

# **A Primer on Food Security in Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington**

November 2015



**Food Policy Council** for  
Kingston Frontenac Lennox & Addington

The Food Policy Council for Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington (KFL&A) is an independent body consisting of a diverse group of members who live or work in KFL&A area. The Council's mandate is to work towards the KFL&A Food Charter's purpose of creating a secure and sustainable food system for our region.

## What is food security?

The most widely accepted definition describes it as a situation where “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy life.” (Committee on World Food Security)

The five key elements in food security are availability, accessibility, adequacy, acceptability and agency (Ryerson Centre for Studies in Food Security):

- “Availability-sufficient food for all people at all times
- Accessibility – physical and economic access to food for all at all times.
- Adequacy – access to food that is nutritious and safe, produced in and environmentally sustainable ways.
- Acceptability – access to culturally acceptable food, which is produced and obtained in ways that do not compromise people’s dignity, self-respect or human rights
- Agency – the policies and processes that enable the achievement of food security”

Most discussions around food security relate to individual or household food security, there has been a growing focus on the concept of “community food security”. While community food security includes discussions on household food security, it also addresses issues relating to the broader food system which is made up of all the features from how and where food travels from field/water to table to disposal. It requires consideration of the social, economic and environmental factors that affect the food system and play out at the community level.



(Graphic: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning)

## How is food security measured?

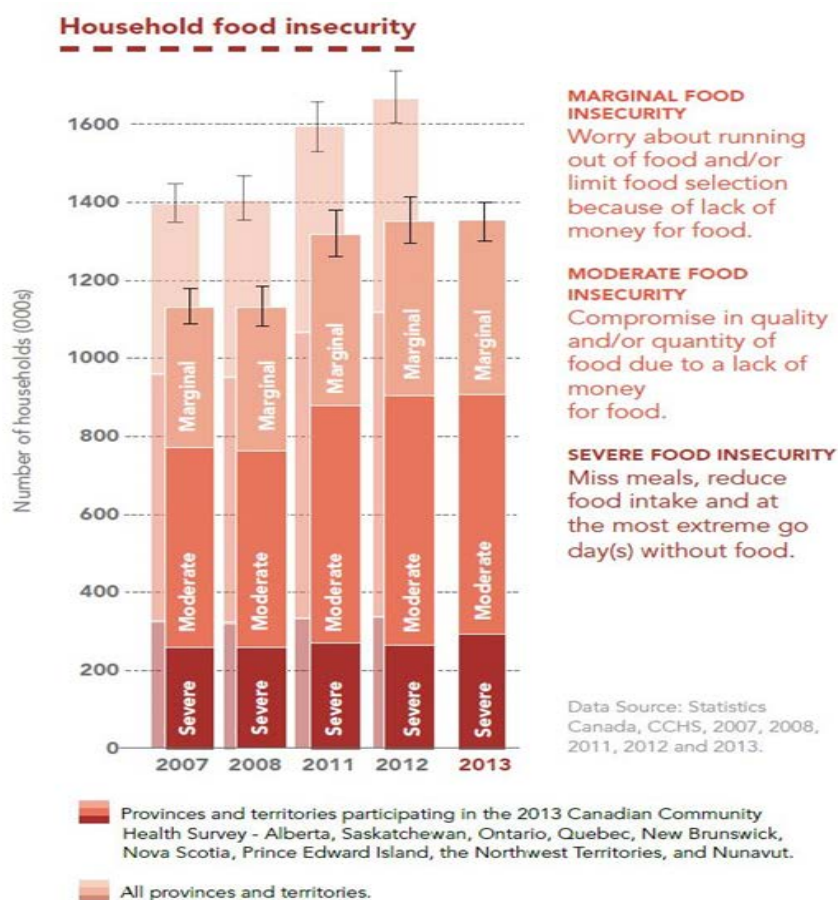
In Canada, one way household food security is measured is through Statistic Canada’s Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) which collects data from approximately 60,000 households from across Canada annually on a range of topics relating to their health status including food security.

Respondents answer eighteen questions relating to food related behaviors, experiences and conditions. Based on their answers and the frequency and severity of their food insecurity experiences over the past 12 months, they are then placed in one of the following groups:

- “Food Secure” – there was no (or only one) indication of difficulty with access to food due to inadequate income
- “Moderately food insecure” – the quality and/or quantity of food consumed were inadequate due to inadequate income
- “Severely food insecure” – respondents indicated that they reduced their food intake and/or experienced disrupted eating patterns due to inadequate income

Statistics Canada and Health Canada only report on these three categories and only for those aged twelve and older. There is a fourth group tabulated but not reported that are “marginally food insecure” defined as “those that worry about running out of food and/or limit food selection because of lack of money to buy food.”

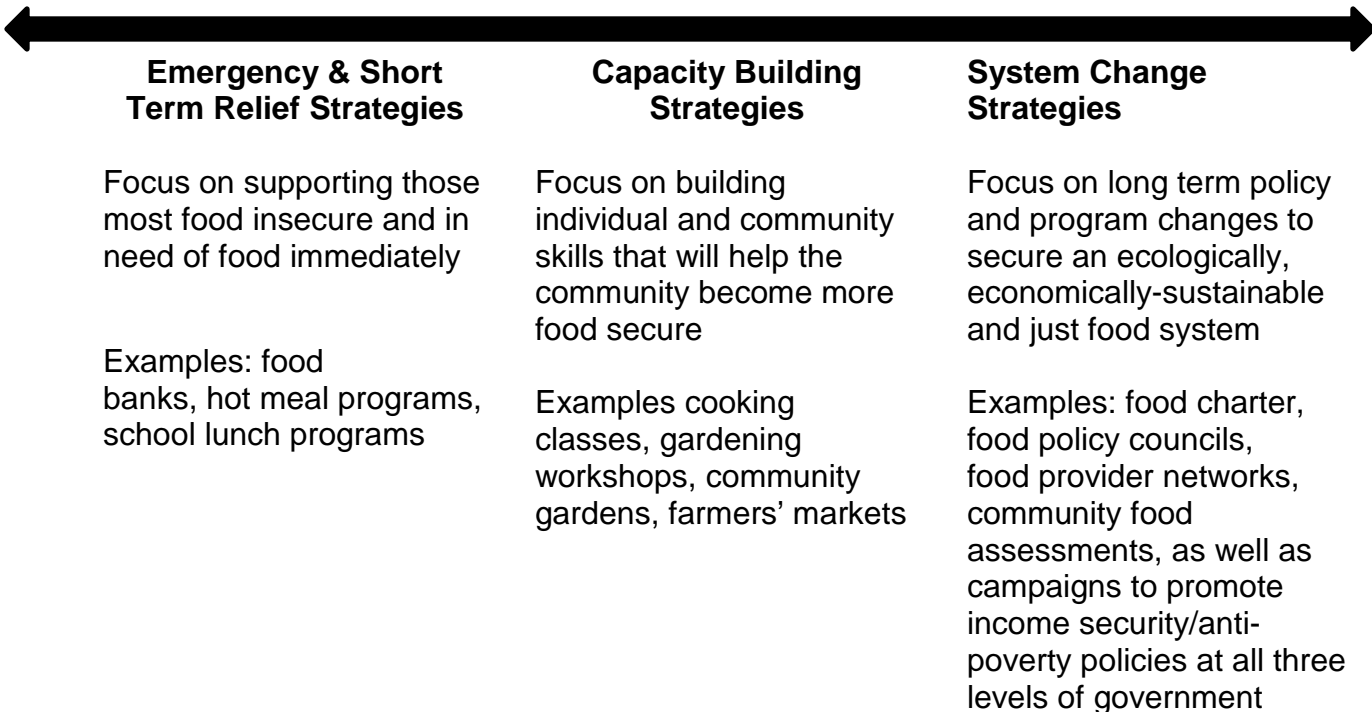
Data from CCHS was analyzed by Research to Identify Policy Options to Reduce Food Insecurity (PROOF) in the report “Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2013”. This analysis included those under the age of twelve and those defined as marginally food insecure as well as the other three categories. It identified 642,200 households in the province of Ontario as being food insecure in 2013. This graphic from the report shows the increase in all types of food insecurity in Canada since 2007.



To understand their community’s food context and level/distribution of food security, communities often undertake a community food assessment to gather local data and information regarding various aspects of availability, accessibility and adequacy of food in their communities.

## Food Security Continuum

Similar to continuums developed to represent the spectrum of homelessness and housing, it may be useful to look at food security in this way as well. The continuum represents the various strategies implemented by a community to address food security. In a community committed to addressing food security, there will be activities occurring simultaneously across this continuum to address provide immediate to longer term solutions.



## What does it mean to live in a severely food insecure household in Canada?

From the Canadian Community Health Survey (2011-2012), respondents who lived in a severely food insecure household reported the following:

- 97.1% were worried that their food would run out before they had money to buy more
- 98.1% had cut the size of meals or skipped meals due to lack of money to buy food
- 71.6% were hungry but not eating because they couldn't afford to buy food
- 32.8% had an adult in the household had not eaten for an entire day because there wasn't enough money for food

## What do we know about household food security?

Research has led to the identification of some common traits of households experiencing food insecurity. In brief:

- Low income is the main contributor to food insecurity
- Low income households whose income sources are mainly government-related are more likely to be food insecure than low income households with employment and other income. Sixty-five percent of households in Ontario reliant on social assistance are food insecure
- Aboriginal households are three times as likely to be food insecurity as non-aboriginal households

- Households with children have higher rates of food insecurity than those without children. Fifteen percent of children in Ontario live in a food insecure household
- Lone-parent families with children under 18 have the highest levels of food insecurity of any household type. In addition, thirty-four percent of female led lone parent families in Canada are food insecure
- Approximately one quarter renters experienced food insecurity compared to 6.4% of homeowners. This parallels the statistics on poverty rates of renters compared to homeowners.

## **What do we know about household food security in Kingston, Frontenac Lennox and Addington (KFL&A)?**

The Canadian Community Health Survey (2011-2012) indicates that approximately 8.3% of the population of KFL&A is food insecure at the moderate or severe levels. This level was about the same in 2007-2008 and is on par with provincial levels.

Due to the sample size of this survey, the data from the survey is not available at a regional level to identify differences between different demographic characteristics. However, based on the provincial and national data trends, we can use other local and Statistics Canada data sets to help to identify the populations that are or maybe at risk of food insecurity within KFL&A.

- 38.4% of all households in the City of Kingston are renters, 18.1% in Lennox and Addington and 8.7% in the County of Frontenac
- 24.6% of all families in KFL&A are single parent families, with 80% of these being female led
- 13.4% of total income in the City of Kingston and County of Frontenac comes from government transfer payments including 3.7% from social assistance. In Lennox and Addington, 17% of total income is from government transfer payments including 4.3% from social assistance.
- 15.4% of the population of KFL&A live under the Low Income Cut Off After Tax (LICO-AT)
- 25% of youth between the ages of 15-24 live under the low income thresholds
- Almost 1 in 3 (31.85%) residents of KFL&A over the age of fifteen have individual after-tax incomes below \$20,000/year.

Use of emergency food services, the 2015 Point in Time Count (Kingston Food Providers) is high. On an average day in May 2015:

- 4,968 meals were served by community agencies including school meals – an increase of 60% over 2014
- 44 grocery gift cards were issued
- 79 vouchers issued for groceries and meals

The “Good Food –Community Consultation” report for KFL&A released by Loving Spoonful in October 2015 identified the following seven primary barriers to food access based on the input of research participants: poverty/lack of money; physical/mental health and social anxieties; attitudes and stigma; transportation; access/distance to outlets; housing (equipment, storage); and knowledge and skills.

## **What are some examples of what being done in KFL&A to address food insecurity and make KFL&A a more food secure region?**

### Emergency and Short Term Relief Strategies

- ✓ Emergency meal providers work to meet short-term food needs. On an average day in May 2015, almost 5,000 meals were served in schools and in the community; 44 grocery cards issued, and 70 vouchers for groceries and meals
- ✓ Food reclamation program collects and redistributes food from restaurants, grocery stores and caterers and redistributes to 25 shelters and meal programs. In 2014, 31,000 pounds of food redistributed

### Capacity Building Strategies

- ✓ Community gardens at five schools sites and
- ✓ Three public and farmers' markets in Kingston through the spring/summer months

### System Change Strategies

- ✓ Food Charter was developed and endorsed by Kingston City Council, County of Frontenac Council, KFL&A Board of Health, and Sustainable Kingston Board in 2012
- ✓ Community Foundation made food security a priority in their new Smart and Caring Community Fund
- ✓ Community Foundation Vital Signs 2015 highlights food security in KFL&A
- ✓ Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul organized the local "Chew on This!" annual campaign which is part of a nationwide campaign in 30 cities to raise awareness of food security and the need for a national plan on reducing poverty and food insecurity
- ✓ Food Policy Council for KFL&A established in 2013
- ✓ Food Policy Council conducted a food system environmental scan in 2015 to gather data
- ✓ Public Health conducts an annual Nutritious Food Basket Survey and produced "The Cost of Healthy Eating" report
- ✓ Kingston Food Providers carries out a Point in Time Count of emergency food services in May of each year and produces an annual report
- ✓ Loving Spoonful undertook a community consultation in 2015 to identify food security issues across KFL&A with funding from the City of Kingston and the United Way of KFL&A and produced results in the "Good Food Community Consultation" report
- ✓ Kingston Action Group for Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) is raising awareness and building political support for a Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI) to address poverty and income insecurity across Canada

## **What else can be done?**

- Food Policy Council continues to collect and provide data and information to the community on the food system
- Local government and institutions work with the Food Policy Council in the development of and/or amendment of policies that impact the food system

- Stakeholders be brought together to develop food security strategies for the City of Kingston, the County of Frontenac and the County of Lennox & Addington that will make address and reduce food insecurity in KFL&A
- Continued advocacy targeting all levels of government to ensure the human right to food is recognized
- Continued advocacy at all levels of governments to encourage the creation of policies and programs that will guarantee food security including increasing social assistance benefits to cover all basic needs, raising the minimum wage to a living wage, and supporting affordable housing and a guaranteed basic income

## **Conclusion**

As noted in this primer, issues of food security are addressed through the provision of short-term emergency programs and services, capacity building activities and system change strategies within a community.

However, it must be emphasized that real food security will only be realized come when families receive the guaranteed income necessary to provide sufficient, safe and nutritious food for their households in addition to their other basic needs and communities ensure a safe and sustainable food system.

*“Hunger is not an issue of charity. It is an issue of justice.”*

*Dr. Jacque Diouf, Former Director General UN Food & Agriculture*