



## FOOD SECURITY IN NUNAVUT

A Knowledge Sharing Tool for Policy and Decision-makers

**Summary:** Food Security has been raised as a priority issue to Qaujigartiit Arctic Health Research Network Nunavut (AHRN) by board members and by Nunavut community members. Policy and decision-makers are essential to determining focus and effecting change on this important topic. This tool was developed to assist Nunavut policy- and decision-makers working in food security by sharing information about current literature through interviews with key Nunavut food security policy- and decision-makers. This tool is reflective of events from the fall of 2008 and winter of 2009 and includes:

- a review of the literature; (pg.1)
- a summary of programs and initiatives working to address food insecurity in Nunavut (pg. 4)
- a list of individuals working to address food insecurity in Nunavut (pg. 7)
- food security in the media (pg. 7)
- references/resources.

### Introduction

In the context of Qaujigartiit/AHRN-NU and the work that is conducted by this organization, Knowledge Sharing is defined as *synthesis, translation and communication of health knowledge between various knowledge holders, such as policy- and decision-makers; researchers; community members; and health care providers. Knowledge is dynamic and does not flow in a line from top to bottom, but fluidly between people and groups.*

Food security exists when 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 and healthy life (FAO, 1996). Put more simply, food security refers to the access, availability, utilization and stability of supply to food. The following offers a summary of the academic literature of food security in Nunavut.

### Food Security in Nunavut

Inuit in Nunavut rely on both traditional and store-bought food to meet dietary needs. Food security remains a serious issue for many families in Nunavut communities especially for those on social assistance and the working poor (Lawn, Harvey &

Diagolos, 2001). It was found in a study of six Nunavut communities that participants perceived many people had difficulty obtaining enough food every month (Chan *et al*, 2006). Barriers to getting enough food to eat included: low income level to support living / high hunting costs; the main food choice of younger generations was market

food (which costs 2-3 times more than in the south and offers minimal choice); individuals lacked adequate hunting skills and knowledge for food preparation, budgeting, and nutrition; traditional food was less available to families without active hunters; and community members were less willing to help people with social problems, like addictions (Chan *et al*, 2006).

Barriers to accessing traditional foods, specifically, have been identified as the high cost of hunting, such as gas, ammunition, boats and vehicles, the time to travel distances to find game, the need for a gun license to hunt and purchase ammunition, community size with less consumption in larger communities, and the low current level of support for hunting through the Harvesters' Support program (Chan *et al*, 2006). Food security remains an issue that affects almost half of the people in Nunavut. As noted, this a complex issue. The studies reviewed indicated many factors affecting food

security including the high cost of market foods, the food mail program, the reliance on country food, the high cost of accessing traditional food, the changing culture of youth around hunting, the hunter support program, and the influence of climate on natural and market food systems. Some of the resolutions to improve food insecurity proposed increased

funding for access and availability to all foods and the development of more culturally relevant educational tools.

### **Food Security in Nunavut and Canada**

Results from the Canadian Health Survey revealed that "14.7% of the Canadian population, aged 12 or older, had experienced food insecurity. In Nunavut, over half the population or 56% reported food insecurity" (Ledrou & Gervais, 2005, p. 47). The results also indicated that "68% of people in low and lower-middle income households in Nunavut had had at least one occasion in the previous year when they had not had enough food because of lack of money. In higher-income households 40% reported not having enough food at least once in the past year" (Ledrou & Gervais, 2005, p. 48).

### **Store-Bought Food**

For millennia Inuit have relied on the land and the sea to meet food needs and to survive. Over the last several decades, coinciding with colonization changes imposed on Inuit, northern diets have been changing. The increasing importance of the wage economy, and the influence of travel, advertising, and transportation, has led to imported foods

becoming more widely available and consumed (Bocking, 2001). The high cost of store-bought food is one issue of food security in Nunavut. To better understand the cost of store-bought food and to enable comparison with other regions of Canada, the concept of the Nutritious Northern Food Basket is often used. This is a list of 46 food items modeled after Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Thrifty Nutritious Food Basket for low-income Canadian families and meets the basic food needs of a family of four, a man, a woman aged 25

to 49 years and a boy 13-15, girl 7-9 years (Lawn, Robbins & Hill, 1998).

Using the Nutritious Northern Food Basket, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) was able to determine for the Baffin Region, that "food costs were more than double of those of Southern Canada. Perishable foods were at least three times more expensive in the Baffin Region than in the Northern region of Quebec" (Lawn, Robbins & Hill, 1998, p. 182).

### **Food Mail Program**

To help off-set the high costs of shipping perishable foods to air-access only communities in Nunavut, the Government of Canada introduced the Food Mail Program. In existence since 1986 the program's goal is to reduce the cost of shipping nutritious perishable foods and other essential items by providing a payment to Canada Post Corporation in order to reduce the cost of shipping to northern communities

across Canada (Law, Robbins & Hill, 1998). Today's program charges \$0.80/kg for shipping the eligible foods. This subsidy reduces the cost of nutritious perishable food and other essential items, to improve nutrition, health and well-being of Canadians living in isolated communities (Law, Robbins & Hill, 1998).

### **Food Mail and Food Security in Repulse Bay, Pond Inlet and Kugaaruk**

In the report, Change in Nutrition and Food Security in Two Inuit Communities, the authors studied the impact of the Food Mail Program on food consumption, nutrition, food security, and health in Repulse Bay and Pond Inlet in 1997 by collecting information from nutrition surveys from Inuit women aged 15 to 44 (Lawn, Harvey & Dialogos, 2001). These communities were selected because women from Repulse Bay and Pond Inlet had participated in nutrition surveys in 1992.

The studies found:

- Changes made to the Food Mail Program have significantly reduced the cost of nutritious perishable foods in both communities ...

- Changes to the Food Mail Program were expected to improve nutritional status by making Nutritious Perishable Foods more affordable, thereby increasing their consumption. However, there was no increase found in the consumption of Nutritious Perishables in total in Pond Inlet, and the 20% increase found in Repulse Bay was not statistically significant.' (Lawn, Harvey & Dialogos, Educational Consultants Ltd, 2001)
- Food security remains a serious issue for many families especially for those on social assistance and the working poor. Half of the respondents in both communities reported there was not enough to eat in the house in the previous month – an improvement in Repulse Bay since 1992. In both communities, there was some improvement in the perception of food security for most families in the community. Country food access does not appear to be a problem for most families (Lawn, Harvey & Dialogos Educational Consultants Ltd, 2001).

In 2003 a report entitled Nutrition and Food Security in Kugaaruk, Nunavut: Baseline Survey for the Food Mail Pilot Project obtained baseline data required to measure the impact of a Food Mail pilot project (Lawn & Harvey, 2003, p. ix). At the time of the report, food security was a serious problem in Kugaaruk, with five out of six Inuit households classed as “food insecure” and over half of families experiencing hunger in the past 12 months because they were unable to afford enough food, even though access to country food did not appear to be a problem or a serious concern and country food continues to be shared. Almost half of Inuit respondents in the household survey said they were “extremely concerned” about being able to afford enough food for their family. Most respondents rated the quality of most perishable foods as only fair or poor. Cost, quality, availability and lack of variety as the major barriers to purchasing more fresh fruit and vegetables (Lawn & Harvey, 2003, p. ix-x).

### **The Role of Country Food in Nunavut**

There are inherent nutritional benefits of eating a diet rich in Inuit traditional foods, such as high intakes of antioxidants, vitamins and minerals, micronutrients and phytochemicals and is believed

to provide high levels of n-3, mono and polyunsaturated fatty acids (DHSS, 2005; Chan *et al*, 2006). Traditional food is of fundamental significance in the lives of Inuit individuals, households, and communities, holding nutritional, physical, cultural, spiritual and economic importance (Chan *et al*, 2006, 417). Terrestrial wildlife, including caribou and moose; fish, including Arctic char, trout, and other species; and marine mammals such as seals and beluga whales, remain important sources of food. Drawing on data from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey in 2005-6, Mary Simon, the President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), indicated, “...Inuit continue to harvest country food at a high rate. This for Inuit supports our culture and provides the healthiest food. The vast majority of adults (68%) harvested country foods. This includes seal, caribou, whale, ducks, fish and berries. The statistics show that 8 in 10

Inuit households share food with others and this is important to us, especially in light of the food insecurity we experience in the Arctic” (ITK Media Release, 2008). Mary Simon’s comments reveal the importance of traditional foods to Inuit and hence its importance in the topic of food security in Nunavut. One noted trend is that of decreased subsistence hunting among youth; resulting from a number of factors, such as increased wage employment, which reduces opportunities for hunting, lack of access to funds for purchasing equipment used in hunting/fishing, changing dietary preferences, inadequate training due to requirements of western style schooling, lack of interest in an increasingly “marginalized” activity, and an increased participation in organized sports. (Chan *et al*, 2006). Lambden *et al* revealed “the nature of food insecurity and the role of traditional food is largely unexamined” in Nunavut (2006, p. 333). More qualitative research is required to explore practices and beliefs about food security given the important role of traditional food practices to cultural health and survival identified by Mary Simon (ITK Media Release, 2009). Cultural food security is identified as an additional level of food security beyond individual, household, and community (Power, 2008).

### **The Role of Climate Change in Food Security**

Another theme important to food security in Nunavut is the role of climate change. There is a feedback loop in the relationship of climate change and food security: as the climate changes so does security of foods and food systems (Paci *et al*, 2006). Ford (2008) developed a conceptual framework to illustrate how climatic conditions interact with Inuit food systems, which create conditions of food security and insecurity. Elements of the model included exposure sensitivity, adaptive capacity, understanding that traditional food and store-bought food access are not mutually exclusive, the model is temporally dynamic (transitory), and all interactions are dynamic with feedback at various intersecting points (Ford, 2008). This complex detailed model provides an approach to understanding the relationships between climate change and food security in Nunavut.

### Resolving Food Security in Nunavut

The literature about resolving food security

- Additional funding for the Harvester's Support Program, additional community hunts, community freezers implementation/maintenance, implementation/expansion of youth hunting skills program, commercial selling of traditional foods in Nunavut, non-profit processing plants for traditional foods, salary for hunters
- Improving the affordability of market foods, advocating for increase government supports for better access to market food subsidies, for improving wage-to-living cost ratio
- Increased airline competition to reduce freight costs
- Advocating for healthy food choice promotion
- Classes teaching how to prepare all types of foods to all age groups (Chan *et al*, 2006; Lamden *et al*, 2006, Paci *et al*, 2005).
- School-based, culturally appropriate education to help students and teachers both to value and eat nutritious foods (Paci *et al*, 2005).

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revealed concrete ideas of:

## Knowledge Sharing: Current Food Security Initiatives and Projects in Nunavut

### The Food Security Reference Group (FSRG)

- Established in 2005 with a purpose to bring together the federal government, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to share information, discuss strategies and opportunities, and plan collective actions for improving food security for Inuit and First Nations
- The group has met approximately twice a year since 2005
- The Food Security Reference Group has focused on defining the issue of food security (relating to Inuit and First Nations), filling knowledge gaps and building the evidence base for supporting, planning and decision-making
- From Nunavut, NTI and GN are members

### Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI)

- NTI is the Inuit organization mandated to ensure implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA)
- NTI's Social and Cultural Department is responsible for ensuring implementation of Article 32 of the NLCA, which requires the Government of Canada and the Government of Nunavut to provide "Inuit with an opportunity to participate in the development of social and cultural policies, and in the design of social and cultural programs and services, including their method of delivery, in the

- Policy analysts from NTI's Social & Cultural Department attend federal, territorial meetings, such as the Food Security Reference Group, in addition to working on Inuit specific food security policies
- Food Security is referenced in the 2008 report "Nunavut's Health System: A Report Delivered as Part of Inuit Obligations under Article 32 of the NLCA, 1993" an Annual Report on the State of= Inuit Culture and Society
- Web link for the report: <http://www.tunnngavik.com/index.php?iDocCat=23>

### Food Mail Program

- Since 1986, the Government of Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) collaborates with Canada Post Corporation to subsidize cost of shipping food to northern communities across Canada
- Goal of the program is to reduce the cost of nutritious perishable food and other essential items, to improve nutrition, health and well-being of Canadians living in isolated communities
- Uniform postage rate of \$0.80/kg shipping and \$0.75 per parcel
- Designated entry points for food are chosen by INAC
- Impact of Food Mail Program studied in Kugaaruk in 2001, in Repulse Bay in 1992 and 1997 and in Pond Inlet in 1992 and 1997
- Current review held in fall of 2008 with discussion around the need for monitoring of the program, alternate ways to distribute subsidy, accountability, location of entry points, multi-year funding
- Web link: <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/nth/fon/fm/index-eng.asp>

### "Developing Healthy Communities" A Public Health Strategy for Nunavut 2008-2013

- Developed and published by the Government of Nunavut, Department of Health & Social Services
- The report outlines a vision for public health, setting two Priorities and eight Goals
- Specific to food security are Goals 2 and 3:
  - Goal 2: To Increase the Number of Children Achieving Age Appropriate Developmental Milestones
    - Objective – By 2013, increase the number of children eating country foods – Country foods available in day cares and schools on a regular basis
  - Goal 3: To Improve Food Security for All Families Especially Families with Infants and Children
    - Objective - By 2010, improve understanding of determinants of food insecurity in Nunavut through in-depth analysis
    - Objective – By 2013 reduce the number of pregnant women experiencing food insecurity
    - Objective – Increase access to nutritious and acceptable food, both traditional and commercial (with a focus on pregnant women and children)
    - Objective – Increase knowledge and skills regarding healthy foods, menu options and budgeting
- Web link for the report: [www.gov.nu.ca/health/Public\\_Health\\_Strategy\\_English.pdf](http://www.gov.nu.ca/health/Public_Health_Strategy_English.pdf)

### Healthy Foods North

- Is a research project, which began in 2005 with community residents of Gjoa Haven, Taloyoak, Cambridge Bay, who were 19 years and older
- To be complete by 2010

- Principal Investigator is Dr. Sangita Sharma from the University of Hawaii, with the collaboration of Joel Gittelsohn from John Hopkins University and is being done in close collaboration with each of the hamlets and the Department of Health & Social Services

- Goal - to understand what people are eating, to better understand people's values around food, where food is found, and how food is shared. Community involvement is a key component to this research.

- Steps of the project include

- Formative Research - in-depth interviews, 24 hour food recalls
- Community Workshops – outlining of intervention, foods to target
- Baseline Data Collection – food frequency questionnaire, adult impact questionnaire
- Material Development – focus groups, advisory boards
- Intervention – of 24 months for 6 to 8 week phases, done by local interventionists
- Post-Intervention Data Collection

- Results have and will continue to be presented to the community at each phase of the project

- Once complete, the study results will be submitted for publication

Hunters & Trappers Organization (HTO): Hunter Support Program

- Offers full-time hunters equipment of boats, motors, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles up to a maximum of \$12 000 per hunter.

- Local HTOs decide who will receive equipment

### **Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative**

- Is funded by the Community Programs Directorate of First Nations and Inuit Health Branch of Health Canada

- The Government of Nunavut, Department of Health and Social Services (DH&SS) provides programming

- Goal of the program – “is designed to provide a more comprehensive, collaborative and integrated approach to decreasing diabetes and its complications among Aboriginal

peoples” (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/diseases-maladies/diabete/index-eng.php>, accessed March 16, 2009).

- The DH&SS has asked Sue Hamilton to conduct a literature review for food security and Susan Beaubier to conduct an environmental scan of food security. Both of who are Nutrition Consultants.

### **Canada Prenatal and Nutrition Program**

- Is funded by the First Nation and Inuit Health Program and Public Health Agency of Canada

- The Government of Nunavut (GN), Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS) provides programming for CPNP

- Goal of this program – “to provide long-term funding to community groups to develop or enhance programs for vulnerable pregnant women” ([http://www.phacaspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/programs-mes/cnp\\_maineng.php](http://www.phacaspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/programs-mes/cnp_maineng.php), accessed March 16, 2009)

- During the research and writing of this tool, this position was vacant at a Territorial Level

## Knowledge Sharing: A Directory of People Interviewed and Working on Food Security affecting Nunavut

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