An Inuit-Specific Approach for the Canadian Food Policy
About Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national representational organization for the 65,000 Inuit in Canada. The majority of Inuit live in Inuit Nunangat, the Inuit homeland that includes the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Quebec), and Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador). Inuit Nunangat includes 51 communities and encompasses roughly 35 percent of Canada’s landmass and 50 percent of its coastline.

The comprehensive land claim agreements that have been settled in Inuit Nunangat form a core component of our organization’s mandate. These land claims have the status of protected treaties under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and we remain committed to fully implementing them in partnership with the Crown. ITK advocates for policies, programs and services to address the social, cultural, political and environmental issues facing our people.

ITK is governed by a Board of Directors composed of the following members:

- Chair and CEO, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation
- President, Makivik Corporation
- President, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated
- President, Nunatsiavut Government

In addition to voting members, the following non-voting Permanent Participant Representatives also sit on the Board:

- President, Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada
- President, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada
- President, National Inuit Youth Council

Vision

Canadian Inuit are prospering through unity and self-determination

Mission

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami is the national voice for protecting and advancing the rights and interests of Inuit in Canada
Table of Contents

Common Definitions .................................................................................................................. 2
Acronyms .................................................................................................................................. 2
Executive Summary .................................................................................................................. 3
About ITK’s Department of Health and Social Development .................................................. 4
Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 5
Part 1: Engagement Process ..................................................................................................... 6
   Engagement Overview ........................................................................................................... 6
Part 2: Background ................................................................................................................... 7
   Inuit in Canada ..................................................................................................................... 7
   Inuit Communities ............................................................................................................... 7
   Inuit Food Systems ............................................................................................................... 8
   Historical Context for Inuit Food Systems ........................................................................... 9
   Social and Health Inequities ............................................................................................... 10
   Food Insecurity in Inuit Nunangat ...................................................................................... 11
   Environmental Change ......................................................................................................... 12
   Food Security and Food System Policies, Programs, Services and Other Initiatives .......... 13
Part 3: Engagement Findings .................................................................................................... 14
   Vision ................................................................................................................................... 14
   Guiding Principles ................................................................................................................ 15
   Inuit Food System Challenges and Barriers ......................................................................... 16
      Institutionalized Discrimination ...................................................................................... 16
      Quantity and Access ......................................................................................................... 16
      Quality .............................................................................................................................. 17
      Cost .................................................................................................................................. 17
      Knowledge and Skills ....................................................................................................... 18
Part 4: Recommendations for an Improved Canadian Food Policy ........................................ 19
   Governance and Funding ..................................................................................................... 19
   Income ................................................................................................................................. 20
   Food Systems Infrastructure and Businesses ....................................................................... 21
   Country and Market Food Access ....................................................................................... 22
   Monitoring and Evaluation ................................................................................................. 23
Conclusions ............................................................................................................................... 24
References ................................................................................................................................ 25
Appendices ............................................................................................................................... 26
   Appendix I – Inuit Food Systems Initiatives ....................................................................... 26
   Appendix II – Nutrition North Canada Program Engagement
      IFSWG Written Submission ............................................................................................. 30
Common Definitions

**Country Food:** Country food refers to locally or regionally harvested marine and terrestrial wildlife, fish and plants. The term is used interchangeably with the terms ‘wild food’ and ‘traditional food’.

**Food Insecurity:** Food insecurity is the converse of food security. It is an outcome of inadequate or uncertain access to an acceptable amount and quality of healthy food that is culturally acceptable. It refers to the immediate inability to secure an adequate diet, as well as the uncertainty of being able to do so in the future (Council of Canadian Academies, 2014).

**Food Security:** Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organization, 1996).

**Food System:** A food system encompasses all the stages of keeping people fed including growing, harvesting, packing, processing, transforming, marketing, consuming and disposing of food.

**Harvesting:** Harvesting means obtaining country foods through hunting, trapping, fishing or any other means.

**Inuit Nunangat:** Inuit Nunangat is the Inuit homeland in Canada that includes the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Quebec), and Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador). Inuit Nunangat makes up 35 percent of Canada’s landmass and 50 percent of its coastline. It is a distinct geographic, political, and cultural region that is co-managed by Inuit and the federal government through governance structures established by four comprehensive Inuit land claim agreements (Inuvialuit Final Agreement; Nunavut Land Claims Agreement; James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement; and Labrador Final Agreement).

**Market Food:** Market food is food that is typically shipped from southern centres to Inuit communities and sold in stores.

Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAFC</td>
<td>Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADI</td>
<td>Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative</td>
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<td>CIRNA</td>
<td>Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs</td>
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<td>CPNC</td>
<td>Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program</td>
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<td>IFSWG</td>
<td>Inuit Food Security Working Group</td>
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<td>ITK</td>
<td>Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami</td>
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<td>NCP</td>
<td>Northern Contaminants Program</td>
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<td>NiCoH</td>
<td>National Inuit Committee on Health</td>
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<td>NNC</td>
<td>Nutrition North Canada Program</td>
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<td>PHAC</td>
<td>Public Health Agency of Canada</td>
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<td>RCMP</td>
<td>Royal Canadian Mounted Police</td>
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Executive Summary

Inuit regions share a common interest in building a Canadian Food Policy that advances Inuit food systems and supports the health of Inuit communities and the environment. To contribute Inuit perspectives to the development of the National Food Policy, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the Inuit Food Security Working Group held a two and a half day National Inuit Engagement Session on Food Policy in Inuit Nunangat, the Inuit homeland. Inuit representatives and diverse stakeholders had the opportunity to develop a common vision of the Inuit food systems, identify challenges and strengths experienced within the food systems and develop strategies to improve the food systems in Inuit Nunangat.

The food systems in Inuit Nunangat are very distinct from the rest of Canada. Inuit rely on both market foods shipped from the south and country foods harvested from the local environment. The complexity of these systems has largely been shaped by colonialism which through deliberate action, attempted to estrange Inuit from our traditional way of life. Despite the impacts this had on Inuit food systems, country food remains at the core of Inuit culture and well-being.

Inuit food systems are fraught with many interrelated challenges. Institutionalized discrimination; a lack of market food supplies, decreased wildlife populations and increased safety concerns while harvesting; nutritionally poor or spoiled market food and the presence of diseases and contaminants in wildlife; the high cost of market food and harvesting equipment; and the loss of traditional knowledge and limited food preparation skills all present barriers within the food systems throughout Inuit Nunangat.

These barriers, exacerbated by many social and health inequities have resulted in the current food insecurity crisis being experienced in Inuit communities. The rate of food insecurity among Inuit is the highest of any indigenous population in a developed country and is seven times higher than for Canadian households. With such widespread hardship and close-knit communities, every individual in Inuit Nunangat is affected.

There are numerous policies, programs, services and other initiatives that impact Inuit food systems. These initiatives address a range of challenges from the short-term to long-term. They also span across numerous ministries, departments, organizations, and jurisdictions, highlighting the need for an integrated and holistic approach to address food system challenges in Inuit Nunangat.

Inuit envision a food system where we have access to affordable, nutritious, safe and culturally preferred foods that are available through a sustainable food system that reflects Inuit societal values and supports well-being. This report provides recommendations and specific actions that could be addressed through a National Food Policy. The priority areas for action include: governance and funding, income, food system infrastructure and business, country and market food access, and monitoring and evaluation.
The development of a National Food Policy has the potential to improve access to affordable, safe, nutritious and culturally acceptable food to support the well-being of all Canadians. This will be dependent on the policy being reflective of the varying and unique circumstances of the population. For Inuit, it will be important that all actions support Inuit self-determination, collaboration, environmental sustainability and distinctions based approaches. We are hopeful that by working together, we can facilitate lasting and positive change for the food systems in Inuit Nunangat.

About ITK’s Department of Health and Social Development

The Department of Health and Social Development at ITK is guided by the National Inuit Committee on Health (NICoH), a sub-committee of the ITK Board of Directors. This committee provides a forum that supports the processes of engaging, informing, and advocating for Inuit on health issues. ITK also coordinates numerous sub-committees of NICoH to provide guidance in specific health areas.

One of the NICoH sub-committees is the Inuit Food Security Working Group (IFSWG). The working group is comprised of nutrition, food security and health experts from the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Nunatsiavut Government, Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada and the NIYC. This working group was established in 2012 to foster dialogue and determine a collective course of action to address Inuit challenges, priorities, and policies in the area of food security.
Introduction

Inuit communities are often far removed from national conversations about Canadian food systems. With their remote locations, small populations, significant social and health inequities and diets that incorporate country food, the unique circumstances that form the basis of the food systems in Inuit regions are distinct from the rest of Canada. The challenge of the Canadian Food Policy being developed by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) lies in its applicability to all Canadians. With Inuit involvement, a national policy can positively alter the food systems in Inuit communities and lead to positive improvements in health and well-being for the population.

Canada is a successful food producer, exporter and industry leader, yet it is not immune to food insecurity. The challenges Inuit face have led to a food insecurity crisis in Inuit communities. The 2007/2008 Inuit Health Survey found that 62.6% of households were food insecure in three of the four Inuit regions, with 27.2% experiencing severe food insecurity (Huet, 2012). While the long-term implications for the health and well-being of the Inuit population cannot be ignored, there are also significant ramifications for Inuit culture and society.

The food systems in Inuit Nunangat are unique from any other part of Canada. Today, market foods shipped from the south often make up a large portion of the average diet. This has led to deterioration in diet quality as Inuit are consuming more market foods of relatively low nutritional value and less nutrient-dense country foods. Despite the increase in market food consumption, Inuit continue to have a deep relationship with the environment and consider country foods a vital component of Inuit well-being.

There are many policies, programs, services and other initiatives that act on different aspects of Inuit food systems. These are often conducted through piecemeal approaches without an appreciation of the holistic nature of Inuit food systems. A failure to link solutions involving the environment, health, culture and food have created shortfalls in how food system changes are directed. A unified Canadian Food Policy could provide a coordinated approach to stimulate change and address the numerous and significant challenges Inuit currently face within food systems.

The following report has been produced to provide Inuit perspectives on the development of the Canadian Food Policy. The content was informed by a National Inuit Engagement Session on Food Policy in Inuit Nunangat. The report is divided into four sections. Part one provides an overview of the engagement process. Part two outlines selected background information on Inuit food systems. Part three describes the key findings from the engagement process. Part four provides key recommendations and actions that should be taken to advance food systems in Inuit communities.
Part 1: Engagement Process

Engagement Overview

To inform the development of the Canadian Food Policy, AAFC provided funding for ITK and the Inuit Food Security Working Group to host a National Inuit Engagement Session on Food Policy in Inuit Nunangat. The engagement took place on October 17 – 19, 2017 in Ottawa, Ontario. Over fifty individuals attended the session including citizens and representatives from Inuit communities and regions, airlines, retail organizations, academic institutions and government. Expertise amongst participants was vast and included knowledge related to: food, health, conservation policy, harvesting and wildlife management, economic development, community programs, and much more.

The engagement session provided the opportunity for participants to contribute their experience, expertise and insights to: develop a common vision of the Inuit food system in the Inuit regions; identify challenges and strengths experienced within food system for Inuit; and identify strategies and recommendations that could improve food systems in Inuit Nunangat.
Part 2: Background

Inuit in Canada

There are approximately 65,000 Inuit in Canada, the majority of whom live in Inuit Nunangat, the Inuit homeland. Inuit Nunangat includes 51 communities in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), Nunavut, Nunavik (Northern Quebec), and Nunatsiavut (Northern Labrador). This area encompasses 35 percent of Canada’s landmass and 50 percent of its coastline. More than one third of the communities in Inuit Nunangat have populations under 500 people.

Inuit in Canada are the largest non-Crown landowners in the country. Each of the four regions holds a comprehensive land claims agreement with the federal government. These agreements have the status of protected treaties under section 35 of the Constitution Act and hold interpretive primacy over conflicting federal, provincial and territorial laws. They affirm Indigenous rights, title, interests and jurisdiction to Inuit settlement areas. These land claims agreements contain provisions that define Inuit participation in decision-making that impact the land and well-being of the population.

The Inuit population is very young and one of the fastest growing in the country. In 2016, the average age was 27.7 years compared to 40.5 for Canada as a whole. Between 2006 and 2016, the Inuit population increased by 29.1 percent compared to a 10.9 percent increase in the total Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Inuit Communities

Inuit communities are remote and have limited infrastructure. With the exception of two, Inuit communities do not have all-season road access and can only be reached by air year-round and by sea during the summer months. Many also lack deep-sea port infrastructure limiting the size of boats that can dock and supply communities. While the larger communities in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut and Nunavik have sufficient runway infrastructure to accommodate small jet aircrafts, many communities can only be serviced by smaller airplanes. Only one of the 51 communities has access to a regional energy grid with the remaining communities relying on diesel generators supplying heating and electricity needs. Additionally, water and waste services are provided by truck in the majority of communities, with some being impacted continuously by boil water advisories.

The majority of Inuit communities have a single food retail outlet. There are two major retail chains that account for the majority of stores: the North West Company and Arctic Co-op Limited. There are a number of regional chain organizations, including Stanton’s, La Federation des Co-operatives du Nouveau Quebec, and Big Land Grocery. A small number of independent grocery stores also operate in Inuit communities.
Living or operating in northern communities is very expensive due to the high transportation and power costs that significantly influence the cost of living and doing business. The climate in the four regions is dominated by long and cold winters, resulting in high building insulation and heating costs. The cold northern climate further influences the building and construction season, as most materials have to be delivered in the summer and built in a heated structure to continue work in the winter.

**Inuit Food Systems**

Inuit have unique food systems. Prior to contact with European explorers, Inuit relied solely on nutrient-dense country foods. During the eighteenth century, contact increased with the arrival of missionaries, whalers, fur traders, and the establishment of the Hudson’s Bay Company in the Arctic. Bartering systems were established where items such as caribou skins and meat, whalebone and walrus ivory, were traded for rifles, tobacco, cloth and food. As Inuit became increasingly involved in this newly established market-economy, subsistence became irrevocably tied to economic forces and foreign consumer goods.

Commercial harvesting activities over-exploited many animal species that Inuit relied upon. Populations of bowhead whale, musk ox, and caribou became severely depleted in many areas of the Arctic. With a reduced ability to harvest country food sources and the incorporation of market goods, Inuit experienced a profound shift to their traditional way of life. The Inuit food systems shifted as a result of this nutrition transition with an increasing amount of market food being incorporated into the diet.

Today, market foods, often of inferior nutritional value that are shipped from the south, make up a large portion of the average diet. This has led to reduced diet quality as Inuit are consuming more market foods of relatively low nutritional value and less nutrient-dense country foods. In 2006, 65% of Inuit lived in homes where at least half of the meat and fish consumed was country food (Statistics Canada 2008). It has been estimated that Inuit harvest approximately 79 species of fish, shellfish, marine and land mammals, birds, plants and berries (Egeland GM 2009). A study involving Inuit adults found that on days when country food was consumed there was significantly more vitamin A, D, E and B6, riboflavin, iron, zinc, copper, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, and selenium in the diet (Kuhnlein 2004). Despite the increase in market food consumption, country foods remaining a vital component of Inuit identity and well-being.
Historical Context for Inuit Food Systems

A long history of colonization has significantly shaped the food systems for Inuit through policies and institutional systems that undermine Inuit self-reliance. Prior to the 1940s, the majority of Inuit lived in seasonal camps on the land. Inuit were coerced into permanent settlements by religious missionaries and Government beginning in the 1950s. Many of the elders living today were born on the land and have seen the creation of permanent settlements in their lifetimes.

Despite promises of education, healthcare and housing, Inuit families were met with inadequate conditions in communities. While free government housing was provided to many families, it was of poor quality and in short supply, often lacking adequate sanitation, insulation and ventilation. Some Inuit also experienced eviction and forced relocation from their communities by missionaries, government and medical officials. This often happened without the consent of Inuit families and against their protests. In the early 1950s Inuit were relocated from present day Inukjuak, Nunavik and Pond Inlet, Nunavut, to what are now the high Arctic communities of Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord, Nunavut. This forced families into unfamiliar settings with inadequate support systems in place to ensure well-being.

The imposition of federal residential and day schools on Inuit communities also had a severe impact on families. Inuit children often faced loneliness, estrangement from their language and culture, and for some, physical and sexual abuse. Nutrition experiments were undertaken on many residential school children including forced starvation and nutrient deficiency. Since children were often prevented from participating in traditional activities such as hunting, many Inuit were unable to learn and then pass on these essential life skills.

Once in the new settlements, the government continued to exert control and infringe on the ability for Inuit to be self-sustaining and pursue a diet based on country food. The Canadian Wildlife Service, apprehensive that the use of new technology including snowmobiles and outboard motors would deplete wildlife populations, imposed strict regulations on the type and number of animals Inuit could harvest. Restrictions were also placed on the dates that animals could be hunted. Inuit who did not comply with these regulations were criminalized and faced fines or threats of incarceration for a way of life that had existed for thousands of years.

These gaming regulations also coincided with Inuit sled dogs being culled beginning in the 1950s. The RCMP and other authorities killed hundreds of sled dogs that were the primary means for Inuit to travel and harvest. This event was a devastating loss for communities and magnified the challenges Inuit faced with maintaining a traditional way of life.
Social and Health Inequities

There is a significant gap in health outcomes between Inuit and most other Canadians. High rates of poverty, inadequate and crowded housing, low education attainment, and high suicide rates are just some examples of this inequity. For Inuit, these determinants of health are highly interconnected and directly impact the food systems in Inuit communities.

The poverty in the regions is perpetuated by disparities in employment, income and the high cost of living. Less than 48% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat are employed compared to 60% percent of all Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2016). Despite living in communities with the highest cost of living in Canada, the median individual income for Inuit in the regions is $23,485 compared to $92,011 for non-Indigenous individuals in Inuit Nunangat (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Individuals who live in poverty or on low incomes are often faced with the choice of paying bills or paying for food. Evidence shows that a family of four in an isolated community in Nunavut would spend $395 to $460 a week to buy a basic nutritious diet compared to $226 in a southern city such as Ottawa (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2009). The high cost of market food is further compounded by the high cost of all living expenses in the north including energy, transportation, housing and clothing. According to the Inuit Health Survey, 49.6% of adults had an annual income of less than $20,000. When this was compared to the average cost of their groceries ($380 per week or $19,760 a year) this equated to 99% of their income (Rosol, 2011). In addition, the 2016 Nunavik Cost of Living Survey Report reveals that although Nunavik is the Inuit region with the highest median income, and despite several cost of living reduction programs, low income Inuit households in Nunavik are still spending the majority (70%) of income on food and shelter (Robitaille 2016).

Education gaps also contribute to social inequity, furthering income and health gaps. Over half (58%) of the Inuit population does not have a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree compared to six percent of non-Indigenous Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2016). The most common reasons for not completing post-secondary education were personal/family responsibilities, time constraints, a lack of confidence/preparedness and because it was not a personal priority (Statistics Canada, 2015).

The housing needs in Inuit Nunangat are significant. Almost 52% of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat live in crowded housing, compared to nearly nine percent of the non-Indigenous Canadian population. Additionally, more than a third of Inuit (31.5%) live in homes in need of major repairs, compared to six percent of non-Indigenous Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2011). This trend also results in a lack of space for community programs and services.
Another significant indicator is mental health, including rates of suicide, which are elevated above the national rate in all Inuit regions. The rates of suicide among Inuit vary by region, ranging from five to 25 times that for Canada as a whole. The group most at risk is Inuit males aged 15-29. Young females are also at an increased risk with high rates of suicide attempts (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2016).

**Food Insecurity in Inuit Nunangat**

There is a food insecurity crisis being experienced in Inuit communities. This not only reflects the significant challenges experienced with the food systems but also the compounding social and health inequities. The 2007/2008 Inuit Health Survey found that 68.8% of Inuit households in Nunavut were food insecure (Rosol, 2011). This was seven times higher than the Canadian national average at the time and represents the highest documented food insecurity rate for any Indigenous population residing in a developed country (Rosol 2011, Huet 2012). High rates of food insecurity have also been recorded in Nunatsiavut (61.1%) and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (43.3%) (Rosol, 2011; Nunatsiavut Government, 2017). In Nunavik, 24% of Inuit lacked food in the month prior to the Nunavik Inuit Health Survey, a sign of ‘severe’ food insecurity (Quebec: Institut national de santé publique du Québec and Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services, 2008).

The inability to access food takes a toll on individuals and households. In 2007/2008, among Inuit households in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut and Nunatsiavut, 24.5% confirmed that in the last year, an adult in the house had been hungry but didn’t eat because they couldn’t afford enough food. Nearly one quarter (23.1%) indicated that a child in the house had gone hungry when they couldn’t afford enough food. When asked if an adult in the household had not eaten for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food, 17.6% indicated that it was true. Furthermore, 13.1% indicated that a child did not eat for a whole day because there wasn’t enough money for food (Rosol, 2011). These responses indicate that many Inuit adults and children are experiencing hunger and going whole days without eating.

In Inuit Nunangat, every individual experiences the impacts of food insecurity in some way due to the size and connectedness of communities. Food insecurity is known to make individuals more susceptible to malnutrition and infection, as well as chronic health problems such as obesity, anemia, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and stress. Among children, cognitive, academic and psychosocial development can also be negatively affected. Mental health effects of food insecurity include reduced ability to learn, depression, and social exclusion.
For Inuit, the impacts of food insecurity on health and well-being also extend to social and cultural integrity. Inuit livelihoods continue to be defined by a deep relationship to the environment and the resources it provides. The harvesting, sharing and consumption of country food are still deeply rooted in individual and community practice. They are a significant means of transmitting values, traditional skills and knowledge. Barriers to accessing country food are therefore not only a public health issue, but also threaten overall social and cultural stability in Inuit communities.

**Environmental Change**

Inuit Nunangat is experiencing multiple unprecedented environmental changes including, but not limited to climate change, with impacts on local infrastructure, economies and Inuit cultural well-being. Climate change presents particular risks to Inuit food systems due to changes in access to harvesting areas, the distribution and range of country food sources, the contamination or loss of water sources, changes in country food preparation and preservation techniques and potential changes in contaminant pathways (AMAP 2017). The resilience and adaptability of transportation infrastructure to extreme climatic events and thawing permafrost is also of particular concern where air transportation is the only reliable way to fly market foods into the majority of Inuit communities. Recent studies have raised concerns about aging and inadequate airport infrastructure throughout much of Canada’s North.

For the past 50 years, temperatures in the Arctic have increased to more than twice the global average, and models project that even with drastic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in the short-term, fall and winter temperatures in the Arctic will rise 4-5 °C above late 20th century temperatures by 2050 (AMAP, 2017). Inuit Nunangat is experiencing marked and variable shifts in temperature, precipitation and seasonality. Research shows that the Arctic could be free of summer sea ice in as little as 20 years (AMAP, 2017). These changes are having an impact on Inuit harvesting of both terrestrial and marine wildlife and plant species that are culturally and economically important to Inuit communities. Sea ice is becoming increasingly mobile as its thickness and extent decline. Changes in the distribution, ranges and migration patterns of Arctic wildlife species are occurring with significant implications for Inuit who are economically and culturally dependent on a rich variety of marine and terrestrial wildlife.

The opening of the Northwest Passage presents both opportunities and challenges for Inuit food systems. Increased shipping traffic overlaps with Inuit sea ice travel routes and the habitat and migration routes of the marine mammals Inuit harvest. However, it is also anticipated that the opportunity for new commercial fisheries may emerge with the northward movement of more temperate fish species such as mackerel. The first Arctic Biodiversity Assessment concludes that a lack of reliable baseline data limits understandings of the complexity of climate impacts on Arctic ecosystems (Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna, 2013). This has large implications for
understanding how to adaptively manage future Arctic shipping corridors and industrial activity to avoid conflicts with wildlife habitat, migration routes, and Inuit sea ice travel and food security needs.

Food Security and Food System Policies, Programs, Services and Other Initiatives

Numerous policies, programs, services, regulations, research and other initiatives from federal, provincial and territorial governments, academic institutions, Inuit organizations and community organizations are part of, or directly impact, the food systems in northern Inuit communities. Many of these initiatives focus on addressing particular factors associated with food systems challenges such as the cost of food. Some initiatives mitigate short-term challenges (e.g. food banks, food subsidies); others offer medium-term solutions (e.g. harvester support subsidies, nutrition education programs); and few provide more long-term solutions that address underlying causes (e.g. social enterprises). To date, there has been limited coordination, leading to duplication and diminished overall capacity.

Some key initiatives are highlighted in Appendix I. This is not intended to be a comprehensive review but provides some context of the current national programming, regional food security strategies /food policies and regional/community initiatives. The range of initiatives and also the diversity of ministries, departments, organizations, and jurisdictions involved, highlight the need for an integrated and holistic approach to address food system challenges in Inuit Nunangat.
Part 3: Engagement Findings

The following summarizes the discussions that emerged from the two and a half day National Inuit Engagement Session on Food Policy in Inuit Nunangat. This section includes a vision and principles for an inclusive Canadian Food Policy; challenges and barriers experienced within the Inuit food systems; and recommendations and actions that could be taken as part of a national policy to reimagine Canada’s food systems and enhance Inuit well-being.

Vision

Inuit aspire to co-develop food systems in partnership with governments that are grounded in a holistic worldview of the deep interconnection between food, the environment, health and culture. Food systems have the ability to positively influence health and address the extreme inequities that exist between Inuit and the rest of Canada. Inuit seek a balance between country food and market food, economic development and conservation efforts, and self-governance and collaboration with external stakeholders.

Thus, the Inuit vision statement for a National Food Policy is:

Inuit have access to affordable, nutritious, safe and culturally preferred foods that are available through a sustainable food system that reflects Inuit societal values and supports well-being.

The vision for Inuit food systems is complementary to a National Food Policy that will set a long-term vision for health, environment, social, and economic goals related to food, while identifying actions that can be taken in the short-term. However, Inuit communities experience unique challenges that have to be prioritized as Canada moves to enhance national food systems.

The proposed vision put forward by AAFC during the consultation process is missing two important components in order to be inclusive of Inuit and our unique circumstances and needs. As a country, Canada has a substantial amount of natural resources that have afforded a highly successful food production and export sector. For the 4.3 million Canadians currently living in food insecurity, including in Inuit communities, the country’s abundant food supply does not translate into food access. If national policies are not in place to enable access for all Canadians, producing a sufficient amount of food will not preclude that everyone in the country will be fed. Another aspect of food access is its affordability. Food must be affordable without compromising other basic needs such as paying for utilities. Since the high cost of food remains one of the primary factors contributing to Inuit food insecurity today, it is important to recognize this aspect in a national vision.

In order for the vision of the Canadian Food Policy to be inclusive for Inuit, the following amendments to the draft AAFC vision statement are proposed.
The Canadian food system provides access to a sustainable food supply so that all people in Canada, no matter where they live, have the ability to access sufficient safe, nutritious, affordable and culturally-appropriate food, which contributes to their health, our environment and economy.

Guiding Principles

Achieving the vision for Inuit food systems requires the incorporation of guiding principles. The principles ground approaches in Inuit perspectives and establish foundational expectations for actions that implicate Inuit food systems. The Canadian Food Policy therefore has to embody Inuit self-determination, collaboration, a distinctions based approach and environmental sustainability throughout its development and implementation.

Inuit Self-Determination

Working directly with Inuit organizations and ensuring Inuit are in a position of leadership and decision-making roles will ensure that actions are responsive to Inuit needs. This includes Inuit involvement in the development, design and delivery of any policies, programs and services that affect the food systems in Inuit communities, including the Canadian Food Policy. There are many examples in which stakeholders engage Inuit through respectful and appropriate processes. A current example is the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee where Inuit and government leadership work together on shared priorities.

Collaboration

Addressing the challenges and supporting the future of Inuit food systems requires the co-operation of numerous partners. Inuit organizations, federal, provincial and territorial governments, private-sector and non-profit organizations, researchers and community members are all an integral part of the food systems. While priorities identified and led by Inuit can act as a path forward, collaborative approaches are necessary to effect positive change.

Distinctions Based Approach

Inuit have a unique culture, identity and relationship to the food systems in Inuit Nunangat. While the Inuit population is relatively small compared to the rest of Canada, there also exists a great deal of diversity between communities and regions. Inuit history, geography, language, knowledge, values and social and health challenges must be recognized and reflected in all approaches in a National Food Policy. Inuit-specific strategies are required that will be distinct from the rest of Canada and in some cases, from one Inuit community or region to another.
Environmental Sustainability
Despite inhabiting a vast territory that comprises over a third of Canada, Inuit support a common worldview that recognizes the ties between the environment and Inuit well-being. The Arctic ecosystem and country food play a vital role in Inuit food systems. While there are immediate needs to be addressed, such as the food insecurity crisis, a balance needs to be struck to support sustainable food systems and support the ecological integrity of the Arctic environment.

Inuit Food Systems Challenges and Barriers
During the engagement, participants discussed many of the challenges they have encountered within the food systems across Inuit Nunangat. These findings have been summarized into five categories including: institutional discrimination; quantity and access; quality; cost; and knowledge and skills.

Institutionalized Discrimination
The Inuit food systems have largely been shaped by colonialism which continues to overshadow the relationship Inuit have with government. Inuit knowledge about the Arctic environment and animals continues to be marginalized and undermined in favour of western scientific knowledge. Inuit have been left out of important decision-making tables regarding wildlife management and other areas of health that directly impact our communities. Policies and programs such as the Nutrition North Canada Program (NNC), remove power from Inuit communities by dictating what can and can’t be supported by meager government funding and by placing that funding in the hands of companies that do not operate on the prioritization of community wellness.

Quantity and Access
Availability of market foods in Inuit communities can be lacking. The remoteness, climate change and weather play a big role in the ability to ship goods by sea, which is the cheapest route and yet only available for approximately half the year. This presents numerous storage and infrastructure challenges, as retailers try to bring in non-perishables and frozen goods. Storage space is thus a significant cost and burden for retailers, and can lead to stocks running out before the next shipment. When freezers break down, this can also lead to significant loss if repairs cannot be made before the food thaws. Lack of infrastructure at airports and shipping docks can also lead to food loss, as shipments can be left out when space is unavailable either for dry, frozen or refrigerated storage. These same problems contribute to food quality challenges, particularly for perishable food items in air transit. Weather conditions and cargo prioritization can also prevent entire food shipments from being delivered to communities leading to food shortages. This scenario will only become more of a challenge with the advent of climate change, leaving northern communities in an increasingly precarious position.
Arctic wildlife, upon which Inuit rely, is negatively impacted by climate change, habitat encroachment and industrialization. Climate change has led to changes in migratory patterns, displacing species important to Inuit food security. A ban on caribou hunting in some regions has had a significant impact on communities and our ability to access country food. Whales, walruses and polar bears, amongst other mammals, are also often under restrictions and or quotas. Overall, there is a significant decrease in the availability of country food for reasons that, in most cases, lay outside of Inuit control.

Impacts of climate change are threatening safe access to many harvesting areas. Thinner ice, later ice freeze-up, earlier ice break-up, more variable snowfall, unpredictable weather, warmer temperatures, as well as more frequent and intense storms are being experienced in Inuit regions. This results in safety concerns and can decrease the ability of Inuit harvesters to access country food.

**Quality**
Perishable market foods are transported to the majority of Inuit communities by plane from southern centres. The long-distances required for transporting goods along with the lack of proper infrastructure, diminishes the quality of perishables before they arrive in communities. Once in communities, items may sit on the shelf for extended periods due to the small market size and cost, further diminishing the quality. Moldy food and products past their best before dates are often reported in stores. Conversely, highly processed and packaged foods that are easily transported and preserved are more readily available in stores at a lower cost.

Emerging diseases and contaminants affecting wildlife raise concerns for Inuit health. Since northern regions have a relatively low wildlife and parasitic diversity, environmental change can lead to the introduction of new pathogens. Changes in the quality of wildlife can lead to concerns about consuming country food, or in the case of zoonotic disease, can result in people becoming ill from consuming infected animals. Although some environmental contaminants are decreasing in concentration as a result of international regulations, a wide spectrum of contaminants, including emerging contaminants, are present in northern ecosystems.

**Cost**
The cost of market food can be prohibitively high in Inuit communities compared to southern areas. Factors including food system infrastructure deficits, high building and maintenance costs and shipping distances increase the cost of goods that retailers pass on to the consumer. Since there are often only one or two grocery stores in communities, retailers do not face the same market-based forces as in the south, such as competition, with their tendency to drive prices down.
The high cost of market food is further compounded by the high cost of all living expenses in the north including energy, transportation, housing and clothing. Many families do not have access to harvesting equipment such as a boat or snow machine, money for gasoline, firearms, and ammunition. Individuals who live in poverty or on low income levels are often faced with the choice of paying bills or paying for food. Additionally, households without a hunter, such as single-mothers or elders, rely more on expensive market foods and can struggle to access country foods if they do not have access to strong sharing networks.

The NNC has come under great scrutiny since its implementation in 2011. The fundamental issue with the program is its market-based model. Since the program provides subsidies directly to retailers without full transparency to the public, Inuit are concerned the savings are not passed on to the consumer and the model does not inherently prioritize Inuit health. It has also failed to address the challenges of country food access since the subsidy can no longer be applied to harvesting supplies.

While some believe that hunting might be a mechanism of offsetting the cost of purchasing market food, it has actually become increasingly expensive to go out on the land. Harvesters must purchase gas, ammunition, snowmobiles, boats and motors that are subject to the same elevated costs as other goods in Inuit communities. Due to the changes in some animal species with migratory patterns and decreasing populations, as well as the need for harvesters to alter travel routes due to the changing climate, the travel distance required to harvest is often increased. It is also challenging for those with full-time jobs to find the time to be out on the land. Even when a harvester is able to secure the equipment and time necessary, it is not always guaranteed that they will be successful in bringing back country food for their family and community.

Knowledge and Skills
There is a sense of urgency amongst Inuit about the loss of traditional knowledge and skills. The ability to hunt, trap, gather and prepare country foods is an essential component of Inuit culture and identity. The loss of elders with first-hand experience of being on the land and the breakdown of oral and intergenerational strategies for knowledge transmission, are challenging efforts to revitalize traditional knowledge across Inuit Nunangat. This is coupled with the popularity of modern technology that can draw youth away from traditional activities.

Limited food preparation skills can also be a challenge. Inuit are consuming more market foods but many people have limited knowledge of how to cook with these products, as they are reasonably new additions to the food systems in Inuit communities. This leads to a dependence on prepared foods that are often more expensive than foods that require preparing. There is a need for greater education regarding healthy food preparation.
Part 4: Recommendations for an Improved Canadian Food Policy

Recommendations have been generated to inform the development of the Canadian Food Policy. They are categorized into priority areas that include: governance and funding, income, food systems infrastructure and businesses, country and market food access, and monitoring and evaluation. Actions have also been listed under each recommendation for government and other stakeholders to address the identified challenges and realize the vision for Inuit food systems.

Governance and Funding

Current governance structures that impact the food systems in Inuit regions should respect Inuit self-determination by utilizing Inuit governance structures for decision making. Inuit organizations are best positioned to develop strategies and manage food system programs and funding for Inuit. There are practical and mutual benefits of having meaningful, equitable and sustainable partnerships with Inuit on food system changes. To elevate Inuit governance and funding in the advancement of the food systems, it is necessary to:

1. Partner with Inuit representational organizations in the co-development and implementation of policies that impact Inuit food systems. Specific actions should include:
   a. Engage Inuit partners, as identified by Inuit representational organizations, on Canadian Food Policy governance structures

2. Support the development of Inuit national, regional and community food security strategies/food policies. Specific actions should include:
   a. Provide political support and adequately resource the development of the National Inuit Food Security Strategy
   b. Provide political support and adequately resource the development of regional food security strategies/food policies

3. Provide long-term, flexible, multi-year funding transfers to Inuit regional organizations for sustainable food security programming. Specific actions should include:
   a. Examine existing models of successful transfer agreements to identify how funding and reporting structures of programs that involve Inuit food systems could be streamlined to enhance efficiency and reflect Inuit needs
   b. Provide dedicated food security funding to Inuit regional organizations to carry out holistic food systems interventions

4. Index all government funding, including health programs, income assistance, etc. to reflect cost of living, inflation and population growth in Inuit regions. Specific actions should include:
   a. Monitor and report on cost of living in Inuit communities
   b. On an annual basis, create an index with which to adjust funding so that it is reflective of the realities in Inuit communities
5. Implement an Inuit Nunangat fiscal policy in federal budgets as detailed in ITK’s 2017 pre-budget submission. Specific actions should include:
   a. Allocation of Indigenous and/or Inuit-specific federal funding directly to Inuit regional organizations to enhance the impact of federal spending and efficiency of federal investments in social and economic development

**Income**

Low income is the leading cause of food insecurity. Thus, increasing available income and employment opportunities in Inuit communities is necessary to improve food insecurity. This will help to offset the high cost of living. To remove income as a barrier to food security, it is necessary to:

6. Provide a Guaranteed Basic Northern Income indexed to the cost of living in Inuit regions. Specific actions should include:
   a. Develop a pilot project for a Guaranteed Basic Northern Income in Inuit communities based on past and current projects
   b. Develop appropriate health outcome indicators for implementation of a Guaranteed Basic Northern Income pilot

7. Provide job creation programs that simultaneously support food businesses and training in food preservation and transformation techniques. Specific actions should include:
   a. Support current and new projects that work to increase food access and employment in communities
Food Systems Infrastructure and Businesses

The significant food system infrastructure deficits need to be addressed in Inuit communities. Furthermore, support for new food businesses with a focus on country food, local food production or food transformation, remain an untapped opportunity. There are many examples of innovative and viable models across Inuit Nunangat. Prioritizing these areas can enhance local capacity and support a shift towards a more sustainable food system. To invest in community and regional food systems infrastructure and businesses, it is necessary to:

8. Invest in food system infrastructure development, upgrades and maintenance, including airstrips, airport facilities, ports, roads, retail outlet storage facilities and community facilities. Specific actions should include:
   a. Conduct a needs assessment of current community infrastructure to determine how food storage and transportation could be improved and how it is vulnerable to climate impacts
   b. Invest in dedicated community food spaces (food centres, community kitchens, community freezers etc.) that are used for programming
   c. Create a northern food infrastructure investment plan in collaboration with Inuit organizations, provincial and territorial governments, and private businesses
   d. Support Inuit households facing loss and damage to harvesting infrastructure (cabins, snowmobiles, hunting equipment, etc.) associated with permafrost thaw, coastal erosion and the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events

9. Invest in the development of local food businesses and initiatives that support innovative models of food production, harvesting and processing
   a. Support sharing of best practices of local food businesses and initiatives between Inuit communities and regions
   b. Promote information on funding opportunities available to local food businesses and initiatives
   c. Establish Inuit Nunangat-wide dialogue on the need for links between local food initiatives and surveillance of increasing exposure to emerging climate sensitive food and water-borne infectious and gastrointestinal diseases, and emerging contaminant pathways
Country and Market Food Access

Country and market food access needs to be prioritized for Inuit communities. In order to address the food insecurity crisis, a multi-pronged approach is required that includes long-term structural changes as well as medium- and short-term solutions that put food into the hands of those experiencing food insecurity.

10. Support country food sharing systems. Specific actions should include:
   a. Conduct analysis of regulations that impact country food exchange between Inuit communities and regions and identify areas of improvement
   b. Work towards policy coherence between harvest data collection programs, harvester assistance programs and food security initiatives

11. Support harvesters to pursue traditional livelihoods. Specific actions should include:
   a. Support research on international best practices that support the economic well-being of harvesters, including employer policies and practices
   b. Invest in timely and adequate search and rescue services in Inuit Nunangat, accounting for the increasingly unpredictable and variable snow, ice and weather conditions due to climate impacts and the growing and changing needs of harvesters
   c. Assess and address increasing hunter safety outreach and communications needs including awareness and use of existing safety equipment such as satellite phones, GPS tracking devices, etc.
   d. Address broadband access and bandwidth limitations seen as key to making progress on hunter safety and emergency response efforts in the North and to enhancing communication structures to link responders

12. Revise the NNC. Specific actions should include:
   a. Partner with ITK and regional Inuit organizations to develop a model where Inuit are partners in the NNC governance structure
   b. Implement the policy recommendations for improving NNC, submitted by the IFSWG to Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs (CIRNA) (Appendix II)

13. Explore options to reduce cost and increase access and quality of market food. Specific actions should include:
   a. Conduct analysis of market food chains and identify actions to improve access and quality of market foods
   b. Identify best practices and invest in community food waste solutions
   c. Apply price regulations for market foods that ensures affordability
Monitoring and Evaluation

Enhanced and ongoing monitoring of food insecurity and its associated factors such as the cost of living is needed in Inuit regions. Further investment is also required for the evaluation of policies, programs, services, and community initiatives that address food system challenges. Having an understanding of the state of Inuit food security will provide definitive evidence if objectives are being realized and allow for tailored responses to be implemented.

14. Support monitoring of food insecurity rates in Inuit regions. Specific actions should include:
   a. Support stakeholder engagement regarding the best approach to measuring food insecurity for Inuit communities
   b. Support the sustainable implementation of an Inuit Health Survey that monitors food insecurity measures

15. Monitor the cost of living in select Inuit communities on an ongoing basis to ensure appropriate indexing of government programs. Specific actions should include:
   a. Support sharing and assessment of cost of living work across Inuit regions
   b. Support price monitoring measures of food and other items in all Inuit regions

16. Support the evaluation of policies, programs, services, and community initiatives addressing food system challenges. Specific actions should include:
   a. Provide evaluation funding to community initiatives
   b. Identify and support sharing of best practices among community food security initiatives
Conclusions

Inuit have a vested interest in the success of the Canadian Food Policy. A National Food Policy presents an opportunity to improve the food systems across Inuit Nunangat. This document, including key recommendations and actions developed through the National Inuit Engagement Session on Food Policy, provides a path towards a Canadian food system that is responsive to Inuit needs.

The effectiveness of a national policy will be dependent on following a number of guiding principles to weigh all actions moving forward. The support of Inuit self-determination is essential in order for Inuit to lead the path towards change. Improving food systems in Inuit Nunangat requires the cooperation of numerous partners from the federal government, provincial/territorial governments, Inuit organizations, communities and the private and non-profit sectors. Solutions require a tailored, but holistic approach, taking the unique food system circumstances of Inuit communities into account. This includes prioritizing the food insecurity crisis in Inuit Nunangat. Finally, it is necessary to account for environmental sustainability in actions implicating Inuit food systems.

Although Inuit food systems are divergent from what many Canadians can relate to, they are an important component of strengthening the country’s health, environmental, social and economic goals related to food. Inuit are committed to moving forward with approaches that re-imagine food systems and address many of the current associated challenges. With Inuit involvement and leadership, we are hopeful that new strategies can lead to lasting and positive change for the food systems in Inuit Nunangat.
References


Appendices

Appendix I – Inuit Food Systems Initiatives

National Programming

A range of federal initiatives are impacting the Inuit food systems. They range from programs that address income support, food subsidy, food education, and contaminants among others. These involve a number of departments and agencies including Health Canada, CIRNA, Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Employment and Social Development Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Parks Canada, Transport Canada, and Fisheries, and Oceans Canada. These programs provide guidelines and funding to regions and communities to carry out initiatives. A whole of government approach involving these departments and agencies is needed in order to address the Inuit food insecurity crisis and ensure an integrated government approach to Inuit food systems changes.

The Nutrition North Canada Program (NNC) is the only federal program directly aimed to make nutritious food more accessible and affordable to residents in Inuit and other northern isolated communities that lack year-round surface (i.e. permanent, road, rail, or marine) transportation links. This retail subsidy program was launched in April 2011 to replace the Food Mail Program. It is run jointly between CIRNA which provides retail subsidies, and Health Canada and PHAC that funds culturally appropriate retail and community-based nutrition education initiatives. This program has been heavily criticized and was the subject of a public consultation in 2016. ITK, along with the IFSWG submitted a report to inform this engagement process that has been included in Appendix II.

The Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) is a community-based program funded by PHAC that provides support to improve the health and well-being of pregnant women, new mothers and babies facing challenging life circumstances. The CPNP aims to improve maternal-infant health, increase the rates of healthy birth weights, and to promote and support breastfeeding. In addition, the program also works to promote the creation of community partnerships and strengthen capacity within communities to increase support for vulnerable pregnant women and new mothers.

The Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (ADI) was established in 1999. The program aims to reduce type two diabetes among Inuit and other indigenous peoples by supporting health promotion and primary prevention activities and services delivered by trained community diabetes workers and health service providers. Renewed funding has enabled First Nations and Inuit communities to continue to build on past successes in more than 600 First Nations and Inuit communities throughout Canada.
Since 1991, the **Northern Contaminants Program (NCP)** has engaged northerners and scientists in researching and monitoring long-range contaminants in northern Canada and food chains. The NCP is managed by a committee chaired by CIRNA and includes four federal government departments (CIRNA, Health Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada), the territorial governments and representatives of northern indigenous organizations. Research findings from NCP help to determine the safety of country foods that are important to the health and livelihoods of Inuit and other indigenous peoples. Results also inform policy, resulting in action to reduce and eliminate contaminants.

**Regional Food Security Strategies and Food Policies**

Regional food security strategies and food policies have either been completed or are underway in each of the four Inuit regions. Since the experience and solutions to act upon food security and food systems vary between regions and communities, it follows that regional strategies and policies undertake different approaches. These regional food security strategies and food policies are being supported by the development of a National Inuit Food Security Strategy, being undertaken by ITK and the IFSWG. The national strategy is intended to provide a collective vision to address challenges within the Canadian Inuit food systems while bolstering unique regional approaches.

Nunavut released the Nunavut Food Security Strategy and Action Plan in 2014. The strategy was developed by the Nunavut Food Security Coalition with representatives from government departments, Inuit organizations, non-government organizations, and the private sector. The Nunavut Food Security Coalition continues to fulfill the actions outlined in the strategy and action plan by funding community food security initiatives, conducting research, promoting public awareness of food security and advocating for improved policies and programs.

Nunavik is currently developing a regional policy and strategy on food security. Inspired by Nunavut’s Food Security Strategy and Action Plan, the process is being coordinated by the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services. Numerous food system stakeholders are involved in the process, including Kativik Regional Government, Makivik Corporation, Fédération des Cooperatives du Nouveau Québec, hunters, women, elders and youth associations. The policy and strategy, expected to be released in 2018, will identify actions that can improve food security in the region.

The Inuvialuit Settlement Region is also in the process of developing a regional food security strategy. To date, two regional workshops with community representatives, as well as health, education, and wildlife sectors were undertaken in 2012 and 2014. Based on results from these workshops and research in the region, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation in partnership with the University of Ottawa is developing a plan for community consultations with all six Inuvialuit communities. The strategy is intended to align with the Northwest Territories Country Food Strategy that is also currently under development.
In 2014, the Nunatsiavut Government in partnership with Trent University, completed Household Food Security Surveys in all Nunatsiavut communities. Results from these surveys have been returned to the communities and participants and are in the process of being communicated more broadly. Obtaining and interpreting these community specific results was the first step in building a regional food security strategy. Planning is underway to strike a steering committee to oversee community and regional consultations to inform the strategy's development.

**Regional and Community Initiatives**

Regional and community initiatives play an important role in advancing the food systems and addressing food insecurity. The type of programming is diverse depending on the community. They also employ a range of approaches from supporting nutritional needs, teaching traditional skills, and strengthening social connections around food.

To protect and promote cultural harvesting practices and alleviate food insecurity challenges in Nunavut communities, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated re-launched the Harvester Support Program in 2017. This program supports numerous aspects of accessing country food including providing funding and assistance to organizations or groups interested in participating in community hunts and to individuals for harvesting equipment and tools. The need for this program has become more evident since the subsidization of harvesting equipment was discontinued after the transition from the Food Mail Program to the current NNC Program.

In Nunavik, families and individuals can have access to traditional meat and fish through the Inuit Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Support Program. Hunters participating in the program receive financial support for their harvesting activities in exchange of meat, which is then made available free of charge through a community freezer. All beneficiaries can get traditional food, but elders, widows and single mothers are often prioritized when the quantity is limited. Nearly 88% of households access traditional food from the community freezers according to 2004 health survey. Among them, 75% did so occasionally and 13% did so often (Quebec: Institut national de santé publique du Québec and Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services 2008). This program is managed by the Kativik Regional Government. Each Nunavik community receives funding based on population size, and determines how they will allocate the funds. Beside community freezers, this program can also provide a range of different community opportunities to support harvesting activities, including purchase and reparation of community equipment, search and rescue activities, and marketing of by-products of hunting (e.g. fur, clothing) (Kativik Regional Government Support Program 2016).
In response to the growing demand for country foods and rising food prices, the Inuvialuit Community Economic Development Organization has invested in a certified Country Food Processing Methods Training Course and country food processing training facility. Located in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, the program teaches participants how to process country food utilizing commercial equipment. This initiative aims to sustainably maximize economic benefits from, and accessibility to, nutritious country foods in the region through awareness, skills development and product development while further promoting food security. Future project plans include the construction of community level country food processing facilities and community freezers to allow participants to apply the skills in their respective communities and in so doing, support local economic development.

The Going Off, Growing Strong program in Nain, Nunatsiavut was designed to build resilience among at-risk Inuit youth facing widespread social, cultural and environmental change. This community led program is based on inter-generational healing through the transmission of environmental knowledge, skills and values from experienced harvesters to youth. Participants also provide for the community by harvesting and preparing country food for the community freezer and distributing it to elders. The program is now being adapted and implemented by other communities in the region.
Appendix II – Nutrition North Canada Program Engagement IFSWG Written Submission

Written Submission

Inuit Food Security Working Group
November 30, 2016

This written submission was prepared by the Inuit Food Security Working Group. The working group is coordinated by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the national representational organization for Inuit in Canada. The Inuit Food Security Working Group includes representatives from the Inuit Land Claims Organizations or a designate – Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Development, Nunatsiavut Government as well as representatives from Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, the National Inuit Youth Council and the Inuit Circumpolar Council – Canada.

Introduction

Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world yet Canadian Inuit have the highest prevalence of food insecurity for any indigenous population in a developed country. With up to 69 percent of Inuit households living with food insecurity, the impacts on the health and well-being of the population are severe. Food insecurity is an incredibly complex challenge for Inuit that is rooted in past colonial policies and the persisting social and economic inequities they have contributed to. As a result, no program can be the sole solution for addressing the food insecurity challenges in Inuit Nunangat (the Inuit homeland encompassing the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut). However, current programs such as the Nutrition North Canada (NNC) Program that are intended to address food insecurity in Inuit communities, must be revised in order to have their intended impact.

There is a rights dimension to food security. The right to food is an international human right affirmed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In addition to store-bought foods, Inuit country foods are a necessary component of food security. Indigenous peoples have the right to engage freely in all traditional and other economic activities including the harvesting of country foods, as well as the right to maintain, control, protect and develop cultural heritage and traditional knowledge in relation to country food harvesting, as affirmed by the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on the right to food highlighted the elevated prevalence of food insecurity among Inuit in his 2013 mission to Canada, and included the observation echoed in this submission that “more needs to be done to improve the effectiveness of Nutrition North Canada”.

Currently, the NNC Program which seeks to “provide Northerners in isolated communities with improved access to perishable nutritious food” is not meeting its objectives and is not meaningfully addressing the food insecurity situation for Inuit. The construct of the program with its market driven model, at its core does not lend itself to reducing social inequity. Revision to the program needs to consider another model or foundational changes to the current structures that are implemented in partnership with Inuit. Below are recommendations to address some of the significant challenges of the current NNC Program.

**Program Model**
Inherent in the market driven model of the NNC Program is the inability to prioritize Inuit health. The corporate interests of the retailers and suppliers that receive subsidies conflict with the program’s goal of making nutritious food more accessible to Inuit communities. Despite the promised disclosure of program operation costs, there is no guarantee that food will be affordable to community members if profit margins are not capped and if there is no mechanism for penalizing non-compliance. Without major revisions to the NNC Program’s administration, which is described in later sections, the program will be ineffective in addressing food access for Inuit communities and will continue to create antagonism between the retailers and the communities the program is intended to serve.

It is not possible to determine if the NNC Program is having the desired impact with its current program goal and its lack of clear objectives. Furthermore, due to the complexity of factors that lead to food insecurity, the program goal in isolation from a more comprehensive plan to reduce Inuit food insecurity is insufficient to effect change. Recommendations to address current challenges with the program model include:

- Investigate international best-practices that support food access and food insecurity in remote Indigenous communities as potential alternatives to the current market driven model
- Conduct an in-depth study and potential testing of alternative models such as support for social enterprises, community based programming etc. as a new program model
- Revise program goals and objectives so that they are measurable and are associated with relevant indicators that address food insecurity
Program Assessment
The NNC Program is not currently supported by rigorous evaluation methods, in part due to the lack of sufficient program goals and objectives. Current measures including the examination of food prices with the Remote Northern Food Basket and the shipment of subsidized items to communities with freight weights, are not sufficient to determine if the program is improving access to nutritious foods. Recommendations to address current challenges with the program assessment include:

• Revise price monitoring measures so that they are comparable to southern measures and include foods and items that account for usage and consumption patterns for Inuit communities
• Administer ongoing evaluation of subsidy levels to address the current inequality in the cost of items across different regions and communities
• Oversee ongoing evaluation on additional aspects of accessibility, including the availability, quality and affordability of items in communities, particularly for those that are most vulnerable to food insecurity
• Conduct compliance evaluations of all retailers and suppliers and produce regular reports that are made accessible to the public
• Collaborate with researchers, Inuit organizations, Inuit communities and other experts on an ongoing basis to inform program delivery and revise the program according to findings
• Coordinate evaluation mechanisms with programs that address other aspects of food insecurity and establish indicators to evaluate impacts that include the prevalence of food insecurity among Inuit

Program Budget
The Federal Government has recently committed additional funding to the NNC Program with the inclusion of additional eligible First Nations communities. However, the program budget that is available to communities through the subsidy or educational initiatives has not changed since 2011 despite increases in food costs and population. Without significant investments in policies and programs that address other barriers to food security, such as a guaranteed annual income, the current NNC Program budget is insufficient to increase accessibility to nutritious foods. Recommendations to address current challenges with the program budget include:

• Adjust the program budget to reflect inflation, the growing Inuit population and the changing demographics of Inuit communities
Program Advisory Board

The Advisory Board was created “to provide guidance to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada on policies, structures and operations associated with the NNC”. While the Advisory Board has the potential to improve the NNC Program, its current structure and function does not provide Inuit with the opportunity to participate in the governance of the program. Recommendations to address current challenges with the program Advisory Board include:

- Restructure the Advisory Board to ensure equal representation across all Inuit regions including Nunavut that despite being the largest participant in the program, does not have a representative on the Board to voice the unique perspectives from that region.
- Revise the selection process of the Board to be more strategic regarding skills and qualification to ensure that Board members can accurately represent the interest of communities.
- Provide accessible information on the application process for the Advisory Board including how to apply, required qualifications etc.

Program Educational Initiatives

The health education component of the NNC Program run by Health Canada has been effective for communities. However, there is a need to expand and strengthen this component of the program. Recommendations to address current challenges with the program’s educational initiatives include:

- Develop an inventory of education initiatives conducted under the NNC Program and facilitate sharing between these initiatives.
- Support more integration between the NNC Program and other programs such as the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative and the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program.
- Offer multi-year funding to ensure continuity and sustainability of programming.
- Improve efficiencies in reporting and funding delivery to Inuit regions.
Program Subsidies

County Foods and Country Food Related Items

The current approach to country food subsidization is inadequate and does not recognize the integral role of country food for Inuit. The cost of hunting, fishing and harvesting activities is a major barrier to country food access in communities. While the NNC Program offers subsidization for country food from four federally regulated commercial processing plants, this does not support access to the majority of community members. Supporting access to country food needs to be foundational in any program that addresses food insecurity. Recommendations to address current challenges with the program subsidization of country foods and related items include:

- Work in partnership with regional Inuit organizations to increase investments for country food access beyond the subsidization of federally regulated processing plants which may include the subsidization of equipment for hunting, fishing and harvesting
- Investigate options to introduce a new program with sustainable funding that focuses on increasing access to country foods using strategies best suited to local contexts

Market Foods and Market Food Related Items

The subsidization of market foods and items are out of touch with the needs of Inuit communities. The focus of the program to subsidize high quality, nutritious foods and essential personal and household products is legitimate. However, not enough consideration is given to the dietary habits and preferences of Inuit and there is a lack of collaboration between the government and Inuit to jointly develop the subsidization list.

Personal orders have a positive impact to many participants, particularly those with dietary requirements. However, many people in Inuit communities are not aware of this program opportunity and due to the lack of necessary resources including credit card, internet access and access to a financial institution, it remains inaccessible to those most in need. Recommendations to address current challenges with the program subsidization of market foods and related items include:
• Work in partnership with regional Inuit organizations to revise the subsidy list to include additional personal hygiene and household items that support public health and nutrition, particularly among those most vulnerable to food insecurity
• Implement a price cap measure to items in communities to prevent surge pricing
• Streamline application and reporting process to reduce barriers for retailers and suppliers to enter into the program
• Facilitate outreach to other retailers and suppliers not involved in the program, particularly for smaller stores in communities
• Provide training and information to retailers and suppliers on supply and demand to improve product ordering
• Expand subsidization to include items shipped by sealift
• Invest in community infrastructure that supports food chain management

Program Communication
Within Inuit communities, the NNC Program’s communication efforts have not been able to address the continued lack of understanding of the program’s mandate and how it functions. This absence of clear communication has perpetuated certain misunderstandings and does a disservice to the program and the communities it intends to serve. Recommendations to address current challenges with the program’s communication include:

• Enhance communication efforts at the community level to provide information such as general program information, what items are on the subsidy lists, how to make personal orders etc.
• Set communication standards for retailers providing program information within Inuit communities
• Ensure communications material are always available in the regional dialect of Inuktut (the Inuit language)
• Provide more educational tools for regional/community organizations that can be adapted for various programs
• Establish a formal communication arrangement between government program representatives and the Inuit Food Security Working Group
Conclusion

There is a need for greater investment to address the food insecurity crisis in Inuit communities. The current NNC Program requires significant improvements if it is going to meaningfully improve access to nutritious foods in Inuit Nunangat. Further, the program needs to be part of a more comprehensive approach to tackle other barriers to Inuit food insecurity. Challenges related to income, physical and mental health, and climate change, among others, directly impact food security status and therefore cannot be excluded from or acted on in isolation from other strategies to improve food security. While the current engagement process to improve and advance the NNC Program is encouraging, program alterations must be premised on the renewed Inuit-to-Crown relationship and embody an inclusive approach to the program’s reform. The involvement of Inuit in revitalizing the program and in its management will be essential for its success.