

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

Food Insecurity Video Transcript

Food security is one of the most pressing dilemmas of our time with over one in ten people suffering from some form of food insecurity in Canada.

Currently, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO 2018:1), almost 767 million people live in extreme poverty, mostly within rural areas of 'fragile' countries where the rural poor are dependent upon agriculture for their livelihoods. The Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) also reports that, due to environmental vulnerabilities, persistent social and environmental crises, and burgeoning population growth, 815 million people were hungry and food insecure in 2016, an increase of 38 million people over the previous year (UNFAO 2018; McGuire et al. 2015).

Once regarded as a crisis of the South, the wealthy Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries to which Canada now belongs are also now reported as experiencing some form of food hunger; or inability to feed themselves under circumstances of deprivation (Dowler 2003; Sonnino and Hanmer 2016; O'Connor et al. 2016; OECD 2008; Riches 2012). In other words, the number of people experiencing some form of food deprivation has more than doubled, to total approximately 2 billion people globally today. At the 2000 Millennium Summit and at the 2002 World Food Summit, governments committed to halving hunger. However, every five seconds, a child under ten is reported to die from hunger and malnutrition diseases (UNFAO 2008b; UNHRC 2008). The current food crisis is due to many factors ranging from a shift to growing biofuels, rising oil prices, financial market instability, and increasing control of the food supply by industrial, agricultural corporations (Sonnino and Hanmer 2016).

In recent years, an enormous number of food insecure people in Canada has grown, leading scholars to question why food security exists in an ostensibly food secure country. In California, long-term drought is affecting B.C.'s primary source of fruit and vegetable supplies. According to Ostry (2010), British Columbia produces almost three billion dollars of food annually (4), about half of which is exported or about \$1.6 billion (7) (Government of Canada 2010). Although most of the exported products are fish and meat (predominantly cattle), most vegetables grown in B.C.'s expanding hot-house facilities are also exported (Ostry 2010). Because B.C. exports much of its produce, it is highly dependent on California for most of its \$2 billion of imported food, mainly fruit and vegetables (Ostry 2010).

Approximately half of B.C. food is imported from other provinces in Canada and other nations such as the U.S.A. (BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands 2006; Ostry 2010). In 2007 for example, 70 percent of fats and vegetables, 60 percent of cereals, fruits, nuts, and fish, and 40 percent of meat came from the U.S. (Industry Canada 2009; Ostry 2010). B.C. is most dependent on its import of fruits and vegetables. In 2007 according to Industry Canada (2009), B.C. imported 70 percent of vegetables not only from the U.S. but 17 percent from Mexico and seven percent from China, whereas 55 percent of fruit – primarily from California – was imported from



the U.S., eight percent from Mexico and Ecuador, seven percent from China and six percent from Chile. The remaining 13 percent came from 30 other nations.

Clearly, with B.C. so highly dependent on the state of California for its fruit and vegetable supply - because it exports 95 percent of its produced food (Brynne 2011) - diversification of its food supply outside of drought-affected California is critical and urgent. Furthermore, a re-envisioning from industrial food producing regimes and current government policies that support locally sourced and environmentally sustainable food production is imperative (Ostry et al. 2011; Qualman 2011). As climate change exerts its devastating effects on B.C. food production, the import and export systems must be addressed. In other words, we can no longer be so cavalier in our attitudes towards food security and food sovereignty when food production is being severely affected by calamitous, long term climate change.

Climate change aside, the growing and increasingly wealthy population is accelerating the demand for meat, dairy, and fat-rich foods (Ostry 2010). According to B.C. Stats (2010), B.C.'s population is estimated to increase from 4.5 to 5.9 million by 2036. This population increase will necessitate an increase of arable farmland base, requiring a further intensification of agricultural yields, ultimately resulting in the increased application of petrochemicals and fertilizers of which more substantial amounts of nitrous oxide (N₂O) will be generated (Desjardins et al. 2007; Qualman 2019). At the nexus of global demographics, dietary trends, future increases in greenhouse gasses (GHG), land degradation, and sustainable land management in terrestrial ecosystems, a transformation in our current food system must occur to halt what even the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) calls an “unprecedented challenge” for the one economic sector that covers the “largest surface area in the world; agriculture...” (IFAD 2013:9).

Food Security in British Columbia

Poverty continues to exist in the province of British Columbia at alarming levels. Data first began to be kept in 1989 by First Call (2019); a non-partisan youth advocacy coalition made up of over 101 provincial and regional organizations. The First Call mandate is to put children and youth first in B.C. through community mobilization and public policy advocacy (2019). The First Call Report refers to the LIM when it uses the term ‘below the poverty line’ interchangeably with ‘poor child’ or ‘poverty’ (First Call 2017). In B.C., 20.4 percent of children in B.C. aged 0 – 17 years, live below the poverty line according to Statistic Canada’s LIM (First Call 2017). Having the highest provincial record in Canada, one in five children (over 167,810 in B.C. and the highest number in the 0-5 age group - 20.7 percent) grow up in poverty. This abysmal record by provincial government points to the need for systemic policy changes that would support families in their child-rearing years (First Call 2017). Children 0 – 5 are at the most vulnerable age for proper brain development, so it is critical that their daily food and nutrition needs are met (McCain and Mustard 1999).

