

# Food Security Policy

Updated as of 2025-04-03



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# Food Security Policy

Adopted by Legislative Council: 2023-03-09

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Expires: 2030-05-01

[Link to Motion](#) [\[Amendment\]](#)

## 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 these territories' traditional laws and customs. This policy recognizes McGill University's contribution to colonialism's historical and ongoing role on Tiohtià:ke/Montréal and Turtle Island. 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 are disproportionately felt by Indigenous communities, including 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 asserts the value of traditional knowledge regarding sustainable food systems and reciprocity between land, plants, animals, and people.

## 2. Scope

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 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. Definitions

3.1. **Food Security**<sup>1</sup> shall refer to the 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** shall refer to a 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** shall refer to the right to access healthy and sustainable food and self-determination over food systems<sup>2</sup>.

## 4. Background

### 4.1. Causes of Food Insecurity

The right to food is recognized as a fundamental human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and is defined by availability, accessibility, and adequacy—criteria that align with the concept of food security. The Canadian government's 2019 Food Policy identified household food insecurity as a serious public health issue linked to poorer mental health, increased disease rates, and lower academic performance.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank. "[What is Food Security?](#)"

<sup>2</sup> Food Secure Canada. "[What is Food Sovereignty?](#)"

<sup>3</sup> 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.



At McGill University, food insecurity is driven by economic, social, and environmental factors, including the privatization of food services, rising cafeteria and grocery prices, and the overall cost of living in Montreal. The University's shift away from student-run food services has contributed to the unaffordability of on-campus dining, prioritizing profit over student food security. Between 2000 and 2007, McGill replaced eight student-run cafeterias with private food providers and in 2010, shut down the Architecture Cafe despite strong student support.<sup>4</sup> Unlike other institutions, McGill does not subsidize its campus food services, further exacerbating affordability issues.

Broader macroeconomic trends—inflation, supply chain disruptions, climate change, and wealth inequality—have worsened food insecurity, with food prices in Canada rising 11% between 2021 and 2022.<sup>5</sup> Given that this crisis is escalating, this policy seeks to formalize SSMU's commitment to advocating for food security and supporting community-led, non-profit food initiatives on campus.

## 4.2. McGill University

At McGill University, on-campus food services have been becoming increasingly unaffordable for students, with costs increasing since the initial publication of this policy in Winter 2023. The cost of the mandatory meal plan for residence students has increased by 35.5% over the past five years alone.<sup>6</sup> Today, residence students have to pay a minimum of \$6,300 for the meal plan, which includes the mandatory meal plan and oneCard dollars.<sup>7</sup> This comes out to \$787.5/month for the eight (8) months of the typical school year, which is over 103% higher than what the average Canadian spends on groceries (\$300-400 a month).<sup>8</sup> <sup>9</sup> 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.

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, receives high demand, serving approximately two hundred students every lunch serving. They also provide a solidarity serving

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<sup>4</sup> Matt Chesser, (2010), "[Architecture Cafe shut down by McGill](#)", The McGill Tribune.

<sup>5</sup> Allyson Fradella, (2022), [Behind the Numbers: What's Causing Growth in Food Prices](#)

<sup>6</sup> Adeline Fisher, (2022), [Rising prices are making on-campus eateries too expensive for students](#), The McGill Tribune.

<sup>7</sup> McGill Food and Dining Services, Mandatory Residential Plan, [Fees and Payment 2022-2023](#).

<sup>8</sup> Courtney Squire, (2022), "[The mandatory meal plan should be taken off the table](#)", The McGill Tribune.

<sup>9</sup> [Canada's Food Price Report 2025](#)

(catering) program to support initiatives lacking the budget to provide food at their events. However, due to capacity, they are only able to serve meals once or twice a week, demonstrating the present need for expanding affordable alternatives on campus. Other subsidized or free grocery programs like the Student Nutrition Accessibility Club (SNAC) also report a great student demand that exceeds their supply. Finally, the SSMU Grocery Program, which reported great demand, also struggled with inefficient administration and was thus unable to serve the maximum number of students. As a result, VP (External Affairs) launched a pilot project initiative in Winter 2025 to shift the scope of the SSMU Grocery Program funding to encompass the [creation of the SSMU Food Pantry](#), which would provide a more sustainable and long-term solution to food insecurity on campus through cross-campus collaboration with student and community groups.

In the Winter 2023 semester, a group of students, supported by the VP (External Affairs), began meeting around the issue of campus food security. This group included 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 Student-run Ecological Gardens (now Élèves des Champs), Macdonald Campus Student Society (MCSS), and the SSMU. These students launched a [petition](#) with nearly 2,000 signatures to date and organized a student assembly on the issue on March 7th, 2023. This group, known as Let's Eat, McGill, became an official SSMU campaign upon the passage of the first iteration of this policy, on 2023-03-09.

However, this campaign has not remained active following the Winter 2023 semester. As a result, there still exists a need for comprehensive advocacy for increased food security on campus and connected efforts between on-campus food groups. This need, as well as the connections created through the Let's Eat, McGill campaign, resulted in the emergence of the McGill Food Coalition, which purports to “act as a central point of engagement and collaboration between the diverse array of student-led food projects and the wider campus community in working towards a democratic campus food system that is accessible, sustainable, and diversified.”<sup>10</sup>

### 4.3. Other Universities

Other universities can serve as a model for action taken by the SSMU and the University administration. For example, in 2022, the University of British Columbia committed \$850,000 CAD<sup>11</sup> to long-term food security initiatives, including a meal share program, food bank, and the Sprouts student cafe.

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<sup>10</sup> McGill Food Coalition [mission](#).

<sup>11</sup> Alma Mater Society of UBC, [Long Term Food Security Plan](#).

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 organizations and other student representatives are even invited to work in collaboration with Concordia's dining services to create a Sustainable Food Systems Plan<sup>12</sup> every five years that establishes specific targets for access to healthy, affordable, and sustainable food options on campus.

## 5. Mandates

5.1. The SSMU shall prioritize grassroots, student-led, and community-based initiatives and sustainable farming practices over larger restaurant chains in all food security advocacy efforts and event planning, ensuring that services and activism align with principles of Service and Leadership as outlined in its Constitution.

5.2. The SSMU shall adapt its food security initiatives wherever possible to meet the diverse accessibility needs of Members, considering the impact of intersecting systems of oppression (e.g., racism, fatphobia, ableism, classism).

5.3. The SSMU shall promote access to culturally relevant food options and, where possible, prioritize the accessibility needs of Members with specific dietary requirements (e.g., vegan, kosher, halal, allergen-free).

5.4. The SSMU will prioritize Indigenous-led food providers wherever possible, specifically at events relating to Indigenous education and solidarity<sup>13</sup>

5.5. The SSMU shall ensure that food options are available at public events sponsored by the SSMU wherever possible, especially during mealtimes.

5.6. Although the 2023 Campaign to increase affordable food access to students, known as "Let's Eat McGill" is no longer active at the time of this Policy's writing, the SSMU External Affairs Portfolio will endeavour to uphold the values of the 2023 campaign Let's Eat, McGill and will work with future food justice campaigns, wherever possible, in alignment with SSMU policy and the values of the campaign.

These campaign objectives include:

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<sup>12</sup> Concordia University, [Sustainable Food Systems Plan](#), Sustainability Action Plan 2020-2025.

<sup>13</sup> [See the 2021 SSMU Indigenous Solidarity Policy, particularly Section 4: Implementations](#)

- Organize 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 and student autonomy over food systems.

5.7. To this extent, the Vice-President (External Affairs) and the Vice-President (Clubs and Services) shall ensure the following:

- That food-related Clubs and Services are informed of the resources and assistance that are available to them through the SSMU;
- That the resources of existing affordable food options, such as the SSMU Food Pantry, Gerts Cafe, the McGill Farmers Market, Eleves des Champs (EDC), Midnight Kitchen, and the Student Nutrition Accessibility Club (SNAC) are properly compiled and communicated to the membership through social media and other outreach, in collaboration with the McGill Food Coalition (MFC)
- That lobbying and advocacy is undertaken with respect to McGill Administration on topics including, but not limited to: lowering cafeteria prices and implementing alternatives to privatized food vendors. These solutions may encompass not limited to subsidized meals, student cafes, and not-for-profit vendors.

5.8. The Vice-President (External Affairs), the Community Engagement Commissioner, as well as the Food Pantry Coordinators, will ensure that the following plan is successfully implemented and maintained through their respective mandates:

 2025-02-03 | SSMU Food Pantry Project Proposal

## 6. Accountability

6.1. The Vice-President (External Affairs) and the Policy and Mobilization Researcher shall ensure that there is an updated page on the External affairs website dedicated to discussing the groups and projects relating to food security on campus and within the SSMU, as well as resources which are available to students in need of support.

6.2. The Vice-President (Clubs and Services) shall formulate, distribute, and summarize the results of an annual survey regarding students' current experiences with respect to food security, the status of



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dining options on campus, as well as the specific needs of the student community to gain insight into the efficacy of the SSMU's efforts.