

Food action and understanding: The roots of household food insecurity and ways to grow community food security

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Introductions

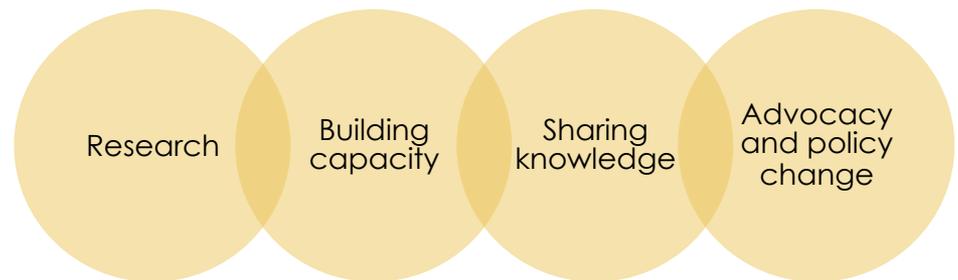
What is the Our Food Project?

- An initiative of the Ecology Action Centre to shape positive food environments.
- Funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada since 2011.
- Embraces a “pickles to policy change” or holistic approach.
- Focuses on cross-sectoral action for food systems change.
- Helps connect regional, inter-provincial, and national efforts.



What is FoodARC?

- Food Action Research Centre (FoodARC) is housed at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia (NS).
- Committed to research and action to build food security in NS and beyond.
- Dr. Patty Williams is FoodARC's Director. The centre has many partners within NS and across Canada.

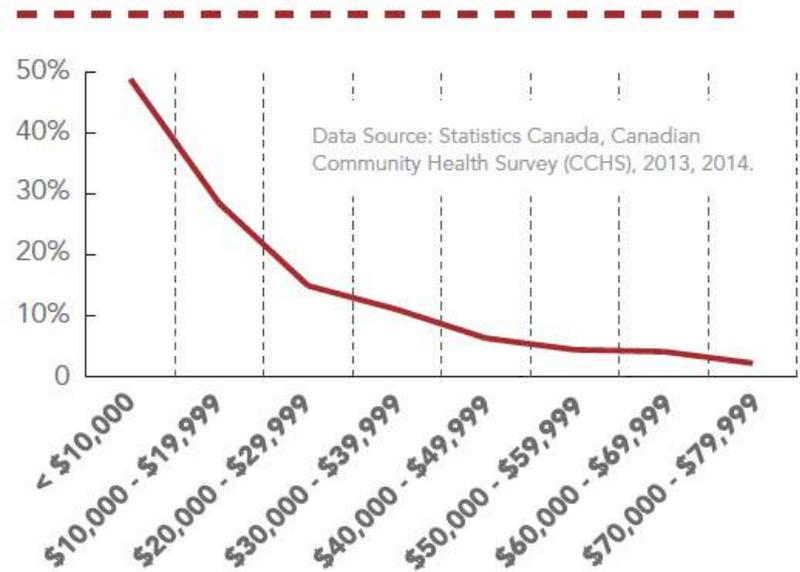


Background: Definitions

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 predictor¹ – and many things influence income.
- In Canada, it is measured by an 18-question module in the Canadian Community Health Survey, which has been used since 2005.

(1) Food insecurity by household income



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.”²

- Family Resource Centre Partner

(1) Household food insecurity in Canada by province & territory, 2014

Data Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 2014.

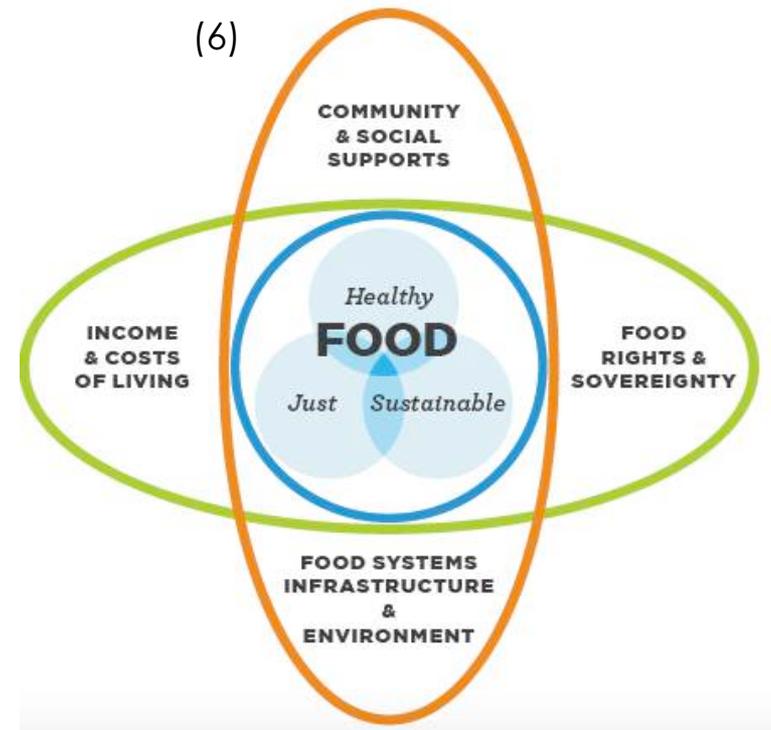


Household food insecurity in Nova Scotia

- Across, Canada, about 4 million people live with some level of food insecurity¹
- Nova Scotia has the highest rate of food insecurity among the provinces (15.4%) – 1/6 households – in 2014¹, having peaked at 18.5% in 2013.³

What is **community** food security?

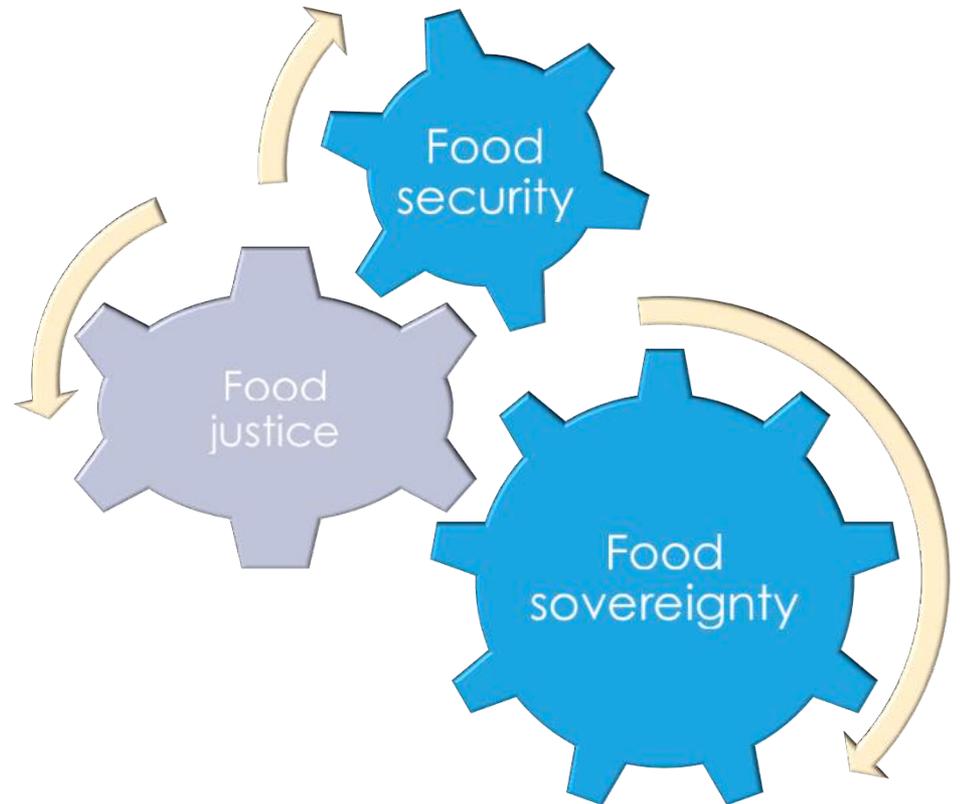
- Community food security goes a couple steps further to look at food systems.
- It exists “when **all community residents** have access to enough **healthy, safe food** through a **sustainable food system** that maximizes **community self-reliance** and **social justice**.”⁵



Why are there so many terms?

Community
food security

Household
food
security



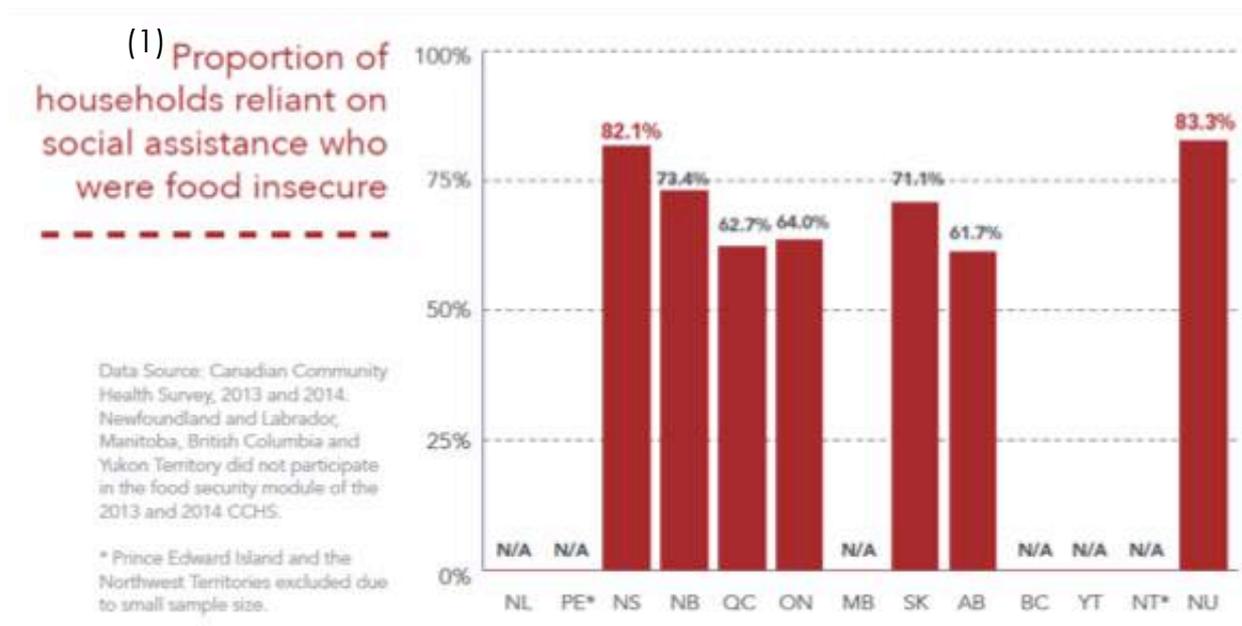
Food environments

- ▣ **Where we live, work, play, and learn**
- ▣ **Food deserts:** Typically refers to neighbourhoods - where it's difficult to access nutritious food (e.g., poor access to grocery stores, farmers' markets, etc.).⁷
- ▣ **Food swamps:** The lack of nutritious food and the overabundance of processed, low-nutrient food outlets and options.⁸⁻⁹
- ▣ There are limitations to these concepts - they do not account for financial access, nor the way people move throughout their communities (i.e., work, recreational activities, etc.)

Background: Evidence

Who is most at risk of food insecurity?

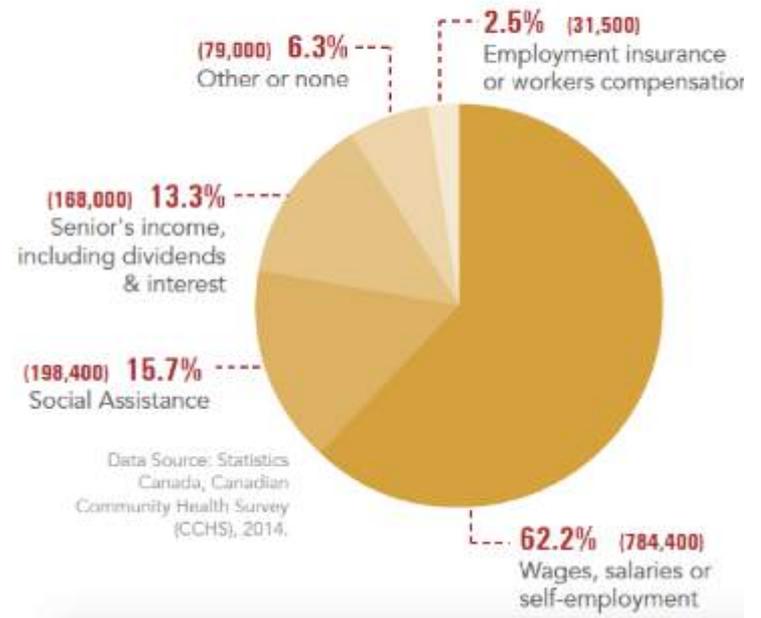
People who rely on social assistance have the greatest likelihood of experiencing food insecurity.¹



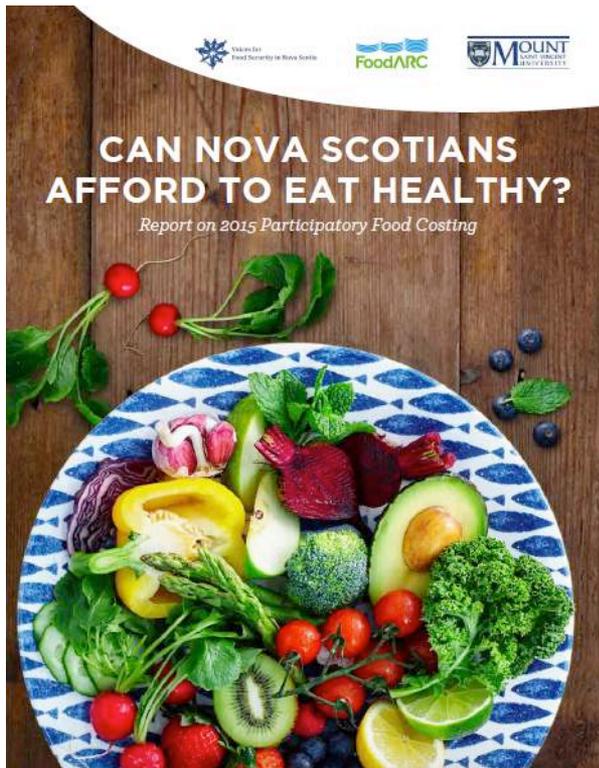
Who is most at risk of food insecurity?

- The majority of all households experiencing food insecurity **are employed.**¹
- Precarious employment and inadequate wages (i.e., not living wages) contribute.

(1) Food insecure households' main source of income



Participatory Food Costing and household food insecurity in NS



- 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

*The report is available at: foodarc.ca

Affordability scenarios (June 2015)

Household of 4, Income Assistance¹⁰



Lone mother (2 children), min. wage¹⁰

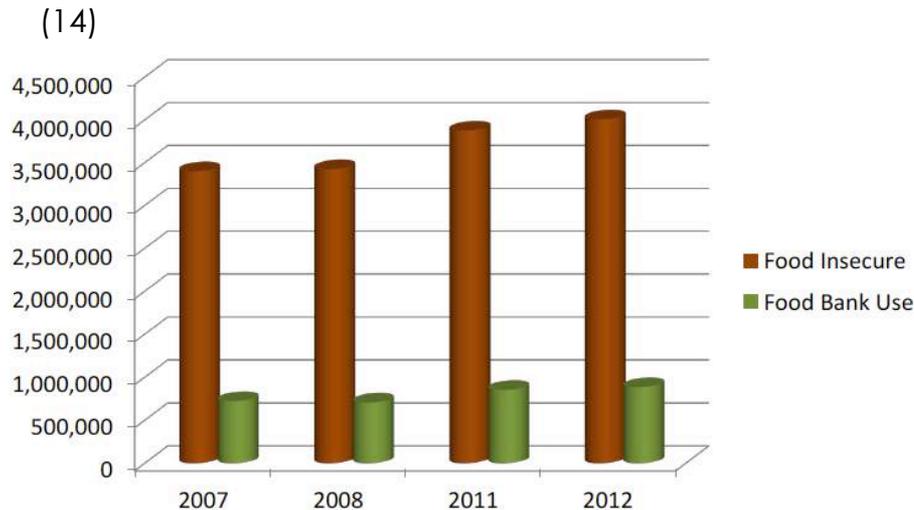


The potential of policy and systemic change to address root causes:
 If \$15/hr min. wage: Surplus of + \$167.24 / Smaller potential deficit: -\$101.07

Food matters: Food insecurity, health, and sustainable communities

- ▣ **Food is part of the foundation of health.** Food insecurity affects our mental & physical health and development. Economically and environmentally unsustainable food systems challenge our ability to be resilient
- ▣ The **food economy** – fishing, farming – is a vital part of rural communities.
- ▣ Economically and ecologically **unsustainable food systems challenge our ability to be resilient and healthy.**
- ▣ Food is one way historical **societal injustices** manifest

Charitable food has limited impact



Data Sources: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2012, and Food Banks Canada, HungerCount, 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2012.

- Most have been operating for 10 years to fill a void in Canada's social policy, relying on donated food and donated time by volunteers.¹¹⁻¹²
- 2010 research surveyed 517 CFOs across Canada; 340 were grocery programs and 72% indicated people needed more food than they could provide.¹³
- Most people who experience food insecurity don't access charitable food organizations.¹⁴

Change in household food insecurity does not equal changes in food bank use¹¹

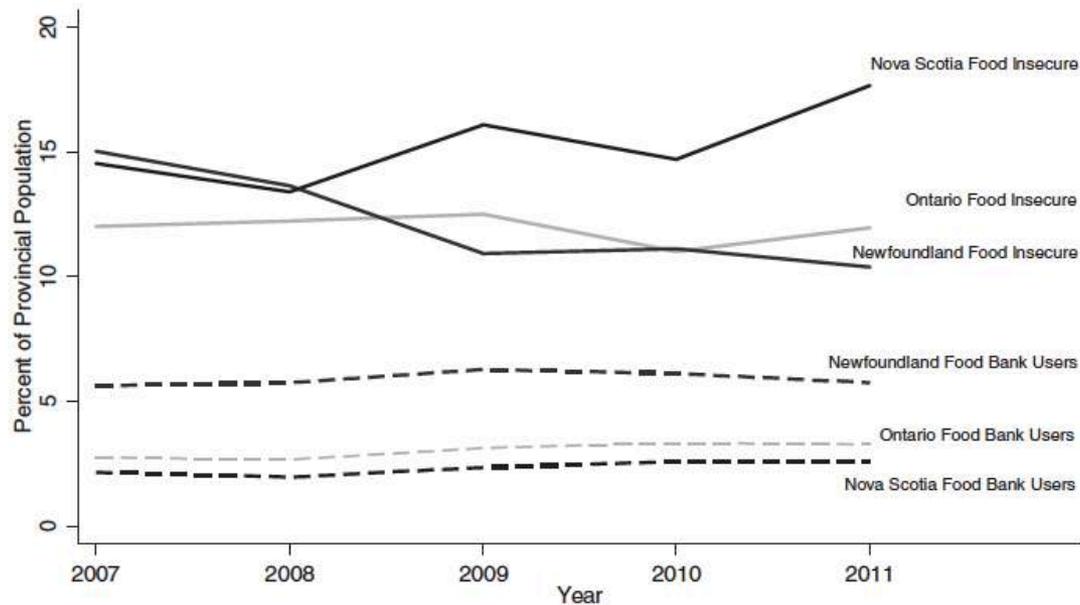


Figure 2. Provincial trends in population use of food banks and food insecurity.

Source: Authors' calculations from *Canadian Community Health Surveys, 2007–11*, and *Food Banks Canada, HungerCounts, 2007–11*.

Food literacy assumptions

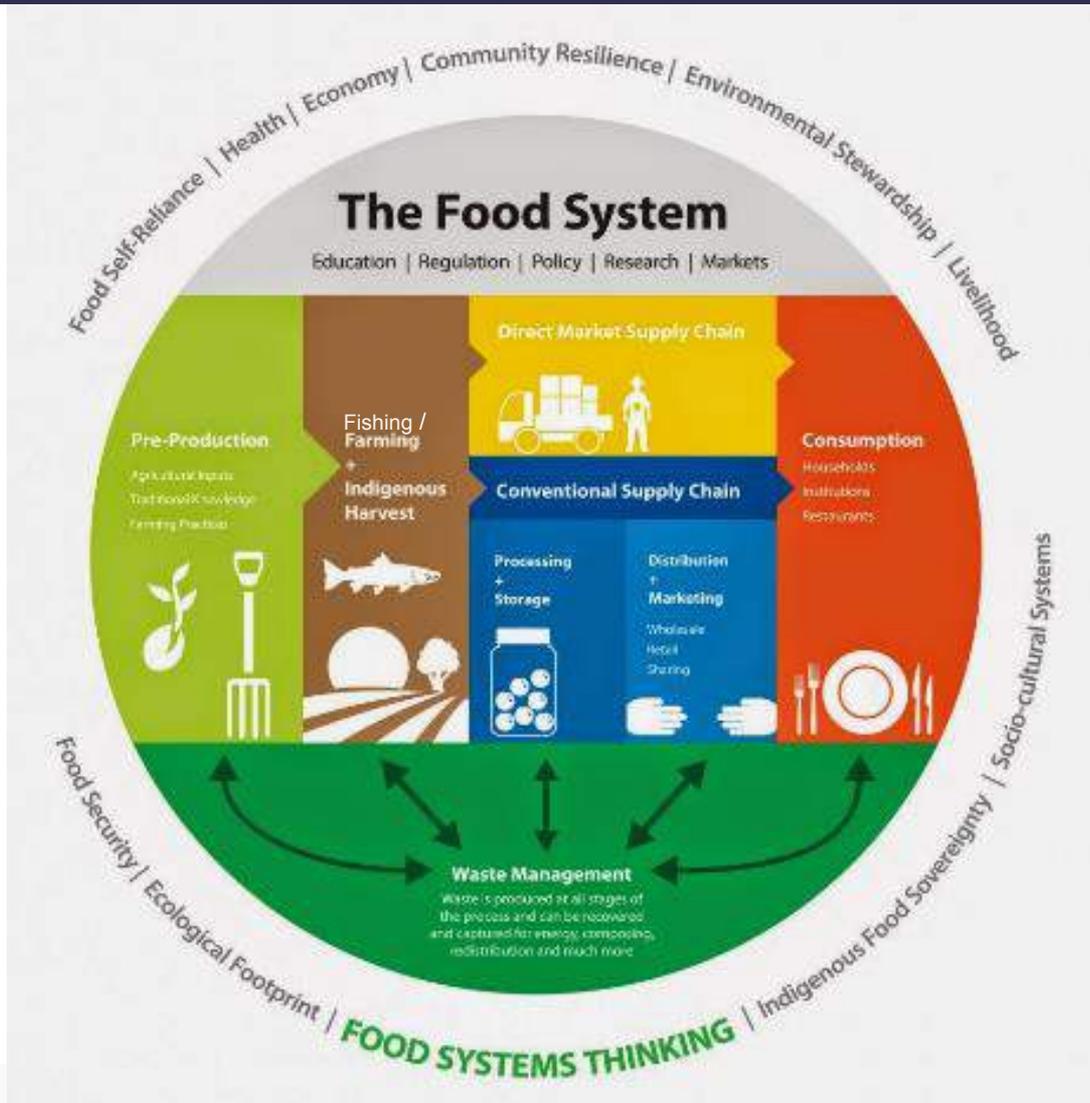
- There is no difference in shopping behaviours (e.g., planning meals, using a grocery list) between food insecure and food secure adults¹⁵
 - But, 84% of adults in food insecure households shop with a budget vs. 43% of food secure adults¹⁵
- Adults in food insecure households do not report having lower food preparation skills than those in food secure households; their cooking abilities are also similar.¹⁵
- Almost 2/3 adults report adjusting recipes to make them healthier; adults in food insecure households are not less likely to do this¹⁵

Creating change

What's happening in Nova Scotia?

- ▣ Involves everybody: farmers, fishers, workers, processors, distributors, retailers, restaurants, and all who eat!
 - ▣ Food intersects with our health, environmental, and economic concerns.
 - ▣ Different organizations have cross-cutting initiatives and others are more targeted.
- Ecology Action Centre – Our Food Project
 - Feed Nova Scotia
 - Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia
 - FoodARC
 - FarmWorks
 - Agri-Futures
 - NS Alliance for Healthy Eating & Physical Activity
 - NS Federation of Agriculture
 - Island Food Network (Cape Breton)
 - Cumberland Food Action Network
 - Antigonish Food Security Coalition
 - Pictou County Food Security Coalition
 - Halifax Food Policy Alliance
 - Pan Cape Breton Food Hub
 - + Many local initiatives...

Our Food System¹⁶



FoodARC recommendations for change

- 1) Income-related:** Living wages, a guaranteed annual income, and incentives for businesses to employ Nova Scotians full-time¹⁰
- 2) Beyond income:** Strong social policy that prioritizes affordable housing, affordable and accessible transportation, and childcare; examine the effectiveness of a publicly-funded, provincially regulated childcare system¹⁰
- 3) Food-focused:** Holistic approaches to make food matter; mobile/pop-up fresh and local food outlets; procurement of local, healthy, and sustainable food by institutions¹⁰

What can we do?

Short-Term Strategies

Emergency responses that provide short-term relief – “Band-Aid” solutions that do not address root causes of food insecurity.¹⁷

e.g., food banks and meal programs

Individual & Community Capacity Building Strategies

Strategies that build individual and collective skills and capacity, which equip people to strengthen community food security.¹⁷

e.g., community gardens can lead to a mobilized group, mobile food markets

Systems Change Strategies

Supportive and healthy public policy that will build food security and are informed by those whom the policies impact.¹⁷

e.g., forming a policy group, participatory food costing

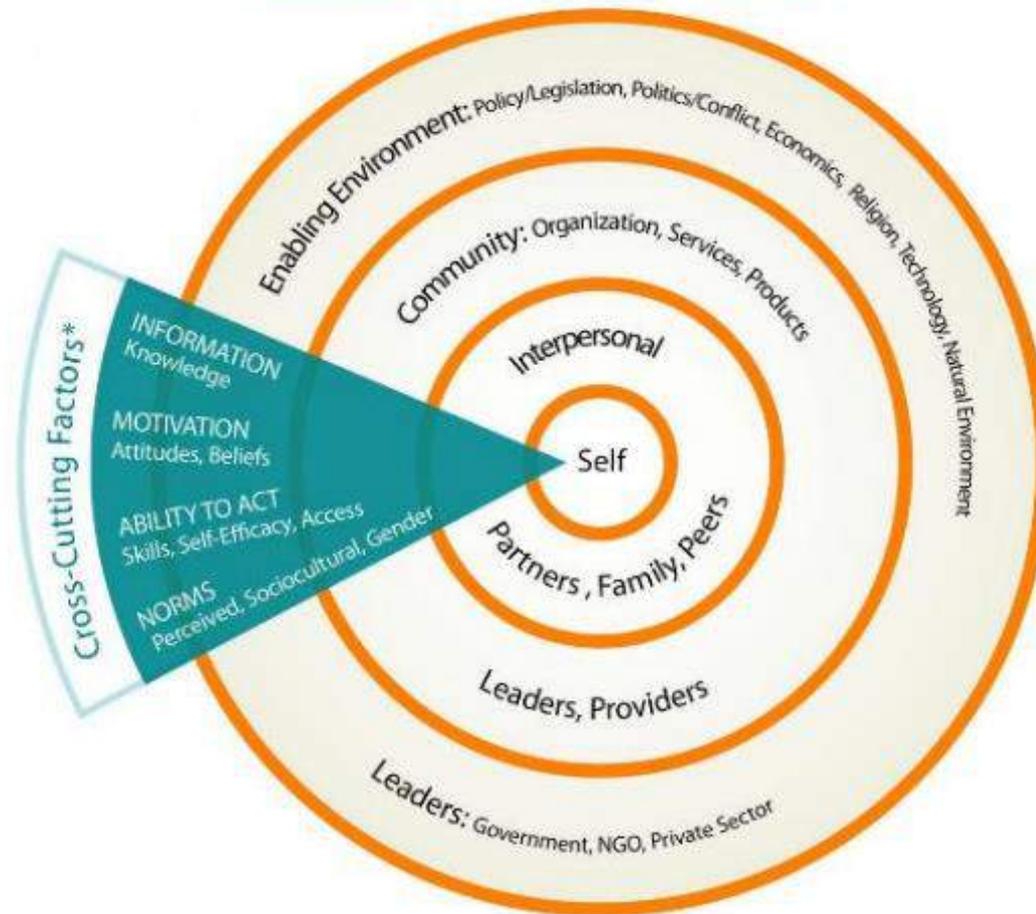
Inspiring initiatives

- When we design strategies and programs to build community food security, how can they help address food insecurity? How can we work towards system change?
- Inspiration from around NS:
 - [Pan Cape Breton Food Hub Cooperative](#)
 - [Cumberland Cost-share CSA](#)
 - [Halifax: Food Charter](#)



Thinking about change ¹⁸

Socio-Ecological Model for Change



*These concepts apply to all levels (people, organizations, and institutions). They were originally developed for the individual level.

SOURCE: Adapted from McKee, Manoncourt, Chin and Carnegie (2000)

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