



Association étudiante de l'Université McGill

Située sur les territoires traditionnels des collectivités Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.

Students' Society of McGill University

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MOTION REGARDING FOOD SECURITY POLICY

2023-04-06

Submitted for: 2023-04-06

Submitted to:	SSMU Legislative Council	Document no.:	LEG-PUB-MOT-2023-04-06-002
Moved by:	Val Masny <i>Vice-President (External Affairs)</i>	Current Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> FOR APPROVAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> APPROVED <input type="checkbox"/> POSTPONED <input type="checkbox"/> COMMITTED <input type="checkbox"/> NOT APPROVED
Seconded by:	Angelica Voutsinas <i>Arts Faculty Representative</i>		

Issue

The prevalence of food insecurity among McGill students is increasing due to widespread food inflation and the lack of affordable options on campus. This problem is compounded by the high prices set by McGill dining services, making it difficult for students to access the food they need. The current External Affairs platform does not explicitly address students' access to affordable and nutritious food. This motion aims to include food security into executive mandates and emphasise the critical role it plays in students' physical, social, and academic wellbeing.

Background and Rationale

Food insecurity is a crisis among students in Canada. A 2021 survey of Canadian universities found that approximately 3 in 5 students were food insecure.¹ This issue affects McGill students as well, as they have reported minimising, delaying, or skipping meals due to the high cost of food on campus.

The exorbitant cost of food is having a detrimental effect on the mental and physical wellbeing of students. Many students have to closely manage their budgets, resulting in rationing meals, which can exacerbate or trigger disordered eating habits. Students have reported that the high cafeteria

¹ Meal Exchange, (2021), [National Student Food Security Report](#).



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prices have contributed to their eating disorders.² Moreover, the high cost of food has created an unwelcoming atmosphere in campus dining halls for food-insecure students, highlighting income inequality and their precarious financial situation.

To address food insecurity on campus, residences councils and other student groups have been consistently advocating for and building affordable and accessible food options on campus. Starting in 2002, the Midnight Kitchen Collective, a vegan soup kitchen on campus, formed in response to the privatisation of campus food services. Other relevant programs include, Students Nutrition Accessibility Club (SNAC), the Milton Parc Food Bank, and student residence councils. In 2022, SSMU launched its own pilot grocery program. However, many of these initiatives rely on student volunteerism and would benefit from increased funding and other structural support from SSMU and McGill at-large.

As food inflation is expected to rise, addressing the issue of food insecurity on campus requires structural action. This motion aims to formally recognize the significance of food insecurity faced by students and mandate SSMU's action towards creating a food-secure campus.

Alignment with Mission

The present motion and the associated Food Security Policy align with the SSMU's mission to provide services to its Members and to be a leader in social justice matters as outlined in its Constitution, Equity Policy, and Sustainability Policy.

Consultations Completed

Governance Manager, Michal Chernov
VP Finance, Marco Pizarro
External Affairs, Zeke Bertrand
Community Affairs Commissioner, Isabel Fuentes
Midnight Kitchen
Co-op Bar Milton-Parc
Let's Eat McGill

- Public Student Assembly on Food Security (March 7th, 2023)
- Public petition (<https://chng.it/2hH2nqDT>)

² Sarah Farnand, (2022), "[Leaving the starving student](#)", The McGill Tribune.



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Risk Factors and Resource Implications

This motion poses no risk factors, but has resource implications. This motion will require the continued support of the Vice Presidents External, Finance, and University Affairs in advocating for student food security.

If this motion is adopted, implementing SSMU's mandate to protect students' food security may create a conflict with the university administration. This is because high cafeteria prices and longstanding inflated mandatory meal plans for residence students, as set by McGill, contribute to the food insecurity crisis on campus.

Sustainability Considerations

If campus food services are to be long-lasting, they must be accessible and environmentally sustainable. This mandate recognises opportunities for sustainability throughout the entire food system, including production, packaging, transportation, and waste management. In alignment with the existing Sustainability policy, this motion mandates that we prioritise sustainable practices to achieve the goal of food security. This includes sourcing food locally, using recyclable or compostable packing, and implementing a circular waste management system that minimises waste and prioritises reuse.

Impact of Decision and Next Steps

Should this motion pass, the Food Security Policy will be adopted by the Legislative Council.

The Vice-Presidents (Student Life), (University Affairs), and (External Affairs) will be notified of their mandate under this Policy. They will be expected to report on the status of food security on campus as detailed in the Policy.

The Food Security Coalition will be recognized as an Affiliated Political Campaign. The Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) will assist their work through resources and logistical support.

Motion or Resolution for Approval

Be it resolved that the Legislative Council approve the Policy in Appendix A.



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Results of the Vote

In favour	(UNANIMOUS)
Opposed	()
Abstain	()

APPROVED



Appendix A : Policy on Food Security

1. Land Acknowledgement
2. Scope of Application
3. Relevant Terminology
4. Background
5. Policy Framework
6. Operations
7. Office-Specific Mandates
8. Accountability

1. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The SSMU acknowledges that McGill University is situated on the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee nations. The SSMU recognizes and respects these nations as the true and constant custodians of the lands and waters on which we meet today. Furthermore, the SSMU commits to and respects the traditional laws and customs of these territories. This policy recognizes McGill University contributing to the historical and ongoing role of colonialism. Recognizing how the colonial project aims to exploit the land and resources upon the territory from a plurality of Indigenous communities, Indigenous food systems and exercise of attaining of foods has been obstructed by colonial activities. Across Turtle Island, the impacts of food insecurity is disproportionately felt by Indigenous communities from issues regarding access to community involvement in food production, particularly by northern communities. This policy not only recognizes the history of food injustice faced by various Indigenous communities, but also the value of traditional knowledge regarding sustainable food systems and reciprocity between land, plants, animals, and people.

2. SCOPE OF APPLICATION

The present Policy applies to all individuals and bodies of the SSMU concerned by the issue of food security, which might include, but is not limited to, Officers, Directors, Senators, Councillors, Committees, Committee Members, Clubs, Services, and Staff. The emphasis is put



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on decision-making processes, political campaigns, and food security-related services offered by the SSMU. This Policy is meant to highlight the need for affordable and accessible food services on campus and serve as a guide for its services and advocacy on the matter.

3. RELEVANT TERMINOLOGY

3.1 Food Security³

Physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet one's dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle. There are four dimensions to food security: physical availability, economic and physical access, nutritional value, and stability of access.

3.2 Food Desert

Region with limited access to affordable and nutritious food. Deserts may emerge as a product of high prices, geographic location, or insufficient transportation networks.

3.3 Food Sovereignty

The right to access healthy and sustainable food and self-determination over food systems.⁴

4. BACKGROUND

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 by the UN General Assembly, the right to food is recognized as a fundamental human right. Three criteria define the right to food: availability, accessibility, and adequacy. This is similar to the concept of food security as defined earlier in this document.⁵

The 2019 Food Policy adopted by the Canadian government identified household food insecurity as a priority, since it represents a serious population health problem. Food insecurity has several pernicious consequences, including poorer mental health, higher rates of diseases and injuries, increased health-care utilisation, and premature mortality.⁶

³ World Bank. "[What is Food Security?](#)"

⁴ Food Secure Canada. "[What is Food Sovereignty](#)"

⁵ Food Secure Canada. "[The Right to Food in Canada](#)"

⁶ Tarasuk V, Fafard St-Germain A, Li T. Moment of reckoning for household food insecurity monitoring in Canada. *Health Promot Chronic Dis Prev Can.* 2022;42(10):445-9. <https://doi.org/10.24095/hpcdp.42.10.04>.



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Furthermore, there exists a link between food insecurity and lower test scores and trouble interacting with peers.⁷

4.1 Causes of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is the product of economic, social, and environmental factors. At McGill University, factors contributing to food insecurity include, but are not limited to, the significant rise of cafeteria prices due to inflation in recent years, the privatisation of food services on campus, and the general inflation of grocery prices and the cost of living in Montreal.

The general trend in food price inflation is due to several factors, namely supply chain disruptions, labour shortages, shifting consumer preference, unusual weather events, and higher tariffs, each which have been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Between October 2021 and October 2022, food prices in Canada grew by 11.0%.⁸ This inflation of food prices is not followed by a consistent increase in salaries, which negatively impacts the purchasing power of individuals, especially students, many of whom are unemployed or only employed part-time.

The privatisation of food services by the university is one of the principal causes of increased food prices on campus. Alternative food services like non-profit student cafes and food co-operatives enable access to affordable food through fee levies or membership contributions. Unfortunately, management of the last student-run cafe on the downtown campus, the Architecture Cafe, was seized by McGill University in 2007 and shut down three years later, despite strong student support for the cafe. McGill University cited a lack of profit as the principal reason for doing so. This illustrates the University's prioritisation of profit over student food security. In total, between 2000 and 2007,⁹ McGill University took over eight student-run cafeterias on campus to replace them with private food services. More than a decade later, those decisions are reflected in the unaffordable, privately-managed food services on campus.

⁷ Anisef, P., Robson, K., Maier, R., Brown, R. S. (2017) [Food Insecurity and Educational Outcomes: A Focus on TDSB Students](#). Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

⁸ Allyson Fradella, (2022), [Behind the Numbers: What's Causing Growth in Food Prices](#)

⁹ Matt Chesser, (2010), "[Architecture Cafe shut down by McGill](#)", The McGill Tribune.



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Another factor which explains the high food prices on campus is the University's refusal to subsidise campus food. McGill's Housing and Hospitality Services (SHHS) runs on a for-profit model and does not receive the fiscal support from the University it would need to keep food prices low. Section 4.3 will detail how other universities subsidise their dining services.

According to Canada's 2023 Food Prices Report,¹⁰ the macroeconomic drivers of this crisis are the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and wealth inequality. Considering that the national and local crises of food insecurity are only escalating, this motion urgently seeks to formalise SSMU's support of campus food security.

4.2 McGill University

At McGill University, on-campus food services have been becoming increasingly unaffordable for students with many food prices reaching an all time high this semester, Winter 2023. The cost of the mandatory meal plan for residence students has increased by 35.5% over the past five years alone.¹¹ Today, residence students have to pay a minimum of \$6,200 for the meal plan, which includes the mandatory meal plan, oneCard dollars, and an unspecified administrative fee.¹² This comes out to \$775/month for the eight months of the typical school year, which is over 103% higher than what the average Canadian spends on groceries (\$300-400 a month).^{13 14} However, although Student Housing and Hospitality Services alleges that this plan should last students the full academic year, many students report that this amount is insufficient to afford three daily meals given the prices at the dining halls and students are forced to replenish their oneCard and Meal Plan accounts with more funds. Even for non-residence students not bound under the meal plan, accessing campus food services is ideal for quick, convenient meals between classes and other activities. This inflated reality is illustrated by the following examples of individual cafeteria items, sourced in February 2023, not including tax:

- **Hot meal (one main and two sides): \$12.95** (available at all dining halls)
- **Mandy Salad Bowls: \$11.79 – \$17.69** (available at all dining halls)

¹⁰ [Canada's Food Price Report 2023](#)

¹¹ Adeline Fisher, (2022), [Rising prices are making on-campus eateries too expensive for students](#), The McGill Tribune.

¹² McGill Food and Dining Services, Mandatory Residential Plan, [Fees and Payment 2022-2023](#).

¹³ Courtney Squire, (2022), "[The mandatory meal plan should be taken off the table](#)", The McGill Tribune.

¹⁴ [Canada's Food Price Report 2023](#)



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- **1 Simply Protein Granola Bar (40g): \$5.82** (available at all dining halls)
- **1 slice of pizza: \$10.99** (Bishop Mountain and Royal Victoria College Dining Hall)
- **1 Kiju juice box (200mL): \$3.06** (available at all dining halls)

The Macdonald campus is a particularly vivid site of food insecurity. The campus has recently become a food desert, since the local grocery store closed down and students can only access a supermarket via weekly shuttle.

While student-run food mutual aid programs exist, their capacity is limited by funding and student volunteerism. The Midnight Kitchen vegan soup kitchen, for example, is only able to serve fifty lunches once a week or every other week. And yet, over a hundred students frequently line up for Midnight Kitchen lunch distributes, demonstrating the present need and interest for affordable alternatives on campus. Other subsidised or free grocery programs like the Student Nutrition Accessibility Club (SNAC) and the SSMU Grocery Program also report a great student demand that exceeds their supply.

Notably, a new group of students, supported by the VP (External Affairs), has begun meeting around the issue of campus food security in the Winter 2023 semester. This group includes representatives from the Midnight Kitchen Collective, Student Nutrition Accessibility Club (SNAC), Environmental Residence Council and other Residence Councils, Challah for Hunger, Meal Care, ECOLE House, Milton Parc Foodbank, McGill Undergraduate Geography Society (MUGS), MacDonald (MSEG), MacDonald Campus Student Society (MCSS), and the SSMU. These students have launched a petition with nearly 2,000 signatures to date (<https://chnng.it/2hH2nqDT>) and organised a student assembly on the issue on March 7th, 2023.

4.3 Other Universities

Other universities can serve as a model for action taken by the SSMU and the University administration. For example, last year, the University of British Columbia committed \$850,000 CAD¹⁵ to long-term food security initiatives, including a meal share program, food bank, and the Sprouts student cafe. At Concordia University, student-run cafes and coops such as Le Frigo Vert, The Hive Cafe, and the People's Potato also benefit from the university's support. These organisations and other student representatives are even invited to work in

¹⁵ Alma Mater Society of UBC, [Long Term Food Security Plan](#).



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collaboration with Concordia's dining services to create a Sustainable Food Systems Plan¹⁶ every five years that establishes specific targets for access to healthy, affordable, and sustainable food options on campus.

5. POLICY FRAMEWORK

5.1 Principles for Advocacy

The SSMU shall adopt a framework of community-lead services and activism when tackling the issue of food security, in accordance with the principles of Service and Leadership outlined in its Constitution and the positions outlined in its Equity and Sustainability Policies.

5.1.1 Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty is central to this Policy. The main goal of the SSMU's activities surrounding the issue of food security shall be to increase the agency of its Members concerning their food choices. This can be done through education, the improvement of the SSMU's complimentary food services, and advocacy among both McGill University and governmental institutions.

5.1.2 Equity

The SSMU recognizes that its Members have different needs, and that its activities should be adapted to varying levels of food insecurity. These needs can be shaped by intersecting systems of oppression, including but not limited to racism, fatphobia, ableism, and classism, and the SSMU acknowledges that its response shall be cognizant of these differences in needs and aim to work against those oppressive systems. The SSMU shall follow the initiative of its Members affected by those systems of oppression in organising around the issue of food security. The SSMU also recognizes that a diversity of tactics can better answer the needs of all its Members and it shall aim to encourage various approaches.

5.1.3 Accessibility

The SSMU identifies the importance of accessibility within the issue of food security. One of the main aspects of food insecurity is whether nutritious and varied food is available and

¹⁶ Concordia University, [Sustainable Food Systems Plan](#), Sustainability Action Plan 2020-2025.



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accessible to people. In its advocacy and services surrounding food, the SSMU shall ensure that its activities and resources are financially and physically accessible. The SSMU shall also consider dietary restrictions, whether for health, religious, ethical, or other reasons, in both its services and advocacy.

5.1.4 Sustainability

The SSMU appreciates the importance of sustainability, whether social, ecological or economic, in food systems. Resilient food systems consider the environment in which the food is cultivated and transported, the needs of the communities which it serves, and the durability of the system on a long-term basis. The SSMU will respect sustainability principles by encouraging local foods, culturally-relevant foods, reduced animal products in diets, and sustainable farming practices.

5.1.5 Climate Justice

The SSMU recognizes the interdependence between climate justice and food security, where the communities most impacted by climate change, who might experience food insecurity as a result, should lead the movements for change. Following principles of climate justice, the SSMU shall follow the lead of communities which aim to strengthen their food systems, whether they comprise some of its Members or operate outside of its purview. Climate justice also follows principles of sustainability, which, as highlighted in the previous subsection, is also meaningful in food security advocacy.

5.2 National Student Food Charter

The National Student Food Charter¹⁷ articulates guidelines relevant to the following seven key points:

1. The role of post-secondary education in society,
2. Healthy individuals and communities,
3. Social justice,
4. The Earth and environmental sustainability,
5. Vibrant local economies,
6. Democratic governance and transparency, and

¹⁷ Campus Food Systems Project, Meal Exchange, Sierra Youth Coalition, [National Food Student Charter](#).



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7. The celebration of food as a universal human experience.

The SSMU's work around food security shall follow the action principles highlighted in the National Student Food Charter in order to respect its seven key points, which are connected to the SSMU's guiding values.

6. OPERATIONS

6.1. Food Security shall become a Political Campaign under the Vice President (External Affairs). The campaign will have the following objectives:

- Organise student advocacy around food security at McGill University;
- Connect existing food-related groups on and off campus; and
- Advocate for affordable, sustainable food options on campus.

6.2 The SSMU shall provide financial support and physical spaces to its Services and Clubs organising around food security, which currently include, but are not limited to, Midnight Kitchen Collective, the Grocery Program, Students Nutrition Accessibility Club (SNAC), Meal Care, and Nazun (formerly Challah for Hunger).

6.3 The SSMU shall educate its members about the issue of food security and make existing food-security related Services, Clubs, and external organisations known to its Members.

6.3.1. The Office of the Vice-President (Student Life) shall organise a yearly food security-themed tabling event.

6.3.2 The Office of the Vice-President (Student Life) shall create and compile resources of existing affordable food options such as food banks, free meal services, and other options near campus.

6.3 The Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) shall organise yearly assemblies open to all its Members to discuss food security on campus.

7. OFFICE-SPECIFIC MANDATES

7.1 The Office of the Vice-President (External Affairs) shall support the Food Security Coalition and creation of educational resources regarding food security.



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7.2 The Vice-President (University Affairs) shall advocate and collaborate among McGill University for lower cafeteria prices and the implementation of alternatives to privatised food vendors.

7.3 The Office of the Vice-President (Student Life) shall support the food security-related Services and Clubs.

8. ACCOUNTABILITY

8.1 The Vice-President (Student Life), (External Affairs) and (University Affairs) shall co-generate an annual report, submitted to the Legislative Council at the end of the school year, on food security which addresses the following topics:

8.1.1 The Vice-President (Student Life) shall report on the status of food insecurity among the SSMU's Members, which can be done through surveys or other public consultations;

8.1.2 The Vice-President (Student Life) shall report on the status of the SSMU's food-related services. The report should give an overview of the current services offered by the SSMU around food security, their successes over the year and their needs going forward;

8.1.3 The Vice-President (External Affairs) shall report on the status of the Food Security Coalition Political Campaign, its successes over the year and its needs going forward;

8.1.4 The Vice-President (University Affairs) shall report on the status of McGill University's food services. The report should summarise the ongoing efforts with McGill University to reduce cafeteria prices and develop sustainable alternatives to private-run cafeterias.