



The Province of Prince Edward Island

Food Insecurity

Poverty Reduction Action Plan Backgrounder

5/17/2018

www.princeedwardisland.ca/poverty-reduction



Food Insecurity

SUMMARY

Access to sufficient quantities of nutritious food is a fundamental human need. When individuals or families have inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints, they are said to be **food insecure**. Various levels of food insecurity have been [defined](#) to support analysis.

Rates of food insecurity have been [measured](#) in Canada since 2005. This backgrounder relies on data from Statistics Canada's Food Security module of the Canadian Community Health Survey, available for most years, analysis of that data by the PROOF Food Security Research Project at the University of Toronto, and data from *Hungercount*, the annual count and profile of food bank users carried out by Food Banks Canada.

These data sources indicate that over the decade since 2007, [food insecurity climbed](#) in PEI to a peak in 2013 and has improved slightly since then. In 2013, almost one in eight Island households experienced moderate or severe food insecurity, dropping to one in 10 by 2014. A further 5% had a marginal level of food insecurity, such as worrying about running out of food. These rates are higher than in most [other provinces](#). The proportion of Islanders making use of [food banks](#) to help meet their food needs is much smaller, at just over 2 percent, slightly below the national average.

The level and extent of food insecurity varies among [population groups](#). By household type, food insecurity is highest among lone-parent households, followed by single households. Among couple families, those with children are far more likely to be food insecure. By age, food insecurity is highest among younger Islanders, and lowest among seniors.

A high proportion of Island [children](#) live in households that experience some level of food insecurity – 22 percent in 2014 – but detailed survey findings indicate that adults in those households take much of the brunt of food insecurity on themselves. A smaller proportion of children face compromises in the quality and especially the quantity of food.

DEFINITIONS OF FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD INSECURITY

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, food security exists when “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

Where these conditions are not met, three levels of food security have been defined:

- households which worry about running out of food, and/or limit their food selection due to lack of money for food, are **marginally** food insecure;



- households which compromise the quantity or quality of food due to lack of money are **moderately** food insecure; and
- Households whose members miss meals, reduce food intake, and at worst go a day or more without food are **severely** food insecure.

HOW IS FOOD INSECURITY MEASURED?

Data on food insecurity are collected by Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), a regular survey of 60,000 Canadians aged 12 and over. The CCHS includes a Household Food Security Module, consisting of 18 questions, 10 related to adults and eight to children, on the food situation in the household over the previous year.

The food module operates on two-year cycles, mandatory for one cycle and optional the next. Since inception of the food module in 2005, Prince Edward Island has participated in all years except for 2009 and 2010. The most recent data available are from the 2014 survey.

The questions range from worrying about running out of food, to changing the quality or quantity of foods, to doing without food. Households not experiencing any of these situations, i.e. saying no to all 18 questions, are considered food secure. "Yes" responses are classified into the marginal/moderate/ severe levels as follows:

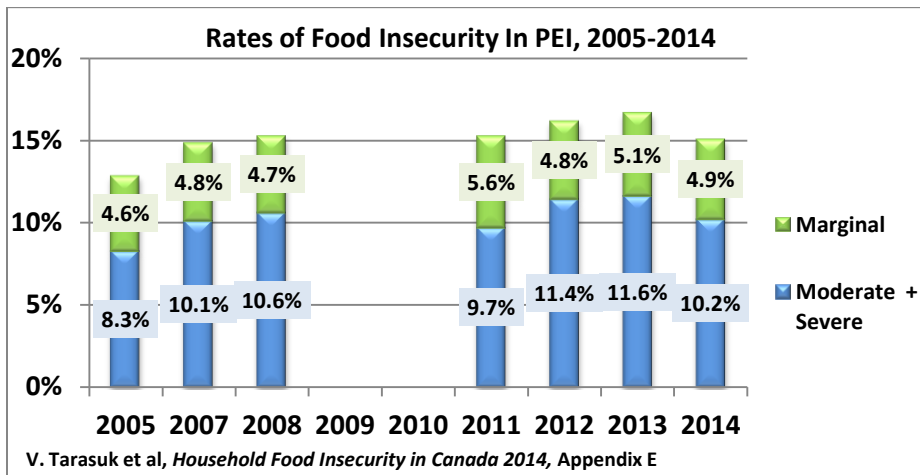
- respondents who answer yes to one of the 10 adult-related questions or one of the eight child-related questions are considered marginally food insecure;
- respondents who answer yes to between two and five questions on each scale are considered moderately food insecure; and
- respondents who answer yes to six or more questions on each scale are considered severely food insecure.

Statistics Canada's reports on food insecurity focus on the moderate and severe categories, and on the population aged 12 and over. The PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research series at the University of Toronto relies on this data, but also includes the marginally food insecure population in its reports, and includes children under 12 as well. This results in some significant differences in the indicators reported by these organizations.

LEVELS AND TRENDS OF FOOD INSECURITY

For the decade from 2005 to 2014, levels of food insecurity in PEI rose over time to a peak in 2013 and then dropped in 2014 to 10.2 percent for moderate and severe food insecurity and 4.9 percent for marginal food insecurity. These were similar to levels in 2007 prior to the recession, but higher than in 2005.

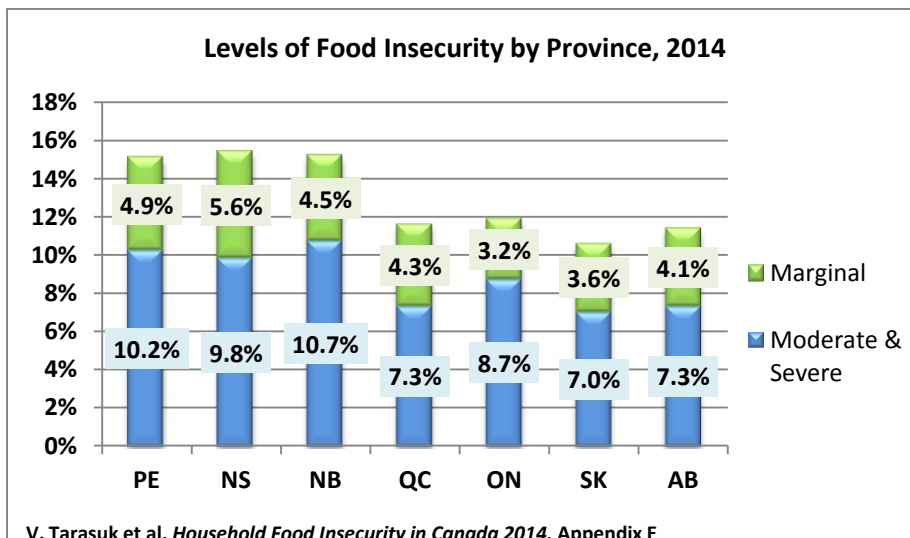
Detailed CCHS data for PEI are available for the 2011-12 cycle, indicating 4,307 PEI households experiencing moderate food insecurity and a further 1,570 households experiencing severe food insecurity.



LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY ACROSS CANADA

Prince Edward Island’s rates of food insecurity have been higher than in most other provinces throughout the period covered by the CCHS, from 2005 to 2014. The province’s rate of moderate and severe food insecurity was the second-highest of six participating provinces in 2005 and worsened to the highest rate among the 10 provinces in 2007 and 2008. Prince Edward Island did not participate in the optional survey in 2009 and 2010.

In 2011, the Island’s rate was the third highest among all Canadian provinces, behind rates in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, then rose to second highest in 2012. The rate rose to the highest of seven participating provinces in 2013, a year in which low income rates also increased sharply, and dropped to second highest within the same group in 2014. (Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, and British Columbia did not participate.)



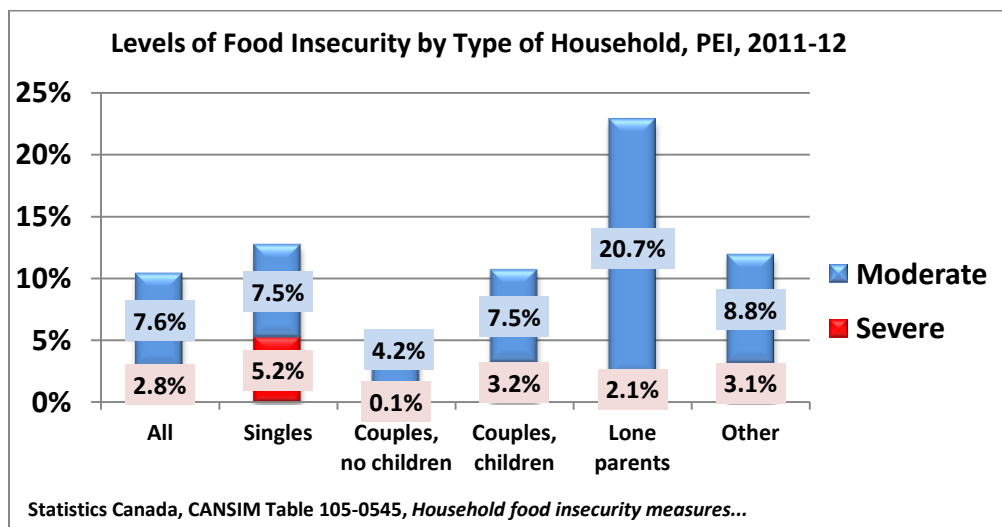


DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS OF FOOD INSECURITY IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

The province’s detailed data from the 2011-12 cycle of the CCHS indicate that the risk of food insecurity is much greater in some types of households than others.

Single individuals experience higher levels of severe food insecurity than do families. And, within the family category, couple families with children are more than twice as likely to be food insecure as couples without children.

Lone parent households are the most vulnerable of all, with almost one in four being food insecure. While their rate of severe food insecurity was similar to or less than other households, at 2.1 percent, the rate of moderate food insecurity was very high, affecting over 20 percent of lone parent households. While this is concerning, it represents an improvement over the 2007-08 survey findings showing over one-third of lone parent households as moderately or severely food insecure. Over this period, the number of lone parent households that were food insecure dropped from 1,088 to 763.



According to the CCHS, in 2011-12 the number and share of food insecure households by type of household were as follows:

- There were 3,330 lone parent households with children under 18, accounting for 6 percent of all households. Of those, 763 households were food insecure, representing 14 percent of all food insecure households.
- There were 14,925 single individuals, accounting for 26 percent of all households. Of those, 1,898 were food insecure, representing 32 percent of all food insecure households.
- There were 11,884 couple households with children under 18, accounting for 21 percent of all households. Of those, 1,276 households were food insecure, representing 21 percent of all food insecure households.



- There were 16,598 couple households without children under 18, the largest group, accounting for 30 percent of all households. Of those, 720 households were food insecure, representing 12 percent of all food insecure households.
- There were 10,429 households in various other living arrangements, accounting for 18 percent of all households. Such households were slightly more likely than average to be food insecure, at 1,220 households or 21 percent of all food insecure households.

FOOD INSECURITY AMONG ADULTS AND CHILDREN IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Over the past several years, the PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research initiative at the University of Toronto has worked with CCHS data to analyze patterns of food insecurity and to propose solutions. As noted above, their approach includes households which are marginally food insecure, and includes children under 12.

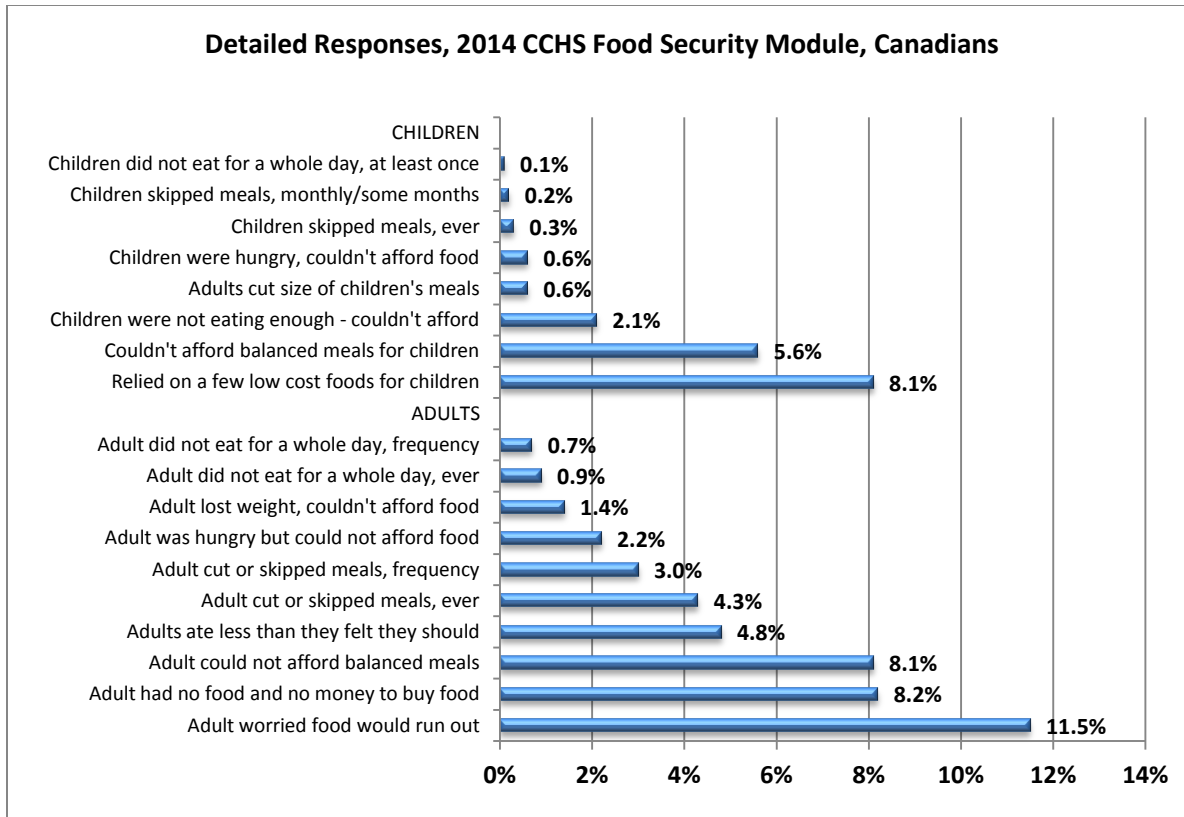
Based on this approach, PROOF reports on the proportion of children in food insecure households. According to their most recent report, released in 2017 and using 2014 data, 15.1 percent of Prince Edward Island households were food insecure at some level, and those households accounted for 22% of PEI's children.

CCHS data show that adults in food insecure households take much of the burden of coping upon themselves, and shield children from its impacts. Survey data for PEI for 2011-12 indicate that:

- 10 percent of adult Islanders were food insecure, with one in four of those (1,570 of 5,877) severely food insecure.
- 6 percent of Island children were food insecure, with almost all of those (958 of 986) falling into the moderately food insecure category.

The detailed responses to the CCHS Food Security survey questions provide insights into the ways in which households experience and cope with food insecurity. The chart below is derived from the PROOF report on *Household Food Insecurity in Canada 2014*. As noted above, it indicates that direct impacts of food insecurity tend to be borne by the adults in the household.

The following table shows the pattern of replies to survey questions, for Canadian households with children under 18. While Prince Edward Island responses are not available, the data provide some sense of likely impacts in the province.



FOOD BANK UTILIZATION

A range of community supports have come into being to assist individuals and families who are food insecure. These include food banks, soup kitchens, community kitchens and gardens, and food sharing networks.

As well, breakfast and lunch programs have been established in many schools. To promote inclusion, school-based programs are open to all, but are of especial value for children who are experiencing food insecurity at home.

Since 2005, Food Banks Canada has done an annual survey of food banks across the country, through a count in March of each year, releasing its findings in its *Hungercount* reports. The most recent available report is for 2016. The reports provide valuable information on the profile of Islanders who use food banks, over time and compared to other provinces. Key points include the following.

- The number of Islanders using food banks climbed during and after the recession to a high of just over 3,502 or 2.4 percent of the population in 2013. It then declined in 2014 and 2015, hitting a post-recession low of 3,153 or 2.15 percent in 2015. In 2016, it increased again to 3,370 or 2.3 percent.



- The Island's 2016 rate of 2.3 percent was slightly below the national average of 2.4 percent, and the fourth lowest among provinces. The other three Atlantic provinces were higher, at 2.6 percent in New Brunswick, 3% in Nova Scotia, and 5% in Newfoundland.
- By sex, women accounted for 45% of food bank users overall; in rural Prince Edward Island, this proportion dropped to 36 percent.
- By age, food bank users were much younger than the general population:
 - Those aged 45 and over accounted for almost half the population, but just over one-quarter of food bank users. In particular, seniors accounted for 19 percent of the population but less than 6 percent of food bank users. Province-wide, the 45-64 age group accounted for 30 percent of the population and almost 22 percent of users; in rural areas, this share climbed to 25 percent.
 - Children aged 0 to 17, on the other hand, accounted for one-fifth of the population but over one-third of food bank users. Usage was particularly high among children aged 0-5, who accounted for 6 percent of the population but 14 percent of food bank users.
 - Youth aged 18-30 made up 15 percent of the population and 18 percent of food bank users. Proportions were similar for younger adults aged 31 to 44, who made up 16 percent of the population and 19 percent of food bank users.
- Looking at other groups known to be at risk of low income:
 - 13 percent of food bank users were Aboriginal; in rural areas, this proportion rose to 16 percent.
 - 7 percent of food bank users were newcomers; none of these were in rural areas.
- By family structure, single individuals accounted for one in three food bank users. Couple families with children and lone-parent families each accounted for one in four food bank users, while couples without children formed a relatively small share at one in eight. Lone parent families were most over-represented, followed by single individuals, while couple families, especially without children, were underrepresented.
- By source of income, well over one-third of food bank users in Prince Edward Island were working or receiving Employment Insurance, more than double the national average. About 38 percent were receiving Social Assistance benefits, a much lower proportion than in other provinces. The remaining one-quarter of food bank users were fairly evenly split between pensions, disability benefits, and other sources of income. Rural users were less likely to have earnings or Social Assistance income and more likely to rely on all other sources of income.
- By housing type, over half of food bank users lived in private rental dwellings, and another one in five lived in social housing. Homeowners accounted for 17 percent of food bank users – double the national average – and residents of band housing another 7 percent.