

# FOOD BANKS OF THE COLUMBIA BASIN 2012



An in depth look into this essential community service

Prepared by  
The Golden Food Bank Society  
[info@goldenfoodbank.ca](mailto:info@goldenfoodbank.ca)

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AN IN DEPTH LOOK INTO THIS ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY SERVICE

## ABSTRACT

*4175 individuals were provided food from food banks in the Columbia Basin in March 2012.*

To put this into context, food banks across the Columbia Basin provided food to a population equivalent to ~50% the size of Kimberley and surrounding area.  
This happens every month in the Columbia Basin.

In 2012, the Golden Food Bank initiated a study of 19 food banks across the Columbia Basin. The purpose of the study was to research initiatives, structure, funding and needs of these 19 food banks. This study was made possible with funding from the Columbia Basin Trust's Community Initiatives & Affected Areas Program.

A questionnaire was developed and administered by phone. Questions focused on demographics, intake procedures, access, operations, costs associated with services, funding resources, community capacity around food security, adjunct community programs, as well as challenges and successes experienced. Responses revealed great diversity among the food banks in all areas.

Similarities were found in the ongoing challenges they face. These include uncertainty of funding, food and monetary donations, providing food of increased nutritional value, inadequate storage space including cold storage, operational costs, and maintaining staff and volunteers.

The strength of the local economy has a direct impact on food bank usage. For many individuals assisted by food banks in the Columbia Basin their income is not likely to change within the foreseeable future. As a result food banks become a needed resource for many.

The extent of food bank usage in the Columbia Basin is significant. Sharing the diversity of food bank operations will enable food banks in the region to develop their own best practises and seek community collaboration in overcoming these challenges.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2012, the Golden Food Bank initiated a study of food banks across the Columbia Basin. The Columbia Basin Trust's Community Initiative and Affected Areas Program provided funding for this study. The Golden Food Bank recognized the need for this research based on feedback received during their Strategic Planning Session in late 2011. The extent of food bank usage in the Columbia Basin is significant. Exploring the diversity of food bank operations will enable food banks in the region to develop their own best practises.

A questionnaire was developed that would guide discussion and elicit information from the 19 participating food banks. The questionnaire was administered by phone to participating food banks between August and November 2012. Information collected focused on food bank operations, costs associated with their services, funding resources, community capacity around food security, as well as success and challenges. The findings were then amalgamated to generate this report.

This report highlights the diversity of food banks within the Columbia Basin. Food banks continually face challenges to maintain operations amidst a high demand for services. These challenges vary among food banks, but generally include providing sufficient nutrient rich food, food shortages, lack of sustainable funding, limited storage, limited accessibility, community perception and lack of human resources. Community connections and collaboration are fundamental to overcome these challenges.

This report is directed to local politicians, government, social service agencies, Columbia Basin Trust and other organizations that can work directly with food banks to strengthen their future initiatives. It provides insight for food banks within the Columbia Basin to recognize the diversity of their work within the region, and to share their successes and failures. This report is intended as a resource for food banks in the Columbia Basin for their future development.

## BACKGROUND

The first officially recognized food bank in Canada opened its doors in 1981 in Edmonton, Alberta. While food banks were originally intended to be a temporary measure, the need for them continued and in fact grew. Food Banks Canada reports that today, there are more than 800 food banks and 3,000 food programs across the country. Most people are aware that food banks provide food to those in need. In addition, food banks often offer a variety of programs such as meal or snack programs, community kitchens and community gardens.

People who turn to food banks often need other types of assistance. Some food banks have responded by providing advocacy and support. This may include education in nutrition and food preparation, skills training and job search, community awareness about hunger and poverty, affordable housing, emergency shelters, child care resources, and referrals to other social agencies and support services.

The demand for food bank services has increased across the country since the onset of the recession. *HungerCount*, an annual survey of food banks by Food Banks Canada, reported in March of 2012, that 882,188 people received food from a food bank in Canada. In British Columbia, *HungerCount* 2012 found there was a 23.1% increase in food bank usage since 2008. In the Columbia Basin alone, 4,175 individuals were provided food by a food bank in March 2012. The recession has increased demand for food bank services and has also challenged people's ability to give.

Food banks rely on their communities for both financial support and food donations. The general population recognizes the essential need for this service and responds with food and various fundraising initiatives in support of their local food bank. Most food banks depend heavily on volunteers for much or all of their day to day activities. Without this considerable, dedicated, volunteer support, food banks would not be in existence.

Food Banks Canada, a nationwide charitable organization, and their provincial members including Food Banks BC provide a significant amount of support to food banks across the country. This includes running programs that provide food banks with large-scale donations of food, funding and educational resources, developing partnerships with corporate donors, raising awareness of hunger and related issues, and conducting research and policy recommendations that will reduce hunger and poverty in Canada.

Low income is the key factor perpetuating the need for food banks. The strength of the local economy has a direct impact on food bank usage. For many individuals making ends meet becomes a persistent challenge as they work seasonally or juggle several part time positions. For others, their income is not likely to increase within the foreseeable future. They are living on a fixed income such as social assistance, provincial disability or pension income. As a result food banks become a needed resource for many.

Many communities in the Columbia Basin are engaging in active discussions evaluating what a Living Wage is in their community. Calculations for a Living Wage reflect what an individual would need to support their family based on the actual costs of living in a specific community. This differs from the minimum wage, which is the legislated minimum set by the provincial government. These discussions are a critical part of developing a poverty reduction strategy, ultimately impacting the number of people assisted by food banks in the Columbia Basin.

## FOOD BANKS

**4175 individuals were provided food from a food bank in the Columbia Basin in March 2012.**

To put this into context, food banks across the Columbia Basin provided food to a **population similar to the size of the Town of Golden and Valemount combined.**

This happens every month in the Columbia Basin.

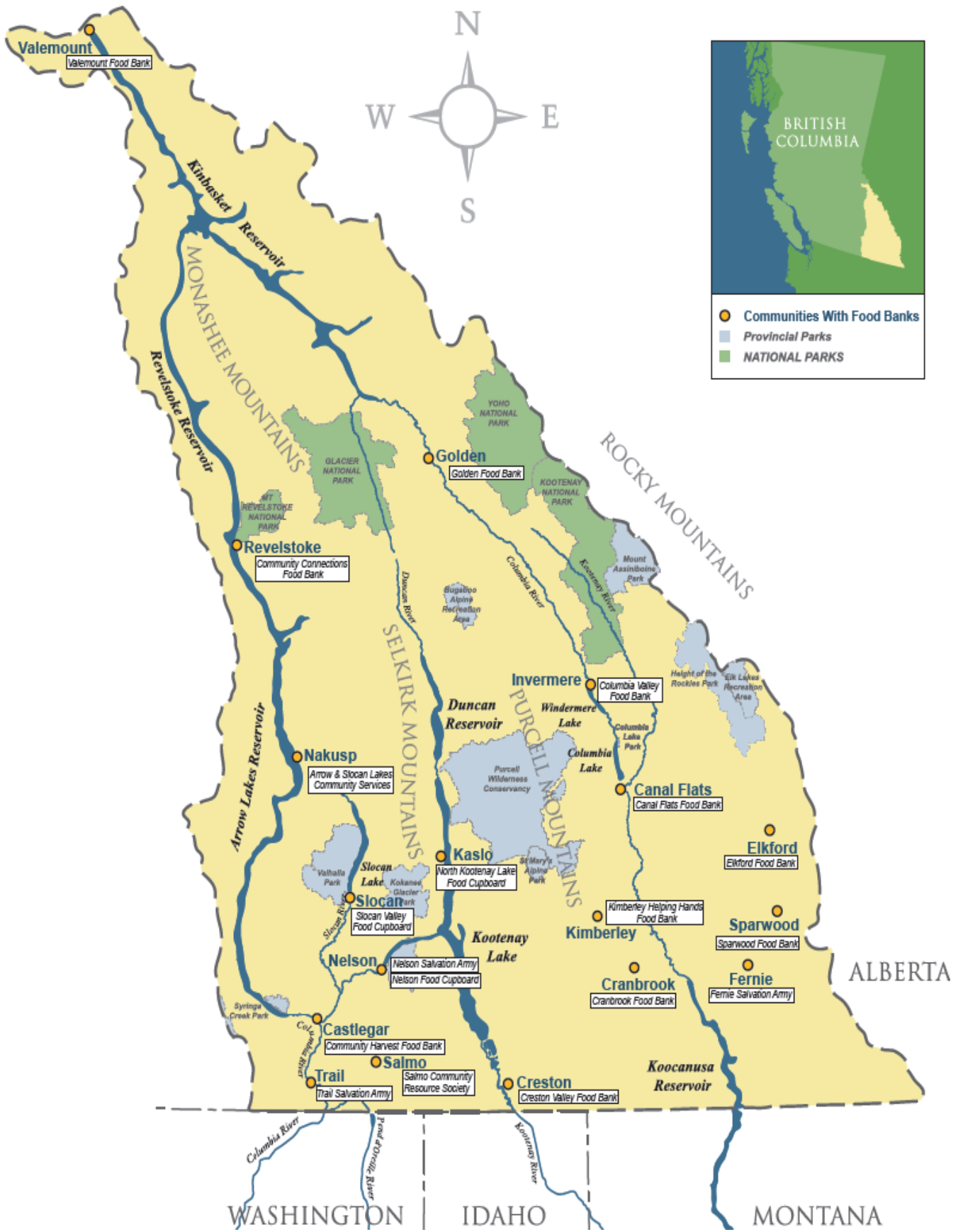
The following food banks operate within the Columbia Basin and are members of Food Banks BC or are recognized as a food bank within their community. Their primary role is to provide food to those in need. There are 19 food banks that participated in the Basin Study of Food Banks and will be referenced throughout this report. Some churches and other organizations in the Columbia Basin provide meals and emergency food to those in need. Due to their size and/or scope they were not included in the research.

COMMUNITY	FOOD BANK	POPULATION
<b>Canal Flats</b>	Canal Flats Food Bank	685
<b>Castlegar &amp; Area</b>	Community Harvest Food Bank	13,382
<b>Cranbrook &amp; Area</b>	Cranbrook Food Bank	27,368
<b>Creston &amp; Area</b>	Creston Valley Food Bank	13,285
<b>Elk Valley Corridor (includes Elkford, Fernie &amp; Sparwood)</b>	Elkford Food Bank Fernie Salvation Army Sparwood Food Bank	12,537
<b>Golden &amp; Area</b>	Golden Food Bank	6,766
<b>Columbia Valley Corridor (including Invermere)</b>	Columbia Valley Food Bank	7,809
<b>Kaslo &amp; Area</b>	North Kootenay Lake Food Cupboard	2,439
<b>Kimberley &amp; Area</b>	Kimberley Helping Hands Food Bank	8,286
<b>Nakusp &amp; Area</b>	Arrow & Slocan Lakes Community Services	3,328
<b>Nelson &amp; Area ( includes Salmo)</b>	Nelson Food Cupboard Nelson Salvation Army Salmo Community Resource Society	20,723
<b>Revelstoke &amp; Area</b>	Community Connections Food Bank	7,691
<b>Slocan Valley</b>	Slocan Valley Food Cupboard	5,284
<b>Trail &amp; Area</b>	Trail Salvation Army	19,223
<b>Valemount</b>	Valemount Food Bank	1,020

Above population figures were provided by the Rural Development Institute ([www.cbrdi.ca](http://www.cbrdi.ca)). The data was extracted from a June 2012 report titled "The Last 10 Years: Growth Corridors Stabilize Population in the Basin Boundary".

It is important to recognize that many of the food banks listed above provide services to rural populations outside of their local boundary. In the Columbia Basin, these rural areas may increase the local population 2 or 3 fold putting increased demand on food bank resources. Some food banks report working with other food banks in close proximity to ensure individuals are accessing only one of the food banks. Other food banks recognize a household may also be seeking food from other food banks or community based resources.

Populations in many of these communities swell at various times of the year. Populations may increase due to their climate and tourist attractions including festivals and recreational activities. These fluctuations in population may create increased demand for local food banks. They also provide food banks with additional sources of donations, both food and money.





## FOOD BANK USAGE

The most reliable source of information on food bank usage is based on Food Banks Canada's annual survey, *HungerCount*. This survey of food banks across Canada includes soup kitchens and other charitable food programs. March is chosen annually to conduct the survey as it provides a 'normalized' view of food bank usage rather than choosing a month with significantly higher or lower usage. The *HungerCount* report reveals the extent of hunger in Canada, and the work food banks undertake across Canada to address this persistent problem.

COMMUNITY	FOOD BANK	INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED MARCH 2012 (data provided by <i>HungerCount</i> 2012)
<b>Canal Flats</b>	Canal Flats Food Bank	10*
<b>Castlegar</b>	Community Harvest Food Bank	126
<b>Cranbrook</b>	Cranbrook Food Bank	772
<b>Creston</b>	Creston Valley Food Bank	328
<b>Elkford</b>	Elkford Food Bank	15*
<b>Fernie</b>	Fernie Salvation Army	189
<b>Golden</b>	Golden Food Bank	231
<b>Invermere</b>	Columbia Valley Food Bank	166
<b>Kaslo</b>	North Kootenay Lake Food Cupboard	180**
<b>Kimberley</b>	Kimberley Helping Hands Food Bank	320
<b>Nakusp</b>	Arrow & Slocan Lakes Community Services	81
<b>Nelson</b>	Nelson Salvation Army	478
	Nelson Food Cupboard	1166**
<b>Revelstoke</b>	Community Connections Food Bank	278
<b>Salmo</b>	Salmo Community Resource Society	98
<b>Slocan</b>	Slocan Valley Food Cupboard (WE Graham CSS)	147
<b>Sparwood</b>	Sparwood Food Bank	106
<b>Trail &amp; Area</b>	Trail Salvation Army	526
<b>Valemount</b>	Valemount Food Bank	30***

\*The Canal Flats Food Bank, Elkford Food Bank, North Kootenay Lake Food Cupboard in Kaslo, Nelson Food Cupboard and Valemount Food Bank did not participate in *HungerCount*. The above numbers were provided by the respective food banks for the Basin Study.

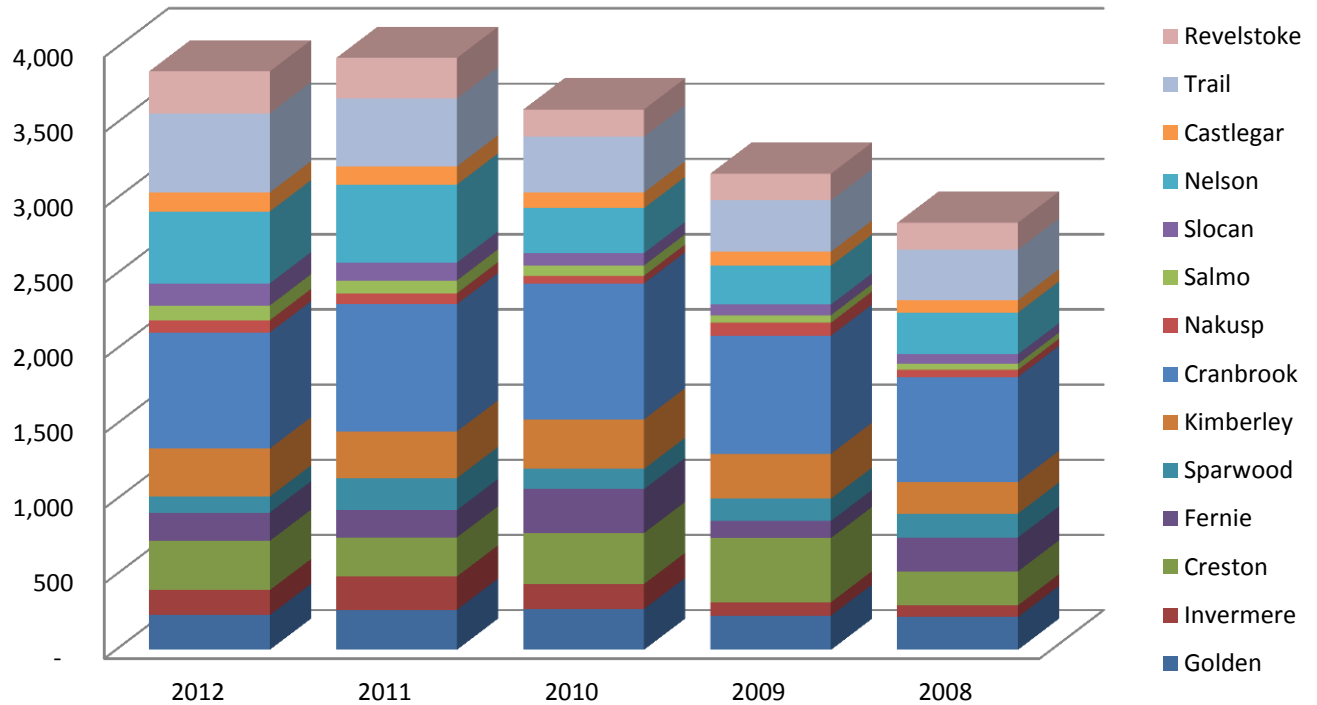
\*\*The Nelson Food Cupboard and The North Kootenay Lake Food Cupboard's collection methods do not separate out unique individuals. The numbers listed above (1166 assisted and 180 assisted respectively) account for individuals that may have used the Food Cupboard repetitive times in the month.

\*\*\*The Valemount Food Bank does not account for total individuals seen monthly. They provide an average of 30 hampers per month.

### Total Individuals Served by Food Bank

#### HungerCount 2012 - Food Banks Canada

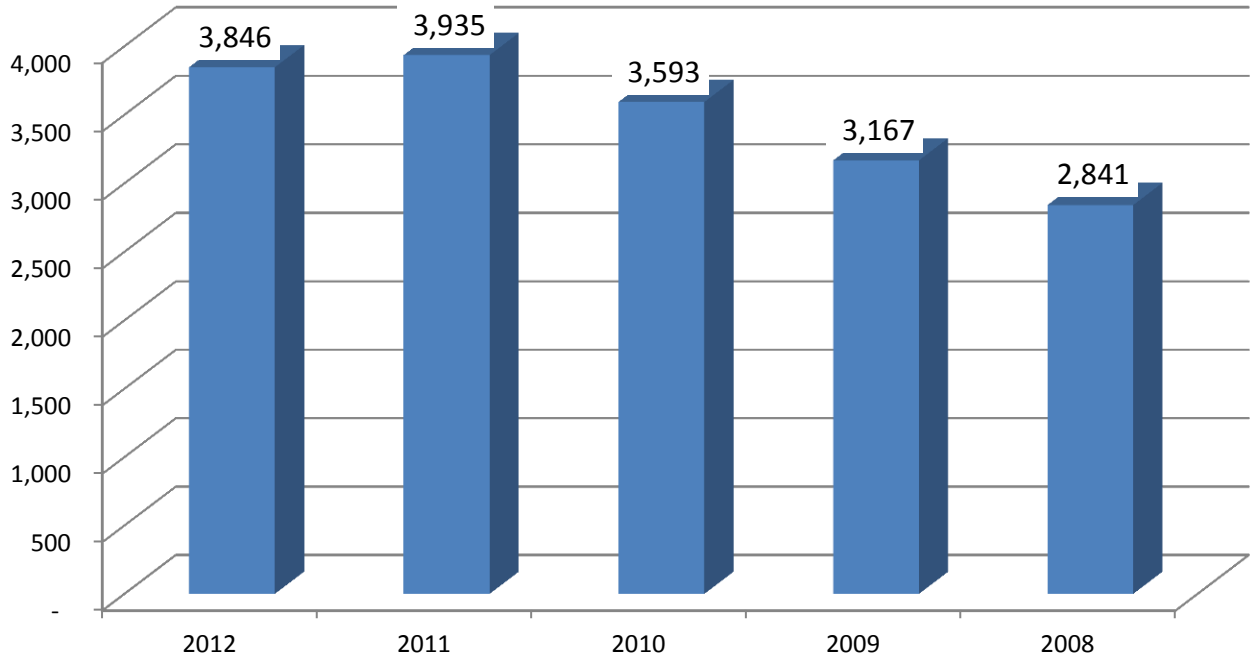
Cranbrook, Slokan and Castlegar numbers were projected for 2008/09 based on growth in region



### Total Individuals Served

#### HungerCount 2012 Food Banks Canada

Cranbrook, Slokan and Castlegar numbers were projected for 2008/09 based on growth in region



## Household Demographics

*HungerCount* collects various data on food bank usage in Canada. This includes information on the type of households accessing the food bank as well as the primary income source of the household. Understanding this data is important for food banks as it impacts the quantity and in some cases the quality of food distributed. Different populations have varying dietary needs. Information related to the income source of the household is valuable as it provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics within communities that impact food bank usage. At a national level this data provides Food Banks Canada with the information needed to advocate and make recommendations for policy change both provincially and federally for those that face food insecurity daily.

### **Household Type**

*HungerCount* describes various household types as ‘single people’, ‘single parent families’, ‘dual parent families’ as well as ‘couples with no children’. Single person households have a wide variety of dietary needs depending on numerous factors including age, income source and their home. Refrigeration, storage, basic cooking instruments, as well as their cooking skills impacts dietary choices and the ability to prepare meals from basic whole foods rather than eating pre-packaged meals.

This varies from a family where emphasis on making meals at home becomes cost effective rather than purchasing pre-packaged meals. Dietary needs of families vary widely. Families with young children may require formula for infants as well as food palatable to babies and toddlers’ tastes. Families with school-aged children often require food items for lunches and snacks. And as children grow into teenagers, their appetites often increase exponentially augmenting their caloric intake.

*HungerCount 2012* reports “children and youth represent 21% of the Canadian population, while 38% of those helped by food banks are in this age group.” It is essential that these individuals receive adequate nutrition to thrive. Their food choices have a direct impact on their ability to learn, grow and be active and healthy.

Seniors as well as those with disabilities also have unique dietary needs. Their capability of preparing meals may impact their nutrition. As we age health and lifestyle factors affect our ability to get maximum nutrition from the food we eat. The healthier and more vibrant seniors are, the more their community thrives and the fewer costs to health care resources. The aging population needs adequate nutrition, particularly protein rich foods and fresh produce, to support their wellbeing. Those with health conditions including diabetes, celiac disease and food allergies also have special dietary needs that impact their food choices.

ACCORDING TO *HUNGERCOUNT 2012*, THE MOST COMMON USERS OF FOOD BANKS IN THE COLUMBIA BASIN ARE SINGLE PEOPLE REPRESENTING 60% OF HOUSEHOLDS.

The **Golden Food Bank** reports the most common users in their community are families representing 47% of households accessing the food bank.

**Income Source**

According to *HungerCount 2012*, the majority of food banks in the Columbia Basin report the primary source of income for households accessing food banks is social assistance, provincial disability or pension income. These individuals are living on a fixed income and will not likely see an increase in their income in the foreseeable future.

The Golden Food Bank reports 25% of households accessing their services state employment income as their primary income. According to *Golden and Area A's Vital Signs*, "27% of the workforce (in Golden) is employed in the sales and service industry, with over half of the labour force working part time or seasonally." *Vital Signs* is a community check-up conducted by community foundations across Canada that measures the vitality of communities, identifies significant trends, and supports actions on issues that are critical to quality of life.

The Sparwood Food Bank reports 31% of households accessing their food bank state pension income as their primary income source. Sparwood has a significant number of seniors living in their community.

## INTAKE PROCEDURES

Walking into a food bank can be a humbling experience. Individuals may be embarrassed or ashamed, feeling the need to justify why they are using the service. A common belief about food banks is that the same individuals use the food bank month after month, year after year. Although this may be the case for some, many see food banks as an emergency, short-term resource. As someone returns to a firm financial foothold, another turns to the food bank for support.

As diverse is the region, so is intake for those assisted. Some food banks adhere to a rigorous screening process to minimize abuse of their services. Others trust that those turning to their food bank are in need and require minimal details from those assisted.

Feedback received supported both practices. Some food banks report abuse of food bank services by those perceived as not truly in need. Food banks were concerned about the community's perception of those abusing the food bank and the impact this has on donations throughout the year.

Several food banks reported the rigorous nature of intake procedures created an additional barrier (of intimidation) for those who may desperately need the service. Promoting barrier free policies encourages food bank use and trust between those in need and those providing the service.

### **The range of intake procedures:**

Food banks most often reported collecting details on an individual's **income versus expenses**. Total monthly household income less expenses, most often rent, determines a household's level of need. This is in addition to requiring identification for the individual registered as well as their dependents and proof of residency within their community.

Some food banks look mainly to the individual's **income source** to determine their level of need, realizing that many living on part time employment, social assistance, and provincial disability or pension incomes will have difficulty making ends meet.

Other food banks focus on **residency within the community**. They recognize that transients may put an increased demand on a food bank's resources limiting the availability of food for those in need living within the community.

### **Community perception:**

Food banks across the Columbia Basin are supported by their local communities. As a result the community's perception of the food bank has a direct impact on donations. When examining intake procedures this is essential to keep in mind.

Providing food hampers for individuals residing in a community for a short time can impact community perception as reported by the Revelstoke Community Connections Food Bank. The expansion of Revelstoke Mountain Resort led to community concerns of the Food Bank being used by non-residents and seasonal visitors during the ski season. This concern resulted in Revelstoke's Community Connections Food Bank taking action to ensure processes were in place and that their intake criteria were being followed. When community members voiced their concerns about non-residents and seasonal visitors accessing food bank services, the Community Connections Food Bank was able to quickly address their concerns based on the measures they had implemented. These steps ensured community perception did not negatively impact food bank donations.



Many food banks report that abuse of food bank services is minimal. But, unfortunately, it's the few negative impressions that can impact community support. Statistics that accurately demonstrate who is accessing the food bank are necessary to help food banks connect with potential donors.

One lingering question for food banks across the Columbia Basin is how successful they are at reaching those in need in their communities. There are many barriers facing those living on low income from accessing social services and food banks. These include geographical diversity and a predominance of rural areas in the Columbia Basin. Some individuals may feel too proud to reach out when in need.

## FOOD HAMPER ACCESS

For the majority of food banks in the Columbia Basin, households access the food bank once per month and are provided with food that would last approximately 1 week.

The **Nelson Food Cupboard** is open 2 days per week. Individuals can access the Food Cupboard as often as needed. As many households have minimal food storage for perishable items, this increases their accessibility to perishable food such as fresh produce.

The **Revelstoke Community Connections Food Bank** provides a weekly service of food hampers including milk, bread, children's snacks, baby items, diapers, frozen goods, fresh produce and non-perishable food.

The **Sparwood Food Bank** is open an additional day a month just for seniors. They can pick up milk, fruit and vegetables in addition to a regular food hamper. This was an initiative to encourage seniors in need to access the food bank.

Most food banks operate similarly with respect to building food hampers. Food is collected in advance and is stored until the food bank is open. Volunteers then provide the manpower to assemble and hand out the food hampers to those in need.

The **Cranbrook Food Bank** and the **Kimberley Helping Hands Food Bank** have households pre-register in the mornings and then return to pick up their assembled food hamper in the afternoon.

There are 3 food banks in the Columbia Basin that provide a unique offering to those in need. They operate as a food cupboard allowing individuals to choose items from food shelves based on their needs and tastes.

These food banks are:

- The Nelson Food Cupboard
- The North Kootenay Lake Food Cupboard in Kaslo
- The Slocan Valley Food Cupboard

These food banks report increased interaction with those assisted including time to provide basic nutrition education. They also report a reduced amount of wasted food items as individuals choose only what they like and will use.

## FOOD

Food Banks across the Columbia Basin are a community-focused initiative. Their support lies fundamentally within their communities. There are no federal or provincial government departments that provide core funding for the work of food banks. As such, food banks become resourceful in order to keep their shelves stocked and their doors open.

- 8 of the 19 food banks in the region reported funding as an ongoing challenge for their organization.
- 5 out of 19 food banks in the Columbia Basin reported food shortages in 2012. This created a 'call out' for food within their communities, and also impacted their service delivery. Food banks cut back on the amount of food being distributed and in some cases food banks closed for a period of time until shelves were restocked.

Food banks often lack the security of knowing they will have enough food and money to continue their services into the next year. Food banks then look at any possible avenue for food or funding. If demand increases unpredictably, as was reported by 5 of the 19 food banks in 2012, resources are often stretched beyond what is available.

### Food Sharing

As an affiliate member of Food Banks Canada, food banks are able to participate in the National Food Sharing System. This is a nationwide food-sharing program that redistributes food to small, rural communities such as those in the Columbia Basin. In 2012, \$3.5 million in food was redistributed from corporate donors to food banks across the country from this program. The provincial member food banks including Food Banks BC arrange and pay for transportation costs related to this program. As a result, food banks incur no costs to participate in the National Food Sharing System.

This initiative is intended as an additional source of food for rural based food banks that do not have ready access to reclaimed food items and donations as food banks in larger urban centers. Items range in quality and diversity providing a variety of non-perishable food times and other household goods.





There are 4 food banks in the Columbia Basin that receive food from other distribution sources. These food banks pay to have the food transported, but have no control over the contents of what is received. Food shortages for these food banks would be more common without this source of food.

- The Golden Food Bank, the Kimberley Helping Hands Food Bank and the Cranbrook Food Bank all report receiving shipments from the Inter-Faith Food Bank in Calgary on an as needed basis. The items received are often abundant relative to the cost of transport, but often include damaged goods including light bulbs, hair dyes, children's toys, household items and aerosol cleaning supplies. Some food items such as cake mix, cookies, crackers, water, and pop may come in such large quantities they become a challenge to distribute in a timely fashion and lack nutrition. In addition, the best before dates are often soon approaching or have just past.
- The Trail Salvation Army receives shipments from a reclamation company, Alternate Processing Systems. As with the above food banks they pay to have the shipments delivered, but they report the food value outweighs the cost of transport.

Geographical location can make it challenging for some food banks to engage in alternative sources of food other than from directly within their community. This puts an increased demand on their own communities to keep food bank shelves full.

Some food banks in the region report sharing with other food banks in close proximity to themselves:

- The Nelson Food Cupboard's gleaning program shares their surplus of fresh fruit and vegetables with the Nelson Salvation Army.
- The Nelson Salvation Army provides Christmas Hampers to the North Kootenay Lake Food Cupboard in Kaslo.
- The Trail Salvation Army provides food to the Nelson Salvation Army when in need.

Food sharing also occurs within communities:

- The Golden Food Bank provides the Golden Family Centre with baby items including diapers, formula, baby food and bottles.
- The Kimberley Helping Hands Food Bank receives all food donations within their community. They provide food for the elementary breakfast and lunch programs, a literacy program called Alphabet Soup, and other programs, as food is available.
- The North Kootenay Lake Food Cupboard in Kaslo provides food for programs at their Family Centre.
- The Trail Salvation Army provides food to a local shelter for their nightly suppers. In addition, the Salvation Army supplies food to a local church that operates a small food bank.

## Buying Food

All food banks in the region report buying food on a regular basis to supplement donations. Geographical location may prevent food banks from accessing other distribution sources. They may lack community support or recognition of their need. Some food banks have enough financial resources to dedicate all or a significant part of their budget to purchasing food. Food donations then supplement what they regularly purchase. Other food banks recognize the need to increase the nutritional value of food hampers by purchasing fresh produce, meat and dairy items. Purchasing food requires funds and often this is scarce. Food banks become resourceful at stretching what is available.

- The Revelstoke Community Connections Food Bank collects Save On More Points through their local Coopers grocery store and in turn use the points to purchase food items. Grocery customers can also donate their points to the Food Bank as the food bank is a designated charity of Coopers. For each 1000 points donated it generates \$1.00 and Save On then donates a matching dollar making 1000 points worth \$2.00.
- The Sparwood Food Bank collects points from their local Overwaitea, which they save to purchase turkeys at Christmas.
- All food banks across the Columbia Basin strive to build partnerships with their local grocers in hopes of buying items at discounted prices throughout the year.
- Food Banks BC organizes the BC Share program offered at local grocery stores across the province. Shoppers are able to purchase a \$2 BC Share coupon at the till in support of their local food bank. The grocer then reimburses the local food bank with gift cards or credit for their grocery store.
- Turkey Farmers of Canada work in partnership with Food Banks Canada helping support the costs to food banks of purchasing turkeys for Christmas/Holiday hampers.

Some food banks such as the Elkford Food Bank and the Fernie Salvation Army report a significant amount of community support that keeps their shelves well stocked throughout the year. They spend very little on groceries purchasing only on an as needed basis. On the opposite spectrum, 3 food banks in the Columbia Basin report spending over \$5000 on food monthly. This may include purchasing food for programs they offer in addition to food hampers.

*In an average month, food banks across the Basin spend ~\$45,000 on food for food hampers and meal programs. This is in addition to food that is donated.*

The partnerships food banks develop with local grocers and food providers are significant. Discounts they receive increase their buying power. As donated food and food received from distribution centers supplement the purchased food in hampers, the money spent on food is less than the dollar value of food in the hamper.

## Transportation Costs

Some food banks incur the cost of transportation to obtain food. Transportation costs become a necessary expense for their operation. Rural food banks are eligible to submit a grant application to Food Banks Canada to cover transportation costs up to \$1500 per year.

- The Cranbrook Food Bank owns a van they use for food pick up from within their community. This provides them with transport for food from their local grocery stores as well as a means to pick up donations throughout the community. There are 2 volunteers designated as the drivers. Operating their own van adds additional costs for gas, insurance and vehicle maintenance.
- The Golden Food Bank, the Kimberley Helping Hands Food Bank, the Cranbrook Food Bank and the Trail Salvation Army report paying transportation costs from other food distribution hubs to their location throughout the year. The cost varies from one location to another and depends on the frequency of deliveries. The Golden Food Bank reports paying \$4800 annually to transport food from the Inter-Faith Food Bank in Calgary to Golden.
- Canal Flats Food Bank and the Valemount Food Bank drive distances greater than 60km to purchase food at an affordable price. This comes at an expense to their volunteers for the fuel and time required for travel.
- Through the National Food Sharing System organized and run by Food Banks Canada and their provincial members including Food Banks BC

## Food Hamper Contents

According to *HungerCount 2012* food banks in the Columbia Basin reported the following food items to be most lacking from food hampers:

- fresh vegetables
- fresh fruit
- meat and protein alternatives such as tofu and peanut butter
- milk and other dairy products



These foods can substantially increase the nutritional value of food hampers, but are costly to purchase putting increased demands on food banks' often limited financial resources. In addition to the food cost, these items require increased operational logistics and capacity to handle, store and distribute. Perishable foods require cold storage and/or freezers, which may be lacking at some food banks. Cold storage requires electricity, space and maintenance that is not always feasible.

## Non-food Items

Some food banks encourage donations of non-food items. For some selling these items enables them to generate revenue thus helping to keep their doors open and their shelves stocked. For others, they become the one-stop depot for donations and redistribute items to other agencies or organizations in their community.

There are 3 Salvation Army food banks in the Columbia Basin, Fernie, Nelson and Trail. Each of these operates food banks and thrift shops, in addition to providing other community services.

The Creston Valley Food Bank is part of a larger organization, the Creston Valley Gleaners Society. Creston Valley Gleaners operate a large-scale thrift shop that sells reclaimed clothes, linens, toys, furniture and appliances. The majority of the profit from their sales directly supports the Creston Valley Food Bank. Creston Valley Gleaners is primarily operated by volunteers – with over 100 volunteers providing their time and energy to this operation. In addition to the food bank they are able to support other charitable groups in Creston.

## FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVES

Individuals facing food insecurity often turn to food banks for support. It becomes a natural fit for food banks to engage their communities in initiatives that increase food security locally.

Some areas of the Columbia Basin are a haven for gardeners. The majority of food banks across the region report receiving surplus garden produce from gardeners during the growing season. *HungerCount 2012* reported fresh vegetables and fresh fruit are some of the items most lacking from food hampers. And yet, we recognize the nutritional value of fresh produce far exceeds canned or frozen alternatives. The surplus garden produce from local gardeners is a step forward in providing fresh fruit and vegetables in food hampers, but it is not enough.

The Columbia Basin also provides large backcountry areas for hunters. Some food banks in the region report receiving donations of elk and deer during the hunting season. The game meat is required to be processed by a commercial butcher to ensure quality control. This creates an added barrier in receiving game meat, as it is an additional cost for either the hunter or the food bank and there may be transportation costs involved if there is no local butcher.

Local gardens and game meat are 2 sources of local food within the region. Creating awareness of these initiatives and building community connections are needed if food banks are to receive these kinds of donations. In addition, food banks require appropriate cold storage and freezers to handle fresh produce and meat. Having the space, as well as the added funds to pay for electricity and maintenance can be a challenge.

### Community Gardens and Gleaning

Community gardens and gleaning initiatives are a natural fit for food banks to engage in food security initiatives. They provide fresh produce for food banks for part of the year, as well as an opportunity for education and capacity building for those that access food bank services. Due to the short growing season in the Columbia Basin, food banks still need to find other means to source fresh produce for 6-8 months of the year.

- Community gardens in Cranbrook and Elkford grow a plot specifically for their local food banks.
- The College of the Rockies Creston Campus has a community greenhouse that offers a variety of programs for children, families and seniors. Produce grown at the greenhouse is given to the Creston Valley Food Bank.
- The Harvest Share Program in Creston developed by the Creston Valley Food Action Coalition redistributes produce that would otherwise go to waste. The food is shared with the food bank.
- Through a partnership with the Town of Golden, the Golden Food Bank has hired a Garden Manager to grow fresh produce specifically for food hampers at the Ruth Wixon Community Garden.
- The Kimberley Helping Hands Food Bank provides lunch to volunteers who grow produce at the community garden in Kimberley. In exchange, the Food Bank receives fresh produce.
- The North Columbia Environmental Society operates a community garden located at the United Church in Revelstoke. The community garden is generous in their donations to the Community Connections Food Bank from their yearly harvest.



- The Nelson Food Cupboard hires a Gleaning Coordinator for 5 months of the year to work with volunteers in gleaning local fruit and vegetables. This provides them with an abundance of fresh produce during their growing season. Excess is given to the Nelson Salvation Army.
- Bear Aware partners with food banks in Kaslo, Golden and Revelstoke to provide donations of locally grown fruit.
- Bear Aware in Revelstoke also partners with the North Columbia Environmental Society to preserve excess fruit. Donations of fruit leather and other preserves are given to the Revelstoke Community Connections Food Bank.



In Kaslo, the North Kootenay Lake Community Services Society has developed initiatives directed at food security under the umbrella of their Food Hub. The Food Hub has several programs including the Food Cupboard:

- They operate a farm direct buying club. Revenue from the buying club supports some of the costs related to the Food Cupboard.
- A Community Root Cellar is used by the Food Cupboard, the Bulk Buying Club and local farmers during the market season, and is also available for locals needing additional cold storage.
- The Tool Library contains a variety of kitchen-based appliances as well as a cooking and nutrition resource library for the community's use.
- The Baby Supplies Cupboard operates similarly to the Food Cupboard, but is specific to early childhood needs with both food and non-food items.
- And 2 online directories:
  - The West Kootenay Food Directory – connects farmers and eaters
  - The Farmland Database – connects farmers looking for land or land owners looking for farmers

## PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Food banks primary role is to provide food to those in need. In addition, many food banks in the Columbia Basin develop and, or collaborate with existing programs focused on food initiatives. This increases the diversity of services offered by the food bank while providing additional support to those in need. To be successful these programs require community awareness, staff and/or volunteers and ongoing funding. This funding may come through donations or fundraising as well as from granting agencies.

### Children's Programs

- The Invermere Food Bank provides funding for breakfast and lunch programs at five schools within School District 6.
- The Kimberley Helping Hands Food Bank provides \$10 lunch cards for students in need attending the local high school. They can use the lunch cards to purchase food at the school cafeteria.
- The Sparwood Food Bank supports elementary school children with a hamper made up of healthy snacks for school including fresh produce.
- The Nelson Salvation Army offers a lunch program for families with school-aged children. Twice per month parents pick up lunch supplies at the Salvation Army and are able to make lunches for their children at home.
- The Community Connections Food Bank in Revelstoke provides a weekly food hamper with children's snacks, fresh milk and baby items.
- The Kaslo Baby Cupboard provides a variety of items for early childhood including food and non-food items.

### Fresh Produce

- The Elkford Food Bank provides \$10 gift cards to households to purchase fresh produce at their local grocery store. The Food Bank doesn't have the capacity to store and distribute fresh produce.
- The Columbia Valley Food Bank in Invermere provides \$5 or \$10 coupons to those in need to purchase fresh produce at a discounted rate through the Family Resource Centre.
- The Nelson Food Cupboard strives to provide nutrient rich foods to those in need. They guarantee 5 varieties of fresh produce every week. Households can access the Food Cupboard as often as needed.
- The Community Connections Food Bank in Revelstoke offers a coupon program to those in need when the Farmer's Market is operational. Individuals can then purchase fresh produce of their choosing.

Many food banks in the Columbia Basin offer meal programs including:

- The Castlegar Community Harvest Food Bank
- Arrow & Slocan Lakes Community Services in Nakusp
- Nelson Salvation Army
- Revelstoke Community Connections
- Salmo Community Resource Society
- Slocan Valley Food Cupboard
- Trail Salvation Army

The **Community Harvest Food Bank in Castlegar** provides additional resources to those in need. There is access on an individual basis, to haircuts and chiropractic services at the Food Bank during operational hours. They also run a short-term emergency shelter aimed primarily for men.

The **Revelstoke Community Connections Food Bank** offers cooking classes free of charge. During the class they prepare a meal and attendees are able to take the prepared food home with them.



## OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS

### Building & Location

Location is as critical to food banks as it is to any business or organization. Food banks need to be in proximity to where people live as many individuals who access food banks arrive on foot, bikes, transit or through carpooling. Most food banks warehouse a large amount of inventory requiring adequate storage and shelving including cooler and freezer space. Food Banks need to be accessible for food deliveries and receiving food donations. And yet, these are often not the case.

- 4 food banks in the Basin report operating out of basements with limited access posing challenges for food deliveries as well as hamper pickup.
- 2 food banks report warehousing their food in separate locations from food bank operations. This requires time and fuel to transport food week to week from the warehouse to the food bank.
- 4 food banks report a lack of adequate storage for food.
- 2 food banks report the lack of cold storage impacts their operations.

In addition to these criteria, the cost for space needs to be affordable to maintain a non-profit relying on community donations for funding.

- 7 of the 19 food banks in the Columbia Basin operate in space that has been donated to them. This ranges from church basements to curling rinks and in some instances to retail space that has been donated.
- 5 of the 19 food banks in the region own their own space, 2 of which are part of the Salvation Army network of charitable organizations. Owning space means saving over the long term, building connections within the community, partnering with other service agencies, the right timing and in some instances the support of grants.
- 7 of the 19 food banks report paying rent and or utilities in some capacity for their premises. Most often the rent is marginal making up a small portion of their operating expenses. For the Golden Food Bank and the Trail Salvation Army the high cost of paying market price for rent and utilities puts a significant drain on their funding resources.



## Staffing and Volunteers

People power is often the success or failure behind any business or organization. Most food banks depend heavily on volunteers for much or all of their food bank operations ensuring shelves are stocked and food is available every week for those in need. The incredible amount of time, dedication and energy of volunteers young and old go a long way to ensure food is available for those in need.

- The Cranbrook Food Bank, the largest food bank in the Columbia Basin, is 100% volunteer run.
- The Creston Valley Gleaners Society operates a large-scale thrift store that supports the Creston Valley Food Bank. Creston Valley Gleaners is primarily volunteer run with over 100 volunteers.
- 3 of the 19 food banks reported a shortage of volunteers.
- The Sparwood Food Bank shared concerns regarding their aging volunteers. The majority of their volunteers are seniors. There is concern as to how volunteer turnover will impact their operations in the future.

Of the 19 food banks in the Columbia Basin, 10 food banks report employing staff, most commonly 1 or 2 part time staff, in addition to volunteers. Some of these paid employees have several roles, supporting one or more programs outside of their role with the food bank. Whereas other paid employees dedicate 100% to their time to food bank operations. Their responsibilities range from writing grants, to coordinating volunteers and food bank operations, and developing food security initiatives. Staff wages account for an additional operating expense incurred for 10 of the 19 food banks in the region.

## FUNDING

Food banks across the Columbia Basin rely on their communities for both financial support and food donations. Many service groups, businesses and organizations within the region take on fundraising initiatives in support of their local food bank. Without this dedicated support, food banks would not be in existence. Food Banks Canada and their provincial members including Food Banks BC work with corporate donors to provide additional funding resources and programs for food banks.

The demand for food bank services increased across the country since the onset of the recession. In British Columbia there was a 23.1% increase in food bank usage since 2008 (*HungerCount 2012*). The recession put an increased demand on food bank services and yet the recession also challenges peoples' ability to give. More critically, the local economy has a direct reflection on the need for food bank services and the resources available.

Continued financial uncertainty is one of the greatest challenges facing many food banks. As a result food banks manage with as little operational costs as possible. To minimize expenses food banks operate in spaces that are donated or at a minimal cost, often creating challenges for storage and accessibility. The increased demand for food bank services strains financial resources for food purchase and ultimately the quality of food being distributed is compromised. For food banks in the Columbia Basin operational expenses often compete for funds available to purchase food for food hampers.

- The Golden Food Bank is the sole food bank in the Columbia Basin that reports paying market price for rent and utilities in addition to staff wages and other operational expenses without the support of a partner agency.
- The North Kootenay Lake Food cupboard in Kaslo reduced the hours they were open due to funding constraints. They are unsure if funding will be available for the Food Cupboard Coordinator in the future.
- The Nelson Salvation Army experienced severe food shortages in 2012. Their food budget was depleted months before their fiscal year was through.

Some food banks in the Columbia Basin generate revenue through various initiatives to support some of their costs. Although this revenue does not fund 100% of their operations, it provides a consistent source of funding.

- The Kimberley Helping Hands Food Bank operates a monthly bingo that generates revenue for their food bank operations.
- The Kaslo Food Hub operates a Farm Direct Bulk Buying Club. This is a social enterprise; a portion of their gross profit goes to the Kaslo Food Cupboard to cover some of their expenses.
- Kootenay Savings Credit Union launched a unique initiative that supports the Salmo Community Resource Society. 'Changelt' enables Credit Union members to donate to as many of their favourite charities every time they make a purchase using their MemberCard. 'Changelt' rounds up the purchase to the nearest dollar, creating 'Virtual Change', and forwards this 'Virtual Change' to the member's preferred charity.
- Thrift shops operating out of the Salvation Army locations in Fernie, Nelson and Trail generate revenue that offset food bank costs.
- The Creston Valley Gleaners is a non-profit society that operates a large-scale thrift shop selling reclaimed clothes, linens, toys, furniture and appliances. The majority of the profit from their sales

goes directly to the Creston Valley Food Bank. In addition to the food bank they are able to support other charitable groups in Creston.

- Food Banks Canada and their provincial members including Food Banks BC develop corporate partnerships to develop unique fundraising opportunities for food banks including CBC's food bank fundraiser in December and the Kraft Food for Families online campaign.

## Grants

In search of funding for food, programs, operations and increased capacity, some food banks have sought funding through granting agencies. Of the 19 food banks in the Columbia Basin, 11 report having applied for funding from granting agencies. This may be through municipal or regional Grant in Aid programs, through funding programs offered by Columbia Basin Trust or through larger charitable organizations including Food Banks Canada.

Grants provide a means to diversify resources for funding, but often pose additional challenges for food banks. Completing grant applications in addition to monitoring and reporting on the funding is time consuming and requires capacity beyond what volunteers may be able to provide. In addition, grants come with their own restrictions as to how the funds are spent and often do not support funding of operations or ongoing programs.

## Operational Structure

As food banks have evolved over time, communities have responded in unique ways to support those in need in the community. In some communities, social service agencies have come together to work collaboratively sharing resources, space and program delivery. This requires time, resources, a shared vision and the commitment of many to succeed. This model has been successful in many communities in the Columbia Basin and is often reported as an improved means of delivering social services and programs that reduce barriers for those in need. A diverse range of services is offered and may range from a Work BC office, safe homes, family counselling, assisted living, childcare resources, mental health and victim services. The following social service hubs provide a food bank as one of their many services:

- The Fernie Salvation Army
- Kaslo's North Kootenay Lake Services Society
- Nakusp's Arrow & Slocan Lakes Community Services
- The Nelson Salvation Army
- Revelstoke Community Connections Society
- Salmo Community Resources Society
- Slocan's WE Graham Community Service Society
- The Trail Salvation Army

## DISCUSSION

The need for food bank services within the Columbia Basin is demonstrated by the 4175 individuals assisted by food banks in March of 2012. These individuals are our neighbours; they are the seniors in our community, the children at play, and the family next door. Food banks provide food for those in need every month of every year. Many individuals assisted by food banks will not see a significant increase in their household income in the foreseeable future. Food bank usage will vary but currently is at an all time high. Food banks are continually faced with challenges particularly the uncertainty of knowing they will have enough food and money to continue their services into the next year.

Food banks question whether they are servicing all those in need in their communities including the outlying areas that are common in the Columbia Basin. Food banks are uncertain they will have enough food to fill their shelves from week to week especially when usage increases unpredictably. Quantity versus quality is often drawn into question, particularly from food sharing with larger distribution centres. Providing food of increased nutritional value poses additional challenges for food banks already stretched for storage space and accessibility. Cold storage and freezers require electricity, space and maintenance.

Rent, utilities, transport costs for food and other operational expenses including staff wages compete directly for funds available to purchase food. Human resources to maintain operations including volunteers and funding for staff create additional challenges. Ultimately, the lack of sustainable funding poses the greatest challenge for many food banks.

Food banks have responded in unique and diverse ways to these challenges. Managing or engaging with community gardens and gleaning within local communities provide some variety of fresh produce throughout the growing season.



Food banks are a community-based initiative. The general population recognizes the essential need of this service and responds generously with food and financial donations. These donations often do not provide the needed sustainability. In each community dedicated volunteers provide many or all of the operational activities. The reliance of food banks on volunteers to do most of the work is staggering. Though most food banks have a core of earnest volunteers there is a continual need for new helpers.

In addition, food banks have responded to the needs of those assisted by their services by providing advocacy and support through community programs. These programs range from providing education in nutrition and food preparation, skills training and job searches, community awareness about hunger and poverty, affordable housing, emergency shelters, child care resources, and referrals to other social agencies and support services. These programs build capacity for those in need, but also develop partnerships and collaboration at the community level. Strengthening community partnerships, building collaboration and developing best practices are key factors in ensuring food banks services continue to support those in need.

The majority of those assisted by food banks have no one to advocate for them. Their ongoing needs are not recognized and supported with any certainty of funding. Despite continued outreach, it is impossible to know how many people in need do not receive food. These people are vulnerable to policy change that impacts the availability of affordable housing, pension income, social assistance programs and job availability. A negative change in any area can affect their ability to purchase food.

Though recognized as essential at the community level, Basin wide, food banks are not recognized at the political level as being an essential service and as such do not get ongoing support and financial assistance. Local and Basin wide recognition and support are needed to provide a secure financial future for food banks. Though demand for services may vary food banks will remain a community necessity, particularly if our communities are unable to support a Living Wage.

## CONCLUSIONS

Food banks in the Columbia Basin are as unique as the communities they serve. Each has been innovative in finding ways to meet the food challenges in their area. Best outcomes appear to coincide with conjunct community programming. Despite each community's differing approach to operating a food bank, there are challenges common to all:

- Lack of sustainable funding
- Uncertainty of food and monetary donations
- Providing food of quality nutritional value
- Inadequate storage space including cold storage
- Operational costs
- Manpower for running the organization, staff and volunteers

*4175 individuals were provided food from by food banks in the Columbia Basin in March 2012.*

To put this in context food banks across the Columbia Basin provided food to a population equivalent to ~80% of the total population of the Slokan Valley. This happens every month in the Columbia Basin.

## Recommendations

- Share and present findings, particularly to local political leadership.
- Reexamine funding priorities by organizations such as Columbia Basin Trust. Food banks need financial sustainability to deliver one of humanities basic needs to the often voiceless members of our Basin communities.
- Hold a seminar for food banks throughout the Basin to share these findings and understand best practices. This seminar would incorporate resources available through Food Banks Canada and Food Banks BC.
- Examine opportunities for a social media presence for food banks in the Basin to share resources and best practices with potential for linkage with existing Food Banks BC capacity.