

A young girl with red hair and freckles is smiling broadly in a classroom. She is wearing a light blue shirt. In the background, other children and a teacher are visible, though out of focus. There are colorful storage bins on a table in front of her.

2015

The Cost of Healthy Eating in Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan Food Costing Task
Group

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Introduction

It is important to ensure that a safe, nutritious and affordable food supply is available in Saskatchewan. The affordability and availability of food has the potential to influence consumer food choices and impact health. The purpose of this document is to present the 2015 data on the average food cost of a nutritionally adequate, balanced diet in Saskatchewan.

The Cost of Healthy Eating in Saskatchewan 2015 report can be used by decision makers and organizations to inform:

- allocation of funds for nutrition programs, food grants and food allowances;
- decisions regarding health, nutrition and social policy development and implementation;
- further assessment and monitoring of regional barriers and cost differences affecting healthy food access; and,
- supporting and promoting access to nutritious, safe, and personally acceptable foods.

Food Security

Food security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care, allowing for a healthy and active life (1).

Food security consists of three pillars (2): Food Affordability—adequate income is available to obtain nutritious food, Food Availability—adequate amounts of nutritious foods are consistently available, and Food Use—adequate knowledge of nutrition and food preparation skills exist.

People who are more vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity include (3):

- low and low-middle income earners, including those who rely on sporadic or part-time incomes;
- recipients of social assistance, employment insurance or worker's compensation;
- single parent households, in particular, women who are single parents;
- First Nations and Métis people;
- northern Saskatchewan residents;
- renters or homeless people;
- those with chronic health conditions or disabilities; and,
- recent immigrants.

Household food insecurity is defined as “the inadequate or insecure access to adequate food due to financial constraints” (3).

Food Insecurity In Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan families of all income levels are noticing increases in the price of food (4). However, Saskatchewan families with low incomes are finding it more difficult to put healthy food on the table, after paying for necessary purchases such as rent, utilities, transportation and clothing.

Research has indicated that in Saskatchewan, 10.6% of households and 19% of Saskatchewan children experience food insecurity (3). These statistics do not include households on First Nation reserves or people who may be transient or homeless. The true estimate of food insecurity in Saskatchewan is likely much higher.

Because poverty and household food insecurity are closely linked, Saskatchewan poverty rates may also provide an indication of the number of families struggling with food insecurity (3,5). The childhood poverty rate in Saskatchewan is reported to be 25% (6). These rates do not include First Nation children living on reserve. Recent research indicates that in Saskatchewan the childhood poverty rate on First Nation reserves is 69% (7). In light of this, the actual childhood poverty rate in Saskatchewan could be as high as 35% (7).



Nearly 1 in 3 children in Saskatchewan are living in poverty.

Impact of Food Insecurity on Health and Wellbeing

Food insecurity is one of the many social factors that impacts health and wellbeing (8). The social factors that impact our health are known as the social determinants of health. The impacts of food insecurity on health and wellbeing include:

Birth outcomes and maternal health

- Nutritional deficiencies during pregnancy and infancy affect cognition, behavior, and productivity throughout the school years and adulthood (9,10).
- Food insecurity during pregnancy increases the risk of health problems, such as gestational diabetes and birth defects. (11).

Child and youth development

- Food insecure children and youth have more behavioural, emotional, and academic problems than children and youth who are food secure (12, 13).
- Childhood food insecurity is linked to lifelong poor health (12, 13).

Chronic disease

- Food insecurity results in higher rates of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, depression and high blood pressure (14, 15).

Mental health and emotional wellbeing

- Both children and adults experience higher rates of stress, anxiety, social isolation, depression and suicidal thoughts when they experience food insecurity (10).

The impacts of food insecurity on health and wellbeing result in higher rates of healthcare utilization and costs. This includes increased use and cost for inpatient hospital care, emergency department visits, physician services, same day surgeries, home care services and prescription drugs (15).

The health of Canadians is largely impacted by the social determinants of health. Social determinants of health interact closely with each other and include factors such as food security, income, education, employment, early childhood development, housing, and social inclusion (8).



Food Costing in Saskatchewan

The cost of food is recorded every three years in randomly selected grocery stores throughout Saskatchewan. The 2015 food costing was completed in 104 grocery stores including urban, rural and northern locations, and included stores on First Nation reserves. Data was collected in the month of June in order to minimize the effect of seasonal price fluctuations (16).

Saskatchewan uses Health Canada's National Nutritious Food Basket and the province of Ontario's food costing guidance document to collect food cost data (17,18). The National Nutritious Food Basket includes 67 basic healthy foods commonly eaten by Canadians and meets the recommendations from Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide (19). The Basket includes foods such as fresh and frozen vegetables and fruit, cheese, bread, meat, beans and lentils. The food included in the basket is minimally processed and typically widely available. The food requires some preparation. It is assumed that people have basic cooking skills and a location to cook and store food.

Not included in the National Nutritious Food Basket are:

- convenience and restaurant foods;
- cultural preferences or food for special diets;
- cleaning or personal care items that are often included on a family's grocery bill; and,
- travel costs to a grocery store.

Several limitations may have impacted the food costing data collection and interpretation:

- Food costing collects a "snapshot" of the cost of food at a specific time. Seasonal differences in prices will not be reflected nor will significant price increases since June 2015.
- North East food cost data should be interpreted with caution as some of the randomly selected stores could not be accessed due to June 2015 forest fire evacuations.
- Due to geographic limitations, there were several data collectors and as such, there is potential for human error in data collection, as well as data entry, analysis and interpretation.
- Some food items were not available in some stores which may have impacted food cost calculations for some geographical locations.

Weekly Food Costs and Where You Live

The weekly food costs for a Reference Family of Four were determined for various geographical locations. Provincial average food costs for the Reference Family of Four are **\$243.64 per week**.

A Reference Family of Four includes a 31-50 year old man, a 31-50 year old woman, a 4-8 year old girl and a 14-18 year old boy.



Northern Saskatchewan
Communities farther than 100km north of Prince Albert.

Far North: Low access communities with air travel as the main form of transportation. Some communities have limited seasonal roads.

North West: Moderately accessible communities with gravel or paved roads and air access.

North East*: Moderate and low access communities with gravel or seasonal roads or air travel as the main forms of transportation.

Northern Town: Highly accessible communities with paved roads, access to nearby towns and cities and air access.

Southern Saskatchewan
Large City: >100,000 people
Small City: 5,000-99,000 people
Town: 500-4,999 people
Rural: <500 people

*2015 North East data should be interpreted with caution as there was a smaller sample size than in 2012 due to forest fire evacuations.



Is Healthy Food Accessible for Everyone in Saskatchewan?

The cost of food is not the only factor affecting a family's ability to purchase healthy foods. For families living in rural or First Nation communities, and some urban neighbourhoods, the accessibility and availability of nutritious foods can also be a challenge. This can limit the ability to buy some basic healthy food items and can cause some families to be more reliant on packaged and pre-prepared foods. Barriers to availability and accessibility are listed below.

Lack of Local Grocery Stores

- Communities that lack local grocery stores are impacted by the lack of available healthy food.
- Many First Nation reserves do not have local grocery stores and people rely on food available at gas stations, convenience stores or local general stores (20). It is also likely that many rural or remote communities face this issue.
- Within many urban centres, food is not readily available within certain neighborhoods as grocery stores are not located nearby (20, 21).

Transportation Challenges

- Distances to grocery stores can be a barrier for many rural, remote and northern communities.
- The Far North has unique challenges since the main travel option to and from communities is by air. This is the main reason why food costs in the Far North are 80% higher than the provincial average.
- Urban neighbourhoods without grocery stores also present a challenge if residents do not have access to a vehicle or readily available and affordable public transit.

Availability of Nutritious Foods

- A variety of healthy foods may not be consistently available in grocery stores in some communities in Saskatchewan.
- Northern and rural Saskatchewan stores had more food basket items missing than stores in the rest of Saskatchewan. About 1 in 5 stores in northern and rural Saskatchewan were missing almost 30% of the Food Basket items.
- The most common missing Food Basket items were vegetables, fruits, meat and meat alternatives.



Faces of Food Insecurity

Challenge: Groceries are not affordable for everyone

Elaine grew up on a farm and learned to be resourceful. She has good shopping skills such as buying in bulk and scanning flyers for sales to save money on food. She cooks with basic ingredients to stretch her grocery dollars.

Despite her efforts, Elaine still struggles with the cost of food, especially fruits, vegetables, meat and poultry. She feels the high costs of food impacts her ability to buy healthy foods for her family. "I am buying less fresh fruits and vegetables than normal because of the high prices."

Elaine, mother living in Saskatoon, Collective Kitchen leader

Challenge: Groceries are not accessible for everyone

There are small villages (less than 500 people) scattered throughout Saskatchewan. If the communities are lucky, there might be a small general store in the village or a few kilometers away. The general store can carry a variety of foods, although sometimes, there is a lack of foods like vegetables and milk before the next delivery truck arrives. Some communities do not have this opportunity and community members are forced to travel long distances to the next large town or city to buy groceries. "It is especially difficult for struggling single parents and seniors without a car, unless the grocery store is willing to deliver", which will also increase the cost of food.

Brenda, rural community member

Challenge: Groceries are not accessible for everyone

Pelican Narrows is a remote northern First Nation of about 3,500 people. It is located approximately 450 km from Prince Albert and 175 km from Creighton/Flin Flon. The people living in Pelican Narrows and Sandy Bay, 75 km north of Pelican Narrows, rely on the Pelican Narrows grocery store for their groceries and other essential services. In April 2016, their grocery store burnt down.

“Without the grocery store, community members, either purchase groceries at the convenience stores or leave and travel to Flin Flon for groceries. The convenience stores have higher costs and a limited selection of healthy foods. Travelling to Flin Flon is challenging as many community members, such as elders or single parents, don’t have vehicles. They either rely on family members or they pay somebody \$140 to take them to Creighton/Flin Flon.”

Weldon McCallum, Band Councillor for Pelican Narrows, Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation



Weekly Food Costs Over Time

All geographical locations showed an increase in the cost of food over time (23,24). From 2012 to 2015, the provincial average increase in weekly food costs for a Reference Family of Four was 11.5%. This is double the average increase from 2009 to 2012 (6%).

Table 1: Average weekly cost for a Reference Family of Four.

A 31-50 year old man, a 31-50 year old woman, a 4-8 year old girl and a 14-18 year old boy.

Location	2009	2012	2015	Dollar Increase 2009-2015	Percent Change 2009-2015
Saskatchewan	\$ 205.02	\$ 218.24	\$ 243.64	\$38.62	18.8%
North Average	\$ 252.27	\$ 290.37	\$ 314.69	\$62.42	24.7%
North West	\$ 256.95	\$ 273.75	\$ 307.84	\$50.89	19.8%
North East*	\$ 227.48	\$ 253.34	\$ 329.79	\$102.31	45.0%
Far North	\$ 349.99	\$ 394.20	\$ 440.74	\$90.75	25.9%
Northern Town	\$ 214.32	\$ 229.04	\$ 255.72	\$41.40	19.3%
South Average	\$ 195.14	\$ 204.64	\$ 228.83	\$33.69	17.3%
Rural	\$ 206.94	\$ 223.60	\$ 246.65	\$39.71	19.2%
Town	\$ 202.20	\$ 216.46	\$ 241.74	\$39.54	19.6%
Small City	\$ 188.28	\$ 194.09	\$ 219.74	\$31.46	16.7%
Large City	\$ 184.91	\$ 193.69	\$ 212.52	\$27.61	14.9%

**2015 North East data should be interpreted with caution as there was a smaller sample size than in 2012 due to forest fire evacuations.*

The cost of food data results show that the weekly cost of the National Nutritious Food Basket in Saskatchewan is steadily increasing over time and the amount of the increase varies across the province. The cost of a healthy diet can affect individuals and families of all incomes and has the greatest impact among households with the lowest incomes

\$50 of Groceries Over Time

The amount of groceries you can buy with \$50 has decreased over time.



How Does Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Affect Food Costs?

Breastfeeding is more economical than formula feeding, since infant formula costs more than the extra food needed for a breastfeeding mother. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding have to eat a little more food each day (18). A pregnant woman aged 19-30 years needs \$22.09 more per month for food than a woman who is not pregnant. A breastfeeding woman aged 19-30 years needs \$38.78 more per month for food than a woman who is not breastfeeding.

A breastfeeding mother, aged 19-30 years requires an extra \$465.39 per year for food costs, but this is less than the price of infant formula*. Depending on the type of infant formula used, the cost ranges from \$1,204 to \$3,453 per year. It costs \$1,204 per year for liquid concentrated formula and \$1,227 for powdered formula. Ready to feed formula is considerably more expensive at \$3,453 per year. These prices do not include additional costs associated with formula feeding such as the cost for bottles, nipples and water.

**In addition to the cost of healthy food, infant formula costs were collected in 15 of the randomly selected grocery stores.*

Pregnancy	Cost per Week	Cost per Month
18 years or younger	\$ 62.84	\$ 272.11
19-30 years	\$ 63.42	\$ 274.62
31-50 years	\$ 61.93	\$ 268.14
Breastfeeding		
18 years or younger	\$ 65.36	\$ 283.03
19-30 years	\$ 67.28	\$ 291.31
31-50 years	\$ 65.78	\$ 284.83

Ensuring Food Security for Saskatchewan Families

To make healthy food accessible, available and affordable for all Saskatchewan families, a continuum of strategies are needed. This includes creating long term solutions through system changes, building capacity in communities and families, and short-term food emergency relief (25).

System Change	Capacity Building	Short Term Relief
Focuses on addressing problems underlying food insecurity including the social determinants of health. Strategies are broader in scope and require a long-term commitment.	Provides opportunity for skill development and increased community food access. Requires commitment in terms of time and personnel, and the engagement of people who are experiencing food insecurity.	Provides immediate, but temporary, relief to hunger and food issues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National/provincial poverty reduction strategies • National/provincial food security strategies • Healthy food is available within schools, recreation facilities, public spaces and communities (26) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community kitchens • Community gardens • Good food boxes/bulk buying programs • Mobile stores • Cooking skills and nutrition knowledge building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food banks • Soup kitchens • Community freezer programs

Saskatchewan has recently developed a provincial poverty reduction strategy, *Taking Action on Poverty: The Saskatchewan Poverty Reduction Strategy* (27). This strategy has the potential to provide system change by reducing poverty and improving food security for families living in poverty. The strategy has a target to reduce poverty in Saskatchewan by 50% by 2025. Implementing this strategy can improve poverty and food security for Saskatchewan families by:

- Enhancing income security so families have enough money to meet their everyday needs such as housing and food.
- Ensuring safe, affordable housing to make it easier for individuals living in poverty to succeed in education, training and employment.
- Improving access to education, skills training and employment to support improved incomes.
- Focusing on early childhood development to support children’s intellectual and social skills and improve their long term success with education and employment.
- Improving health and food security to improve long term health outcomes.
- Supporting vulnerable families impacted by domestic violence, poor mental health addictions issues and disabilities.
- Working with northern leaders to improve access to healthy food.
- Reviewing the adequacy of food allowances for Social Assistance clients in the north.

Conclusion

Food security and poverty are important issues that impact many Saskatchewan families. *The Cost of Healthy Eating in Saskatchewan 2015* provides decision makers and organizations with information to support the continuum of food security strategies to ensure all Saskatchewan families can afford healthy, nutritious food.

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Table 1: Average weekly cost of the National Nutritious Food Basket, by age, sex, and location, Saskatchewan, 2015.

	Saskatchewan	North Average	South Average
Males Age (yrs)			
2-3	\$32.44	\$42.39	\$30.38
4-8	\$41.69	\$54.45	\$39.03
9-13	\$55.09	\$71.65	\$51.62
14-18	\$77.66	\$99.99	\$72.99
19-30	\$75.07	\$96.60	\$70.58
31-50	\$67.88	\$87.39	\$63.81
51-70	\$65.63	\$84.46	\$61.71
over 70	\$65.06	\$83.66	\$61.18
Females Age (yrs)			
2-3	\$31.82	\$41.63	\$29.80
4-8	\$40.45	\$52.94	\$37.86
9-13	\$47.26	\$61.59	\$44.28
14-18	\$56.44	\$73.38	\$52.90
19-30	\$58.32	\$75.23	\$54.81
31-50	\$57.65	\$74.37	\$54.17
51-70	\$51.12	\$66.24	\$47.97
over 70	\$50.22	\$64.94	\$47.16
Pregnancy Age (yrs)			
18 and younger	\$62.84	\$81.39	\$58.97
19-30	\$63.42	\$82.09	\$59.53
31-50	\$61.93	\$80.05	\$58.15
Breastfeeding Age (yrs)			
18 and younger	\$65.36	\$84.85	\$61.29
19-30	\$67.28	\$86.74	\$63.22
31-50	\$65.78	\$84.70	\$61.84

Table 2: Average monthly cost of the National Nutritious Food Basket, by age, sex, and location, Saskatchewan, 2015.

	Saskatchewan	North Average	South Average
Males Age (yrs)			
2-3	\$140.47	\$183.56	\$131.56
4-8	\$180.50	\$235.77	\$169.01
9-13	\$238.53	\$310.26	\$223.52
14-18	\$336.29	\$432.97	\$316.05
19-30	\$325.06	\$418.27	\$305.62
31-50	\$293.92	\$378.41	\$276.32
51-70	\$284.17	\$365.73	\$267.19
over 70	\$281.69	\$362.33	\$264.91
Females Age (yrs)			
2-3	\$137.80	\$180.28	\$129.02
4-8	\$175.16	\$229.21	\$163.92
9-13	\$204.65	\$266.67	\$191.72
14-18	\$244.36	\$317.72	\$229.06
19-30	\$252.53	\$325.76	\$237.33
31-50	\$249.61	\$322.03	\$234.56
51-70	\$221.35	\$286.81	\$207.72
over 70	\$217.45	\$281.19	\$204.21
Pregnancy Age (yrs)			
18 and younger	\$272.11	\$352.43	\$255.35
19-30	\$274.62	\$355.44	\$257.76
31-50	\$268.14	\$346.60	\$251.78
Breastfeeding Age (yrs)			
18 and younger	\$283.03	\$367.38	\$265.38
19-30	\$291.31	\$375.58	\$273.73
31-50	\$284.84	\$366.73	\$267.76