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## EVIDENCE SUPPORTING *Food Literacy Education*

### Children and youth's dietary habits are among the poorest of all age groups

- Most youth do not comply with Canada's Food Guide recommendations<sup>4</sup>.
- Only 4% of Manitoba grade 9 students consume the recommended number of fruit and vegetable servings<sup>5</sup>.
- 38% of youth consume fast food at least once per day and approximately 50% of youth consume non-diet soft drinks at least once per day<sup>6</sup>.

### Rise in ultra-processed foods and culinary deskill

- Ultra-processed foods (e.g. fast and salty snack foods, frozen meals, candy, soft drinks), account for almost 62% of the total daily energy intake of Canadians' diets<sup>10</sup>.
- Diet quality decreases significantly with increased frequency of food eaten outside the home and unstructured eating patterns<sup>11-14</sup>.
- A recent survey found that more than one third of 5 to 8 year olds and 17% of 8 to 11 year olds believe pasta comes from animals<sup>15</sup>.
- There is a "deskill" with respect to food and nutrition<sup>16-17</sup>; for example students entering home economics classes have fewer skills

## MORE *Information*

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than they did two decades ago<sup>18</sup>.

- Busy schedules and competing demands reduce time available for food preparation and transfer of knowledge within the family<sup>19-20</sup>.
- Little time is spent on food-related activities such as planning and cooking<sup>19-20</sup>.
- A decline in family meals, regular meal structure, and greater frequency of consuming food outside the home has contributed to loss of fundamental food knowledge and skills<sup>21-22</sup>.

### Health and well-being is at risk

- Too many children, girls and boys, have negative body images; children as young as three are unhappy with their bodies<sup>6,23</sup>.
- Youth have narrow views of health, focused on individual responsibility to eat healthy and be active; lack broader understanding of well-being and social determinants of health<sup>24</sup>.
- Early obesity can carry into adulthood and lead to the development of several chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, some types of cancer and diabetes<sup>25-26</sup>.
- 26% and 31% of Canadian and Manitoban children, respectively, aged 2 to 17 are either overweight or obese<sup>27-28</sup>.
- Type 2 diabetes was previously only seen in adults; however the disease is increasingly appearing in adolescents and children<sup>29</sup>.

### This study was conducted at the University of Manitoba by:

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# CRITICAL FOOD LITERACY COMPETENCIES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

To determine what critical food and nutrition competencies are required for Manitoba youth to prepare them for independent adult living and being well.

## WHAT WE DID

We conducted a study with expert stakeholders to identify a critical set of food literacy competencies required by youth. This was achieved using a Delphi method, a structured group communication approach for soliciting expert and diverse opinion about complex problems or novel ideas, through the use of interviews, survey questionnaires, controlled feedback, and rigorous analytical methods<sup>1</sup>.

## WHO PARTICIPATED

A total of 41 experts participated in the study, including registered dietitians, home economics teachers, physical education teachers, social science teachers, senior culinary arts students from a technical college, and senior nutritional sciences undergraduate university students.

## WHAT THEY DID

Participants completed in-depth telephone interviews and two online surveys. Guiding interview questions and subsequent surveys focused on three domains: *confidence and empowerment with food; joy and meaning through food; and equity and sustainability*

## What is *Food Literacy*?

*for food systems.* A sub-group of participants provided feedback on the competencies and identified strategies for communicating results to other stakeholders.

## WHAT WE FOUND

Consensus was reached on a list of critical food literacy competencies necessary for youth to successfully navigate complex food environments; improve health and well-being; and reduce risk of obesity, heart and other chronic diseases.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING WITH THE RESULTS

Results have been incorporated into a framework called Food Literacy Competencies for Young Adults. The framework outlines three categories of food literacy competencies: *Functional Competencies; Relational Competencies; and Systems Competencies.*

## HOW THE FRAMEWORK CAN BE USED

- To communicate about the importance and scope of food literacy.
- To guide curriculum and program development.
- To evaluate food literacy programming.
- To advocate for policies and programs to promote food literacy.

In its most general sense, food literacy is a spectrum of food related knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enhance health and well-being. Vidgen and Gallegos (2014) have defined food literacy more comprehensively as "a collection of inter-related knowledge, skills and behaviours required to plan, manage, select, prepare and eat foods to meet needs and determine food intake" as well as "the scaffolding that empowers individuals, households, communities or nations to protect diet quality through change and support dietary resilience over time" (p. 55)<sup>2</sup>.

## Why do we need *Food Literacy*?

The ability of people to maintain health and well-being through food and nutrition has paradoxically become increasingly difficult in recent decades. This is especially concerning for youth as they transition to independent adulthood. The Conference Board of Canada recently identified food literacy as an important area for examination of its role in health and disease prevention as well as its potential benefits for the Canadian economy<sup>3</sup>.



**FUNCTIONAL  
COMPETENCIES**

# Confidence & Empowerment with Food

## Have basic nutrition knowledge:

- Understanding food groups and portion sizes.
- Understanding the link between dietary choices and health.
- Understanding the role of nutrients in the body.
- Understanding the nutrition composition of different foods.
- Understanding energy balance.
- Understanding nutritional needs at different life stages.
- Understanding different eating "lifestyles" (e.g. vegetarianism).
- Understanding nutrition claims about food.
- Being able to use technology to find credible nutrition information.

## Have food safety & hygiene knowledge:

- Understanding food safety risks associated with food storage and preparation.
- Understanding hygienic food handling practices.

## Have knowledge of where food comes from:

- Understanding food origins.
- Understanding seasonality of food.
- Understanding where to access food.
- Understanding the impact of food systems on the environment and local economy.

## Have food preparation skills:

- Being able to prepare meals with basic ingredients.
- Being able to use basic kitchen equipment and tools.
- Being able to read/follow a recipe.
- Being able to plan for food/meals ahead of time.
- Being able to cook with and for others.
- Being able to use technology to find appropriate recipes.

## Be able to successfully navigate the grocery store to make healthy and economical food choices:

- Being able to compare food costs to make economical choices.
- Being able to compare foods to make healthy food choices (by interpreting food labels and packaging).
- Being able to stock a pantry with staple ingredients.

## Have food budgeting skills:

- Being able to develop a food budget.
- Being able to select healthy foods within a budget.

## Have a healthy food relationship:

- Having positive attitudes around food and eating.
- Understanding the relationship between body weight and health (e.g. body weight does not equal health).
- Having healthy body image and self-esteem.
- Understanding that all foods can have a positive role in our diets.

## Be able to think critically about and act on food and nutrition issues:

- Being able to advocate for the availability of healthy foods in the community.
- Understanding food and weight loss/supplement industry interests and marketing strategies.
- Understanding media reports on food and nutrition.



# Joy & Meaning through Food

## Have a positive relationship with food:

- Enjoying food and eating.
- Making food choices that promote well-being.
- Engaging in mindful eating practices.
- Preparing food in a fun and enjoyable way.
- Enjoying preparing new and diverse foods.

## Enjoy cultural foods:

- Passing on family food traditions through celebrations, cultural foods, and family recipes.
- Appreciating foods from different cultures.
- Being able to access foods particular to one's culture.

## Have experienced new and varied foods:

- Being open to eating new and diverse foods.
- Enjoying cooking new and diverse foods.

## Value local food systems:

- Appreciating the role of local foods for community well-being.

## Recognize the importance of preparing and eating food with/for others:

- Valuing sharing food with others.
- Valuing everyday family meals.
- Valuing preparing food together.
- Valuing preparing food for others.

# Equity & Sustainability for Food Systems

## Understand social justice issues in the food system:

- Understanding food security issues at individual, community, and global levels.
- Understanding ethical issues in food production.
- Recognizing farming as a career option.
- Understanding social justice implications of food choices.

## Understand the influence of food corporations and lobbying interests:

- Being able to think critically about the influence of food corporations, lobby groups, and media on food choices.

## Understand aspects of environmentally sustainable food systems:

- Being able to think critically about the link between food origins and sustainability.

- Understanding how food systems can be more sustainable and equitable.
- Understanding the impact of food production on the environment.
- Understanding the impact of food waste.
- Choosing and preparing foods to support sustainable eating.
- Understanding food production and distribution systems (farming, harvesting, shipping, processing, marketing and distribution).

**RELATIONAL  
COMPETENCIES**

**SYSTEMS  
COMPETENCIES**