



ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF FOOD INSECURITY



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WHAT IS EAT THINK VOTE?

Eat Think Vote is a non-partisan campaign, gathering community members living coast-to-coast-to-coast to speak with federal candidates ahead of the upcoming election. This backgrounder, and other policy backgrounders are based on Growing resilience and equity, Food Secure Canada's food policy action. It is grounded in the analysis and policy proposals of civil society food movement actors across the country, and situated within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Framework. This page highlights the intersections between the policy issues and the SDGs.



CONTEXT: FOOD INSECURITY

Canada has ratified the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which gives our government the legal duty to guarantee its citizens the right to adequate food.¹ Yet, before Covid-19, more than 4.4 million people in Canada were already living with food insecurity², and these numbers were rising. According to Community Food Centres Canada, since the start of the pandemic that number has risen by 39 percent; meaning one in seven people in Canada are food insecure.³

¹ Ad Hoc Working Group on the Right to Food (2017) Ensuring the Human Right to Food Through A Food Policy for Canada (Submissions to the Government of Canada).

² Tarasuk V, Mitchell A. (2020) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

³ Community Food Centres Canada. (2021). Budget 2021: Firm steps toward a more equitable recovery.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

Notably, and before Covid-19, 65% of people living with food insecurity were working (wages, salaries, self-employed). Indigenous and racialised people are disproportionately likely to be both food insecure and susceptible to Covid-19. Black households are 3.5 times more likely to be food insecure than white households,⁴ and almost half of all First Nations families are food insecure.⁵ These disparities are due to the systemic racism which these communities are forced to face.

Food security is overwhelmingly about poverty, and access. Now, during the COVID-19 pandemic millions more people have been pushed out of employment and have been reliant on income supports, and emergency government programs. Currently, more research is needed to identify the impact that programs such as CERB have had on food insecurity in Canada.⁶

Beyond accessing food to meet energy needs, Canadians living with low-incomes report less access to healthy and sustainable food primarily due to inadequate income (for example having to choose between food and shelter) and physical inaccessibility to smaller specialty grocers and farmers markets where sustainably grown foods tend to be more readily available. Considering the impact of market forces on price and accessibility, non-stigmatized, government-funded healthy food access programs managed by non-profits are necessary measures to support healthy eating and strengthen food security.

Local food organizations including food banks are working hard to distribute food to people in communities across the country. Yet, even with increased funding, charity-based models will never be able to deliver the right to food⁷. To address the root causes of food insecurity, and realise the right to food, it will be necessary to ensure everyone's income is adequate for the local cost of living.

⁴ PROOF and FoodShare (2019) Race and Food Insecurity (Fact Sheet). Retrieved from https://foodshare.net/custom/uploads/2019/11/PROOF_factsheet_press_FINAL_6.pdf

⁵ FNFNES First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study (2019) Summary of key findings. Retrieved from http://www.fnfnes.ca/docs/FNFNES_Report_Summary_2019_FINAL.pdf

⁶ Men, F., & Tarasuk, V. (2021). Food insecurity amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Food charity, government assistance, and employment. *Canadian Public Policy*, (aop), e2021001.

⁷ Saul N. (24 April, 2020) Remarks to Finance Committee - the federal government's COVID response (Community Food Centres Canada). Retrieved from <https://cfccanada.ca/en/News-Events/Latest-News/Announcements/Nick-appears-before-the-Standing-Committee-on-Fina>

POLICY PRIORITIES

- Establish a universal livable income floor beneath which no one can fall. This can and should build on increasing existing diverse government income supports and tax credits; mandated livable minimum wage; and other subsidies for necessities of life (e.g., rent), complemented by well-designed basic income schemes (with social safeguards and public review);
- Strengthen food security by increasing access to healthy, ideally local and sustainably-produced food for low-income households⁸ through government-funded, non-profit managed programs (such as good food boxes, good food markets, farmers market vouchers, food and vegetable prescriptions and subsidies, and school food programs);
- Uphold the Healthy Eating Strategy, including using the Canada Food Guide⁹ to promote healthy eating, and measure all policy and programme interventions against how well they move Canada towards ensuring everyone can afford and access healthy, sustainably produced food; and
- Ensure that those disproportionately experiencing food insecurity, including Indigenous Peoples, Black and racialised communities, lead and coordinate appropriate and distinct responses.



⁸ Kramer D., Ferguson R., Reynolds J. (2019) Sustainable Consumption for All: Improving the accessibility of sustainably grown foods in Canada (FSC Research Report). Retrieved from <https://foodsecurecanada.org/sustainable-consumption-for-all>

⁹ Government of Canada. Canada's Food Guide. Retrieved from <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- Canada has committed to meeting the 17 SDGs and their targets by 2030 - in nine years. If elected, how will you ensure the next government fulfils its commitment on food security, especially Goal 2: Zero Hunger while more than 4 million people in Canada are food insecure. If elected, what would you do to ensure all Canadians can access healthy, culturally appropriate food?
- Given the link between poverty and food insecurity, what is your party's perspective and approach to poverty reduction, including tax reform and a guaranteed annual income?
- Is your party in favour of ensuring that food insecurity is measured annually and consistently by all provinces and territories?
- Black households in Canada are 3.5 times more likely to suffer from food insecurity than white households. If elected, what would you do to tackle systemic racism?

