

Topic Area: Food Security

Abstract Title

Food Insecurity and Food Retailers: Perceptions, Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION: Food insecurity is a growing problem in Canada. Over 485,000 individuals in BC are food insecure, and 65% of food insecure households are in the workforce. Solutions to date have focused on charitable food donations, which few working families or individuals can access. Many local food policy coalitions have been established throughout British Columbia to address system redesign; however, food retailers have not participated in these discussions in the Eastern Fraser Valley region and may be an overlooked resource.

OBJECTIVES: This study explores knowledge and awareness of food insecurity among food retailers in this region, current corporate policies and practices that support food insecure households, and future opportunities and policy directions for improving access to healthy affordable produce for vulnerable families or individuals.

METHODS: Four traditional and five non-traditional food retailers servicing the Fraser Valley participated in semi-structured interviews using qualitative methodologies. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded using NVivo® software, and thematic analysis conducted.

RESULTS: Food retailers perceived food insecurity as primarily related to supply chain management, and not in the broader context. Most had Corporate Social Responsibility policies but none that specifically addressed food insecurity. Most of the suggested “novel solutions” from the grey literature were considered impractical.

CONCLUSIONS: There needs to be a common understanding and shared definition of food insecurity that is meaningful to all stakeholders. Food insecurity is a good fit with Corporate Social Responsibility Policies, and any recommendations should focus on customer expectations and corporate values. Food retailers are a potential partner to address food insecurity at the community level.

SIGNIFICANCE: Food retailers have partnered with dietitians for healthy eating promotion. These partnerships could be leveraged to explore policy change that addresses food insecurity.