

Fourteen Reasons Why Food Security is Important

Food security is important because:

1. **Everybody has to eat.**

The obvious should not go without saying. Our dependency on food is so central that we often do not consider it or who is benefitting and who is paying.

2. **Food is a basic human right.**

Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 25 includes the “right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care ... “ Human rights leaders around the world are concerned about actions of global institutions like the World Trade Organization that violate these and other human rights.

3. **Food is the basis of a community’s economy.**

Food is the basic element of community self-reliance. It provides jobs, enhances culture, enables community and supports public health. Because of its essential nature, agriculture and food keeps going when other industries fail. For every farmer there are many related jobs in processing, distribution, sales, and food preparation.

4. **Our food system is unduly dependent on distant suppliers.**

Most of us rely on a system that rarely has more than 3-4 days fresh food stockpiled locally—food that travels hundreds or thousands of miles. Excessive transportation (such as milk trucked out of province for processing and back again for sale) is dictated by economies of scale that do not account for environmental costs or loss of product freshness. This practice is vulnerable to interruptions of various kinds and is poor risk management.

5. **What we see in the grocery store is a *vulnerable* perfection.**

The bounty on the grocery store shelves gives the impression that our food systems are in fine shape. The perfection—in looks and variety—comes with a price, but all the risks and most of the long-term environmental and social costs are hidden. For instance, you can buy fruits and vegetables all year round which have to be imported outside our growing season—these products are grown far away, under rules over which we have no control, by people who may be forfeiting their own food security to grow cash crops for our markets.

6. **We can only control what is close to home.**

The way food products are grown/raised, prepared, processed and packaged can only be effectively monitored in our own jurisdiction where people have some say about the rules.

7. **The jurisdiction that cannot feed its people is at the mercy of whoever can.**

Ultimately a community, province or nation is beholden to its food suppliers. The use of food as a weapon is becoming more common around the world. It is folly to let go our capability of feeding ourselves.

8. It is vital to preserve the blueprint (capacity, skills and tools to feed ourselves).

In less than a century we have gone from societies where almost everyone was on the land to societies in North America where fewer than 2% presently are. In North America hardly anybody is left to train new growers in regenerative farming techniques. We are losing the people who could teach us the arts of growing, harvesting, preserving and cooking our own food, and many of us are losing the skills.

9. People are rightly concerned about food-health connections.

Consumers are growing increasingly concerned about the safety of their food. This relates to manufactured food products and questions about additives, pesticide residues, hormones, or genetically modified organisms; and to links between diet and disease (such as cancer or Mad Cow Disease).

10. Good food is the basis of health.

Nutrition is tied to health. The major causes of death and disability in our society (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer) can all be significantly affected by healthy eating choices and lifestyles.

11. People in our community are hungry and/or undernourished.

According to Food Banks Canada Hunger Count 2013, 833,000 Canadians used food banks each month and one third were children. This rate is 23% higher than it was in 2008. Today there are about 700 food banks across the country, as well as more than 2,000 agencies operating emergency food programs.

12. Inability to pay should not mean hunger.

A single person on welfare receives \$663.37 a month. The average rent for a bachelor suite in Victoria, BC is \$695 and there is a short supply of subsidized housing. The Ministry of Health publishes monthly information on a basic "nutritious food basket" and a "thrifty food basket." The prices of the items in the basket are updated each month. Today in many BC cities and towns families on welfare cannot afford even the thrifty basket.

13. What we eat should not exploit those who produced it.

In a global food system dedicated to free trade that encourages exports, the trend is to grow monoculture crops on a large scale for distant markets. All countries end up doing this at the expense of the land, the water, their farmers and their workers, families and communities.

14. Cheap food is too good to be true.

Canadians only spend 11-12 per cent of our disposable income on food, the lowest percentage in the world. Our reluctance to spend more, coupled with international trade pressures and corporate concentration, make it difficult for our farmers to stay in business. If the environmental and social costs were taken into account (fuels for transportation, loss of species diversity, loss of jobs, loss of community) the equation would be far different and cheap would be exposed as not cheap at all.

There is also an issue about food value. It is normally taken to mean cost. We need to define what values we most want in our food and what trade-offs we are willing to make. Value added, for instance, could mean fresher or more flavourful rather than further processed. (Further processing often decreases nutritional value.)