

Food Instability and Waste in Canada

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Executive Summary

Food insecurity is a problem that faces many Canadians and people around the globe. Food waste is occurring at an enormous pace and is a significant issue in Canada. It is essential that we bridge the gap between these two issues and put the needs of individuals struggling with food insecurity at the forefront of Canadian concerns.

With many struggling we must create more resources than just food banks to help Canadians. In Canada, in 2019 alone more than one million people a month had to reach for help from local food banks. The ideal goal is to no longer have Canadians struggling with food instability. We must make access to food banks and affordable food easier for individual and families to obtain.

I discuss multiple organizations aiding in the reduction of food waste while also helping those in need of food. Companies have partnered with organizations such as Second Harvest food rescue, Square Roots and Beyond Food. These organizations all have different ideas but similar initiatives to help Canadians with this crisis.

Government must enact better policies and regulations to combat food waste. Companies must continue to further partnerships with organizations to utilize the over abundance of food they have before it goes to waste. We must bring greater awareness to all that this is a significant and real problem in Canada.

Food waste and subsequent food instability are enormous problems many Canadians face. Food waste happens at many different levels. Not only does food waste happen at grocery stores and restaurants but right in our own home. On one hand we have this huge food waste issue while at the same time many Canadians struggle with food security. How can we bridge that gap?

In March of 2019 over one million people sought the help of food banks in Canada. (Matern,R. 2019) This number is staggering and reveals a complex problem that needs to be brought to the forefront. We all can make efforts in our own homes to reduce our own personal food waste issues however, to have any great impact large corporations must actively support the reduction of food waste.

We simply cannot ignore that many Canadians are struggling to access food. It is estimated that 58 percent of all food produced in Canada is lost or wasted. (Nikkel,L.2019) This is unacceptable and we must work harder to ensure corporations and industry leaders.

take this problem serious. We cannot continue to let this many people struggle when we have so much food unused.

We must look at why food is going to waste. One major reason for food waste in Canada is due to large grocery corporations and restaurants stockpiling too much food. Once the food products pass the expiration dates, the food is considered not edible and thrown out. Much of these "expired" foods are still very safe to eat, however cannot be sold. Large amounts of food are thrown out every day. Food packaging also plays a role. When packaging does not keep food fresh it ends up wasted before it is necessary. Products come from all around the globe and to save costs are often bought in bulk by large chains and grocery corporations. While this is still a very big problem more and more attention is bringing the issue to light and companies are starting to work towards solutions.

Canada committed to the United Nations goal to “halve per capita global food waste at the retailer and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including Harvest losses” by 2030 (Canada,2020). On Nov 19, 2020 Canada launched the Food Waste Reduction Challenge. The Challenge is to find innovative solutions that have real potential to reduce food waste.

Loblaws, a large food supply corporation has set a goal to divert or reduce waste they produce by 50 percent by 2025. They plan to measure this goal against 2016 baseline results. They have invested in high tech inventory systems to help track in store product life cycles. This helps them order the right amount of food. This they say helps shorten supply chains and keep food fresher for longer. They have also partnered with Flashfood and sell food for up to fifty percent off the shelf price when it gets close to its best before date. They report that they have the program running in more than 400 stores and in 2019 this resulted in more than two million kilograms of potential food waste. They have also partnered with food banks across Canada and report that they have donated more than 5.4 million kilograms of food to food banks and other agencies. (Loblaws 2021)

Loblaws also partnered with Second Harvest Food Rescue. Businesses have an alert system where each business will register how much of a product they have left after sales and local non profit organization will then be notified and have the chance to take that food for shelters etc. Second harvest food rescue has provided over 500,000 meals to local communities as well as prevented at least 2,800,000kg of greenhouse gas emissions! (Second Harvest 2020)

What’s happening in Atlantic Canada? In Halifax a company “Square Roots” is helping the community by working with restaurants to redirect food waste. Square roots is collecting food that would probably be going to waste and instead is creating meals to sell to Halifax people for only \$5. This is a way restaurants can reduce the food waste. If they purchased more food then they can use those ingredients to create a meal for people with their tokens. When you pay for a \$5 token you can redeem that at any of the listed venues on their website and collect a \$5 meal from participating restaurants. (Patil, A. 2017) Square roots also has an affordable produce program. They purchase bulk produce that

is considered seconds from the growers. They then bundle it in ten pound bunches and sell it on the last weekend of the month at various locations.

Also in Atlantic Canada, we have a Dartmouth based company "Beyond Food" who is also working to reduce food waste in Canada. This company uses clean technology to turn fruits and vegetables into plant based supplements! This helps the environment and tackles food waste. This is a great opportunity for partnerships with growers and supermarkets to use fruits and vegetables destined for the garbage bin. (Canada, 2019)

We should think more about our own food and be mindful of the journey it makes before it comes to our home and we consume it. We need to think about how much unnecessary amounts of food we buy. We need to consider how much we waste and the impact it has globally by throwing out so much food. It is not just the food wasted but the packing and the labour that went into that product. This all contributes to our climate and negatively affects our environment with the use of unnecessary energy. Given the state of global warming and climate change we cannot afford this waste. The creation of greenhouse gases that the food production and distribution contributes to the climate crisis. We know that often while discarding these mass amounts of thrown out food, packaging is likely not being separated or sorted and composting may not be taking place.

What can we do better? What can corporations do better? What can the government do better? I believe that while things have been improving and our leaders and big corporations are starting to take steps to reduce food waste much more can be done. Better policies need to be in place. Companies volunteering to reduce food waste is excellent but it is not enough. Our government at various levels will need to enact better regulations and policies around food waste and food security. It is not enough to just hope for companies to volunteer in the commitment to reduce food waste. More detail in food waste plans from food suppliers, grocery stores, restaurants, hotels, convention centres and beyond are needed. Goals need to be continuously monitored and revised. We can see that there are some great programs in place that use innovative ways to reduce waste but it must continue.

In the research I completed I was not able to find much information about First Nations in Canada being involved in the implementation or discussions around Food waste. There is plenty of statistics and information out there to show that poverty is a major crisis in many First Nations communities across Canada. Those in poverty of course are those with the greatest need for healthy, good quality food. I believe this is a lost opportunity and partnerships should be explored with First nation communities across Canada.

In closing we can do better, we must do better for the next seven generations and beyond.

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