

Food and Water Security Course Module 1: Food Security and Insecurity Food Security Video Transcript

What exactly is food security? Well, Food security discourses began to first appear in international development literature in the late 1960s and 1970s sparked by the world oil crisis which precipitated the rising food prices of 1972–74 and the Sahelian food crisis of 1972-73, the Biafra famine in 1968, and the Bangladesh food crisis 1972-1974 (Edelman et al 2014; Escobar 1995; Jarosz 2014; Toronto Public Health 2006).

U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger convened the first World Food Conference (WFC) in Rome in 1974 after the previous devastating two-year famine in Bangladesh. He stated the necessity of increasing world grain production, establishing food reserves, and engaging in transfers of food from surplus areas to food deficit places (Friedman 1993; Jarosz 2014). It was no small coincidence, however, that the areas of food surplus were located in the European Union and the United States, thus creating the persistent notion that these two influential contributors would feed the world (Jarosz 2014).

It was also at the 1974 United Nations General Assembly that the Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition stated that:

Every man, woman, and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop fully and maintain their physical and mental faculties¹.

In 1986, the World Bank's Poverty and Hunger: Issues and Options for Food Security in Developing Countries provided one of the most widely cited definitions: "food security has to do with access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life" (World Bank 1986: v). Not only does the need for enough food for a healthy life, is required for food security but it also states, food security is "...achieved only if all households have the ability to purchase food" creating a necessity to measure ones' food security in terms of material wealth only.

The latest UN definition however states:

when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services, and care, allowing for a healthy and active life (UNFAO 2013:50).

Although the B.C. government temporarily opted out of measuring food insecurity in 2013 and 2014 (Tarasuk et al. 2015:8), statistics from other participating provinces indicate high rates of persistent food **insecurity** (Tarasuk et al. 2015, 2016).

1 World Food Conference General Assembly. 1974. "Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition". United Nations.



In Canada, the Ontario Public Health Association (2002) has taken a keen interest in **community food security**. In its 2002 paper, “A Systemic Approach to Community Food Security: A Role for Public Health,” a broad definition of terms is based on the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion which says that the importance and definition of ‘social determinants of health’ is:

Community food security is a strategy for ensuring secure access to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate food for everyone, produced in an environmentally sustainable way, and provided in a manner that promotes human dignity (2).

Ontario Public Health Association’s (2002) definition also includes and addresses several other points such as issues of adequate income for consumers and growers, local food production, environmental sustainability, fish and wildlife habitat protection, and access to nutritional, food-based community economic development, and social cohesion. Many health authorities nationwide have adopted community food security as a response to the rise in food banks and obesity along with the increase in diabetes rates while environmental concerns were also being tabled for discussion; bio-diversity preservation, the health ramifications of chemical pollutants, and the impact of genetically modified foods on the environment (Toronto Public Health 2006).

Food Sovereignty Definitions of Food Security

In 1996 at the World Food Summit in Rome the concept of food sovereignty emerged to counter food security discourses. It began as an alternative paradigm aimed at thwarting the neoliberal, industrialized economic model and took on an anti-globalization stance towards the corporatized, globalized, nationalized, and regionalized food systems, partly as a revolt against the dumping of subsidized US corn in Mexico (Beuchelt and Virchow 2012). Specifically however, in a meeting in Mexico in 1996, La Via Campesina first discussed food sovereignty. Based in Brazil, La Via Campesina (LVC), an international peasant² movement formed in 1993, is comprised of 148 organizations from 69 countries throughout the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe (La Via Campesina 2000c, 2008, 2009). The movement was premised upon a call for national sovereignty in agriculture, which aims to reframe and reconstitute an agrarian citizenship and ecologically sustainable local food production (Beuchelt and Virchow 2012; Desmarais and Wittman 2014; Desmarais et al 2011; Edelman et al 2014; Holt-Giménez 2009; Jarosz 2014; La Via Campesina 2003; Sage 2014; Wittman 2011a). In 1996 LVC (1996a, 1996b) defined food sovereignty as:

The right of each nation to maintain and develop *its own* capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce *our own* food in *our own* territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security (1996:3)³.

2 While the term “peasant” is seen colloquially as a pejorative term, national and international farmers’ movements embrace the term with pride, and it is therefore used within the framework of this paper as such.

3 See Jarosz 2014 – Via Campesina’s Seven Principles of Food Sovereignty (173).



It is important to note that as the definitions of food security evolved from a national right of governments to negotiate free trade agreements, to the need to include the right of individuals, food sovereignty became the prerequisite to achieving genuine food security. This fundamental shift is based on the rebuilding of direct relationships between producers and consumers and became one of its most essential cornerstones in achieving equitable social, economic, and political relations in agriculture. Truly, food sovereignty demands a healthy, diverse, and sustainable rural economy that does not just address food but goes on to offer a vision of a sustainable future within the broader issues of how, what, where, and by whom and for food is produced.

In 2003, LVC released a second food sovereignty position document that continued to oppose the neo-liberal food system:

The right of people to define their own agriculture and food policies, to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives, to determine the extent to which they want to be self-reliant, and to restrict the dumping of products in their markets. Food sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather it promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of people to safe, healthy, and ecologically sustainable production (La Vía Campesina 2003:1).

I hope that this brief explanation on the definitions of Food Security and Food Sovereignty have enticed you to think more deeply about the differences of these two concepts. If you have any questions, please note them, or email them to me and we can continue discussing these two definitions.

