Food action: Addressing the roots of household food insecurity & supporting seeds of action to build community food security

Catherine Hart, FoodARC

Kings County Food Summit
Wolfville, Nova Scotia
June 10, 2017
What is FoodARC?

- The Food Action Research Centre is housed at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, NS
- We are committed to research and action to build food security in NS and beyond
- FoodARC’s Director is Patty Williams and the centre has many partners within NS and across Canada
What is household food insecurity?

- It is “inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints”\(^1\)

- Income is household food insecurity’s strongest predictor

- In Canada, it is measured by an 18-question module in the Canadian Community Health Survey

- Nova Scotia has the highest rate among the provinces (1/6 households)

---

What is household food security?

Food security is not the opposite of food insecurity - it's more broad.

“Household food security exists when everyone has access to safe, nutritious food of the variety and amount that they need and want, in a way that maintains their dignity.”

So then what is **community** food security?

- Community food security goes a couple steps further to look at food systems.

- It exists “when **all** community residents have access to enough **healthy**, **safe** food through a **sustainable** food system that maximizes **community** self-reliance and **social justice**.”

Activating Change Together for Community Food Security (ACT for CFS)

A part of the relationship between FoodARC & Northeastern Kings County
What was ACT for CFS?

- A “Community-University Research Alliance”
- A 5-year participatory action research project (2010-2015) involving 4 communities in NS in partnership with local organizations:
  - Eastern Shelburne County
  - Northeastern Kings County (Kids Action Program)
  - Spryfield
  - Pictou County
- It involved Participatory Community Food Security Assessments comprising 10 common indicators & 1 unique
The indicators and communities were:

1) Opportunities & barriers to selling food locally
2) Community participation in food-related activities
3) Programs that support food education and skills
4) Formal food production
5) Physical accessibility of food
6) Availability and range of food outlets
7) Economic accessibility of food
8) Supports for populations vulnerable to food insecurity
9) Supports for community development and cooperation
10) Conditions that support breastfeeding

+ Changes in Farming
“In Northeastern Kings County, food is in abundance.”

“One of the key challenges identified by the research [...] is the judgement and assumptions that people experiencing poverty and food insecurity face within the community.”

“Common assumptions about people experiencing food insecurity – for example that they lack knowledge around healthy food choices or cooking and budgeting skills – fails to recognize the root causes of food insecurity.”
What about food literacy? A new PROOF fact sheet tells us:

- There is no difference in shopping behaviours (e.g., planning meals, using a grocery list) between food insecure and food secure adults.
- But, 84% of adults in food insecure households shop with a budget vs. 43% of food secure adults.
- Adults in food insecure households do not report having lower food preparation skills than those in food secure households; their cooking abilities are also similar.
- Almost 2/3 adults report adjusting recipes to make them healthier; adults in food insecure households are not less likely to do this.
Since 2002, household food insecurity has increased in Nova Scotia.

Continuous monitoring of a healthy food basket illustrates food insecurity as a systemic problem, and not an individual one.

Involving those with experience of food insecurity in the research is transformative.

Over time we can see the increasing cost of a healthy diet.
Affordability Scenarios

“Stories” of typical Nova Scotia households and their ability to afford a basic nutritious diet
Affordability scenarios (June 2015)

Household of four, income assistance

Lone mother (2 children), min. wage
Findings: A bird’s eye view

| Table 2 Summary of end of month balance after purchasing a basic nutritious diet. |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Current Situation                                | Policy Change                                    |
| Income Assistance                                | Minimum Wage                                     | OAS/GIS                                          | Increased Canada Child Benefit                    | $15/h min wage                                   |
| Reference household of four                      | -$986.44                                         | -$418.07                                         | -$929.73                                         | $167.24                                          |
| Lone mother with two kids                        | -$681.10                                         | -$510.12                                         | -$589.33                                         | -$101.07                                         |
| Lone man                                         | -$793.54                                         | $141.40                                          | N/A                                              | $674.90                                          |
| Lone man with disability                         | -$510.33                                         | N/A                                              | N/A                                              | N/A                                              |
| Lone senior man with disability                  | N/A                                              | N/A                                              | -$26.79                                          | N/A                                              |


2015 Participatory Food Costing
Conclusions

- Income-related: Income Assistance rates are inadequate and the minimum wage rate is inadequate for working households with children.

- Looking beyond income: We need strong, complementary social policy.

- Unique needs that create added costs exacerbate the inadequacy of current income supports and minimum wage.
ACT for CFS: Calls to action

1) Use holistic approaches to make food matter
   - Work across sectors and geographies in coordinated ways; harness government leadership

2) Adequate liveable incomes
   - Living wages; a guaranteed annual income; affordable housing, transportation and childcare

3) Mobile/pop-up fresh and local food outlets
   - Can improve access and help small producers distribute their food

4) Scale-appropriate food regulations
   - Current state hurts small-scale operations and informal activities

5) Institutional procurement
   - Institutions’ purchasing power is capable of supporting small producers & increasing local, healthy, sustainable food consumption
How can we use this knowledge to inspire our initiatives?

- When we design strategies and programs to support and build community food security, let’s ask, how can they help address household food insecurity?

- Inspiration from the Island:
  - The Pan Cape Breton Food Hub Cooperative
Pan Cape Breton Food Hub Cooperative

- Inverness County was awarded funded from the Dept. of Agriculture for 2-year pilot from (2015-2016)

- How does it work?
  - Online grocery shopping platform
  - Partner organizations (drop off/pick up)
  - Local trucking company

- Farm Fresh Food 4 All
- Glace Bay Food Bank
Thank you!

- To learn more about FoodARC and access resources: [www.foodarc.ca](http://www.foodarc.ca)

- For more information, contact: voices.ra@msvu.ca

- We are especially grateful for funding support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council!
FoodARC’s next steps: Ongoing projects, future food costing, and new chapters!

- Consumer food and beverage environment;
- Increasing local food procurement by publicly funded institutions;
- Ongoing food costing;
- Cultural food security of new immigrants;
- Innovative knowledge translation; and,
- Developing a roadmap for the Centre’s future.
Voices of food insecurity in Nova Scotia

“Well, the first word that pops into my head is fear. Fear of not having enough to feed your children. That’s the first thing – because I experienced it. [...] I mean I know there is a definition and I could rhyme off the definition for you, but for me personally, food insecurity is fear and a lack of dignity.”

- Family Resource Centre Partner
Household food insecurity in Nova Scotia

- Across Canada, about 4 million people live with some level of food insecurity.
- Nova Scotia has the highest rate of food insecurity among the provinces (15.4%).

Glace Bay Food Bank

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ChRfvCmFLA
PROOF: An amazing resource

For emerging research and resources, please visit our website: proof.utoronto.ca
@proofcanada

Investigators:
Valerie Tarasuk (PI, U Toronto), Craig Gunderson (co-PI, U Illinois), Lynn McIntyre (U Calgary), Herb Emery (U Calgary), Catherine Mah (Memorial U), Jurgen Rehm (CAMH), Paul Kurdyak (CAMH)

Funding:
PROOF is supported by a Programmatic Grant in Health and Health Equity, Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) (FRN 115208).
Why are there so many terms?

Community food security

Household food security

Food security

Food sovereignty

Food justice
How did we conduct participatory food costing?

- 21 grocery stores throughout NS in June 2015 by 29 people
- Prices of the 67 food items in the National Nutritious Food Basket were documented using the "Participatory Food Costing Survey Tool"
Dual earner household

- **Reference household of four receiving Income Assistance**
  - Cost of healthy food basket = $935.11
  - Income ($2592.04) - Expenses ($3578.48)
  - What’s left? -$986.44

- Since 2002, the monthly cost of a basic nutritious diet for the reference household of four has increased by 63%
  - 2002: $572.90 → 2015: $935.11
Single earner households

- **Lone mother with two children receiving minimum wage**
  - Cost of healthy food basket = $679.47
  - Monthly income ($2601.46) – expenses ($3111.58)
    - What’s left? -$510.12

- **Lone man without a disability receiving Income Assistance**
  - Cost of a healthy food basket in 2015: $370.13
  - Monthly income ($653.52) – expenses ($1447.06)
  - What’s left? -$793.54
Protective factor of guaranteed income

- Lone male...with a disability receiving Income Assistance
  - Cost of a healthy food basket: $321.92
  - Monthly income ($961.85) – expenses ($1472.18)
    - What’s left? -$510.33

- ...On Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement
  - Monthly income ($1445.39) – expenses ($1472.18)
    - What’s left? -$26.79
What is the impact of key policy levers?

Federal government’s new Canada Child Benefit

Hypothetical increase in minimum wage to $15/hour
Federal government’s new Canada Child Benefit

Figure 9: End of month balance after purchasing a basic nutritious diet in Nova Scotia in June 2015 for a reference household of four and lone mother with two children receiving Income Assistance with previous Child Tax Benefit and Universal Child Care Benefit compared with the New Canada Child Benefit.
Hypothetical increase in minimum wage to $15/hour

Figure 10: End of month balance after purchasing a basic nutritious diet in Nova Scotia in June 2015 for a reference household of four, lone mother with two children, and lone man without a disability if minimum wage was increased to $15/hour compared with 2015 minimum wage ($10.60/hour)

- Current minimum wage ($10.60 per hour)
- Hypothetical minimum wage ($15.00 per hour)
Recommendations: Income (1/2)

- Increase IA rates within 5 years to an amount that would allow all households to meet their basic needs; adjust annually.
- Ensure Nova Scotians who need to can afford to have a private vehicle.
- Reduce the rate at which employment income is deducted from IA amounts for those who are working while receiving IA.
- Put automatic enrollment in place for the Guaranteed Income Supplement.
Recommendations: Income (2/2)

- Research the possibility and impacts of a living wage in Nova Scotia workplaces; pilot a program.
- Increase incentives for businesses to employ Nova Scotians in full-time positions and offer benefits.
- Pilot and evaluate the impact of a guaranteed basic income in NS on household food insecurity.
- Ensure enough income and related policy supports for Nova Scotians with disabilities, who work and who do not work, to have a basic nutritious diet.
Recommendations: Community Infrastructure

- Increase the number of adequate, affordable, and safe housing units to reflect the number of households living below the low-income cut-off.

- Invest in affordable and accessible community-appropriate public transit.
Recommendations: Complementary Social Policy

- Ensure strong social policy as the foundation for food policy.
- Look at the provincial childcare subsidy to see if it helps people seek and keep employment.
- Increase the amount of the federal CCB, or increase other benefits to offset the high cost of childcare.
- Examine the effectiveness of a publicly funded, provincially regulated childcare system.
Who is most at risk of food insecurity?

- People who rely on social assistance have the greatest likelihood of experiencing food insecurity.

- Almost one-third of households in Canada that rely on social assistance as their primary income source were found to be severely food insecure through PROOF’s analysis of CCHS data.