



Context

In the past, Inuit harvested all of the food they consumed; today, more and more of what we eat comes from elsewhere in the world. While contributing to food security for an ever-growing population, all store-brought food is more expensive due to high transportation and operating costs. Over the years, a number of initiatives have been undertaken to improve the supply of locally harvested food, as well as to create export markets for specialty foods from the region. These initiatives have met with varying degrees of success and faced many of the same problems: uncertainty of supply, as well as high production and transportation costs.

A Few of the Challenges

Inuit still derive a portion of their diet from traditional subsistence harvesting. The increasing food needs of a growing population put pressure on wildlife resources and industrial development projects threaten their habitats. The capacity to access harvesting areas safely is also at risk due to climate change.

Traditional knowledge of wildlife resources as well as safe and sustainable harvesting methods is disappearing as many Inuit elders are passing away. There is also a lack of scientific knowledge concerning regional terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.

Current harvesting and processing regulations for animal food products hinder the development of the bio-food industry.

The transportation of imported food from the south and specialty foods for export is very expensive.

Poverty affects roughly 37% of the population, making expensive store-bought food even less accessible.

The federal government has so far failed to provide a clear picture of how Nutrition North Canada is affecting Nunavimmiut, especially the region's most vulnerable residents.

Employment opportunities in the bio-food industry are seasonal and further limited by market potential.

Solutions and Priorities

Take steps to ensure that vital Inuit traditional knowledge will be passed down to succeeding generations.

Implement a variety of bio-food production pilot projects:

- mussel, scallop, arctic char and seaweed enhanced local harvesting and aquaculture;
- transformation of locally harvested products into convenience food;
- caribou, muskox and ptarmigan domestication;

- community greenhouses;
- berry enhanced local harvesting and cultivation;
- biopharmacological exploitation of plants and wildlife;
- recovery of waste heat from Hydro-Québec diesel-generating stations and arenas for use by adjacent bio-food facilities.

Conduct research into the impacts of climate change and population growth on local harvesting.

Adapt wildlife and food production regulations to regional realities. Train local food inspectors and butchers. Make locally harvested food available to tourists, as well as in restaurants and health centres.

Develop a *marque de terroir* for Nunavik food products.

Discussion

The challenges of securing affordable, nutritious and culturally relevant food are immense. Attention must be focused on knowledge acquisition from within and outside the region to build on resources. But even once these challenges have been addressed high transportation, operating and production costs will remain to be dealt with. Commitment is needed to once again secure our own food supply.

