

Food Secure Canada /Sécurité Alimentaire Canada

Local Food Self-Reliance Working Paper

Grow local, Eat local, Know what you Eat, Be healthy, Be food secure

“To become intimate with your home region, to know the territory as well as you can, to understand your life as woven into the local life does not prevent you from recognizing and honoring the diversity of other places, cultures, ways. On the contrary, how can you value other places if you do not have one of your own? If you are not yourself “placed,” then you wander the world ... with no gauge for measuring what you see. Local knowledge is the grounding for global knowledge.”

(Sanders 1993: 114).

This statement is Food Secure Canada’s working paper on local food self-reliance. It explains what we mean by local food self-reliance and why we think it is important, describes key considerations, and recommends actions for local governments, communities and individuals.

Introduction

Food Secure Canada aims to unite people and organizations working for food security nationally and globally. Food Secure Canada (FSC) works to ensure that the following interconnected goals are achieved:

Zero Hunger: All people at all times must be able to acquire, in a dignified manner, adequate quantity and quality of culturally and personally acceptable food.

A sustainable food system (including the fishery and other wild foods): Food in Canada must be harvested, produced, processed, distributed and consumed in a manner which maintains and enhances the quality of land, air and water for future generations, and in which people are able to earn a living wage in a safe and healthy working environment by harvesting, growing, producing, processing, handling, retailing and serving food.

Healthy and safe food: Nourishing foods must be readily at hand (and less nourishing ones restricted); food (including wild foods) must not be contaminated with pathogens or industrial chemicals; and no novel food can be allowed to enter the environment or food chain without rigorous independent testing and the existence of an on-going tracking and surveillance system, to ensure its safety for human consumption.

Context

The importance of food to human health and the economy is well understood and recognized. As one of the vital elements of human existence, food, from production to consumption, involves many of the most important cultural, social, and economic activities of human societies.

In 2005, the Vancouver Food System Assessment identified diverse threats to the world’s food supply, including (but not limited to) climate change, loss of agricultural land to overuse and

urban development, rising oil prices that drive up the costs of producing and transporting food, and a lack of political understanding about food security issues.¹ A key finding of this study notes that community food security can be increased when a region's reliance on imported food is reduced and local food production, processing and consumption are encouraged. However, regional self-reliance is hampered by the growth and continuing consolidation of agribusiness, where food production is increasingly controlled by a small number of transnational corporations.

Food Secure Canada recognizes that food security requires that adequate amounts of safe, healthy, nutritious, culturally acceptable food be accessible to all in a dignified manner; that food producers earn a fair return on their labour, and that food production, harvesting and distribution methods sustain the environment. In a society in which most people purchase their food, they must have adequate funds to do so, and full information about what they buy.

Local food self-reliance is essential to the creation of a secure food system. FSC believes that the health of our populations, communities and the environment depends on reducing our vulnerability to all threats to food security and eliminating barriers to local food self-reliance.

Local food self-reliance

Principles of local food self-reliance

The ability of local (regional, community, bioregional) populations to meet their primary food needs with food that is locally and sustainably produced is maximized when local food self-reliance policies are in place.

Self-reliance means reducing dependence on other places for the supply of food consumed locally, rather than complete local self-sufficiency.

What is local food self-reliance?

“Local” is an elastic term that encompasses a combination of geographic, biological, historical and cultural factors. Although difficult to define precisely, people have an intuitive sense of what local means in their area. It is the nearby, the community, the valley. Local food systems can be viewed as foodsheds – a food system counterpart to watersheds.

Local self-reliant food systems reduce but do not eliminate dependence on other places. But while we know our own backyards best, we are all situated in a global context. We are obligated to coordinate and maintain relationships with other places, and to remember that we share the planet with 6 billion other people and act accordingly so that we do not foul our backyards, or anyone else's.

¹ **Vancouver Food System Assessment**, 2005, funded by Western Economic Diversification Canada in partnership with the City of Vancouver's Department of Social Planning, SFU's Centre for Sustainable Community Development, and the Environmental Youth Alliance; produced by: Herb Barbolet, Vijay Cuddeford, Fern Jeffries, Holly Korstad, Susan Kurbis, Sandra Mark, Christiana Miewald, Frank Moreland

Benefits of increased local food self-reliance

Local self reliance helps create community on a human scale, eliminates or minimizes the distancing effects (alienation, loss of control) of globalized food systems; and enhances meaningful citizen control – democracy. It facilitates the return of control of food to people from corporate entities, which are often large, remote and unresponsive to local needs, traditions and ethics. It develops relationships within the community, and strengthens links between producers and consumers of food. Local self reliance, because it establishes multiple links among local people and institutions, helps create trust and enhance communication among members of a community.

Municipalities, regions, and other local jurisdictions that promote and enable local production of food that is consumed in their area benefit in many ways, including:

- more robust and stable local economies
- more jobs
- protection and restoration of local ecosystems (including improved biodiversity and air and water quality)
- better health for local citizens
- more nutritious, tasty, and culturally appropriate foods
- a net reduction in the total real cost of food

Actions toward local food self-reliance

Local, regional and provincial authorities have many tools that can be used to increase local food self-reliance. These tools include the power to make and implement policies and laws that enhance access to locally produced food, build capacity, determine how land is used, and protect local resources.

To increase local food self-reliance in our communities, Food Secure Canada recommends that policies and legislation be developed and implemented to support actions in these areas.

Enhance access to locally produced food

Develop significant local processing capacity – eg. canneries, freezing plants, abattoirs, fish processing facilities etc.

Promote convenient access to healthy and affordable foods in neighborhoods- eg. partnerships and programs that support rural-urban food links through farmers' markets, Fresh Fruit and Veggie Box programs, improved transportation to grocery stores, and other rural-urban initiatives

Work with local institutions to promote the regular sale of locally produced foods in government facilities, universities, colleges, schools, retirement homes, daycares, restaurants, farmers markets, etc.

Implement income, employment, housing, and transportation policies that support access to local food

Regularly assess community food security
Establish and support local food policy councils
Adopt and abide by local food charters which outline commitments to local food production/processing/consumption
Support community networks that provide information about local food choices and accessibility, eg. local area producer maps

Build capacity

Provide an adequate social safety net so that disadvantaged populations can afford healthy, nutritious food
Create “beginner farmer” training programs to encourage more small horticultural operations
Make farmland available to new farmers
Create incentives for farmers to provide ecological goods and services – eg. habitat
Develop significant local processing capacity – eg. canneries, freezing plants, abattoirs, fish processing facilities etc.
Foster a regional culture that supports increased local food self-sufficiency
Support health and nutrition promotion strategies designed to increase the health status of all members of the population;

Determine how land is used

Support strategies for regional waste disposal and composting systems that recycle nutrients for local food production
Support the tremendous potential of urban agriculture as a tool for informing people about and connecting people with nature and the land, eg. through community gardens, backyard and rooftop gardens, and city fruit trees

Protect local resources

Protect lands with good agricultural potential
Protect and enhance fish habitat
Ensure appropriate quality and supply of water for local agricultural use
Implement agricultural extension programs to support diversification of horticulture

Contact us

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