Food Security

Expiry: April 30, 2027

1. Facts

1. Food security is 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.
   a. Food Secure is defined as: Sufficient and adequate access to food that meets quality and quantity needs[1]
   b. Moderate food insecurity is defined as: Significant food access issues, including income-related concerns and reduced quality and/or quantity[2]
   c. Severe Food Insecurity is defined as: Extreme food access issues, including income-related concerns and reduced quality and/or quantity[3]
2. Food security is a critical factor in the financial, mental, and physical wellbeing of students, and as such plays a significant role in their academic success[4]
3. According to the 2021 National Student Food Insecurity Report done by Meal Exchange, 41.7% of students surveyed faced some level of food insecurity in the 2020/2021 academic year.[5]
   a. In the Fall 2021 semester this percentage increased to 56.8%[6]
   b. The percentage of students experiencing severe food insecurity was 20.7% in Fall 2021.[7]
      i. This is an increase of 12.4% from 2016[8]
4. Marginalized students, including, but not limited to, students of colour, International students, Indigenous students, students with disabilities, LGBTQIA2S+ students, and student with dependent children/families face a higher rates and risk of food insecurity[9,10]
5. Food insecurity risk factors include, but are not limited to, being low income, living away from home, or being an ethnic minority.[11]
   a. Other contributors to food insecurity among students include, but are not limited to: the cost of food; limited time to prepare food; tuition fees; housing costs; inadequate income supports; transportation costs; limited knowledge and skills to prepare food; physical accessibility to food; and limited facilities and equipment to prepare food[12]
6. On average Canadians spend $200 - $250 dollars a week on groceries[13]
7. Strategies that food bank users employ to cope with the cost of food included applying for loans, trying to get part-time jobs or seeking more hours at the jobs they held, purchasing food by credit card, and pawning their possessions[14]
8. There is a stigma surrounding food insecurity, which is often viewed as a normal rite of passage for students in university.
9. Access to sufficient on-campus options for students with specific dietary needs including, but not limited to, vegetarian, vegan, kosher, halal, culturally appropriate, and allergen-free food is limited.
10. The University has a strategic plan to provide a variety of food vendors.[15] Strategies include:
    a. The Grocery Run program which was created to connect migrant women with healthy, culturally appropriate food options;[16]
    b. Working with the Leftovers Foundation and Fresh Routes to create Edmonton's first community mobile food market which provides both healthy and affordable foods (at below market prices) to communities with low-income or single parent families, immigrants and refugees, students, and seniors.[17]
11. Nutritional information for food products provided by Dining Services is available online.[18]
12. Access to food preparation facilities on campus is currently limited.
    a. Some Residences have limited food preparation facilities, however, they are typically insufficient for full meal preparation.
13. Students living in Lister Centre, Peter Lougheed Hall, and Augustana residences must purchase mandatory meal plans, which allow unlimited access to resident cafeterias and limited access to certain outlets on campus.
    a. The meal plan at UofA is contentious. In 2017 when it was first proposed it was protested by hundreds of students from in and outside of residence. These protests were the results in cost to

the meal plan and a transition to an all you can eat plan. The current meal plan is mandatory for residents living in Lister Residence and Peter Lougheed Hall (PLH). For an 8-month contract residence services charges $5,059 for a 7 day plan and $4416 for a 5 day plan.[19]

b. Every year the meal plan can be increased to adjust by inflation. This means that with large events that disrupt the food chain such as the COVID-19 pandemic the meal plan can be raised significantly.

c. Students continue to complain about the meal plan. Main concerns center on quality, cleanliness, and cost.

14. Aramark is a multi-billion dollar organization that the University of Alberta has signed a contract with Aramark to provide us with our food services across campuses particularly within residencies.[20]

a. Aramark is the second largest food provider in North America, providing food services not only to universities and sports venues but prisons. As they serve hundreds of prisons they are central to Canada's prison, industrial complex. They have also been embroiled in many scandals and lawsuits as they have been tied to “smuggling drugs into prisons, sexual contact between employees and inmates, and solicitation of murder-for-hire as recently as 2015”.[21] This has led many to cancel their contracts with Aramark. The states Florida and Michigan for examples have stopped using their services for their impact on prisons. And multiple universities have also cancelled their contract as “Student-led university campaigns in Washington, D.C, Florida, Tennessee, and Newfoundland, Canada have targeted Aramark for food quality concerns as well as its treatment of workers, while also criticizing the company’s ties to prison industries”.

15. Many students lack education and awareness of healthy eating and the options that are available on campus.

16. Students have access to organizations including the Campus Food Bank that work to fight food insecurity.

a. Programs offered by the Campus Food Bank include:

i. Campus Kitchens, which is a free service that puts on events to teach U of A students a variety of kitchen skills with a focus on low-cost ingredients. The first fifteen registrants for each session will receive the ingredients for the session.[22]

ii. The Grocery Bus program, which picks students up at the taxi drop off in front of the HUB/LRT entrance and takes them to the Superstore on Gateway Boulevard, T&T Supermarket or at some Specialty Stores on 34th Avenue (Spice Centre, Halal Meat Shops, etc)[23]

iii. WECAN Food Basket, which is an Edmonton based non-profit that offers quality fresh and low cost groceries.[24]

iv. Food Hampers, which reduce grocery costs for U of A students by providing food boxes as often as every two weeks.[25]

17. The production, distribution, and consumption of foods and beverages can have adverse social and environmental impacts.

18. There is a lack of research into how sustainable U of A’s food systems are. This limits our ability to improve.

a. Other universities have begun prioritizing the creation of sustainable food systems. Concordia University, for example, has invested heavily in providing sustainable, locally grown, and healthy food options on campus.

19. The SU runs a successful Reusable Dish Program.[26]

a. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the temporary pause of this program.[27]

20. Currently the SU does not have a waste and carbon tracking system.

a. This is important in the context of food because food waste and all the carbon generated from transportation is large.

b. Many universities across Canada and the United States are working to ensure that on-campus food vendors provide food from local and sustainable sources. This cuts down on the carbon footprint of meals while supporting local industries and food systems.

2. Resolutions

1. The Students' Union shall work to create an advocacy campaign on food insecurity to aid in diminishing the stigma associated with food insecurity.
2. The Students' Union shall work to create greater awareness of what supports exist for those facing food insecurity, including, but not limited to, the Grocery Run Program and the Working with the Leftovers Foundation and Fresh Routes.
3. The Students' Union shall work with student demographics who face higher rates of food insecurity to ensure that the avenues to accessing support and available resources are made clear and accessible.
4. The Student's Union shall advocate for greater on-campus options for students with specific dietary needs including, but not limited to, vegetarian, vegan, kosher, halal, culturally more appropriate, and allergen-free food.
5. The Students' Union shall consider affordability and cultural, religious, and medical factors when selecting food outlets in spaces controlled by the Students' Union.
6. The Students' Union shall collaborate with partner organizations, such as the Campus Food Bank when possible to reduce food insecurity.
7. The Students' Union shall advocate for education about healthy eating, and for nutritional information to be provided at campus food outlets.
8. The Students' Union shall advocate for the creation of food preparation facilities on campus that are adequate for full meal preparation and accessible to students living in residence.
    a. Facilities such as, but not limited to: water fountains, water bottle filling stations, community kitchens, and microwaves.
9. The Students' Union shall advocate that residence meal plans be affordable and offer nutritionally, culturally, religiously, and medically appropriate food to all students in residence.
10. The Students' Union shall advocate for the cancellation of the University's Aramark contract.
11. The Students' Union shall collaborate with partner organizations, such as the Campus Food Bank, when possible, to reduce food insecurity.
12. The Students' Union shall advocate for environmentally and socially responsible food and food containers to be provided on campus.
13. The Students' Union shall advocate for research to be conducted regarding the sustainability of U of A's food systems.
    a. The Students' Union shall advocate for the creation of a waste an carbon tracking system.

3. References

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