

# FOOD INSECURITY PRELIMINARY STUDY

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THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK  
INDIVIDUALS IN GREATER VICTORIA





Iyé Creative is a social enterprise that works with communities to restore our connection and relationship to the land. This is done through identifying systemic issues and addressing structural barriers to accessing land and nutritious food, and by creating alternative systems of mutual collaboration to advance the concerns of food security.

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## Land Acknowledgement

It is with much respect to the L k'w ̓ n and SENĆOŦEN speaking peoples of the W SÁNEĆ, Esquimalt, and Songhees Nations, on whose traditional territories we live, work and play that we present this report. We are grateful to call these unceded lands home.

Report co-written in March, 2022 by Tariro Murwira and Nancy Nyandika of Iyé Creative.  
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# FOREWORD

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Food insecurity is a prevalent issue amongst communities of colour in Canada. As a grassroots organization, lyé Creative (lyé) prioritizes community-led solutions for sustainable change. Through research, community building and cross-collaboration, lyé works alongside communities to identify and address barriers that impede communities of color from accessing land as well as nutritious and culturally relevant food. This exploratory study, highlights community issues that lead to food insecurity amongst individuals of African, Black and Afro-diasporic descent living in Greater Victoria.

This report, and the unstructured interviews upon which it is based, is an incomplete picture of the food accessibility issues faced by the individuals we interviewed and their communities across Greater Victoria. The opinions expressed represent the lived experiences of the individuals interviewed and present an exploratory snapshot of the issues. Thus, we acknowledge that although this community project is important, this research study has its limitations. Some research constraints were our small team, limited timeframe to carry out the research, limited resources and funding, and the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, which compounded uncertainty, isolation, and insecurity within our community. This preliminary study focused on African, Black and Afro-diasporic descent communities in Greater Victoria because of the lack of academic research on this topic within the Canadian context.

We are grateful to everyone who contributed to the creation of this report—including our lyé family, its dedicated volunteers, and various community groups that supported the study process. We are thankful to our interviewees for sharing their time and stories. We express gratitude for funding received from the Victoria Foundation's Community Recovery Program (CRP) to carry out this work.





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Since 2020, lyé Creative has supplied numerous households within Greater Victoria with bi-weekly produce boxes containing fresh, nutritious, and culturally relevant food through the Palenke Produce Box program. The produce boxes are a bandaid for a much bigger issue as recipients of the produce boxes, the majority of whom are Black, People of African descent and other Persons of Color, continue to report a disconnect within the food system in Victoria.

In creating this report, we interviewed 20 individuals who identify as African, Black or of Afro-diasporic descent, living and working across Victoria. They identified this food system disconnect, in their words. The stories they shared emphasize that individuals from these communities are not a monolith with a single story; they experience life in diverse ways and have different responses when interacting with new and dominant cultures.

Based on the interviews, food insecurity amongst Black, African, and Afro-diasporic communities in Greater Victoria is a real and urgent problem. Food insecurity, evidenced by the lack of access to

affordable, fresh, nutritious, and culturally relevant food, was reported by nearly all study participants. Study participants attributed this lack of access to extremely high food prices, lack of adequate variety in the food options, and other competing needs such as the extremely high cost of housing in the city. Evidently, there is an urgent need for culturally appropriate food to be made more accessible in the city.

Moreover, study participants cited a lack of culturally relevant information relating to diet and nutrition in Victoria as a prominent barrier to accessing fresh and nutritious food. Language is an additional accessibility barrier to people who are not fluent in English or French, Canada's official languages. This presents an immediate need for dietary information to be made available to the diverse language and cultural groups living in the city.

Despite an alarming lack of access to fresh, nutritious, and culturally relevant food, many study participants reported a readiness to try local food and immerse themselves in the cultures around



Unquestionably, food is more than something people need to satisfy their hunger.



them. Noticeably, study participants reported adopting varying cultural adaptation mechanisms when faced with the existing and often dominant cultures and food patterns in Canada and Victoria.

Unquestionably, food is more than something people need to satisfy their hunger. Study participants detailed how food possesses the power to heal their bodies and reported actively using food to supplement Western medicine and exercise for better health outcomes. As a socio-economic connector, food is also a community-building practice: food growing and food sharing brings diverse people and communities together. The resilience of our community is evidenced by the networks that people have built, in which information is shared about where to access affordable, fresh, nutritious, and culturally relevant food. Every study participant expressed a willingness to participate in a communal system where knowledge, food, recipes, and other ingredients such as spices are shared.

As this report was co-created with input from community members, their stories and lived experiences emphasize the need for affordable, fresh, nutritious, and culturally relevant food in Victoria. Considering that food insecurity remains an urgent social justice issue and a major social determinant of health, the stories that shaped this report provide the basis for further larger-scale, community-led research on this matter.



# DEFINITIONS

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## FOOD SECURITY

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” (World Food Summit, 1996).

## FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

“Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Food Secure Canada, n.d.).

## ACCULTURATION

Acculturation is when an individual relocates to a new area and adapts to or borrows traits from another culture, resulting in the merging of culture due to this prolonged contact (Merriam-Webster, Acculturation).

# BACKGROUND

Food security is achieved 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” (World Food Summit, 1996). Thus, food security is tied to health. According to the World Health Organization, health is “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (n.d.). Similarly, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (World Health Organization, 1986) stresses the ability to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment as key prerequisites for achieving the status of health. Food systems—including the way food is produced, processed, distributed, consumed, and disposed of—have direct impacts on the lives of Canadians (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2019).

Because food is one of the key determinants of well-being, the inability to access food is an urgent public health concern: it affects an

individual’s or community’s ability to access healthy, affordable, nutritious, and culturally relevant food. Consequently, food insecurity affects both the physical and mental health of individuals and, by extension, the communities they live in. People living in food-insecure households in British Columbia have poorer health than their food-secure counterparts, report lower rates of healthy eating, and experience higher rates of obesity and mood/anxiety disorders (Li et al., 2016).

Research has shown that race is tied to food insecurity (Dhunna & Tarasuk, 2021). A recent study conducted by PROOF and Food Share found that Black households had a higher likelihood of experiencing food insecurity than their white counterparts (Dhunna & Tarasuk, 2021). For Black, African, or Afro-diasporic communities, food insecurity has far reaching adverse effects. Moreover, children living in food-insecure households have an increased likelihood of developing chronic diseases, such as diabetes, asthma, and depression (Roberts, 2021).

In light of this, Canada’s national food policy acknowledges that food is more than a product for many cultures. The

policy recognizes that “food is the medicine that ensures their wellbeing; it is a way of sustaining culture and community; and it is a way of reconnecting to the land” (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2019). Thus, without access to affordable, fresh, nutritious, and culturally relevant food, many individuals and communities lose their medicine as well as their connection to their culture and the land.

Ultimately, people and communities know what is best for them. In this regard, the final say on the things that determine their health, such as food, should lie with individuals and their communities. Although all stakeholders within the community—individuals, households, and the local government—have different interests, they must work together to achieve the common goal of creating a healthy and sustainable community. It is important to prioritize collaboration and communication to achieve this level of individual and communal participation that is rooted in the identity and culture of all participants.





FOOD

IDENTITY

CULTURE

Food is a core issue for all as many food practices are rooted in culture.

Canada prides itself on being a multicultural nation. This multiculturalism is the result of the diverse cultures, histories, unique value systems, and traditions each individual and community carries with them. As a result of multiculturalism, individual identities are negotiated, co-created, reinforced, and challenged through communication with others (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

According to the 2016 Canada census report, just over 1 million people reported African origins, 749,155 people reported Caribbean origins, and 674,640 people reported Latin, Central, or South American origins (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Most of the people who reported African origins or Latin, Central, or South American origins were part of the first generation to arrive in Canada. The most common ancestries among first-generation individuals from these two regions are Mexican, Colombian, Egyptian, and (Statistics Canada, 2016). Based on these data, individuals from these ethnicities are considered minority ethnic groups in Canada.

When facing more dominant cultures, individuals from minority ethnic or cultural groups are constantly negotiating their identities (Martin & Nakayama, 2018).

As minorities, individuals from African, Black, and other Afro-diasporic communities go through transformational stages when they

encounter more dominant cultural groups in Canada and are exposed to all aspects of the dominant cultural groups' cultures, including food.

First, these individuals go through an unexamined identity stage, in which there is a lack of exploration of racial or ethnic identity (Martin & Nakayama, 2018). This is particularly evident in newcomers to the city who, as minority group members, may initially accept the values and attitudes of the majority culture when they first arrive in Canada or a new city such as Victoria. Regarding food and diet, this would present itself as not immediately complaining about the dominant cultures' food being more available in stores and restaurants compared to theirs. As time goes on, these individuals may conform to the existing dietary preferences of those around them. Gradually, many minority group members finally reach the integration stage of identity development where they confidently exhibit a strong sense of their original culture while being able to appreciate the culture of those around them (Martin & Nakayama, 2018).

# FOOD INSECURITY IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

Food insecurity is an established marker of material deprivation in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2020).

According to a 2020 report by Statistics Canada, about 1 in 7 (14.6%) Canadians lived in a household where there was food insecurity in the past 30 days. Though food insecurity is a problem that affects all persons living in Canada, racialized individuals are more vulnerable to food-insecurity as compared to non-racialized individuals (McNicoll & Curtis, 2020). Black communities experience the highest levels of food insecurity at 28.9%; Indigenous populations are affected as much at 28.2%; Arabic and West Asian populations stand at 20.4% and South Asian populations at 15.2%, respectively; and 11.1% of non-racialized people experience food insecurity (Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020 as cited in McNicoll & Curtis, 2022).

Noticeably, lack of sufficient income has proven to be a major cause of food insecurity in Victoria. Individuals are faced with multiple competing needs—such as expensive housing—such that accessing healthy and affordable food becomes a secondary need. Access to adequate income would undoubtedly provide a much-needed remedy to food insecurity, as Black communities are more than twice as likely to be living on a low-income than non-visible minorities (Good Food Toronto, 2021).

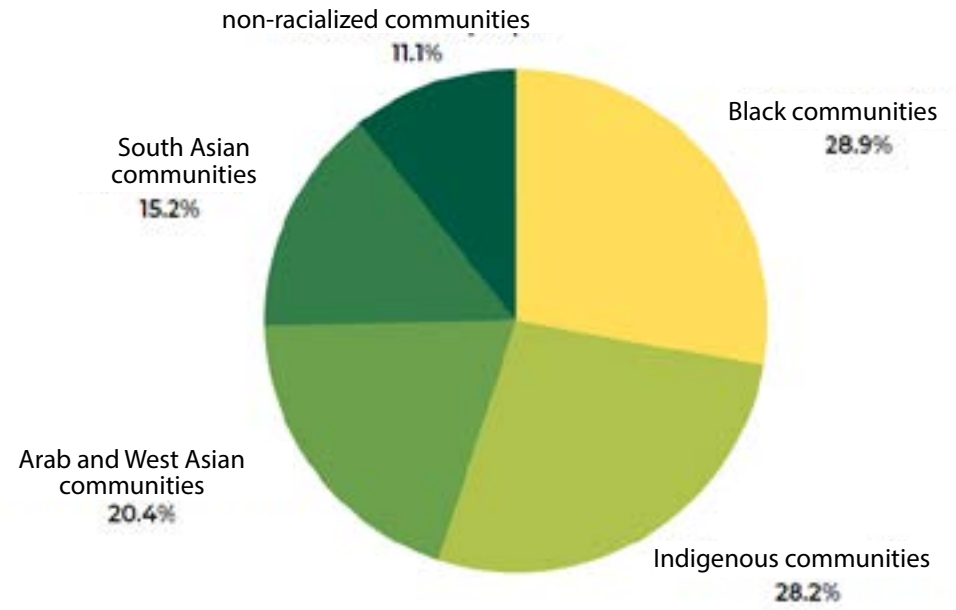


Fig I

2020 report by Statistics Canada

Canadians households with food insecurity in the past 30 days.

# FOOD INSECURITY AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In 2020, the world was confronted by a global health crisis as the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19), quickly spread throughout the globe.

The effects were immediately felt in Canada. Victoria's and much of the world's food system resiliency—that is “the capacity over time of a food system and its units at multiple levels, to provide sufficient, appropriate, and accessible food to all, in the face of various and even unforeseen disturbances” (Tendalla, et al., 2015)—was challenged. Store shelves were suddenly empty as people panic bought items quicker than the stores could replenish them. This had an impact on people's access to food. Specifically, low-income individuals were forced to compete for the little food available with higher-income people who could afford to buy greater quantities of products. Additionally, many workers had their work hours drastically reduced. These figures increased from 2017 and 2018, where close to 1.2 million households

“

The start of Covid-19 impacted my diet a bit because while I stocked up on some things, I couldn't find what I wanted. Instead of going to several stores to get everything I like and want, I would go to one store and try to get as much as I can. As Covid-19 went on, I had to limit certain food types because it just got too expensive, and I could not afford all the things I could afford before.”

A study participant of North African and French descent on the effect of Covid-19 on her diet.

Almost 1 in 7 Canadians reported experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic (Brule, 2020).

experienced food insecurity (Polsky & Gilmour, 2020).

As a response to this rising food insecurity, some grassroots community organizations such as lyé rallied together to provide food to the groups most vulnerable to food insecurity. This provided some form of food security, but as it was not designed to be a long-term solution, it is not sustainable. It has been argued that increasing income levels might be a more long-term solution to food insecurity: most people in Canada are not food insecure because of a physical lack of food

but because of an economic lack (McNicoll & Curtis, 2020).

Study participants reported stocking up on canned food products and a change in shopping habits, as they reduced the number of trips they would take to food stores. Since provincial health guidelines emphasized social distancing, some study participants turned to technology to order food, share recipes, or at times have an online dinner with friends over platforms such as Zoom. Cooking at home became more frequent, and, as a result, study participants were more aware of what they were eating. Overall, Covid-19 called for communal and individual adaptation and community members found innovative ways to adapt.



# THE STUDY



# METHODOLOGY

The study is non-interventionist; the researchers did not manipulate the research situation (Punch, 2016). This study involved qualitative research in the form of unstructured interviews, each lasting close to an hour, to get a clear picture of the state of food security and the factors leading to this.

All research pertaining to this study was carried out on Lekwén and SENĆOŦEN speaking peoples' of the W SÁNEĆ, Esquimalt, and Songhees Nations, traditional territories. The study was open to and focused on the lived experiences of all persons of African, Black, and Afro-diasporic descent living in Victoria. In October 2021, an open invitation was issued to all community members meeting these criteria to be part of this study as interviewees. Participant involvement in the research was voluntary, with the understanding that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished. Most interviews were audio recorded, and some included in person note-taking. No information that could potentially identify study participants was collected during the study. All study participants agreed to the sharing of the audio recordings within the lyé team for purposes of transcription.

All interviews took the form of a relaxed conversation as opposed to a rigid question-and-answer scenario. This allowed study participants to freely provide answers to questions posed in their own words. Each interview was unique: every answer provided by a study participant dictated the path that the conversation would follow. Flexibility in the questions asked provided interviewers with more room to seek more information from study participants, thus gaining a clearer sense of a study participant's understanding of the food situation. The interviews relied on the interviewers' ability to establish and maintain rapport with study participants. Flexibility—in time and interview structure—was useful to study participants and interviewers as they learned from each other.

Participation in the study was not contingent upon any remuneration. At the end of every interview, lyé offered study participants grocery store gift cards as a token of appreciation for participating in the study. The gift cards were not remuneration for work done but a token of appreciation for participants who dedicated their valuable time to the study.

# DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

The study was open to all persons of African, Black, and Afro-diasporic descent. 20 participants were interviewed. When asked how long they had resided in Greater Victoria study participants responded as follows:

- 50% of study participants had lived in Victoria for 5+ years.
- 40% of study participants had lived in Victoria for 2 to 5 years.
- 10% of study participants had lived in Victoria for 2 years or less.

How long have you been a resident of Victoria, BC

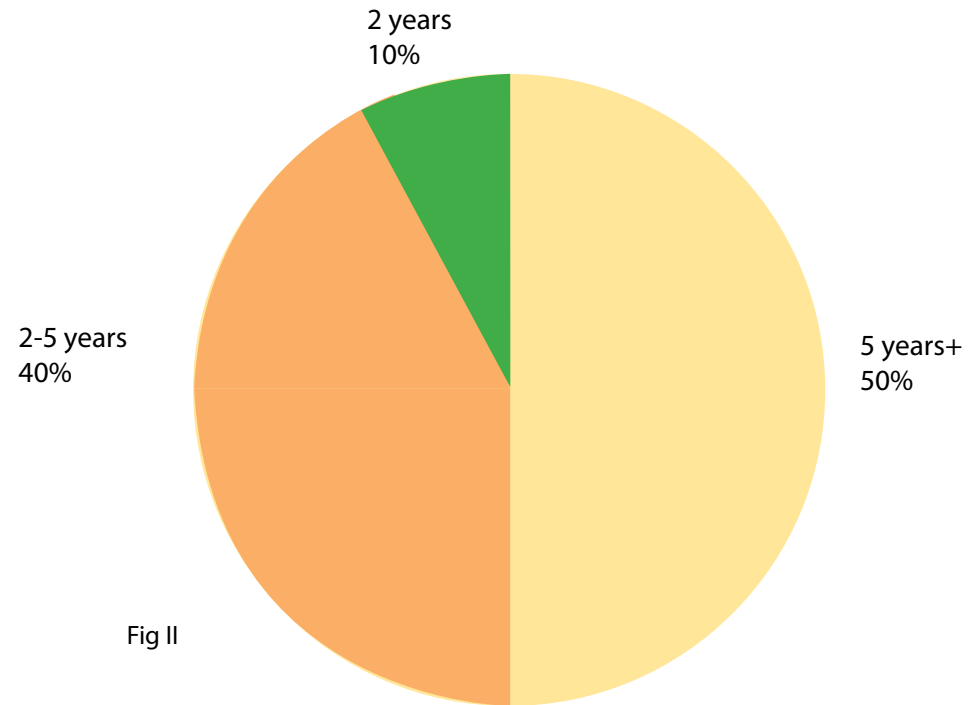


Fig II

## FOOD AND ITS CULTURAL RELEVANCE

Some individuals noted that eating culturally relevant food is very important to them and reported eating food from their cultural backgrounds on a daily or weekly basis. Some individuals noted that they had been forced to adapt to a Western diet because the unavailability of their cultural staples affected their feeling of well-being. Other individuals reported that eating culturally relevant food was not very important to them, typically because they had learned to adapt to its scarcity within the Canadian context. Through acculturation, they had adapted to the Canadian diet.

# FOOD AND COMMUNITY

A study participant from Trinidad and Tobago shared how being a newcomer gave more relevance to the cultural connection of food.

This study participant immigrated to Canada with her family at the beginning of 2020, just before the Covid-19 pandemic. She described how, for her, the familiarity of cultural food was important in providing her children with a sense of safety and stability. In a new culture where her children were in an unfamiliar school, community, and culture, food was part of building their sense of home and supporting their emotional well-being.

70% of participants in the study strongly agree that food insecurity is a significant problem among Black communities in Greater Victoria.

70% Agreement



These individuals noted that they had seen their communities worry about accessing nutritious and culturally relevant food in Victoria. They expressed worry about the perceived nutritional content and quality of regularly available food, inaccessibility brought on by price, and the barriers to getting culturally relevant food.



## FOOD AND COMMUNITY (Continued)

25% of study participants felt that they did not have enough information to make a general statement on the state of food insecurity regarding Black, African, and other Afro-diasporic individuals in Victoria.

25% Agreement



However, these study participants admitted to being aware of the high cost of food that affects all individuals living in the city regardless of cultural origin. One study participant was clear that, “I don’t know if I can speak to the food insecurity within the African diaspora, but food insecurity in Victoria is a huge problem, and knowing where our food comes from, knowing how to grow our food, having agency over what types of food we put in our bodies is a huge issue.”

Another study participant echoed this sentiment stating that, “It is very hard to say whether food insecurity is an issue for African or Black communities in Victoria because we did not conduct any research. I know that, generally, food insecurity is a problem for everyone but we do not have data to determine if it is an issue for Black communities, but what I know is that food insecurity is an issue to everybody in Victoria.”

Every study participant said that they were aware of the challenges involved in accessing affordable, fresh food; the general attitude is that food insecurity is a major problem in Victoria.



## SOCIAL SEGREGATION MASKING FOOD INSECURITY IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

65% of study participants were unaware of or had never seen hunger or acute food insecurity among Black communities in their immediate social groups and or extended circles.

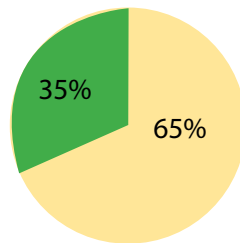


Fig III

However, these individuals noted that they often find themselves in circles of more privileged socio-economic backgrounds and demographics, so they may be outside the area of some of the more extreme food issues the Black communities may be facing. For these individuals, interacting with people like themselves limited their view of issues to their immediate social circles.

One study participant of African American background noted that because she was “in a fortunate socio-economic group” there was sometimes a lack of opportunity to connect across diverse groups. She knew these issues existed and had seen this food insecurity

“In an emergency situation such as food insecurity, it is hard to know what is going on with everyone else.”

intersect with issues of homelessness and the drug crisis within Victoria, but she was unaware of anyone within her personal networks who dealt with these issues.

Although unseen cases of acute food insecurity exist in Victoria - as 15% of study participants responded that they had never seen hunger or acute food insecurity in Victoria - 11.1% of respondents had experienced it and knew of individuals in their networks who had struggled with acute food insecurity.

One study participant of Ugandan descent notes that during the Covid-19 pandemic, she found herself newly unemployed and without any means of providing adequate food for herself as an international student. She found herself anxious about where her next meal was going to come from and facing hunger.

Similarly, another study participant of West African descent noted that food insecurity is not something that people openly discuss with strangers. The general sentiment is that it is very hard for newcomers, from outside Canada or Victoria, to immediately build connections with people in the city. To address this, 90% of participants expressed the desire for community. One participant noted that, “I am raised in a community of people interacting with each other, that is where we learn, so the absence of the communities is the problem for me. Because, in a community, we communicate every day and the news goes like this, I get information from you and pass it on to another person—but here you must call this professional person to get information, and there is money involved there, there is time involved there, and there is culture involved there.”





# FOOD AND HEALTH

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When asked if their health had improved or gotten worse since coming to Canada, 55% of study participants said that their health had gotten worse. 45% said they had not seen any considerable difference in their health.

One study participant of Nigerian descent who migrated to Canada as a student noted that, “earlier on, my health got horrible, I started getting bigger, but now I would say it is getting better because I go to the gym very regularly and I am eating consciously. I am making a conscious effort about my diet because I am the one making my food, so I know what I will eat every single day. I would say that my health has improved since I got here.”

Notably, study participants who noted their health got worse after moving to Canada took immediate steps to address their health issues by becoming more health conscious, leading more active lifestyles, and actively researching what they put in their bodies. Only 3 of these study participants reported seeking medical advice to address their health concerns. Even then, they found other ways to improve their health by supplementing Western medicine with physical exercise and dietary changes informed by cultural knowledge. One study participant of North American descent indicated that when she went back to her country of birth and ate food from her culture, her health improved.

“When moving to a different culture you hear a lot of conversations about employment, housing, etc. [...] everything but food, which is an important part of taking care of yourself.”

# GROWING FOOD AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

When asked if they had ever considered growing a garden, or growing their own food, 70% of study participants said yes. Some of the identified barriers to growing a garden include lack of access to local gardening knowledge, such as understanding the seasons, what grows in Victoria, and best practices. There were other unexpected issues, such as understanding how to protect one's garden from deer and other grazing animals. Other barriers linked to structural issues included housing and tenancy restrictions in growing gardens. Study participants expressed how hard it is for them to grow food within tenant situations that are restrictive, such as most apartments, condos and townhomes.

When asked if growing their own food made them feel more connected to their culture, 35% of all study participants responded no. Conversely, 55% responded that growing their own food would help them feel connected to their culture. 10% of study participants highlighted health concerns and the desire to be more health conscious as the main reason for an interest in gardening and growing their own food as opposed to cultural considerations.

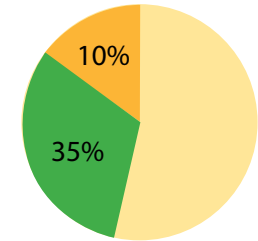


Fig IV

Some study participants pointed to overall affordability - and the desire to reduce their food cost - rather than cultural ties as an incentive for growing their food. One family detailed how gardening provided an opportunity for family bonding and an enriching learning opportunity for their children.

## FOOD AS A COMMUNITY PRACTICE

*"In Africa, people ate together. In my culture, we eat together, you bring your food, I bring my food and we eat together, we share, and if there is a person who doesn't have food, we are concerned about their social welfare. We eat together and food for us is not just food, it is sharing [...] It is the dialogues; people sit and interact with each other. But now you eat, you are in a car, and you start eating a meal and you call it a meal. So, it is totally different."*

A common theme in the interviews was that food is a communal aspect in many cultures, and living in Canada, study participants have adapted to different eating patterns. Where they once ate around a table with family and friends and exchanged stories, many study participants now reported having meals alone -

and, at times, on their way to other commitments such as work. Food was a social connector and love language in their respective cultures. Nevertheless, despite the challenges involved in obtaining the ingredients to cook nutritious and culturally relevant food, a few study participants have found ways of sharing recipes, spices, and plates of food with those around them. That speaks to our communities' resilience and ability to adapt to the challenges around them.

Some study participants noted that they felt restricted and unable to fully engage in their food practices in their housing situations as they shared their kitchen space with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Some study participants, especially international students, felt that they did not have the culinary skills from their home countries.

# BARRIERS TO ACCESSING AFFORDABLE, FRESH, NUTRITIOUS, AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT FOOD

## TASTE

45% of study participants expressed dissatisfaction with the flavor or taste of available meat and produce in Victoria, in comparison with the taste of similar food from their home countries.

For example, one study participant of Bahamian descent mentioned that the mangoes in grocery stores in Victoria did not taste as “authentic” as she was used to. This feeling was echoed by other study participants who noted a distinct difference between the taste of food in Victoria and Canada as a whole, compared to food in other countries. This difference in taste may be attributed to the differing climatic conditions where food is produced. Some study participants were unsure how best to replicate dishes from their home countries with available spices and had to adjust to the Canadian food context. For one study participant of Southern African and Canadian descent, satisfaction with food improved once he adjusted to cooking with locally available ingredients. Only 5% of study participants were satisfied with the taste of available food.

## PERCEIVED QUALITY

“I grew up eating organic food, and we used to get food straight from farmers. Coming to Canada, I was surprised that most foods are non-organic.”

Study participant of Southern African descent.

Many study participants considered average grocery store produce to be inferior to organic produce. This is understandable, as over 90% of all study participants had immigrated from countries where organic food was common, and food came directly from farmer’s markets. A large percentage of study participants indicated that they were dissatisfied with the perceived quality of average grocery store meat and produce. These individuals expressed uncertainty regarding and the nutritional quality of genetically modified food. Some study participants cited health concerns over added hormones, for example, as a reason to be skeptical about food content. There was a general sentiment that many individuals do not know what they are eating.

Additionally, most study participants noted that as they had typically grown up eating organic food in their countries and expressed not feeling satisfied with the quality of average meat and produce in stores. These individuals were concerned with the process and chemical inputs that were used in the production of non-organic food. This may explain why many study participants prefer organic food. One study participant noted that most people in her community feel that they are not getting the nutrition they need from food.

The following table, Fig 1, shows some comments from our interviews:

“Food that hasn’t been grown in soil may be picked too early.”	
“Food doesn’t taste the same.”	
“Fruit and Vegetables have different names.”	
“There are different programs, but they are not geared towards Black people.”	

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## LIMITED OPTIONS

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90% of study participants mentioned that the availability of culturally relevant food options was limited in Victoria. For these individuals, finding their authentic food options was very difficult.

All study participants pointed to the sole African food store on the Island as their main supplier of culturally relevant food. Many study participants agreed that there was an over-reliance on this one store and expressed worry about what would happen if it closed. Due to the limited culturally relevant food options on the island, many study participants resort to having their visiting friends and family—from out of town or the country—bring them culturally relevant food and ingredients when they come to Victoria. One study participant of South American descent noted that much of the food insecurity she sees in her community is based on finding authentic Caribbean food ingredients from their region.

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## LOW VARIETY

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80% of all study participants affirmed that it is difficult for them to find culturally relevant food in Victoria. Some individuals noted that, sometimes, there are cultural food intersections between various ethnic food stores. For instance, one study participant of Southern African descent noted that he had found some culturally relevant food in a store in the Chinatown in Victoria. Food stores on the island typically cater to major ethnic communities in the city—leaving other groups with fewer options. A recurring theme was that the sole African store on the island tends to stock West African-specific food, thereby leaving individuals from other parts of the African continent with further limited food options, as the food available is not culturally relevant to them.

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## FINANCIAL EARNING CAPACITY

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Study participants who were international students, refugees and generally, newcomers to Canada reported being particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, as there is very limited financial support available to them as compared to domestic students, Canadian permanent residents and citizens. This financial hardship was also felt by study participants who were single parents. Nearly all study participants who cited finances as a barrier to accessing affordable, fresh and culturally relevant food disclosed that finding stable professional jobs to be able to afford healthy food was a major challenge for them. Even when they found jobs, they were paid minimum wage, and, as a result, lived paycheck to paycheck, having to balance other financial commitments associated with tuition, housing, healthcare, childcare, and transportation.

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## DISTANCE

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45% of individuals expressed that distance was a barrier to accessing culturally relevant food. In comparison, 55% did not find distance to stores a major barrier.

Many individuals noted that, typically, they do not have local access to their cultural food in Victoria and have few local options. They specified that they would be willing to travel to the mainland (Vancouver) or else to get access to their cultural food staples, demonstrating the importance of cultural food play in their diet. One study participant of South American descent said she would invest and travel to a nearby larger town, such as Vancouver if needed to access culturally relevant food. Furthermore, most individuals mentioned that without a vehicle, it is hard to access culturally relevant food.

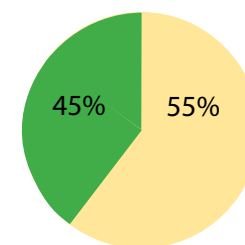


Fig V

# LIMITED BLACK-OWNED FOOD BUSINESSES

All study participants noted there are not enough Black- or ethnic-owned food businesses in Greater Victoria. Although most study participants expressed a strong willingness to support African, Black, and other Afro-Diasporic food businesses in Victoria, several study participants noted that there are not enough members of their cultural group in Victoria to financially sustain a store.

## COST OF FOOD

90% of study participants expressed concern over the high cost of fresh, nutritious, and culturally relevant food. The high cost of food coupled with the high cost of living—housing, education, healthcare etc.—in the city poses a challenge. 70% of all study participants noted that they sometimes chose cheaper and less nutritious food options to be able to meet the demands of rent and other financial obligations. In this regard, price presents one of the biggest barriers to accessing fresh, affordable, healthy, and culturally relevant food.

Similarly, 25% of participants in the study felt they did not have enough financial resources to feed themselves and/or their family properly, whereas 65% of participants were able to meet the financial demands of a healthy and nutritious diet. For some study participants, their preference for organic food raised their food bill. One study participant of South American descent noted that she prefers to buy produce in a farmer’s market or from organic stores, and that if she did not have the financial means to afford organic food, then she would be dissatisfied with the nutritional quality of average grocers.

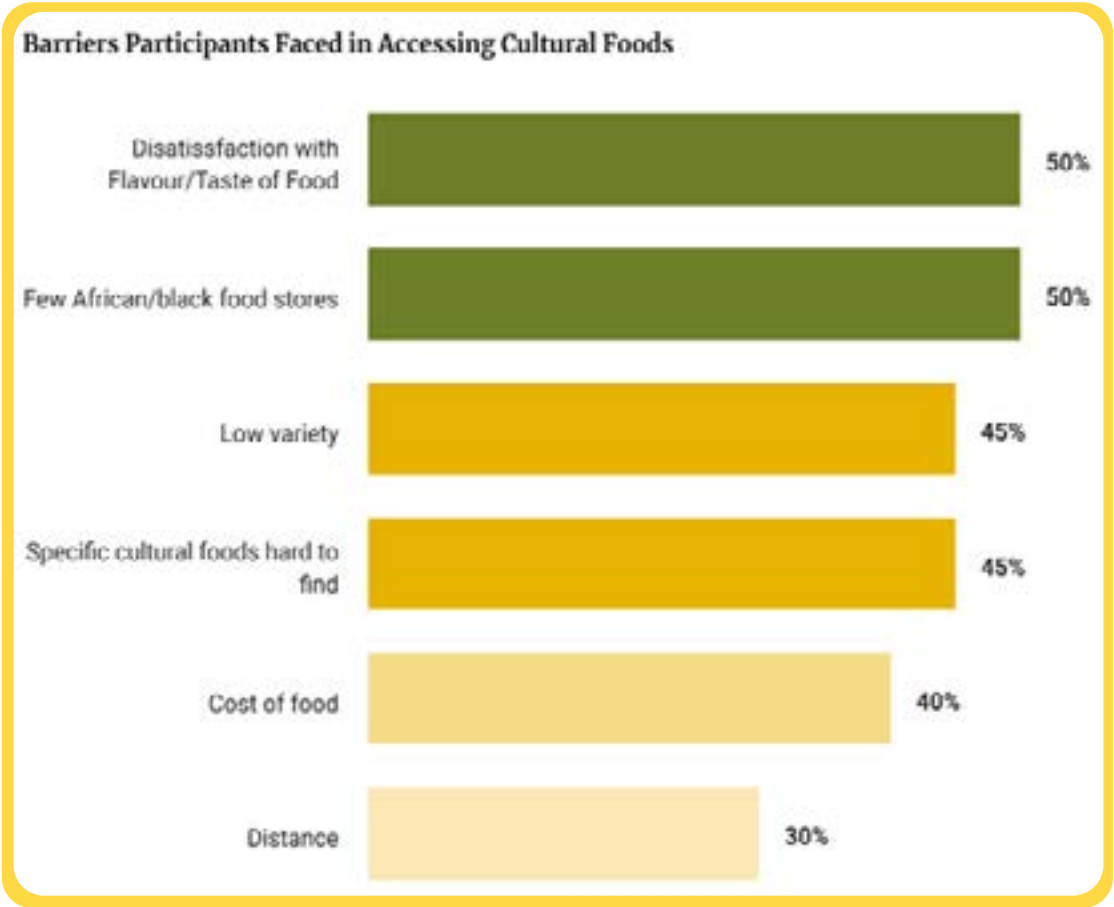


Fig VI

Victoria offers unique food options but has limitations\*



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## LIMITED ACCESS TO RESOURCES ON CULTURAL DIET AND NUTRITION

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85% of participants felt they had little access to culturally relevant information on diet and nutrition. The other 15% actively researched health information through sources such as books and, as a result, felt they had access to this information to inform them.

Generally, study participants felt that they did not have access to resources on cultural diet and nutrition. Most study participants were unaware of the organizations doing this work, and resources on proper eating. One study participant who did get access to culturally specific resources said that she could not afford to eat according to recommended health guidelines.

Two healthcare practitioners of color indicated that from their professional insight, African and Black individuals would benefit from culturally specific diet recommendations because of common health pitfalls immigrants in particular face when they transition to a Western diet. They suggested increased education around nutrition, particularly for students, as a remedy.

Another major concern was that even where information on diet is available, it is usually not culturally relevant and very hard for immigrants who do not speak either French or English to understand. Thus, language poses another barrier to access information on nutrition and diet. One study participant of

East African origin who has lived in Canada for almost 14 years noted that, “I don’t feel that there is information because the information is invested in the hands of individuals, or you have to talk with people who are experts in that field, but where are those people? Are they connected with the community? They are not. Language is a problem, especially when people are here as refugees and speak very limited English.”

This was echoed by another study participant who is also of East African origin and has lived in Canada for 2 years. He noted that he relied on friends for information on nutrition and diet: “By talking to people, I learn what we can eat and what we cannot eat. I can get information from people like you, because we speak the same language, Kiswahili, so I know what food you can or cannot eat and after that, I understand. Our language, that brings us together, helps one know the food that others like and don’t like and is able to make a decision.”

# A FOOD-SECURE VICTORIA: IN THEIR WORDS

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Through these discussions, community members identified lack of access to fresh, affordable, nutritious, and culturally relevant food as a major problem in Victoria. This is alarming because it leaves households with no option but to seek less healthy, culturally irrelevant, and sometimes processed food. As this study was rooted in participatory action, where community members were actively involved in identifying problems that affect them, it was essential that they described the ways these problems could be addressed. Therefore, we asked participants what a food-secure Victoria would look like to them.

In describing food security, one study participant of First Nations, Black, and Asian descent noted that “food security is teaching people that there is still honor in doing work on the land and it is not a menial job. It is a hard job, it is a back-breaking job, and there needs to be a rebuilding of the community around that.”

One study participant of Ugandan and Canadian descent stressed the importance of communal action, “I think there would be more situations where people can grow their own food, like community gardens as well as farming co-ops so maybe a bigger plot where we get together and pool resources to have equipment and resources, but it is still grown locally and naturally...”

Another study participant of Nigerian descent pointed to the need to establish communal trust, “it might just be as simple as giving out

recipes, or as simple as inviting people to try different meals in potluck style. One step at a time, trust will be gained, and help will come, and it is going to be a community.”

To another study participant of Mauritanian and French descent, reasonable pricing is essential in building a food secure city, “I mean, one thing but that’s hard to enforce would be reasonable pricing. Being able to go to 1 store, maybe 2, to get what I need and actually be able to get what I need and not just some of it and going to 5 stores to get only some of the stuff I want. Somewhere where I could find culturally relevant food. Healthy and good food at a reasonable price and not having to run around everywhere to find it, and also for me, I would like to be able to find good, culturally relevant food when I want to; from more than one place once in a while. You know what I mean? Just have food choices. I know there are some in Victoria, but it’s not a ton.”

## A FOOD-SECURE VICTORIA: IN THEIR WORDS (Continued)

Another study participant of African and Canadian descent noted that, “I would love for everyone to have access to fresh food. It would be good if everyone could have access to food, good food, not too expensive—and good food does not have to be too expensive, and that it is why it is important to grow local because most of the things that we are paying for it is shipment from other countries when they ship the food here, but it would be great if our food was grown locally, then we don't have to pay those taxes, right? So, try to buy local, if you can have a beautiful garden to grow your vegetables, also that would be great but, in my case, I try to buy local.”

The above sentiments were echoed by other study participants in various ways and point to the desire of community members to be actively involved in issues that affect them, specifically in something as personal and important as food.





**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study revealed that access to affordable, fresh, healthy, and culturally relevant food in Victoria is a major challenge. Food insecurity is not an individual problem but a communal problem; it deserves the attention of every stakeholder in the food system. Community members know what works for them. These are some of the suggestions they put forth to help alleviate the food crisis they find themselves in.

1. Development of a cultural food resource map

Finding stores that stock healthy, affordable, and culturally relevant food remains a major challenge for many newcomers to Victoria and people with very small culturally similar social circles. As most people rely on their friends or people close to them to get information about food, study participants expressed a need for more resources on food stores, or a cultural food resource map in Victoria. This would help newcomers find their desired food options within the Capital Regional District (CRD). There was also an expressed need for race-specific dietary information and resources. Likewise, study participants expressed a desire for improved food literacy for consumers to understand the science behind food products, as well as for the related processes to be better informed and relieve fears.

2. Establishment of a community cultural centre

All study participants expressed the desire to be part of some cultural exchange system. They were eager to learn about new cultures and share bits of their own culture with others. All study participants agreed that no one individually can be self-sufficient; community is important to so many of their practices. In this regard, all study participants indicated that they would support having a physical space where they can regularly gather and exchange knowledge as a community. This recommendation was made with the recognition that the importance of community and the exchange of wisdom is common across all African, Black, and other Afro-diasporic groups, as collectives, despite the diversity of experiences. In this way, we can reclaim some of our ancestral memories and practices and guarantee food security for many in our community.

3. Expansion of dietary information to newcomer communities

The majority of study participants pointed to existing dietary information as being very Eurocentric and not applicable to their needs. They advocated for more culturally relevant dietary information. This would present itself as information translated into more newcomer languages and culturally relevant communal dialogue on nutrition.



#### 4. More support for newcomers to Canada

People who are new in Canada are heavily impacted by the food crisis in Victoria as well as the housing crisis. This burden is too much for many of them, who reported feeling alone, depressed, and pessimistic about their current condition. Many immigrant organizations in Victoria are catered towards permanent residents of Canada, leaving other newcomers with no recourse. Study participants suggested a lifting of the 20-hours per week work limit by the federal government, access to better jobs, and student loans as ways to alleviate their suffering.

#### 5. Diversify the variety of food in store shelves

This study has established that there is a need for culturally relevant food in our community. The majority of the study participants would like to see more of their cultural food options at their local grocery stores.



A person wearing a red and black plaid shirt and a blue lanyard is holding a large, dark red beet in their left hand. Their right hand is reaching into a wooden crate filled with various fresh vegetables, including carrots, radishes, and leafy greens. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the vegetable display.

# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions relate to community perceptions of Food Insecurity within Greater Victoria, BC.

### Self identification

1. Do you self identify as Black, or a person of the African diaspora?
2. Do you live in Greater Victoria?
3. How long have you been a resident of Greater Victoria?
  - A Less than 12 months
  - B 1 year to 2 years
  - C 2 years to 5 years
  - D 5 years+

### Food insecurity and the Black Community:

4. In your opinion, is food insecurity amongst Black communities a big problem within Greater Victoria?
  - Strongly Agree
  - Agree
  - Neutral
  - Disagree
  - Strongly Disagree

Please tell us more.

5. In your close communities, have you seen people you know experience issues accessing local, fresh food from their cultures whilst living in Greater Victoria?
6. In your opinion, is it easy for you to find information about cultural diet and nutrition in Victoria? (e.g., organizations doing this work, resources about proper eating/nutrition etc.)
7. In your opinion, is it easy for you to access local, fresh food from your culture in Greater Victoria? What could make it easier to do so?

#### Food and its cultural relevance

8. Is eating food from your cultural background very important to you?
9. Do you feel there are enough Black or ethnic owned food businesses in Greater Victoria?
10. In your opinion, are there any reasons that make it hard for you to access culturally relevant food? (Can pick multiple options)
  - A Food is expensive
  - B High cost of living (housing, education, healthcare etc.)
  - C The distance to stores is too far
  - D There is a low variety of cultural food
  - E My cultural food is not easy to find

Please tell us more.

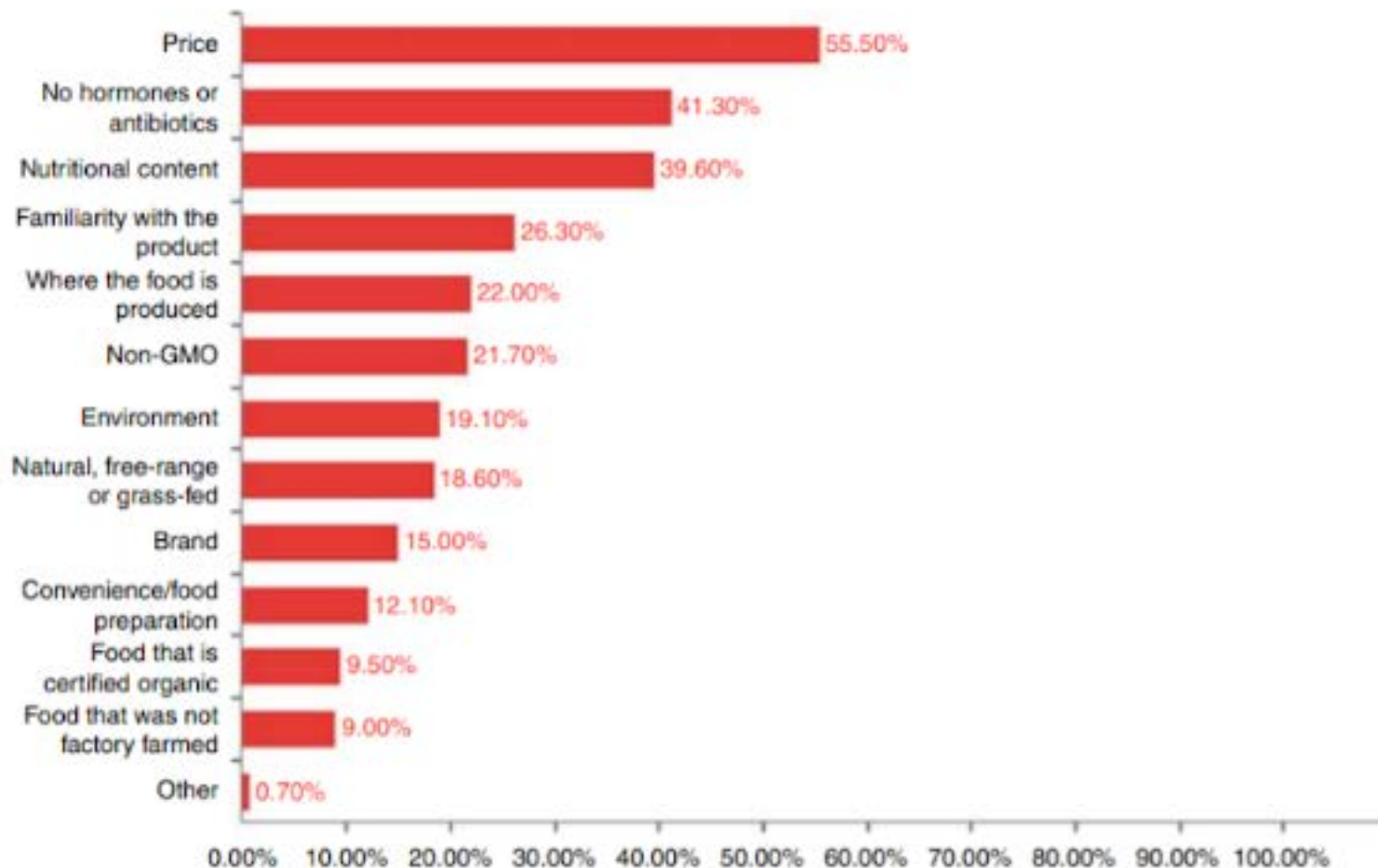
#### Growing your own food

11. Have you ever considered growing a garden, or growing your own food? Are there any reasons that would make it hard to do so?
12. Would growing your own food make you feel more connected to your culture?
13. Do you feel you have enough financial resources to feed yourself/your family properly?

#### Food and your health

14. Would you say your health has improved or gotten worse since coming to Canada? Please tell us more about your experiences.

Thank you for your thoughtful answers!



**Note:** From the list below, please choose up to three considerations that are important to you when purchasing food (GM or Non-GM)



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