

ACTION PLAN:
Food Security

ALLAboard:

**Manitoba's Poverty Reduction and
Social Inclusion Strategy**



All Aboard Action Plan on Food Security

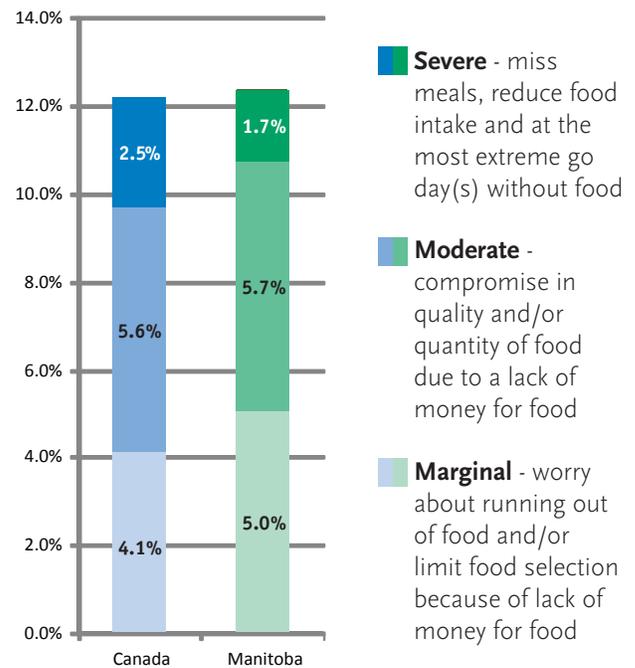
The Manitoba government aims for all Manitobans to live with food security. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, food security exists when “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”¹

In 2011, approximately 56,500 Manitoba households (excluding those living in First Nations reserve communities) experienced some level of food insecurity, ranging from those who worry about running out of food to those who miss meals due to lack of food.² At 12.4 per cent, Manitoba has the fifth lowest proportion of households living with food insecurity of all ten provinces and three territories, and one of the lowest rates of severe food insecurity at 1.7 per cent (See table 1).³

Food security is essential to the well being of both adults and children; insecurity can harm children’s physical and mental health, and contributes to a greater prevalence of depression and asthma later in life.⁴ In 2011, 18.9 per cent of children in Manitoba were food insecure.⁵ The situation on-reserve is even more severe: 24 per cent of Manitoba First Nations people on-reserve indicated that primary caregivers could not afford enough food for the children in their care.⁶ Food insecurity among adults also jeopardises physical and mental health, leading to increased risks of illnesses, including depression, diabetes and heart disease.⁷

Food Banks Canada (a national charitable organization representing food banks) reported

Table 1 - Household Food Insecurity, 2011



that in March 2013, 4.7 per cent of Manitobans accessed a food bank (Canadian average, 2.4 per cent), which is the second highest rate of food bank usage in Canada.⁸ The picture is clear: Some Manitobans are unable to access affordable and healthy food. Hunger is unacceptable in this province.

The Manitoba government held public consultations in March 2013, about *ALL Aboard: Manitoba’s Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy*. During these consultations, Manitobans ranked food security as the second most important area where efforts should be directed to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion, after housing.

¹ United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, *Rome Declaration on World Food Security, World Food Summit Plan of Action*, paragraph 1, Rome: November 1996. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e00.htm>

² Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). (2013). *Household food insecurity in Canada 2011*. Page 5. Retrieved from <http://nutritionalsciences.lamp.utoronto.ca/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, *Manitoba First Nations Regional Health Survey RHS & RHS Community Survey 2010 Newsletter*. February 2011. Page 6. Available at: http://amc.manitobachiefs.com/images/pdf/rhs_community_quickfacts_february_2.pdf

⁷ Tarasuk, V. et al.

⁸ Food Banks Canada. *Hunger Count 2013, A comprehensive report on hunger and food bank use in Canada, and recommendations for change*. 2013

Some consultation participants argued that without affordable housing and nutritious food, people cannot be expected to succeed in schools, training programs or jobs. The Manitoba government was also told that geography and hunger go hand-in-hand. Some communities may not have access to grocery stores or affordable food options, making transportation a food security issue. Participants suggested that supporting food banks and nutritious breakfast programs, making healthy food more affordable, and increasing the cost of unhealthy foods were all good ways to help people living in low income meet their food needs.

Food insecurity is a symptom of low income, and addressing poverty requires a long-term vision achieved through actions that are multi-faceted and integrated. This action plan highlights key existing and planned efforts to meet the immediate food needs of all Manitobans while improving their physical and economic access to safe and nutritious food. It is just one of seven action plans under the ALL Aboard Strategy, which sets out to provide a comprehensive package of actions that together address the underlying factors associated with poverty.

“Household food insecurity is linked to ongoing challenges with low income or poverty. While many programs offer subsidies and tax cuts to low-income households, they do not prevent low income: rather they act to reduce the effects of low income. A forward thinking strategy would be to create a more integrated approach to address low income and poverty issues ... a co-ordinated plan of action and budget, a government accountability structure, and a set of poverty indicators.”⁹

When we think of addressing food insecurity, we envision interventions by all levels of government and across all provincial departments that ensure those most at risk have access to safe and nutritious food. Community groups, not-for-profit organizations, businesses and food producers, schools and food banks all play an important role.

For all Manitobans to live with food security, we must address the underlying risk factors that are associated with being food insecure. In addition to low income and employment levels, risk factors include geographic isolation, lack of access to transportation and low food literacy levels. Some risk factors can be lessened by actions that provide direct access to nutritious food. For example, by providing food at no or reduced cost to recipients, or by providing financial assistance to families to meet their dietary needs. However, these short-term solutions are not as sustainable as those that are achieved by actions that address the underlying risk factors that are associated with being food insecure.

Many of the actions outlined below focus on short-term solutions to meet immediate food needs. Some actions integrate long-term solutions that increase incomes, improve food literacy levels and build capacity within geographically-isolated communities, so that Manitobans have the tools they need to meet their ongoing food needs. We have separated our actions into the following five categories:

1. Actions that improve access to nutritious food at no cost to recipients.
2. Actions that improve access to affordable and nutritious food.
3. Targeted actions that improve food security in northern communities.
4. Actions that address multiple risk factors and provide long-term solutions.
5. Actions that promote informed decision-making.

⁹ Howard, Alison and Dr. Jessica Edge. *Enough for All: Household Food Security in Canada*. The Conference Board of Canada. 2013. Pages 40-41.

Actions that improve access to nutritious food at no cost to recipients

Manitobans are working together to address the immediate needs of individuals and families who are food insecure with actions that make healthy food available at no cost to recipients, or that provide financial assistance for food. These actions help ensure low income does not create a barrier to accessing a nutritious diet. Children, youth and families are provided with food right in their schools and communities (ex: community gardens, community kitchens, and school meal and snack programs). With nearly one out of every five children in Manitoba living in food insecure households, it is critical to have actions that meet the needs of children and youth. Recognizing that the provision of nutritious food and financial assistance alone are not sustainable solutions to food insecurity, these actions also aim to integrate activities that improve food literacy levels. This enables Manitobans to choose, grow and prepare healthy food that can be accessed close to home and within their financial means.

Actions in Progress:

- Funding for community-based food program grants delivered through the Winnipeg Foundation's Nourishing Potential Endowment Fund, which works on behalf of children and youth to improve their access to nutritious food, nutrition education and opportunities to participate in food preparation activities.
- Providing project-based support for community gardens, community kitchens, cooking classes and other food security activities through *Neighbourhoods Alive!*
- Funding for the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba to help support approximately 170 schools participating in school nourishment programs (breakfast and snack), and approximately 50 after-school sites participating in the Vegetable and Fruit Snack Program, which aims to increase children's intake of vegetables and fruits.

- Providing the Manitoba Prenatal Benefit to eligible women to help them meet their extra nutritional needs during pregnancy. Beneficiaries also receive health and nutrition information and can be connected to community health services and/or Healthy Baby community support programs in their area.
- Funding Healthy Baby community support programs in over 100 communities throughout Manitoba to provide pregnant women and new parents with information and resources related to health and nutrition, early prenatal care, breastfeeding, healthy lifestyle choices, parenting ideas, infant development and strategies to support the healthy development of children. Low-cost snacks and meals, interactive cooking sessions, budgeting, meal planning, and milk coupon programs are offered.
- Working collaboratively with stakeholders across Manitoba through the Healthy Together Now initiative, to support bulk purchases and distribution of seeds and fruit trees, create community gardens where access to food is limited, deliver food preparation skills courses, and distribute locally-grown produce to those in need.

2013 and Beyond:

- Continue to support community-led food security initiatives that improve access to nutritious food at no cost to recipients through *Neighbourhoods Alive!* funding programs, including a community garden project in Thompson involving the local community school and other partners.
- Explore opportunities for nutrition support services in child care centres.
- Carry forward efforts to help communities tackle chronic disease risk factors through the Healthy Together Now Initiative, which actively addresses unhealthy eating.

Actions that improve access to affordable and nutritious food

Manitobans are working together to address the immediate needs of those who are food insecure through actions that improve access to affordable and nutritious food locally. These actions address a lack of transportation as a barrier to nutritious food, by supporting meal programs, food pick-up depots and food delivery options in 'food deserts.' These initiatives alleviate transportation costs, enabling low-income individuals and families to spend more of their limited financial resources on other priorities.

Actions in Progress:

- Supporting the Winnipeg FoodShare Cooperative, which partners with community organizations to provide families in low-income neighbourhoods with a regular source of nutritious food at affordable prices in the form of Good Food Boxes.
- Providing assistance to Neechi Commons Community Business Complex located in the inner-city of Winnipeg, which houses a supermarket, restaurant, seasonal farmers market and food kiosks that promote healthy eating and food sovereignty.
- Supporting Manitoba Housing's Congregate Meal Program, which provides close to 100,000 low-cost meals in approximately 20 seniors' buildings annually (in Winnipeg and Brandon). Additionally, support is provided to approximately 40 meal programs operated by local seniors resource councils in Manitoba Housing properties (outside of Winnipeg and Brandon).
- Partnering with Peak of the Market and the Manitoba Association of Home Economists to offer the Healthy Choice School Fundraising pilot project, which provides parent councils and child care centres with an opportunity to use locally grown vegetables for fundraising.

2013 and Beyond:

- Launched the Local Sustainable Food Procurement Pilot Program which will integrate more locally grown food into government and non-government institutions.
- Continue to support community-led food security initiatives through *Neighbourhoods Alive!* funding programs. These include support for food security initiatives in Winnipeg's north end, such as community education and engagement activities and a shuttle bus program to facilitate access to grocery stores.

"... as a university educated, single parent in a full-time professional career, I still live below the poverty line... I go without (food) so my children can have, which is having an effect on my overall health and will surely continue to affect me as I grow old.

Public Consultation Survey Response, 2013

Targeted actions that improve food security in northern communities

Manitoba’s northern communities are characterized by unique food security challenges and opportunities. High transportation costs create high food prices and – when combined with low incomes and food literacy levels – exacerbate food insecurity in the north. Effective actions would respond to local challenges and build upon local efforts to help northern Manitobans access sufficient, affordable, nutritious and culturally-appropriate food. To that end, the Manitoba government has been delivering the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative. Actions like this one help address geographic isolation by increasing community capacity to source nutritious and culturally-appropriate food locally. This improves access to food choices, particularly for low-income households in the north, who then have an alternative to transporting food that may be less nutritious from outside the community at costs that may be prohibitive.

“Food nutrition programs are not sensitive to the reality of poverty – Poor northerners can’t afford a diet based on the Canada Food Guide.”

Public Consultation Survey Response, 2013

Actions in Progress:

- The Northern Healthy Foods Initiative has helped deliver:
 - gardening and greenhouse operations
 - programming to assist communities to buy freezers for food preservation and to enable bulk purchases that save money
 - assistance for families to begin small livestock operations (turkeys, geese, chickens and goats)
 - workshops, conferences and training sessions on cooking, nutrition, greenhouse operations and teaching of traditional food skills (such as preservation)
 - food-related community economic development projects
 - partnerships to strengthen food self-sufficiency efforts (federal, interdepartmental and community-based)
- The winter road network, which is used to transport food to northern communities.

2013 and Beyond:

- Encourage the federal government to expand the Nutrition North Program for milk in remote fly-in communities, and undertake a milk price review (through the Manitoba Milk Price Review Commission) to identify actions that would lower the cost of milk in the north.
- Strengthen Northern Healthy Foods Initiative efforts, including growing and harvesting local foods, nutrition awareness and focusing on traditional food gathering and preservation.
- Expand a network of roadways on the eastside of Lake Winnipeg to provide road access to previously isolated communities to, amongst other benefits, improve access to affordable nutritious food.

Actions that address multiple risk factors and provide long-term solutions

While many of the actions in this plan address more than one factor contributing to the food insecurity of Manitobans, initiatives that aim to address multiple risk factors and reach multiple at-risk socio-economic groups are needed to achieve effective and sustainable solutions to food insecurity.

I will know my community is healthy when:

- everyone has food, shelter and love.
- everyone has ... food in their stomach.
- there is no need for a food bank.

Public Consultation Survey Responses, 2013

Actions in Progress:

- Supporting The Good Food Club which aims to build a healthy community and make nutritious and affordable food available in West Broadway (Winnipeg). The Good Food Club offers nutrition education workshops, community cooking kitchens, volunteer opportunities, transportation to local farms and access to a mini market selling food and other products from local vendors.
- Funding the FortWhyte Farms program which provides marginalized youth with work experience and training in agricultural production and operations, education about healthy foods, and access to high quality locally-produced food.

2013 and Beyond:

- Invest in innovative and comprehensive food security and poverty reduction initiatives, such as Winnipeg's first Community Food Centre. A project of the NorWest Co-op Community Health Centre, this centre will offer cooking classes, nutrition education, volunteer opportunities, free meal programs, a low-cost food market and access to community gardens.

“In working with kids in poverty, I wonder about the impact of poor nutrition on physical and emotional health, and on physical and cognitive development. Few of the kids with whom I work are calorically deprived, but many are nutritionally deprived.”

Public Consultation Survey Response, 2013

Actions that promote informed decision-making

The Manitoba government cannot provide food security to Manitobans on its own. Individuals, community-based organizations and the private sector have done tremendous work in this area and their unique knowledge and expertise of food insecurity risk factors and food security solutions are key. An ongoing examination of the issues related to household food insecurity in Manitoba, particularly for isolated and at-risk socio-economic groups, will help ensure appropriate actions are taken to target those most in need.

Actions in Progress:

- Establishing the Minister of Family Services' Roundtable on Community Action against Child Hunger, to work with stakeholders to develop community-based strategies and evidence-based solutions to reduce the number of children who rely on food banks in Manitoba.

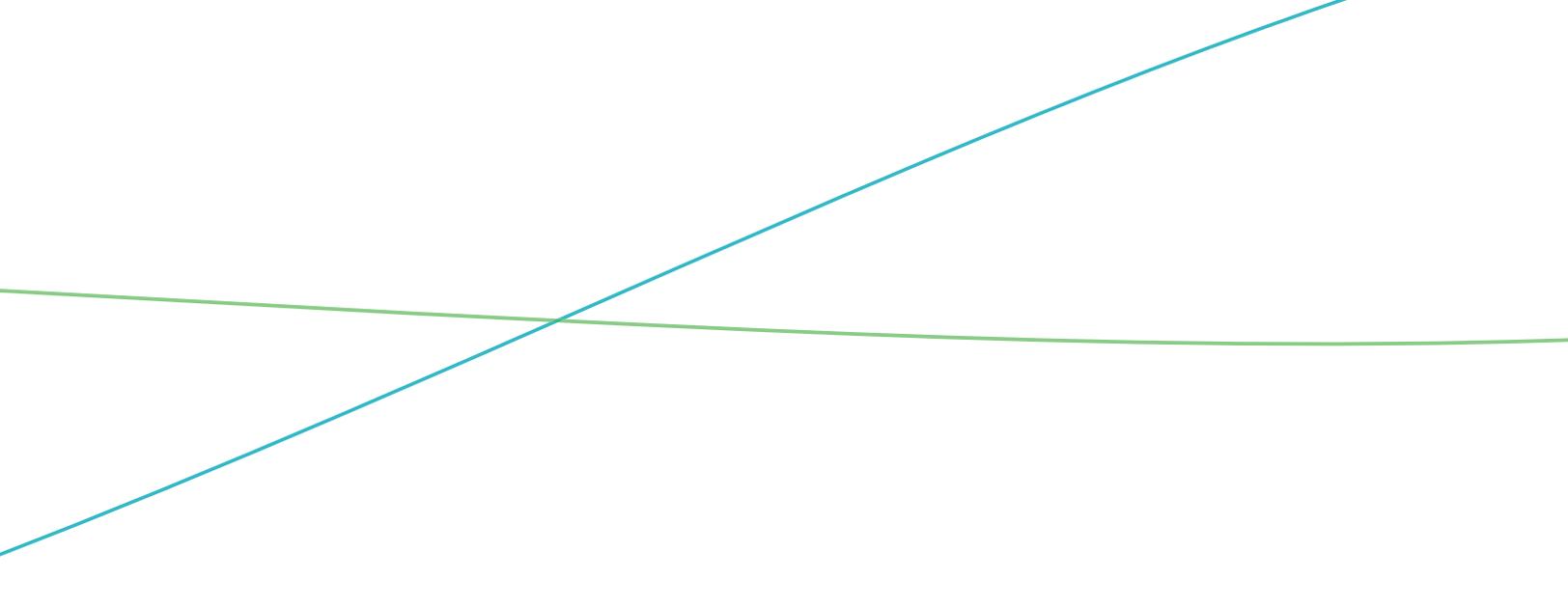
2013 and Beyond:

- Funding a Brandon Community Food Assessment that will focus on: determining the availability and affordability of food; identifying local food security programs; and making recommendations to support existing programs and to prioritize future food-related programs.
- Provide stable and streamlined support through the Provincial Reducing Red Tape Initiative for Not-for-profit Organizations including Food Matters Manitoba and FortWhyte Alive, which are government partners delivering targeted food security initiatives. This initiative better enables government partners to take long-term, strategic and effective action to address food insecurity.

Moving Forward

The Manitoba government believes that ongoing community consultation will be critical for achieving food security in Manitoba.

A community advisory committee will monitor the implementation of this action plan and advise on existing and future actions.



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Available in alternate formats upon request.