead of this model, he said that “most new farmers that come in are market driven... they have got a market, they have determined the margin, and they are producing the product for it. So they work backwards from normally what farmers do... that is one of the big changes that has happened” (Hunter, F. 2011). Examples of niche products include growing pharmaceutical crops, grass-fed beef, and organically certified cheeses (Thomas, B. 2011; Hunter, F. 2011). When agriculture is approached from the vantage point of potential niche products, some interviewees felt there were real opportunities ahead. For example, a processor stated: “I could see NS increasing its grain and oil seed production by 300% or 400% without really trying. If people knew it was profitable” (McClelland, J. 2011).

These strong opportunities are being capitalized on by some of the new entrants coming into agriculture in NS. Despite the many challenges that face new entrants in Nova Scotia discussed in the context section, there are also some advantages. For example, land is much cheaper than in some other provinces such as Ontario (Oommen, T. 2012), and there is potential to capitalize on Nova Scotia’s tourism economy.

In line with those who see new opportunities in agriculture, it was noted that the NS Department of Agriculture is continually investing in research on new crop varieties that can adapt well in Nova Scotia’s climate, for example grapes and honey crisp apples (Densmore, B. 2012). This interviewee further explained how this investment in agricultural innovation has supported a great deal of research, such as the Atlantic Centre for Agricultural Innovation (ACAI), a \$7.5 million facility that will soon be available to the agricultural industry within the province to use for research (Thomas, B. 2011). This investment in research and innovation reflects a view that there continue to be new opportunities for food production in Nova Scotia within the current model that blends production for local and export markets.

Economic enabler: Farmer control of processing infrastructure

Many producers are looking into ways to overcome the financial constraints of primary production by investing in infrastructure to strengthen their own role in processing and distribution, thus regaining control of the “middle point” of the supply (value) chain. Small-scale farmers feel that by working cooperatively the costs of equipment and infrastructure become more manageable. For example, one processor explained that many farmers have found ways to share equipment and infrastructure, observing, “if you have the infrastructure in place, you are able to add capacity very quickly” (McClelland, J. 2011). Regaining the infrastructure and capacity to control the processing of products also allows producers to better control the distribution of their products. This interviewee also saw opportunity in overcoming distribution challenges and stated: “there may be opportunities for co-operatives to play in 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” (McClelland, J. 2011).

Economic enabler: Branding

Some interviewees discussed the ways in which brands and labels can support both local and exported products by increasing awareness of the uniqueness of products and locality. Some also pointed to the value that could come out of increased Atlantic distribution collaboration (Raynolds, J. 2011; Dickie, P. 2011; McMahon, B. 2011; Newman, D. 2012). A representative of the food processing industry saw value in having an Atlantic food products brand as the “missing link” in the local food movement. Pointing to the success of ‘Foodland Ontario’ and ‘Aliment Quebec’ he explained that...

“one of the big reasons that the consumption of local products is so low in Atlantic Canada is that the consumer can’t really tell what is from Atlantic Canada... our Atlantic Canada brand is in fact to provide an identifier, because that is the missing link in all this...the reason for us doing the Atlantic Canada brand instead of a provincial brand is that in reality, the food industry of Atlantic Canada is a regional industry, it is not a provincial industry.” (Newman, D. 2012).

While this interviewee and others believed that local or regional branding supports local food producers (Newman, D. 2012; Anonymous 2013), the owner of a supermarket was “not convinced that our consumers are ready to pay

the price for local.” (Anonymous2 2013). This point draws attention the fact that, at the very least, there is a price point that the majority of consumers will not go over in their support for local food production and processing.

Interviewees listed a variety of different types of certification, brands, or labeling that support their aims and add value to their product. These include eco-certification (Reardon, C. 2011), organic certification (McMahon, B. 2011), gluten free (McClelland, J. 2011), and other premium or value-added products (Thomas, B. 2011). Although many stakeholders noted that regional branding, traceability, certification, quality brands, and labeling initiatives have created new opportunities for both fishers and farmers (Irvine, G. 2011; Thomas, B. 2011), it was noted that many of these initiatives support farmers by allowing them to access price premiums, and that the resultant products are often unaffordable to populations living with low-incomes.

Finally, it is important to recognize that very few of these emerging opportunities such as direct marketing and niche markets (with the exception perhaps of the Atlantic brands sold through the supermarkets) are less helpful to larger scale producers who achieve the greatest economies of scale in production. This has implications both in terms of the further erosion of this size farm in Nova Scotia, but also for the accessibility side of the community food security puzzle. One larger scale producer put it in these practical terms, comparing his farm to that of a smaller scale farmer selling through a farmer’s market: “Say we produce cauliflower for x cents a pound, so to go to that smaller scale and level of efficiencies; they’d be double or triple. You’d be doing well to be making money at that because of their scale. So if you flow that through a system, a distribution system, even if it’s in their own mini-van that they take to the market, they’re cost per unit is still way up here. So the person coming in the front door to buy that is just looking at a price that’s... well, from a food security point of view... that is *not* the solution.” Anonymous 2013)

Economic constraint: Limited funding for key departments and organizations

Among the economic constraints to achieving CFS in Nova Scotia, the interviews revealed a range of budgetary, funding and investment constraints include a lack of funding for both government departments and civil society groups, restrictions on funding allocation and a lack of appreciation for upstream investment. Anti-poverty, agricultural, and aquaculture groups all expressed concern for a lack of government funding to support their work on issues related to CFS (McMahon, B. 2011; Hopkins, R. 2011; Dickie, P. 2011; Brun, C. 2011; Knowlton, W. 2011; Lord, S. 2011). For example, a representative from the co-op sector expressed concern for the amount of funding allocated to agricultural budgets and explained that “in government policy, agriculture is looked at as being more of an expense, rather than an investment” (McClelland, J. 2011). A similar concern was raised by a representative of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture who noted a lack of funding for agriculture in general, stating: “We are actually one of the few investments, in the resource sector, that does generate dollars for the rural economy, and yet the government has decided that we are only 0.8% of the budget. There is something wrong with that picture” (Densmore, B. 2012).

Economic constraint: Limited discretion over how funds can be allocated

Interviewees also expressed concern surrounding their lack of control over funding provided by governments and how this may influence the direction of the organization (Lord, S. 2011; Newman, D. 2012; Austin, M. 2011). For example, the representative of one non-governmental organization explained that there is a need for core funding and that they are “always chasing project money” (Austin, M. 2011). Agricultural groups share this concern. One representative explained that one of the top priorities for agricultural enterprises is access to capital, but “in spite of a lot of government programs that are around, most of them are not targeted at supplying capital” (Newman, D., 2012). In contrast, a farmer expressed concern that government subsidies for agriculture may actually prevent the industry from advancing, stating that “95% of the funds in that program go to maintaining what was done in the past. 5% goes to new developments... this is a problem” (Hunter, F. 2011). Finally, a representative from an organization working on poverty issues pointed out that there are often restrictions on how funding can be used and this limits the types of work and advocacy that these groups can partake in. Funding allocation is not just a concern for civil society groups, but also for government departments. For example, a representative from the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness noted that sometimes federal transfers come with strings attached, which is problematic because the federal government is so far removed from the needs of communities (Anonymous3, 2011)

Economic enabler: Private sector funding for non-profit organizations

Some health, anti-poverty, and agricultural groups are finding success in supplementing government funding with private and corporate sponsorship (Fulton, H. 2011; Anonymous2 2011; Shelton, E. 2011). Although this can have some disadvantages in terms of ethical investment and funding allocation, many 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” (Fulton, H. 2011). Similarly, while school breakfast programs do get 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. Groups have also found other means of support, for example, one organization noted that it is registered with the Registry of Joint Stock Companies in Nova Scotia, which opens more possibilities for acquiring grant funding (Poirier, L. 2011).

2.2 – ECONOMIC STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

Comparing the economic constraints and enablers draws out some economic strategic opportunities that can be strengthened to move CFS forward in Nova Scotia. Despite the agriculture and fisheries’ material constraints, such as the high costs of safety and best management practices, the out-migration of youth, and the challenges faced by new entrants, it is also clear that certain agricultural and fisheries sectors still offer opportunities. Product development, group buying (to curb high input costs) and an interest in local products has opened doors for some producers and harvesters, while new niches are emerging in both local and export markets. While the centralization and power of supermarket chains is generally (though not universally) seen as a challenge, primary producers are finding ways to collaborate and invest in infrastructure, processing and distribution systems. Regaining control of this point of the supply chain has opened doors for some of the producers. Whether further movement in this area can help to increase and stabilize producers profits, as well as open doors to increasing the access to local products for all citizens, remains a question worth more exploration. Specific initiatives, such as Atlantic branding, also point to opportunities that could benefit both consumers and producer interests, though not necessarily the immediate interests of those most food insecure. Despite limits in governmental funding and control over funding allocation, civil society groups have found opportunities to target sponsorship from some corporate sponsors that align with their ethics and goals.

2.3 – IDEAS THAT CONSTRAIN OR ENABLE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY

Our research identified ideas as a second set of forces both constraining and enabling CFS in Nova Scotia. Relevant ideas include popular trends and ways of thinking embraced by civil society organizations, political departments, and the public at large. Ideational cohesion plays an important role in policy change. As one government representative stated, “the more voices that you have singing the same song, the greater likelihood that something will change” (Langille, L. 2011). When cohesion through shared understanding of a problem and its potential solutions does not exist, change is much harder to achieve. Interviewees pointed to a number of ideational constraints on movement towards greater CFS, including: misunderstanding of the idea of food security; a lack of understanding of poverty; a negative view of or lack of understanding of agriculture; a negative perception of the fisheries; a lack of food skills and preference for convenience foods; overemphasis on “market-driven” solutions; and an emphasis on immediate results resulting in a lack of long-term strategies. Fortunately, these constraints are countered by some strong enabling trends, including the rise of the local food movement and strong support for children’s health. Each of these constraints and enablers are discussed below.

Constraining idea: Misunderstandings of food security and negative stereotypes of poverty

Many interviewees noted a lack of understanding of their sector, often resulting in negative stereotypes, as a major constraint to their being able to advance their goals. This was true for a variety of sectors, whether it be food security, agriculture, fisheries, or health. For example, a representative from a non-government organization in the health sector noted, “there are people, groups, and organizations that don’t understand what food security

is and what it means... I think lack of understanding is [our] biggest opponent" (Anonymous2 2011). Several interviewees noted a lack of understanding of, and negative stereotypes towards, poverty as being a key constraint. One interviewee stated: "There is a lot of resentment in the community around people living in poverty... Some of the stereotypes, which are perpetuated by the media... are supported by political people" (Knowlton, W. 2011). One of the key negative stereotypes about poverty that stakeholders pointed to was the "inclination of most people to explain health inequalities in terms of individual behavior and not the broader conditions in which people live and work" (Langille, L. 2011).

Constraining idea: Negative stereotypes of farming and fisheries

Both agricultural and fisheries groups discussed the ways in which negative stereotypes of agriculture and fisheries have had an impact on their industries. An executive with one fisheries organization noted that his is not a "well perceived industry" at this time, because of the assumption that fishers are responsible for the depletion of fish stocks (Brun, C. 2011). A representative of the Nova Scotia Department of Aquaculture and Fisheries also raised the issue of a lack of public appreciation and awareness of the fishing industry, stating: "It's got a bad rap... all you hear about is how bad everything is" (Reardon, C. 2011). Farmers and agricultural groups also pointed to the negativity surrounding agriculture on issues such as animal rights, the environment, and the lack of opportunities in agriculture (Fulton, H. 2011; Pick, A. 2011). A representative of the NS Department of Agriculture stated: "Generally there is a lot of negativity [about agriculture]. The press always wants to focus on... an animal cruelty case, when there is a crop failure, when there is a flood, or a fire, or a disaster. I think that is unfortunate because there are a lot of positive stories" (Pick, A. 2011). In each case, interviewees felt that a lot of this negativity originates from a lack of understanding. For example, a representative of the organic farming industry said "the average person on the street really doesn't pay much attention to food security or where their food comes from or the quality of the food... A lot of work needs to be done... to raise the general level of knowledge of food and nutrition and health" (Patterson, A. 2011).

Constraining ideas: Dietary choices and limited food preparation skills

Several interviewees noted that society's preference for convenience foods presents challenges to CFS. One local farmer stated that "what we call food security, there has got to be a will from the community that they want food security... people aren't wanting food security if they want pop and chips" (Hunter, F. 2011). Other stakeholders did not relate this demand to preference but instead connected it to a number of other factors such as busy schedules, lack of financial resources (discussed above), and a lack of food preparation and cooking skills. A representative of the Nova Scotia Food Policy Council stated: "I think where the rubber hits the road is with food skills. We are in a cooking crisis in Canada and North America... kids today, they don't know food and they don't know how to cook... what is going to happen to food traditions? What will happen to food culture" (Wiseman, M. 2011). A farmer extended this point to food production itself: "We don't teach any skills anymore to produce food in our schools" (Hunter, F. 2011).

Constraining idea: Short-term and market-driven rather than holistic thinking

Interviewees mentioned a number of political and economic ideas that present constraints on furthering policies to support CFS, including an emphasis on short-term results, and market-driven political-economic policies that leave certain groups in society behind. A focus on immediate results was identified by some interviewees as limiting the development of long-term strategies (Anonymous 2011). Some connected this challenge with a political system that is organized in 4-year terms. Others connected it with policy programs that appear to block change by being focused on maintaining the status quo. As one farmer explained, "95% of the Growing Forward¹⁶ program is going to maintaining what was done in the past... 5% goes to new developments" (Hunter, F. 2011).

¹⁶ Growing Forward is the name of the federal government's Agricultural Policy Framework (AAFC 2013). It was launched in 2008 and is to be renewed in 2013.

Other interviewees pointed to the challenges of large-scale and export-oriented policy. A representative from the Rural and Coastal Communities Network (RCCN) 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” (Austin, M. 2011). Although export plays a large role in Nova Scotia’s agriculture and fishing industries, some interviewees felt it was time to recognize the value of smaller scale production and local economies, and to ensure that policies are designed in ways that are scaled appropriately and can support both smaller and larger-scale producers and processors.

Constraining idea: Tensions within and among organizations working on CFS related issues

Interviewees were asked to comment on the obstacles to their organization’s achievement of its goals. One theme to arise from their responses is the idea that while Nova Scotia’s small population has enabled collaboration between groups, the overlap of players can also fuel conflict (McMahon, B. 2011; Anonymous 2011; Wiseman, M. 2011). Stakeholders discussed both specific examples of negative relationships as well as general causes for these tensions. For example, the representative of an exporting company in the fisheries noted that there are historical tensions and hostility between dealers and harvesters in the fishing industry (Lamont, S. 2011). A similar tension is also present with anti-poverty circles. For example, a representative from an anti-poverty organization explained the frustration that she feels when poverty seminars invite “people who were living in poverty to attend, but never really gave them a voice” (Knowlton, W. 2011). Other stakeholders pointed to more general circumstances that fuel misunderstandings or tensions. One interviewee discussed the problems that arise when there are expectations in relationships and certain parties do not understand or meet the role of what is expected (Raynolds, J. 2011). Others pointed to perceived tensions that have arisen from misunderstandings of the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project among some within the agricultural community. Some believed that the researchers were calling for cheaper food, which would have a negative impact on local farmers (Anonymous. 2011), even though the objective of that work is actually to examine the adequacy of income, and its relationship to access to a healthy diet and the broader issue of food security. Although these tensions have the potential to present barriers to the advancement of CFS in Nova Scotia, many interviewees were optimistic about their ability to overcome these misunderstandings. A representative from the Department of Health and Wellness stated: “I don’t see people so much as opponents, perhaps so much as allies that are not yet on board” (Langille, L. 2011).

Constraining ideas: Educational needs and challenges

Several of the issues identified above, from negative stereotypes towards certain groups in society, to the need for longer-term policy thinking, suggest that public education efforts must be part of the solution to enhancing CFS in Nova Scotia. In fact, many interviewees discussed their efforts in public education. Analysis of these points allows us to identify a number of education-related challenges that can be seen as constraints to furthering CFS in Nova Scotia. The first is the challenge of ensuring that consumers know how to identify “local” foods. A representative of the food processing industry believed that the “missing link” is better labeling and branding that would enhance consumer awareness (Newman, D. 2012). Stakeholders also identified a gap in the school system around agricultural education, and the need to enhance education on agriculture as a career choice (Hopkins, R. 2011; Grant, J., 2011). Several organizations also explained that, although they would like to provide more educational programs, a lack of funding, or restrictions on the use of finances, has limited their ability to do this type of extension work (McMahon, B. 2011). However, it is also important to recognize that education, including public education systems, are not seen by everyone as a neutral force. For example, a representative of the Fédération Acadian de Nouvelle Écosse explained that for minority groups, such as Acadians and First Nations, schools were often used as part of assimilation strategies, resulting in distrust of these institutions (Robichaud, R. 2011).

Constraining ideas: Challenges with sharing research findings

Public education challenges were also raised in the context of sharing research designed to improve the food system. A representative from Perennia noted that one of the key challenges of his work is presenting information

in a way that will interest his constituency (farmers); that it is relevant and that it can be shown to improve efficiency or profitability, so that the information will be readily adopted (Thomas, B. 2011).

Some interviewees expressed frustration with some of the research being done on food security in Nova Scotia and noted that at times it appears to have targeted the wrong issues and doesn't necessarily lead to change (Anonymous, 2011). The example that came to the fore was the participatory food costing research.¹⁷ Some stakeholders noted that Nova Scotia is fortunate to have very active research communities that are working towards increasing food security, and drew attention to the participatory food costing research as an important enabler for anti-poverty and health groups (Anonymous2 2011). Others had a more critical view of this research (Anonymous 2011). One felt that the way food costing information is being presented gives the impression that the cost of food is too high, which appears to put the blame on farmers. He explained that "when you take a low income person's income, you take off their housing cost, their heat and lights, and everything else they don't have enough money for food. That can be presented as the price of food is too high. Or you could take the same numbers and say, this person's income less the cost of food, means that their housing is insecure because they don't have enough left over for housing" (McLelland, J. 2011). It is important to recognize that this perspective on the research findings does not accurately reflect those findings or conclusions (Williams et al. 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Still, this quote demonstrates that even well-intentioned research can actually be perceived as a constraint if it is misunderstood. Another interviewee felt that one reason for this misunderstanding of the participatory food costing data by some in the farming community is because research hasn't always included the communities it is affecting (Anonymous, 2011). Notably, the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Research group has strong connections with some agricultural groups, but there are perceptions that they do not exist nonetheless. Interviewees noted that one reason for poor communication with certain stakeholder groups (in the context of various research projects) is that often meetings between communities and research groups don't fit the schedules of the communities they seek to work with (e.g. farmers, fishers or others) (Anonymous, 2011; Oommen, T. 2012; Thomas, B. 2011) often despite efforts by the research groups to be thoughtful about this. These issues represent constraints on moving forward towards CFS, regardless of whether or not the issues are real or perceived to be real by certain communities.

Stakeholders also noted a series of ideational forces that have acted as enablers in their movements. Two key areas are the growing interest in local food and in children's health.

Enabling ideas: Growing consumer interest in "local" food

Informants described certain ideas and trends that can be seen as enablers of CFS. The growing strength of the local food movement was noted by many stakeholders as a strong enabler, especially for agricultural stakeholders, specifically drawing attention to buy local campaigns and the Food Miles Project (McMahon, B. 2011; Brun, C. 2011; Conrod, D. 2011; Hopkins, R. 2011; Pick, A. 2011; Anonymous 2013). A representative from the cooperative sector explained that "the whole 'buy local' movement has gained traction... there is more demand from consumers for local products... if customers are coming [to grocery stores] and asking for local produce... those chains will respond to that if enough people ask" (McLelland, J. 2011). And this pressure on grocery stores has put farmers in a position to negotiate with those stores on price, according to at least one interviewee (Anonymous 2013). A local farmer explained that this movement is also encouraging some consumers to connect directly with producers and opt for alternative ways of growing and selling food entirely: "people are really clueing into the fact that food is travelling so far, and it's having an energy implication... people are getting up and going to the markets and trying to support local farmers... people know things are wrong with the industrial model, they want a real connection" (Oommen, T. 2012).

Enabling ideas: Growing public interest in children's health

¹⁷ The Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project is housed at FoodARC, which is also the institutional home for ACT for CFS. For more details: <http://www.foodsecurityresearchcentre.ca/nova-scotia-participatory-food/>

The widespread support for improving children's can be considered an enabler for CFS. A farm organization representative explained, "people genuinely care about their children and grandchildren more than they do about their own health" (Hopkins, R. 2011). She used the example of Jamie Oliver's "revolution" in the UK that prioritizes food in schools and discussed the huge impact that this has had on pushing forward trends that are supportive of local and nutritious foods. This mindset is already present in Nova Scotia and reflected through widespread support for healthy food in school programs and breakfast programs. This interest in children's health has the ability to penetrate any number of campaigns and draw support from a wide range of stakeholders, but in order for this to be effective Nova Scotia needs to see a shift towards longer-term policy thinking.

Enabling ideas: Successful educational programs and tools

With regards to education, some stakeholders discussed the value of already existing programs for youth. For example, a representative of 4-H explained, "we [4-H] have market steer and market lamb projects where they graze their own animal and learn the economics of their cost and what they would have to sell it for a profit" (Conrod, D. 2011). Other stakeholders pointed to factors that allow public education efforts to succeed. Strong communication abilities were considered a key enabler (Knowlton, W. 2011). The representative from Perennia discussed different avenues that have been successful at reaching out to communities such as meetings, newsletters, blogs, grower days, and farm tours. These communication tools have enabled these individuals and organizations to reach out to the public and other groups to educate communities (Thomas, B. 2011).

Enabling ideas: Shift towards thinking about food security beyond poverty reduction leading to role for more regional actors

The shift from a narrow focus on food insecurity as a poverty-related issue, to a broader understanding of the way that "food environments" shape food security, appears to be another enabler for CFS in Nova Scotia, because this shift has created an entry point for new actors to get involved in developing creative CFS solutions. That such a shift is occurring was evident in an address given by Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed, Medical Officer of Health for the Capital District Health Authority, upon the release of Participatory Food Costing Report 2012. Dr. Watson-Creed used this address to emphasize a number of concrete ways that various actors can get involved in enhancing food security. She noted other factors that shape food security in addition to the cost of food including, "Rates of food production; location of food outlets; availability of healthy food in outlets; variety of food outlets and foods within outlets; promotion of healthy food; and quality of food" (Watson-Creed, 2013a). What is significant about her list is that while some of these factors lie within the mandate of provincial government and the district health authorities, others lie with municipal governments. In fact, she specifically focused on municipalities in her ensuing remarks, stating:

...the other factors I would argue are not the purview of provincial or even federal governments per se. They are well within the reach of municipal governments and specifically within the reach of urban planners (city planners) who create the vision and design of our municipalities. These strategies – permissive zoning for healthy food outlets in high risk neighborhoods, opening up of agricultural farming and recreational farming lands (soil quality permitting); promotion of local fishing and protection of waterways and aquatic species; incentives for the creation and uptake of low income housing; and active and mass transit routes that make our food more accessible to us wherever we choose to live work or play – all of these are things that municipalities could do to improve food security. (Watson-Creed, 2013a).

When asked about this focus of her comments, Dr. Watson-Creed noted there has been a recent shift in the food security discussion in Nova Scotia which enables these broader conversations: "I think what has changed is that over the past year or so... [is] the understanding that regional food security can be about much more than about reducing poverty. And so that is where the food environments conversation has bubbled up." (Watson-Creed, 2013b). Further details on how municipalities can and are engaging in community food security are discussed under organizational enablers, below. The important consideration here is to note how broadening the

conversation about food security from poverty reduction to food environments has enabled new actors to be seen as players in helping to achieve CFS.

2.4 IDEATIONAL STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

Comparing the ideational constraints and enablers allows us to identify some ideational strategic opportunities. Despite the negative views of poverty, agriculture and fisheries discussed by stakeholders, we simultaneously saw a growing interest in certain movements that support the vision of CFS and also align with the interests of multiple stakeholders in the Nova Scotia food system, such as the local food movement, the increased support for children's health and nutrition, and a broader understanding of food security as a complex issue with multiple determinants. These movements have the potential to grow throughout the province in ways that will support community food security. Although stakeholders discussed educational and research challenges that limit the ability for groups to move certain ideas forward, they also pointed to opportunities to overcome the challenges such as increased cooking and agricultural education in schools, the strength of research communities, the role of new actors in helping to achieve food security, and specific tactics that have allowed for better dissemination of knowledge and communication among key stakeholders.

2.5 ORGANIZATIONAL CONSTRAINTS AND ENABLERS

A number of organizational constraints and enablers to achieving CFS came to the surface in our analysis of the interviews. These include the structures of institutions, decision-making, and collaboration among actors working for change in the Nova Scotia food system. Stakeholders pointed to a number of organizational constraints, including political constraints, constraints due to the organizational structure of civil society groups, policy constraints, and 'silos' or lack of collaboration between various organizations and departments. They referred to strong institutional forces that act as enablers including existing policies, the benefits of organizational systems and structures, and collaboration. By drawing attention to and strengthening these areas, stakeholders may be able to build further capacity towards CFS.

Organizational constraint: "Political will"

The first political constraint to be voiced during the interviews was the notion of a "lack of political will." Agricultural and anti-poverty groups identified a lack of political will as a key constraint to realizing their agendas, whereas health groups were more likely to say they have been able to find support from politicians for their causes. A number of non-profit organizational representatives lamented the lack of will from politicians or bureaucrats to work towards change that would address agricultural or poverty issues important to them (McMahon, B. 2011; Paterson, A. 2011; Hopkins, R. 2011; McLelland, J. 2011; Knowlton, W. 2011). A representative of the co-op sector stated: "I don't see it so much opponents as inertia... It wasn't that there was someone adamantly opposed... but it wasn't in the legislation, so you have to justify why it needs to be changed and you have to keep persistent to get it changed" (McLelland, J. 2011). This problem was also identified by representatives from specific agricultural groups who felt that there is a lack of political will to support organic and local foods. One interviewee noted that despite its stated support for local foods, the Department of Agriculture is not even buying local food for its events and functions (Hopkins, R. 2011). This point was reinforced by another interviewee, who stated: "I don't see government will when you talk to some of the officials, the bureaucrats of the departments...I would like to see the government put some strength behind forcing institutions to use products grown in Nova Scotia" (Paterson, A. 2011). Anti-poverty groups also noted a lack of political will to reduce poverty (Knowlton, W. 2011; Lord, S. 2011), with one interviewee stating that provincial civil servants do not always seem receptive to anti-poverty groups (Lord, S. 2011).

Organizational constraint: Lack of follow through

The issue of a lack of political will was also presented by both anti-poverty and agricultural groups in terms of the lack of follow through or enforcement once policies are created. For example, a representative from a farm organization explained that despite legislation that requires a certain amount of local product in some venues, she

believes that even the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture does not always follow through and instead uses international distributors, such as Sysco, when catering events (Anonymous 2011). Similar concerns were voiced by anti-poverty groups, with one representative noting that although the NDP government gives namesake to the poverty reduction strategy created by the previous Progressive Conservative government, there are no reporting mechanisms or clear targets that encourage follow-through (Lord, S. 2011). These organizations also connected the lack of enforcement or compliance with a lack of transparency when working with governments on issues such as government budgets, understanding their day-to-day activities, and whether or not actions had been taken on specific strategies such as the provincial poverty reduction strategy (M. Murton and T. Swinamer 2011; Lord, S. 2011). Referring to the Poverty Reduction Strategy,¹⁸ one organizational representative stated: “In their document you will see that they have promised to do consultation, well this really hasn’t happened unless we have initiated it” (Lord, S. 2011). Fortunately these political barriers are countered by some strong political enablers.

Organizational enabler: Integration with existing provincial policy priorities

Political enablers included opportunities for integration into existing government priorities and a shift in political strategies. Several stakeholders noted that finding opportunities to integrate their priorities into existing government policies is a strategy that can help to move CFS-related policies forward in the province (Poirier, L. 2011; Shelton, E. 2011; Murton, M. and T. Swinamer. 2011). A representative from the health sector used the example of the current government’s obesity prevention strategy,¹⁹ and described it as an area where opportunities for integration exists: “We are now talking here in Nova Scotia about an obesity prevention strategy. That seems to be the one thing that our current government has bought into, so the rest of us are just trying to figure out how we fit these types of issues into that platform. When you are talking obesity prevention, it makes sense to build a food security piece into that” (Poirier, L. 2011). Not only is there value in finding ways to integrate goals into existing strategies, but stakeholders also noted the importance of being able to adjust positions and find compromises in order to be realistic about current situations (Anonymous 2011). One interviewee explained the importance of reflecting on how “realistic” one’s own position is in order to ensure that your group can be most effective and use the best means possible when working to achieve a goal. For example, if it reaches a point where it is certain that the government will move forward with certain activities that you have lobbied against, it may be better to then switch to a campaign that tries to minimize the harms associated with that activity (Anonymous4 2011).

Organizational enabler: Opportunities at the regional level.

Several interviewees identified an emerging opportunity for moving forward on policies related to community food security within the Halifax Regional Municipality in particular. A number of factors appear to have come together to create a climate amenable to exploring more fully the role of regional governments and health authorities in building supportive food environments. These include the election of a mayor (Mike Savage) with a strong healthy communities platform in the fall of 2012 (Watson-Creed, G. 2013b); the current review of the regional plan for HRM that provides opportunities for incorporating new measures to support food security (and which is being led by planning staff who understand the importance of these opportunities) (Smillie, L. 2013; MacLellan, R. 2013, Watson-Creed, G. 2013b), as well as the appointment of a Medical Officer of Health for Capital Health who exhibits a deep understanding of the way that various levels of governments can work together with researchers and community-based organizations to improve community food security (Watson-Creed 2013a). Two projects being

¹⁸ Nova Scotia Poverty Reduction Strategy (2009)

http://novascotia.ca/coms/specials/poverty/documents/poverty_report_2009.pdf (accessed August 13, 2013)

¹⁹ Since the interviews this strategy has been renamed “Thrive!: A Plan for a Healthier Nova Scotia” see:

<https://thrive.novascotia.ca/>

undertaken in HRM offer further promise. First is CLASP²⁰, 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 CDHA. The second is the Community Food Centers of Canada's pilot project in Dartmouth alongside the Dartmouth Family Resource Centre. Announced in early 2013, this partnership

...will see the creation of a Community Food Centre that will expand the existing array of programs and provide a number of new entry points for families with young children while expanding food access and skill-building opportunities for other community members. Programming will include advocacy, a food distribution initiative, and community kitchens and gardens (CFC Canada 2013).

The combination of these factors, in addition to the day-to-day work of nutritionists and other staff at the CDHA on food-security related files (Watson-Creed, G. 2013b), suggest that there is a currently an opportunity for expanding the engagement of municipal governments and regional health authorities in the HRM.²¹ Food security has also been identified as a priority in several municipal sustainability plans and by several Community health boards (Williams, 2013. Pers. Comm.).

Organizational constraint: Policies perceived as barriers to CFS

When it comes to institutional constraints and enablers for CFS, interviewees identified a number of specific policies that currently present barriers to CFS, but could possibly be adjusted to support the needs of stakeholders. Government policies, including the decision to negotiate certain trade agreements, such as the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement with Europe, and food safety regulations, such as stringent regulations for on-farm slaughter were both identified as (real or potential) barriers for some producers and consumers attempting to buy local (Austin, M. 2011; Oommen, T. 2012). While discussing the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement with Europe, currently being negotiated by the Federal and Provincial governments of Canada with the European Commission, a representative from the RCCN pointed out that such agreements often lead to the removal of tariffs, and "what that does is undermine our own ability to supply our own food... to have viable livelihoods" (Austin, M. 2011). On food safety regulations, 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" (Oommen, T. 2012). The representative of an organic industry association explained that the "government's position on certain food safety issues and the certification of small scale abattoirs- that is a challenge for people... it doesn't meet the needs of the livestock producers, and that is not just for organic, but for anybody" (Patterson, A. 2011). In response to these problems, one interviewee stated: "We would like to see the government's policies change to support more small and medium scaled famers, either organic or otherwise. We would like to see them support the scale of agricultural production changing" (Patterson, A. 2011). Despite these policies that present barriers, stakeholders also pointed to a number of existing government strategies or policies that act as enablers in moving forward specific goals aligned with CFS.

²⁰ "The Partnership's Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention (CLASP) initiative brings together more than 60 health-care organizations to collaborate to improve the health of Canadians by preventing chronic disease. CLASP has funded seven distinct projects, listed below, that tackle different disease prevention priorities, including nutrition, physical activity, body weight, tobacco use, and environmental exposure to air pollution from automobiles. This co-ordinated approach accelerates action to reduce common risk factors by allowing for the exchange of knowledge and best practices, while complementing federal, provincial and territorial healthy living strategies." <http://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/priorities/2007-2012-initiatives/primary-prevention-2007-2012-strategic-initiatives/coalitions-linking-action-science-for-prevention-clasp-2/> (accessed July 23, 2013)

²¹ Similar work is also taking place in other parts of the province as well. Unfortunately, we did not capture that in the interviews for this project.

Organizational enabler: Policies perceived as supportive of CFS

Government strategies or policies that are seen to support CFS discussed in the interviews included, but are not limited to: the provincial breastfeeding policy.²² program standards around pre- and post- natal health; food and nutrition standards for regulated childcare settings; policies that support the development of new markets for Nova Scotia farm and fisheries products (e.g. grass-fed beef); school food nutrition policies; positions dedicated to health in school; physical activity, and healthy eating; increases in income assistance personal allowance benefits and child benefits; increases in the minimum wage; the affordability tax credit; agricultural awareness education in schools; programs for new entrants into agriculture; the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative; and the Head-Start Program. Although various stakeholders noted that past political trends focusing on short-term strategies have constrained their ability to achieve goals related to CFS, these particular strategies and policies all reflect positive developments.

Organizational constraint: Challenges associated with short-term policy making

Another significant concern raised in relation to policy is the lack of recognition on behalf of elected representatives (more so than by the civil servants who administer programs) of the need for upstream investment and a strong emphasis on short-term rather than long-term strategies (Anonymous 2011; Poirier, L. 2011; Shelton, E. 2011). This perspective is most strongly voiced by health groups, who explained that society has bought into “Band-Aid” solutions when in reality capacity building and longer-term, comprehensive strategies are needed (Anonymous2 2011; Poirier, L. 2011). This emphasis on short-term strategies can be connected with the political system which is based on 4 year terms that encourage the need for immediate outcomes. One interviewee explained that it is more “politically hot” to respond to demands regarding hospital wait times and beds, than to invest upstream and look for longer term outcomes (Anonymous2 2011). A local farmer shared this concern and stated, “the problem is that to politicians, sustainability is the next elections. There is no long term strategy on how we are going to move forward” (Hunter, F. 2011). This constraint is closely connected to issues surrounding budgets, funding, and investment (discussed above).

Organizational enabler: Growth of long-term strategizing

Despite the frequent turn to “Band-Aid” solutions, some interviewees also pointed towards an increased recognition of the benefits of long-term strategies, upstream investment, and interdepartmental collaboration. One said, “we are slowly starting, perhaps, to move towards solutions that won’t just cover up the problem, but that will really address the issue in a longer term type of nature” (Poirier, L. 2011). Some of the policies listed above fall into this category. Despite these opportunities, there are nevertheless a series of other barriers to the policy process that stakeholders identified.

Organizational constraint: Policy consultation and design challenges

A number of barriers were identified that stifle the development of policies supportive of CFS. Rural organizations raised concerns about the setting of provincial policy on poverty and other issues without including rural representatives in the conversation. One interviewee stated: “Sometimes where the provincial government is putting resources into addressing certain things by building the Halifax economy, it is not really helping us [rural NS] and sometimes it is really draining us...” (Austin, M. 2011). This individual further explained that despite the effects of policies on rural communities many of the issues are being discussed in Halifax and it is important to ensure that rural people are at the table (Austin, M. 2011). One local farmer suggested that this lack of inclusion may come from a misunderstanding of the role of government in relation to citizens. He felt that people have been

²² For details on Nova Scotia’s provincial breastfeeding policy, go to: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/cdip/healthy-eating-breastfeeding.asp>

misguided about the political process, and as a result expect government to be the leaders when it is in fact the citizens that should be leading. In the case of farm issues, this interviewee said: “government has to be the catalyst; the farmers should be the leaders” (Hunter, F. 2011).

Government representatives discussed some of the challenges associated with designing and implementing policy. One civil servant noted the difficulties associated with incorporating feedback, gauging potential reactions from different sectors, the development of standards and lack of follow-up and lack of ramifications for non-compliance (Sinamer, T. 2011). Some government representatives also noted that even the best-intentioned policies can have negative consequences. For example, while a number of stakeholders discussed the positive outcomes of the 2006 school food policy, which required the removal of unhealthy food choices from school cafeterias and vending machines, it was also noted that schools have struggled with lost revenue from food sales and dealt with challenges due to grey areas around the policy’s application (Murton, M. 2011).

Organizational constraint and enabler: Ottawa’s role

For some stakeholders, there are challenges associated with jurisdictional divisions. This is not just a constraint to advancing CFS because of confusion of roles (in terms of understanding which level of government is responsible for which issue). One interviewee expressed concerns about the amount of control at the federal level over policy that affects local and rural communities, and the lack of local input into those policies. This representative of a rural organization explained that “they [Federal government] know what they want to do with the policy, so they are not interested in community input at that level... we have been helping write a position paper on which way we should go [at the provincial level]. I haven’t experienced that at the federal level” (Austin, M. 2011). The interviewee further stated: “policy is not something that is made by the bureaucrats at the regional level. It is political and done in Ottawa. We have no way of influencing those [Federal] discussions... at the provincial level there are ways to be involved in creating policy” (Austin, M. 2011).

Staff interviewed from provincial governments also noted provincial-federal connections and the effects of federal policies on provincial goals. They noted the importance of these connections, but also pointed to tensions that can arise in these relationships. A representative from the Department of Health and Wellness explained that the department is “influenced by federal policies, we are actually just awaiting a new health accord coming up in 2014 and there is a lot of buzz about what that will look like” (Langille, L. 2011). This influence can not only be seen in the use of reports and research (Murton, M. and T. Swinamer, 2011) but also through federal government funding of areas, such as health care and public health, through transfers (Langille, L. 2011). Although this support and influence can benefit provincial governments, it also poses problems. For example, representatives from the Department of Health and Wellness explained they are not always sure of the direction of federal priorities, creating disconnects between different government levels (Murton, M. and T. Swinamer, 2011). Similarly, a representative from the provincial Department of Agriculture explained that because Atlantic agriculture is different than the rest of Canada, federal policies sometimes do not reflect the needs of the Atlantic provinces (Grant, J. 2011). Not only is there a lack of cohesion between levels of government, but interviewees also noted disconnects between different provincial departments. Although there have been some cases of inter-departmental collaboration, these connections tend to be case-specific and do not reflect systematic collaboration.

Organizational constraint: Provincial government cutbacks to programming

Government restructuring presents challenges to stakeholders’ ability to help move the CFS agenda forward. This restructuring involves two major challenges: funding cutbacks, and a lack of clarity on who will be doing what. Agricultural and anti-poverty groups both noted that government cutbacks and restructuring has affected the capacities and influence of their organizations (Dickie, P. 2011; Lord, S. 2011; Poirier, L. 2011). One organizational representative gave the example of the Beehouse Advisor, which was a government extension position that was cut out during restructuring, leaving less support for Beekeepers (Dickie, P. 2011). Bees are vital to maintaining CFS in Nova Scotia due to their role in pollinating crops. “A rule of thumb is that an extra hive of bees in an acre field of blueberries will give you an extra ton of blueberries per acre” (Dickie, P. 2011). A representative from another agricultural organization echoed the need for increased government support for local agriculture and noted that she would like to see a larger staff at Select Nova Scotia in order to further support local farmers (Anonymous, 2011).

Organizational constraint: Confusion due to provincial government restructuring

Provincial government staff pointed to the challenges that restructuring presents within the departments. For example, a representative from the Department of Health and Wellness, which was created by the merger between the former Department of Health and Department of Health Promotion and Protection, noted that the mission of the new department was still unclear (Langille, L. 2011). Other representatives from the NS Department of Health and Wellness explained that the merger of departments with different working cultures has created unwritten boundaries, issues of ownership and power structures “that are not always conducive to collaboration” (Murton, M. 2011).

Organizational enabler: New organizational structures

Certain groups spoke about the way that new organizational models and structures enable them to better achieve their goals. A representative from Perennia explained how the company’s structure as a crown-entity, which is independently contracted by the Department of Agriculture, has enabled the company to move forward more effectively. Comparing Perennia’s current structure to government agencies he stated that “there is a lot more flexibility in what we have now, because we are a company... we have a lot of flexibility in terms of human resources, so we can hire people quickly on a contract basis to get a job done. We also have the ability to generate income, which we can then plow back into services” (Thomas, B. 2011). One anti-poverty group noted that a shift from a charity model in their food work has been a strong enabling factor (Knowlton, W. 2011):

“We are not working on the charity model, we are working from an empowerment model. Anybody can register for it and there is no application process. The only thing that we ask is that you help us with the program... there are all kinds of different ways, but we ask that everybody gets involved. So it is actually their program that they are working towards” (Knowlton, W. 2011).

These shifts in the structure and organization of agricultural and civil society groups were noted as strong enablers allowing these organizations to pursue specific aspects of the CFS agenda.

Organizational constraint: Working in “silos”

Lack of collaboration, or working in “silos,” is the most common constraint noted by organizations trying to achieve policy change. Representatives from the NS Department of Health and Wellness and the NS Department of Agriculture, both noted the silos within their departments, with one representative pointing to “silos in budget and a lack of coordinated budget planning” (Murton, M. 2011). A representative from the co-op sector stated that “there are a lot of initiatives that just don’t happen because of silos” (McLelland, J. 2011) and used the example of food in schools to explain that although programs that support health, agriculture and education could be funded by all three departments, silos are preventing this from happening. Silos are reflected within agricultural and fisheries industries as well, with a representative from the NS Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture noting that “we have to start integrating in a vertically cooperative way to mirror... what the value chain is demanding” (Reardon, C. 2011). He further noted that there is “a lot of fragmentation. We do have some good organizations... but as a whole 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” (Reardon, C. 2011). These examples represent only a small portion of the situations in which a lack of collaboration was seen as limiting stakeholders’ abilities to achieve their goals. However, examples also came to the fore that show organizations are finding ways to overcome these barriers through new opportunities for collaboration.

Organizational enabler: Collaboration

Many stakeholders expressed an interest in finding more avenues for collaboration, whether it be within government departments (Murton, M. 2011; Grant, J., 2011), between government departments (Langille, L. 2011; Murton, M. 2011; Reynolds, J. 2011), within and between industries (Dickie, P. 2011; McLelland, J. 2011; Hunter, F.

2011; Newman, D. 2012; Reardon, C. 2011, Hopkins, R. 2011), within and between civil society groups (Poirier, L. 2011; Lord, S. 2011; Knowlton, W. 2011; Austin, M. 2011; Paterson, A. 2011), between government and civil society groups (Langille, L. 2011), between industry and civil society groups (Fulton, H. 2011; Conrod, D. 2011), between researchers (Thomas, B. 2011; Hopkins, R. 2011; Paterson, A. 2011), and between regions and provinces (McMahon, B. 2011; Newman, D. 2012). Interviewees also discussed the need for more regional or cross provincial collaboration, for example Atlantic cooperation (McMahon, B. 2011; Anonymous2 2011; Newman, D. 2012; Dickie, P. 2011). Strengthening links and relationships in these different avenues would enable those interviewed to better achieve their unique goals as well as contribute to more food policies that address CFS across the province.

Interviewees discussed the many benefits that come from collaboration. A civil servant within the provincial Department of Agriculture said: “We have a lot of opportunity for partnerships surrounding food nowadays because of the growing interest worldwide in food production and local food production... we have partnerships in health and within the department of health strategy, for example on a childhood obesity strategy. We are looking into collaboration with that group to try and address some of the food choices we see in the young population of Nova Scotia” (Grant, J., 2011). Similarly, a representative from the Department of Health and Wellness discussed the success they had when they collaborated with the Nova Scotia Department of Education and the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture in the design and implementation of the school food nutrition policy (Langille, L. 2011). Another representative from the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness explained that collaboration between provincial and federal governments have been fruitful: “We are fortunate now to have a network, a federal, provincial, territorial group on nutrition. We can connect and collaborate and share on that level” (Murton, M. 2011). Similarly, a representative from the NS Department of Agriculture stated: “We collaborate with them [Federal Government] on the delivery level of our programs. So they will participate in the things we do and they also are fantastic in terms of supporting financially” (Grant, J., 2011). Other interviewees point out the positive outcomes when government collaborates with community groups on the design and implementation of program or policies, for example a representative the NS Department of Health and Wellness stated that “our ability to engage with others is probably going to be one of the critical factors in terms of achieving food security” (Langille, L. 2011). Interviewees also see room for increased collaboration among civil society groups themselves to, for example, “convene in various groups, either around specific issues or in general to look at rural policy issues” (Austin, M. 2011).

Collaborating in effective ways can have major benefits. One local farmer explained, “it is all to do with relationships and talking” (Hunter, F. 2011). Similarly, a representative from a health organization said:

“Strategies that build individual skills can help build communities, but all of these things certainly take time. If it were a whole government policy, it would not only touch agriculture but it could touch the health system it could touch the education system. It could touch the economy. You could have a variety of approaches to the same issues and increase your chances of success” (Poirier, L. 2011).

Collaborating in an effective way is “to work together smarter, but not harder... So we use each other’s strengths and do not duplicate, but really take the issue to the next level” (Poirier, L. 2011). A representative from the NS Department of Health and Wellness explained: “in order to change policy you have to be working at both of those levels [civil society and government], or a whole bunch of levels really. At the government policy level, at the institutional level, mid-levels, and then in communities as well” (Langille, L. 2011). Although many stakeholders discussed coalitions that they have built in the past (Brun, C. 2011), they also noted a strong desire to form new partnerships (Knowlton, W. 2011; Fulton, H. 2011; Langille, L. 2011; Grant, J., 2011). Part of this desire to build coalitions is motivated by the value that stakeholders see in having diversity in their membership.

Organizational enabler: Diversity as strength

A representative of an organization that works on health issues discussed the ways diversity in their executive allows for unique perspectives and offerings to come to the table (Poirier, L. 2011). This sentiment is also expressed by a representative from an anti-poverty organization, who explained that they have found strength in expanding and reaching out to groups they have traditionally not worked with, for example, local farmers and businesses (Knowlton, W. 2011). Making these connections has drawn attention to similarities between issues

facing small-scale farmers, such as poverty and low pay, and other low-income groups (Hopkins, R. 2011). The links being made between anti-poverty coalitions and local farmers have the potential to help stakeholders move beyond some of the “producer versus consumer” tensions in the NS food policy landscape (Knowlton, W. 2011).

One interviewee pointed to cultural communities and minority groups as examples of resiliency and successful collaboration and explained that

“Because they [Acadian and First Nations] 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 and First Nations are great examples of cooperative and family-run businesses that have given resiliency to communities. Their young people choose to be there and come back there” (Austin, M. 2011).

Organizational enabler: Producer cooperatives

Industry representatives noted that increased collaboration between industry groups (eg. agricultural, fisheries, processing) could be a strong force enabling their success. A representative of the co-op sector pointed out that a formalized business collaboration, in the form of a cooperative, also has its benefits, and has a strong history in the province:

“In Nova Scotia the majority of the agricultural processing is done through co-ops. A lot of people are maybe not aware of that. For example, in the dairy industry we have 2 large dairy co-ops, Farmers Dairy and Scotsburn Dairy and they would produce, I would say 90% plus of the milk and milk products that are sold in the province... Scotian Gold is probably the largest apple processor and packager in the province, they are a farmer co-op... 4 or 5 companies or processing companies would process the largest amount of the apple industry, the largest amount of the dairy, some of the poultry... And then on the input side, Scotian Gold also has a fertilizer plant. You have cooperative feed businesses. So there is a lot, both on the supply and processing side, co-ops play a big role” (McLelland, J. 2011).

He also explained the benefits that cooperatives have for the fisheries industry,

“I worked with a couple groups of lobster fishermen who set up marketing co-ops and again lobster is more of a luxury item so demand really dropped after the financial crisis in 2008. The prices really dropped to the fishermen. So I worked with a group of fishermen who put together a marketing co-op looking at marketing to Europe and different areas... the advantage of 10 or 20 fishermen [is] if someone wants a large order, they can meet that order” (McLelland, J. 2011).

Organizational enabler: Collaboration among supply chain partners

In other cases producers do not form cooperatives, but still see the value of communicating with other players in the food supply chain. One local lamb farmer explained that “we all sit down about 4 times a year with Sobeys, with the producer, with us, the abattoir, and talk about the price of lamb and how everyone is going to make a margin, it is called communication” (Hunter, F. 2011). A representative of the beekeepers of Nova Scotia also noted the benefits of collaborating with others who indirectly benefit from their work. This interviewee stated “their [blueberry growers] industry is worth way more than ours, but they know they are dependent on our bees, so they help to lobby on our behalf sometimes” (Dickie, P. 2011). Stakeholders also noted the value in regional and cross-provincial collaboration, especially within the Atlantic region (McMahon, B. 2011; Anonymous 2011; Newman, D. 2012).

2.4 Organizational Strategic Opportunities

Looking back at the organizational constraints and enablers discussed, one can see the potential for strategic organizational opportunities for moving forward. Although interviewees noted limited political will as a key

constraint, they also pointed to programs where there is potential for collaboration, such as obesity reduction, children’s nutrition and programs for new entrants to agriculture. By working in areas where there is already fairly widespread support, it is possible to overcome challenges. Similarly, although certain regulations and policies present barriers to CFS, supportive policies that present opportunities for advancement in a variety of sectors are also apparent. Furthermore, although stakeholders noted constraints due to the buy-in that currently exists for “Band-Aid” solutions reflected in short-term planning and budgeting, some of the emergent policies supportive of CFS demonstrate a shift to more long-term strategies and upstream investment. Strengthening and then building on these existing opportunities may open doors for those organizations that perceive a lack of follow-through or enforcement of certain policies, such as poverty reduction and institutional procurement. Finally it is clear from this section that collaboration in its many forms must be part of any attempt to target these opportunities.

3.0 DISCUSSION

This final section of this report is organized into three sections. The first section provides a summary of some of the key tensions identified through the interviews, along with some thoughts on how these tensions can be addressed in order to build capacity for CFS in Nova Scotia. The second section presents an initial list of strategic opportunities for advancing policy change that take into consideration the constraints, enablers and opportunities discussed above. We have organized these recommendations into three thematic categories: sustainable agriculture and fisheries; healthy and accessible food for all; and cross-sectoral collaboration. The third section concludes with some of the lessons learned for working towards policy change that were shared with us in the interviews.²³

3.1 KEY TENSIONS

Several areas of tension related to the community food security agenda, and its advancement in Nova Scotia, came forward through the interviews. The most important is the tension between the financial struggles of many primary producers, including both fishers and farmers, and the needs of that part of the population that has insufficient income to pay for food. To accentuate this tension, in their bid to improve the viability of primary production in Nova Scotia, 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. Though such an impact is not always the case, with direct sales at a farmers’ markets being an example of a vehicle that can increase net income to a farmer without necessarily increasing the price to the customer, the reality is that many interviewees noted that value-added production and niche marketing often mean higher prices for the end consumer (albeit for a more specialized and possibly higher quality product). This tension reveals the need to recognize that some of the short term strategies that need to be adopted by some parts of the population (e.g. primary producers) to achieve their goal of financial viability may not immediately meet the immediate needs of the whole population, at least not without further policy interventions. That various strategies for building a strong food system may be divergent in the short term is not immediately apparent in the way that the definition of community food security (found in the introductory paragraphs of this report) is presented. On the other hand, there may still be ways that all citizens and levels of government can work together on common causes tied through a CFS vision (Allen, 1999; Power 2000). These include ensuring that local production as a whole is enhanced and that significant portions of this production supply local needs, including paying specific attention to the needs of vulnerable populations in community-based action planning.

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; Lippert 2001). Williams,

²³ More detailed analysis on how to achieve policy change, drawing on additional interviews with Nova Scotia activists and government employees, is discussed in the second report of the ACT for CFS Policy Working Group: “The Political Economy of Food Policy Change: A Framework for Analysis.”

McIntyre and Glanville (2010) argue that this cost differential contributes to “milk insecurity” in low-income households. Effects of milk insecurity in Atlantic Canada include inadequate calcium and vitamin D uptake among lone mothers (Glanville and McIntyre 2006). The milk supply may thus be an example of good public policy on the supply side, from the point of view of maintaining sustainable productive capacity and providing fair prices to farmers, but what is missing is corresponding public policy on the demand side to ensure that all Canadians are able to access that supply. Williams and colleagues (2010) suggested several policy options on this front, including regulation of processor/distributor/retailer costs added to milk, increasing access to non-quota milk for specific groups, continuing the practice of giving coupons for free milk through community based programs, and targeted price controls for low-income consumers. These proposals are consistent with a CFS framework, illustrating the way that this perspective draws policy attention to both producer and consumer interests to ensure that market-based systems will be fair for all citizens.

This particular tension can also be seen in the avenues chosen by organizations seeking to improve food access for low-income individuals and families. Some campaigns, such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation’s “Goodness in Many Ways”²⁴ campaign which seeks to promote fruit and vegetable consumption, put their emphasis on promoting these healthy foods in general, regardless of origin or whether it is “fresh, canned or frozen.” Their approach was likely adopted out of recognition that the many inexpensive fruits and vegetables often come through supply chains that import products from beyond Nova Scotia’s shores. Nonetheless, this particular campaign is also an important example of how this tension can be addressed through a shared vision of CFS. The campaign has several co-sponsors, including the province of Nova Scotia, and many pages of the campaign’s website draw particular attention to Nova Scotia-grown produce, including educating consumers on the fact that “you can now get Nova Scotia-grown cauliflower with green, orange, and purple heads as well as the traditional white.” It is these details which show that a campaign to improve access to healthy foods can also become a campaign to support locally produced foods when possible, as well as one that encourages the know-how and skills to work with those products.

A further tension to arise from our interviews concerns the idea of self-sufficiency and how this relates to the current food system based more around imports and exports, and which clearly has both its benefits and its costs. While the definition of CFS presented earlier in this report includes “community self-reliance” (Hamm and Bellows 2003), it would be inappropriate to read this concept too narrowly as the idea that all Nova Scotian residents eat only locally produced foods, and that Nova Scotia producers shift all production towards local markets. Few activists – even the strongest proponents of local food – encourage a world with no imports and exports of any kind. Furthermore, such a model for the food system would have devastating effects on those industries (e.g. lobster) that rely heavily on external markets. Self-reliance in the context of community food security is perhaps better understood in terms of having the capacity (skills, infrastructure, economic links, etc.) to support a vibrant and diverse food system, one that includes trade to meet a variety of community needs (including income generation), but one which also has strong local and regional links (including direct links between producers and consumers when this is mutually advantageous). Diversity is at the heart of resilience, and this is no less true for a food system that would deliver community food security. Still, since it is the local and regional linkages that have been systematically undermined in recent decades through the abundance of cheap fuel, supermarket policies and more, the CFS agenda must include a strong focus on rebuilding them.

Another tension to arise in the research is the perception that ACT for CFS, through its association with the Participatory Food Costing research also undertaken by FoodARC at Mount Saint Vincent University, is about “bringing the price of food down.” This perception has caused tensions with some in the agricultural community. In response to this issue, it should be clear to readers by now that this current piece of research is not (nor is the Participatory Food Costing Project (Williams et al 2012b) and affiliate projects) about bringing the price of food down across the board. CFS demands a much more nuanced approach that both rewards producers and is fair to citizens. Furthermore, it is important to clarify that the consistent message has been that those with the lowest incomes need to see policy interventions introduced that allow them to have the same access to nutritious food as all other Canadians, and that people vulnerable to food insecurity have much to offer in understanding and creating solutions to food insecurity in communities.

²⁴ <http://www.freshcannedfrozen.com/index.php/about/>

3.2 Strategies around which alliances can be built for improving CFS in Nova Scotia

Many policy change priorities were discussed in the interviews, and quite a few had a clear connection with the goal of improving CFS in Nova Scotia. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus this section on strategies for achieving three particular policy objectives: Support for small and mid-sized farmers and fishers; supports that ensure equitable access to healthy food for all; and collaborative strategies that may allow the organizations interviewed to work towards a common purpose while furthering CFS.

Agriculture, Wild-harvesting and Fisheries

The first set of strategies identified to improve CFS in Nova Scotia is targeted at the agriculture sector and wild harvesters, including the fisheries. The common theme across these strategies is the need to support sustainable production and harvesting by increasing community economic development activity in small- and mid-scale agriculture and fisheries, as well as to (re)build mechanisms for the distribution of local and regional products, thereby increasing the percentage of local products grown/harvested and marketed in Nova Scotia. These two foci are not meant to suggest that other strategies (such as production for export, or production at larger scales) are inconsistent with CFS; rather it is in these areas that our analysis suggests the possibilities of synergies among the organizations interviewed to date.

The agriculture, wild harvesting and fisheries sectors face challenges at all levels of the food value chain from production and harvesting, to processing, to distribution and marketing. At the production and harvesting level, the high costs of input, labour, and regulatory, auditing, and best management practices present financial challenges to producers and harvesters, even if some of these practices improve the environmental sustainability of their operations. These constraints are exacerbated by a globalized food system that is dominated by cheap imports which put small- and mid-scale producers and processors at a disadvantage. The gradual loss of processing infrastructure and capacity, which is in part due to increasingly stringent regulations, limits the ability for local producers to maintain control of processing, value-adding, and the marketing of their products. This especially affects meat and grain industries, and those with unique requirements such as organic. Producers and harvesters also face distribution challenges due to the corporate concentration of food retail and the lack of mid-scale distribution opportunities, which also limits entry to new local producers. Although small-scale producers have found relative success by marketing through farmers markets and CSAs, regulatory barriers limit local marketing and procurement, while Nova Scotia's relatively small population also puts a hard cap on these opportunities. All of these constraints are amplified for new-entrants, who not only face high-startup costs, but are increasingly required to master a wide range of skills from agriculture, to business and marketing. Finally, agricultural supports through government and civil society groups is being reduced or restructured and doesn't necessarily meet the unique needs of small- and mid-scale producers and harvesters.

Fortunately, there are also opportunities for the Nova Scotia agriculture and fisheries sectors to strengthen their capacity. One of these opportunities relates to the increasing popularity of the local food movement. There are a variety of opportunities to increase the percentage share of the local market beyond the 8.4% identified in the Food Miles Report by targeting niche markets (gluten-free, grass-fed beef, organics, etc), value-added products, and increased product development, even as it must be recognized that these specialized products are often marketed at a high price and an emphasis on them does not address the problems of access and affordability faced by vulnerable populations. Farmers and fishers have also gained strength through cooperative activities, such as group buying, investing in shared infrastructure and collaborative marketing, and there is potential for more collaboration, especially in the fragmented fisheries sector. Cooperatives have a very strong history in Nova Scotia, with approximately 70% of all the agricultural products in Nova Scotia distributed through coops. Gaining further over processing and distribution opens doors for producers and holds the potential to not only increase and stabilize profits for producers and harvesters, but also to increasing the accessibility of local products for Nova Scotians. There is great potential not only through cooperatives, but through other forms of collaboration across industries and regions, and many organizations have shown interest in collectively supporting this goal.

The current situation facing primary producers points to the potential for further action in a number of policy areas. Some of the areas identified in our research are:

- Address key regulatory and supply chain barriers to local agricultural and fisheries products, including processing regulations, and environmental best management practices.
- Establish regulatory policies that are equitable and scaled to the size of the operation
- Increase supports for producers to adjust to best management practices and regulations.
- Work to maintain supply management systems for milk and poultry, which are currently under threat, while seeking to minimize the barriers to entry that these systems represent for new or smaller-scale producers.
- Identify policy supports to help fill local processing and distribution gaps, and rebuild or prevent the loss of further capacity.
- Establish or strengthen cooperatives for processing infrastructures and distribution systems, focusing on the needs of young farmers.
- Strengthen financing for new and emerging farm businesses in Nova Scotia (e.g. The FarmWorks Investment Cooperative²⁵).
- Increase support for farmer's markets and other forms of direct sales through strengthening buy local campaigns (e.g. Select Nova Scotia).²⁶
- Support groups working to establish an "Atlantic" brand to support local producers and processors.
- Establish targets and reporting mechanisms for local and provincial procurement policies.
- Identify and implement policies and practices that seek to address both access for those facing income-related food insecurity and fair livelihood for primary producers (e.g. "good food markets" in low-income communities²⁷; the Community Food Center model²⁸; the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP);²⁹ etc.)

Ensuring Healthy and Accessible Foods for All

The second area of focus for policy action is ensuring equitable access to healthy food for all Nova Scotians. An important goal associated with CFS in this realm is to focus on the needs of low-income, rural, Acadian and First Nations populations, not just in terms of health outcomes, but also through building capacity to support their participation in healthy local economies.

²⁵ "The FarmWorks Investment Co-operative Limited was incorporated as a for-profit Co-operative on May 18, 2011 by an association of community leaders concerned about social, economic and cultural needs, in order to promote and provide strategic and responsible community investment in food production and distribution to increase access to a sustainable local food supply for all Nova Scotians" .<http://farmworks.ca/home/> (accessed July 23, 2013)

²⁶ Under joint pressure from the Ecology Action Centre and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, in November of 2012 the Nova Scotia government inserted two clauses into the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act supporting local agriculture. Section 4.2. (t) states: "local food consumption is supported and encouraged, with the goal of 20 per cent of the money spent on food by Nova Scotians being spent on locally produced food by 2020." According to the federation of agriculture, the current level is about 13 percent. Section 4.2 (u) states: local food production is supported and encouraged, with the goal of increasing the number of local farms by 5 per cent by 2020.

²⁷ <http://www.foodshare.net/good-food-markets>

²⁸ See: <http://www.cfccanada.ca/>

²⁹ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap>

Vulnerable populations such as marginalized groups and those living in low income circumstances face a variety of challenges that prevent the realization of CFS for all in Nova Scotia. Minimum wage and income assistance rates have been shown to be inadequate in Nova Scotia in relation to living costs, limiting access to a basic nutritious diet (Williams et al 2012a and b; Williams et al 2005; Green et al 2008; Green et al. 2012, Williams et al forthcoming). Unlike certain living costs, such as rent, utilities and transportation, which are often non-negotiable, food-budgets are often treated as “discretionary”. As a result, individuals living in low-income circumstances often report having to sacrifice the quality of food purchased in order to keep up with other non-negotiable costs (Williams et al 2012b, McIntyre 2003). A lack of food preparation and cooking skills, combined with a cultural preference for convenience foods, was also noted by some interviewees as presenting challenges to a healthy diet. These trends are compounded by the marketing power of supermarkets, as well as their control over the food supply chain, which influences food preference and choice. Furthermore, although certain policies, such as provincial policies on healthy food in schools, have made great contributions to CFS by supporting healthy diets for children and youth, some schools have faced challenges due to lost revenue and other repercussions of policy transition. Finally, while Feed Nova Scotia has adopted a centralized organization structure as a way of improving efficiency and accessibility within the food bank system, this model may present challenges to the procurement of local products, especially from smaller producers, potentially resulting in less locally grown or processed agricultural products. It is also fair to ask, notwithstanding their critical role in addressing the immediate need that exists today to respond to hunger for those too poor to access food through mainstream market channels, what role food banks and other charitable food programs should play, and what they should look like, within an overall vision of CFS.

Nova Scotians are currently pursuing a number of opportunities for advancing CFS through increasing access to nutritious diets for all, including low-income and marginalized populations. Currently, there is widespread support around the goal of improving the health and nutrition of children and youth, through creating conditions, including built and social environments and related policy, to support healthy food and activity choices. Community initiatives, such as Good Box programs, community gardens, breakfast in schools, and fundraising to support healthy food in schools demonstrate this strong support across the province. Advocacy on this front has also brought forward important policies, such as incremental increases to minimum wages, food and nutrition standards in schools and regulated childcare settings, and programs supporting pre and post natal health and breastfeeding. Some health and anti-poverty organizations have also been shifting away from the charity organizational model, to “empowerment” models that not only provide immediate support, but simultaneously build capacity within communities. Finally, some organizations have been able to find support through sponsorship from private and corporate entities that align with their ethics and goals.

These challenges and opportunities point to the potential for further action in the following areas:

- Work towards ensuring that all citizens have an adequate livable income.
- Work to ensure that social assistance rates, minimum wages, affordability tax credits, and childcare benefits are adequate and indexed to cost of living.
- Address taxation trends that are widening the gap between the wealthy and the poor. Examine taxation policies to increase disposable income for low-income earners, thus increasing resources for healthy eating.
- Identify and address other determinants associated with food insecurity (eg. Housing, transportation, communication).
- Establish targets to increase individual and family capacity for food literacy. Target schools and community centres as focus areas (eg. Increased cooking and food literacy, programs that allow children to know where their food comes from).
- Identify models of group buying that could increase access to local and nutritious foods for vulnerable populations and establish necessary targets.
- Establish incentives to encourage retail outlets to carry more healthy fresh, local products (e.g. Funding for coolers in corner stores that can carry fresh local produce).

- Establish targets for ensuring senior, female, low-income, rural and minority representation (First Nations, Acadian, and African Nova Scotians) on nutrition and CFS boards.
- Establish supports to ease the negative effects of policy transitions (eg. Assistance to schools that have lost revenue due to healthy food in school policies).

Collaboration Among Sectors and Organizations

Our final area of policy recommendations is grouped under the theme of collaboration among diverse groups and departments. Building on the above recommendations around regaining local control of food systems and increasing capacity and self-sufficiency in urban and rural communities, this theme groups together our observations on the potential for alliances, especially between organizations working on food supply and food access, to work towards mutually beneficial goals.

Although coordination across diverse groups and departments offers great potential, there are challenges that must be overcome. One of the greatest challenges is misunderstandings between groups and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. Historical divides within and among sectors has limited collaboration in the past and presents barriers to moving forward. “Silo” mentalities are not only present among and between groups and industries, but are also problematic in and between government departments and levels of government. These divisions have a range of causes - from differing policy priorities to budget allocation. Challenges of collaboration at the government level are further exacerbated by a lack of political will to move beyond ‘band-aid’ solutions and short-term budgeting and policy development. Civil society groups have also faced barriers to collaboration due to decreased core funding and a limited control over the use of funding, for example limited freedom to engage in advocacy work while maintaining non-profit status. Finally, the lack of recognition that rural and urban poverty have distinct characteristics and thus require distinct strategies has presented barriers to coordination.

Despite these challenges, Nova Scotians have found many opportunities for increasing collaboration between a diverse range of groups and communities in ways that will advance CFS in the province. Examples of collaboration can be found within and between many different individuals and organizations, for example government departments, levels of government, community and civil society groups, universities, industries, and regions. In fact, this research project is itself the product of collaboration among a diverse group of organizations and university researchers in Nova Scotia. The increased strength, collaboration, and networking of research communities, such as ACT for CFS, has increased awareness of agricultural, fisheries, poverty, and health issues, and bridged gaps between diverse groups working towards mutually beneficial goals. Encouraging diversity not only within research groups, but also with civil society groups, for example including local farmers and fishers in anti-poverty groups, has presented opportunities to mitigate perceived tensions and encourage collaboration. The inclusion of women, seniors, low-income and minority groups presents a unique opportunity to learn from the resiliency and strength of these groups, for example the strong social and community ties of the Acadians and First Nations.

Exploring new organizational models that encourage inclusivity and building capacity presents new opportunities. These different models range from “empowerment models” in anti-poverty groups, to cooperative agricultural enterprises, to government restructuring, to multi-level (local, provincial, national) collaboration in civil-society groups. Increased long-term policy development, alongside upstream investment, has demonstrated great potential in certain programs, such as the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative. A diversity of opportunities have been targeted to support the distinct needs of rural communities that range from economic initiatives, such as increasing local ownership and reinvestment into rural communities through supporting locally owned businesses, cooperatives and credit unions, to social initiatives, such as developing social networks for youth and seniors. Thus, throughout the province the food movement is moving forward by developing networks and increasing collaboration between (sometimes unlikely) alliances that will contribute to CFS. An analysis of the unique challenges and opportunities associated with collaboration, when combined with an analysis of the policy areas that require work to further CFS in Nova Scotia, suggest several areas for initial collaboration across the groups we have interviewed. These are:

- Establish targets for increasing the procurement of local products in schools and workplaces, with the aim of supporting the goals of health equity, poverty reduction and the agricultural communities (e.g., local products in breakfast programs and workplace catering).
- Focus on the intersection between rural sustainability and CFS across the province, including both economic development strategies (e.g., support locally owned banks/credit unions and businesses) and social policy strategies (e.g., support social programs for youth and seniors).
- Identify ways to integrate CFS into existing cross-cutting government and community initiatives (e.g., Thrive!³⁰, social enterprises, the Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy³¹).
- Conduct public education and awareness (with a focus on youth) on Nova Scotia’s food systems. Educational initiatives can range from information about the benefits of local food on health and economic and social sustainability, to the inclusion of agriculture and fisheries in school curriculums as potential careers opportunities for youth.
- Identify new opportunities for collaborative policy development, including the establishment of a provincial inter-ministerial committee on CFS and working inter-sectorally (eg. NS Agricultural Awareness Committee, and the provincial THRIVE! Strategy), supporting the integration of public health goals into municipal and regional planning (e.g. CLASP – see footnote 20), supporting multi-level boards that bring together municipal, provincial, and federal governments, establishing targets for bridging gaps between community and civil society groups (linking poverty reduction and agricultural issues), increasing industry collaboration (e.g., blueberry growers and beekeepers), and increasing regional (Atlantic) collaboration.

3.3 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH TO DATE

This document is one step in a research process. While it is built on the input of forty-one interviews to date, it is clear that there remain groups which are still underrepresented in our data and in our conclusions. Further outreach is necessary to organizations representing Aboriginal people³² and African Nova Scotians in particular. While this paper has begun to deal with issues related to the fisheries, it is clear to us that more outreach is still needed to better understand the needs of this sector and how they intersect with the community food security agenda. We apologize to readers for the fact that we have yet to reach all of the groups who should be consulted

³⁰ Thrive! is a program introduced by the provincial government in June 2012 to encourage healthy lifestyles in Nova Scotia. Thrive!’s goal is “to make it easier for Nova Scotians to be healthier.” (<https://thrive.novascotia.ca/>) Among Thrive!’s 34 policy actions for 2012-2015 are new grants to community-based organizations that support breastfeeding, new support for programs on cooking and nutrition in schools, and a plan to align policy on food between the Departments of Health and Wellness and Agriculture. These examples show that Thrive! is thus attempting to work on food and health policy across departmental silos at the provincial level. Whether this integration will actually be realized remains to be seen.

³¹ The Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy is an independent body mandated by the Premier’s Advisory Committee on the Economy to engage Nova Scotians in a discussion about its economic future. Its first interim report was released on May 10, 2013, bringing a cross-sectoral lens to analyzing the future of the Nova Scotia economy. On agriculture, the report states: While primary agriculture has seen a decline, for example, there is growing interest in local healthy food production and an increasing number of young people are interested in farmbased lifestyles. These trends, together with our soils and knowledge, present promising avenues for regenerating our agricultural sector. <http://onens.ca/the-commission/>

³² First Nations were not included in our first round of research because this would involve additional ethics clearances.

in this work, and invite suggestions on who else we should be talking with. Finally, our analysis of the relationship between employment and community food security remains underexplored in this paper, yet it is clearly a part of the picture when trying to understand both the context of food access and affordability, as well as the current realities of food production, processing and distribution.³³

3.4 LESSONS LEARNED

This research project has brought to light several lessons that should be considered when moving forward on the strategic opportunities and key policy areas discussed throughout. One lesson learned is the value of identifying policy “windows,” or spaces for integration in other government priorities that have widespread support, such as THRIVE!, the provincial plan “for a healthier Nova Scotia”. It is also important to develop tactics for collaborating in effective ways that will build upon and support past and present initiatives, rather than repeating previous work done. When developing strategies it is important to be realistic with processes and goals in order to maximize existing assets and strengths. In some cases, this may include finding compromises and focusing on broad goals. It is important to bridge perceived tensions or dualities, for example recognizing the need for “band-aids” or immediate relief, while simultaneously supporting the increased need for long-term capacity building for policy change. It is also essential to address misunderstandings in order to mitigate tensions between health, poverty reduction and producer/processor and harvester groups (e.g. addressing the misperception that participatory food costing research is advocating for cheaper food, which has distanced some stakeholders in the agricultural community).

These lessons are connected to improving the dissemination of knowledge and communication between various stakeholders and ensuring that vulnerable populations (women, seniors, low-income, rural, and minority groups) are included in the development and implementation of policy.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this report has been to further the conversation on how community food security can be achieved in Nova Scotia, building on the insights of individuals working in organizations (including government departments) who focus on food, health, poverty, agriculture and fisheries issues in that province every day. It sought to identify where there might be overlaps in interests among these organizations so that alliances can be built or strengthened around specific aspects of the CFS agenda. This report was generally not prescriptive in terms of where new alliances could be developed. Rather, it identified a range of constraints and opportunities to moving the CFS agenda forward (including tensions among organizations and sectors) and then presented a number of policy areas to work on that would be of broad shared interest, first in the area of primary production, then on food access, and finally on the intersections between these two aspects of the CFS agenda. We wish to conclude the report by noting that many of the areas identified for further policy work in Nova Scotia dovetail with the recommendations of an international report released just this month.

On March 4, 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Food addressed the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in Geneva to present his report on the Right to Food in Canada (De Schutter 2012), based on his mission to Canada in May, 2012. Notable about the UN Special Rapporteur’s report was the way it brought together many of the same issues addressed here, including challenges facing Canada’s agricultural producers (p.7-10), the inadequacy of social protection schemes to ensure all Canadians can meet their basic food needs (p.10-12), the fact that minimum wages do not reflect a “living wage” (p.12), and the growing challenge associated with overweight and obesity in Canada, (p.13-15). The UN Special Rapporteur’s report also drew particular attention to the challenges facing Aboriginal people in Canada due to their longstanding marginalization resulting in “considerably lower levels of access to adequate food relative to the general population” (p.16). This situation is caused by, among other things, the impact of climate change and changing migratory patterns on the

³³ The relationship between under-employment and the growing number of migrant farmworkers deserves further attention, as does the impact of recent federal changes to employment insurance and seasonal work in the fisheries, as two examples.

ability of Aboriginal people to access traditional foods, as well as inadequate attention by Canadian governments to ensuring that indigenous people are able to control their traditional lands and resources (p17-19).

At the heart of the UN Special Rapporteur's report is the notion that none of these challenges need to exist. Canada is a rich country, with abundant natural resources, and with one of the lowest debt to GDP ratios of an OECD country (p.13). It also has the policy tools for addressing these issues, including a legal framework that can ensure the protection of social and economic rights like the Right to Food, if governments made this protection a priority. The UN Special Rapporteur's report points out that a number of provinces (including Nova Scotia) have poverty reduction strategies, that there are many municipal and provincial food policy councils emerging, and that there are a number of initiatives afoot (including FoodSecure Canada's People's Food Policy³⁴ and the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute's efforts³⁵) which can form the foundation for a national food strategy that seeks to integrate agriculture, health, environment and food access goals.

Nova Scotia faces many of the same issues as those identified by the UN Special Rapporteur at the national level. Further, the research undertaken for this report clearly shows that the actors involved in food policy in this province have a good understanding of many of these issues, and are thus in a position to take a leadership position in the Canadian context. We hope that this report contributes to further movement – by a diverse set of stakeholders – on collaborative initiatives that will address the full range of challenges, and opportunities, associated with realizing community food security in this province.

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