

The Right to Food Affordable Accessible Food in Northern Canada

ASK: We are calling for an investment in a comprehensive, collaborative strategy and action plan to address food insecurity in the north, where we are facing an unprecedented public health crisis, including a complete overhaul of the federal program Nutrition North Canada (NNC)

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND KEY FACTS

Summary of the issue: Aboriginal communities in Northern Canada are experiencing a food security crisis, with serious implications for health and well-being. This is a multi-faceted issue as northerners rely on a mix of both traditional (wild) and market food, and both harvesting and food shipping costs are extremely high. Food security in the north is about sustaining the availability of and access to high quality food for all. There is no single experience of food security, and a range of holistic, coordinated approaches at multiple scales is required to address it.

Food Insecurity in the North

- High rates of food insecurity (5 to 6 times higher than the Canadian national average) have been documented among Inuit, First Nations and Métis adults across the North¹.
- Food insecurity in Nunavut (68.8%) represents the highest documented food insecurity prevalence rate for any Aboriginal population residing in a developed country². The rate of child food insecurity (62%) is also highest in Nunavut³.
- In northern Manitoba more than 60% of on-reserve Indigenous households are food insecure⁴. Similarly, household food insecurity rates of 70% have been documented in northern Ontario⁵.
- The 'right to food' is both a human and legal right that "protects the right of all human beings to live in dignity, free from hunger, insecurity and malnutrition"⁶. The 'right to food' for Indigenous peoples is recognized by the United Nations⁷.

¹ Inuit Health Survey data

² UN special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

³ UN special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

⁴ Nunavut Inuit Child Health Survey

⁵ Thompson, S et al. "Analyzing Food Related Economic Development in Indigenous Communities in Northern Manitoba for Impacts on Food, Sovereignty, Food Security, and Sustainable Livelihoods." *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*. 3/2 (2012).

⁶ Skinner, K. Hanning, R.M, and Tsuji, L.J.S. "Prevalence and Severity of Household Food Insecurity of First Nations People Living in an On-Reserve, Sub-Arctic Community within the Mushkegowuk Territory." *Public Health Nutrition*, 17/1 (2014): 31-39.

⁷ Ziegler, <http://www.righttofood.org/work-of-jean-ziegler-at-the-un/what-is-the-right-to-food/>

⁷ Knuth, L. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 'The right to adequate food and indigenous peoples', available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/ap552e/ap552e.pdf>



Nutrition North Canada

- Nutrition North Canada (NNC) is designed to lower the cost of perishable and nutritious food in northern communities by providing northern retailers with a subsidy on a select list of foods⁸.
- The 2014 Auditor's General Report⁹ recommended changes in three areas to improve program management:
 - Community eligibility criteria,
 - Passing on the subsidy to consumers,
 - Cost containment and internal management of resources.
- NNC doesn't include subsidies for necessary non-food items (e.g.: harvesting equipment, farming / gardening supplies, hygiene products and medical devices)¹⁰.
- Only in very specific cases is inter-community transport of traditional food subsidized under NNC.

Multi-Level Approaches

- Community members know best their realities and have knowledge and ideas about how to address food insecurity, but require support.
- Government policies and programs at different levels are not well coordinated.

ACTION TO SUPPORT NORTHERN FOOD SECURITY

- Developing a national food policy that includes the northern context, and the recognition of the right to food for Indigenous Peoples in Canada.
- Providing sustainable funding for Community Food Coordinators in all northern communities, as a mechanism to both act at the local level and inform policy.

A complete overhaul of Nutrition North Canada should include:

- Re-allocating the Nutrition North subsidy to include non-profit food markets and the transportation of traditional foods.
- Reinstate subsidies for necessary non-food items such as gardening/farming supplies, and harvesting equipment.
- Ensuring the cooperation of all levels of government and the coordination of provincial, territorial and federal service providers, departments, and organizations.
- Establishing accountability mechanisms, including clear time frames and benchmarks, to address the current state of food insecurity among northern Canadians.

This position was developed by members of FSC's Northern and Remote Food Network.

⁸ Nutrition North Canada, available at: <http://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1415385762263/1415385790537>

⁹ Report of the Auditor General of Canada, 'Chapter 6: Nutrition North Canada – Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada,' available at: http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/docs/parl_oag_201411_06_e.pdf. Retrieved 18 May 2015.

¹⁰ Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 'Changes to the List of Items Eligible for Shipment,' available at: <http://www.aadnc-andc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015868/1100100015870>. Retrieved 11 August 2013.

