

BRITISH COLUMBIA – HUNGER REPORT 2011

Prepared by Food Banks British Columbia, Member of Food Banks Canada

Key Findings

In March 2011:

- Food bank use in British Columbia was 16% higher this year compared to 2008, before the recession began
- The province experienced the second highest level of food bank use on record
- 32% of those assisted were children and youth
- 41% of assisted households were families with children
- More than 16% of households receiving food had income from current or recent employment

Food Bank Use in British Columbia, 2011

British Columbia has seen a slight decrease in people visiting food banks in 2011 after a 16% increase as a result of the 2008-09 recession.

This is due to BC's economy slowly edging back after the recession. The recovery was broadly based, with both the goods and service sectors making significant gains. A long downturn in the forest sector finally came to an end in 2010 while the mining, oil and gas extraction industry posted its first increase in real GDP since 2005. The construction industry also picked up speed after losing ground in 2009. In the service sector, most industries made gains in 2010. The Olympics provided a boost to several tourist-related industries, including accommodation and food services, which expanded 3.5%.

BC's unemployment rate fell 0.8 percentage points to 6.7% (seasonally adjusted in September, the lowest rate recorded since January 2009). The province's jobless rate remains below that for Canada as a whole, and BC's economy is expected to grow moderately over the next year. The average weekly wage in British Columbia was a respectable \$839.93 in August, and the average hourly wage in the province was \$22.97.

In spite of the above figures there are still almost 100,000 people visiting food banks each month in British Columbia, and more than 30% are children.

The need for affordable housing is still a major issue and the cost of living in BC is one of the highest in Canada. With the latest drop in the stock market, many people living on retirement funds are going to face financial hardship as their savings have dropped significantly. Seniors, families, single parents and people with jobs paying minimum wage are relying on food banks more and more – some for a short time and some for longer.



Of the 92 FBBC member food banks, 56% are rural food banks in regions with populations of 10,000 or less. These food banks have only one or two major industries, and jobs can be hard to come by – if a major employer fails or has to cut staff then donors to food banks can quickly become clients.

Another issue with rural food banks is the limited amount of resources for food. There may be no major supermarket in the area and getting enough food to these rural food banks is a heavy burden for the food bank community.

In summary, food banks were started over 25 years ago as an emergency measure to help during a deep recession. They have now become an institution. Although the economy is on the rise, not everyone is impacted by this. Low income families cannot provide the support and food required by their children to continue their education and therefore they become low income citizens and the circle of poverty is not broken. Even with the slight drop in people using this assistance, the numbers are still significant. No Canadian should go hungry and this is especially true for children.