

Fact Sheet #4

Rising food costs a key factor of food insecurity, especially in the North

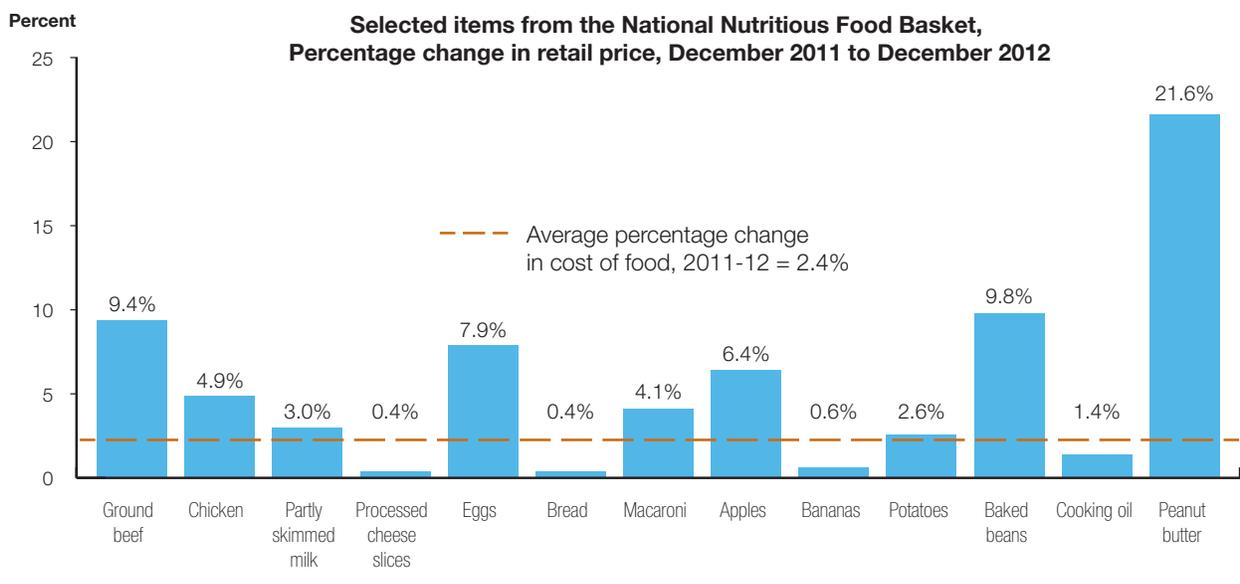
The surge in food bank users and high levels of food insecurity are two of the most visible and lasting impacts of the 2008-2009 recession. Stagnant incomes, inadequate income benefits, and rising food costs have resulted in high levels of food insecurity, especially in remote and northern Aboriginal communities. While food banks were originally intended only as temporary stop-gap measures, they have now become entrenched community institutions in the absence of coordinated efforts to eliminate poverty.

Low-income families cannot afford a healthy diet

- Far too many Canadians do not have access to nutritious food “in sufficient quantities and of sufficient quality” to maintain their health and well-being.³⁰
- According to the 2011 edition of *Cost of Eating in British Columbia*, the average monthly cost of a nutritious food basket³¹ for a family of four in BC was \$868 – or \$217 per week.³² This represents almost one-half of the income of a family on social assistance and more than one-third of the income of a working poor family. The situation is similar in other provinces.³³

- The rising costs of protein-rich foods such as ground beef and sliced ham, as well as fresh fruits and vegetables, make it very difficult for many families to purchase a healthy diet.³⁴
- The disparity between income and the cost of healthy food is particularly acute in northern Aboriginal communities. The 2007-2008 Inuit Health Survey found that the average cost of groceries was \$380 per week in Nunavut, Nunatsiavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, an amount roughly equivalent to the weekly earnings of half the adult population.³⁵

The cost of healthy food is rising faster than inflation



Statistics Canada. Table 326-0012 - Average retail prices for food and other selected items, monthly (dollars)

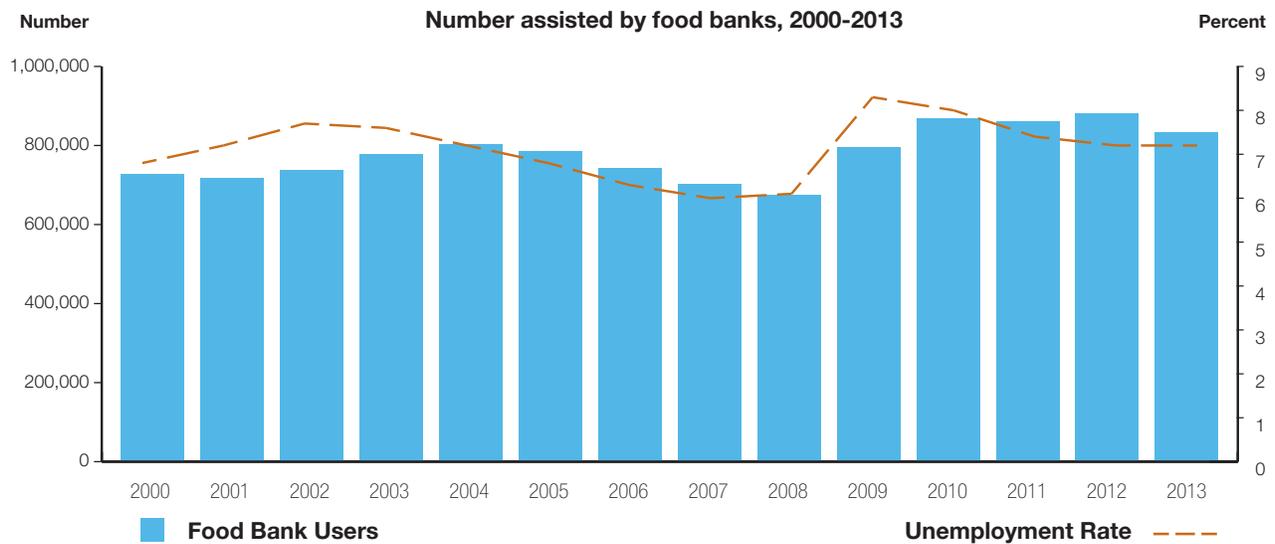
One in eight Canadians experienced food insecurity in 2011

- The high cost of healthy food is a key factor behind significant levels of food insecurity in Canada, especially among low-income families.³⁶
- Research from the Canadian Community Health Survey has found that slightly more than 12% of Canadian households were “food insecure” in 2011 – a number totalling more than 1.6 million households and 3.9 million people. These levels represent an increase of over 100,000 households (and 450,000 Canadians) since 2008.³⁷
- Thirty-six per cent of households in Nunavut were food insecure, the highest concentration in Canada. Food insecurity rates in the Maritimes, Yukon, and Northwest Territories also exceeded 15%.³⁸
- Food insecurity levels were especially high among northern Aboriginal communities. The Nunavut Inuit Child Health Survey found that nearly 70% of Inuit preschoolers aged three to five resided in food insecure households. Overall, 31% of children were “moderately” food insecure, and 25% were “severely” food insecure.³⁹

Canadian food banks continue to be in high demand

- Food bank use is another marker of food insecurity. *Hunger Count 2013* reveals that 834,000 people turned to food banks or an affiliated food program in March 2013.⁴⁰ This represents a decline of 4.5% from 2012, but is still 23% higher than the same period in 2008.
- Based on March figures, Food Banks Canada estimates that 1.7 million individuals will be helped by a food bank at least once over the course of 2013.
- As in the past, children made up the largest single group of food bank users in 2013 at 36.4%, down slightly from 2012. One-quarter of those assisted (25%) were lone-parent families and another 22% were two-parent families with children.
- Eleven per cent of food bank clients identified as Aboriginal, while another 11% were immigrants or refugees, two groups at great risk of experiencing poverty.
- In March 2013, about 12% of food bank users reported that employment was their primary source of income, down from 15% in 2008. The largest group of clients were social assistance recipients at 50%.

High levels of food bank use persist through the post-recession period



Source: Food Banks Canada (2013), Hunger Count 2013; Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 282-0002.