



## MAKING THE CONNECTION: Food Security & Public Health

# Facts

*The evidence is in: public health and food security are closely linked.*

**Making the Connection: Food Security and Public Health** is a comprehensive discussion paper by the Community Nutritionists Council of BC, which reviews the current evidence and proposes multiple strategies for improving food security.

**Food security.** This is a broad concept, encompassing the safety, quality and sustainability of our food supply, and access to a healthy diet. It is essential for healthy growth and development and integral to the prevention of chronic disease. While some aspects of food security are not under the control of the health sector, their potential impact on health and health care costs makes them relevant to all health authorities.

**Chronic Disease.** Highly processed foods are aggressively marketed to children, who now obtain a third of their daily energy requirements from these foods. Childhood obesity rates have doubled over the last 15 years and type 2 diabetes (typically an adult related disease) is increasing in children. Obesity-related illness costs the BC health care system an estimated \$830 million dollars annually.

**Access to a Healthy Diet.** One in six BC children lives in poverty. Poor nutrition in early childhood can impede intellectual and physical development leading to life-long health consequences. In addition, our increasing reliance on imported food places us all at risk of reduced access through supply chain disruption and the environmental impact of transporting food over long distances. Encouraging local food production can improve access and reduce environmental damage.

**Safety of our Food Supply.** How our food is grown, harvested and processed has an impact on health. Health Canada estimates there are 2.2 million cases of food-borne illness in Canada annually, including 30 deaths. Recent reports of toxin levels in farmed salmon, BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) in Canada and avian influenza in BC have consumers and food producers alarmed and anxious. A safer food supply leads to reduced health care dollars.

*Improving food security for all British Columbians will contribute to the health of individuals, communities and the economy.*

**To improve food security, the Community Nutritionist Council of BC recommends:**

- Ministry of Health Services designates food security as a core public health function
- Health Authorities include food security strategies as part of their Health Service Redesign Plans and provide resources for implementation
- Health Authorities incorporate food security indicators as part of their health information database and planning and monitoring processes
- Health Authorities participate in the development of regional food security (or policy) councils and champion the development of a provincial food policy council

**Making the Connection: Food Security and Public Health is endorsed by:**

- The Health Officers Council of BC • Farm Folk City Folk • BC Association of Social Workers
- Public Health Association of BC • First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
- BC Food Systems Network