

DEFINING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

TRANSCRIPTION AND NOTES

0:00 Thank you for joining our Cultivating Food Sovereignty training program. In Module 1, we will define food sovereignty, clarify the difference between food sovereignty and food security, and explore how food sovereignty can help target food insecurity while building a more resilient food system.



0:24 Food sovereignty is the right to healthful, culturally appropriate, and sustainable food (1). Defining and controlling our own food systems, including production, transportation, and distribution of food, is a key aspect of food sovereignty, according to the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives (1). In Indigenous communities, food sovereignty recognizes the inherent and fundamental right Indigenous persons have to food from the land, the importance of participating in cultural harvesting practices, and the critical ability to manage one's own decisions about how much to take from the land and how much is needed (2). In order for this idea to be realized, many of the forestry, fishing, hunting, conservation and other environmental laws need reform (2). Similarly, in Canadian agriculture, food sovereignty targets how producers sell their products and whether Canadian consumers have access to that product before it is exported (1).

1:16 Food sovereignty is supported by 7 pillars (3).

- **Focuses on Food for People** means that food is more than a commodity, it is a human right. This pillar places feeding people at the centre of policies and programs.
- **Building Knowledge and Skills** is a pillar that promotes sharing of traditional knowledge and ensuring that knowledge is passed on to future generations.
- **Working with Nature** aims to improve the resilience of food systems by optimizing and contributing to ecosystems rather than draining the soil and land of resources.
- **Valuing Food Providers** is a critical pillar which respects the important work producers do and seeks to keep their livelihoods sustainable.

- **Localizing Food Systems** has several goals, such as reducing the distance between producers and consumers, which can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This pillar also rejects inappropriate food aid, such as only desserts being sent to disaster-stricken areas. Additionally, this pillar builds accountability into the food system as we know where our food is coming from.
- In addition to localizing our food system, food sovereignty **Puts Control Locally**. This means local food providers have ownership and decision-making power over their product. Local control also helps resist the privatization of natural resources and supports the sharing of territories and land.
- The seventh pillar was added by members of the Indigenous circle during the People's Food Policy process in Canada. **Food is Sacred**. It is a gift that should not be wasted or commodified. What we eat affects our spirit, and sourcing food from our own land helps build a connection to that land.



2:58 Food sovereignty and food security are not the same, despite many people using the terms interchangeably. Food sovereignty refers to ownership and agency within the food system. Do you have a say over the food you're eating and where it comes from? As a producer, can you choose where you sell your food? Can you access land to grow, harvest, or hunt culturally appropriate food? Food security is simply how much food you have, or whether you have enough of that food. For example, when a natural disaster hits, it is human nature to send aid. However, food aid is often not culturally appropriate or nutritionally complete. People in disaster situations cannot choose to eat something else and are frequently limited to what is given. Their food sovereignty is lost, even if they are considered food secure. If they had a resilient, localized food system, culturally appropriate and nutritious food would be more readily available and their food sovereignty and food security would be maintained.

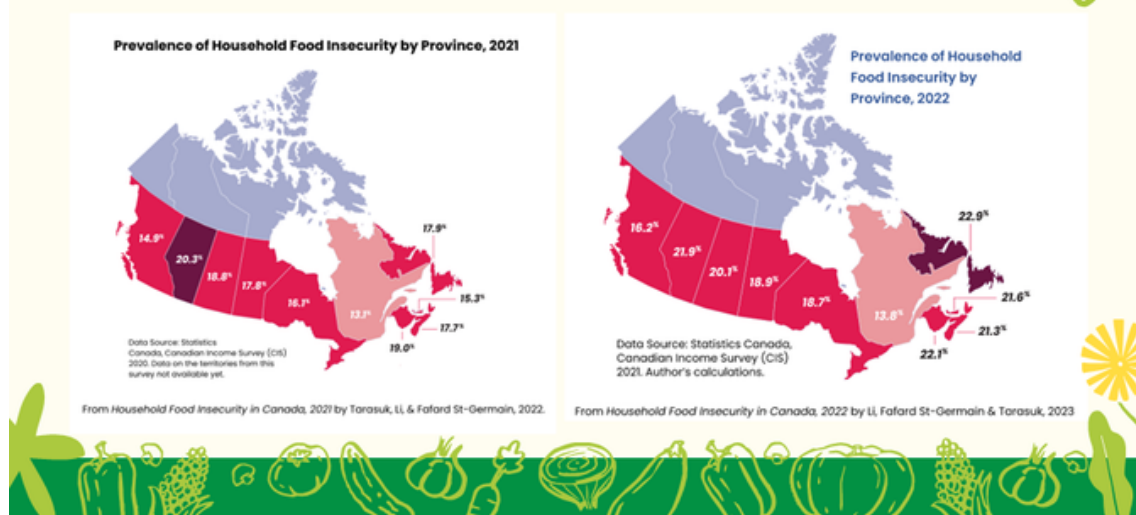
How is Food Sovereignty Different From Food Security?

“Food sovereignty is about rights and the decisions surrounding food, [and] decreasing reliance on external sources. Food security is part of food sovereignty, [it] is food wealth, a measure of how many days you can go without going to the store. Food security is about “how much food you have in your bank account,” while food sovereignty is about how you get that food in your bank account.”

— Jacob Beaton, Tea Creek

As the founder of Tea Creek, an Indigenous-owned and operated farm in British Columbia, explains “Food sovereignty is about rights and the decisions surrounding food and decreasing reliance on external sources. Food security is a part of food sovereignty. It is food wealth, a measure of how many days you can go without going to the store. Food security is about how much food you have in your bank account, while food sovereignty is about how you get that food into your bank account.”

Food Sovereignty: Targeting Canadian Food Insecurity



4: 28 Why should we focus on food sovereignty? Food sovereignty and food security are connected, and food insecurity is a prevalent concern in Canada.

Food insecurity is tied to factors such as low income, reliance on social assistance, renting and having children (4). Most food-insecure households in Canada are working, which means many Canadians are not making enough money to afford basic necessities (4). Additionally, Black and Indigenous households are over twice as likely to be food insecure than White households (4). In fact, People of Colour have significantly higher rates of food insecurity the White households across the board (4).

Food insecurity has also worsened across Canada from 2021 to 2022, with Alberta ranking second highest in foods insecurity after Newfoundland (4). Food insecurity is also usually worse in the territories, with 46.1% of households and none of it and 22.2% of households in the Northwest Territories being food insecure (4).

In rural and remote communities, food insecurity is often worse due to lack of options. Food in these communities is frequently more expensive and transportation to other food sources is expensive, time-consuming, or unavailable (5). Additionally, less support services are active in remote areas, which further compounds food insecurity (5).

Food sovereignty can shift the reliance for food onto one's own skills and knowledge. For example, in Indigenous communities with the ability to access traditional foods, nutrition and diet quality improve (6). Access to traditional foods incorporates pillars of food sovereignty such as Knowledge and Skills, Working with Nature, Localized Food Systems, and Keeping Food Sacred. Indigenous hunters and gatherers have agency over where they can source their food and how it is distributed, which has positive impacts on food insecurity in their families and communities. Similarly, only a few generations ago it was common for every household to have their own vegetable garden (7). The ability to grow food, cook and preserve vegetables was critical for ensuring one's family ate throughout the winter (7). Growing food for one's family, knowledge and skills, valuing those who grew the food and local control were embedded in the food system. Food insecurity still existed, but food sovereignty empowered families to feed themselves, and there is pride in the skills households cultivated.



6:57 Food sovereignty also enables adaptation and innovation as it puts agency back into our food system. A sovereign food system is a resilient food system.

Our current globalized food system is not without challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic showcased our global reliance on international trade in our food system (8); any disruption to this flow of trade can lead to empty grocery

shelves, food shortages, and rippling food security consequences (8). As global weather patterns become increasingly erratic, climate-related disasters can significantly disrupt our food system at a number of levels (8). A wildfire in California or a drought in Alberta can both impact food availability and cost in regions globally. Similarly, regional disasters can have immediate impacts on whether or not food can be transported to local grocery stores.

In 2021, this exact disruption occurred in the town of Lytton, British Columbia and the neighbouring Kanaka Bar Nation. Following a record-breaking heat dome in the region, a wildfire fueled by high winds and dry tinder incinerated the town and much of the surrounding region (9). Regional drought and increased air temperatures, both driven by climate change, resulted in this devastating wildfire, which destroyed grocery stores and led to refrigerated food spoilage (9). Only a few months later, severe regional flooding washed out important transportation corridors, which contributed to significant food system disruptions (10). Kanaka Bar Nation has been aware of the changes to the regional climate, and they have developed a Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and adaptation plan in response to emerging regional pressures, which include drought, impacts to staple foods such as salmon and berries, forest fires, reduced air quality and heat stress (11). Their adaptation plan seeks to continuously monitor the region's watershed and inspires to install a raw water reservoir to complement their local ecosystem (11). They are also tackling the vulnerabilities in their food system by extending local food production activities, documenting traditional food sources, implementing an agricultural plan, and working to protect salmon in the region (11).

The efforts and innovation seen in Kanaka Bar are a testament to the value of sovereignty and our food systems. Their efforts will support food security, skill development, local ecosystems and their local food system with or without regional disaster. Food sovereignty builds food system resilience and nurtures respect for both natural and human-driven resources. It does not avoid challenge and seeks to adapt to difficulties, whereas food security often relies on food from elsewhere. Kanaka Bar is responding to their food needs locally and immediately, which means they are able to adapt and adjust as needed.

9:48 Thank you for taking the time to listen to Module 1: Defining Food Sovereignty. Please review our references and further reading sections to learn more about this topic.

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FURTHER READING

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2. <https://www.bia.gov/service/indigenous-tourism/why-food-sovereignty-matters>
3. <https://www.nfu.ca/campaigns/food-sovereignty/>
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5. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/food-sovereignty-canada>
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