

Defining food security & food insecurity in British Columbia

Food security and food insecurity have sometimes been framed as opposite concepts; however, this is a simplistic comparison given the evidence that food insecurity can exist in the presence of food security. Here the focus is on differentiating food security and food insecurity by highlighting specific elements of each term.

Multiple ministries, sectors and jurisdictions are responsible for strategies, policies, and actions that:

- contribute to food security
- decrease food insecurity
- uphold Indigenous food sovereignty

Food security

Food security means that everyone has equitable access to food that is affordable, culturally preferable, nutritious and safe; everyone has the agency to participate in, and influence food systems; and that food systems are resilient, ecologically sustainable, socially just, and honour Indigenous food sovereignty.



Food insecurity

Food insecurity exists when factors outside an individual's control negatively impact their access to enough foods that promote wellbeing. Economic, social, environmental, and geographical factors influence this access. Food insecurity is most acutely felt by those who experience the negative impacts of *structural inequities*, such as discrimination and on-going colonial practices.

Structural inequities are the unfair and unjust systemic biases present in institutional policies and day-to-day practices that disadvantage certain social identities over others based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other domains.

Food insecurity is a significant public health concern:

- negatively impacting physical, mental, and social health
- decreasing intake of nutritious foods
- increasing likelihood of chronic disease

MAJOR FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO FOOD INSECURITY



Economic

- Inadequate income to afford food or the means to acquire food (e.g., hunting/fishing supplies)
- Housing status (e.g., security of tenure)



Environmental

- Climate change
- Contamination of land and water
- Unsustainable agricultural practices



Social

- Colonization and systemic discrimination that excludes specific social identities



Geographical

- Unstable food supply chains
- High food and transportation costs in remote areas

Natural disasters, large-scale emergencies, and economic and political crises

can all disrupt food supply chains. While these disruptions can be felt broadly, they disproportionately impact those already experiencing food insecurity.

Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) is an essential element to addressing food security and food insecurity. IFS is not defined here as Indigenous partners have indicated that a definition cannot adequately capture the nuances of IFS, and that it must be discussed in the context of actions and systems change.

Colonial systems need to be restructured to better support IFS and ensure policy is grounded in practice. This work is the responsibility of non-Indigenous people — an ongoing process of unlearning current ways of thinking and re-learning based on the values and practices that guide Indigenous peoples' relationships to the land and to each other. The Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty has outlined [four key principles](#) that guide IFS.

Framework for defining Food Security and Food Insecurity in B.C.

Based on an adaptation of the [5A's of Food Security](#) to reflect provincial priorities and context, these elements intersect with one another, and all eight must be addressed to ensure the health and wellness of the B.C. population and the Indigenous ancestral lands which we reside on.

1 Adequacy

- Enough nutritious, safe food that is free of environmental contaminants and contributes to overall wellness

2 Acceptability

- Food that meets cultural preferences and needs
- Food that is produced, accessed, and consumed in ways that do not compromise people's dignity, self-respect, and human rights
- Indigenous peoples have access to food that aligns with their identity, beliefs, knowledge, culture and connection to land and water food systems

Framework for defining Food Security and Food Insecurity in B.C.

3 Availability

- A diverse food supply is available in sufficient quantities to all people, without reliance on charitable organizations (includes both commercial and Indigenous food systems)
- Sufficient food storage infrastructure that can resist and recover from disruptions

4 Accessibility

- Physical access to adequate and acceptable food – impacted by factors such as geography, climate-related events, transportation, and physical mobility
- Indigenous peoples' access to their traditional foods through trade and access to land and water

5 Affordability

- Adequate income to purchase foods that meet cultural and personal preferences – high food costs can be a barrier, especially in remote communities

6 Agency

- People's ability to have choice over the food they eat, how they

access it, use it, and interact with their food systems; self-determination

- People's ability to advocate for food security
- Indigenous peoples' ability to exercise their rights and ownership over their lands and water, and access to their traditional foods

7 Social justice

- Human rights, fair treatment, and equal opportunities for everyone to participate in the food system and benefit from it

8 Sustainability

- Adoption of practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for, and adapt to, the changing climate
- Safe and resilient food systems
- Adoption of food production, processing, distribution, and disposal practices that support the long-term economic viability of workers, businesses, and regions
- Indigenous knowledge is upheld and practiced