

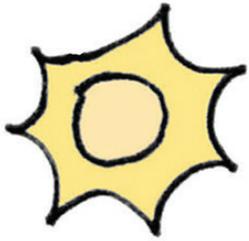
FOOD COUNTS

HALIFAX FOOD ASSESSMENT



HALIFAX FOOD POLICY ALLIANCE

2014 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

In Canada, municipalities hold pivotal positions in creating healthy, resilient, local food systems. They are influential in supporting (or hindering) the realization of community food security because they govern the use and development of land in addition to setting policies and by-laws.⁽¹⁾ *Food Counts: Halifax Food Assessment* report marks the beginning of a comprehensive, ongoing monitoring and reporting on the state of community food security¹ in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The development of the report was led by the food assessment working group of the Halifax Food Policy Alliance (HFPA) and was fueled by the need to better understand our local food system, in order to lay the foundation for a food strategy and municipal policies that better support community food security. The primary purpose of the report is to use existing qualitative and quantitative data to answer the question: What is the current state of our food system in Halifax? Through answering this question, we are able to identify potential areas for research and further policy development as revealed by the gaps, limits and strengths in the data described throughout the report.

Although much of the jurisdictional power of our food system lies with the federal and provincial governments, the ways food is produced, distributed, accessed, prepared, consumed, recycled and disposed of are directly linked to our quality of life, the vibrancy of our neighborhoods, and sustainability of our urban centres and rural landscapes.⁽²⁾ Moreover, municipalities are often faced with the consequences resulting from the loss of agricultural land, water and air pollution, and climate change. The financial struggles of fishers and farmers, the inequitable distribution of wealth that affects people's ability to afford food, and reduced employment and tax revenues from food related businesses have social impacts that present challenges for municipalities. Food assessments are useful tools and starting points that can demonstrate the state of our food system and identify areas to focus and improve municipal by-laws, practices, and policies.

1 A state when all community residents have access to enough healthy, safe food through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.

2. METHODS

The process began in 2013 with a review and analysis of existing literature related to food assessments and food policy work of other jurisdictions. While much of the data focused on Halifax, the report does feature data that were identified at other levels of geography.

Arising from this, it was decided that the *Food Counts Halifax Food Assessment* should be defined by six determinants that captured the complexity and diversity of our food system and represented prerequisites for a healthy, just, and sustainable food system.⁽³⁾

The six determinants are:

- Accessibility
- Adequacy
- Knowledge and Agency
- Local Food Economy and Infrastructure
- Public Investment and Supports
- Resource Protection and Enhancement

3. DEMOGRAPHY, SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND FOOD SECURITY

In 2011, 42.3% of the population of Nova Scotia lived in Halifax. In comparison to the rest of the province, the population is slightly younger with a smaller proportion aged 65 years and older. There is a higher proportion of immigrants and visible minorities and a lower proportion of people who identified as Aboriginal. Halifax has a higher median income across a number of different household configurations when compared to the rest of Nova Scotia. Educational attainment is generally higher in Halifax and there are lower rates of unemployment and income assistance when compared with Nova Scotia as a whole.

There are a number of socio-economic conditions that impact community food security that need to be considered, such as the high number of low income households and the high proportion of children living in low income households. The income spent on housing in Halifax is relatively high compared to the rest of the province. People living on low wages or on income assistance may find it difficult to afford or access healthy nutritious food.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 ACCESSIBILITY

Where and how do we acquire our food?

Healthy, culturally appropriate and sustainably produced food needs to be physically available to all citizens in order to enhance community food security. Access to food is directly related to income, the affordability of food, the distance to food outlets, access to resources to produce food and the availability of a sustainably produced food supply.

Data collected show that...

Food is physically accessible in Halifax in the following places:

- 37 grocery stores; however, distribution of stores is sparse outside the urban area;
- 227 fast food chain outlets with the majority clustered in the urban area;⁽⁴⁾
- 12 farmers' markets;
- 15 to 18 food trucks;
- 20 Community Supported Agriculture enterprises;
- 1 Community Supported Fishery;
- an unknown number of pop-up fish and farm markets.

Currently there is no inventory of community based food resources in Halifax, but we have identified several community based initiatives.

- 43,700 meals were delivered by Meals on Wheels and Frozen Favorites in 2013;
- 62% of the 165 schools that make up the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB), Le Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP) and the 18 private schools have breakfast programs;
- No human milk banks, but informal breast milk sharing arrangements do exist;
- 43 Feed NS food banks⁽⁵⁾ as well as non-affiliated charitable food assistance;
 - 28.6% increase in food bank use in Nova Scotia since 2008;⁽⁶⁾
 - 8,555 people, 2,660 of whom were children, relied on food from a food bank, in Halifax (2013);⁽⁵⁾
 - Access to charitable food assistance is affected by the day in the week.⁽⁷⁾

The distribution of large scale grocery stores that carry a full range of food items is sparse in many communities outside of Halifax's urban area.² While there has been an increase in alternative food options that also appear to serve mainly urban areas, complete data on some access alternatives (e.g., small scale meat markets, pop-up fish or produce markets, and small supply grocers or bakeries) is difficult to obtain, so the reach of innovative food retail access points may not be fully understood at this time.

Though most experts agree that food bank use under-represents the extent of food insecurity, a high number of low income people in Halifax do rely on food banks. Access to charitable food outlets fluctuates in that the majority of agencies and organizations are open throughout the weekdays while very few are open on weekends. Federal and provincial government income security policies and programs are failing to ensure that income support is adequate to ensure food security.

² Urban areas are those with a population density greater than 400 persons per km².

Alongside food banks, researchers and community organizations are involved in seeking more sustainable approaches to improving access to affordable nutritious food. Some provide transportation to conventional food resources, others develop cooking or gardening programs, or offer spaces for people to come together to grow, cook, prepare and share food. These initiatives and advocacy efforts also help to build skills and community connections.

4.2 ADEQUACY

Does the food system meet our needs?

Adequacy refers to the ability of every individual to acquire sufficient quantities of safe, culturally appropriate, nutritious and sustainably produced food without resorting to emergency or charitable food sources. The food available will be of the quality and quantity to promote health and manage chronic disease. The protection and promotion of breastfeeding are recognized to be important dimensions of food adequacy.

Data collected show that Halifax has...

- 43 vendors at 5 farmers' markets who sell culturally diverse foods from 24 different countries;
- 64 ethno-cultural retail food stores;
- higher rates of diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity than the national average;⁽⁸⁻¹¹⁾
- a lower percentage of women (85%) who initiate breastfeeding than the provincial and national rates;⁽¹²⁾
- the percentage of women in Capital Health who were exclusively breastfeeding dropped from 53% at 2 weeks to 14% at 6 months;⁽¹³⁾
- only 38% of Halifax adult residents report adequate fruit and vegetable consumption;⁽¹⁴⁾
- those with incomes below \$20,000 were least likely to meet the recommended fruit and vegetable requirements;⁽¹⁴⁾
- 1 in 5 households in Halifax are food insecure;⁽¹⁵⁾
- 70% of Nova Scotia households relying on income assistance were food insecure;⁽¹⁵⁻¹⁶⁾
- 4X increase in the cost of a National Nutritious Food Basket (NNFB)³ in NS since 2002;⁽¹⁷⁾
- 23% locally produced items on the NNFB.⁽¹⁸⁾

The presence of culturally appropriate foods appears to be growing with access points in large grocers, farmers' markets and independently owned small retail stores. Little is known about the adequacy of traditional aboriginal foods in Halifax.

The data show that nutrition-related chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure are higher in Halifax than the national rates.⁽⁸⁻¹¹⁾ Rising rates in household food insecurity and the rising cost of food will make it difficult for individuals to meet their daily requirements for fruits and vegetables and other nutritious food needed to prevent and manage chronic diseases. This could impact our already high rates of nutrition-related chronic diseases. A high minimum wage and an increase in welfare income could help the financial situations of those most at risk of food insecurity.⁴

3 The National Nutritious Food Basket (NNFB) is a tool developed by Health Canada that is used by stakeholders at various levels of government to monitor the cost and affordability of healthy eating.

4 The inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality diet or a sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.

Most women in Halifax are initiating breastfeeding however, despite evidence heralding the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months and continued breastfeeding for up to two years or beyond, breastfeeding rates in Halifax show a steady decline between initiation and six months. There is a need to examine why the rates of exclusive breastfeeding decline over time as well as information about what supports and conditions mothers and families need to continue exclusive breastfeeding.

Research shows that just over 1/3 of Halifax residents (12 and older) meet their daily requirement of fruit and vegetables.⁽¹⁴⁾ The adequate consumption of fruits and vegetables has an impact on the prevention and management of chronic disease. This may signal an opportunity for targeted programs and social enterprises to increase access of affordable fruits and vegetables to populations most at risk.

Household food insecurity is an issue in the Halifax region, with levels increasing from 13% (2007) to 20% (2013).⁽¹⁵⁾ In 2013, Halifax rated highest in household food insecurity among 33 Canadian cities.⁽¹⁵⁾ As food costs rise, income assistance levels are not adequate enough for households to afford a healthy, nutritious diet as measured by National Nutritious Food Basket (NNFB). Minimum wage earners also struggle to have enough income to purchase healthy food options.

4.3 KNOWLEDGE AND AGENCY

How we learn about and apply our knowledge of the food system?

Knowledge is defined in this report as opportunities for citizens to gain skills, awareness, familiarity and understanding of food and the food system, including where, how, and by whom food is produced and distributed.⁽³⁾ Agency enables citizens to act upon this knowledge to enhance personal and community food security and health.

Data collected show that Halifax has...

- 42 of 165 schools with a school garden;
- 74% of junior and senior high schools offer food skill development courses;
- three 4-H clubs with a total of 95 members (2014);
- 4 food training programs are offered by Nova Scotia Community College and Feed NS;
- 249 safe food handling courses conducted by Department of Agriculture (2008-2013);
- a growing number of community- based skill development programs;
- breastfeeding supports, programs and services available and outlined in the Breastfeeding Community of Practice's Breastfeeding Helping Tree resource.

There are a number of programs and opportunities to gain knowledge about the food system, mainly education programs at universities and schools, along with some community-based food skill programs. There appears to be a strong foundation upon which food related skills and knowledge could be furthered.

The data would suggest that there are many opportunities to be trained and involved in the food and agriculture system. However, there may be a low-level of awareness of the opportunities to work in the agriculture and food sector. This could be the result of traditional views of food producers as being farmers with a long history of living in a rural community, with access to skills and resources that are inaccessible to those who reside outside of those communities. There may also be stigma associated with careers in the agriculture, farming and fishing industries. Some of these challenges may be addressed through the promotion of careers in food and agriculture to graduating students. A recent survey at the University of Guelph demonstrated that for every agriculture graduate, there were two job opportunities⁽¹⁹⁾

There may be a gap in our knowledge related to how agency is built as a result of knowledge and skill building opportunities. Anecdotally, there appears to be a greater awareness related to local food as evidenced by the data presented in the full report such as, increases in farmers' markets, community gardens, buy-local media and the inclusion of buy-local guidelines embedded in institutional policies. There is less certainty how social isolation, feelings of belonging, awareness, knowledge and skills, and opportunities to act, are impacted by involvement in knowledge building activities.

4.4 LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

How does our food system operate from land and sea to table?

The diversity and strength of a local food economy and the individuals all along the supply chain are significant determinants of the strength and self-sufficiency of our food system. A healthy, just, and sustainable food system is economically, environmentally, and socially beneficial for everyone involved including farmers, fishers, workers, and citizens.

Data collected show that Halifax has...

- 3 urban farms and 41 community gardens;
- 6 community greenhouses;
- 250 bee colonies;
- 164 farms;⁽²⁰⁾
- 1 meat processing plant, 2 milk processors, 1 flour processor, 1 major bread producer and a number of other small bakeries and food processors;
- farm operators whose average age of 56.4 years and 57.4% of farm operators are aged 55 years and older;⁽²¹⁾
- 414 fewer fishing licenses in 2012 compared to 2010 in the Nova Scotia maritime fishing zone⁽²²⁾
 - increases in the proportion of older fishers (aged 45-64);⁽²²⁾
- 22 fish processing plants (2006);⁽²³⁾
- average market day spending that ranges from \$6,435 (VG Partners for Care Market) to \$239,800 (Seaport Market);⁽²⁴⁾
- farmers' market day visitors that range from 486 (Tantallon Market) to 9,482 (Seaport Market).⁽²⁴⁾

The data show both reasons to be optimistic and reasons to be concerned. On the positive side, the number of community gardens and community greenhouses has increased in recent years, as have the number of farmers' markets and other forms of direct marketing such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).⁵ On the negative side, the majority of farmers are over age 55 and the proportion of fishers age (45-64) is growing. This is a concerning trend, as it suggests that older farmers and fishers are retiring and new farmers and fishers are not replacing them.

There are many new examples of how small-scale and urban or peri-urban agriculture production systems are viable, and offer a way to support the development of a secure and stable food system in Halifax. Nova Scotia was the only province in Canada that showed an increase in farm numbers between the last two agriculture censuses (2006-2011)⁽²⁰⁾—an indication of the opportunity and availability of resources. Moreover, it is generally considered that there is no other province in Canada that has such an optimal combination of soil, water, climate and infrastructure to support small-scale agriculture. Combined with the educational support (shown in the previous section) and the availability of land in the Halifax region, there are lots of reasons to be optimistic.

4.5 PUBLIC INVESTMENTS AND SUPPORTS

How we support our food system

Governments, businesses, and institutions can set policies and spending priorities that impact community food security. Optimally, these actions would be coordinated, strategic, and evidence-based.

Data collected show that Halifax has...

- 352 sites with provincial food policy guidelines that support local procurement;
- over 50 breastfeeding-friendly spaces through the Make Breastfeeding Your Business initiative;
- 2 marketing programs that support community food security: Select Nova Scotia and Taste of Nova Scotia;
- some businesses and organizations who include food provisions as part of their emergency response plan.

The data show that local governments, organizations, institutions, and community led initiatives are contributing to strengthening community food security through policies, practices and processes. There are a number of policies, initiatives, and strategies focused on the advancement of community food security by promoting healthy eating, local food procurement, adopting of waste management practices, improving food access and creating opportunities for learning.

There are gaps in our knowledge in relation to emergency preparedness and Halifax's current capacity to be self-sustaining should an emergency arise requiring closure of the transportation network. There are a number of research projects and knowledge supports focused on the food system and a few examples are shared in the report. It is also likely more research is being conducted that we are currently unaware of. The development of an inventory of these activities would be a valuable contribution to understanding the food system both locally and beyond. This knowledge could inform decisions related to potential food system actions in future.

⁵ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a program that partners consumers directly with you, the producer, to sell products and build relationships. Customers buy annual shares or subscriptions from individual farmers, usually at the start of the season before the crops are even in the ground. In return, the farmer provides fresh produce on a regular basis.

4.6 RESOURCE PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT

How can we sustain our food system?

A healthy, just, and sustainable food system is reliant upon a strong foundation of local farmers and farmland, as well as fishers and fishing grounds. The health of the system is impacted by the degree to which farmland and fish stocks are protected from loss. In a sustainable food system, the health of the environment is protected, promoted and preserved.

Data collected show that Halifax has...

- dairy and mixed farming as important sources of employment despite the fact that the number of farms has declined in the last 50 years;
- the Musquodoboit Valley as the only remaining prime farmland in Halifax that is largely unaffected by non-agricultural uses;⁽²⁵⁾
- 164 farms⁽²⁰⁾, comprising 4131 hectares of farmland;⁽²¹⁾
- 2 food retailers (Sobeys and Loblaws) with sustainable seafood sales policies;
- 1 seed library;
- 3976 km: average distance traveled by a food item from its origin to Halifax;⁽²⁶⁾
- community gardens with higher concentrations of lead (which is naturally occurring) than the recommended guidelines (1/3 of samples);⁽²⁷⁾
- 52% of residential waste and 66% of industrial and commercial waste diverted from the landfill (2012);⁽²⁸⁾
- 51,328 tonnes of organic waste generated (2012) for use as compost.⁽²⁸⁾

The protection and enhancement of our food, agricultural, and fisheries resources are piecemeal. The assessment shows that there is some recognition of the need to protect farmland and topsoil in Halifax. With regard to fisheries, there is a lack of Halifax specific data because of the way the fishery zones are defined. The sustainable seafood sales policies of the major retailers are a promising trend but there is still much work to be done to fully realize the potential of these policies. Haligonians are largely dependent on food from both outside the region and outside the province, as is evidenced by the average distance travelled by a given food item. Food waste is a serious issue in all of Canada, where it is estimated that 27 billion dollars or roughly 40% of the food produced is wasted each year.⁽²⁹⁾

While we do not have Halifax specific statistics related to food waste, it is reasonable to assume that the trends are similar to the rest of the country. Halifax, however, does divert much of its food and yard waste from the landfill to be composted.

5. CONCLUSION

This report details some of the evidence about the current food system, highlighting some of the strengths and challenges. There are many examples of a movement towards a healthy, just, and sustainable food system in the Halifax region and, therefore, many reasons to celebrate. The region has a long history of fishing and farming activity. Children and youth in schools and adults in the community are learning to grow food. Farmers' markets are creating hubs of social interaction while providing a distribution centre for local food products and people are coming together to talk about food. Local food has a stronger presence in the community and innovation abounds with food trucks, pop-up fish stands and farm markets. Children and youth in schools and in the community are learning to grow food and building entrepreneurial skills through gardening and value added product businesses. Institutions are supporting ways to procure local food and protect the environment through composting and recycling efforts. Researchers are working with community partners and people affected by household food insecurity to advocate for changes in social policies.

Yet, while there is much to celebrate, more work is needed to ensure everyone has access to enough nutritious, culturally acceptable, and safe food. Many residents are still not able to afford a healthy diet, some neighborhoods lack places to purchase healthy foods and there appears to be a loss of food-related knowledge and skills. Chronic disease rates are high and the ability to prevent or manage chronic disease is a struggle when healthy, nutritious food is not physically or monetarily accessible. Farmers and fishers are likely to experience challenges to make an adequate living and a tension exists between development and preservation of agricultural land. Collectively these are all very real and very complex issues that require careful deliberation and collective action.

It is our hope that the information presented in this report will prompt a discussion in the community where residents with different backgrounds, interests, and knowledge about the food system will come together to explore the possibilities in building a healthy, just, and sustainable food system.