

Food Resilience- Rejuvenating Community

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How and what we eat may be among the most important decisions we can make for our body's health and for the health of the planet. We are being challenged to find ways to eat healthy food because the prices of groceries are climbing higher and higher. Last year, grocery store food prices rose an average of 10%¹. This year, they are forecasted to rise another 5 to 7%. Nearly one quarter of Nova Scotians are having a hard time accessing healthy foods². It means that we need to think more creatively and communally about how to source nutritious foods, so that we can protect our health and the environment in which we live.

At the food security workshop last Thursday, we were joined by a very passionate, engaged group of five people who highly value local food and community-based solutions. There was a couple with a farm and their own greenhouse, a young man tasked with connecting the food security community in the Western region, and a mother and child who have just moved from Ontario and want to grow some of their own food. The discussions were very engaging and all kinds of ideas were brought forward.

One idea was to rethink how we use the term food security. The definition of food security that is commonly used is taken from the World Food Summit of 1996: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, [social] and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 1996). For some people, the word "security" brings to mind militarism. It can be directly connected to the term national security. It is often used in the context of the global scale and when talking about hunger, poverty, and food aid. The term food security still has its uses however if we want community-based approaches to flourish without an imposed "national security" agenda I find it best to use a term like food resilience.

Food resilience is when people have community-based capacities to source their own healthy food, even in times of crisis. It looks like a local food system that includes community gardens, backyard and patio gardens, community supported agriculture (CSA), farmer's markets, and farm stands. It can include practices like seed-saving, wild foraging, gleaned fruit and nut trees, and exchanging produce for goods and services. People work together to build the infrastructure and social supports necessary to sustain these local food options.

At the workshop, there were more ideas like vans and distribution centers with refrigeration so that Nova Scotia farmers can broaden the reach of food deliveries to Nova Scotian communities. There are food rescuing apps like Too Good To Go, Flashfood (Loblaws), Feedback and Olio that connect people with good, edible food that would otherwise go to waste. Community kitchens could be used to give budget-friendly cooking classes. Pay-what-you-can produce markets can help to close the gap between food banks and grocery stores. There could be free healthy lunches for children and education for mothers (and fathers) on sourcing and cooking healthy foods. Commons grazing, commons banking, and cooperatives for bulk buying food also came up.

There are many benefits to supporting local food systems and we as communities have the knowledge we need to support them. Supporting local helps to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions involved with transporting food. It also supports a system that has higher resiliency during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, during which time we saw major inefficiencies and wastage in the globalized food system. We can influence local farmers to offer organic or pesticide-free produce. Local, whole foods inherently have less chemicals than processed, packaged food in the grocery store and are thus healthier for us to ingest. Organising around local food initiatives builds community and interconnectedness.

What can we do to support a more resilient, healthy food system? Shop local. Visit the farmer's markets. Grow your own vegetables. Barter and trade for produce with friends and neighbors.

The abundance of potential local initiatives for improving food resilience is astounding. All we need is people power: aware human beings ready to be in service of their community.

¹ Canada's Food Price Report 2023 <https://www.dal.ca/sites/agri-food/research/canada-s-food-price-report-2023.html>

² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/food-insecurity-data-nova-scotia-2022-1.6833773>