

OVERVIEW PATHWAY

# WHAT IS "FOOD SOVEREIGNTY"?



**Four Stories About  
Food Sovereignty**

# INTRODUCTION

In 1996, members of La Via Campesina coined the term “food sovereignty” as

*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.*

Four Stories About Food Sovereignty is an international, collaborative research effort addressing pressing questions surrounding food sovereignty. A particular concern of the project is the lack of food security and lack of control over food supply and food systems for many communities around the world. How are vulnerable communities to feed themselves, especially in the era of climate change? How can education help us understand and intervene in these challenges?

Those who work toward or research food sovereignty often describe it as a more powerful concept than “food security” (although sometimes people use “food sovereignty” and “food security” interchangeably). Food security can simply mean people having enough to eat – enough calories to sustain life – without considering the nature of the food and how it was produced. In an extreme example, a prisoner in a detention camp who is fed gruel three times a day could be said to have “food security.”

Food sovereignty (Adapted from the language of the Nyéléni Declaration, 2007):

- foregrounds the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute, and consume food;
- empowers peasant and family farmer agriculture, artisanal fishing and gathering, pastoralist-led grazing;
- prioritizes ecological, social, and economic sustainability;
- defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation;
- prioritizes local, regional, national markets;
- promotes transparent trade with fair incomes for producers;
- ensures the rights to use and manage lands, waters, seeds, livestock, and biodiversity are in the hands of producers;
- implies social relations free of oppression and inequality.

When learning about food sovereignty, it is important to consider the various factors that impact a household's or community's access to food. Some factors that impact food sovereignty for many people on a daily basis include:

- economic systems (e.g., globalized trade favouring large corporations)
- political influence (both global and local policies)
- gender
- access to water
- climate
- intergenerational teaching, knowledge transmission and enskilment
- identity
- culture
- unemployment
- farming techniques

Which ones impact your community? Your family? Can you think of others to add to this list?

Part of the La Via Campesina statement refers to “culturally appropriate food”. What does this mean? In explaining “culturally appropriate food”, participants in Four Stories have explained that “every land has its own seed” (Fatima O. from Jordan). How do you understand this statement?

### **Meet Dr. Elizabeth Vibert, Project Lead**



Throughout this resource you will meet and hear from small-scale food producers, food activists and researchers around the world who are working as a team on the Four Stories About Food Sovereignty project. Dr. Elizabeth Vibert is the lead researcher. Elizabeth is a history professor at the University of Victoria who originally hails from Nova Scotia. Her main research interests include food insecurity and food sovereignty, particularly in colonized spaces and in the era of climate crisis. To read more about Elizabeth and the rest of the team, visit the [Our Team](#) page on our website.

## **Student Activities**

Here are some great ways to get students to start thinking about food sovereignty. For other educational resources and case examples, visit our website.

In class, or as a homework assignment, **challenge students to research local foods** (native to the area). Perhaps they could try to grow one or two in their backyard or in pots. Discuss the process: what do they need to start in terms of supplies and knowledge? How will they choose a space? What can they expect to happen? Have students record the events over time by taking pictures, creating mini-videos, posting a blog, etc.

**Consider engaging a local Indigenous food specialist** to teach the students about the connections between indigenous foods and the land, and the importance of taking care of and honouring the land and resources around them.

**Try a larger garden:** if the school doesn't already have a garden, as a class think about starting a community garden on the school grounds, filled with the students' favourite local and locally adapted foods (seasonal). Such a project requires long-term planning and thinking about what happens over the summer (when most produce matures). This is a big project, but even just planning the logistics of a garden is a productive exercise. Even in planning a garden, students will learn about how local foods are grown and the importance of understanding the local soil and climate, and will help alert students to the food sovereignty issues in their own community - in particular, access to healthy, local food. There are many resources available to schools in the CRD to support starting and maintaining school gardens. <https://lifecyclesproject.ca/our-projects/growing-schools/>

Split students up into groups and have them **come up with responses to the following questions**; share the responses in small groups or anonymously with the larger class. Consider asking these questions at the beginning and end of the unit and track the changes in responses.

Do you have a garden at home?

What do you grow in your garden?

What, in your opinion, is missing?

What is your favourite thing to grow and why?

What is your favourite thing to eat from the garden? How do you prepare it? Do you eat it raw or cooked? How do you gather it?

**Questions continued next page...**

Think back to when you were younger: What was your favourite food and why? Is that a food that comes from the land you lived on?

Do you see any challenges of food security and food sovereignty in your own community? Can you think of any solutions? What would you or your community need to make these solutions work?

Think about your home and the rhythm of daily life. Who is responsible for growing/buying/cooking/distributing food? How does gender play a role in the food production of your community and your household? Can you think of other communities where gender might play a role in food production or other processes related to food? What problems do you see with these gender divisions?

Thinking about the challenges with achieving food sovereignty, can you think of any solutions? Do you think the problems surrounding food security and food sovereignty are best addressed on a global scale or a local scale? Why? What is standing in the way of communities and regions experiencing food sovereignty?

**For other educational resources, visit our website.**