

Participatory Action Research (PAR) & the Food Movement: Issues, Ideas, and Insights

Canadian Association of Food Studies
Sunday May 29th, 2011

Session Chair: Patty Williams, PhD, PDt

Participatory Action Research and Training Centre on Food Security
Mount Saint Vincent University

On behalf of Partners of the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project of the NS
Food Security Network, CURA Activating Change Together for Community Food
Security and the Atlantic Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network

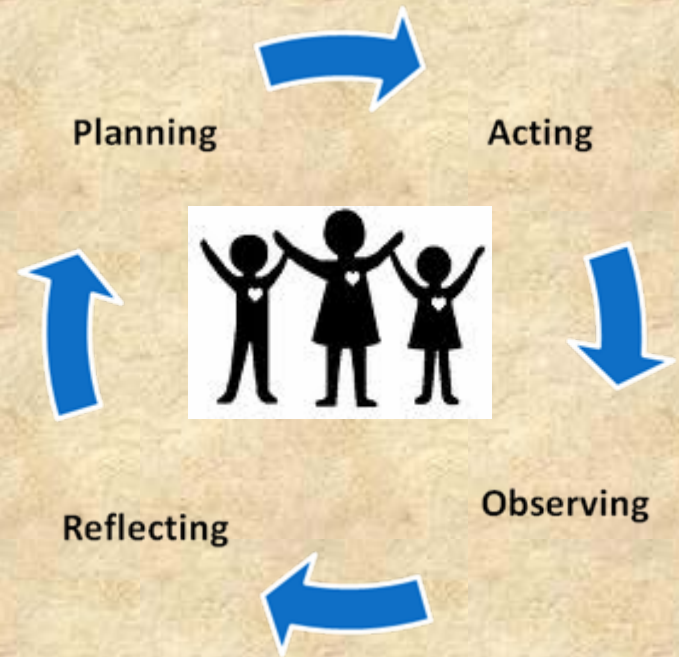


Overview

- *Setting the stage:* Insights, ideas, and issues
- Explore Small group discussions

What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

- Within a critical framework
- Four pillars: collaboration, mutual learning, action / change, and research.
- Incorporates diverse perspectives



NS Participatory Food Costing Model

Purpose: To help build capacity food security for all Nova Scotians using participatory approaches to examine and address the accessibility of a nutritious diet.

Objectives:

- To engage individuals and mobilize communities towards knowledge and skill development to improve food security
- To collect and critically analyze evidence about factors that affect the accessibility of a nutritious diet
- To share the evidence by creating effective communications mechanisms
- To inform and support healthy public policy development



Community-University Research Alliance (CURA): Activating Change Together (ACT) for Community Food Security

Aims to **enhance community food security for all Nova Scotians.**

Rooted in **lived** experiences, **real community needs** and innovative solutions...

...it amplifies and broadens **conversation, research, and action to strengthen capacity for policy change.**



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The Social Economy and Sustainability (SES) Research Network: Sub-node 3

One of six research clusters of SES Network with focus on CFS.

To support Participatory Action Research that:

- is driven, guided and approved by SES Project community partners;
- involves an element of university - community collaboration;
- contributes to building food security at multiple levels and with diverse groups;
- benefits the social economy in Hants, Kings and Annapolis Counties; and
- has relevance to/impacts on the wider social economy.



Mobilization on Food Security
and Community Economic
Development



Participatory Action Research (PAR) & the Food Movement: Issues, Ideas, and Insights

Knowledge Mobilization

Christine Johnson¹, Dr. Doris Gillis¹ & Rita MacAulay²

1: St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish NS

2: Capital District Health Authority, Halifax NS



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Capital Health

What is Knowledge Mobilization (KM)?

- Evolving understanding of KM is emerging through practice
- Little in reported literature
- Concept central to collaborative & participatory approaches
 - Embedded as focal process within *ACT for Community Food Security*



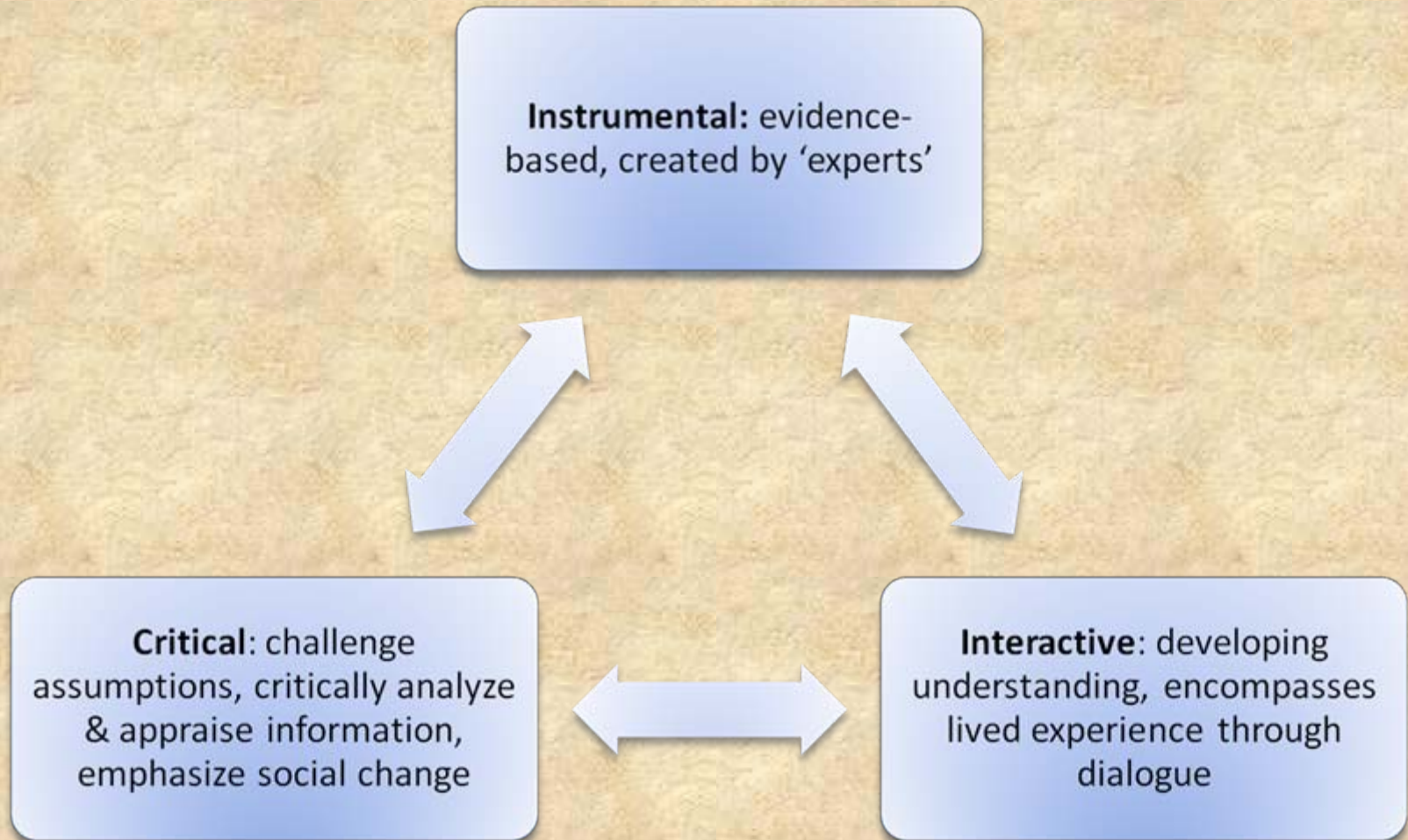
Knowledge Mobilization – Working Definition

...the process of getting knowledge into *active service in the broader society* based on a multi-dimensional and long-term research scale; it is *political in nature*, working to influence decision making and policy by getting the **right information to the right people in the right format at the right time**.

Felt et al. 2004; Jacobson et al. 2007; Levin 2008; ONF 2009



What Knowledge?



Opportunities

- **Aligns** with PAR principles & best practices for building capacity for CFS
- **Enables** use of knowledge to inform policy change for CFS
- **Encourages** attention to power relations embedded in knowledge creation & sharing
- **Shares & expands** our learnings about KM & CFS/policy change
- **Contributes** to emerging literature, future research & practice

Challenges



- Understanding Knowledge Mobilization in PAR
- Framing the work (conceptualization)
 - Scope of *ACT for Community Food Security*
 - Drawing boundaries between KM & communication
- Critical to start at the beginning
- Learning from/being responsive to needs of the project
- Evaluation

Participatory Action Research (PAR) & the Food Movement: Issues, Ideas, and Insights

Advocacy

Cynthia Watt, Heather Hunter, & Patty Williams

On behalf of the NS Participatory Food Costing Working Group

NS Participatory Food Costing Project, Participatory Action Research and Training
Centre on Food Security, Mount Saint Vincent University



**The Nova Scotia
Participatory
Food Costing Project**

Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project

- Food costing has been conducted across the province in 2002, 2004/05, 2007/08, and 2010.
- Engages individuals most affected by the issue of food insecurity
 - Data collection
 - Knowledge sharing
- Generates info on the cost and affordability of a basic nutritious diet – can be used to inform policy change (i.e. increases to minimum wage and income assistance rates)



Opportunities for Advocacy

Food Studies Research:

- PAR approaches: bring “voice” and experience to research (i.e., story sharing).
- Participatory Food Costing Project – proposes a model for meaningful involvement/engagement of people experiencing food insecurity in food costing research



Opportunities for Advocacy

Broader food movement:

- Participatory Action Research approach creates opportunities for self-advocacy
- Share knowledge and influence public opinion via media outlets
- Influence policy change





Patty Williams, Canada Research Chair in Food Security and Policy Change, looks on as Jacqueline Smith, a mother of four from Bridgewater, shares her experiences of living in a low-income household during a news conference at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax on Tuesday.

Facing some tough choices

Many Nova Scotians can't afford to eat nutritiously, food costing report says

INSIDE: Grocery squeeze / A12

By PAT LEE
Staff Reporter

JACQUELINE SMITH, an unemployed mother of four, has tough choices to make every day. The Bridgewater woman has to explain to her seven-year-old why there isn't more food to eat, visit a food bank when faced with unexpected vehicle repairs, and carry a calculator to the grocery store to prevent the embarrassment of not having enough money when going through the checkout.

"(My daughter) will say to me, 'Mommy... can't I have another piece of bread? Can't I have a banana? Mommy, why are we living like this?'"

JACQUELINE SMITH
Mother of four

Smith is suffering from what researchers call food insecurity, which means her family doesn't have enough money to adequately cover the cost of a bare-bones healthy diet along with other basic needs.

According to the 2010 Participatory Food Costing Report, released Tuesday at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, she's not alone.

"Even when he was making \$14 an hour, we still struggled. It was a tough challenge to try to feed my children."

See **CHOICES** / A2

Minimum wage hike not enough to help N.S. families eat healthy

Nick Logan, Global Maritimes: Tuesday, May 10, 2011 3:23 PM



A study on food insecurity indicates families living on low-incomes often sacrifice healthy food to cover the high cost of living and a Nova Scotia minimum wage increase may not be enough to help.

Photo Credits: Mario Beauregard, The Canadian Press

RELATED

Minimum wage in N.S. goes up to \$10 in October

REPORT: Can Nova Scotians Afford to Eat Healthy?

Using a list of 67 items, known as the National Nutritious Food Basket, that make up a healthy costing study at grocery stores around Nova Scotia.

The "basket" includes necessities such as milk, meat and alternatives, fruits and vegetables, but not additional items such as snacks, special dietary needs and alcohol.

Even with minimum wage going up to \$10 an hour this fall, the increase may not be enough for many Nova Scotia families to eat healthy.

The 2010 Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Study finds a nutritious diet is "out of reach" for families surviving on low incomes.

The study was conducted by the Participatory Action Research and Training Center on Food Security (PART-CFS) at Halifax's Mount Saint Vincent University, under the direction on Dr. Patty Williams.

Can Nova Scotians Afford to Eat Healthy?

Report on 2010 Participatory Food Costing



A project of the Nova Scotia Food Security Network and the Participatory Action Research and Training Centre at Mount Saint Vincent University in partnership with community partners, and the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness

Government of Nova Scotia | gov.ns.ca

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Province Announces New Support for Nova Scotia Families

Published by [the Premier's Office](#)

Thursday, April 7, 2011

About 240,000 Nova Scotia families will soon have more money to make ends meet thanks to new support announced by Premier Darrell Dexter. The province will invest more than \$18 million over the next year to help low-income families regain their independence and pay for family priorities.

Quotes

"This is the largest investment in Nova Scotia families and children in over a decade. Raising strong, healthy children is key to Nova Scotia's social and economic future. We're working hard to make life better for families. We are moving the province on a new path forward while living within our means."

Premier Darrell Dexter

"Families are our priority, which is why we're making investments while other provinces and countries are cutting social programs. Investing in Nova Scotia families helps them provide for themselves, and contribute to their communities and the province's economy."

Links

[All Government News \(RSS\)](#)

Images

Advocacy Challenges

Varying public opinion around poverty and food insecurity.

“Choises??

Mother of four says it all doesn't it? Like the saying goes, if you can't afford children then don't have them. Why not go after the fathers of these kids?? Get them to pay child support and stop expecting the taxpayer to keep throwing \$\$\$ at you. Half my pay is lost to the taxman to keep the welfare crowd comfortable while at the same time I have my own family to raise and struggle with bills to pay. Remember it's the middle income worker that foots the bill for all these programs, and right now we are the ones overtaxed and trying to get by. Where's my break??”

(Online response to Food Costing media release story in The Chronicle Herald)

Advocacy Challenges

- Giving Voice vs. Exploitation
- Power differences.
 - Risks vs. benefits for researchers and food costers when going public.
- Communicating complex issues in ways that resonate
 - Framed as a societal issue, not just individual ones



Participatory Action Research (PAR) & the Food Movement: Issues, Ideas, and Insights

Policy Change

Debbie Reimer¹, MSW, RSW, Patty Williams, Lynn Langille²

1: Kids Action Program and Apple Tree Landing, Canning, NS

2: Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness



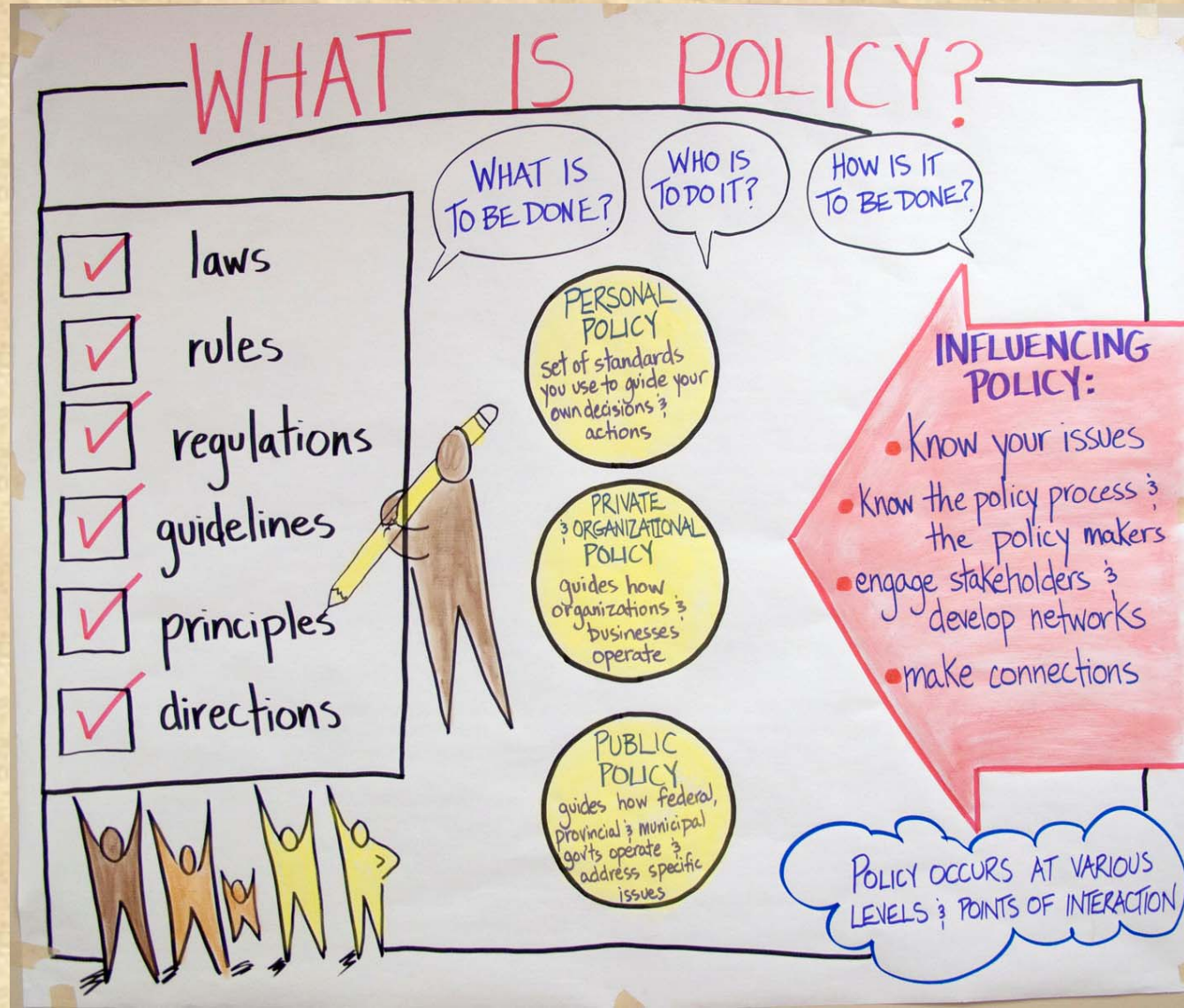
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**The Nova Scotia
Participatory
Food Costing Project**

Policy Change

To build
Community
Food Security,
we need to
influence
policy.



Influencing Policy Change

- Participatory Action Research builds processes around sharing knowledge long term.
- Ensures support for building policy over time.
- Informs and creates policy change.
- Identifies and evaluates processes regarding impact on policy.



... and social change!

Personal Policy

Opportunities

- Challenging personal policy encourages individuals to challenge other kinds of policy
 - Results in influencing food movement as an individual.
- PAR gives voice to personal policy

Challenges

- Involves struggle and resistance all the time – never stop working!
- Makes the personal political.
- Personal dilemma: lack of personal choice.



Organizational Policy

Opportunity

- Important to have leadership.
- If you aren't the leader, you need to influence that leadership.
- Educate more people around the issues, why the policy is important, and to showcase the possibilities.

Challenge

- Always receive opposition within the organization.
- Working with families who are marginalized, results in constant justification – e.g., “You take what you get, if you're poor!”
- Takes a long time to change: importance of process & time.
 - Can lose people and organizations



Public Policy

Opportunity

- Brings voices of marginalized individuals to the table.
 - Involves community in a meaningful way (not just a token person).
- Better policy: those living the experience involved in policy recommendations.
- Part of something bigger. People see things happening, because the connection continues.

Challenge

- Hard to keep people involved.
- Support for real contribution and **co-creation**.



Participatory Action Research (PAR) & the Food Movement: Issues, Ideas, and Insights

Ethical Challenges and Opportunities

Patty Williams¹, Barb Anderson² & Samantha Cohen²

1: Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, NS,

2: Acadia University, Wolfville, NS, Education & Training Working Group Host Institution



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Ethical Challenges & Tensions

- Trust and respect¹
- Power and control²
- Differences in perspective, priorities, assumptions, values, beliefs, and language³
- Conflicts over funding⁴
- Tasks vs. processes⁵



1: Bastida et al., 2010; Maiter et al., 2008; Minkler, 2004; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006

2: Jacobs, 2010; Ross et al., 2010; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006

3: Edwards et al., 2008; Minkler, 2004; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006

4: Flicker et al., 2007; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006

5: Wallerstein and Duran, 2006

Ethical Challenges & Tensions

- Time-consuming processes⁶
 - When does “research” begin?
- Who represents the community and how is the community defined?⁷
- Inability to fully specify all aspects of research up-front⁸
- Privacy and confidentiality⁹
- Data ownership and dissemination¹⁰



6:Wallerstein and Duran, 2006

7: Cargo and Mercer, 2008; Maiter et al, 2008; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006

8: Boser, 2006; Wallerstein and Duran, 2006

9: Boser, 2006; Reid & Brief, 2009

10:Flicker et al., 2007; Khanlou & Peter, 2005

Opportunities: Researchers

- Informed consent as an opportunity for dialogue ¹¹
- Protocols to ensure privacy/confidentiality ¹²
- Community involvement ¹³
- Protocols guiding data ownership & disclosure ¹⁴
- Balancing harms and benefits ¹⁵

11: Edwards, Lund, & Gibson, 2008; Flicker et al., 2007

12: Edwards et al., 2008

13: Macaulay et al., 1998

14: Bastida et al., 2010; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2007

15: Flicker et al., 2007

Opportunities: Ethics Boards

- Familiarity with PAR/CBPR ¹⁶
- Alternate ways of addressing the issues covered by current protocol forms ¹⁷
- Concern with action outcomes ¹⁸
- Revisiting ethical concerns once approval is granted ¹⁹
- Need for training/education and communication tools ²⁰

16:Downie & Cottrell, 2001

17: Downie & Cottrell, 2001; Guta, et al., 2010

18: Flicker et al., 2007

19: Downie & Cottrell, 2001

20: Interview, 2011

Opportunities for the Food Movement

- Community and university partnerships
- Strengthened capacity for PAR projects
- Better integration of diverse perspectives and ways of working
- Lessen disparities in food and nutrition resources
- Inform and strengthen practice and policy

Discussion Questions

What resonates with you from the sharing this morning? (What is giving you pause or making you uncomfortable? What is making you excited?)



What specific ideas or actions can you apply to your own way of working in the short term? In the long term?

Thank You!

For More Information...

Participatory Action Research and Training Centre on Food Security

www.foodsecurityresearchcentre.ca

Thought About Food? A Workbook on Food Security and Influencing Policy and accompanying DVD Food Security: It's Everyone's Business.

www.foodthoughtful.ca

Special thanks to...

Funding from the NS Dept of Health and Wellness and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council is gratefully acknowledged.