



Saskatchewan



Notes

Food Secure Saskatchewan: Concerned about Food Security of Saskatchewan Citizens

By Dr. Rick Sawa

Food security is a significant determinant of health. According to the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) 2003, 54% of Saskatchewan low-income respondents reported some food insecurity in the past 12 months. Food tends to be seen as the more 'flexible' part of the family budget often accessed after housing issues are addressed.

What is Food Security?

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 happy life. The four pillars of food security are availability, stability of supply, access, and utilization (World Food Summit, Rome, 1996).

Food Secure Saskatchewan

Food Secure Saskatchewan (FSS), officially formed in 2005, supports the above stated definition of food security. FSS has a diverse membership of over 150 that includes community-based organizations, nutritionists, civil servants, food program volunteers, advocates, First Nations residents, farmers, health professionals, and community leaders. A coordinating committee that consists of representation from all geographic areas of Saskatchewan orchestrates the efforts of the organization. Members of the coordinating committee, as well as other FSS members, have formed the following four sub-committees:

- Food Policy
- Education, Awareness, and Advocacy
- Localism
- Broader Participation

Purpose and principles

The purpose of FSS is to improve food security in Saskatchewan through co-ordinated, community-led action. It works to stimulate policy change and encourage the development of a comprehensive, integrated food security strategy. The principles are that:

- all citizens will have just and dignified access to food;
- the food will be safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate; and
- local food distribution and local producers will be supported.

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Activities

The primary activities of FSS are to:

- advocate for and work towards improved food security policies and programs for Saskatchewan citizens;
- enhance the skills and knowledge of its members and their community partners;
- foster coordination and cooperation among food organizations by working across sectors with all involved in the delivery of a healthy, sustainable food system; and
- provide support and information to groups working in the delivery of front line food security initiatives and policy development.

Food Security in Saskatchewan Report

Building the capacity of families and communities to meet their food needs, shifting the focus from short-term relief to strength-based approaches to food issues, and developing policy alternatives for the government are key priorities of the organization.

To inform the work of FSS three food security roundtable discussion groups were held between December 2004 and May 2005 in Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, and LaRonge attended by 170 people. The main objectives of the roundtables were:

- to provide opportunities for discussion of a provincial food security agenda with diverse groups of stakeholders representing all areas of the province;
- to identify the interests, resources, and experiences to create a comprehensive, integrated provincial food security strategy; and
- to develop priorities for action.

The proceedings of the roundtables were compiled in a report entitled *Food Security in Saskatchewan*, which can be found on the newly developed FSS website www.foodsecuresaskatchewan.ca.

The report clarifies the roles of various food security stakeholders, including government, local and regional communities, Food Secure Saskatchewan, and the business sector. It also outlines the main strengths, resources, and assets that were identified through the roundtable process.

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The report also discusses the following common themes, values, and strategic directions that emerged from these roundtable dialogues:

- the importance of local production and linking local production and consumption to sustain human health, the environment and the economy¹;
- the importance of public education and awareness;
- support for strength-based, community-driven solutions²;
- partnerships and networking;
- multi-disciplinary cooperation and collaboration;
- supportive policy from governments;
- the importance of Northern solutions and enhancing Northern capacity by, for example, adapting food inspection and safety practices to northern conditions; and
- development of a strategy to equalize access to food in communities similar to the demonstrated ability to make a variety of alcoholic beverages available to the majority of Saskatchewan communities.

The Planting Seeds and Growing Together Conference

The roundtables and subsequent report led to a very successful conference held in Prince Albert on May 5-6, 2006 that brought together 55 people from throughout the province, with varied backgrounds, from grassroots folks to policy makers, who were interested and concerned about food security for the citizens of Saskatchewan. The objectives of the conference were threefold:

- to contribute to skill development and community capacity building around food security in Saskatchewan;
- to share diverse approaches from rural, urban, Northern, and First Nations communities; and
- to formally establish and provide direction for Food Secure Saskatchewan.

“Striving to ensure that every child, woman and man enjoy adequate food on a regular basis is not only a moral imperative and an investment with enormous economic returns; it also signifies the realization of a basic human right”

During the conference, participants were asked what key directions coming from the round-table report they would like to see FSS focus on in the upcoming year. Support was given for:

- developing a meaningful definition of food security;
- increasing public awareness and education around food security;
- involving a broader range of stakeholders;
- clarifying the role of the provincial government;
- organizational development;
- initiating a ‘Made in Saskatchewan’ labeling program;
- developing a Food Secure Saskatchewan website;
- developing a website to link producers and consumers; and
- advocating for a universal school-based snack program that would have integrated funding and emphasize utilizing locally produced food.

FSS has acted on a number of the recommendations from the *Food Security in Saskatchewan* report as well as from



feedback from the conference participants and stakeholders. It has developed a website, involved more organizations and individuals, increased public awareness by holding a well attended and well covered media conference on World Food Day to announce its formation, held an organizational meeting to amend its Terms of Reference and to decide upon its membership fee structure, and is presently drafting a letter to key government officials to offer to meet with them to discuss the provincial government’s role in food security and to offer to work along side government to improve food security for all Saskatchewan citizens. The FAO endorses such cooperation: “States are encouraged to apply a multi-stakeholder approach to national (or provincial) food security to

“States and international organizations should consider the benefits of local procurement for food assistance that could integrate the nutritional needs of those affected by food insecurity and the commercial interests of local producers”

¹ According to *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security* adopted by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in 2004, “States and international organizations should consider the benefits of local procurement for food assistance that could integrate the nutritional needs of those affected by food insecurity and the commercial interests of local producers” (p. 26).

² “States may wish to promote gardens both at home and at school...” (FAO, 2005, p. 21).



identify the roles of and involve all relevant stakeholders, encompassing civil society and the private sector.” (FAO, 2005, p. 15).

Role of Government in Food Security

According to Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, “Striving to ensure that every child, woman and man enjoy adequate food on a regular basis is not only a moral imperative and an investment with enormous economic returns; it also signifies the realization of a basic human right” (FAO, 2005, p. x). It is the opinion of FSS, which is in sync with the United Nations 2002 declaration, that governments have a legal obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to food.

“Every person or group that suffers a violation of the right to adequate food should have access to effective recourse, legal or otherwise....”

In September 2002, the Saskatchewan Council on Children tabled its third report, *Making it Happen*. This report was directed to the ministers participating in Saskatchewan’s Action Plan for Children. Within the report, Recommendation 3.2, Ensure food security, states: The Government of Saskatchewan (should) develop a provincial strategy, in partnership with communities and businesses, to promote food security. According to this report the strategy should include:

- continuing the development of food programs such as community gardens, community buying, collective kitchens, baby food workshops, and school nutrition programs³;



- addressing issues of availability of low-cost nutritious foods;
- working toward a more sustainable food system; and
- recognizing that pre-conception, prenatal and post-natal needs of women are key to healthy early childhood development.

Members of FSS believe that it is crucial to act upon recommendation 3.2 and are more than willing to work with government to implement its strategies.

The *Voluntary Guidelines*, although not binding, enunciate the obligation of the state in terms of food security, “to take appropriate steps to achieve progressively the full realization of the right to adequate food” by passing “appropriate legislation and effective remedies of a judicial or quasi-judicial nature, if the right to food is to be more than an aspiration or mere rhetoric” (Marco & Blommestein, 2006, p. x). Under the section ‘Market systems’ it states, “States should encourage the development of corporate social responsibility and the commitment of all market players and civil society towards the progressive realization of the right of individuals to adequate food in the context of national food security”, and, “states should take into account the shortcomings of market mechanisms in protecting the environment and public goods” (FAO, 2005, p. 13, 14). Riches (2000) goes even further. He suggests that, “food is too essential a commodity to be left to the profit making dictates of the private market and particularly the corporate barons” (p.10).

According to Marco and Blommestein (2006), “the heart of the problem is the access to justice for violations of the right to food: if the right to food is really a right, it should be legally enforceable” (p. 3). At the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, 171 states approved a Declaration and a Plan of Action. The General Comment no. 12, paragraph 32, states, “every person or group that suffers a violation of the right to adequate food should have access to effective recourse, legal or otherwise....” (p. 3). It is, then, clear that if food is a right it is the responsibility of government to ensure that all citizens are afforded that right. Furthermore, “States should strive to ensure that budget cuts do

not negatively affect access to adequate food among the poorest sections of society” (FAO, 2005, p. 24).

“Food is too essential a commodity to be left to the profit making dictates of the private market and particularly the corporate barons”

Provincial government initiatives

The provincial government has attempted to improve food security for its citizens in a number of ways. The Department of Community Resources, for at least 8 years, has funded food security initiatives through the Child Nutrition and Development Program (CNDP) and supported, at their conception, the Saskatchewan Child and Nutrition Network (SCNN) and FSS. Through CNDP the provincial government has financed community and school-based child feeding programs. Regional Intersectoral Committees, with funding from the provincial government, have also supported food security programs as has the Department of Health by including food security in promoting healthy living and the Department of Learning by investing human resources. Finally, the Department of Agriculture and Food has provided limited assistance for diversity and development in organic and locally marketed food production. The province has offered some degree of support in the past to Saskatchewan producers in the organization of local Farmers Market Co-operatives for the direct selling of Saskatchewan products.

As can be seen, the provincial government has shown, and is showing, concern for its citizens most affected by food insecurity. But it can accomplish much more and FSS is prepared and committed to assist the government in realizing a food secure province.

3 “Regional and local authorities are encouraged to allocate resources for anti-hunger and food security purposes in their respective budgets” (FAO, 2005, p. 24).

Food Security Movement

FSS believes that there is a growing movement and mood throughout Saskatchewan, and indeed throughout the country, related to food security. Evidence of this may be seen in the ever increasing number of food security collaborations, food security programs and food charters in existence across our province and Canada. In Saskatchewan we have food charters in Saskatoon, Prince Albert and Kelsey Trail (Melfort, Tisdale and Nipawin), which lay out key areas of good food policy and actions as steps toward food security for all Saskatchewan citizens. Also, there is a food security coalition at the national level; Food Secure Canada, to which Food Secure Saskatchewan belongs, is comprised of both individual members and organizations. (See: www.foodsecurecanada.org)

The time to act provincially is now. The momentum gained over the past number of years should be exploited as we move toward a more food secure province. Medicare began in Saskatchewan; why not food security for its citizens? Let's, again, lead the way for the rest of Canada.

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