



Municipalities and Community Food Security

Community food security relies on having **healthy, just, and sustainable food systems**. Food systems are made of several, connected parts, including how and where food is produced and whether that protects the environment and creates good jobs. Food systems also shape how and where people can get healthy food, what foods are available, and whether or not people can afford it.

Community food security means that everyone has enough safe, affordable, and nutritious food to live a healthy life in ways that ensure their dignity, reflect their preferences and promote equal rights and opportunities.

Food is a shared responsibility and accountability - policies affecting food are within all levels of government, from band councils and municipalities to provincial and federal governments. We need to break down silos within, and across, governments and sectors to work together to build community food security. Municipalities can play an important role; for example, decisions about the design of our neighbourhoods can shape where food stores are located and whether it is easy to get there by walking, biking or taking transit. This series of policy backgrounders has a **municipal focus**, but we acknowledge that food systems are regional and require well-aligned policy at multiple levels.

Current State of Community Food Security in Halifax

On June 3rd, 2015, the Halifax Food Policy Alliance (HFPA) launched [Food Counts: Halifax Food Assessment](#)ⁱ, a scan of the current situation relating to food in Halifax. This report is a benchmark to inform policies and action towards building a healthy, just, and sustainable food system for Halifax.

One of the biggest challenges is that many households struggle to access and afford enough healthy food. In 2012, **one in five Halifax area households** experienced food insecurity and the region saw one of the highest increases (**49.3%**) in food bank use from 2015-2016 compared with other areas of the province and countryⁱⁱ. Of those 12 years and older, **63%** were not eating the minimum amount of vegetables and fruitsⁱ. These challenges take a toll on our health and wellbeing. Many Halifax area residents live with diet-related chronic diseases, such as some cancers and diabetes, and over **57%** are overweightⁱⁱⁱ.

REFERENCES

ⁱ Halifax Food Policy Alliance. (2014). Food Counts: Halifax Food Assessment.

ⁱⁱ Feed Nova Scotia. November 15, 2016. Press Release: Nova Scotia sees the Highest Food Bank Use Increase in Canada

ⁱⁱⁱ CCHS survey 2011-2012 Canadian Community Health Survey, Statistics Canada, 2010/2011. CANSIM table no.: 105-0502, 105-0592 data.

Halifax Municipality has begun to put several policies, plans and programs in place to help to address these issues including:

- Halifax Municipality’s [Regional Plan](#) which intends to shape communities that are “attractive and healthy places to live” and that “promote community food security.”
- Halifax Municipality’s [Community Garden Program](#) which promotes the development and expansion of community gardens on municipal land.
- Regional Council naming “**Healthy Communities**” as a core priority and the **Mayor’s Conversation on Healthy and Livable Communities** identifying food production and promotion as a key priority.
- The adoption of the **Urban Forest Master Plan**, which includes development of urban orchards.
- The [Centre Plan](#), which includes supports for enhancing food production, increasing access to healthy foods, and improving community-scale food infrastructure and services.
- The launch of the [Mobile Food Market](#), co-led by the Office of the Mayor in partnership with Halifax Transit, other municipal departments, Ecology Action Centre, Partners for Care, and the Nova Scotia Health Authority.

How can Halifax Municipality support healthy, just, and sustainable food systems?

We can build on the great work started here and learn from other cities. Across Canada, more municipalities are taking a strong leadership role in food by:

- Proposing visions and implementing action plans, such as through food charters and strategies.
- Creating community and municipal plans that encourage healthy food retail and promote urban agriculture.
- Using public resources, like libraries, community centres and transit systems to improve community food security.
- Buying local, sustainable, and healthy food for use in municipal programs and activities.
- Working to reduce food-related waste.
- Bringing together different kinds of partners, such as community, government, business, health, researchers, and others to create leading-edge ideas and initiatives.

The Halifax Food Policy Alliance is recommending the following opportunities as important next steps:

