



FOOD SECURITY IN YUKON: A Snapshot

**PREPARED FOR
THE YUKON
ENERGY FOOD
SECURITY
NETWORK
BY
Charlotte
Hrenchuk**

November, 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	2
Introduction.....	2
Method.....	3
Definitions.....	3
Background.....	3
Initiatives Contributing to Food Security.....	4
Themes.....	6
1. Who is food insecure.....	6
2. Why are people food insecure.....	6
3. Barriers to food security.....	6
4. Effects of Covid-19 on food security.....	7
5. Gaps in providing food security.....	8
6. Systemic problems.....	9
Moving Forward.....	9
Rural Communities.....	10
Atlin.....	10
Beaver Creek.....	11
Carcross.....	11
Carmacks.....	12
Dawson City.....	13
Haines Junction.....	14
Mayo.....	15
Pelly Crossing.....	16
Ross River.....	16
Watson Lake.....	17
Discussion.....	18
References and Resources.....	19
Appendix A.....	20
Federally Funded Food Programs Benefitting Yukon.....	20

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is based on conversations with a variety of people across the Yukon and is not meant to be exhaustive. It is meant to be a springboard for conversations and action on food security and sovereignty across the Yukon. It is a snapshot of food security in the Yukon as of November 2020.

Food security and sovereignty are major issues in the Yukon. Covid-19 has illustrated the depth of food insecurity that has always existed and the main driver is poverty. The response has not been coordinated or a high priority. Covid-19 has created an opportunity to incorporate food security and sovereignty into the “new normal”. It is time for a strategic approach involving all stakeholders including people with lived experience and government officials.

The pandemic has seen people pulling together in all communities to provide food to those who need it. There is an appetite to move forward on the issue and build on the cooperation and collaboration that has emerged to fill the demonstrated needs. Several options were suggested: a more formal food network/council where people can learn from one another across the Yukon; a rights-based food security hub; food councils in each community; a Yukon food bank with local coordination. However, capacity is a problem for organizations in Whitehorse and rural communities. Consultation with rural communities is essential for viable and sustainable solutions.

Some issues such as supply chain are easier to fix. The deeper, underlying issues affecting food security are not. A multi-layered approach was suggested to work on these intersecting issues, such as housing, basic annual income and transportation. Clearly, more public conversations and awareness, as well as collective processes are needed to create food security and sovereignty approaches and strategies that work. The importance food plays in social connection, community building and mental wellness can not be understated. The bottom line is that food is a basic human right and no one should be hungry in the Yukon.

INTRODUCTION

Food is a basic human need and a human right. To this end, the Whitehorse Food Bank (WFB) provides emergency food hampers to those in need in Whitehorse. Since the onset of the Covid-19 emergency, WFB began receiving requests from other communities for assistance in providing food security in their communities. WFB has been providing hampers on a monthly basis to Haines Junction, Carmacks, Mayo, Atlin, BC, and initially to Pelly Crossing and Carcross. Most recently, upon request, food was sent to Fort MacPherson and Inuvik in the Northwest Territories. WFB has also been distributing pallets of frozen meat from the federal government Food Surplus Program to rural communities.

At the onset of Covid-19, some agencies that were providing food programs closed their doors or stopped offering food and some programs due to Covid-19 restrictions. Food sharing is an important form of social glue, decreasing isolation and increasing mental wellness. Food programs provide connection, cohesion and community building that was lost with program closures. However, the community responded with creative ways to fill the need. Some of these programs were generated in reaction to the Covid-19 emergency, were unsustainable and, consequently, have ended.

The rise in demand due to Covid-19 has shone a spotlight on food insecurity in the Yukon which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Yukon Energy Corporation has provided funding to create the Yukon Energy Food Security Network. The Whitehorse Food Bank, Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition and United Way Yukon will manage the Network and have used part of this funding to commission this study. The Yukon Energy Food Security Network will build on this study to help build food security programs throughout the Yukon that are sustainable, coordinated, appropriate for every community and respectful of First Nation food sovereignty.

METHOD

Representatives from service agencies and First Nation governments connected with food security in all communities in the Yukon were contacted for an interview by phone or in person, when possible. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted in Whitehorse and thirteen in rural communities. The interviews were transcribed and the responses analysed by theme.

DEFINITIONS

The definitions adopted by the Arctic Institute of Community Research are used in this report.

Food security: The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations defines food security as "when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life." It includes both the physical and economic access to food that meets people's dietary and cultural needs and food preferences. (1)

Food insecurity: is a lack of food security - people don't have access to affordable, acceptable, and adequate food to meet their daily needs and preferences. Food insecurity is serious public health concern; when people are food insecure they are less likely to be able to lead a healthy, active life. (1)

Food sovereignty: The right of peoples, communities and [nations] to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, spiritually, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. (1)

BACKGROUND

The Yukon has a population of 42,152 with the majority, 33,119, living in Whitehorse and the surrounding area (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, Population Report, First Quarter, 2020). It is located on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dun First Nation and the Ta'an Kwach'an Council. The cost of living in the Yukon is high, especially for housing. The average cost to purchase a single family, detached home in Whitehorse is \$546,800 and prices are rising in rural Yukon as well (Yukon Bureau of Statistics, Yukon Real Estate Report, Second Quarter, 2020). As housing costs rise, so do rental costs leaving less monthly income to spend on other necessities such as food. The "Household Food Insecurity in Canada 2017-2018" report by the PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research Centre at the University of Toronto states that 16.9% of people in the Yukon are food insecure, the third highest rate in Canada. (2) These Yukoners have disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake, compromise the quality or quantity of food consumed due to lack of money for food or worry about having adequate and secure access to food due to their income.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has aggravated the situation and increased food insecurity. It has exposed flaws in the food supply chain leaving shelves in some grocery stores bare at times. Some people initially lost their employment and some have still not returned to work. Various businesses closed or downsized. People have lost employment in rural communities where sources of employment and resources to respond to the additional needs are already limited. The federal government's CERB program provided relief, but for those who accessed the funding and were not eligible, repayment may plunge them further into poverty. Food insecurity existed before Covid-19 and, according to Food Secure Canada, is expected to grow (*Growing Resilience and Equity- a food policy action plan in the context of Covid-19, May 2020*).

In April, 2020 the Yukon Government released the report of the panel appointed to conduct a comprehensive review of health and social programs and services, *Putting People First*. (3) The recommendations have been accepted by the Yukon government and include a section on working to reduce food insecurity in the Yukon. The section outlines the necessity of working with partners "to increase investment in infrastructure and programming for community food hubs in all Yukon communities." (3) This provides a positive context for working collaboratively to increase food security in the Yukon.

This study follows upon and is informed by the work of: the Yukon Food Security Roundtable, May 18-19 (2016), the Arctic Institute for Community Based Research (1), Food Network Yukon, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition *Our Food in Place and Our Food in Place Recommendations* (5), *The cost of healthy eating in Yukon 2017* (6) and the City of Whitehorse *Local Food and Agriculture Study* (4) which was released in August 2020.

INITIATIVES CONTRIBUTING TO FOOD SECURITY

For a listing of food programs in Whitehorse as of November 2020, please see the document *Food Security in Whitehorse: A Snapshot, Food Programs in Whitehorse*.

The following are initiatives contributing to food security.

City of Whitehorse Local Food and Agriculture Study.

The City of Whitehorse *Local Food and Urban Agriculture Study* (LFUAS) is the result of a 4-year review and engagement process led by the Planning & Sustainability Services department. This study consists of two draft reports, a *Backgrounder* and *Potential Actions* accompanied by an information resource, *Food Project Series* which describes some of the food projects in Whitehorse. (4)

The *Background Information* document outlines input collected through engagement activities and information available from online and print sources highlighting the City's connections to the food system. It provides a good overview and context for food systems in the City as well as informative descriptions of many of the essential components.

The LFUAS provides a cross-departmental work plan for the next 10 years. It identifies opportunities for the City to confirm its commitment to supporting a robust local food system that is sustainable, resilient, and accessible to all Whitehorse residents. It describes eight goals and 66 potential actions which the City can undertake or provide support to other organizations to implement.

Chilkoot Food Rescue Society

A volunteer group formed in 2011 to re-direct food waste (dairy and produce) from grocery stores to farmers and community groups. They also divert packaging waste from the landfill. They were recently working with Save On Foods and with Super A in the past. They received a grant from Second Harvest to incorporate and partner with another community organization to provide a community fridge outdoors for 24/7 access. The fridge would be stocked with items about to expire. This group has not been able to divert food waste from Save on Foods over the summer because another larger group, LOOP (see below), has come to Whitehorse and is now working with Save On Foods. They were concerned that food waste was being dumped over the summer. They are also concerned that packaging waste will no longer be diverted from the landfill and are wondering how this group now fits into the changing food security landscape.

Community Fridge Project

A small group working with the Chilkoot Food Rescue Society with the goal of reducing food waste in Whitehorse by providing a free shared- food fridge in the community. A community fridge is used by anyone in the community to drop off or take food and is usually located outside. There are projects like this in many cities in Canada. The idea is to reduce food waste in Whitehorse by providing a free shared-food fridge in the community. Through working with the Chilkoot Food Rescue group, funding from Second Harvest can be used for a staff person and/or electricity expenses. The group is currently looking for a location to place the fridge in partnership with a service provider.

LOOP Resource

A western Canadian organization based in Dawson Creek, Alberta that diverts unsaleable food to charitable and outreach organizations as well as farms. The retailers donate the food waste to LOOP which has liability insurance, taking on any associated risk. This reduces retailers' reluctance to participate in food waste diversion.

LOOP has the ability to divert meat as well as produce, dairy, baked goods and prepared items. The stores bring them in and fund their programs.

LOOP was invited to work with Superstore in Whitehorse and then with Save On Foods because they work with the Loblaws group and Save On Foods in other provinces. Each grocery store has its own set of rules about unsaleable items. Food waste from Superstore will be diverted to farmers, dog mushers and compost. They prefer to donate to community organizations themselves. However, Save On Foods allows donations of goods received by LOOP. They contacted Anne Savoie at Agriculture Canada for a list of local farmers whom they contacted themselves. They have an on-boarding system for farmers and provide them with some training on the rules.

LOOP representatives met with interested community groups October 7, 2020 to discuss their program. They provide “access without obligation” and some training for community groups. Groups can pick the items they wish to take. They have confirmed a point person/organization for daily pick-up from Save On Foods. Pick-up times are from 11 am - 2:00pm daily for community organizations and after 2:00pm for farmers. The WFB agreed to provide storage space for organizations that are unable to pick up what they want directly from the store. As of this writing, the program has begun.

Food Rescue Feasibility Study

A project for Zero Waste Yukon funded by the United Way looking at the barriers to food rescue and the feasibility of a pilot food rescue project. The study involves a literature review as well as interviews with local stakeholders and potential food donors. The report and recommendations will be ready by the end of November, 2020.

Yukon Meat Share Program

This is a joint project between the Yukon Outfitters Association, the Yukon Fish and Game Association and Yukon Department of the Environment that has been operating for four years. This program has donated \$1.2 million in value of meat per year in the past. Outfitters and hunters can donate meat that has been processed by an approved butcher. However, outfitters usually bring meat that needs to be butchered to members of the local community near their hunting concession. Outfitters mainly donate to their local communities and have donated to elders, single mothers, and local school programs. However, some have also donated directly to the Whitehorse General Hospital, the Whitehorse Correctional Centre, the Whitehorse Food Bank and a healing centre. Last year, the Outfitters Association signed up forty households at the Whitehorse Trade Show for individual donations. Each household received six pounds of meat. Six hundred pounds of meat was donated to the WFB.

Covid-19 has had a huge impact on the outfitting business. Due to restrictions, hunters had to be Canadian. Some drove up with trucks and freezers and kept the meat. Some outfitters did not operate at all. Consequently, there will be no meat donated in Whitehorse this year through this program. Donations in the communities were reduced as well.

The Dept. of the Environment, Hunter Education Program, deals with individual hunters who wish to donate meat. Those who take their meat to a butcher can designate meat to be donated. The butchering of the donated meat is paid for by the three program partners. The Hunter Education Program has a list of organizations and elders for donation. Usual recipients are the WFB, the First Nation program at the hospital and youth groups. However, this program has not had the anticipated uptake among Yukon hunters. Most of the donated meat comes from confiscated animals and ranges between 1,000 – 1,500 lbs per year. This type of program is very popular in other jurisdictions and the Hunter Education coordinator would be interested in collaborating with the WFB on an advertising campaign for the February/March bison hunt. A limiting factor might be that there is only one butcher shop currently processing wild meat.

This program has a big impact on food security in rural Yukon communities. It would be interesting to discuss the program with the partners about how to increase donations in Whitehorse and how the program fits in with the larger picture of food security in the Yukon.

THEMES

1. Who is food insecure?

The breadth of food insecurity widened with the onset of Covid-19. Covid-19 has shone a light on the issue of food insecurity due to the immediacy of need in a pre-existing condition. Some people may cycle in and out of food insecurity depending on circumstances. Covid-19 has deepened the situation and tipped many, such as the following, over the edge into food insecurity without a clear way out.

- People previously able to make ends meet now jobless, running out of savings and not having enough for the essentials of living.
- People not previously connected with any programs, like seniors in low income housing.
- People who were struggling are finding it even harder to feed themselves and their families.
- People with specific issues: those who are street involved, living with addictions, homeless (including hidden homelessness), with disabilities, with mental illness, fleeing violence.
- Those without an adequate income, either from social assistance, earning minimum wage, on a fixed income, or not earning a liveable wage.
- They can be single parents, families with children, couples, middle-aged single women and men and seniors/elders.
- Street involved seniors fall through many cracks.
- Families relied on school breakfast and snack programs for their children and these ceased when schools closed in March.
- Many agencies had to close due to Covid-19 rules and regulations and/or shut down their food programs, leaving people who relied on them hungry.

2. Why are people food insecure?

The following factors are inter-related and affect people differently. All are conditions leading to food insecurity.

- Poverty, low wages, low minimum wage, no living wage, and unemployment
- high cost of living, high rent, lack of affordable housing, high electricity costs and the high cost of food, "rent eats first"
- People on a fixed income, such as seniors, those on social assistance and disability find it difficult to afford nutritious food.
- homelessness (unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally sheltered and at risk of homelessness)
- Addiction and substance abuse, mental ill health, trauma, poor health in general and the fall-out from residential school negatively affects people's ability to find and keep employment and provide food
- Violence can force women and children to flee and economic abuse keeps a family food insecure.
- An illness in the family, sudden unemployment or disability
- attitudes such as a lack of will to feed people and of "pull yourself up by your bootstraps"
- The climate prevents year-round agriculture and, isolation, with one road into the territory from the south, keeps food costs high and, at times, the nutritional value of produce dubious.

3. Barriers to food security

The conditions that conspire to create food insecurity also create barriers.

- Homeless people, those living in hotels and couch surfing, have nowhere to prepare and store food.
- Poverty prevents people from buying in bulk to create savings.

- Seniors and those living in small places do not have the ability to store food or it may be too costly to can, dry or freeze garden produce when it is available and abundant.
- People with mobility issues, such as those with disabilities and seniors/elders, may not be able to access food security programs. If they can get to the WFB, they may not have the ability to carry their hampers home.
- Public transportation is pricey and the hours of operation may be awkward.
- There are people who can not take time off work to get to food programs or WFB.
- Hampers from WFB are only given out once a month with enough food for a few days. Some of the food in hampers is not useable for people with disabilities or palatable for others.
- People lack knowledge of nutrition to make healthy choices.
- “take out” food programs and the closing or limiting of safe spaces means there is no sober space for homeless or vulnerable people to eat the food they can get.
- systemic barriers such as lack of sensitivity to people’s circumstances and dignity, lack of privacy when accessing help, and systemic racism, discrimination and exclusionary policies.
- A cafeteria setting can trigger residential school memories for some First Nation people.
- Poor communication about resources available.
- Personal reasons such pride can prevent some from accessing resources, especially for some seniors or people who have lost their jobs.
- Lack of knowledge about food nutrition, buying and preparation and the ready availability of cheap, fast food are also barriers to low cost, healthy eating.
- The high cost of hunting, preparation and storing of the meat prevents those with ability from providing food security from the land.

4. Effects of Covid-19 on food security

The consensus among participants was that food insecurity has increased due to Covid-19 and has had the following effects.

- At the beginning of the pandemic: fear of public spaces such as grocery stores and service agencies; prices rose; disruptions in the food supply chain; panic buying led to bare shelves and lack of choice. less for those waiting until the end of the month for income support and pension cheques.
- Temporarily and permanent job loss edged some into poverty and vulnerability.
- An increase in drug activity and violence resulting in greater food insecurity.
- Schools closed resulting in no school food programs.
- Mask requirements left some standing at the door.
- An increased demand on food programs coupled with strict rules and regulations for services.
- Agencies quickly pivoted to meet demand leading to new programs and exhausted staff.
- Increased availability of food meant some vulnerable people could get more than one meal a day but had no way to store it safely.
- New rules and regulations meant agencies reduced their hours of service, no longer gave rides to their clients which decreased accessibility to the WFB and other services and inability to go into clients’ homes to help with meal preparation.
- Decrease in volunteers.
- Services are delivery changes meant programs could no longer function as community builders fostering connections between people and portals to other services. Many people found themselves isolated, especially seniors, those with disabilities, mobility and health issues.
- Agencies have risen to the occasion, working together and collaborating on services and to problem solve.
- New programs have emerged such as the federal government Surplus Food Rescue Program, delivery of frozen meals, and bagged meals initially at the WFB, now distributed at the Family Hotel.
- A free cell phone program for vulnerable women enabled them to call for limited meal delivery.

Effects on WFB:

- An increase in the demand for hampers due to layoffs at the same time as a decrease in volunteers and donations. Fewer donations mean fewer hampers.
- A new demographic of people has been going to the WFB since July; possibly people who have not been able to return to work and have used up their savings.
- Rural communities requested services and the WFB stepped up, sending hampers and pallets of frozen meat from the Surplus Food Rescue Program to nine different communities to date and recently, to Ft. MacPherson and Inuvik in the Northwest Territories.

5. Gaps in providing food security

Participants identified gaps that existed pre-Covid-19 and gaps which emerged or have been created due to the pandemic.

- Inconsistent funding for food programs leads to lack of the human capacity to coordinate, prepare food, deliver it and provide transportation support.
- Pre-existing gaps: food programs and no safe, indoor, sober places to eat for families, same sex male couples with children, people in mid-life without children and who are not yet elders/seniors, single young men, as well as seniors living in their own homes/market rentals and living alone.
- Homeless people lack places to store and cook food.
- Lack of food for special diets or culturally relevant foods.
- Lack of services for the working poor and minimum wage earners, those who may be unable to take time off work or have transportation
- Affordable transportation.
- No year round nutrition programs for children.
- Lack of multiple access points for food programs. All food programs are located downtown. Multiple access points create choice and contribute to safety.
- Women and children no longer have a safe, sober space for lunch since the cancellation of the Sally & Sisters twice weekly lunch program.
- Spaces that comply with Covid-19 regulations are limited or unaffordable or inappropriate, prolonging programming gaps.

Gaps that were filled:

- Food delivery which could be expanded.
- Funding for short-term programs such as pre-made meals for seniors,
- New lunch programs.
- Various groups provided pre-made meals filling another gap for people who do not have the capability or place to cook.

6. Systemic problems

Problems within systems can contribute to food insecurity for individuals and create problems for organizations.

- The WFB operates on a charitable model, not a rights based model. Importantly, it is the only organization dedicated to reducing food insecurity. The WFB is vulnerable to economic changes, such as those brought on by the pandemic and is chronically understaffed and under-funded. It is called on for any issue food related which is unsustainable and unrealistic.
- The CERB solved problems for some but created problems for others. Those who took the payments and were not entitled to them will have to repay driving them deeper into poverty, homelessness and food insecurity.
- Will people who deferred their rent will be able to repay what they owe?
- The Yukon Government provided supports during the first phases of the pandemic that have since been withdrawn affecting people's ability to remain housed and fed, potentially increasing demand at the

Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. These programs included provision of the full cost of a hotel room plus a food allowance.

- The eviction moratorium and additional rent supplements were only extended to those who lost their jobs due to Covid-19.
- Scheduled food programs are problematic for those with mental illness, addictions or cognitive disabilities.
- Access to quick emergency funding for food.
- The already limited housing options decreased as landlords were afraid of Covid-19 transmission.
- Some vulnerable people are afraid of Family and Children's Services and SCAN preventing them getting needed services.
- Food for Learning Programs in schools underfunded and run by volunteers and would benefit from paid staff to shop and prepare food. It seems that Health and Social Services wants to claw back additional funds from donations or other sources; funds needed to augment the program.
- Poor communication about available resources and supports prevent people from receiving help.
- Lack of political will to address the issue. Food programs are essential but not funded accordingly.
- Stop gap measures and pilot projects do not respond to the continued food crisis.
- Systemic racism and colonial policies play a part in the problem.
- Current systems seem unable to end generational poverty.
- Well intentioned national organizations do not understand the barriers to food distribution and storage in the North creating problems for organizations and communities.

MOVING FORWARD

Covid-19 has provided a huge opportunity to change the way things are done and illustrated the importance of working towards food sovereignty in the Yukon. Food security and sovereignty can be included in the "new normal". There was a general consensus among participants of the need for collaboration and coordination of food distribution, including food rescue, and food access. One way forward would be a well-funded organization to head a food security project connecting all players, including regular meetings with service organizations to gain their perspectives regarding the populations they serve.

An alternative would be for the WFB to formally change their model to a community food centre/food security hub, a central coordinating body involving service users meaningfully in operations and providing a diversity of food programs. There was also consensus regarding keeping the existing food network and food distribution network going with the suggestion of working on all levels simultaneously. "It's a good think tank and place to solve problems..." A Yukon-wide food council to connect all those working on food security in the Yukon was suggested. A project to determine Yukon's food self sustainability is an idea (just how long could the territory survive on its own?) which could provide an impetus for further investment in food self-sufficiency and local agriculture.

There is a need to look at the root causes of food insecurity and address them. A basic annual income would provide a way forward as would raising the minimum wage to a living wage. Increasing rent supports could free up money for food as would a safe, controlled supply of drugs. A collective impact process on food security (similar to the process used to create Safe at Home) involving the community as well as governments could create the impetus for food security in Whitehorse.

The following are program recommendations:

- multiple access points for food
- a mobile food van
- expand food/meal delivery
- an app or website of current food resources

- expand Food for Learning to daycares
- services for families in an all inclusive space
- greenhouses but expensive to run year round
- a community freezer, could be walk-in with individual lockers
- big community space with commercial kitchen organizations could use. Could be used for community kitchens with rotating staff from different agencies
- vending machines with free food. Need food available 24/7
- places where children and families could access food in the summer from a mobile service, in locations such as at playgrounds. This could be somewhere children could get food themselves when their parents were unavailable.
- Universal school nutrition program
- Contract with local farmers to provide food
- Create policies to enable use of hunted and grown food. Use the policies at the Whitehorse General Hospital as a guide

A community food centre seems to be the first step in working on the issue of food security. This could provide a central location for any further research, collaboration and coordination among stakeholders and partners as well as a clearing house for local information on existing food systems. It could provide a place for learning about food preparation and storage, nutrition, gardening and peer involvement. There are many models elsewhere in Canada which could be adapted to the needs of Whitehorse and the Yukon. Food systems have been built by people with privilege. Inclusion of people with lived experience is crucial to workable and non-stigmatizing solutions.

The issue of food sovereignty for Indigenous people must be front and centre with First Nations taking the lead. Food security is often looked at from a colonial lens. A food centre, food network or food council could act as an ally and assist First Nations with their plans for food security for their nations.

Continuing with the existing food networks can be easily accomplished as could many of the above recommendations with a shift in resources and collaborative planning. However, a commitment by funders is necessary to tackle the fundamental issue of providing adequate food for Yukon citizens.

RURAL COMMUNITIES

The following section focuses on rural Yukon communities.

Atlin

Atlin is located near the Yukon/British Columbia border with a population between four and five hundred. It is located on the territory of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation.

Issues:

- Isolation from the rest of British Columbia (BC) with Whitehorse the closest town.
- The economy is poor with unemployment a big issue. Population mostly of seniors and elders.
- Groceries at the local store are double the price in Whitehorse.
- Since Atlin is located in BC, their social assistance rates are much lower than those in the Yukon making it difficult for people to make ends meet.
- Storage space for food.

Food programs

- WFB supplies monthly food hampers.

- Hamper recipients are a mix of First Nation and non-First Nation people: elders, single moms, people with disabilities, young guys on their healing journey and some families. In August, 10-12 hampers were delivered.
- The First Nation has a community kitchen and dining area. Pre-Covid-19, they served two lunches for elders and one lunch for the community. Now take-out soup and sandwiches provided.

Moving Forward

There is interest in participating in a food network. However, protocol must be followed and permission gained from Managers and First Nation Spokespersons.

Beaver Creek

Beaver Creek is located at the border between Alaska and the Yukon in the traditional territory of the White River First Nation with a population of 124.

Issues:

- There is only a convenience store which is expensive.
- The First Nation is very short staffed and closed their offices during the initial phases of Covid-19 and re-opened in August. Staff worked from home.
- Barriers to food security are a lack of employment and transportation.
- The elders have a lot of health issues so are afraid to travel to Whitehorse.
- Some single moms, single people and elders are food insecure in Beaver Creek.
- Some single moms, single people and elders are food insecure in Beaver Creek.

Food programs

- Prior to the Covid-19 emergency the White River First Nation ran programs and services.
- The community hall is being renovated so no access to a kitchen or space large enough to comply with Covid-19 spacing requirements. They have the funds but not the space.
- Pre-Covid-19, they provided transportation into Whitehorse for appointments and shopping on a regular basis but this has been discontinued due to Covid-19.
- The Development Corporation brought food into the community twice at the beginning of the Covid-19 emergency, but not since the spring. They provided funds to members not living in the community.

Moving forward

There is interest in the issue and in participating in a wider network.

Carcross

Carcross is situated south of Whitehorse with a population of 477. It provides services to the nearby village of Tagish, population 359. It is on the territory of the Carcross Tagish First Nation.

Issues:

- One very expensive convenience store which lacks variety and fresh produce. It remained open during the Covid-19 emergency.
- The First Nation laid off all their auxiliary on-call employees and seasonal employers. The White Pass and Yukon Route Railway, did not open and is not planning on opening in 2021. Consequentially, there was an increase in the number of people on Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA).
- Barriers to food security are the lack of locally available nutritious food, transportation and money.
- Addictions and mental health problems prevent people from having a steady job or income. Participants felt that Covid-19 and the CERB program exacerbated addiction problems.
- Homelessness contributes to food insecurity.
- The Health and Wellness Dept. provided rides to Whitehorse for people on TFA but it is difficult to find reliable drivers. They also have a van that brings people to Whitehorse once a month but people in Carcross were very fearful of contracting Covid-19 and did not want to travel in vehicles with others.
- Covid-19 revealed the extent of food insecurity in the community

- There is a gap for TFA clients and single people and those without children.

Food programs

- Prior to Covid-19 there was a breakfast program for seniors/elders which was discontinued and has not resumed.
- Jordan's Principle funds nutrition programs at the school and daycare. Weekly hampers were sent home when the school closed and during the summer. However, this was not sustainable so hampers are being provided to citizens twice a month.
- Volunteers assemble hampers sent to families with children once a month. However, some families do not know how to cook/use some items in the hampers.
- There is concern that the way the school programs must now be provided reminds parents and some children of residential school.
- All programs and events offer food and people come out to any event just to get a meal.
- At the onset of Covid-19, every family received a \$100 gift certificate for groceries at the local convenience store.
- The First Nation Health & Wellness Dept. initiated a frozen meal program for elders and those unable to cook for themselves on an as needed basis (2 meals/day for a week). They would like to continue this program but are reliant on Covid-19 funding which will end.
- Frozen meals and pallets of frozen meat from the WFB and the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate.
- There is a Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program that offers cooking classes and can provide Purchase Orders.
- There are no provisions for food emergencies. They would like to have an "emergency food cupboard" or a local food bank and a soup kitchen, perhaps a "pop up shop" mid-month when funds are tight for people.
- Christmas hampers are provided.
- The First Nation has a farm which produces vegetables, eggs and pigs which are sold at a reduced rate. Eggs are included in food hampers and supplied to people on TFA and elders. They also sell produce at the Lorne Mountain farmer's market. The farm and greenhouse operate during in the summer months with the bulk of food available at the end of the summer.

Moving Forward

Participants interested in being part a food network and thought that there would be interest from the First Nation. There is a strong inter-agency group in Carcross which could provide suggestions and help determine the greatest needs.

Carmacks

Carmacks is situated north of Whitehorse on the Klondike Highway with a population of 599. It is on the traditional territory of the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation.

Issues:

- One grocery store/hotel/restaurant, the Tatchun Centre. The other gas station/convenience store is closed. Prices at the store are high and people's food dollars do not stretch as far as if they shop in Whitehorse.
- Job losses and reduced hours due to Covid-19.
- Lack of transportation is a barrier to food security and limits people's ability to shop for groceries in Whitehorse or get to the WFB. There is no food bank in Carmacks and since the pandemic, people have been unwilling to go to Whitehorse.
- Food insecurity has increased for families since Covid-19 when work and mining slowed down.

Food programs

- At the beginning of the pandemic, the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation gave food vouchers to members, also Easter hampers and some formula and diapers.
- School breakfast program closed.
- The Healthy Families Worker has been working with the WFB to provide food hampers in Carmacks. People call her if they want a hamper and she passes the information on to the WFB. In August, 60 hampers were sent to Carmacks. The community and First Nation are very supportive and cooperate to distribute the hampers. The Recreation Centre provides the space and a driver, and the team at Yukon University helps when the food arrives.
- Hamper recipients are First Nation and non First Nation people: families and a handful of single men.
- Pallets of frozen meat from the WFB distributed by the First Nation staff.

Moving forward

Carmacks has come to rely on the food hampers and the participant believes food insecurity would rocket if the program does not continue. There is an appetite for a local food bank. The Executive Director at the WFB is their biggest support. The participant indicated a need for a more formal local food network and a person dedicated to food security.

Dawson City

Dawson City has a population of 2,277 which doubles in size in the summer due to tourism. It is on the traditional territory of the Trondek Hwi'chin First Nation.

Issues:

- Several grocery stores but the prices are high and the quality of produce varies.
- There are a number of farms and market gardens in the area and a farmer's market during the summer pre-Covid.
- The First Nation owns and operates a successful teaching farm.
- Many businesses did not open, hired fewer people or limited staff due to Covid-19 restrictions and regulations.
- People were afraid to go to the grocery store due to concern about who was transporting and handling the food. Elders/seniors, people with disabilities and medical issues did not shop.
- Food insecurity has increased.
- Barriers to food security include: transportation and the ability to cook and shop; addiction, disabilities and lack of housing.

Food programs

- Prior to Covid-19, the First Nation offered a weekly free bannock and hot lunch program open to the community as well as a monthly free community lunch which was cancelled due to Covid-19.
- Three days a week, Meals-on-Wheels are provided predominantly for elders. Meals are made in the First Nation kitchen using produce from the farm.
- Two days a week, they partner with MacDonald Lodge which provides long term care, respite, home care services and Meals-on-Wheels in the Dawson City area. The Meals-on-Wheels program used to serve about 15 people but the numbers are now up to 35-40 and the service has expanded to more than elders/seniors and people with disabilities.
- The First Nation provides transportation through their elders' program.
- Jordan's Principle funds a lunch program in the school for all students.
- The First Nation delivers groceries and prescriptions for those unable to access stores.

Moving forward

There is interest in a food security network and stable food programs for all. People need more access to food such as the First Nation partnering with the City and the Yukon Government to create a take-out food program

Haines Junction

Haines Junction is located on the Alaska Highway northwest of Whitehorse with a population of 989. It is located on the traditional territory of the Champagne Aishihik First Nation.

Issues:

- A very small grocery store with limited supply, hours of operation and high prices.
- A small agricultural base but it is a challenge to grow food in the area. There are no collective storage facilities but there is a mobile abattoir which meets the needs of farmers.
- The farmer's market did not open in 2020.
- The community lost a lot of seasonal employment programs due to Covid-19.
- Some businesses did not open or scaled back hiring. However, the First Nation and Yukon Government, the largest local employers, did not lay off employees.
- People are generally more stressed and unsure of the future while trying to live on less money since Covid-19.
- Reasons for food insecurity: the current economic system is not providing the necessities of life, systemic issues such as racism, history of oppression of Indigenous people, violence, history of trauma and the ways people cope such as addiction and mental ill health, high rent, low wages and the high cost of living and poverty.
- Barriers to food security include: not having enough money, money management, lack of transportation, no collective storage facilities, no daily food kitchens.
- Some families falling through the cracks and many families do not send their children to school.
- Single people and the elderly are in need of food security support.

Food programs:

- The Haines Junction Food Association (volunteer) received funds in May from the United Way for transportation, volunteer appreciation and administration. There are about thirty volunteers who receive training and rotate monthly to prevent burn out.
- They have two food programs: food hampers and frozen meals.
- Food hampers: They partner with the WFB to provide monthly food hampers to families, single adults and seniors. The number of hampers has grown each month with 105 in August. They have also received shipments of frozen meat. Recipients are referred by Yukon Health and Social Services, the Wellness Hub and Champagne and Aishihik First Nation. The First Nation delivers hampers to their citizens. G&P ships the hampers to Haines Junction and the organization pairs volunteer drivers for eight different delivery routes including to the outlying communities of Takhini Crossing Subdivision, Champagne and Canyon Creek. A pick-up model did not prove successful due to lack of transportation for recipients and Covid-19 protocols. Recipients say they appreciate delivery as it affords them privacy and dignity. The hampers are meeting a pre-existing need that has grown with Covid-19.
- Preparation and distribution of frozen meals once a week for seniors: To support local businesses, they use local cooks and kitchens. They have distributed up to 150 meals. They would like to transition to a Meals-on-Wheels program.
- Both programs are sustainable since they commit to four months at a time, as long as they can maintain their volunteer base. The timing of deliveries is very important for organizational logistics.
- Champagne and Aishihik First Nation: food security programs for its citizens as well as delivering food hampers from the WFB. They have a meals-on-wheels program for elders once or twice a week. They also have events and programs that provide food. They distributed Superstore gift cards and have a mini bus that takes citizens to Whitehorse every day, stopping at different stores. This service was suspended but is now operating with reduced seating capacity.
- The First Nation Education Department receives funding from Jordan's Principle for breakfast and lunch for all students and lunch/snacks at the daycare. They serve 300 meals a day at the school and send any leftover food and produce home with the children on weekends. They provide an after-school snack in the Takhini Subdivision community centre for children who go to school in Whitehorse. Funding is

applied for on a yearly basis and dependent on the federal government so may not be sustainable. When school closed, parents could receive \$200/child as a stop-gap measure.

Moving forward

The Haines Junction Food Association participant is interested in being part of a larger network. There is value in sharing information and learning from one another. They do not have the capacity to handle more than one hamper delivery per month and does not believe they would be able to build the hampers themselves because they do not have the connections to supply chains. Food hampers need to better reflect what people in rural Yukon eat. De-constructing the hampers with service workers and recipients would reveal what would better meet their needs and would fit with what is available at the WFB. More reliable hot meals that are delivered are needed, especially for seniors and single parents.

There was interest in a food security network/council if it was meaningful and could make a difference. For the first Nation, trust and the authority to feed their citizens as they see fit is very important as is universality of programs.

Mayo

Mayo is located in central Yukon with a population of 471 and is on the traditional territory of the Na-Cho Nyak Dun First Nation.

Issues:

- One grocery store owned by the development arm of the First Nation. It has the same problems as other rural grocery stores: high prices, lack of variety and poor quality produce.
- Since Covid-19, unemployment has been high.
- The First Nation purchased Partridge Creek Farm in 2018 which is run by Sonny Gray, the CEO and co-owner of North Star Agriculture. The company is assisting the First Nation with reopening the farm. The First Nation bought the farm as part of efforts to increase food security and sovereignty, as well as to provide jobs and social programming. The farm is 75 km west of Mayo. However, there has been no employment for First Nation citizens yet.
- There is also a First Nation community garden.

Food programs

- Pre-Covid-19 there was a weekly soup kitchen run out of the Anglican church currently not running.
- There was a Meals-on-Wheels program three times a week.
- At the start of the pandemic, the First Nation gave their citizens a \$300 purchase order at the local grocery store. Those not living in Mayo received the funds directly.
- School food programs are funded by Jordan's Principle. When the school closed, they combined the Meals-on-Wheels Program with student meals into a take-out service for students and elders. At the time of this interview in early October, there were no programs running.
- Ads were up for cooks and the First Nation was looking at renting the restaurant to prepare meals. They are also looking at buying prepared meals from Air North that elders can microwave. There is concern that these meals are not culturally appropriate and the elders would prefer homemade soup.
- Elders received chickens from the farm and citizens of the First Nation received vegetables, chicken and pork. However, some of the food was not culturally appropriate.
- The First Nation asked citizens not to fish this year due to the low salmon run. They brought in two truck loads of Taku River salmon and every family received two fish to compensate.
- There was a donation of eggs from a local farmer.
- Citizens can apply to the First Nation for \$300 for traditional pursuits such as hunting and fishing on a first come, first served basis.
- The First Nation receives and delivers monthly food hampers from the WFB. In August, 73 hampers were delivered. However, when she was on vacation, no one picked up the food. She believes they rely

on the WFB and there will always be a need for hampers. She has 69 people on her list in Mayo which included non-Indigenous people. Recipients are mostly elders and those on social assistance.

- The First Nation has a community garden.

Moving Forward

There is a need for the community to talk about food insecurity together. The Anglican church is a big advocate for food security as is the coordinator of the community garden.

Pelly Crossing

Pelly Crossing is located on the Alaska Highway north of Carmacks in the traditional territory of the Selkirk First Nation and has a population of 396.

Issues:

- One store owned by the First Nation is very expensive, especially for meat, and the produce is of low quality by the time it arrives at the store.
- Unemployment is high due to the lack of employment opportunities. The only local employer is the First Nation. The Health Centre employs a janitor as well as Yukon University.
- The nearby Minto Mine employed about five young men but was shut down and cut back.
- People shop in Whitehorse but for those without vehicles, transportation is a barrier. T
- Many elders and people with disabilities in the community are unable to travel and some don't travel at all. They rely on others to shop for them in Whitehorse when possible.
- Pelly Crossing is a very small community with limited capacity.
- People do not want to go to Whitehorse, preferring to keep their community in a safe bubble.

Food programs

- At the beginning of the pandemic, the First Nation gave each citizen \$300 and food vouchers for the local store. They also provide funds for traditional activities like fishing and hunting.
- This year the fishing season was good.
- The community also received frozen fish through the Jordan's Principle Program which also funds a breakfast and lunch program in the school.
- Elders and single mothers received some wild meat from the First Nation Renewable Resources Department.
- The First Nation received food hampers from the WFB twice in the summer. However, they were overwhelmed by the amount of work needed to receive, store and distribute them. Recipients were unhappy with the amount of canned goods in the hampers, especially tomatoes, and do not know what to do with some of the items like kidney beans and chickpeas.

Moving forward

There was interest in exploring possibilities for alliances and events, such as Whitehorse Connects, in Pelly Crossing

Ross River

Ross River is a small community, population of 407, located in southern Yukon on the traditional territory of the Ross River Dena Council.

Issues:

- one expensive local grocery store with a lot of unhealthy food such as pop and pre-made items.
- There is a high rate of diabetes in the community.
- During the first phases of Covid-19 there was a lack of stock at the store but it is now getting back to normal. Those with vehicles went to Faro or Whitehorse to shop.
- There were job losses in mining and the First Nation was closed for 2.5 months.
- There is a fear that many people received CERB who were not entitled to it.
- Rent is high and unemployment and alcoholism contribute to food insecurity.

- Social assistance is not enough and leaves people short of food.
- Lack of transportation is a barrier to food security.
- Many grandmothers look after their grandchildren on their meagre pensions.
- Many First Nation people did not get a moose this year and there was only one outfitter hunting in their area so little donated meat. Usually outfitters donate meat to the elders and the school program. The school has freezers used for storage but not enough for large donations of frozen items.
- Lack of capacity to write funding proposals for food/community programs.
- It is difficult to get volunteers.

Food programs

- When there is funding, there is a Meals-on-Wheels Program. There is a gap in consistent funding for any food programs.
- Jordan's Principle funds the school program coordinated by a volunteer. They provide breakfast, lunch and snacks. This year the program is just for students. Last year they ran it for all.
- Jordan's Principle also funds pre-natal hampers. There is a concern that they contain a lot of carbohydrate rich foods not suitable for women with gestational diabetes.
- The First Nation provides hampers twice a year, at Christmas and Easter. Due to Covid-19, 130 hampers were distributed to citizens, including those in Faro, at Thanksgiving instead of Easter. The hampers are funded by donations and they ran out before all the need was met.
- The First Nation received food and meat through Jordan's Principle and may receive frozen meat from the WFB in future. It takes a lot of work and volunteers to prepare hampers, and to store and distribute the frozen meat.

Moving forward

A gap exists in teaching young people how to be self-sufficient with their traditional ways out on the land which would contribute to food sovereignty and security. A significant gap is the lack of human capacity and any consistency in food programming. There is interest in learning from other communities and being part of a larger network.

Watson Lake

Watson Lake is located in the southern Yukon near the border with British Columbia and has a population of 1,493. It is within the traditional territory of the Liard First Nation.

Issues:

- The economy has experienced a downturn and there is a big difference between the haves and have nots. Most people did not lose their jobs due to Covid-19.
- There is a Super A grocery store with good variety but high cost.
- Previously, Watson lake had a food bank and soup kitchen. It closed due to administrative problems. The First Nation took on the programs but stopped due to lack of funds, creating a huge gap. There have been attempts to form a new society to access ongoing funding support and re-open the food bank and soup kitchen. There are plenty of volunteers but board members can not be found to take on the roles and responsibilities.
- Transportation is a problem for those without vehicles.
- Rent is exceptionally high.
- Unemployment and addictions contribute to food security problems.
- Barriers include people being too proud to ask for help or who do not know how to get what they need; The capacity of service agencies and funding.
- People on low income tend to shop daily, as they can afford it, so had no supply of food to rely on during isolation.
- Many seniors ate in restaurants that are now closed.

Food programs

- On the advent of Covid-19, the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon received funds from Reaching Home, the United Way, Breakfast Club of Canada and two local mining companies to hire a local coordinator to work on food security. The Coordinator organized food hamper and meal delivery programs that ran until the end of July when funding ceased.
- At the height of the program, they delivered 110 meals each day and an additional 20 people were receiving seven frozen meals per week.
- Meals were prepared by a local restaurant and went to seniors/elders, marginalized people and people without kitchens who previously relied on the soup kitchen for a hot meal.
- 78 hampers were distributed weekly to over 200 individuals. Recipients included the working poor and families.
- They received frozen meat from the WFB.
- The Liard First Nation gave out monthly gift cards to their citizens initially. However, there are Indigenous people living in Watson Lake who do not belong to that First Nation so are under-served.

Moving forward

A plan is in place for the WFB to send hampers and more frozen food. A mining company will help defray shipping costs and they have also received a donated freezer. Once a secure space for the freezer and food/hamper storage is found, the program can proceed. They plan to use the same intake process used at the WFB.

Watson Lake needs a soup kitchen and food delivery program. It was suggested that a Yukon Food Bank would provide consistency, a larger volume of food and a coordinated territorial approach. A local part-time person could coordinate and provide logistics. Some goods could be bought locally such as bread from the bakery. YAPC has offered some financial support through the Gordon Foundation. There is interest in this idea and a broader network as well as people passionate about the issue.

DISCUSSION

Rural communities had many issues in common. Most do not have adequate access to affordable, healthy food year round. With the exception of Watson Lake, Carmacks and Dawson City, the grocery stores are really convenience stores and are not well-stocked with healthy foods, as well as being very expensive. Participants reported that it is assumed most rural citizens will travel to Whitehorse for major grocery shopping. However, many people do not have transportation and can not always rely on their friends and family to shop for them in Whitehorse. Rural residents, especially First Nation citizens, would like to rely more on traditional foods but it is expensive to hunt and fish. Employment opportunities are not abundant in many rural communities which further limits food security for rural Yukoners. It would be important to address some of these underlying issues to lessen food insecurity.

There was an appetite in each community to address their food security issues. Participants were interested in networking with one another and the WFB. Each community has specific needs and circumstances as well as capacity for moving forward. Haines Junction has created a system of hamper distribution that works and seems willing to share their process with others. Watson Lake had a functioning food bank and soup kitchen until fairly recently and the participants indicated that they would like to re-establish them. Some participants indicated that they had trouble recruiting volunteers, especially in smaller communities. Often programs are dependent on an individual and lapse when that person is no longer available. A sustainable structure is needed for development and continuity. Most participants would like assistance from the WFB which has the contacts and expertise they lack. A community development approach to build on what already exists and take direction from the “champions” in each community would be a way forward. Beginning the process by asking First Nations what would be helpful to them would be a first step.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

1. Pratt M, Friendship K, Kassi N, Butler Walker J. Working together towards a food secure Yukon. Outcomes from Yukon Food Security Roundtable, An Evening on Food Security and Open House. May 18-19th, 2016, Whitehorse, Yukon. Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research. 2016. <https://www.aicbr.ca/food-system-resources/2019/>
2. Tarasuk V, Mitchell A. (2020). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity. (PROOF). <https://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/proof-annual-reports/household-food-insecurity-in-canada-2017-2018/>
3. McLennan B, Green G, Marchildon G, Strand d, Zelmer J. Putting People First – The final report of the comprehensive review of Yukon's health and social programs and services, April, 2020. <https://yukon.ca/en/putting-people-first>
4. The City of Whitehorse. *Draft Local Food and Urban Agriculture Study (LFUAS), Background Information, Food project Series and Potential Actions, 2020 – 2030*, August 2020. <https://www.whitehorse.ca/departments/planning-building-services-/plans-and-implementation/local-food-and-urban-agriculture>
5. The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition. *Our Food in Place and Our Food in Place Recommendations*, 2015. www.yapc.ca
6. Hammond, K. (2017). *The cost of healthy eating in Yukon 2017*. Whitehorse, Yukon: Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition. <https://yapc.ca/assets/files/Healthy%20Eating%202018.pdf>
7. For more information on Indigenous food sovereignty, see Dawn Morrison, Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, indigenousfoodsystems.org
8. Curtis, Andrea, Saul, Nick. *The Stop, How the Fight for Good Food Transformed a Community and Inspired a Movement*. Vintage Press: 2014.
9. Reaching Home funding through which food needs can be addressed: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/notice-covid-19.html>
10. Applications and press release for COVID 19 funding can be found at www.yapc.ca

APPENDIX A

Federally Funded Food Programs Benefitting the Yukon

Surplus Food Rescue Program

The innovative Surplus Food Rescue Program is a \$50-million federal initiative designed to address urgent, high volume, highly perishable surplus products falling under fruit, vegetables, meat and fish and seafood. These surpluses were created because the COVID-19 pandemic largely shut down the restaurant and hospitality industry, leaving many producers without a key market for their food commodities.

The Program awarded contributions to eight organizations that leverage existing food redistribution and recovery networks and agencies, who will bring the food to every region in the country. Partners, which include leading not-for-profits Food Banks Canada and Second Harvest, and La Tablee des Chefs, will redistribute products such as potatoes, walleye, chicken, turkey, eggs, and more. In total, the program will redistribute approximately 12 million kilograms of surplus food to more food insecure families that would otherwise have been wasted.

- Second Harvest is a registered charity whose purpose is to rescue and deliver fresh, healthy, surplus food to feed people experiencing hunger across Canada. With an existing network of over 1,750 non-profit partners and a history in food rescue and logistics, Second Harvest is well positioned to purchase, process, and distribute surplus food across Canada.
- Food Banks Canada is a national not-for-profit organization that works closely with a network of provincial associations, affiliate food banks, and food agencies. With FBC's coordination efforts, over 3,000 food banks and community agencies distribute food to Canada's vulnerable populations, with 1.1 million visits per month in 2019.
- According to Statistics Canada, one in seven Canadians indicated that they live in a household where there was food insecurity over a one month period during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In 2019, there were 1.1 million visits to food banks and 5.6 million meals served on average each month.

This announcement builds on the measures we have introduced to keep Canada's agri-workforce strong, including:

- \$100 million for food banks and local food organizations to help Canadians experiencing food insecurity, which is helping serve an estimated 2 million Canadians through 1,800 different community-level food organizations.
- \$25 million through Nutrition North to ensure food security for Canada's most vulnerable

The Local Food Infrastructure Fund (LFIF)

The Local Food Infrastructure Fund (LFIF) is a five-year, \$50 million initiative ending March 31, 2024. The program is part of the Government of Canada's Food Policy which is Canada's roadmap for a healthier and more sustainable food system in Canada. The LFIF objective is to strengthen food systems and to facilitate access to safe and nutritious food for at-risk populations.

The LFIF's objectives are to:

- improve access to safe, healthy and culturally-diverse food while promoting community development
- support local economies
- improve health outcomes for Canadians most at-risk
- promote environmentally sustainable food systems

The fund supports community-based, not-for-profit organizations to improve their food systems through investments in infrastructure that are directly related to addressing food insecurities and increasing the accessibility of healthy, nutritious, and ideally, local foods within their community.

Projects should be mostly infrastructure specific, community-driven and dedicated to improving access to safe and healthy foods for Canadians at risk of food insecurity. The risk factors and prevalence of food insecurity vary from community to community and can impact Canadians in both rural and urban environments through a lack of access to affordable and nutritious food choices.

Eligible projects can range from simpler infrastructure requests such as purchasing a refrigerator for a food bank to more complex requests that strengthen local food systems, such as projects that integrate multiple areas of the value chain through the creation of partnerships. The applicant must demonstrate how their project will be integrated into and strengthen the local food system and how it will impact the well-being of community members.

First Nation Rural Food program

Children and youth in Yukon First Nations rural communities will have access to two meals a day, five days per week with a new initiative launched through the Council of Yukon First Nations. A group proposal submitted by CYFN totalling \$4.4 million in Jordan's Principle funding was recently approved by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC).

The funding will be used to purchase and transport fresh, nutritious food into the communities; assist with harvesting traditional foods; pay for cooks; upgrade kitchen equipment and facilities, and to hire two CYFN coordinators to manage the program.

Yukon's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Brendan Hanley, supported the group proposal, stating: "Food insecurity is an urgent public health challenge in Canada that disproportionately affects First Nations peoples. Canada is the only country in the 34-nation Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) without a national school food program."

Those participating include Liard First Nation, Little Salmon-Carmacks First Nation, Vuntut Gwitchin Government, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Ross River Dene Council, Selkirk First Nation, First Nation of Na-cho Nyäk Dun, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, Kluane First Nation, White River First Nation; Champagne and Aishihik First Nation, and Teslin Tlingit Council.

Chambers said the money will ensure that every Yukon First Nations community has a nutritional food program. Both youth and children will have access to two hot meals a day during the school week. There will also be weekend initiatives. The program will serve two hot meals per day during the school week, with food also available for prenatal, early childhood and after school programs.

The funding will go directly to the First Nations. The CYFN has been able to hire two food co-ordinators to help each First Nation develop and implement its program.

The \$4.4 million will cover the cost of the program for the remainder of this school year, which will end in June 2020. The money will cover the costs of the food itself as well as to pay cooks and for kitchen supplies. There is a provision for training, Chambers added. This will cover preparing a menu, incorporating traditional food and shipping.

Chambers said the CYFN is looking to ensure that this is an entrenched program that is available and led by Yukon First Nations. This also represents an economic opportunity. She explained that many First Nations citizens own food stores, and this will help those businesses. The co-ordinators will be working with food distributors.

Enjoy the following short video about the first year of the Rural Yukon First Nations Nutritional Food Program. CYFN is pleased to have the new [Yukon First Nation Education Directorate](#) (YFNED) takeover the coordination of the program, which continues in the rural Yukon First Nations communities this fall. Funded by [Jordan's Principle](#)

<https://youtu.be/CibJgZCCCvU>