

# INTRODUCTION

**Purpose:** This introductory chapter provides basic information on today's food landscape in Nova Scotia and describes the purpose of this toolkit, how it is organized, and how to use the information and resources presented in the rest of the toolkit.

Food security and access to healthy food has become a major area of focus in Nova Scotia, like many provinces throughout Canada<sup>1</sup>. Despite this increased attention, few Nova Scotians routinely engage in discussions about the meaning of food security and healthy food, where food comes from, and how food is produced and made available to consumers. Community members are often unsure of how to become involved in the wider decisions related to community food security<sup>1</sup>. Demand for local food and awareness of access issues is increasing<sup>1</sup>, and so is the need for easy-to-use tools to facilitate dialogues among community members and groups, planners, and decision makers.



This **Community Food Assessment Toolkit** is a resource for community-based organizations, land-use planners, and community members interested in the current food security situation and how to plan for actions to improve food security for their community. There are a number of toolkits related to food security, many of which are available online. These toolkits serve a variety of purposes such as for advocacy, education, strategic action planning or policy making. They also have different focuses—urban agriculture, healthy diet, inequity, food distribution systems, community gardens etc. The Food Action Research Centre\* (FoodArc - [www.foodarc.ca](http://www.foodarc.ca)) is an excellent resource to find many of these toolkits; Chapter 5 also provides examples of other toolkits.

This **Community Food Assessment Toolkit** is intended primarily for the purpose of facilitating activities to identify the food resources that exist in your community, assess food security, and formulate strategies to improve the situation. Foremost this is a tool to start a dialogue with community members as partners of the process of enhancing community food security starting with developing a common understanding of the food environment.

\*FoodArc—A Nova Scotia based food action research centre located at Mount Saint Vincent University. The Centre's work focuses on research, building capacity, sharing knowledge and advocacy and policy change.

## 0.1 Toolkit Objectives

This Community Food Assessment Toolkit provides practical, easy-to-use tools for the following activities:

1. Engage your community to learn and gather information about the food environment and food system
2. Assess opportunities and barriers to achieving community food security
3. Plan possible actions towards change.

## 0.2 Key Terms to Consider

Throughout this Community Food Assessment Toolkit, you will see key terms appear regularly. It is good to have a common understanding of these terms before you start using the tools in this Toolkit as they are important concepts in a food system analysis. These important terms are:

### Food Security:

Food security exists when all members of a community have reliable access to healthy food<sup>2,3</sup>. For food security to exist, the Six A's of Food must be met for everyone.

### Food System:

A food system incorporates all of the processes and people involved in providing food to a community. A food system involves all aspects of getting food onto your to fork such as harvesting, processing, transport, sale, and consumption. A Food system is also defined by the food related services offered to a community<sup>2</sup>.

### Food Environment:

The food environment is the physical, social, economic, cultural and political factors that impact the accessibility, availability, and adequacy of food within a community. They can be defined by geographic access to food, consumer experiences inside food outlets (price, variety, quality, etc.), food policy, food services or the information available about food<sup>6</sup>.

### The Six A's of Food Security:

To ensure food security within your community, all of the **Six A's** of Food Security must be met for the entire population. This means that every individual must be ensured all the following:

1. **Accessibility**
2. **Affordability**
3. **Availability**
4. **Adequacy**
5. **Awareness**
6. **Appropriateness**

These terms are explained in Chapter 1 (pg. 12).

### Community Food Assessment:

A process that examines food-related issues, barriers, assets, and resources to inform the processes and actions taken to improve community food security<sup>4</sup>.

## 0.3 Quick Facts about Food Security in Nova Scotia

### Food Security

- In 2011, over 17% of Nova Scotian households experienced some level of food insecurity, where in Halifax this number was as high as 20% in 2013, a rise from 13% in 2007<sup>2</sup>
- There was a 28.6% increase in food bank usage in Nova Scotia since 2008<sup>4</sup>; Halifax specifically in 2013 had 8,555 people reliant on food banks, 2,660 (31%) of whom were children<sup>5</sup>.
- Nova Scotia has one of the highest rates of chronic disease and obesity in Canada. Chronic disease has been linked to food insecurity and has a significant impact on both quality of life and economic wellbeing, both personal and communal<sup>2</sup>
- While there are 37 full scale grocery stores present in Halifax, the distribution outside of urban areas is sparse, and the accessibility to these poor<sup>2</sup>

### Alternative Food Programming

There is an increased demand for healthy and nutritious food in Halifax, seen through the increase in alternative food programs such as community gardens and farmers markets.

- A 2015 assessment by the Halifax Food Policy Alliance<sup>2</sup> found:
  - 12 farmers' markets
  - 20 community supported agriculture enterprises
  - A community supported fishery
  - 15 to 18 food trucks
  - 3 urban farms, and 41 community gardens

### Supporting our Local Food<sup>2</sup>

- Farmers in Nova Scotia are struggling to make enough money, with farm debt in Nova Scotia increasing from \$203 million in 1983 to \$795 million in 2010.
- Our farmers are aging, with just 7% of Nova Scotian farmers under the age of 35.
- Only 13% of food dollars returned to Nova Scotian farmers in 2010.
- Farmland is a limited resource in Nova Scotia, which has not been adequately protected. Currently the mechanisms for farmland protection in Halifax are focused on retaining the opportunity for farming and not proactively encouraging farming nor expanding the area with potential for farming.

## 0.4 Why do a food assessment?

**Food security is a right.** Access to adequate healthy food is a critical component of community food security. Food security is a fundamental right of every person as our diet is one of the most important factors in good health<sup>3</sup>. Performing a food assessment and opening dialogue can be the first step in improving community food security.

In order to make a decision or plan action(s) to improve food security in your community, you first need to have a clear understanding of the current situation—e.g., what resources and services are available? What is lacking? What are the possible causes or influences on food security in your community? A food assessment is tool to start an analysis of the current state of your community's food landscape or environment. It is used to inventory food retail and services, and to better understand the 1. **Accessibility** 2. **Affordability** 3. **Availability** 4. **Adequacy** 5. **Awareness**, and 6. **Appropriateness**, of food in your community<sup>1,6,7</sup>. A community based food assessment goes further in that it also gathers information on the community's perceptions and behaviours in the food environment, and helps understand *awareness* of food in the community<sup>2</sup>.

The first step of a food assessment is to collect information and analyze the situation together with your community, so that you can find the best way to respond to the issues that are compromising food security in your community. Research has shown that learning about community food and sharing the knowledge can empower the community and increase its capacity to create positive change while building broader awareness and support for the local system<sup>8</sup>. Examples of food assessments and other food security tools from other communities are available in Chapter 5.

## 0.5 Food Security and Land Use Planning

Community Food Assessments are often the first step in planning for food security and have been used to inform both traditional planning practice<sup>7</sup> and community food planning<sup>7</sup>. Despite food being a basic need like clean water and shelter, food security and the food system have received little focus in planning practice until recently<sup>8,9</sup>. This may be due to the fact that many aspects of the food system, such as food processing, distribution, and consumption have little direct impact on the built environment. However, as we learn more about the impact of the built environment and community design on the health of our communities, it has become clear that planning has an important role to play in improving community food security. The foundation of planning practice is based on the principle of making places better to serve the needs of people; as a basic need, food must be factored into planning and community design. In addition, our food system is intimately connected with a region's economy, health outcomes and natural environment, which are all concerns of any planning profession.

Measures like preserving agricultural land; improving transit and walkability to food outlets; reducing barriers to the growing, selling and processing of food; encouraging food services in areas where there is a shortage; and maximizing opportunities for increased food awareness and

access to food through land uses such as community kitchens and gardens are examples of how planning can directly impact food security and the health of the food environment. A community food assessment is fundamental for developing recommendations for actions and planning policies that address food security, and subsequently identifying which of these measures are most applicable and effective in the community. This process will be enhanced by including broad community participation. This toolkit guides planners and policymakers as well as community leaders in the development of a community food assessment by engaging their community.

## 0.6 How does this toolkit work?

This toolkit was designed so that the reader can use it in its entirety, or can choose the sections that suite their own issues and goals. The toolkit is divided into 5 Chapters, each focusing on a different stage of any community food assessment.

### The Five Chapters of this Toolkit

**Chapter 1—Learning about Community Food Security**

**Chapter 2—Gathering Information**

**Chapter 3—Analyzing Food Security in Your Community**

**Chapter 4—Choosing Tools & Taking Action**

**Chapter 5—Additional Information & Resources**

The flow of Chapters 1 to 4 reflects the typical steps of planning—1) learning about the issues; 2) understanding the situation; 3) identifying opportunities and barriers; and 4) formulating strategies for action. The last chapter (Chapter 5) is a collection of resources that you can use to learn more about food security issues, food environments, and find other toolkits and resources related to the above four stages.

Each chapter first describes purposes of a particular state of community food assessment introduced. You will then find a set of **tools** that can be used to undertake the tasks to achieve the purpose for each stage. Although the whole set of tools in this toolkit is organized for you to use in sequence, you can also skip to a specific chapter and select or customize one or more individual tools that you feel is best suited to your needs.



## 0.7 Chapter Purposes and Activities

### Chapter 1: Learning About Community Food Security

**Purpose:** *Facilitate a conversation about food and food security and the concepts around them.*

**Activities:**

1. Learn about the food system, food security, and the food environment
2. Learn about **Six A's** of food security
3. Identify stakeholders

### Chapter 2: Gathering Information

**Purpose:** *Provide tools to collect information with community members and food service providers about how your community accesses food.*

**Activities:**

1. Learn about mapping methods and techniques for food mapping
2. Use the **Mapping Tools** to inventory food services and travels to food
3. Collect information about the **Six A's** in your community using the **Questionnaires**

### Chapter 3: Analyzing Food Security in Your Community

**Purpose:** *Guide analysis of what you have learned about your community through your conversations, community feedback (Questionnaires), and food mapping efforts*

**Activities:**

1. Learn how to identify what food security barriers your community may be experiencing and consider the possible causes of these barriers.
2. Use the **Analysis Worksheet - Strengths & Weaknesses Tool** to inventory and analyze your findings and identify **Key Issues** in accessing food and achieving food security.

### Chapter 4: Developing an action plan (Planning Action)

**Purpose:** *Help identify the actions you want to undertake to improve the key issues facing your community*

**Activities:**

1. Learn how to create an **Action Plan** to develop actions to address your **Key Issues**.
2. Look to the **Sample Action Plan** for sample barriers and suggested actions to improve them.
3. Use the **Action Plan Tool** to list your community's **Key Issues** and identify the considerations, actions, resources, etc. that could improve the situation. Prioritize these based on the seriousness of the issue and ability to impact it.

### Chapter 5: Additional Resources and Information

**Purpose:** *Provide a suite of resources and tools for each of the above chapters, which can be used to inform food assessment as outline in this toolkit*