



## AFFORDABLE FOOD IN THE NORTH



**FSC**  
**RAD**

Food  
Secure  
Canada  
Réseau  
pour une alimentation  
durable

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# Context

Indigenous communities in Northern Canada<sup>1</sup> are experiencing a food security crisis with serious implications for health and well-being. Nearly 70% of Nunavut lives in food insecurity, the highest documented rate amongst Aboriginal populations residing in developed countries in the world<sup>2</sup>. Similarly alarming numbers of people live with food insecurity in other parts of the North. Food security is more than just having a full stomach; in Northern communities it is closely tied to culture, identity, and rights for self-determination. It is also closely connected to broader socio-economic inequities, including poverty, unemployment, lack of land-based education, and access to proper housing<sup>3</sup>. Urgent action is required in the face of this unprecedented public health issue. The solutions must come from the communities themselves, and the federal program designed to lower food prices in the North - Nutrition North Canada - needs a complete overhaul to be effective.

Food insecurity in the North is a multifaceted problem. Northerners rely on a mix of traditional (wild) and market food (imported), and both harvesting and food shipping costs are extremely high. Nutrition North Canada, the federal program intended to lower the cost of perishable and nutritious food in northern communities by providing northern retailers with a subsidy on a select list of food, is failing in its mission and does little to support regional food systems in the North.



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<sup>1</sup> Northern Canada refers to a large and diverse group of regions: the northern territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut) and the northern regions of several provinces, including the self-governing Inuit regions of Nunavik and Nunatsiavut. While this is undoubtedly an incredibly diverse grouping, these regions, and the communities within them, share some important common experiences in relation to their food systems, which we have sought to highlight in this document.

<sup>2</sup> De Schutter, O. (2014). UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food. Report on agroecology and the right to food.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, A., et al. (2019). Cultivating Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Food Systems in the North: A Review and Recommendations. Montreal, Quebec: Food Secure Canada, Pp.1-16

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Issues connected to climate change have also adversely affected the ecosystems and key traditional food sources of Northern communities, further complicating wild food procurement<sup>4</sup>. One cannot talk about Northern food systems without acknowledging how food has been used as a colonial weapon against Indigenous peoples. The destruction of traditional Indigenous food systems, including hunting, fishing and gathering, is connected to a broader process of cultural genocide and a deterioration of health and wellbeing in Indigenous communities. We must acknowledge the history and ongoing legacy of colonialism and prioritize reconciliation and decolonization as key guiding principles of our food system. Indigenous food systems are deeply connected to Indigenous economies, cultures, health, and wellbeing.

A range of holistic, coordinated approaches at multiple levels, based on local knowledge is required to address the food crisis in the North in the short-term, and to build a more sustainable and resilient food system over the long-term. Northern community members know their realities best and have knowledge and ideas about how to address food insecurity and build a food system that best suits their needs. However, support is needed, along with a recognition of Indigenous food sovereignty and the right to food of all people. The term '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"<sup>5</sup>. The right to food is recognized by the United Nations<sup>6</sup>.



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<sup>4</sup> PROOF. (2019). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2015-16: Graphic preview series.

<sup>5</sup> Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2014). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Knuth, L. (2009). The Right to Adequate Food and Indigenous Peoples: How Can the Right to Food Benefit Indigenous Peoples?. FAO. Retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/ap552e/ap552e.pdf>.

# KEY STATISTICS:

- First Nations, Inuit and Métis adults across the North experience five to six times higher levels of food insecurity than the Canadian national average according to some studies<sup>7</sup>.
- Nearly 70% of Nunavut lives in food insecurity, the highest documented rate amongst Aboriginal populations residing in developed countries<sup>8</sup>. The rate for children in Nunavut is also high at 62%<sup>9</sup>.
- More than 60% of on-reserve Aboriginal households in Northern Manitoba are food insecure<sup>10</sup>.
- Similarly, household food insecurity rates of 70% have been documented in northern Ontario<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Egeland, GM (2010). Inuit Health Survey 2007-2008. International Polar Year Inuit Health Survey: Health in Transition and Resiliency. Retrieved from [https://www.mcgill.ca/cine/files/cine/adult\\_report\\_nunavut.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/cine/files/cine/adult_report_nunavut.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> De Schutter, O. (2014). UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food. Report on agroecology and the right to food.

<sup>9</sup> Nunavut Inuit Child Health Study. See also Egeland GM, Pacey AP, Cao ZC, and Sobol I. (2010) Food insecurity among Inuit preschoolers: Nunavut Inuit Child Health Survey, 2007-2008. Canadian Medical Association Journal.182(3):243-8. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.091297

<sup>10</sup> Thompson, S., Kamal, A. G., Alam, M. A., & Wiebe, J. (2012). Community development to feed the family in northern Manitoba communities: evaluating food activities based on their food sovereignty, food security, and sustainable livelihood outcomes. Canadian journal of nonprofit and social economy research, 3(2).

<sup>11</sup> Skinner, K., Hanning, R. M., & Tsuji, L. J. (2014). 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), 31-39.

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## Policy Proposals

a) Support made-in-the-North solutions, taking into account the cultural, environmental and geographical context of the north.

b) Recognize the right to food for Indigenous peoples in Canada, and support Indigenous self-determination and self-governance, including control over land and resources.

c) Provide sustainable funding for Community Food Coordinators in all northern communities, as a mechanism to both act at the local level and inform policy.

d) Guarantee a basic income, adjusted to reflect northern costs.

e) Overall, change Nutrition North to:

- ensure the subsidy is passed onto consumers<sup>12</sup>;
- ensure subsidies for necessary non-food items such as supplies and equipment for hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering, harvesting, gardening and farming.
- increase support for programs enhancing access to country and community-grown foods.

f) Provide an incentive for retailers to purchase locally-produced and harvested foods. Support community-based programs that promote the transmission of both traditional knowledge and new approaches to sustainable food systems, including support for on-the-land training opportunities and programs for Northern youth.

g) Address current food safety regulatory barriers that hamper the growth of regional food systems by either increasing access to federally-inspected processing facilities or developing new regulatory mechanisms specific to country foods in Northern regions.

h) Establish accountability mechanisms, including clear timeframes and benchmarks, to address the current state of food insecurity among northern Canadians.

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<sup>12</sup> See the 2014 Auditor General's Report, Chap.6 Nutrition North Canada—Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada [http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/att\\_\\_e\\_39985.html](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/att__e_39985.html)

<sup>13</sup> Burnett et al. (2015). From Food Mail to Nutrition North Canada: Reconsidering federal food subsidy programs for northern Ontario. *Canadian Food Studies* 2(1): 141-156.

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## Questions for candidates

- Will you commit to addressing food access in the North from a perspective that acknowledges the right to food and Indigenous food sovereignty?
- Food insecurity is a crisis in many Northern communities - what immediate action are you willing to take, and what would you propose as longer-term solutions?
- What is your plan to fix Nutrition North?
- How can we address the impacts of climate change on traditional food sources in the North?
- What does a “made in the North” solution to food insecurity mean to you?

