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FOOD SECURITY IN NORTHERN AND ISOLATED COMMUNITIES: ENSURING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ADEQUATE AND HEALTHY FOOD FOR ALL

Report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Bob Bratina, Chair

**JUNE 2021
43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION**

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Indigenous and Northern Affairs**

**Bob Bratina
Chair**

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Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

has the honour to present its

TENTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied food security in northern communities and has agreed to report the following:

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SUMMARY

Food security contributes to people's physical and mental health and well-being. Food security exists when all human beings at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, healthy and nutritious food enabling them to lead healthy, active lives. Yet, many Canadians remain food insecure, a problem that is rooted in poverty and socio-economic inequalities. This is notably the case in northern and Indigenous communities, where rates of food insecurity can be up to six times higher than the Canadian average.¹ In northern and Indigenous communities, food is also particularly important to social, cultural and spiritual well-being.

In 2020 and 2021, the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs of the House of Commons undertook a study on food insecurity in northern communities to find ways to ensure that Northerners have access to healthy and nutritious food. The committee heard about the causes of food insecurity in the North, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation on northern food systems, the shortcomings of the Nutrition North Canada program and the need to support community-based solutions to food insecurity.

Based on what it heard, the committee is recommending that the Government of Canada:

- recognize that food insecurity cannot be solved by the Nutrition North Canada program alone and work with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to explore complementary solutions, such as income supplements or social assistance programs;
- recognize that food sovereignty is a precondition to the food security of Indigenous Peoples and Northerners and enable them to make their own decisions with respect to their food systems;
- launch a full external evaluation of the Nutrition North Canada program;

1 In 2017–2018, 12.7% of Canadian households were food insecure. During this study, witnesses indicated that 76% of Inuit aged 15 or over and living in Inuit Nunangat were food insecure in 2017. Similarly, witnesses indicated that food insecurity rates reach almost 80% in some First Nations communities that do not have road access.

- support Indigenous-led environmental management and climate change monitoring programs;
- enable the creation of new meat and traditional food processing facilities in the North.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That Environment and Climate Change Canada expand and ensure consistent, adequate, and long-term funding for Indigenous-led programs to manage protected areas, test water quality and monitor development and changes to the climate, such as the Indigenous Guardians Pilot..... 19

Recommendation 2

That Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency enable the creation of new meat and traditional food processing facilities in the North supporting local harvesters; and that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada work to increase animal production and create training programs for animal husbandry and butchering in the North. 20

Recommendation 3

That Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada work with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to launch a full external evaluation of the Nutrition North Canada program; that the program’s mandate be changed to improve food security outcomes in northern and isolated communities; and that, throughout this process, the Department consider, in co-development with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners:

- Ways to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and Northerners have direct input into how the subsidy is used in their communities, including which food items should be subsidized;**
- Expanding the Harvesters Support Grant or establishing additional measures to increase access to traditional foods;**

- **Conducting a gender-based analysis plus of the program’s benefits, with a particular focus on the distribution of benefits between low and high-income households and different household compositions;**
- **Establishing processes and new evaluation measures to ensure that Nutrition North Canada is transparent and accountable, and that it focuses on the needs of the most vulnerable individuals and families;**
- **Adding a social programming component to Nutrition North Canada;**
- **Making the Nutrition North Canada retail subsidy available to agricultural producers as well as community cooperatives, non-profits and community organizations, such as food banks, which provide food and services in some remote and isolated communities;**
- **Providing the subsidy to more than one store per community, wherever possible;**
- **Exploring the possibility of expanding eligibility criteria to include remote and isolated communities that may not lack year-round road or marine access, but where the proportion of household income spent on food and rates of food insecurity are disproportionately high;**
- **Expanding the list of eligible items to include non-food items sold in participating stores and used for hunting, fishing, and gathering; and**
- **Decreasing the administrative burden required to join the program. 26**

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that northern food insecurity is a complex problem rooted in poverty which cannot be solved by the Nutrition North Canada program alone, work with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to explore economic development opportunities and options such as income supplements or other social assistance programs to alleviate household poverty and increase the income levels of food-insecure households in the North; and that any new measure be indexed to the cost of living, population growth and inflation in the North. 27

Recommendation 5

That Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, recognizing that food sovereignty is a precondition to food security, enable Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to make their own decisions with respect to their food systems, including by:

- **Focusing on the North’s existing and well-established food systems;**
- **Providing long-term, sustainable funding and resources to support community-based projects, and to strengthen food production and processing capacity at the community level;**
- **Exploring innovative technologies to support local food production, processing, transport and storage; and**
- **Establishing new co-developed mechanisms and governance models to address gaps in existing policies and programs. 30**



FOOD SECURITY IN NORTHERN AND ISOLATED COMMUNITIES: ENSURING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ADEQUATE AND HEALTHY FOOD FOR ALL

INTRODUCTION

“Access to nutritious foods is not just necessary for individual well-being, but also for achieving broader public health objectives. Food insecurity threatens our cultural integrity, our overall social stability and has devastating effects on economic development. In the north, absolutely everyone is affected, even the food-secure.”

Mr. James Eetoolook
Acting President of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

The right to adequate food is an internationally recognized human right.¹ This right has been interpreted to mean that all people should “have sufficient access to food that provides all nutrients required for a healthy and active life at all stages of the life cycle, that is safe for human consumption and free from adverse substances, and culturally appropriate.”² It has been 45 years since Canada voluntarily undertook an international obligation to take steps towards ensuring that all people under its jurisdiction have access to adequate food.

Yet, food insecurity remains a serious issue in parts of Canada, particularly in northern and Indigenous communities.³ Food security “exists when all human beings at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, healthy and nutritious food enabling

1 [*International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*](#), art. 11, accession by Canada in 1976.

2 First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study [FNFNES], “[The right to food: a coast-to-coast look at food security among First Nations living on-reserve south of the 60th parallel](#),” Brief, 2021, p. 1.

3 Elizabeth Kay-Raining, Elaine Power, Jen Brady and Sid Frankel, “[Basic Income Guarantee to End Food Insecurity](#),” Brief, 2021.



them to lead healthy, active lives.”⁴ Conversely, people are food insecure when their access to food is limited by various factors, such as poverty and exorbitantly high food prices. Food insecurity is “an income-rooted problem that disproportionately impacts Indigenous [Peoples] and other racialized groups, those with disabilities, children, lone-parent families, and those receiving social assistance or earning less than a livable wage.”⁵

In 2020 and early 2021, the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs of the House of Commons (hereafter, the committee) undertook a study on food security in northern communities to find ways to ensure that Northerners have access to healthy and nutritious food. During this study, the committee heard from 38 witnesses, held eight meetings, and received 10 written briefs during the second session of the 43rd Parliament. The committee held one meeting with four witnesses during the first session of this parliament, before the House of Commons suspended its work because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In northern and Indigenous communities, food that is purchased at a store forms only part of complex and unique food systems that also rely heavily on traditional foods (also known as country foods or wild foods) obtained from hunting, fishing and gathering.⁶ Traditional foods are particularly important to the social, cultural and spiritual well-being of Indigenous Peoples.⁷ They also tend to be of a higher nutritional value than many items purchased at a store.⁸

4 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs [INAN], [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku, Executive Vice-President, Department of Environment, Wildlife and Research, Makivik Corporation). This is the definition of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. It was also cited in FNFNES, “[The right to food: a coast-to-coast look at food security among First Nations living on-reserve south of the 60th parallel](#),” Brief, 2021, p. 1.

5 Elizabeth Kay-Raining, Elaine Power, Jen Brady and Sid Frankel, “[Basic Income Guarantee to End Food Insecurity](#),” Brief, 2021.

6 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku); INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Mrs. Marie Rochette, Director of Public Health, Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services).

7 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner, Director, Poverty Reduction Division, Department of Family Services, Government of Nunavut); INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku); INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Mrs. Marie Rochette); INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Malek Batal, First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study); INAN, [Evidence](#), 4 May 2021 (Mr. Wade Thorhaug, Executive Director, Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre); INAN, [Evidence](#), 4 May 2021 (Chief Roberta Joseph, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation).

8 Ibid.

The committee heard that there is a crisis of food insecurity in the North:

- Across Nunavut, Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunatsiavut (northern Labrador) and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), together known as Inuit Nunangat, 76% of Inuit aged 15 or over were food insecure (2017);
- In Nunavut, 57% of households were food insecure and 79% of the territory's children lived in a food insecure household (2017);
- In Nunatsiavut, 68% of Inuit were food insecure (2017);
- In Nunavik, preliminary results from the 2017 *Qanuilirpitaa?* survey⁹ indicates that over three-quarters of Inuit are food insecure, with rates reaching 87% for youth between 16 and 19, and 89% for pregnant women.¹⁰

The food security situation is also dire in northern First Nations communities. The communities surveyed during the decade-long First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study (FNFNES)¹¹ reported an average food insecurity rate of 47.1%. The study found that food insecurity increased along a south-north axis, reaching almost 80% in some northern First Nations communities without road access.¹² To put these statistics into perspective, only 12.7% of Canadian households were food insecure in 2017–2018.¹³

9 [Qanuilirpitaa?](#) is a survey on the sociocultural determinants of Inuit health and well-being in Nunavik.

10 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner); INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. James Eetoolook, Acting President, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.); INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed, President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 January 2021 (Hon. Johannes Lampe, President, Nunatsiavut Government); INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Mrs. Marie Rochette); INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Ms. Kirstin Beardsley, Chief Network Services Officer, Food Banks Canada). For Inuit Nunangat and Nunatsiavut, data came from the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey; for Nunavut, data came from the 2017 Canadian Community Health Survey.

11 The FNFNES was initiated by a resolution of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). It was jointly led by the AFN, the University of Ottawa (2013-2019) the Université de Montréal, and the University of British Columbia (2008-2013). It received logistical and financial support from the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch at Indigenous Services Canada.

12 INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Malek Batal).

13 Based on data from the 2017–2018 Canadian Community Health Survey and reported by Tarasuk, V. and Mitchell, A., "[Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18](#)," Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF), 2020. This report was shared with the committee by Mr. Duane Wilson, Vice-President of Stakeholders Relations at Arctic Co-operatives Limited.



Grand Chief Garrison Settee of Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. explained that food insecurity jeopardizes the mental and physical health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples and Northerners.¹⁴ Food insecurity can lead to dietary deficiencies that contribute to other illnesses.¹⁵ It also has a negative impact on the educational outcomes of children and youth.¹⁶ Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation stated that the constant fear of food insecurity is itself “traumatic, demoralizing and unnecessary.”¹⁷

This report examines the testimony heard with respect to the causes of food insecurity in northern communities, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation on northern food systems, the Nutrition North Canada program, and the need for the government to support community-based solutions to food insecurity. The committee stresses that solutions to this issue need to be designed with the direct participation of Northerners.

The committee wishes to thank all the individuals and organizations who took part in this study and who shared their invaluable experience and expertise. The committee also acknowledges that conducting this study was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and that the pandemic itself exacerbated socio-economic inequalities and other issues related to food insecurity.

14 INAN, [Evidence](#), 18 February 2021 (Grand Chief Garrison Settee, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.).

15 INAN, [Evidence](#), 9 March 2021 (Mr. Frank Suraci, President and Chief Executive Officer, FJJ Growtec).

16 Ibid.; INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Tracy St. Denis, Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Development Industry, Tourism and Investment, Government of the Northwest Territories); Elizabeth Kay-Raining, Elaine Power, Jen Brady and Sid Frankel, “[Basic Income Guarantee to End Food Insecurity](#),” Brief, 2021.

17 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 January 2021 (Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy, Nishnawbe Aski Nation).

CAUSES OF FOOD INSECURITY

“There are so many things that are happening across Inuit Nunangat, but we need more investment and we need more of a focus on community-based solutions and less of a focus on ideas that other people might think are great for us but are things that don't really have a lot of bearing on what we would like to do.”

Mr. Natan Obed
President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

The leading cause of food insecurity is poverty.¹⁸ This section of the report explores the root causes of food insecurity, which include low incomes, income inequality and the northern infrastructure deficit, as well as factors protecting against food insecurity.

Food insecurity in Canada disproportionately affects Indigenous Peoples, racialized groups, those living with disabilities, children, single-parent households and those that are recipients of social assistance or low wage earners who do not earn enough to meet their basic needs.¹⁹ For Indigenous Peoples living in remote, northern or Arctic communities, food insecurity is compounded by significant inequalities in employment and income.²⁰ According to Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “[l]ess than 48% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat are employed.”²¹ Income inequality is severely high between Inuit and non-Indigenous people in Inuit Nunangat, where Inuit median income is about \$23,000 per year compared to about \$95,000 per year for non-Indigenous individuals.²² Moreover, Mr. Gérard Duhaime, Professor at Université Laval, indicated that “[l]ocally hired

18 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Hon. Johannes Lampe); INAN, [Evidence](#), 18 February 2021 (Ms. Lori Nikkel, Chief Executive Officer, Second Harvest); INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Ms. Kirstin Beardsley); Elizabeth Kay-Raining, Elaine Power, Jen Brady and Sid Frankel, [“Basic Income Guarantee to End Food Insecurity,”](#) Brief, 2021.

19 Elizabeth Kay-Raining, Elaine Power, Jen Brady and Sid Frankel, [“Basic Income Guarantee to End Food Insecurity,”](#) Brief, 2021.

20 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner).

21 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, [An Inuit-Specific Approach for the Canadian Food Policy](#), 2019.

22 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).



employees do not enjoy the same conditions or benefits ... [as] ... those who are brought in, who receive an allowance for food shipping.”²³

In 2018, according to the after-tax low-income measure, over one-fifth of Nunavut residents (21%) lived on low incomes, almost double the rate in the Northwest Territories (12%) and triple the rate in Yukon (7%). By way of comparison, the low-income rate for Canadian provinces was 12%.²⁴ The high cost of living and the cost of goods in remote, northern and Arctic communities exacerbates pre-existing household poverty. Housing and energy costs can be prohibitively high. Even healthy, store-bought food is out of reach for many people. As explained by Deputy Grand Chief Smallboy:

Purchasing significant healthy food to sustain growing families is impossible for many, primarily because of the cost. Many rely on imported foods, which are extremely expensive and often nutrient deficient options that further contribute to poor health outcomes. Because of the high unemployment rates in our territory, the majority of our families are forced to purchase and consume these unhealthy foods, which leads to our communities being disproportionately affected by poorer health outcomes.²⁵

Furthermore, federal income supplement programs available to all Canadians do not consider the realities of life in the North. It appears that the income replacement schemes operating in the North replace income at a rate that in real terms ends up being lower than in the South. For example, Mr. Alex Yeo, President, Canadian Retail, North West Company, informed the committee that in his view none of the federal income support programs, such as the Canada Child Benefit or Old Age Security “are indexed to the higher cost of living, operating and working in the [N]orth.”²⁶ Mr. Duhaime said that federal transfer payments for households use scales established for households in southern urban centres; however, the northern “food basket costs 50% to 100% more.”²⁷

Witnesses highlighted the role of income and other social support programs in reducing food insecurity. Mr. Malek Batal of the FNFNES argued that income support programs

23 INAN, *Evidence*, 25 February 2021 (Mr. Gérard Duhaime, Professor, Université Laval, As an individual).

24 Statistics Canada, *Canadian Income Survey: Territorial estimates, 2018*, 1 April 2021.

25 INAN, *Evidence*, 26 January 2021 (Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy).

26 INAN, *Evidence*, 4 May 2021 (Mr. Alex Yeo, President, Canadian Retail, North West Company).

27 INAN, *Evidence*, 25 February 2021 (Mr. Gérard Duhaime). The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is the new way to measure Canada’s Official Poverty Line. The new proposed Northern Market Basket Measure adapts the MBM to capture life and living conditions in the Northwest Territories and Yukon, comprised of “five components: food, clothing, transportation, shelter and other necessities.” Burton Gustajtis, Keith Lam and Sarah McDermott, “Proposals for a Northern Market Basket Measure and its disposable income,” *Statistics Canada*, 5 January 2021.

can lower levels of food insecurity: “in households where there was an [E]lder, a person who was on the old age pension, food insecurity was lower.”²⁸ Mr. Duhaime, as well as Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku, Vice-President, Department of Environment, Wildlife and Research, Makivik Corporation, noted the Government of Quebec provides funds to the Kativik Regional Government in Nunavik to operate a Nunavik-specific cost of living reduction measure.²⁹ Mr. Alaku noted that federal programs such as Nutrition North Canada supports reductions in the cost of shipping of food to retailers; however, additional supports are warranted. The measure in Nunavik is comprised of six initiatives to help reduce the cost of living: “[E]lders’ assistance; airfare reduction; country food community support program; household appliances and harvesting equipment program; food and other essentials program; ... and a gasoline [subsidy].”³⁰

Similarly, the Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre in Iqaluit informed the committee that the income support program provided to workers during the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to support food security: “In the week that the Canada emergency response benefit, CERB, was first distributed in April 2020, demand for our emergency food services suddenly dropped by over two-thirds.”³¹

Infrastructure and the Costs of Goods and Services

The acute infrastructure gap across all northern regions puts added pressure on the supply chain and adds to the cost of foods shipped from the South.³² Communities in the Arctic are remote, many without all-season road access or only ice road access in the winter and reached year-round by air or sea transport. Many remote communities rely on diesel for power, and water and wastewater, some of which is subject to boil water advisories, are delivered by truck.³³

The infrastructure deficit translates into exorbitantly high living and operating costs. For businesses in the Arctic and northern regions, acute infrastructure needs add to operating costs and weaken the food supply chain. Mr. Yeo outlined some of the

28 INAN, *Evidence*, 25 February 2021 (Mr. Malek Batal).

29 INAN, *Evidence*, 10 December 2020 (Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku); INAN, *Evidence*, 25 February 2021 (Mr. Gérard Duhaime).

30 INAN, *Evidence*, 10 December 2020 (Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku); Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *An Inuit-Specific Approach for the Canadian Food Policy*, 2019.

31 INAN, *Evidence*, 4 May 2021 (Mr. Wade Thorhaug).

32 In April 2019, during the 1st Session of the 42nd Parliament, INAN tabled a report on the significant infrastructure deficit in northern and Arctic regions entitled, *A Path to Growth: Investing in the North*.

33 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *An Inuit-Specific Approach for the Canadian Food Policy*, 2019.



problems in Nunavut: “[t]he cost of energy is up to 10 times higher in Nunavut versus in the [S]outh. Making a repair to a building in the [N]orth can be 50% higher due to the cost of flying in supplies and skilled trades and the lack of infrastructure that previous speakers alluded to.”³⁴ Witnesses called for the improvement of northern transportation networks, including all-weather roads and ice roads, the establishment of ports and docks for sealift access and the upgrading of existing airports to accommodate larger planes.³⁵

The effects of climate change erode already deficient infrastructure systems in the North; coastal erosion and permafrost thaw threaten existing buildings, as well as water and sewer infrastructure. The adaptation of existing infrastructure to climate change was also identified as an urgent priority.

Community freezers and spaces to butcher meat, process fish and store foods shipped from the South are also critical for sustainable local food systems. Lastly, access to reliable forms of energy was raised as a contributor to food security. For example, in Pikangikum First Nation in northern Ontario, which was recently connected to the hydro grid in northern Ontario, reliable electricity means “[t]heir breakdowns and their brownouts are much fewer, with therefore less wear and tear on their appliances and houses.”³⁶

Factors That Protect Against Food Insecurity

The committee also heard evidence regarding pathways to food secure communities in Canada’s Arctic and northern regions.

Grand Chief Settee emphasized that “[e]conomic opportunities are the thing that will bring emancipation to our people from poverty and education is our way out of poverty.”³⁷ While employment is part of the answer, others noted that a focus on paid employment renders the different forms of unpaid labour required to serve society invisible and undervalues traditional Indigenous hunting and gathering for subsistence purposes. Accordingly, it was suggested that paid employment is only part of the

34 INAN, *Evidence*, 4 May 2021 (Mr. Alex Yeo).

35 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner); INAN, *Evidence*, 10 December 2020 (Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku); INAN, *Evidence*, 26 January 2021 (Hon. Johannes Lampe).

36 INAN, *Evidence*, 4 May 2021 (Mr. Alex Yeo).

37 INAN, *Evidence*, 18 February 2021 (Grand Chief Garrison Settee).

solution, and several academics suggested a basic income guarantee to end food insecurity as:

most food insecure households (65%) rely on wages. To address food insecurity, jobs must be stable, wages must be sufficient, and those who are not employed such as those caring for children or elderly family, new entrepreneurs, and students must have a liveable income.³⁸

Food security for Indigenous Peoples in the North is closely linked to the practice of Indigenous cultures. Harvesting and sharing of country food transmit values, languages and traditional skills. It also fosters the practice of Indigenous cultures that were negatively affected by colonialism.³⁹ As stated by Ms. Lindsay Turner, Director of the Poverty Reduction Division, Department of Family Services, Government of Nunavut, “today there is a lot of concern that country food skills are not being passed to younger generations and that similar skills related to store-bought food are not being acquired.”⁴⁰

The FNFNES argued in favour of prioritizing investments in local food solutions, such as increasing access to and promotion of country food programs. In addition, efforts are required to ensure Indigenous Peoples can financially afford high-nutrition market food.⁴¹ These types of initiatives ensure a degree of self-determination for Indigenous food security so that local communities can continue to support themselves. The committee also heard of the high costs of snow machines, boats, gas and other equipment required to hunt and access traditional foods.⁴²

Raising household incomes and supporting investments in community and regional infrastructure will help make life more affordable, and healthy food more accessible, in the northern and Arctic regions. The committee values the many concrete proposals it heard from witnesses to improve food security in northern communities.

38 Elizabeth Kay-Raining, Elaine Power, Jen Brady and Sid Frankel, “[Basic Income Guarantee to End Food Insecurity](#),” Brief, 2021.

39 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, [An Inuit-Specific Approach for the Canadian Food Policy](#), 2019.

40 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner).

41 FNFNES, “[The right to food: a coast-to-coast look at food security among First Nations living on-reserve south of the 60th parallel](#),” Brief, 2021.

42 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner).



CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS EFFECTS ON COUNTRY FOODS

“Less appreciated is a diminishing supply of traditional foods and impacts on the First Nations way of life. Food security in Canada is also defined through a western lens and measured using economic indicators. More specifically, one’s ability to purchase food is the sole determinant of food security. This measure, however, does not account for the importance of traditional foods and medicines. The diet of First Nations people in the Yukon relies on the access to healthy populations of fish, caribou, moose and birds. Harvesting this wildlife involves traditional practices integral to our sense of self and maintenance of culture.”

Chief Roberta Joseph
Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation

Indigenous Peoples in the North remain closely connected to the land and have developed unique food systems that reflect this special relationship. Indigenous Peoples in the North hunt, fish and harvest, in addition to relying on market foods shipped from the South. Country foods are highly nutritious and their consumption has broader benefits such as the transmission of Indigenous cultures and languages, strengthening of social cohesion and overall well-being.⁴³ As Grand Chief Settee said, “[b]eing out on the land, and having access to the land, is the way our people heal themselves. That’s all connected with food security.”⁴⁴

Climate change poses a grave risk to the traditions and well-being of Northerners. Temperatures in the Arctic are rising two to three times faster than the rate of the global average and ecosystems in the Arctic are at the greatest risk of seeing adverse effects of climate change. Environmental degradation, due to a warming climate, industrial development and environmental contaminants, restricts the availability and safety of country foods.

43 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku).

44 INAN, [Evidence](#), 18 February 2021 (Grand Chief Garrison Settee).

Northern food systems are closely tied to the overall health of the environment.⁴⁵ The committee heard that climate-driven environmental changes have led to “drastic reductions in the quantity of harvestable resources available, and increased difficulty and danger associated with harvesting.”⁴⁶ Climate change has added an element of risk for hunters, altering millennia-old patterns of navigation and travel. In many regions, the ice is less reliable, making travel difficult as it freezes later or breaks up early. Witnesses indicated that reductions in sea ice affect the population numbers, migration and composition of marine mammals, birds and fish. For example, Mr. Wayne Walsh, Director General, Northern Strategic Policy Branch, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, noted that “[t]he effects of climate change are having a tremendous impact on caribou herds, fish stocks and migration patterns.”⁴⁷ These changes, in turn, can create limitations on the supply of traditional food for communities and several examples were raised.

Chief Roberta Joseph of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation discussed the decline of the chinook salmon migration in Yukon. She told the committee that there are various reasons for the decline in salmon stocks, including warming oceans and rivers in the rearing and migration streams. As a result of declining chinook salmon stocks, the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation has “had to volunteer not to harvest for one full life cycle. We just recently extended that for another year until we have a salmon harvest management plan in place for our [F]irst [N]ation.”⁴⁸

Mr. James Eetoolook, Acting President, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., and the Honourable Johannes Lampe, President, Nunatsiavut Government, both outlined serious concerns with the reductions in sheer numbers of the Baffin Island and George River caribou herds in Nunavut and Nunatsiavut.⁴⁹ According to the *Nunavut Food Security Strategy and Action Plan 2014-16*, “[p]reserving the ecological integrity of Nunavut food resources is a key component of a sustainable food system in Nunavut, and is therefore of concern to food security.”⁵⁰ Mr. Lampe noted that Inuit in Nunatsiavut have been

45 FNFNES, “[The right to food: a coast-to-coast look at food security among First Nations living on-reserve south of the 60th parallel](#),” Brief, 2021.

46 Human Rights Watch, “[Briefing on Food Security in Northern Communities](#),” Brief, 12 March 2021.

47 INAN, *Evidence*, 8 December 2020 (Mr. Wayne Walsh, Director General, Northern Strategic Policy Branch, Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs).

48 INAN, *Evidence*, 4 May 2021 (Chief Roberta Joseph).

49 INAN, *Evidence*, 10 December 2020 (Mr. James Eetoolook).

50 Nunavut Food Security Coalition, *Nunavut Food Security Strategy and Action Plan 2014-2016*, 2014, p. 7. This document was referred to by Ms. Lindsay Turner on 8 December 2020.



unable to hunt or consume caribou for over 13 years.⁵¹ Quotas on the allowable harvest of certain mammals are being adopted by Inuit across Inuit Nunangat or, in some cases, are being imposed. For example, Mr. Alaku observed that in Nunavik, in addition to adhering to strict quotas on beluga whales, “we are going towards a very restrictive caribou harvest going forward, knowing that the Leaf River herd is the only herd that we are harvesting.”⁵² Nunavik also reported a conflict between Inuit knowledge of the land and wildlife and Western scientific knowledge, where “polar bears are a great source of healthy food for our community, but we are at a clash with scientists. We are saying that polar bear populations are healthy, and then the trends that are projected [by scientists] say that polar bears are not healthy.”⁵³

Extreme weather events also threaten animal populations, affecting the hunt and overall food supply in the North. For example, in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, “people have ... hunted moose along the Slave River for generations, but wet weather and a short spring created so much water higher up in the woods that moose were not walking along the river this fall.”⁵⁴

The FNFNES raised concerns over the harmful effects of environmental contaminants in certain species of fish in northern First Nations. In northern Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, for example, “large predatory fish (such as pickerel and northern pike) in some areas have higher levels of mercury.”⁵⁵ In these areas where these fish are consumed in significant quantities, some women of childbearing age have “elevated levels of exposure.”⁵⁶

Several witnesses raised the importance of Indigenous Peoples’ involvement in environmental monitoring and integrated wildlife management.⁵⁷ Indigenous witnesses provided examples of contributing to wildlife management and environmental

51 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Hon. Johannes Lampe).

52 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku).

53 Ibid.

54 INAN, [Evidence](#), 18 February 2021 (Ms. Lori Nikkel).

55 FNFNES, “[Key Findings and Recommendations for Decision-makers](#),” Background document circulated to the committee, February 2021.

56 Ibid. Specifically, the study measured mercury levels through hair samples, and showed a relationship between estimated mercury intake from traditional foods and hair mercury. However, the report attests that these results suggest that the dietary estimate may be underestimated or there may be other sources of mercury.

57 INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Mrs. Marie Rochette); INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Gérard Duhaime).

monitoring. Greater inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in these initiatives was also cited as a “viable socio-economic sector that would create jobs.”⁵⁸

In order to adequately address environmental threats to traditional food systems, efforts are needed to strengthen Indigenous Peoples’ connection to the land and their stewardship of the environment, as well as their ability to pursue their own economic, social and cultural development. The committee believes that Indigenous priorities and values need to be recognized within relevant federal policies related to land use, development, conservation and habitat protection to maintain or enhance access to and the availability of high-quality country food. Therefore, the committee recommends:

Recommendation 1

That Environment and Climate Change Canada expand and ensure consistent, adequate, and long-term funding for Indigenous-led programs to manage protected areas, test water quality and monitor development and changes to the climate, such as the Indigenous Guardians Pilot.

As previously noted, equipment like snow machines, boats and motors, as well as ammunition, bait and gasoline, are required in order to hunt for game or fish, but these items can be expensive. Moreover, for some Indigenous Peoples, less time spent on the land due to the intergenerational effects of colonialism has also meant a loss of knowledge about country foods. For example, Deputy Grand Chief Smallboy told the committee that “land-based foods play a critical role in the diets of many, but these practices are becoming a luxury for many families who do not have the means to go out on the land or for those for whom the knowledge of country foods has been lost.”⁵⁹

With respect to traditional food and local food production and processing, the committee heard about problems around the imposition of food safety regulations and inspections designed in the South. Mr. Natan Obed, President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, noted that regulatory hurdles and inspection requirements made it difficult to sustain traditional food businesses.⁶⁰ Mr. Alaku stated that they “restrict the use of local and

58 INAN, *Evidence*, 23 February 2021 (Mrs. Marie Rochette).

59 INAN, *Evidence*, 26 January 2021 (Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy).

60 INAN, *Evidence*, 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).



regional resources.”⁶¹ Mr. Eetoolook added that trade is hampered by the lack of federal food inspectors in the North.⁶²

Ms. Tracy St. Denis, Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Development Industry, Tourism and Investment, Government of the Northwest Territories, explained that the Northwest Territories are trying to increase the local production of food, including of processed meats, poultry, and traditional food.⁶³ According to the Hon. Ranj Pillai, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, Government of Yukon, the territory is also trying to become more self-sufficient in order to reduce its vulnerability to southern supply chains disruptions.⁶⁴ Similarly, Mr. Merlyn Recinos, Vice-President, Business Development, Arctic Fresh Inc., made the case for the establishment of micro-businesses in northern communities to increase self-sufficiency.⁶⁵

The committee believes that the federal government should support the consumption and trade of traditional foods by dealing with regulatory and inspection hurdles. Therefore, the committee recommends:

Recommendation 2

That Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency enable the creation of new meat and traditional food processing facilities in the North supporting local harvesters; and that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada work to increase animal production and create training programs for animal husbandry and butchering in the North.

61 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku).

62 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. James Eetoolook).

63 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Tracy St. Denis).

64 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Hon. Ranj Pillai, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, Government of Yukon).

65 INAN, [Evidence](#), 4 May 2021 (Mr. Merlyn Recinos, Vice-President, Business Development, Arctic Fresh Inc.).

NUTRITION NORTH CANADA

“A significant and sustainable change is needed. We must re-envision food systems and food governance within our nation, because what has been made available through government funding and initiatives to address food security in the north simply isn’t working. Simply providing subsidies on food will not address this issue. We support a system change, placing emphasis on the traditional culture of food within communities and the significant role it plays in not only physical health outcomes but also mental health outcomes.”

Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy
Nishnawbe Aski Nation

In 2011, the Nutrition North Canada (NNC) program replaced the decades-old Food Mail program.⁶⁶ Whereas the latter supplemented a portion of the expenses incurred by shipping items to northern communities (a transportation subsidy), NNC subsidizes a list of eligible items that can be purchased from registered retailers and suppliers (a retail subsidy). NNC’s goal is to make nutritious food and some essential items more affordable and accessible in communities lacking year-round ground or marine access.⁶⁷ This section explores some of the concerns expressed by witnesses about the program, as well as their suggestions for improvement.

NNC was recently expanded with the addition of the Harvesters Support Grant, which aims to reduce the high costs incurred by traditional hunting and harvesting activities in

66 In 2011, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development – as it was then known – presented a report entitled [From Food Mail to Nutrition North Canada](#). This report provides details on the Food Mail program, the transition to the Nutrition North Canada program, and issues identified by witnesses regarding its implementation, features, and attributes.

67 Government of Canada, [How Nutrition North Canada works](#). In addition to the retail subsidy, the Nutrition North Canada program also supports nutrition education initiatives to promote healthy eating habits and food skills.



the North.⁶⁸ According to witnesses, this addition is “an important milestone”⁶⁹ and was “well received,”⁷⁰ because of the high costs associated with such activities. Mr. Obed spoke positively of the new grant, noting that it will increase the consumption of traditional food: “That not only does wonders for our food security, but it also helps with the transmission of culture and the connections that individuals have within a community. It builds community.”⁷¹ Deputy Grand Chief Smallboy stated that there is a need “to create more programs and services that encourage our people to be more out on the land.”⁷²

It should be noted that NNC will not, in and of itself, solve food insecurity in the North as addressing food insecurity is not an explicit goal of the program.⁷³ The NNC Advisory Board,⁷⁴ a body composed of Northerners providing advice to the Minister of Northern Affairs regarding the program, noted that NNC “wasn’t established to solve food [in]security on its own.”⁷⁵ As the main federal program with respect to food and nutrition in the North, however, it was discussed at length by witnesses during this study.

Some witnesses stated that the program lacks transparency and accountability. Mr. Batal explained that “we don’t know how the subsidies are trickling down to the consumer.”⁷⁶ This lack of transparency leads to distrust when community members do not see that the subsidy increases their food purchasing power.⁷⁷ Mr. Duhaime also said that the program had been poorly received in communities, noting that “there is a hint of neocolonialism in the lists of items that were deemed healthy and subsidize by [NNC]

68 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Mr. Wayne Walsh).

69 Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board, “[Introductory Speaking Notes for Nellie Cournoyea, Chairperson](#),” Brief, 25 February 2021.

70 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku).

71 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

72 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 January 2021 (Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy).

73 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Mr. Wayne Walsh).

74 Government of Canada, [Mandate: Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board](#).

75 Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board, “[Introductory Speaking Notes for Nellie Cournoyea, Chairperson](#),” Brief, 25 February 2021.

76 INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Malek Batal).

77 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner); INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 January 2021 (Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy); INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Laurie Chan, First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study); INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Malek Batal).

and that were forced onto the communities, telling them what defines healthy eating.”⁷⁸
According to Mr. Obed,

a healthy diet, a healthy lifestyle and healthy food choices are subjective. Inuit society and Inuit communities might have a very specific idea about what healthy foods fit within an Inuit-specific diet. If there are tens of millions of dollars every year earmarked for Inuit communities and the majority of the [N]utrition [N]orth subsidy services Inuit Nunangat communities but Inuit don’t control the eligible items list or the rate of subsidy, then it’s just another program that decides for Inuit what is important to Inuit.⁷⁹

Nutrition North, Poverty and Food Insecurity

A key challenge in addressing food security in the North is the relative absence of a poverty reduction strategy or targeted programs to reduce poverty that is specific to the realities of Northerners. Due to the high levels of poverty in the North, food remains unaffordable despite the NNC subsidy.⁸⁰ In its brief, the FNFNES wrote that “[its] data on food cost and on levels of food insecurity in remote communities show that existing federal programs such as [NNC] have failed to reduce food insecurity in the communities where these programs are present.”⁸¹ Community Food Centres Canada and the Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre similarly noted that “food insecurity in the territories has deepened since [the program’s] implementation.”⁸² Mr. Wade Thorhaug, Executive Director of the Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre confirmed during his appearance that “food insecurity in Nunavut has actually increased since the implementation of NNC, based on one report, despite an increase in the quantity of subsidized food purchased in communities”.⁸³ According to Ms. Turner, “[t]he program objectives should be food security rather than the shipping of food.”⁸⁴

The Government of Canada does not, however, measure the success of the NNC on the basis of its contribution to poverty reduction or food security in the North. Instead, the

78 INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Gérard Duhaine).

79 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

80 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner).

81 FNFNES, “[The right to food: a coast-to-coast look at food security among First Nations living on-reserve south of the 60th parallel](#),” Brief, 2021, p. 9.

82 Community Food Centres Canada and Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre, “[Written Submission on Food Security in Northern Communities](#),” Brief, 2021, p. 4.

83 INAN, [Evidence](#), 4 May 2021 (Mr. Wade Thorhaug).

84 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner).



two indicators used to determine program effectiveness are whether the price of the northern food basket is maintained or lowered over time, and the overall quantity of food shipped to the North.⁸⁵ The NNC Advisory Board stated that the program “has proven to be successful in meeting its mandated objective” and that “most Northerners appreciate that this subsidy improves access and lowers the prices of nutritious foods.”⁸⁶ Among the program’s successes, the Advisory Board cites an increase in the amount of food shipped to northern communities since its inception and the maintenance of the rate of inflation for food prices in eligible communities below the national average.⁸⁷

On the other hand, Human Rights Watch stated that although NNC “has helped maintain food prices in remote and northern communities, ... it has not significantly reduced them, resulting in a decrease of only 1.03 percent in communities eligible for the subsidy.”⁸⁸ The minimal impact of NNC on food prices has led Mr. Batal to conclude that the program does not seem to be working well for communities where it is implemented.⁸⁹ Similar concerns were voiced by other witnesses in their appearances before the committee.⁹⁰

Nutrition North and Socio-economic Inequalities

Mr. Obed explained that there are significant socio-economic disparities in Inuit Nunangat, especially between Inuit and non-Inuit; yet, because the program is “need-blind,” “the family that has a median income that is three to four times that of another family is going to the store and getting the same subsidy for the same items.”⁹¹ Community Food Centres Canada and the Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre agree that, “[c]onsidering the level of inequality [in the North], a universal subsidy is likely not the most effective food-security intervention.”⁹² The two organizations recommended

85 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Mr. Wayne Walsh).

86 Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board, “[Introductory Speaking Notes for Nellie Cournoyea, Chairperson](#),” Brief, 25 February 2021.

87 Ibid.

88 Human Rights Watch, “[Briefing on Food Security in Northern Communities](#),” Brief, 12 March 2021.

89 INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Malek Batal).

90 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 January 2021 (Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy); INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Ms. Kirstin Beardsley); INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Malek Batal).

91 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

92 Community Food Centres Canada and Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre, “[Written Submission on Food Security in Northern Communities](#),” Brief, 2021, p. 5.

[t]hat the federal government evaluate whether the Nutrition North Canada subsidy is benefiting higher-income households more than those that are food insecure, and make certain that any future changes to the NNC program ensure communities benefit directly from the subsidy and take into account the needs of food-insecure households.⁹³

Mr. Obed recommended ensuring that the program be targeted to support those who are food insecure, possibly reimagining it as a social program rather than a retail subsidy.⁹⁴ Mr. Batal likewise suggested transferring the subsidy directly to households, as opposed to retailers, and possibly “aiding families to actually be able to afford food whatever the food costs.”⁹⁵

Witnesses stressed that the program also needs to be adapted to the unique realities of the northern and Arctic regions. Indigenous Peoples must be proactively involved in its operations.⁹⁶ Mr. Todd Nadon, owner and manager of Fresh Market Foods (a retailer based in Sioux Lookout), explained “that this program is only successful when consumers are involved.”⁹⁷

Finally, Mayor Randy Jones of the Municipality of Gros-Mécatina noted that some retailers in his region are not applying to be part of the program “due to the bureaucracy and ... [the] paperwork that needs to be done.”⁹⁸ He added that often, there is only one store per community that is part of the program, which he said was unfair.

According to Mr. Thorhaug, it would be “worth taking stock of [the program’s] shortcomings” now that it has been in place for a decade.⁹⁹ Based on what it heard, the committee agrees and therefore recommends that:

Recommendation 3

That Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada work with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to launch a full external evaluation of the Nutrition North

93 Ibid., p. 2.

94 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

95 INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Malek Batal).

96 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed); INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Mr. Randy Jones, Mayor, Municipality of Gros-Mécatina).

97 INAN, [Evidence](#), 9 March 2021 (Mr. Todd Nadon, Owner and Manager, Fresh Market Foods).

98 INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Mr. Randy Jones).

99 INAN, [Evidence](#), 4 May 2021 (Mr. Wade Thorhaug).



Canada program; that the program's mandate be changed to improve food security outcomes in northern and isolated communities; and that, throughout this process, the Department consider, in co-development with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners:

- **Ways to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and Northerners have direct input into how the subsidy is used in their communities, including which food items should be subsidized;**
- **Expanding the Harvesters Support Grant or establishing additional measures to increase access to traditional foods;**
- **Conducting a gender-based analysis plus of the program's benefits, with a particular focus on the distribution of benefits between low and high-income households and different household compositions;**
- **Establishing processes and new evaluation measures to ensure that Nutrition North Canada is transparent and accountable, and that it focuses on the needs of the most vulnerable individuals and families;**
- **Adding a social programming component to Nutrition North Canada;**
- **Making the Nutrition North Canada retail subsidy available to agricultural producers as well as community cooperatives, non-profits and community organizations, such as food banks, which provide food and services in some remote and isolated communities;**
- **Providing the subsidy to more than one store per community, wherever possible;**
- **Exploring the possibility of expanding eligibility criteria to include remote and isolated communities that may not lack year-round road or marine access, but where the proportion of household income spent on food and rates of food insecurity are disproportionately high;**
- **Expanding the list of eligible items to include non-food items sold in participating stores and used for hunting, fishing, and gathering; and**
- **Decreasing the administrative burden required to join the program.**

NNC only addresses one side of the equation, namely food prices.¹⁰⁰ Mr. Duane Wilson, Vice-President of Stakeholders Relations at Arctic Co-operatives Limited, explained that “it does nothing to... address the most reliable determinant of food security, that being income.”¹⁰¹ It is evident that the program “does not make life in the North affordable.”¹⁰² Mr. Thorhaug noted that “[w]e cannot hope to address issues of food insecurity without first addressing lack of income.”¹⁰³ In his view, the federal government needs to “boost income for those [Northerners] living in food insecurity through tax credits or social assistance programs.”¹⁰⁴

Making life affordable and increasing income levels is beyond the mandate of NNC. Nonetheless, the committee believes that new measures could complement the work of the program by ensuring that Northerners who are the most vulnerable to poverty have the means to afford food despite exorbitant prices. Therefore, the committee also recommends:

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada, recognizing that northern food insecurity is a complex problem rooted in poverty which cannot be solved by the Nutrition North Canada program alone, work with Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to explore economic development opportunities and options such as income supplements or other social assistance programs to alleviate household poverty and increase the income levels of food-insecure households in the North; and that any new measure be indexed to the cost of living, population growth and inflation in the North.

100 INAN, [Evidence](#), 4 May 2021 (Mr. Duane Wilson, Vice-President, Stakeholders Relations, Arctic Co-operatives Limited); INAN, [Evidence](#), 4 May 2021 (Mr. Alex Yeo).

101 INAN, [Evidence](#), 4 May 2021 (Mr. Duane Wilson).

102 Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board, [“Introductory Speaking Notes for Nellie Cournoyea, Chairperson,”](#) Brief, 25 February 2021.

103 INAN, [Evidence](#), 4 May 2021 (Mr. Wade Thorhaug).

104 Ibid.



COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS

“[Food insecurity] has its roots in colonization and the disenfranchisement and disempowerment of Inuit through the killing of dogs and dog teams, the coerced relocation into communities and the push for a wage-based economy. There have been 50 or 60 years of a push for Inuit not to rely on our own society and our own food, and we’re only now trying to get that back.”

Mr. Natan Obed
President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

Solutions to northern food insecurity need to be northern-based and driven by community needs.¹⁰⁵ Ms. Turner told the committee that the Qikiqtani Inuit Association recommended shifting the discussion towards the notion of food sovereignty and the need to “[empower] Inuit to feed their own communities and control their food systems and supply.”¹⁰⁶ According to the FNFNES, food sovereignty is a requirement for achieving food security and it “emphasizes the close connection Indigenous Peoples have with their environment, the work being done by Indigenous communities to revitalize their food systems, the transmission of cultural knowledge about their lands, and the harvesting of traditional food (i.e., hunting, fishing, gathering, cultivating).”¹⁰⁷

Grand Chief Settee explained that “[f]ood sovereignty speaks to the rights of the [Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak First Nations] to sustainably meet our food needs in accordance with our customary food preferences and harvesting practices from our traditional territories.”¹⁰⁸ Food sovereignty means giving people back ownership and control over their food systems.¹⁰⁹

105 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Tracy St. Denis); INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner); INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Ms. Kirstin Beardsley); INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Tonio Sadik, First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study); INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Gérard Duhaime).

106 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner).

107 FNFNES, “[The right to food: a coast-to-coast look at food security among First Nations living on-reserve south of the 60th parallel](#),” Brief, 2021, p. 1.

108 INAN, [Evidence](#), 18 February 2021 (Grand Chief Garrison Settee).

109 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner).

Throughout the North, communities are developing and implementing innovative solutions to improve food security.¹¹⁰ Deputy Grand Chief Smallboy observed that “communities are eager to make change for themselves, but they need financial support so that they can acquire equipment such as rototillers needed to create gardens, infrastructure such as storage facilities and community-owned stores.”¹¹¹ Mr. Laurie Chan of the FNFNES also emphasized that “many of the solutions can come from the communities, but oftentimes they don’t have the resources to implement them. A couple of [federal] programs that can eventually support local solutions would probably be the most effective solutions.”¹¹²

Examples of local and regional initiatives mentioned by witnesses included:

- Young hunter mentorship programs;
- Community freezers (where residents can donate and share traditional food) and other storage facilities;
- Community-owned stores and centralized distribution centres;
- Community gardens, kitchens, and greenhouses;¹¹³
- School food programs; and
- On-the-land programs.¹¹⁴

Moreover, to achieve food sovereignty and lower food prices in the North, witnesses advocated in favour of increasing local food production, as well as other solutions that

110 INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed).

111 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 January 2021 (Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy).

112 INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Laurie Chan).

113 On 4 May 2021, Mr. Wade Thorhaug stated that greenhouses may, however, be another example of a “southern or commodity-based” solution. He noted that “the output [of greenhouses] is low compared to the inputs required, and there is often a lack of community support to sustain them over the long-term.” The committee therefore wishes to reiterate that the government should not pursue “one-size-fits-all” solutions to food insecurity in the North and that projects such as greenhouses should not be imposed on communities which do not see them as a solution.

114 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Lindsay Turner); INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed); INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Hon. Johannes Lampe); INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 January 2021 (Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy); INAN, [Evidence](#), 18 February 2021 (Grand Chief Garrison Settee); INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Malek Batal).



do not rely on food being shipped from the South.¹¹⁵ Mr. Chan explained that enabling Northerners “to access more local traditional food or find solutions so that they can store or share traditional food will be a more effective solution than subsidizing imported food to go into communities.”¹¹⁶ Mr. Frank Suraci, President and Chief Executive Officer of FJJ Growtec, a company selling “turnkey commercial grade indoor growing facilities,” said that we need to “enable communities to grow fresh produce locally at commercial volumes to meet community demands.”¹¹⁷ According to Mr. Duhaime, “local production by and for communities would have to be supported in a big way, and not only on a commercial basis.”¹¹⁸

The committee agrees with Deputy Grand Chief Smallboy, who said that northern communities cannot keep going from crisis to crisis: they need long-term solutions.¹¹⁹ Often, these solutions already exist; the government only needs to provide meaningful support. For millennia, people thrived in the North. Today, Northerners still know what is best for their communities. Therefore, the committee recommends:

Recommendation 5

That Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, recognizing that food sovereignty is a precondition to food security, enable Indigenous Peoples and Northerners to make their own decisions with respect to their food systems, including by:

- **Focusing on the North’s existing and well-established food systems;**
- **Providing long-term, sustainable funding and resources to support community-based projects, and to strengthen food production and processing capacity at the community level;**

115 INAN, [Evidence](#), 8 December 2020 (Ms. Tracy St. Denis); INAN, [Evidence](#), 10 December 2020 (Mr. Natan Obed); INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Mrs. Marie Rochette); INAN, [Evidence](#), 23 February 2021 (Ms. Kirstin Beardsley); INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Gérard Duhaime); INAN, [Evidence](#), 9 March 2021 (Mr. Frank Suraci).

116 INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Laurie Chan).

117 Frank Suraci, [Overview Presentation of the GROWTEC Technology Application on Food Security in Northern Communities](#), Brief, 9 March 2021; INAN, [Evidence](#), 9 March 2021 (Mr. Frank Suraci).

118 INAN, [Evidence](#), 25 February 2021 (Mr. Gérard Duhaime).

119 INAN, [Evidence](#), 26 January 2021 (Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy).

- **Exploring innovative technologies to support local food production, processing, transport and storage; and**
- **Establishing new co-developed mechanisms and governance models to address gaps in existing policies and programs.**

CONCLUSION

Food insecurity in northern Canada is deeply rooted in complex and interrelated issues such as poverty and socio-economic inequalities. Environmental degradation and climate change are further complicating the situation. And although the federal government put in place the Nutrition North Canada program to make nutritious food more affordable in the North, the committee heard that the program needs to be reassessed and reformed to lower food prices and support food-insecure households. The committee also heard that the Government of Canada must support community-based initiatives aimed at increasing food sovereignty in the North in order to improve food security.

The committee believes that the recommendations contained in this report will help ensure that northern communities have access to healthy and nutritious food. As it has done in the past, the committee will continue monitoring northern food security going forward. The committee agrees with Mr. Thorhaug: “We should not be content to live in a country where so many of our citizens are unable to meet their dietary needs, where food banks dot the landscape and where regions that were once food sovereign are dependent on subsidized imports.”¹²⁰

120 INAN, *Evidence*, 4 May 2021 (Mr. Wade Thorhaug).

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food John Fox, Director General Innovation Programs Directorate, Programs Branch Matt Parry, Director General Policy Development and Analysis Directorate, Strategic Policy Branch	2020/12/08	11
Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Wayne Walsh, Director General Northern Strategic Policy Branch	2020/12/08	11
Department of Indigenous Services Mary Trifonopoulos, Senior Manager Healthy Living, Population Health and Wellness Division, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch	2020/12/08	11
Government of Nunavut Lindsay Turner, Director Poverty Reduction Division, Department of Family Services	2020/12/08	11
Government of the Northwest Territories Tracy St. Denis, Assistant Deputy Minister Economic Development Industry, Tourism and Investment	2020/12/08	11
Government of Yukon Hon. Ranj Pillai, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources	2020/12/08	11
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Natan Obed, President	2020/12/10	12
Makivik Corporation Adamie Delisle Alaku, Executive Vice-President Department of Environment, Wildlife and Research	2020/12/10	12

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Nunatsiavut Government Johannes Lampe, President	2020/12/10	12
Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. James Eetoolook, Acting President Hannah Uniuqsaraq, Chief Administrative Officer	2020/12/10	12
Nishnawbe Aski Nation Deputy Grand Chief Jason Smallboy	2021/01/26	13
Congress of Aboriginal Peoples National Chief Elmer St. Pierre	2021/02/18	18
Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. Grand Chief Garrison Settee	2021/02/18	18
Second Harvest Lori Nikkel, Chief Executive Officer	2021/02/18	18
Food Banks Canada Kirstin Beardsley, Chief Network Services Officer	2021/02/23	19
Municipality of Gros-Mécatina Randy Jones, Mayor	2021/02/23	19
Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services Marie Rochette, Director of Public Health	2021/02/23	19
As an individual Gérard Duhaime, Professor Université Laval	2021/02/25	20
Eat Well Saskatchewan Carrie Verishagen, Director	2021/02/25	20
First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study Lynn Barwin Malek Batal Laurie Chan Tonio Sadik Constantine Tikhonov	2021/02/25	20

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board Nellie Cournoyea, Chairperson	2021/02/25	20
Arctic Buying Company Inc. Kivalliq Tara Tootoo Fotheringham, Chief Executive Officer	2021/03/09	21
FJJ Growtec Frank Suraci, President and Chief Executive Officer	2021/03/09	21
Fresh Market Foods Todd Nadon, Owner and Manager	2021/03/09	21
Arctic Co-operatives Limited Duane Wilson, Vice-President Stakeholder Relations	2021/05/04	31
Arctic Fresh Inc. Silvano Cendou, Vice-President Operations Merlyn Recinos, Vice-President Business Development	2021/05/04	31
Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec Daniel Lelievre, Manager Store Services	2021/05/04	31
North West Company Michael Beaulieu, Vice-President Canadian Sales and Operations Alex Yeo, President Canadian Retail	2021/05/04	31
Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre Wade Thorhaug, Executive Director	2021/05/04	31
Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation Chief Roberta Joseph	2021/05/04	31

APPENDIX B LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

43rd Parliament – 1st Session

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Serge Beaudoin, Assistant Deputy Minister Northern Affairs Organization Wayne Walsh, Director General Northern Strategic Policy Branch, Northern Affairs	2020/02/27	3
Department of Indigenous Services Constantine Tikhonov, Acting Director Environmental Public Health Division, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch Tom Wong, Chief Medical Officer and Director General Office of Population and Public Health	2020/02/27	3

APPENDIX C LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Brady, Jen

Canadian Produce Marketing Association

Canadore College

Community Food Centres Canada

Eat Well Saskatchewan

EnerDynamic Hybrid Technologies

First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study

FJJ Growtec

Frankel, Sid

Human Rights Watch

Kay-Raining Bird, Elizabeth

Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services

Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board

Power, Elaine

Prentice, Barry

Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 11 to 13, 18 to 21, 31 and 40](#)) from the 43rd Parliament, 2nd Session and ([Meeting No. 3](#)) from the 43rd Parliament, 1st Session is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Bratina
Chair

