CHAPTER 1:
LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY

Purpose: **This "Learning about Community Food Security" Chapter facilitates a conversation about food and food security and the concepts around them.**

Activities:
4. Learn about the food system, food security, and the food environment
5. Learn about **Six A's** of food security
6. Identify stakeholders

TOOLKIT STAGE

Learning about Community Food Security

Gathering Information

Analyzing your Community

Choosing Tools & Taking Action

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* A Healthy, Just, and Sustainable food system is economically, environmentally, and social beneficial for everyone involved – from Food Counts, 2015

1.0 Introduction: What is community food security and why is it important?

Achieving food security can differ from person to person their circumstances as it is impacted by many social, economic, governmental and environmental factors. Community food security work is based on three key principles:

1. A goal of achieving a healthy, just, and sustainable food system*;
2. A comprehensive view of food systems and food environments and their connections to people, resources   and places;
3. Recognition that communities are crucial for developing solutions and creating positive change[8]

Community food security is defined as "*when all community residents have access to enough safe and nutritious food through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice while meeting cultural requirements*"[8]. Conversely, food insecurity exists when members of the community have difficulty accessing or affording enough quality food to promote a healthy lifestyle[8].

1.1 The Six A's of Food Security

Food security in a community is a complex issue, and ensuring food security means that a number of factors must be met for every member of a community. These factors can be largely categorized into six domains, detailed below[10-13].

Six A's of Food Security

Food Accessibility: Healthy food should be accessible to all members of the community; this means that it should be easy for residents to get to food outlets, emergency food programs, and alternative food programs.

Food Affordability: Every member of the community should be able to afford adequate amounts of healthy food without relying on food banks and other emergency food outlets and without sacrificing other necessities such as transportation, housing and health care.

Food Availability: The selection available to residents is often dependant on the choices and priorities of producers, buyers, processors, and distributers. While the availability of fresh food may vary based on season, in general there should be an adequate supply of healthy fresh food in all seasons.

Food Adequacy: Community members should have enough healthy food options that are high quality and provide adequate nutrient content. This means that healthy non-perishable and fresh foods need to be available in adequate quantities.

Food Awareness: Community members should be aware or be given opportunities to know about their food security and food system. They should have access to educational materials and programs on healthy food and diets as well as cooking skills to prepare these foods.

Food Appropriateness: The healthy food that is available must be appropriate to specific diets, such as those who have food requirements/restrictions based on health concerns (i.e. food allergies, diabetics, heart disease), or those who require specific foods based on culture, religion, and traditions. Some cultures may have different food requirement according to their custom. For example, in First Nations communities, access to traditional foods may include utilizing traditional practices of obtaining and preparing food.

Developed for the purpose of this toolkit. The concepts are based on: The Six Determinants of Food Security[2,] World Health Organization, 2015, USDA, 2009 Raja, 2008 , Shaw, 2006 , Minaker, et al., 2011.

1.2 The Food System and the Food Environment

Food System

From Production to Disposal
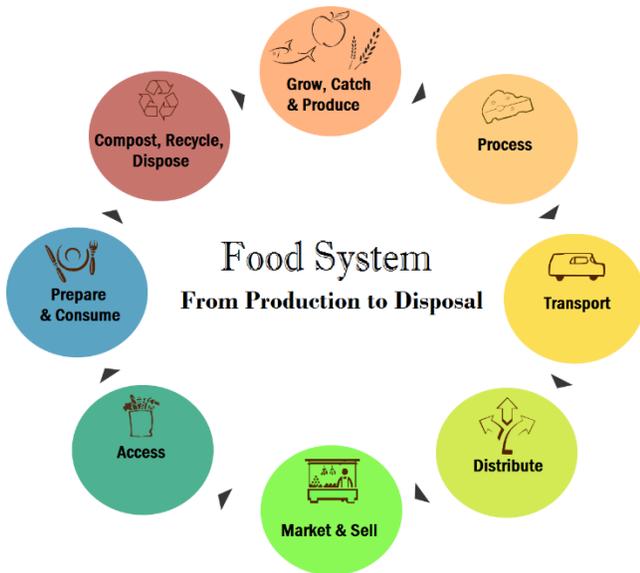
Modified from *Food Counts 2015*

1.2.1 The Food System

Food systems are highly complex, involving every step in the life of food, from harvest or catch all the way to the fork and into disposal. The diagram on the left shows the food system as being stepwise in nature, however in reality some of these processes may be skipped, duplicated, combined, and interconnected. This example shows the typical market (commercial) food system, where food travels through many different processes between production and consumption, such as processing, transportation and distribution.

Different food systems will inherently involve different steps and may look quite different. For example local foods may require little or no processing, transportation, and distribution; the gardening system mainly involves the processes of grow, process, consume and compost/dispose. In any type of food system, it may be possible to perform one or more of these steps locally; the more processes that are performed locally, the better the health of our local food system.

1.2.2 The Food Environment

The food environment is includes how community members directly interact with the food system. The food environment is how where and how the consumer engages with the Market & Sale, Access, and Preparation and Consumption stages of the food system. Because the food environment is how consumers actually obtain and consume food, the food environment has a significant impact on food security. While many food system assessments chiefly look at issues of geographic access, the concept of a food environment is a more nuanced view that better represents the complexity of a food system[14]. Food environments are the product of the built and social environment, including physical, social, economic, cultural, and political factors that impact how the community interacts with food[7].

1.3 Why Local Food?

According to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CIFA)[15], local food means those produced within the province or territory where it is sold, or within 50 km if it is sold across a provincial or territorial border. CFIA claims that with changes in food production practices and consumer needs and expectations, this definition of local food will change as the way we interact with the

Halifax Farmers Market 2015 - (http://www.halifaxfarmersmarket.com)

food system and how food literacy is accessed (via internet, social media, etc.) changes over time[15].

The Nova Scotian diet is primarily made up of imported food rather than local, with an average travel distance of 8,000 km. Approximately 87% of food consumed is from outside the province[16]. Not only does this mean less money going to local food producers and the local economy (with approximately $2.4 billion spent on imported food[2]), it also creates vulnerability[17,18]. Reliance on imported food leaves the food system susceptible to fluctuations in the availability and pricing of imported foods, transportation costs and reduced freshness, and quality control issues. Food systems that rely heavily on mass produced and imported foods have been criticized for their negative environmental [18], socio-economic [16,17], and health related issues[20,21], while also negatively impacting rural areas, and reducing food safety[19].

There are a number of potential benefits for our community from supporting our local food system. Literature has pointed to these main benefits[16,22-35]:

Healthy People
- Helps provide food for everyone
- Local food is often more nutritious and fresher with less preservatives

Strong Communities
- Connects consumers to producers
- Engages the community by increasing local involvement in the food environment
- Promotes local trust and collaboration

Robust Local Economy
- Builds and supports local jobs
- Promotes long term economic viability of the food system
- Strengthens infrastructure and promotes sustainable development
- Promotes fair food pricing

Sustainable Environment
- Connects people to the environment that supports them
- Reduces food shipping and carbon footprint
- Supports sustainable harvesting practices

Justice and Equity
- Improves food access and equity
- Helps respond to community needs/desires
- Benefits food system workers

Variety, Quality, and Freshness
- Enhances the variety of food product and services available
- Provides fresher, higher quality foods

Food Sovereignty and Security
- Increases the value of the local food system
- Promotes access to food for all communities

Promotes Culture
- Honours traditional culture around fishing, farming, and food production
- Strengthens family farms and fishing business

1.4 Food Services in Your Community

Your community accesses food from a number of different types of sources, which are important components of the food system:

We typically access food from one of three major sources:

1. The dominant market-oriented food providers (commercial)
2. The charitable food providers (not-for-profit)
3. Alternative food sources.

1.4.1 Commercial food services (Market)

Commercial food services are businesses and organizations that provide food retail and services for profit. These include businesses such as grocery stores, convenience stores, specialty food stores, restaurants, as well as for-profit services such as meal delivery, cooking classes, grocery delivery, and more.

Left - Pete's Fine Foods (www.pete's.ca) / Right – Atlantic Superstore (www.apm.ca/content/project/atlantic-superstore-1)

1.4.2 Not-for-profit (charitable) food services

Not-for-profit food services include those provided by governments, organizations, and other groups that offer food or food services at little or no cost. More information on these programs can be found in Chapter 5.

a. Food education programs

These programs are designed to provide educational resources and improve skills on topics such as how to recognize, source and prepare healthier options, food budgeting, gardening, and food preparation[13,14].

Left -Presidents Choice Cooking School (meghantelpner.com) / Right - Nourish Nova Scotia Good Education Program (nourishns.ca/)

b. Meal/Grocery Delivery Programs

Meal delivery and grocery delivery programs are intended to help overcome transportation, accessibility, and ability barriers faced by members in your community[36] These programs are offered to those in need by not-for-profits, typically for free or at a reduced rate.

Left - GroPro Grocery Delivery (www.gropro.ca) / Right - Saute Meal Delivery (https://trysaute.com)

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c. Meal in School Programs

A community's youth can be particularly vulnerable in terms of food security. Schools and other organizations may provide meals to help ensure that students have healthy breakfast and/or lunch options, which is critical for a good learning environment[37].

Left - Nova Scotia Breakfast Program (www.nourishns.ca/program-resources/breakfast-programs) / Right - East Antigonish Break Program (www.breakfastclubcanada.org)

d. Food Banks

Food banks provide emergency food to those who are unable to obtain enough food to feed themselves or their family. Food banks provide the raw ingredients and packaged foods that are then taken home by the service user for preparation. Ideally they are used to provide short term support to those in need, until their situation improves[2,38.39].

Food Bank (via FeedNovaScotia.ca)

While food banks are designed to alleviate the pressure of those who are experiencing food insecurity, fewer than 1 in 4 people experiencing insecurity utilize food banks in Halifax Regional Municipality[36]

e. Meal Centres

Meal centres, often called soup kitchens or food kitchens, provide prepared food at no or low cost. These programs offer a critical service to the most vulnerable, often those who do not have the resources to prepare food that could be obtained from food banks[40,41].

Hope Cottage Meal Kitchen (source: hopecottage.ca)

1.4.3 Alternative sources for food (Local)

Alternative food systems differ from for-profit (market) and not-for profit (charitable) systems as they offer food and food services at a smaller scale, through local food production and provision. Alternative food sources can help meet specific food requirements and fill in food gaps[41,42]. Significant change and investment in local options would be needed for local to become the predominant source of food.

a. Community Gardens/Agriculture

Community gardens are gardened collectively and are intended to provide a source of fresh produce, while also promoting food literacy (knowledge and skills) and social interaction in the community. They are managed by community members themselves or managed by a local non-for-profit organization or government association[42,43]. Halifax has a program to support community gardens on municipal land, which has seen growing interest since it began, with over 20 community gardens in operation in 2016 (HRM, 2016).

Left - Community Garden in Halifax (halifaxgardennetwork.com) / Right - Community Garden Dalhousie University (dal.ca)

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b. Personal Gardens

Personal gardens, like community gardens, exist to supply a source of fresh produce to residents. Personal gardens are generally smaller and designed to supplement the diets of the owners with fresh produce. Similar to their community counterparts, personal gardens promote food literacy, while providing the owners a means of engaging in an outdoor activity in their own home[42, 43]. Recent studies have also linked gardening to improved overall physical and mental wellbeing. See the following link for an infographic on the benefits of gardening:

http://whatshed.co.uk/why-gardening-is-good-for-your-health/

c. Urban Agriculture

Urban agriculture is the growing, harvesting, and selling of produce and other food products within an urban environment. Urban agriculture is often started by restaurants, governments, non-profit organizations, or community groups to promote the local food system by providing fresh, locally sourced food products, while also supporting environmental sustainability. Urban agriculture can occur in open spaces and on developed lands from vacant lots to rooftop gardens, etc [44,45]. It can take many forms such as animal and beekeeping, edible landscaping, shared backyards and small scale farms. Chapter 5 contains resources on planning for urban agriculture on pages 57, 65, and 66.

Rooftop Garden in Halifax (Eastcoastliving.ca) Left – Urban Farm in Spryfield (Halifax) (urbanfarmsspryfield.com)

1.4.4 Limitations of Food Services and Sources

Market Oriented:

There are many concerns relating to market oriented food providers such as: (1) food is disconnected from local production to the extent that we have little knowledge of its source and under what conditions it is produced; (2) increased social and environmental impacts from the energy intensive nature of large scale food production, processing, and transportation; (3) the promotion of unhealthy food choices as the majority of food marketing dollars are spent on less healthy and more processed foods; (4) being vulnerable to volatile food prices.

Charitable Food Providers:

Charitable food provision has been criticized for being well-intentioned but diverting attention from the broad reforms necessary to create food security such as a living wage and adequate education, health and child care. It's also seen as continuing the idea that volunteerism is the preferred way to address issues of the poor. While charitable food providers are an essential emergency service, for food security to exist community members must not be reliant on charitable food sources to meet their needs.

Alternative Food Sources:

Alternative food sources are seen as a sustainable source of food, however having them become the main source of food would require a major rethinking of how our cities operate and how we maximize the potential of available land for food production. For alternative food to become a main part of the food system, significant changes in investment, community design, policy, and food education are needed.

The initial process of setting up alternative food sources (such as urban or community gardens) in the food system requires significant investment in land for agriculture, staff for maintenance, materials, etc. Importantly, there is a need for a shift in how we think about open spaces and how they can be developed to maximize food. The establishment of alternative sources as a viable and significant inputs to the food system goes beyond issues such a land zoning for production, sale, and raising and slaughtering animals; it is a systematic issue where there is an increased need for skilled labour inputs, food production skills and literacy, and community engagement with these sources of food. These changes need to occur before alternative food sources can become a significant part of the food system.

1.5 Identifying Stakeholders

Performing a community food assessment requires a commitment of time and energy; therefore it is important to think carefully about who the leaders in this work will be, who the potential partners you could seek are, and what **Community Resources** could be tapped into. The following are examples of stakeholders who may be interested in a food assessment, and who could provide valuable information and resources throughout the process:

1. **Food Outlets**: restaurants, groceries, farmer's markets, convenience stores, etc.

2. **Food Services**: school meal programs, food delivery programs, etc.

3. **Emergency food programs**: food banks, community kitchens, etc.

4. **Alternative food programs**: urban gardens, community gardens, etc.

5. **Food producers**: farmers, fishers, food manufacturers, etc.

6. **Community members**: residents, local organizations, schools, etc.

7. **Governments and Institutions**: health agencies, city planners, local government, etc.

Halifax Farmers Market 2015   (http://www.halifaxfarmersmarket.com)

Identifying Stakeholders Tool

The following table can be used to identify potential stakeholders and the ways in which they could be involved to help support the food assessment.

The first column should be used to identify groups and individuals in your community that would be interested in the food assessment process. The second column should be used to identify what stake they have in the food system. The third column should be used to identify how they can participate in the food assessment and the actions to be taken afterwards.

Stakeholder Name	What is their interest in a food security assessment	How can they be involved