



CALLING OUR COMMUNITIES TO ACTION

2030 AGENDA

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The 2030 Agenda focuses on building capacity, education and action across the Prairie provinces in order to address the Sustainable Development Goals from the grassroots up. It is an effort to foster connections between individuals, initiatives, agencies and networks doing food security, anti-poverty, anti-racism and gender equity work across the Prairies.

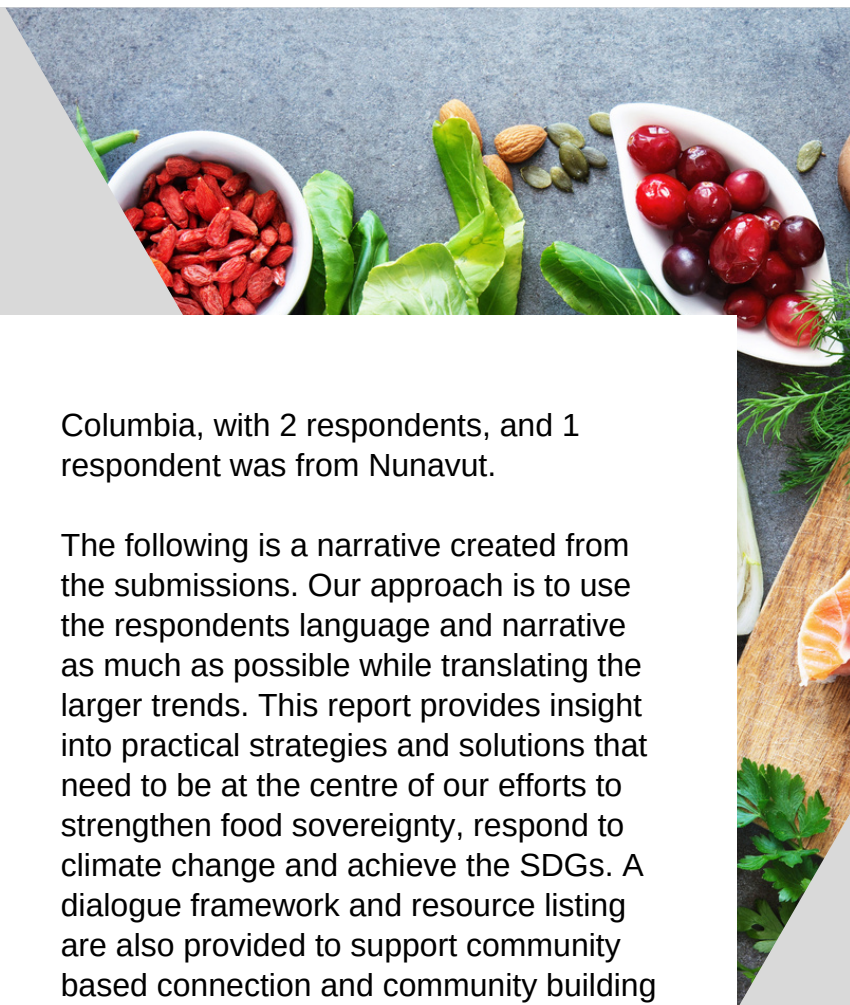
In the summer of 2020, the West Hub of Righting Relations (constituted by partner agencies and individuals from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) conducted outreach across the country through the Righting Relations National Network to gather thoughts and perspectives on food security across the country to provide inspiration for education and advocacy on how we can collectively innovate to shift our food systems.

Seventy two people responded to the survey which was sent out by email through the Righting Relations national network and shared over social media channels. Most of the people who responded to the survey live in Manitoba, with 29 respondents, and Alberta, with 15 respondents. In Saskatchewan 10 people responded, 8 respondents were from the Atlantic provinces, and in Ontario there were 7 respondents. A smaller proportion of respondents were from British

Columbia, with 2 respondents, and 1 respondent was from Nunavut.

The following is a narrative created from the submissions. Our approach is to use the respondents language and narrative as much as possible while translating the larger trends. This report provides insight into practical strategies and solutions that need to be at the centre of our efforts to strengthen food sovereignty, respond to climate change and achieve the SDGs. A dialogue framework and resource listing are also provided to support community based connection and community building through a rights based lens.

The West Hub of Righting Relations is facilitated by the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, which is a nonprofit organization based out of Edmonton (Alberta) that works to advance dignity, freedom, justice, and security through collaborative relationships and transformative education on peace and human rights. Righting Relations Canada (RRC) is a heart-centred, national network of adult educators, community organizers and Indigenous Peoples of the world working for radical social change through decolonization and popular education to bring about political and economic literacy for a just society in Canada.



WHAT DOES FOOD SECURITY LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

When asked ‘what does food security look like for you?’ A resounding theme was equitable and equal dignified access to sufficient food to meet a family’s or individual’s needs, that is culturally appropriate, adheres to dietary needs (e.g., “diabetes”, “allergies”), and is nutritious and healthy.

The following are excerpts of some of what respondents shared:

“Not worrying about choosing to pay bills vs groceries.”

“ALL people in Canada can purchase and have access to purchase nutritious food that meets their food needs, culturally and diet speaking, to live an active and healthy life.”

“Eating every day. It doesn’t have to be a huge meal. But going days without eating is severely affecting my health physically and mentally. ”

“Food security is when everyone has access to good quality and healthy food. The food should be elaborate and it shouldn’t be highly processed. No sugary cereals or snacks. No pop or sugary drinks. Just simple, basic, healthy food.”

“No worrying, no scraping together money, no parents skipping meals for their children to eat, no children missing meals for any reason.”

Having dignified access to food means access “without shame” that is “non-judgemental” and “non-fatphobic”. Importantly, dignified access to food comes from having access to a variety of food sources and, thus, access to make choices for themselves that meet their and their family’s needs.

People shared a variety of ideas and needs that as a society we must work to meet in order to ensure dignified food access:

“An abundance of food, either fresh or dried/preserved for all individuals to consume.”

“Access to food weekly, community gardening, collective cooking for reduction of food costs. Being part of the food chain to help plant food and take care of gardens that are accessible to urban families.”

"Access to food [that is]...connected to Land, Indigenous-led"

"It means having access to freshly cultivated or harvested fruits and vegetables, access to wild spaces for foraging seeds, nuts and mushrooms."

"Root cellars, greenhouses built into the earth so they can be 4 seasons, hunters and fishers sharing their harvests."

"Less reliance on food banks and fast food options and more accessibility to local, culturally appropriate options."

"No one will be hungry. No one will have to dumpster dive for their next meal. Soup kitchens, and feeding programs will be substantially reduced in our communities. Food banks will no longer exist".

Lastly, the need for diverse food sources that offer people choice with dignity and reaffirm people's agency to make decisions for themselves is connected to our current food system in which foods that adhere to dietary needs and are culturally appropriate and nutritious are cost prohibitive, relative to "sugary", "highly processed" foods.

People articulated this concern in different ways:

"To buy food without going into debt every month, but also to choose local whole foods over cheap processed foods that are often the highlight of every sales flyer."

"When I lived in Cuba, cheap, healthy locally produced food was available in markets in practically every neighbourhood. Buying junk food is expensive. This is how it should be."

"Food security for me looks like people who are not in a large urban center need access to fresh, healthy food. Currently, many Northern communities are faced with a commercial supply of what you might find in a convenience store or 711. Processed, unhealthy, calorie laden foods causing disease, mental illness and shortening life spans. [And] in large cities, there are food deserts in the poorer parts of the city where again only cheap processed foods are available."

"Healthier options not costing more than unhealthy alternatives."

11 AREAS FOR FOOD ACTION

1. Address Economic Limitations and Create Opportunities

When it comes to the greatest challenges people face in relation to food security, limitations in economic capacity and the need for strengthened financial means came out strongly through the survey. Respondents highlighted the high, and rising, cost of food and limited incomes. Income support does not enable one to pay bills, rent and buy food. In other words, people receiving income support often find themselves having to choose between paying bills, paying rent or buying food; let alone covering any medications or other needs they may have. The cost of healthy and nutritious food, including produce and meat in particular, stands out. Importantly, participants in remote communities expressed the inequities of food affordability and accessibility.

Respondents spoke of:

Living paycheck to paycheck.

Making every penny count.

Getting affordable meats.

Having enough money from disability income (provincial) to pay bills and rent let alone buy food.

The cost of good food -- especially fresh fruits and vegetables. In contrast, junk and processed food is often quite cheap.

The lack of housing and a place to cook food.

The inability for many unhoused people to store more than a couple meals worth is a great challenge.

Sometimes it is time related such as having to work odd hours, other times it's costs.

We are isolated rural communities. For some the drive to get a variety of fresh healthy food is significant. The cost of running freezers is high. Local stores carry mostly packaged foods.

Access to an adequate income and/or employment opportunities were highlighted as a critical need. Respondents spoke of the need for wages to “keep in line with inflation”. A universal and guaranteed basic income was articulated by respondents as a critical need, as well as ensuring adequate income. Respondents They also spoke of the need for “affordable housing” in order to allow people to “buy more healthy food.”

Respondents expressed that support for a basic income would ensure overall better health and well-being for the community. It would result in less mental and financial stress and the reallocation of productive energies to greater financial security and wellbeing. Creating a scheme whereby local community members can be paid to do local food security efforts would “create sustainable skills and more food abundance and local connections.”

Some input from respondents included:

Those inside custodial facilities are provided transitional financial support so they can get food upon release.

Increase payments to Social Assistance recipients.

I frequently hear, from those receiving financial assistance, the complaint that they do not receive enough income to both pay rent and bills AND afford healthy food! That should not be an acceptable state of affairs. Give them more money.

Could start with increasing social benefits so that people can actually afford to purchase their basic needs in our communities.

In addition to a universal basic income, “a drug plan for seniors so that they do not have to use most of their money on medication” was suggested.

2. Address the Costs of Food

Respondents articulated a need to address the high and rising cost of food, particularly healthy nutritious food. Some indicated that restricted diets such as gluten free, low sugar and reduced salt need to be more reasonably priced and accessible. Some spoke of the need for government interventions, controls and/or subsidies to support affordable foods and ensure stability in prices.

Food Share Toronto has an affordable produce box, one they make available to food insecure families charitably. This solution benefits from economies of scale, and mitigates the food desert effect of poverty in urban areas. It is a wonderful solution that should be replicated broadly.

Lack of accessibility to affordable healthy food was identified as the second largest challenge to food security and thus how those living in poverty, with an overrepresentation of Indigenous communities, “are suffering disproportionately from diet related diseases and health problems.” Respondents also highlighted the unique barriers for people living with disability to access transportation to access affordable healthy food.

Individuals who do not have accessible transit, i.e. cost, location, etc. barriers to obtain quality sustenance.

The greatest challenge in this lower income, highly racialized, and Indigenous inner city community is access to services, and the tendency to be passed up for opportunities. The result is unhealthy food options which are often the cheapest. In turn these affect the health of families.

3. Strengthen Local Economies

Respondents also shared that while supporting local producers is preferable, it is also difficult due to the higher costs of buying local. Finding ways to provide local producers with subsidies as a way to support their expenses was highlighted; this kind of help could make local produce more affordable, providing access to healthier foods for people who have limited income and/or insecure income sources.

To be able to afford local, unprocessed, and easily available in season food.

Trying to support local, which is expensive, and avoid mega industry produce. It's difficult.

Throughout the survey, there was a resounding call to subsidize access to local food as well as to cultivate small producers and farmers. Moving to a localized economy reduces the impacts of climate change but also creates space of connection and sustainability.

Incentivizing local producers to ensure accessible and affordable foods based in the local economy should be prioritized over subsidies to larger corporate food systems. Encouraging and supporting stores to access and work with local farms and producers would also significantly change access to affordable and healthy food. Importantly, localizing measures are a significant contributor to reducing the impacts of climate change and strengthening community resilience.

Greater support for small farms, businesses and local food providers that do not have to rely on corporate chains.

Locally - have seniors homes, jails, schools, daycares and hospitals stop importing ready made convenient meals from other locales (ie CISCO in ON) and support employment here, education here and use of local products. Food in these places should be made from scratch from REAL ingredients. Result health, jobs, local economic benefit, a food system that is not dependent on imports.

Provincially - Provide a distribution and transportation system that supports local production, storage and distribution of Saskatchewan grown and produced foods.

Incentivize local producers who are trying to contribute to a just and ecologically sustainable food system. Incentivize and reward local businesses and restaurants and large public institutions such as hospitals and universities to support locally produced food.

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Supporting local producers and farmers is an essential part of building a food security strategy. Current limitations on how much a farm must earn before qualifying for government support programs place a significant barrier up for smaller family farms and localized food production. Creating reliable trade networks facilitates the building of community but also the trading in services, skills and goods allowing for deepened security and connection.

4. Create Space to Grow, Process and Store Food

The ability to grow and prepare food was identified as a significant priority. This ranged from having access to land to grow and secure food; the capacity to work in cooperatives with others; knowing how to harvest, prepare and process foods; support for small family farms; and, finding a better work-life balance in order to have the time and capacity to grow.

Families need to have access and have the ability to prepare food for themselves. The food is necessary directly in the neighborhood.

Large gardens, communal kitchens and shared bulk purchases....anyone wanna share half a frozen prepped bison?

We are systematically reducing the number of small family farms as it is not possible to make a living on such farms in today's market.

Grants or some kind of financial assistance to get started - when we can barely afford groceries how do we invest in soil/planters/seeds etc.

Having access to spaces to grow, process and store food would contribute to food security sustainability for community members.

Space to grow a garden which has enough room to grow enough food for the fall, winter and spring months as well as room to process and store what the garden produces.

Being able to grow enough to survive.....and process it all.... even in the 10x20 garden I have, I don't see much to survive a winter with...tomatoes, potatoes, a few meals with broccoli, carrots beets, salads....but really....it doesn't look like much to me.

Some respondents indicated that accessibility to food also means bringing healthy food and family services into neighbourhoods. In this vein, people expressed a need for policy and decision makers to facilitate greater connections between local farmers and communities. For example, people spoke of the need to ensure trade opportunities for smaller farms and greenhouses to connect with surrounding communities and build direct economic relationships. In relation to the policy, respondents called for a consideration of a law, “similar to France”, whereby grocery stores cannot throw out food and must, instead, divert it. They also suggested a limitation to the “advertising for unhealthy food choices (similar to how it is illegal to advertise cigarettes).”

Practical strategies can be put in place to meet the desire of respondents to access spaces to grow, process and store food as cost effective ways to support food security at the community level. Enabling communities and individuals to grow, as well as to share and trade creates sustainable systems of support. Enabling community gardens, greenhouses, pantries, freezers and kitchens that are cooperative and community-based allow groups “to process more together as well as learn from each other”.

For communities to work together, or for small communities to start and branch out like a Transition Network which starts with just a few people of like mind sharing what they each have of their own to offer.

There was a strong emphasis in responses throughout all of the survey questions about the need to enable people to be able to grow their own food. This included increasing access to public spaces for collective food growth and land purchase, and increasing skills and knowledge in how to grow in small spaces. Additionally, learning to preserve food was articulated as a necessary skill to enable more food security.

More money for gardening supplies, for greenhouses so that communities can have food growing all year round, education for community members on how to cook healthy foods.

Locally, incentives for community and backyard gardens, this worked during war years.

Opportunities to grow food in our homes, it would be a great start. To have access to land to plant and harvest healthy food. We need to make this available to people in urban and rural areas. Need more grassroots engagement in food sovereignty.

Make more space available in cities and outlying communities for fruit and vegetable gardens.

Encourage food plants in all parks and boulevards, especially Indigenous-lead traditional food cultivation. All buildings should have green roofs and community gardens so any resident can grow food.

Everyone, even those in apartments can have access to a garden plot to provide food for themselves with some kind of incentive.

We allow businesses to use public areas for marketing, seating, and commerce. Municipally we need laws that allow the same for community fridges and pantries. Zoning laws currently prevent densification in urban areas increasing home scarcity where they're most needed. Locally Alienable Zoning Rights (LAZR) might mitigate the effect of NIMBYism in residential settings.

Importantly, enabling community members to not only grow their own food but also providing education on healthier diets and eating patterns can improve physical and mental health.

Additionally, some respondents highlighted the desire to know more about how to take care of their food needs such as learning how to cook and learning ways to cook healthy meals. Others spoke of the ways that climate change has affected their ability to grow; *"When it doesn't rain so that my garden doesn't produce food to fill my freezer."*

5. Strengthen Collaboration and Diversion

Respondents also expressed a need for strengthening collaboration and connection across agencies and systems in order to co-develop strategies to divert food from stores to food insecure areas in a consistent and efficient manner.

Strengthening laws that prohibit grocery stores wasting their food and promote greater diversion to those in need is a necessary transformation to our current food system. This is also in line with a desire for bylaws to ensure that excess food be diverted. For example, some respondents suggested that municipalities could institute a mandatory bylaw that requires usable food to be distributed to social agencies and enable simple distribution and connection systems. Also, funding programs that enable grocers to distribute food that is routinely discarded can incentivize this critical shift. Lastly, education campaigns to ensure the community understands that best before dates does not indicate that a food item is unsafe to eat is also an important change that needs to happen within our collective understanding of safe food.

The best before day is great but food can live on longer. No need to throw away items past best before dates out.

A bylaw that requires useable food to be distributed to social agencies, this is voluntary at present.

Within this focus on what institutions could and should do to address food insecurity, respondents called for government entities to demonstrate a commitment to regular and sufficient funding for food security to allow for the creation and sustainability of systems of support for families and communities.

For organizations, long term funding is a hindrance to planning programming that can make continuous, significant impact in filling the need in the community.

In consistency within agencies and systems on their policies and procedures getting food to people. There is enough food in this country, we just cant get it to the people who are starving much of the time.

Creating stronger systems of collaboration among social service and food support agencies is also a key element to strengthen efficiency and effectiveness of support while also strengthening connection to grassroots organizations who are directly tied to and working with communities.

More collaborative working relationship with govt systems such as the welfare systems and agencies. Its politics and turf wars, and it is diverting energy and resources away from the client.

Fund culturally relevant food banks and partner with community-led organizations already doing the work.

6. Organizational Culture Shifts

Concern was expressed that some organizations' rules and regulations act as barriers to food access, and to food security more broadly. A call to facilitate organizational shifts in agencies working in food security was noted by a few respondents who also called for decolonization in organizations in order to address ongoing racism and ableism.

Long term, families need the opportunity to empower themselves. That means support systems need to be easier to access. Not even one childcare centre is available in our community for example. We need to address and remove the deeply ingrained systematic racism that continues to be barriers to racialized and Indigenous people.

The greatest challenges are some of the head of the organizations that are extremely oppressive with their rules and regulations.

Creating and supporting dignified, caring and accessible spaces to access food when critically needed should be a priority. Good examples including Bethel Pantry in Edmonton is a place where people are treated with dignity and care. Ensuring food banks are accessible by bus is also necessary, as is creating sliding scale approaches to food accessibility in order to create more sustainable collective approaches to food security.

We need to have more people from the grassroots help with decisions that impact their lives. Currently in Edmonton the food bank is located at a place where no buses go to. The Bethel pantry has the location and treats people with dignity and care.

7. Appropriate Funding and Support to the Grassroots

Increasing, stabilizing and reducing bureaucracy in funding and access to food resources will go a long way in supporting grassroots organizations who are most connected to the most vulnerable and able to appropriately respond to community needs. Ensuring that these local grassroots organizations are also providing input into food systems and programs to support communities are essential. Indigenous leadership should be cultivated and should provide overall guidance on decisions. Building a network of collaboration and connection among grassroots and mutual aid groups will help strengthen community voices and ensure relevant solutions.

Long—term federal or provincial grants for grassroots organizations such as ours would go a long way in ensuring that food security is tackled within communities, ensuring healthy options reach more family tables, and done in a manner that meets the needs of families with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Mutual aid, basic income without strings attached, and allowing Indigenous peoples to lead us without strings attached.

Be able to donate food conveniently.

Redistribute funds to end poverty and houslessness.

8. Safe Food

Access to safe food was also a theme throughout responses to various questions in the survey, which was often articulated as a challenge to food security. For example, people expressed a need to strengthen nutritional information on labelling, and to move towards supporting local and small farmers and producers in order to enable a departure from “conventional agriculture [which] is encouraged to and insists on using chemical fertilizers and pesticides, insecticides, herbicides and desiccants which then contaminate our food supply.”

Have access to transit to get to different stores to find deals.

Mobile delivery services.

Providing food locally at a lower cost by teaming up with organizations promote healthy food at affordable prices/buy food truck that goes from one community to another.

9. Educate Young People

People spoke of schools as a critical place to impart skills and knowledge on food and food systems. Giving priority to education and practical skills in schools is fundamental for generational and sustainable changes and could have generational impacts on both food security and climate change, given the relationship that we have seen woven between the two throughout responses to the survey questions.

Promote food programs and projects in all public schools.

Encourage school community gardens.

Fund gardening in schools and make it mandatory, like math or English.

We need elementary schools and high schools teaching students in these places with the local community members that also eat from the area. The gov can fund these programs and pay locals to do this work. It will create sustainable skills and more food abundance and local connections.

10. Increase Physical Accessibility

Increasing accessibility to transit or delivery of food should also be a priority in communities, particularly to support those most marginalized such as those living with disabilities, seniors and single moms. For example, supporting food trucks that can provide free or sliding cost meals to travel through communities with healthy food provides an opportunity to make this food accessible.

11. Government Leadership

There is an active role for governments to play in order to ensure we meet our obligations under international human rights laws.

All of our government levels have to take seriously the International Agreements they have entered into, especially the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Housing, Food security, Health and rights to work are all in there, and Canada states these are our basic human rights, and that they will do everything in their power to protect these rights. We now have to demand that they govern using this human rights lens. Ensure all people in Canada have quality food, housing, health and healthcare, education, etc.

poverty and food insecurity. This requires that each level should have a food security strategy in place that does not rely solely on food banks and charity. A food charter to ground in common values was suggested. Additionally, respondents articulated the responsibility of provinces to increase income assistance rates to ensure livable incomes, as well as working with the federal government, a basic guaranteed income could enable access to food.

Housing is a fundamental component of addressing food security, and has also been articulated in this survey, as well as more widely, as a government responsibility. All levels of government must work collaboratively to expand low-income accessible housing options and put regulations in place for accessibility and affordability. For example, one respondent stated “*providing homes is the obvious long term solution.*” Within the context of calls to address some of the roots of food insecurity, people also spoke of the need to address systemic racism, in order to address poverty. For example, one person said that in order to “*ensure that racialized, Indigenous and newcomer groups have the same opportunities to get hired, there should be mandated equity in hiring processes.*” It was also recommended that governments “*ensure that every community has services that are easily accessed by those in need whether those are detox, education, skills training, childcare etc.*”

LOOKING FOR SOME INSPIRATION?

Check Out these Folks who are taking innovative approaches to food security
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1wLQJ2RYvIPSU_xzW-J5SzvOcJMK3KhrYs_dTZWtA_mg/edit?usp=sharing