

Hunger Happens Here:

Lack of choice and insecure food and water sources are alarmingly close to home.

This year marks the **10th anniversary of Vital Signs**, an annual assessment of community life. For 2023, Edmonton Community Foundation and Edmonton Social Planning Council look back at the first topic of Vital Signs — Food Security — and where we are today.

Food security is when everyone has physical, social and economic access to safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy lifestyle. *FAO. 2002. The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2001. Rome.*

Food sovereignty is the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It transforms the idea of food as a commodity to food as a public good. *People's Food Policy Project, 2011.*

The seven pillars of food sovereignty are to:

- Focus on food for people
- Localize food systems
- Build knowledge and skills
- Recognize that food is sacred
- Value food providers
- Control locally
- Work with nature

People's Food Policy project (2011). Resetting the table: A people's food policy for Canada. Food Secure Canada.

Dignified food access means “providing quality food choices, in a respectful way, in welcoming places.” *Roots to Harvest (2021). Dignified food access: A framework for action and handbook for organizations.*

Food justice is about recognizing how power operates at multiple stages of the food system.

“Food justice seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly. Food justice represents a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities.” *Food Secure Canada (n.d.) Food justice.*

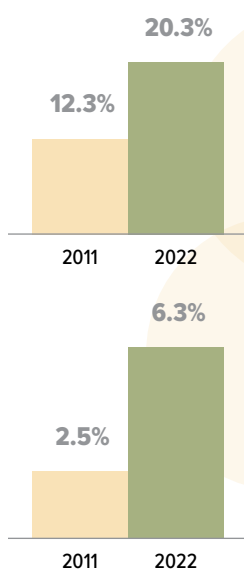
A note on language: This document uses the language and terms as reported in the original sources, and as such, may not reflect the language and terms people identify with and use in their daily lives.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is when a household has inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.

Moderate food insecurity describes when a household **must compromise on the quality and/or quantity of its food due to a lack of money.**

Severe food insecurity describes when a household **misses meals, reduces food intake** and may even go **days without food.**



On the rise

In 2011, **12.3%** of Albertans experienced food insecurity. In 2022, that number jumped to **20.3%**.

More than 2 times

In 2011, **2.5%** of Albertans were **severely** food insecure. In 2022, that number jumped to **6.3%**.

PROOF (2022) How many Canadians are affected by household food Insecurity?

Some are More Likely to Experience Food Insecurity than Others

21.7%

of children (people under the age of 18) lived in food insecure households in Alberta in 2021, compared to

17.9%

in 2011.

PROOF (2022) How many Canadians are affected by household food Insecurity?

15.9%

of female lone parents experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2017-18, compared to

8.5%

of couples with children.

11.9%

of females living alone and

12.7%

of males living alone experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2017-18.

Statistics Canada (2020) Household Food Security by living arrangement.

More than Two Times

28.9%

of Black households live with food insecurity compared to

11.1%

of white households (2017-18).

PROOF (2021) When it comes to tackling food insecurity, tackling anti-Black racism is an important part of the puzzle.

30.7%

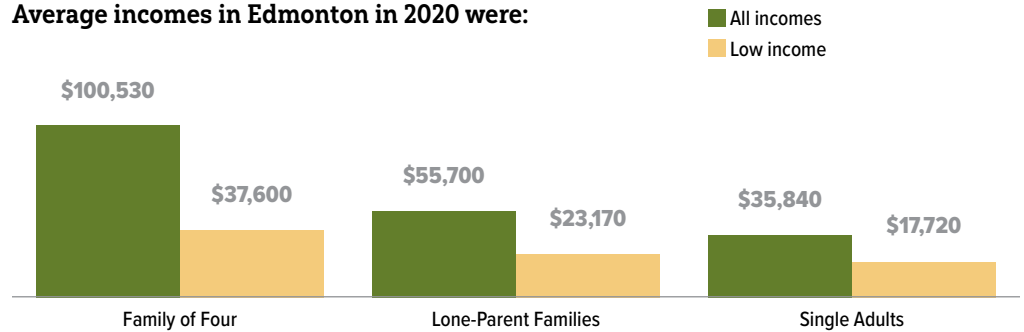
of Indigenous households in Canada experienced food insecurity.

Food Banks Canada (2022) Hungercount 2022.

Income is Not Keeping Up with Increasing Food Prices

Working Canadians experience food insecurity at high rates. In 2021, while only **13.7%** of working Canadians experienced food insecurity, they make up **51.9%** of the population of food-insecure households. *PROOF (2022) How many Canadians are affected by household food Insecurity?*

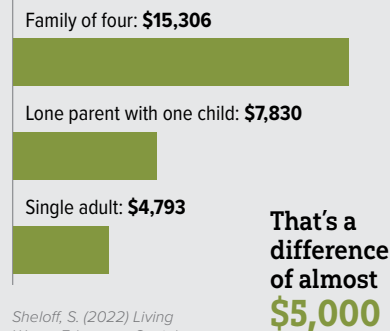
Average incomes in Edmonton in 2020 were:



Statistics Canada. (2022). Census families by family type and family composition including before and after-tax median income of the family (Table 11-10-0017-15). Statistics Canada. (2022). After-tax low-income status of census families based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family composition (Table 11-10-0020-01).

In 2013, healthy food for a year cost **\$10,920** for a family of four.

In 2022, healthy food for a year cost:

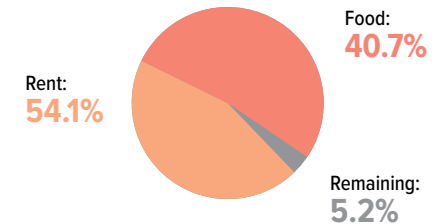


Sheloff, S. (2022) Living Wage. Edmonton Social Planning Council.

Budget for a family of four living in low income:

Healthy food accounts for almost **41%**

of a low-income families' budget and rent accounts for **54%** — leaving very little (a mere **5%**) for all other expenses.



Budget item as % of income for a low income family of four.

Food Isn't the Only Thing Families Need to Worry About

- The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Edmonton in 2022 was **\$1,304**. *Canadian Mortgage and Housing Council (2023). Rental Market Report.*
- Full time child care for a toddler was **\$7,380**, and before and after school care was **\$5,600**. *Sheloff, S. (2022) Living Wage. Edmonton Social Planning Council.*

Minimum wage is not enough:

- A single person working minimum wage, 35 hours a week, would make approximately **\$23,000** after tax annually.
- A healthy food basket would take up **20% of their income**, which is double what financial experts advise. Groceries **should only be 10-15%** of a household's budget. *Quickbooks (n.d.). Alini, E. (2017). How much of your budget should you spend on groceries? Global News.*

Income Supports are Not Sufficient

A couple with two children can receive **\$1,674** per month but a single adult only receives **\$790** from the Alberta Government as part of income support programming.

- A healthy food basket would eat up **50.6%** of a single adult's income *Ministry of Community and Social Services. (2020). Income support, financial benefits summary. Government of Alberta.*

Food insecurity is more common for those who rely on government assistance.

- **63.1%** of social assistance recipients in Canada experienced food insecurity in 2021. **31.1%** of social assistance recipients in Canada experienced severe food insecurity in the same year. They make up **9.4%** of the food-insecure population. *PROOF (2022) How many Canadians are affected by household food insecurity?*
- There are serious gaps in the social safety net. In 2023, Alberta enacted the Affordability Action Plan to help Albertans who were struggling with rising costs of inflation. The plan gave **\$600** to parents, seniors and people on income assistance to help with daily living costs.
- These payments were not available for working single adults, despite the fact that they face high rates of poverty and food insecurity. *Government of Alberta (2023). Affordability Action Plan.*



Food Costs Continue to Rise

Over the course of 2022, food costs rose by **10.8% in Alberta** and **10.3% in Canada** overall.

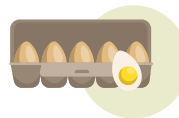
In 2023, costs are expected to rise an additional 5% to 7%.

Dalhousie (2023) Canada's Food Price Report.

As of February 2023, the costs were:

\$4.81

A dozen eggs



\$2.87

A litre of milk



\$5.68

A kilo of apples



Food Bank Use

The number of individuals who are served each month at Edmonton's Food Bank has increased drastically in the last decade.

2013: 12,677

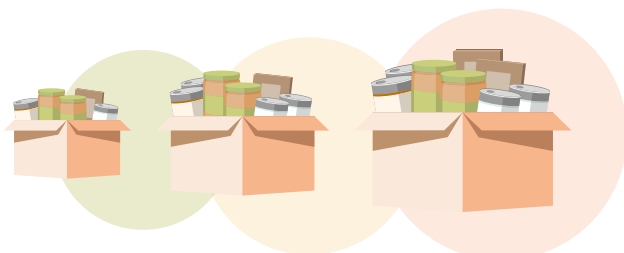
2022: 30,770 — RECORD HIGH

The Food Bank distributed over **5.9 million kilograms of food** in 2022, compared to **3.2 million kilograms of food** in 2012.

Edmonton Food Bank (2023). Edmonton's food bank update.

In 2022, **37.1%** of food bank users in Alberta were children.

Food Banks Canada (2022) HungerCount 2022.



Fruit and Veggie Consumption is Declining

- **36%** of Edmontonians in 2012 consumed the recommended five servings of fruit and veggies per day. *Vital Signs 2013 Report.*
- **19.4%** of Albertans in 2021 reported eating five servings of fruit and veggies per day. *Statistics Canada (2022). Health characteristics, annual estimates (Table 13-10-0096-01) [data set].*

Food Insecurity Impacts Families' Health

- Adults and youth experiencing food insecurity face a greater prevalence of the inadequate intake of essential vitamins, such as vitamin A, folate, calcium, magnesium and zinc.
- Individuals experiencing food insecurity report higher levels of: poor or fair self-rated health, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and food allergies.
- Individuals experiencing food insecurity also have a harder time managing chronic diseases. For example, those with diabetes have a harder time managing blood sugar and keeping up with a diabetic diet.

Provincial Health Services Authority (2016). Priority health equity indicators for British Columbia: Household food insecurity indicator report.

Growing Locally

Farmers' Markets

In the Vital Signs 2013 report, we found there were **12 farmers' markets** within the City of Edmonton and **13 farmers' markets** in the surrounding communities, part of Edmonton's Metro area.

In 2023, there are **31 unique farmers' market** locations in Edmonton and the surrounding area (which include four public markets in Edmonton).

City of Edmonton [n.d.]. Edmonton Farmers' Markets.
Alberta Farmers' Market Association [n.d.]. Edmonton & Surrounding Area.
Alberta Agriculture [n.d.]. 2023 Alberta Approved Farmers' Markets.



Impacts of Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets are a hub for resources. They grow the local economy, foster community bonding, can increase fruit and vegetable consumption, provide fresh produce in food deserts and some become tourist destinations.

Farmers' markets are an important way for marginalized business owners to sell their goods and level the playing field with major corporate entities which dominate the food industry.

Lee, R. (2021). Rooting Our Communities in Farmers' Markets. Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness.

A project out of Montreal gave participants prepaid debit cards to use at community markets and found participants noted a **17% reduction in severe food insecurity**.

Fruit and vegetable consumptions **increased from 82% to 92%**. Other benefits include increased community connections between people in need and the organizations that support them.

Yu, A. (2022). The Idea: How food stamp programs at local markets can improve access to fresh produce.

Community Gardens, Urban Farms and Equity

In the Vital Signs 2013 report, we found that there were over **80 community gardens** within metro Edmonton.

In 2023, there are at least **73 community gardens** on public land.

City of Edmonton [n.d.]. Community Gardens.

Another **83 "pop-up" or temporary gardens** were developed between 2020 and 2023 as part of a city project. In 2023, another **30 pop-up gardens** will be allocated.

City of Edmonton [n.d.]. Pop-up Community Gardens.

Urban farming refers to the practice of growing food in a city or other heavily populated areas, where the food is grown to sell.

Adam Sayner (n.d.). Urban farming ultimate guide and examples. GroCycle.

Several organizations in Edmonton offer opportunities for marginalized groups to get involved in community gardens and farms.

- **Wáposo-Wáti Park and Community Garden** is a partnership between Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA), City of Edmonton and Alberta Retina Consultants. They work with Correctional Services Canada to give healing lodge clients a chance to help in the garden.

It is an opportunity for people to give back to the community, learn about food sovereignty, beautify the city and get in touch with the earth.

Lamb, A. (2022). Edmonton's Waposo-Wati Park and Community Garden is a hopping urban green space.

- **Lady Flower Gardens**, profiled in the Vital Signs 2013 report, gives vulnerable Edmontonians a chance to get involved in gardening and donates half its produce to Edmonton's Food Bank. Clients from Mustard Seed, Boyle Street, Recovery Acres and Alberta Health Services, routinely work in the garden – planting, weeding and harvesting.

Lamb, A. and R. Bremness (2022). A decade of growth and transformation at Edmonton's Lady Flower Gardens.

- Community gardens are not a long-term solution to food insecurity; however, they do increase food literacy, act as sites of community connectivity and cohesion, benefit physical and mental health and increase neighbourhood property values.

Music, J and L. Mullins, S. Charlebois, C. Large, and K. Mayhew. (2022) Seeds and the city: a review of municipal home food gardening programs in Canada in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Humanit Soc Sci Commun 9, 273 (2022).

Farms Surrounding Edmonton

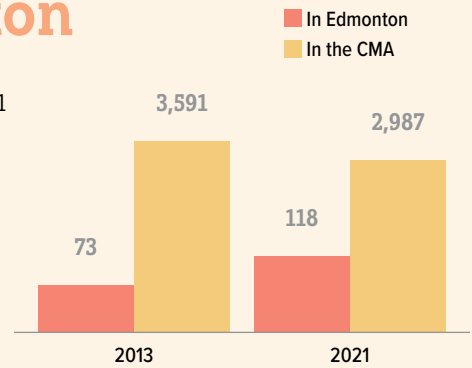
The Vital Signs 2013 report listed 73 farms within the city of Edmonton and 3,591 farms in the Edmonton Census Metropolitan area (CMA).

In 2021, there were 118 farms in Edmonton's city limits and 2,987 farms in the Edmonton CMA.

*(Edmonton City): Government of Alberta (2023). Edmonton – Number of Farms.
(Edmonton CMA): Government of Alberta (2023). Edmonton CMA - Number of Farms.*

Of the 118 farms in Edmonton, a large proportion are oilseed and grain farming (48), with some greenhouse and nursery farming (13) and beef cattle ranching (21).

Statistics Canada (2023). Census of Agriculture: Community Profiles.



The total area of farmland in Alberta dropped from 20.3 million hectares in 2016 to about 19.9 million hectares in 2021.

Frew, N. (2022). Fewer farmers in Alberta in 2021, but number of women increasing: StatsCan.

The number of farms that are 1,120 acres or larger have increased between 2016 and 2012, however, the number of smaller-sized farms seems to be decreasing.

*(Edmonton City): Government of Alberta (2023). Edmonton – Number of Farms.
(Edmonton CMA): Government of Alberta (2023). Edmonton CMA - Number of Farms.*

Changes in farmland is partly due to annexation – the process by which one municipality takes over the land of another. In 2019, for example, Edmonton annexed approximately 20,000 acres of land from Leduc County.

Thompson, J. (2020). 'I wish the county took the land back': Tax trouble for annexed Edmontonians. CTV News Edmonton.



Demographics in Farming

Census numbers show there were

57,200 farmers
in Alberta in 2021,
19,000 fewer
than in 2001.

The number of female farmers has grown in the past 20 years. In 2001, females were **28%** of all Alberta farmers.

Now, about **32%** of farmers are women.

Frew, N. (2022). Fewer farmers in Alberta in 2021, but number of women increasing: StatsCan.

Food Sustainability

Waste Services

The Waste Reduction Roadmap, approved in May 2021, aims to reduce the quantity of waste generated per person in Edmonton by **20%** over 25 years.

- Residential waste collection was transitioned from two-stream (garbage and recycling) to three-stream collection (food scraps).
- The intention of this initiative is to divert **90%** of residential waste from landfill. *City of Edmonton. Waste Services: 2021/2022 Annual service plan.*
- After food scraps carts were rolled out in 2021, landfills received about **30%** less trash that year.
- The City is now phasing in food scraps carts in apartments and condominiums. This will take place between Fall 2023 and 2027.

Lachacz, A. (2023). Edmonton apartments and condos to have separate food scraps collection. CTV News Edmonton.

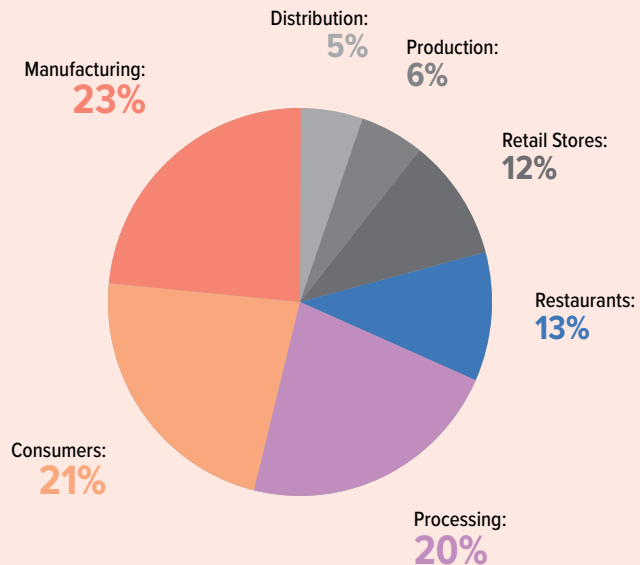
Food Waste

In Canada, an astonishing **58%** of food produced is lost each year — **35.5 million tonnes of food**. **32% of this is avoidable food waste** — food that could have been eaten before it was thrown away.

The average Canadian household spends **\$1,766 on food that is wasted each year.**

Waste Reduction Week Canada (2019). Food waste in Canada: The facts.

Responsibility of Food Waste



Zero Waste (n.d.) Food waste: the issue.

What About the Water?

In the 2013 Vital Signs report, we reported Edmontonians used **144 litres/capita/day** in 2009.

In 2019, the residential average per capita water use in Edmonton was **176 litres/capita/day**.

Newer neighbourhoods tend to have less water use due to more modern, water-efficient fixtures and smaller lot sizes.

EPCOR (2022). Edmonton's changing water use.

Our Water is at Risk

Run-off from glaciers provides a lot of the water that Albertans rely on. The North Saskatchewan River, for example, is fed by glacier run-off. Climate change is melting these glaciers and putting our water sources at risk.

The loss of glacial water sources will cause shortages for Rocky Mountain House, Lake Louise, Hinton and the Bighorn Dam. This will affect more than **1 million people out of 4.4 million living in Alberta** — that's almost a **quarter of Alberta's population**.

The Rocky Mountains could lose **90%** of glacier volume by the year 2100.

Rieger, S. (2020). Melting glaciers will bring instability to more than 1 million Albertans' water supply. CBC News Calgary.

Not Everyone has Access to Water

The water supplied to many First Nations reserves is contaminated, hard to access or at risk due to faulty treatment systems.

Contaminated water directly risks Indigenous peoples' ways of life — Indigenous women are seen as the keepers and protectors of water. Contaminated water makes it hard for Indigenous peoples to engage in ceremonies, customary fishing and hunting practices and teaching children and sharing traditional knowledge.

Human Rights Watch (2016). Make it safe: Canada's obligation to end the First Nations water crisis.

- Kehewin Cree Nation, had a Boil Water Advisory (BWA) in place from April 2012 until September 2020 — for **8 years, all 1,000 residents did not have access to clean drinking water.**
- Kapawe'no First Nation had a BWA from September 2010 until April 2018.

No long-term advisories are currently in effect in Alberta. However, there are several short-term boil water advisories in place.

Government of Canada (2022). Map of long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on reserves. Government of Canada (2022). Short-term drinking water advisories.