

Budget Submission 2026-2027

About Feed Nova Scotia

Feed Nova Scotia collects and distributes more than three million kilograms of food annually to over 130 food banks, meal programs, and shelters across the province. While we help Nova Scotians meet a very basic and urgent need, we're also advocating for solutions that address the root causes of food insecurity, including systemic racism, low wages, and inadequate income support.

Executive Summary

Nova Scotia has one of the highest food insecurity rates among the provinces in the country. In 2024, 29.3% of people in Nova Scotia were experiencing food insecurity¹. The 2025 Hunger Count Report from Food Banks Canada reports that food bank visits in Nova Scotia are up over 10% in the past year, and over 14,000 monthly visits to food banks are children. This is an unprecedented crisis, and we cannot continue to see these numbers rise year after year.

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. While food insecurity is pervasive in the province, historically marginalized Indigenous and Black populations, immigrants, those with disabilities, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and children are among the worst affected by food insecurity.

But food is not the solution to food insecurity. Income poverty and the spiraling cost of living are at the root of the problem and urgently need to be addressed. The solution lies in the government's commitment, support, and investment in bold, life-changing policies. Leaving so many people struggling with food insecurity is a political choice, and we cannot build a strong Nova Scotia when our neighbours are hungry.

The provincial budget is an opportunity to make necessary changes and create a meaningful difference in the lives of so many people facing food insecurity. These evidence-driven recommendations shed light on some urgent areas of investment that could have an immediate, tangible impact on reducing food insecurity.

¹ PROOF (2025). [New data on household food insecurity in 2024.](#)

Recommendations for Areas of Investment

Income-Based Solutions

Food insecurity is the result of insufficient income, and in Nova Scotia, incomes are severely inadequate to cover the cost of living. Currently, a staggering 24% of household visits to food banks across Nova Scotia report employment as their primary income source², showing that, clearly, the cost of living is too high and wages are not keeping up. In Nova Scotia, the amount of people that attribute cost of living as the primary reason for visiting a food bank is the highest across the country, at 75%³.

In addition to inadequate wages, income support is among the lowest in the country, leaving recipients far below the poverty line. Currently 30% of all food bank clients in Nova Scotia report Income Assistance as their source of income³, indicating how insufficient the assistance program is.

To lift people out of poverty, we're calling on the Government to implement the following items in the 2026 budget:

- 1. Reform the Employment Services Income Assistance (IA) program by indexing IA to meet Market Basket Measure (MBM).**
 - Current IA rates keep recipients \$15,000 below the MBM (the accepted poverty line in Canada).
 - IA recipients are forced to live in deep poverty. IA recipients make up the biggest portion of all food bank clients in Nova Scotia.
 - Indexing IA to the poverty line is crucial to ensure IA recipients exit poverty and live a dignified life while receiving support.

- 2. Expand eligibility for the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, the Affordable Living Tax Credit and the Poverty Reduction Credit program to all households earning less than the Market Basket Measure (MBM) and index these programs to inflation.**
 - Current eligibility for these programs falls far below the poverty line, resulting in thousands of struggling households not qualifying for support.
 - None of the programs listed above are indexed to inflation, meaning that the extent of support they provide to households is decreasing over time.
 - Indexing these programs to the poverty line and to inflation is crucial to ensure households living in poverty across Nova Scotia can access adequate supports they are entitled to.

² Food Banks Canada (2025) [Hunger Count 2025: User Statistics](#)

³ Food Banks Canada (2025) Hunger Count 2025 Nova Scotia Data

3. Implement a basic income guarantee program to bridge the affordability gap for lower income households.

- Nova Scotia's minimum wage – at \$16.50 per hour - is woefully inadequate and forces thousands of working households to live in deep poverty.
- Over 35% of Nova Scotia's working population earns \$20 or less per hour⁴, while the living wage rate has grown to \$27.60 per hour⁵.
- A basic income guarantee – an income supplement to bridge the gap between household income and cost of living – is crucial to ensure everyone in this province, including those whose earnings are below the living wage, can exit poverty and live a dignified life.

Why this investment is critical: Evidence shows that income solutions work to reduce food insecurity rates. For example, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement for persons 65+ result in rates of food insecurity among seniors being notably lower than the rates among low-income individuals under 65. Evidence also shows that income-based interventions have broader economic benefits beyond individual recipients: the more people earn/receive, the more people can participate in economies, generating revenue for local businesses and for the government through taxes. In short, government investment in income solutions to poverty and food insecurity makes good economic sense.

Food Access

In addition to income-based barriers to food, access to affordable food is inconsistent across Nova Scotia, with particularly notable impacts on rural communities. Inadequate grocery options and limited public transit restrict many communities' ability to access affordable food. In Nova Scotia, demand for rural food banks is increasing at an alarming rate: 2025 visits to rural food banks across the province are up 52% from last year³.

Community food programs in rural areas can help fill the gap for communities, but are often located in spaces that are inaccessible – community hall basements may be physically inaccessible for people living with mobility challenges or disabilities, and religious spaces aren't always welcoming to everyone, particularly 2SLGBTQIA+ folks and people of different faiths.

Urban communities also face barriers to access food. Two major grocery stores control most of the grocery market in Nova Scotia and have placed restrictive covenants on many properties in urban communities throughout the province, limiting access and

⁴ CCPA (2024). [Atlantic Canadians need a raise: One-third of workers earn less than \\$20 an hour.](#)

⁵ CCPA (2025). [2025 Living Wages for Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.](#)

competition, which in turn, results in higher grocery prices that put food out of reach for lower income households.

To improve food access, we're calling on the Government to implement the following items in the 2026 budget:

1. Increase investment in inclusive and accessible community food spaces.

- Communities across Nova Scotia, particularly in rural areas, lack access to spaces and facilities for community growing, food programming, community markets, and more.
- The Government of Nova Scotia currently offers annual food program and infrastructure funding opportunities through various grants operated by various departments, however current limits on spending through these programs continues to leave many communities behind.
- An increase in the Government of Nova Scotia's investment in community food spaces in 2026-27 is urgently needed to reach communities with no current facilities or resources to support crucial food access.

Why this investment is critical: Measures to improve food access are a necessary step in getting food in people's hands. More money is needed, but for many people, money is not the only part of the solution – additional infrastructure, supports, and programs to ensure they can access the food they want and need is critical.

Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty is about individuals and communities having the right to define and control their own food systems. Food sovereignty is especially important to Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, and immigrant communities, who experience the highest rates of food insecurity across the province. Ensuring that everyone in Nova Scotia has access to cultural and traditional food is critical for population health and wellbeing.

In Nova Scotia, we also face critical threats to our local food system. Our province's farming operators are the oldest in Canada, and many farmers are retiring and leaving the industry. Between 2016 and 2021, Nova Scotia lost 20% of our farmland, while the national average was just 1.8%.⁶ Our local agriculture industry is under threat, which impacts Nova Scotia's ability to be a food sovereign province, which is especially worrying at a time when international tariffs and trade-wars are placing further pressure on our farming communities and local producers.

⁶ Ecology Action Centre (2025). [Growing At Home: Nova Scotia Local Food and Agriculture Report.](#)

To increase food sovereignty and address systemic inequities, we recommend that Budget 2026 includes the following measures:

1. Allocate dedicated resources to develop a comprehensive and coordinated plan for the local food system in Nova Scotia.

- There are currently multiple departments across the Government of Nova Scotia who play a role in policy, funding, and programming to support our province's local food system but without a coordinated approach.
- Restarting the Food and Beverage Strategy, with identification of clear targets and outcomes for the local food system, is a key foundational step to create accountability and momentum to advance the local food system in Nova Scotia.
- It is crucial that the strategy be developed in consultation and partnership with farming communities, Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, and immigrant communities.

Why this investment is critical: We can't address the food insecurity crisis without acknowledging the systemic inequities that exist and the systems in place that restrict people's ability to choose what food they want and need. A resourced Food and Beverage Strategy is an important first step to building a local food system that supports all residents in Nova Scotia, while protecting and strengthening our local food system and our producers for generations to come.