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More Than Just a Meal: Investigating Inequalities in the Kamloops Food System

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Food systems are defined as the infrastructure and processes that are involved in feeding a population. Food security is achieved 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. In this project I document food security in Kamloops, BC and investigate inequalities in the regional food system. I adopted a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to facilitate co-learning with research participants. To determine where and why inequalities exist in the regional food system, I developed research questions with community food security champions. I conducted 24 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with food activists, educators and community food security leaders. This research revealed that class and race are two factors that affect individuals' ability to achieve food security in Kamloops. The key objective of this study is to highlight how inequalities such as class and race restrict individuals from achieving food security in Kamloops and emphasizes that food security must be treated as a right for all rather than a privilege for few.

OVERVIEW

Food security is defined as, “the condition in which 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” (FAO, 2006). In 2018, the Canadian Government found that 1 in 8 households were food insecure, which is the highest levels of food insecurity the country has ever experienced (Tarasuk, 2020). This continues to increase with events such as Covid-19, climate change and overpopulation. Furthermore, factors such as class and race disproportionately affect who achieves food security. Although Kamloops possesses several renowned food security initiatives, such as Canada’s oldest independent food policy council and the Kamloops Regional Farmer’s Market of over 40 years, research on the intersection between social factors and food security is limited. The aim of this project is to explore and document food security in the rural-Kamloops area to identify where and why inequalities exist in the region.



METHOD/METHODOLOGY

- **Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)** facilitates co-learning and allows researchers and participants to work together on multiple aspects of the research process

- **Participant Observation (PO)** fosters significant engagement within the community and requires critical reflection of the researcher as part of the research process.

PO experiences included: The Loop Lunch and Learn, Kamloops Food Policy Council, Kamloops Food Bank, GardenGate, Skeetchestn Food Forest.

- **24 Semi-structured interviews**

- **Snowball sampling technique (referrals)**

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the opportunities to minimize inequalities in Kamloops food security initiatives?
2. What types of food activism, food education, and grassroots food security exist in Kamloops, and how might they contribute to reducing food insecurity?



KEY FINDING #1

Although every individual requires food for nutrition and life, food access and security are still highly controversial. In fact, food security disproportionately affects certain demographics. In Kamloops, this is prevalent in Indigenous and homeless populations. Factors such as class and race highly correlate with who identifies as food insecure. Culturally relevant and appropriate foods are often limited or unavailable too, and food initiatives such as the Kamloops Farmer’s Market have been described as lacking diversity and representation. There exist abundant opportunities to expand Kamloops food security initiatives to balance some of the inequalities regarding race and class.

KEY FINDING #2

Many local food security initiatives are working in silos. This presents substantial challenges to the community as resources like funding and volunteer capital are often extremely scarce. Resources could be used more efficiently with developed communication between food security organizations and supporting partners. Improved communication and efficient resource allocation, combined with coordinated community outreach, would allow for a more accurate measure of food insecure individuals’ needs in the region.



I advocate for the politicization of farmers markets. These spaces need to recognize that they’ve been catering to like a really privileged class. And that that needs to change if we want to be food secure.

We hear it over and over again that the agencies here often work in silos, and we’re trying to overcome that. But it’s not easy. And I don’t know why.

CONCLUSION

Achieving food security requires equal access to education and nutritious foods for all people, regardless of their class and/or racial status. Food security also requires coordinating countless regional initiatives to ensure resources are utilized to their utmost potential. **This study highlights how inequalities such as class and race restrict individuals from achieving food security and emphasizes that food security must be treated as a right for all rather than a privilege for few.** Overall, this study exemplifies how community champions, grassroots activism and locally driven food security initiatives work to minimize inequalities, and identifies the need for funding to support a chapter of the Kamloops Food Policy Council that supports the most food insecure individuals in the community of Kamloops.