

# Examining tools and approaches for reducing food insecurity in Students at the University of Toronto:

## An analysis of causes, needs, and potential solutions

John Kupis | Supervisor: Dr. Michael Classens  
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### Background

- Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain access to sufficient food because of a lack of economic resources to purchase food <sup>1</sup>
- When considering Canadian post-secondary student populations, the incidence of food insecurity has been estimated to be 39%, compared to 15% of the rest of the population of Canada <sup>2</sup>
- This study investigated the current tools and policy measures which aim to alleviate instances of food insecurity on the University of Toronto St. George Campus

### Research Objectives

- The research question posed was “what tools and techniques are the most effective for reducing food insecurity amongst students in post-secondary education, and how can they be applied to the University of Toronto?”
- Within the context of food insecurity; tools are various engagement activities with community members which attempt to combat the symptoms and causing aggravators of food insecurity
- Like any intervention, tools have various different impacts on different aggressors, and help certain individuals more than others- examining the best tools for students was pertinent in this study

### Methodology

- In order to effectively answer the research question, a literature analysis considering the aggressors, tools, and emerging solutions around North America, and specifically at the University of Toronto were consulted
- An interview was conducted with an individual who is responsible for organizing some of the tools available on the St. George Campus of the University of Toronto
- This research was exploratory in nature, and integrated factors not compared in Canadian Literature

### Results

- There were a number of identified tools on campus, both food-based tools, and financial tools
- To complement this, policy on food insecurity has been introduced at a Federal level, however, there is not any specificity towards students <sup>3</sup>
- Current policy is not focused on financial measures, which can have a larger impact on food insecurity, but on food-based solutions such as food banks
- The available on-campus resources are poorly advertised, and do not have the outreach and potential to solve food insecurity on campus
- Future solutions should focus on ensuring financial stability of students, as well as educational measures which connect peers and knowledge of food systems



#### Food Based Tools

- On campus Food bank
- Community gardens
- Hart House cooking classes and membership
- Mealcare-food saving programs



#### Financial Tools

- Emergency bursaries through colleges
- University of Toronto Student Union Financial Aid

68%

of U of T students are dissatisfied with the availability of affordable food on campus

4. Meal Exchange. (2017)

64%

of U of T students feel that more locally-grown food options will increase the availability of healthy food options on campus

4. Meal Exchange. (2017)

### Key Takeaways

- There are not enough available tools for the number of students and requirements to alleviate food insecurity on campus
- There are too few financial, community, and food based solutions available to those who require them
- Little research on the University of Toronto has been conducted, and integration of students, staff, and board members has not occurred
- In order to provide effective tools for reducing levels of food insecurity, broad adaptable solutions must become available

### Recommendations

- The University of Toronto should integrate programs which elevate students' knowledge of food systems and how to be a part of the solution in solving food insecurity on campus
- Development of a communication plan from administration of the University of Toronto to students about the presence of programs and available funding for food security is necessary
- The University of Toronto St. George Campus should integrate more local, sustainable food options at their on-campus restaurants
- An evaluation tool for identifying food insecurity in students, and how to ensure that these populations are reached needs to be developed

### References

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