
An Evaluation of Cost-Share Local Food Boxes in Cumberland County and Cape Breton in Nova Scotia for the 2017 season

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ecology Action Centre has provided services to communities through subsidized local food box programs in rural Nova Scotia. The Cost-Share Local Food Box programs seek to address food insecurity while recognizing that accessibility would be a key factor in shaping the programs. This report evaluates the approaches to the Cost-Share model that have been implemented in Cumberland County and Cape Breton. In addition, this report looks at other subsidized food box models in Atlantic Canada to compare differences, findings, and operational practices. Overall, participants reported feeling satisfied with the program, demonstrating that innovative approaches to close the food insecurity gap can be resilient and effective. The Cost-Share Local Food Box programs also contribute to community-building and have high educational value. Funding was identified as a major issue across the different programs. Despite that challenge, the programs are having significant impact on participants' quality of life and communities.



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INTRODUCTION

In a research study about Canadian household food insecurity in 2011, Nova Scotia was identified as having the highest rate of food insecurity of all Canadian provinces.¹ This means that many Nova Scotians do not have reliable access to affordable, healthy food. The Halifax Regional Municipality ranks the highest amongst Canadian cities of food insecurity with 1 in 5 people struggling to access nutritious food (2012 statistics).² In rural areas, factors such as limited transportation and limited number of grocery stores influence levels of food access. In addition, socio-economic factors such as rural poverty may be influenced by less economic stimulation in rural areas compared to in the city. Moreover, rural areas often have fewer social programs for people facing food insecurity.

While there are many short and long-term solutions to food insecurity, not every solution is empowering, environmentally sustainable, and economically stimulating to the local community. In combining all three values, the [Ecology Action Centre](#) has supported serving communities through subsidized local food box programs in rural Nova Scotia. The [Cost-Share Local Food Box](#) programs seek to address food insecurity while recognizing that accessibility would be a key factor in shaping the programs. The Cost-Share programs are designed for low-income individuals and families that want access to local produce but struggle with food insecurity due to intersectional reasons, including but not limited in, price, convenience, taste and source.

The Cost-Share Community Supported Agriculture Program in Cumberland County was the first model developed in the province. In Cape Breton, the model evolved, through partnership with the [Cape Breton Food Hub Co-op](#), to include the ability to purchase from multiple farms. These iterations include the Cost-Share Food Box Program and the [Age-Friendly Food Box Program](#). This report evaluates the three approaches to the Cost-Share model through a localized perspective to analyze outcomes based on survey results and feedback from key stakeholder groups. By evaluating the impacts of the programs, this report identifies areas for improvement to ensure continued success. In addition, this report looks at other subsidized food box models from Common Roots Urban Farm in Halifax and Our Food South-East New Brunswick (Our Food SENB) to compare differences, findings, and operational practices. We hope that results from this report demonstrate that ethical alternative food systems are possible and can be empowering, sustainable, and economically beneficial to local and rural communities.

DIFFERENT MODELS

Cumberland County

The Cost-Share Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program has been operating in Cumberland County since 2014 and has been delivered by the Our Food Project, in partnership with the [Cumberland Food Action Network \(CFAN\)](#) and other partner organizations. The Cumberland CSA program connects “local farmers and low income consumers within the food system more closely by allowing the consumer to subscribe to the harvest of a certain farm or group of farms” for a whole season.³ This model provides local farmers economic benefit and diversification during the season, as they produce fresh vegetables and get to know their consumers. Additionally, consumers are brought closer to the food system by interacting directly with the farmers who feed our communities.

For traditional CSA shares, consumers receive a weekly share of local, fresh and nutritious vegetables for a flat price that goes directly to the farmer. Instead of paying middle-man costs at the grocery store, models such as the traditional CSA share keep money within the local economy – stimulating it. Moreover, whereas a typical CSA requires a lump sum payment for a season’s worth of produce upfront, in the cost-share model this fee is waived for low-income subscribers. Instead, these individuals “pay as they go”, on a weekly basis, which makes the food box much more accessible. The Cumberland County Cost-Share CSA program is a “commitment between a farm and a household for a season” of locally-grown food for \$20 a week.⁴ For individuals and families who are facing financial barriers, the Cost-Share CSA program is available at half-cost for \$10 a week. The other \$10 is fundraised through community donations and other approaches like corporate sponsorship and an annual benefit concert called Musicians for Local Food. Every week, participants go to pick up their produce at a designated location. In Amherst and surrounding areas, [Wymyskal Farm](#) is the main farm that supplies the produce. [Good Thyme Farm](#) is the supplier to the Hillside Villa located in River Hebert, Nova Scotia, which is a social housing complex with many senior residents. Four residents of the Villa receive a fully subsidized food box, made possible by a grant from the [Public Service Alliance of Canada](#). The Cost-Share CSA program is approximately 20 weeks long.

Cape Breton

COST-SHARE FOOD BOX PROGRAM:

The Cost-Share Food Box Program in Cape Breton began in 2016 through partnership with The Pan-Cape Breton Food Hub Co-op. The program worked with the [Glace Bay Food Bank](#) to serve food bank clients as well as participants from the greater community. In 2017, the Cost-Share Food Box Program also worked with [Community Cares Youth Outreach](#) to serve participants in Sydney Mines.

Launched in 2015, the Cape Breton Food Hub is a non-profit cooperative that bridges the relationship between local consumers and local producers. The Food Hub offers an online-shopping catalogue that displays available local food products and is updated weekly. “The

Food Hub receives the orders, sends a report of orders to the producers, and arranges for the pick-up and delivery of products between members of the co-op.”⁵ Every week, participants go to pick up their products at a designated location. “The Food Hub makes it possible to offer the empowering ability to choose. This agency is something that is often lost to households reliant on emergency food, through food banks and lunch programs” says Jody Nelson, a coordinator for the program. Nelson adds, “Working with the Food Hub has also made it possible to offer a range of fresh local groceries: produce, meat, seafood, bread and more.”

The Food Hub waives their \$50 yearly consumer membership fee for low-income participants. There are several producers for the Food Hub and a list of current producers can be accessed on the Cape Breton Food Hub website. Select families from the Glace Bay and Sydney Mines received full subsidy for their local food boxes, but most shares were subsidized at a rate of \$10/week per member. Subsidies are fundraised primarily through a “Share the Harvest” option available to general membership of the Food Hub. Members have proven to be very generous and supportive.

The Cape Breton Cost-Share Food Box Program also offers free cooking workshops for its participants during the length of the food box season. These workshops focus on healthy cooking using fresh, local ingredients seasonally available through the Food Hub. The program is approximately 8 weeks long.

AGE-FRIENDLY FOOD BOX:

The 2017 growing season was a pilot year for the Age-Friendly Food Box in Cape Breton. In collaboration with the Pan-Cape Breton Food Hub Co-op and [New Dawn – Meals on Wheels](#), this program provides fresh, local food to the homes of senior residents of Cape Breton Regional Municipality.

Meals on Wheels has a strong volunteer team of 40+ volunteers who handle deliveries of prepared meals to seniors and clients with limited mobility. The Age-Friendly Food Box aims to link Meals on Wheels services with the local food distribution system offered through the Cape Breton Food Hub.

The Food Hub worked with producers to tailor a list of available products in portions suitable to seniors, many of whom live alone. Meals on Wheels facilitated weekly orders with participants and delivered orders coordinated by the Food Hub.

The pilot ran for eight weeks during peak months of fresh produce supply, September to October. Sign up was free and participants were charged on a monthly basis depending on what groceries they ordered. Participants were also offered a \$5 weekly voucher, made possible through the “Share the Harvest” fundraiser through the Food Hub.



Local food box pick-up table. Photo credits: Wysmykal Farm

[Common Roots Urban Farm](#) - Interview with Jayme Melrose, coordinator

Common Roots Urban Farm is located in Halifax and operates 195 community garden plots. In addition to the traditional CSA model (which costs \$25 a week), Common Roots also has a food bank CSA option designed for low-income households experiencing food insecurity. Common Roots has partnered with [Parker Street Food & Furniture Bank](#) that offers free food in a grocery store style-display. This means that participants are able to directly select the food they want, which is not an option in most traditional CSA share programs. Common Roots donated \$3000 worth of food from their farm to Parker Street Food & Furniture during the 2017 season. The resources to support this program were made possible through community donations in the form of door-to-door canvassing and partnerships. In the interview, fundraising was noted to be the most difficult aspect of maintaining this program. Common Roots Urban Farm is looking to diversify and make changes to their funding stream for the next season.

Common Roots Urban Farm also offers 25 community garden plots at half-price to low-income gardeners through a Pay-It-Forward program. General donations can be made through the program to help subsidize the cost of the plot rentals. There is also a Free Food Pantry located on the farm for any food that may go uneaten. If an individual's plot has ripe vegetables and a reminder to pick them goes ignored, Common Roots reserves the right to harvest the food for the Free Food Pantry. Anyone may take food out of the Free Food Pantry.

[Our Food SENB](#) - Interview with Jill Van Horne, coordinator

South-East New Brunswick (SENB) includes the counties of Westmorland, Albert and Kent. In 2016, a program called Fresh Food for All offered a cost-share food box program at

half-price. The program partnered with three farms in a CSA structure, and five food bank centres across the counties, like the [Peter McKee Community Food Centre](#) in Moncton, Westmorland. Traditional CSA models ask participants to pay the whole season up-front. For the Fresh Food for All Program, The United Way and the Department of Agriculture shared the initial costs. Participants paid half of the weekly cost upon pick-up. Unfortunately, the program took a hiatus for the 2017 season due to the challenges it faced in the 2016 season. “The greatest challenge was delivery of the CSA boxes” said Jill Van Horne, a coordinator for the program. Since the partner food banks were scattered across South-East New Brunswick and many of the farms were located in Hillsborough (close to Fundy National Park), transportation was a concern. A remedial solution to this problem in the future would be to partner with farms in closer proximity. An additional challenge was discrepancy between the CSA boxes. The program partnered with three different farms resulting in three different quantities of food. This became a problem when participants noticed that other boxes contained more or less food than theirs.

At the moment, coordinators and members of the organizing committee are still working on improving and adjusting the programs to respond to the challenges in the pilot year.

EVALUATION

METHODOLOGY FOR SURVEY & DATA COLLECTION

Each survey was created by the respective coordinators for the Cost-Share Local Food Box programs. They are included in “Appendix A” that begins on page 23.

PARTICIPANT SURVEYS:

Seven participant surveys from Amherst–Cumberland County were administered in person mid-way through the program (ten weeks) during a food box pick-up at the collection site. Four participant surveys from the River Hebert Villa were administered on paper at the end of the program. Eighteen participants from Cape Breton were surveyed, in person, by a coordinator with the Cape Breton Cost-Share Food Box Program for the pre-survey. “Pre-Surveys” were collected before the program began (Week 0). Fourteen of the 18 participants completed the “Post-Surveys” which were collected at the end of the program (Week 8). Nine participant surveys from the Age-Friendly Food Box Program were administered at the end of the program (Week 8). Data from all Cape Breton surveys were compiled and sent to this report’s author, Tina Yeonju Oh, in an Excel spreadsheet.

Participant surveys for each program varied slightly according to the program’s model.

FARMER SURVEYS:

Only farmers associated with the Cumberland County Cost-Share CSA Program were surveyed. The survey with Wysmykal Farm was conducted in-person during their food box pick-up service and the survey with Good Thyme Farm was conducted electronically. Farmers with the Cape Breton Cost-Share Food Box were not surveyed as the programs in Cape Breton run through the Food Hub. There is no direct interaction between the participants and the farmers in the Cape Breton Cost-Share Local Food Box programs.

COORDINATOR/COMMITTEE SURVEY:

Two coordinator and/or committee surveys associated with the Cumberland County Cost-Share CSA Program were administered electronically and by phone. Seven coordinator and/or committee surveys associated with the Cape Breton Cost-Share Food Box Program were administered by phone. If interviewed by phone, recordings were made with participants’ permission.

EVALUATION

2017 PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS

Cumberland County

For the Cost-Share CSA Program in Cumberland, surveys with participants were conducted mid-way through the program, at the height of the 2017 growing season. There were eleven participants in Amherst and surrounding area, and four participants with the River Hebert Villa that contributed to this survey and data.

SURVEY RESULTS:

- Most households accessing this program were composed of two people. Average – 3.1
- 100% of participants reported feeling *very satisfied* with the program
- 100% of participants reported an *increase* of their access to healthy food
- 100% of participants reported an *increase* in vegetable and fruit consumption
- 64% of participants reported an *increase* in comfort level in cooking healthy meals “from scratch”
- 64% of participants reported an *increase* of cooking more meals at home
- 73% of participants were cooking new meals due to CSA
- 73% of participants reported feeling closer to the community due to CSA
- 64% of participants reported an *increase* in their health due to CSA
- Price, quality, convenience and buying local, respectively, were reported to be the most significant benefits of the CSA program
- All participants reported they would like to be part of the program again next year
- Three participants commented that their participation with the food box program exposed them to unknown vegetables.
- Two participants commented that the food boxes *exceeded* their expectation of the amount of vegetables included

“We are being exposed to fresh, local vegetables that we were never aware of” – Cost-Share CSA Program participant in Amherst

“The price and convenience [of this program] is the most significant benefit to us” – Cost-Share CSA Program participant in Amherst

Cape Breton

For the Cost-Share Food Box Program in Cape Breton, surveys with participants were conducted at the end of the program in 2017. There were six participants in Sydney, and twelve participants in Glace Bay that contributed to the following data.

PRE-SURVEY RESULTS (18 participants):

- Average age: 42
- 89% of participants had internet at home, only those over 60 years old did not.
- 45% of participants were a couple with children; 33% were single parents; 11% were single persons; 5% were couples; 5% were multigenerational
- 17% of participants were employed full time; 33% of participants were unemployed. The rest of participants were students, retirees, on disability pension, employed part-time, or were only seasonally employed.
- 44% of participants reported feeling either satisfied or very satisfied with their current diet; 33% were neutral. 22% of participants reported feeling either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.
- Price was the leading factor for participants when purchasing food. Thereafter, taste, quality, nutrition, source, and organic was respectively ranked.
- 100% of participants reported that budget was a limiting factor when choosing foods to purchase
- Only 50% of participants reported eating fruits and vegetables once a day.
- All participants reported relying on grocery stores as their primary source of food access.

POST-SURVEY RESULTS (14 participants):

- 92% of participants reported that they were *satisfied* with their diet
- 92% of participants reported an *increase* in perception of a healthier diet
- 83% of participants reported eating fruits and vegetables *at least once a day*
- 92% of participants reported an *increase* in fruit and vegetable consumption
- 83% of participants reported an *increase* in confidence in cooking
- Quality was the leading factor for participants when purchasing food at the Food Hub. Price, nutrition and taste were tied for second-leading factor, followed by organic and producer, respectively.

“I enjoyed meeting new people, learning new recipes, and learning about new veggies that I got to introduce to my kids, and they love them!” – 2016 Cost-Share Food Box Program participant in Cape Breton

For the Age-Friendly Food Box, surveys with participants were conducted at the end of the program. There were nine participants in total who contributed to the following data.

SURVEY RESULTS:

- 100% of participants reported feeling either *satisfied or very satisfied* with the program
- 90% of participants reported an *increase* of their access to healthy food
- 70% of participants reported an *increase* in vegetable and fruit consumption
- 50% of participants reported cooking new meals due to program
- 80% of participants reported feeling *closer to the community* due to participation in the program
- 67% of participants reported that the program affected their ability to *live more independently*
- Increased social connection was reported to be the most significant benefit of the program. Followed by and improvement in health and energy, then convenience and price.
- All participants reported they would like to be part of the program again next year.



Happy local food box participant! Photo credits: Wysmykal Farm

EVALUATION

2017 FARMER SURVEY RESULTS

Cumberland County

Farmers involved in the Cost-Share CSA Program are not only suppliers of the fresh produce, but major stakeholders involved in ensuring the successful delivery of the program. In Cumberland County, Wysmykal Farm supplies the CSA program in Amherst and surrounding area, and Good Thyme Farm supplies the CSA program to the Villa in River Hebert. Wysmykal Farm and Good Thyme Farm are located in close proximity to each other (five-minute drive), which was helpful in delivering the food boxes to the Villa in River Hebert.

Since the CSA model operates as a contract between farmers and participants, it often results in closer relations between the producer and consumer. Participants have the opportunity to directly interact with the farmers that are growing the food they eat, while farmers also have the opportunity to engage with their customers. By working together, stakeholders are making an effort to increase access to local, healthy food.

Additionally, the CSA model provides a source of financial security for the farms as they know before the growing season how much food to grow. The Cost-Share CSA Program has also increased the customer base of participating farm CSAs.

Since the number of farmers involved in this program is limited, the following data was generated through an interview-style conversation rather than a survey. Questions that were asked are listed in “Appendix A” of this report.

SURVEY RESULTS & GENERAL COMMENTS:

- Overall, farmers are satisfied with the program.
- When asked about the significant impact this program has on the farm, farmers responded by saying that the Cost-Share CSA program connects them with new customers resulting in an *increase* to general revenue.
- Farmers noted that the Cost-Share CSA program has resulted in long-term relationships between the farmers and participants
- Cost-Share CSAs provide supplemental income on top of farmers' market and farm stand sales. However, at this point, Cost-Share CSAs, alone, are not enough to replace the overall income of farmers.
- Farmers noted that neglected Cost-Share CSA boxes that did not get picked-up were being wasted.

"Making fresh local food available to people who might not otherwise be able to afford it. It is great to see our food getting out there, especially to families with young children." – Good Thyme Farm on the Cost-Share CSA Program

"Families that do receive our boxes really appreciate what they are getting... they get educated about the farming process. We... have conversations about how to use vegetables that they... [are] unfamiliar with" – Good Thyme Farm on the Cost-Share CSA Program

"Overall, [this is] a really cool program. [We are] happy to be a part of it" – Wysmykal Farm on the Cost-Share CSA Program



Local Food Box pick-up site. Photo credits: Wysmykal Farm

EVALUATION

2017 COORDINATOR/COMMITTEE SURVEY RESULTS

Coordinators and fundraising committees are essential in ensuring successful delivery of the Cost-Share Local Food Box Programs. In order to learn more about the logistics of the different food box models and how they operate, it was essential to speak with coordinators and fundraising committees that are on the frontlines of these programs. They interact with all the different stakeholders while respecting and learning how to improve the broader food system. Since the Cost-Share Local Food Box models are often very labour intensive to organize and require a consistent stream of funding for subsidization, the coordinators and fundraising committees are key to understanding the inefficiencies of the current Cost-Share Local Food Box Programs. By evaluating and learning from these inefficiencies, we hope to have the tools to improve the programs in the years ahead.

Since the purpose of evaluating coordinators and committee members were mainly to improve the program for the future, the following data was provided through an interview-style conversation rather than a survey. Coordinators and committee members were asked questions from the following areas: General Program Management, Sustainability, Project Impact, Private Sector Engagement, and Rural Economy.

Cumberland County

SURVEY RESULTS & GENERAL COMMENTS:

- Overall, organizers felt the program was successful but noted that there was room to improve.
- Funding was said to be a precarious venture and one of the most difficult area of maintaining sustainability for this program
- All organizers felt that this program *improved* the local economy.
- The Cost-Share CSA Program has increased private sector investment in community food through its funding streams like ScotiaBank; local farm participation from Good Thyme Farm and Wysmykal Farm; local food store's contribution of cooler space in their store; and a community fundraiser through the annual Musician for Local Food event in Amherst
- Organizers noted that recurring donations from organizations year after year would be valuable and helpful, as it would put less pressure on reaching fundraising goals from the Musician for Local Food event.
- An organizer commented that a potential future goal would be to increase the number of farms involved in the program and consequently increase the outreach of the number of participants.

“[The most significant impact of this program is] making fresh local food available to people who might not otherwise be able to afford it. It is great to see our food getting out there, especially to families with young children.” – Organizer with the Cumberland County Cost-Share CSA program

Cape Breton

SURVEY RESULTS & GENERAL COMMENTS:

- 83% of organizers felt the program was successful in achieving its intended goals.
- When asked about the significant impacts of this program that were unintended and unanticipated, organizers noted that the online model resulted in many questions for computer and technical help.
- 67% of organizers identified potential barriers that may affect participation in the Cost-Share Food Box Program including, but not limited to, financial constraints, lack of time, transportation and preconceived notions and stigmatization of local food.
- 83% of organizers said that funding or understaffing was an area to improve on.
- All organizers that were involved with the cooking workshops reported they witnessed an *increase* in the participants’ food knowledge.
- Several organizers noted that they were heavily burdened by the program’s required reporting and administrative hours.
- An organizer commented that retaining consistent staff and volunteers could potentially improve the sustainability of this program.
- Several organizers noted the importance of personal choice that is unique to the Cape Breton Cost-Share Food Box Program

“This program is full circle... with farmers, local food, and locals. It helps everyone” – Organizer with the Cape Breton Cost-Share Food Box Program

“When I go to the pick-up location I notice how comfortable the space is... I watched the participants get very excited to receive their food box weekly. Participants came out of their shells and met other people, shared recipes, tried new vegetables, laughed together, and became a part of a healthy community.” – Organizer with the Cape Breton Cost-Share Food Box Program

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Cumberland County

PARTICIPANTS:

In general, participants reported that they were very satisfied with the Cost-Share CSA Program. Community-building and belonging were important outcomes of the program. Comments made by several participants included that they enjoyed talking to and having a relationship with the farmers who provide their food. It is also clear in the evaluation that the Cost-Share CSA Program has increased participants' access and consumption to healthy, local fruits and vegetables.

Overall, areas that the program should focus on improving include building participants' confidence in cooking meals "from scratch" and cooking more meals at home. A frequent comment that was collected during the surveys was that participants were being introduced to produce that they typically did not eat. While increasing access to healthy and local food for low-income people is important, Cost-Share participants should also be able to access support and information needed to cook the new foods. This could be improved through offering cooking workshops like the Cost-Share CSA Program did in Cape Breton, and by partnering and sharing resources with other organizations in the area that are involved in increasing peoples' food knowledge and skills. Family resource centres and food banks typically offer these services.

Additionally, when asked how the program could improve during the surveys, one participant in Amherst said that the program should offer canvas or reusable bags instead of the plastic bags that the farmer provides. If resources allow, this is an easy change that the program could make since environmental sustainability is said to be an important factor. Wherever possible, environmentally-friendly alternatives should be used and participants should be encouraged, at the very least, to bring their own bags next season.

For senior participants at the River Hebert Villa, delivery, convenience, and finances were major factors in participation of the program. The River Hebert Villa is a social housing unit and is geared to low-income seniors that are extremely limited financially. Two separate participant comments were reported during the survey saying that their participation would not be possible had the program *not* been subsidized. Information, as such, help to surface challenges that some seniors living in rural areas face when it comes to food insecurity.

"Selection has been awesome...This program has exceeded my expectations" – Cost-Share CSA Program participant in Amherst

FARMERS:

It is clear in the evaluation that Cost-Share CSA Program is supporting farmers through gaining new customers and increasing income. However, due to the limited size of the program as it stands now, farmers are unable to support themselves financially solely through the Cost-Share CSA program. The income gained from the Cost-Share CSA Program is a supplemental income, meaning that farmers may not have the capacity to devote additional time to logistics of the Cost-Share CSA Program. It was noted in a coordinator's interview that the farmers have a leading role in signing up people for the program and doing the administrative work. It was also noted by in farmers' survey that it was "challenging to keep track of missed pick ups and to follow up in a timely fashion as there are a lot of people to keep track of." If future changes are made to the logistics of the program without parallel increases to income, the increase in administrative work should be shared by others, such as community volunteers, so that the workload is not shouldered by the farmers. Additionally, along with participants' enjoyment of building relationships with the farmers, the farmers responded in mutual reciprocity. They also noted that Cost-Share CSA Program participants often become long-term customers. This is supported by the participants' surveys where 100% of participants reported wanting to join the program again next year.

When asked how the program could better support farmers during the surveys, farmers explained three major areas to improve: attendance, waste, and transportation.

Farmers explained that attendance is not consistent for some Cost-Share CSA Program participants. As a result, the vegetables that have already been picked end up becoming spoiled in the Manasseh Local Food Store cooler or sought to find an alternate purpose. While a small budget is set aside by Ecology Action Centre to cover the cost of missed pick-ups so that the farmers are not burdened, this is an unsustainable practice. One of the many possible solutions may include better communication to participants that emphasizes the consequences of a missed pick-up. Another solution can be a strike system, where a stated number of missed pick-ups results in the cancellation of a program for that individual. Solutions to this issue may change once more information is provided on why attendance is inconsistent. Is this an affordability issue? Is this an accessibility issue? Are reminders needed? Another improvement could be the creation and implementation of a waste policy. A suggestion provided during the interviews was to have a volunteer with the Cumberland Food Action Network deliver unused food boxes to the local food bank or to the local family resource centre so that it may be used in cooking programming, or given to another person in-need.

On the issue of transportation, Cumberland County is a large geographic area, rendering improvements to transportation and accessibility more difficult. As the program currently stands, Good Thyme Farm delivers the River Hebert Villa Cost-Share CSAs by bringing them to Wysmykal Farm (which is a five-minute drive between the farms). Wysmykal Farm then brings them to Amherst during which time Wysmykal Farm operates their Cost-Share CSA pick-up and delivery. A volunteer then picks up the River Hebert Villa Cost-Share CSAs from Wysmykal Farm in Amherst and drives them to River Hebert. While this process works due to the coincidental geography of the farmers and volunteer, it is a largely complicated, unsustainable, and inefficient method. Solutions to improve this issue should keep in mind that transportation is a

major barrier for the River Hebert Villa participants (as well as other rural communities), as many do not have a reliable source of transportation to go and pick-up the Cost-Share CSAs.

COORDINATORS & COMMITTEES:

Survey results illustrate that organizers see purpose and value in running the program citing its improvement to the local farm economy, creating a more localized and ethical food system, and providing an important community-driven alternative to the current charitable food system. However, in order for the Cost-Share CSA Program to run sustainably, the program's revenue stream will need to become more consistent.

Funding is a major concern for organizers as the Cost-Share CSA Program operates heavily on grants and fundraising. Grants are limited and grant-writing is labour intensive. This is a dilemma if the program is under-staffed and/or unable to pay someone for grant-writing. As it stands, Scotiabank has agreed to match fundraising efforts for the past few years, but this has resulted in reliance on them as a big source of funding which could be lost at any time. Fundraising is time/labour intensive which has "locked" the program size due to financial constraints. So far, fundraising has been limited to one large event: The Musicians for Local Food annual benefit concert. Some suggestions include: recurring donations from organizations year after year, presenting an option to non-Cost-Share CSA participants to donate money towards a Cost-Share CSA local food box for families or individuals in-need, targeting corporate sponsorships and partnerships like Common Roots Farm in Halifax has done, and/or broadening fundraising techniques.

Cape Breton

PARTICIPANTS:

Overall, participants in both the Cost-Share Food Box program and the Age-Friendly Food Box Program reported feeling satisfied with the program.

For the Cost-Share Food Box program, the difference in pre- and post-survey illustrate successful outcomes due to participation in the program. There was a 48% reported increase in participants' diet satisfaction; a 33% increase in daily fruit and vegetable consumption; and an increase in the value of food quality than food price when asked the leading factor in purchasing food.

Since the general program is facilitated online through partnership with the Cape-Breton Food Hub, computer and technical help was needed from coordinators. While the online interface offers autonomy to the participants in choice selection, participants do not have the opportunity to engage directly with farmers. Some of the community-benefits associated with the Cumberland County programs do not apply to this model. However, the Cape Breton programs facilitated other benefits like increasing computer literacy to many participants. Coordinators were available to address any questions using the interface and even helped in setting up email accounts which were necessary to make the food orders. The use of the online interface should not be necessarily seen as a barrier, but rather as an unintended opportunity and benefit of the program. Two participants over the age of 60 did not have internet access at

home, so they had alternative arrangements with coordinators at the Glace Bay Food Bank. As discussed in the next section, more funding is needed for increased coordinator support in the area.

In the case of the Age Friendly Food Box Program, Meals on Wheels staff already communicate with clients regularly (by phone or otherwise) and the ordering was not done through the web interface – it was a list specially tailored by the Food Hub for this program.

For the Age-Friendly Food Box, increased social connection was reported to be the most significant benefit of the CSA program with 80% of participants saying that they felt closer to the community due to participation in the program. Like the River Hebert Villa survey results, this information helps to explain the multi-faceted ways that food insecurity affects seniors living in Nova Scotia. Comments from participants of the Age-Friendly Food Box Program stated that they wanted more selection of products including dairy and eggs. However, availability is determined by the producers, so suggestions for greater selection should be addressed to the farmers. Other comments from participants included making the program available year-round. Unfortunately, the Food Hub does not operate year round; however greater capacity could be focused on extending the eight-week program according to the Food Hub's delivery season. The 2017 season was a pilot year for the Age Friendly Food Box Program.

COORDINATORS & COMMITTEES:

Survey results explain that most organizers felt the Cost-Share Local Food Box Program was successful in achieving its intended goals. However, one organizer reported feeling the program's success was neutral, citing a heavy burden in administrative work and time-consumption. Other organizers confirmed this comment in a later question that asked how the sustainability of this program could better improve. 83% of organizers reported saying that funding or understaffing was an issue to the sustainability of running the program Cumberland County Cost-Share CSA Program also found funding was a major issue and barrier to improving the programs. One organizer commented that the program is "running from grant to grant," explaining the precariousness of the program and how sudden and/or unexpected cuts to funding would terminate the program. In order for the Cost-Share Local Food Box program to improve its sustainability, more money is needed to hire and pay more coordinators.

When asked a question about other outcomes of this program that might have been unintended and/or unanticipated, many organizers talked about the increase in computer literacy (from using the online interface) being a major benefit. Coordinators were available to help participants who needed guidance navigating the Food Hub, however they noted that once they learned how to use the interface on their own, they were able to navigate it independently. An organizer commented that the expansion of peoples' computer literacy could help them use the internet for other assistances like applying for a job and writing an email. While computer literacy was not in the initial design of the program, it resulted in being a notable component.

When asked a question about potential barriers that may affect participation in the Cost-Share Food Box program, two organizers identified that there are societal misunderstandings of local food. "There is stigma that local food is expensive," said a coordinator. This stereotype may have prevented people from exploring the program. Some

ideas for solutions include an awareness campaign, or infographics with statistics and information about local food and the Cost-Share programs. Expanding capacity to educate about local food would alleviate the stigma that poses a potential barrier to participation, while serving broader goals of strengthening our local food system.



CONCLUSION

The Cape Breton and Cumberland County Cost-Share Local Food Box programs endeavour to increase access to local, nutritious food in communities facing food insecurity. Over 90% of participants reported feeling satisfied with the program, demonstrating that innovative approaches to close the food insecurity gap can be resilient and effective. While these programs operate on a small-scale, “every box counts”, as was said by a coordinator of the Cumberland County Cost-Share CSA Program. “It is improving food accessibility one individual and family at a time”.

Any food bank user and community member who is experiencing financial barriers accessing healthy and fresh produce should be able to find affordable and accessible local and ethical food sources. As reflected in the comments made by Cost-Share Local Food Box organizers, the program seeks to grow and expand their membership and program length.

Another important component of the Cost-Share Local Food Box program is community-building. In Cumberland County, both farmers and participants noted that they appreciate the relationships made with each other. Cumberland County’s annual benefit concert brings together artists and various members of the community. Local fundraisers, as such, attract more people to learn about program, as well as help those in need. The Cost-Share Local Food Box programs are not only community-oriented but have high educational value. As seen in the Cape Breton Cost-Share Local Food Box Program, individuals had the opportunity to increase their computer literacy by learning how to use the online interface. In addition, cooking workshops expanded participants’ food knowledge, including cooking with vegetables that the participants may not have otherwise eaten before.

Funding is a major issue across the different programs. While not all improvements have financial costs, many of the suggestions and comments from various stakeholders will require funding adjustments. Since grants are limited and typical fundraising methods are generally labour-intensive and time-consuming, increasing the programs’ budgets will require substantive and innovative ideas.

Any diversion from the typical and conventional charitable food box is a way to spread other [potential] models... the programs are meant to [benefit] human health, local communities, economy, environment, and farmers, all at the same time. Charitable food boxes typically source produce from non-local sources. [Conventional] food box programs rely almost solely on food that travels from far distances, that is of the lowest quality – laden with chemicals and often produced on the backs of poor workers. Through local sourcing we are conscious of not exploiting other farm workers in other countries. It’s a socially-just model – Cumberland County Cost-Share CSA Program Coordinator

Overall, the Cost-Share Local Food Box programs are having significant impact on participants’ quality of life and communities. A more localized food system helps to invest money directly into communities and individuals instead of corporations. It creates a pattern of exchange and resilience that diversifies the food system and builds stronger relationships

within the community. The Cost-Share Local Food Box program is transformative through its over-arching goals of finding local solutions to food insecurity that is beneficial to all stakeholders including, but not limited to, farmers, community-members, program coordinators, volunteers, and participants. Through its multi-faceted approach in building relationships and local-sourcing, the Cost-Share Local Food Box programs are proactive in their goals by offering cooking workshops, localizing fundraising streams through community events, and creating partnerships with local businesses. Additionally, the Cost-Share Local Food Box program demonstrates the importance of engaging in a long-term, localized solution to food insecurity that is empowering, environmentally sustainable, and economically stimulating to the local community. Since its inception, the Cost-Share Local Food Box Program has demonstrated the capability to grow by helping to build food-secure and tolerant communities.

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6. Ibid.

Additional Resource:

Voices for Food Security in Nova Scotia. (2017). *Can Nova Scotians afford to eat healthy? Report on 2015 participatory food costing*. Halifax, NS: Food Action Research Centre (FoodARC), Mount Saint Vincent University. Retrieved from https://foodarc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2016_report_Executive_summary_LR_SPREADS.pdf

APPENDIX A: Survey Questions

CUMBERLAND COST-SHARE CSA PARTICIPANT SURVEY:

1. How many people in your household?
2. What is your overall level of satisfaction with the food box program?
Not satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very satisfied
3. Because of the food box program, your access to healthy food has...
 - a) Stayed the same
 - b) Increased
 - c) Decreased
4. During the food box program, your household ate _____ vegetables and fruits per week...
 - a) same amount of
 - b) more
 - c) less
5. Has your comfort level in cooking healthy meals “from scratch”...
 - a) Stayed the same
 - b) Increased
 - c) Decreased
6. Has the number of meals your household cooks at home each week...
 - a) Stayed the same
 - b) Increased
 - c) Decreased
7. Please share a new meal you have prepared for your household during the food box program:
8. Because of taking part in the food box program, has your feeling of being a part of a community...
 - a) Stayed the same
 - b) Increased
 - c) Decreased
9. Has your overall health and well-being...
 - a) Stayed the same
 - b) Increased
 - c) Decreased
10. What is the most significant benefit of the food box for you?
11. How could the food box program be improved?
12. Do you plan to participate in the program again next year? (Y/N)? Why or Why not?
13. Additional comments?

CAPE BRETON COST-SHARE CSA PARTICIPANT PRE-SURVEY:

1. Age of person who most often makes food purchases in your household?
 - a) Stayed the same
 - b) Increased
 - c) Decreased
2. Do you have internet at home? (Y/N)?
3. Describe your household:
 - a) Single person
 - b) Single parent with children
 - c) Multigenerational
 - d) Couple
 - e) Couple with children
4. Describe your income situation:
 - a) Full-time employment
 - b) Student
 - c) Retired
 - d) Part-time employment
 - e) Seasonal employment
 - f) Unemployment
5. Overall, how satisfied are you with your current diet?

Not satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	Very satisfied
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6. What factors are most important to you when buying food? (Rate each 1-5)
 - a) Taste
 - b) Source
 - c) Quality
 - d) Price
 - e) Organic
 - f) Nutrition
7. Do you feel that budget is a limiting factor when choosing food? (Y/N)?
8. How often do you eat fresh fruit and vegetables?
 - a) 2 or more times a day
 - b) 1 a day
 - c) 2 or more times a week
 - d) 1 a week
 - e) less than 1x a week
9. Where do you access food?
10. How confident are you in your cooking skills and nutritional knowledge?

Not confident	1	2	3	4	5	Very confident
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CAPE BRETON COST-SHARE CSA PARTICIPANT POST-SURVEY:

1. During this program did your satisfaction with your diet change?
 - a) Stayed the same
 - b) Increased
 - c) Decreased
2. During this program, do you think your diet was...
 - a) The same
 - b) Healthier
 - c) Less healthy
3. What factors were most important to you when choosing food from the food hub? (Rate each 1-5)
 - a) Taste
 - b) Source
 - c) Quality
 - d) Price
 - e) Organic
 - f) Nutrition
4. How often did you eat fresh fruit and vegetables during the program?
 - a) 2 or more times a day
 - b) 1 a day
 - c) 2 or more times a week
 - d) 1 a week
 - e) less than 1x a week
5. How did your consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables change?
 - a) Stayed the same
 - b) Increased
 - c) Decreased
6. During this program did your confidence in cooking skills improve? (Y/N)?
7. Throughout this program, did you cook more meals at home than before? (Y/N)?

AGE-FRIENDLY FOOD BOX PARTICIPANT SURVEY:

1. What is your overall level of satisfaction with the grocery order program?
Not satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very satisfied
2. Because of the grocery order program, your access to healthy food has...
 - a) Stayed the same
 - b) Increased
 - c) Decreased
3. Before the grocery order program, was a family member or friend responsible for the purchase and delivery of your groceries?
4. Do you (and others in your household) eat more fruits and vegetables on weeks when you have the grocery order?
5. Without the grocery order, what are the different fruits and vegetables that you eat in an average week? (e.g., carrots, lettuce, apples)
6. With the grocery order, what are the different fruits and vegetables that you eat in an average week? (e.g., carrots, lettuce, apples)
7. Have you tried new recipes since having the grocery order? What one(s)?
8. Since having the grocery order, how many home cooked meals do you prepare at home in an average week?
9. Because of taking part in the grocery order program, has your feeling of being a part of a community:
 - a) Stayed the same
 - b) Increased
 - c) Decreased
10. How has the grocery order program affected your ability to live independently?
11. For you, what are the most significant benefits of the grocery order? (circle all that apply)
 - a) increased social connection
 - b) more time to be with family
 - c) improved health and energy
 - d) convenience
 - e) savings
12. How could the grocery order program be improved? (Prompts: Better selection, lower price, offer year round, delivery at different time...)
13. Would you participate in the Age Friendly Food Box program if it were offered again?
14. If a food market was to set up in your building or near your house on a weekly basis and offered healthy food at affordable prices how likely would you be to buy your food from this market?
15. Additional comments?

CUMBERLAND COUNTY COST-SHARE CSA FARMER SURVEY:

1. What is working well for you?
2. What is the most significant impact that taking part in this program has on you and your farm?
3. Does this program increase your farm income? Or support your business in some way?
Please explain.
4. What is not working well for you? Or could be better?
5. How could this improve for you?
6. Additional comments?

CUMBERLAND COUNTY COST-SHARE CSA COORDINATOR/COMMITTEE SURVEY:

1. Overall, how successful do you consider this program? Please explain.
Not satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very satisfied
2. From your perspective is this program sustainable? (e.g., in terms of human resources/capacity, partnerships and financial/fundraising model/capacity) Does this program increase your farm income? Or support your business in some way? Please explain.
3. How could we improve the sustainability of this program?
4. Has this program increased private sector investment in community food (farms, markets, CSAs etc.)? (Y/N)? Please explain.
5. From your perspective, has this program strengthened the local food economy?
6. What is the most significant impact of this program?
7. Additional comments?

CAPE BRETON COST-SHARE CSA COORDINATOR/COMMITTEE SURVEY:

1. Overall, from your perspective how successful do you consider this program in achieving its intended goals: (Prompt for interviewer – intended goals - 1) Increasing fresh vegetable and fruit consumption and 2) Contributing to a supportive food environment?). Please explain.
Not successful 1 2 3 4 5 Very successful
2. Please explain any other outcomes of this program (unintended/unanticipated: (Prompts for interviewer: Did participants learn other skills – internet usage, etc.? Did participants access other services through organization? Did participants report feeling empowered in other ways as a result of the program? Effects on organization/community as a whole? Negative outcomes)
3. Can you identify barriers to recruitment and participation (in program and/or cooking workshops)? Any ideas to reduce these barriers?
 - a. Can you identify barriers that prevented some participants from ordering regularly? Any ideas to reduce these barriers?
4. Could you offer suggestions for improving program delivery?
5. What value, if any, do you see in continuing this program?
6. Do you feel this is a program that could become embedded in and spearheaded by your organization?
 - a. What would you need to make this possible?
7. How could the sustainability of this program be improved?
8. Explain how this project did, or did not, contribute to a supportive food environment:
9. Explain any changes you witnessed in people's understanding of food skills, nutrition and food sourcing.
10. Explain any changes you witnessed in people's attitudes or practices in regards to fruit and vegetable consumption during the workshops:
11. Explain any changes you witnessed in people's attitudes or practices in regards to fruit and vegetable consumption due to the subsidized food hub memberships:
12. What in your opinion are the most significant impacts of this program?
13. Anything else you wish to comment on (Prompts for interviewer: The role of the coordinator, planning and communication process with partners, other aspects of the program, participant anecdotes)?