

# Food Security and Food Sovereignty Initiatives in Inuit Nunangat

## Preliminary Results of a Scoping Study

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## I. Introduction and Research Questions

The present report consists of a preliminary survey of food programs and funding sources in Inuit Nunangat, conducted during Summer 2023 by three master's students, Lucie Cordier, Hubert Demers-Campeau, and Laurie Hétu, under the supervision of Professors Nathan McClintock and Magalie Quintal-Marineau of the Institut national de la recherche scientifique (INRS). This survey forms the basis of a scoping analysis of food programs, the first phase of a larger SSHRC-funded research project led by professors McClintock and Quintal-Marineau entitled "Scoping and Storying Food Governance in Inuit Nunangat", which examines food sovereignty in Inuit Nunangat, with particular attention to Nunavik.

The goal of the scoping analysis is to identify and characterize the various actors and institutions involved in improving food security in Inuit Nunangat, the types of practices these programs promote and support, as well as the language (discourse) used by the different programs and funders. Specifically, our first goal with this preliminary report is to characterize the diversity of food security programs. What are their primary areas of focus? Where do they receive their funding? Who manages them? A second goal is to begin to understand the extent to which food programs in Inuit Nunangat support or promote Inuit food sovereignty and self-determination. To this end, in the report we also present our preliminary efforts to trace the evolution of food sovereignty discourse in Inuit Nunangat and assess the extent to which food initiatives in the North are led or managed by Inuit and support the harvesting of country food.

We begin with an overview of the evolution and adoption of the food sovereignty framework in Inuit Nunangat. We then present the preliminary results of our scoping analysis of 80 food programs and 56 funding sources focused on some aspect of improving food security in Inuit Nunangat. In our analysis, we examine the central focus of these programs (e.g., community development, education, emergency food) and their funding source (e.g., federal or regional government). As a proxy measure of the contribution of these initiatives to Inuit food sovereignty, we also assess whether they are Indigenous-led or managed and whether they explicitly address country food. ***It is important to note that these results are preliminary, as the collection and analysis of initiatives is ongoing.*** After presenting the results of our scoping analysis, we present three examples of food sovereignty initiatives in Inuit Nunangat. We conclude with a discussion of next steps.

## II. The Emergence of the Food Sovereignty Framework in Inuit Nunangat

The term “food sovereignty” was first coined by La Vía Campesina, an international farmers organization comprised of 182 member organizations from 81 countries, at the United Nations Food Summit held in Rome in 1996.<sup>1</sup> Eleven years later, key movement members came together in Mali, West Africa, for the Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty and agreed upon the following definition:

*Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.<sup>2</sup>*

Compared to the dominant discourse on food security, which puts the emphasis on food access, food sovereignty centers social justice and self-determination. Indigenous people from around the world have joined the movement and developed more culturally appropriate conceptualizations of food sovereignty that both consider their histories of colonial dispossession of lands and knowledge and foreground indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. As Tabitha Robin writes:

*Indigenous food sovereignty is ultimately achieved by upholding our longstanding sacred responsibilities to nurture healthy, interdependent relationships with the land, plants, and animals that provide us with our food.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://viacampesina.org/en/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nyeleni.org/en/declaration-of-nyeleni/>

<sup>3</sup> Robin T (2019) Our hands at work: Indigenous food sovereignty in western Canada. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 9(B): 85–99.

Food Secure Canada states that Indigenous food sovereignty across Turtle Island is vital on several fronts, as it addresses: historical injustices, cultural significance, health and nutrition, environmental stewardship, and community empowerment.<sup>4</sup> The organization also highlights several initiatives working on Indigenous food sovereignty, namely the Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre. While the concept of food sovereignty is somewhat recent in the countries of the so-called 'global North', Indigenous peoples were in control of their complex food systems for thousands of years prior to colonization. Reclaiming these foodways are therefore understood by many Indigenous people as acts of resurgence. As Michelle Daigle explains, "Indigenous food practices are part of the larger process of decolonization and self-determination."<sup>5</sup> As Taikake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel write, resurgence entails a "shift to an Indigenous reality from the colonized places we inhabit today in our minds and in our souls" and includes the need to "regain the self-sufficient capacity to provide our own food, clothing, shelter and medicines."<sup>6</sup>

In Inuit Nunangat, as elsewhere on Turtle Island, recent Indigenous efforts for self-determination in food systems represent acts of resurgence. In 2021, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) developed the Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy (INFSS). Even if 'food sovereignty, hasn't replaced 'food security' in the INFSS, it is identified as one of the primary means of achieving self-determination in Inuit food systems. The Strategy lists five priority areas: Food Systems & Well-being, Legislation & Policy, Programs & Services, Knowledge & Skills and Research & Advocacy. Each area presents 3 to 4 objectives and subsequent actions to achieve these.

In this national plan, ITK identifies Nunavik as a model of self-determination in food systems considering its impressive co-op network and set of cost-of-living measures representing "the only comprehensive policy initiative intended to help bring an Inuit region in line with the rest of Canada by reducing the high cost of living."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://foodsecurecanada.org/2023/10/04/harvesting-hope-and-change-food-sovereignty-on-turtle-island/>

<sup>5</sup> Daigle M (2019) Tracing the terrain of Indigenous food sovereignties. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 46(2): 297–315.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred T and Corntassel J (2005) Being Indigenous: Resurgences against contemporary colonialism. *Government and Opposition* 40(4): 597–614.

<sup>7</sup> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2021) *Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy*. <https://www.itk.ca/projects/inuit-nunangat-food-security-strategy/>.

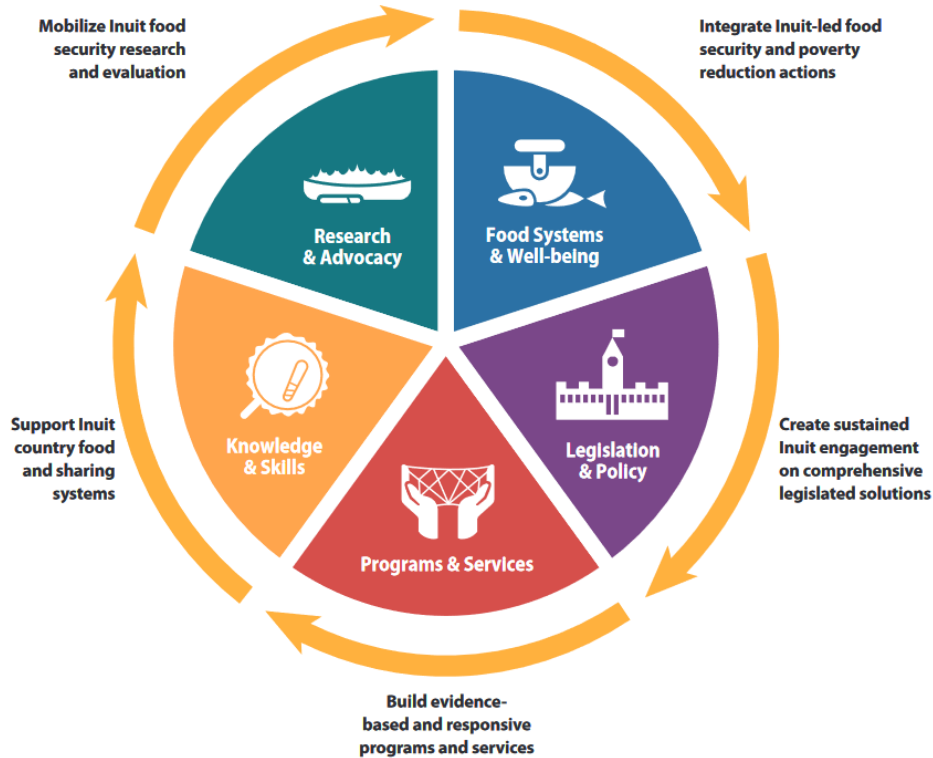


Figure 1: Priority areas for enhancing Inuit food security. Source: ITK (2021) Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy

ITK was the second Inuit organization to adopt a food sovereignty framework. Two years earlier, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA) was the first Inuit organization to define Inuit food sovereignty in its Food Sovereignty and Harvesting Report.<sup>8</sup> For QIA, Inuit food sovereignty means the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food, to food harvested through sustainable methods, and to access wildlife in ways that empower communities through a new collaborative approach between the government and Inuit organizations. Furthermore, QIA's orientation responds to the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act's objectives regarding "rights to ownership and use of the land and resources and to participate in decision-making concerning the use, management and conservation of land, water and resources." Inuit harvesting practices, cultural transmission, and country food are central to QIA's propositions to achieve food sovereignty, which include:

- Renewing policy frameworks and funding models to acknowledge the centrality of country food to Inuit culture, economy, and well-being.
- Investing in harvesting enabling infrastructure that facilitate access to land and waters (marine infrastructure; multi-use facilitates; food processing plants; training facilities)
- Funding harvesters and steward programs (wages; equipment, tools and supplies; Elders and youth programs)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.qia.ca/food-sovereignty-and-harvesting-report/>



Figure 2: Food Sovereignty and Harvesting Report. OIA. 2019

It is also worth noting that the Government of Canada has started using the term food sovereignty in press releases and official declarations about food security in Indigenous contexts. After a study conducted in Northern communities in 2020 – 2021, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs published a report recommending that Canada recognize food sovereignty as a precondition to the food security of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>10</sup> The “Canada’s National Pathways” page of the official GOC website states the federal government’s commitment “to support rights of Indigenous Peoples to participate in traditional food practices, to better integrate traditional knowledge into planning and policy decisions, and to support food system self-determination (Indigenous food sovereignty).”<sup>11</sup> The page also outlines the Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy, made possible through a collaborative Inuit-Crown Food Security Working Group, as an important contribution to improving Inuit food systems.

Since the release of ITK and QIA strategies, Inuit community organizations have increasingly adopted food sovereignty as a term and a framework. The Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre (QCFC) in Iqaluit, for example, states on its home page: “We strive to strengthen health, belonging and food sovereignty in Iqaluit by utilizing the power of food, tradition and community.”<sup>9</sup> In August 2023, QCFC President Beth Kotierk delivered a statement during Canada’s Universal Periodic Review Pre-Session at the United Nations, which included several recommendations for the Government of Canada. The first of these is to fund paid positions for harvesters in Inuit Nunangat, following QIA’s proposition in 2019.

It is also worth noting that the Government of Canada has

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.qajuqturvik.ca/>

<sup>10</sup> House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs (2021) Food Security in Northern and Isolated Communities: Ensuring Equitable Access to Adequate and Healthy Food for All. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/INAN/report-10/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://agriculture.canada.ca/en/departement/initiatives/canadas-national-pathways>

### III. Food Programs and Funding Sources in Inuit Nunangat

#### Food Programs

To date, we have analyzed data related to 80 different food programs in Inuit Nunangat. Most of these initiatives (60%) serve Nunavut; slightly under a quarter (23%) of the initiatives analyzed to date serve Nunavik. The most recent data included in our analysis is from 2022; the oldest data dates to the early 2010s. More than three-quarters (78%) of the initiatives are ongoing.

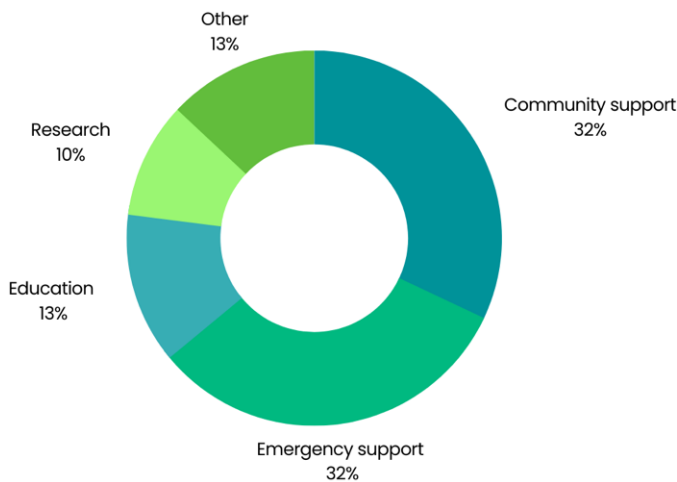


Figure 3: Primary focus of programs (n=80)

For this report, we’ve assessed the primary focus of the different programs (Figure 3). About one-third of the initiatives identified have a primary focus of community support or community development (32%). The same number (32%) are focused primarily on providing emergency food assistance (food banks, etc.). Initiatives focused on education comprise 13% of the programs identified, while research is a primary focus for 10% of the initiatives. Twelve of the fifteen initiatives identified in Nunavik (75%) are focused primarily on community support and development.

The initiatives identified are funded primarily by the public sector, well over half (60%) funded by local and regional governments and just over a third (34%) funded by the federal government (Figure 4). In Nunavik, 62% of the initiatives identified are funded by the Kativik Regional Government (62%), whereas in Nunavut, they are primarily funded by the Government of Nunavut (52%) or directly by the federal government (27%).

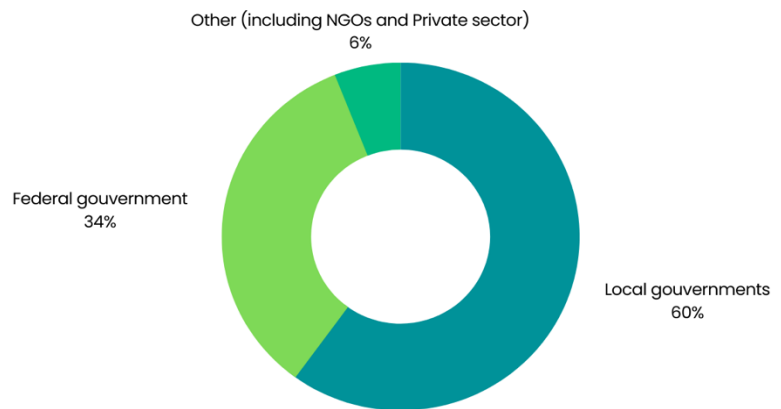
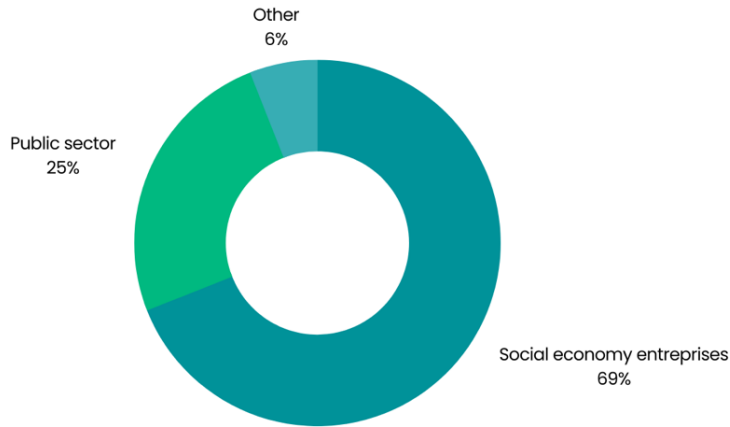


Figure 4: Funding source of programs in Inuit Nunangot (n=80)

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More than two-thirds (69%) of the programs are managed or run by social economy enterprises and Indigenous corporations (such as Makivik). The public sector run approximately one-quarter (25%) of programs identified (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Management of programs (n=80)

Of the programs identified, more than three-quarters (77%) are led by Indigenous people (Figure 6).<sup>12</sup> Overall, slightly more than a third (38%) of 80 initiatives identified are oriented around country food (Figure 7). Among non-Indigenous-led programs, only 16% are focused on country food, whereas 84% of Indigenous-led programs focus on country food.

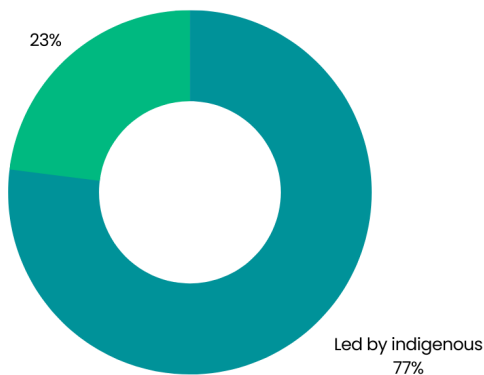


Figure 6: Percentage of programs led or managed by Indigenous people.

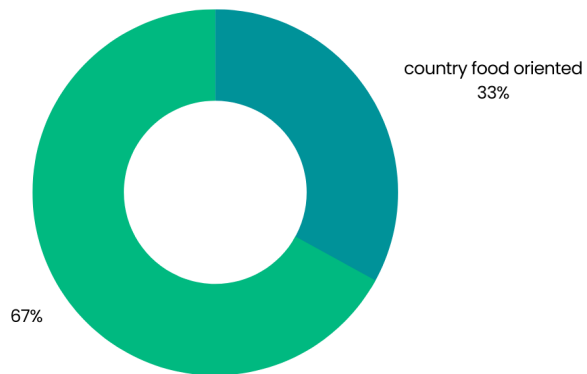


Figure 7: Percentage of programs focused on country food.

<sup>12</sup> Most initiatives in Nunavut are led by Indigenous people (84%), whereas in Nunavik the percentage was considerably less (18%). It is important to note, however, that it is unlikely that the percentage is this low; the figure may be more representative of an incomplete dataset than of the actual situation on the ground.

**Funding for Food Programs**

To date, we have identified and analyzed 56 different sources of funding for food-related in Inuit Nunangat between 2013 and 2020, all but two of which are still active. More than three-quarters (76%) are federal government sources, which have amounted to an investment of over \$2 billion in food security and food sovereignty in Inuit Nunangat. As shown in Figure 8, most of the funding identified supports business projects (40%). Just under a quarter of the funding is dedicated to supporting community development-focused projects (23%), while 19% is geared to support environmental projects (19%).

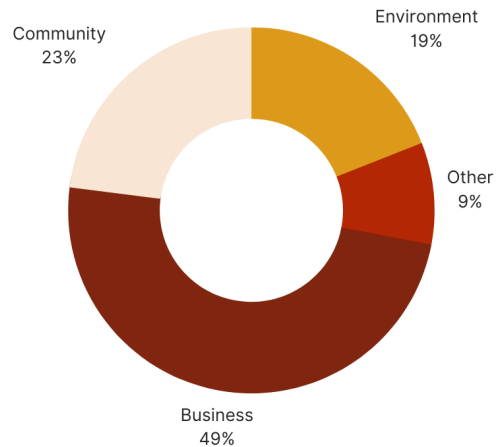


Figure 8: Primary focus of funding.

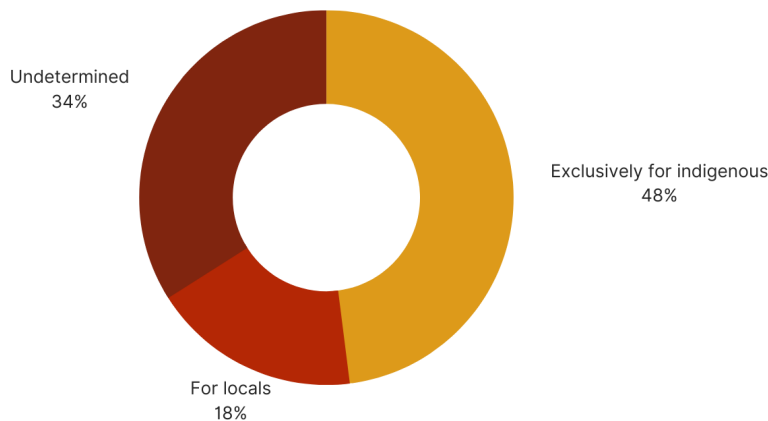


Figure 9: Support for Indigenous people and communities.

Of the funding sources identified, just under half (47%) are exclusively focused on supporting Indigenous people (Figure 9).

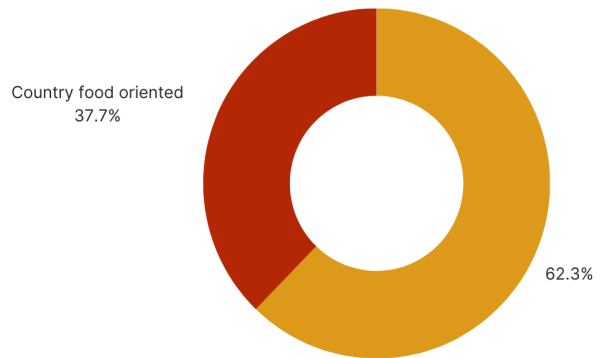


Figure 10: Percent of funding with an explicit mention of country food.

Slightly more than a third (37%) of the funding sources explicitly mention country food (Figure 10). One-third (33%) of funding geared towards businesses funding is explicitly oriented towards country food, whereas well over half (58%) of funding geared towards community development is oriented towards country food. Of funds exclusively to Indigenous peoples, just under half (47%) are explicitly support country food, while only 27% of initiatives available to everyone focus on country food.

Finally, our analysis reveals that more than three-quarters (78%) of federal government funding sources emphasize country food (78%), as compared to only 14% of local or regional government sources of funding.



#### IV. Some Examples of Food Sovereignty Initiatives in Inuit Nunangat

##### ***Nauttiqsuqtiit (Inuit Stewards)***

Following on the idea of supporting paid positions for Inuit harvesters, QIA employs 25 Nauttiqsuqtiit (Inuit stewards), whose mission is to monitor the Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area while working as active harvesters who share their catch with the community. The rapid changes in this region's ecosystem led to the creation of a conservation area in 2017, which drew on Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit, scientific studies, and input from Inuit living locally and across the region. The program has grown from five stewards hired under the pilot program launched in 2018 to 25 full-time Nauttiqsuqtiit working in five communities today. The change from part-time to full-time positions has allowed stewards to go on long hunts while being paid the same salary as a mine worker or any other job. The Nauttiqsuqtiit program is thus a first step in recognizing Inuit harvesting as a full-time work contributing to Inuit food sovereignty and land management and deserving of a wage.



Figure 11: Nauttiqsuqtiit Inuit Stewards.  
Source: [www.qia.ca](http://www.qia.ca)

##### ***Pirursiivik Project: Inukjuak Greenhouse Initiative***



Figure 12: A Pirursiivik cold frame.  
Source: [www.onedrop.org](http://www.onedrop.org)

From 2017 to 2021, the OneDrop foundation and Makivik Society funded the Pirursiivik Project, an art and greenhouse initiative in Inukjuak. The project included a hydroponic growing container that provided vegetables year-round to community members. Another goal of the project was to bring together Inukjuamiut for art workshops and discussions around nutrition and country food. Over the four years of the program, seven community cold frames (Figure 12) and two hydroponic towers were built.

Sirivik, the local food centre, took over the operation and management of the greenhouse in 2021.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.onedrop.org/en/projects/canada/>

Sirivik is also involved in intergenerational transmission of knowledge through its Ulluriat initiative, and provides opportunities for Inuit youth in Inukjuak to go onto the land to engage in harvesting with local hunters. The program also consists of workshops on country food preparation with Elders and other members of the community. As explained on the organization's website:

*Being on the land directly benefits mental health while strengthening cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging. We understand that for some there can be increased barriers to accessing the land, our goal is to limit these barriers and provide opportunities for community members to participate in the harvesting of country food!*

### **Inuliqtait Food Box**



Figure 13: Inuliqtait food boxes. Source: QCFC Annual Report 2022-2023.

Following their recommendation to the Government of Canada to support harvesters, the Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre (QCFC) in Iqaluit launched the Inuliqtait Food Box program in 2022. The goal is to provide lower income residents in the community with affordable country foods purchased from harvesters. Each box contains five individual portions of three to five different types of country food (Figure 13). Valued at \$125 the QCFC also offers a pay-what-you-can system for interested Iqalummiut.<sup>14</sup> This initiative plays a role in access to healthy country food while

offering financial support for the work of harvesters. In 2022-2023, the program saw the expanding of their Nunavut hunter network by 40%, purchasing over 10,000 kilograms in country food and offering boxes to more than 400 households each month.<sup>15</sup>

## **V. Next Steps**

This report is only a preliminary assessment of data that we are still collecting and analyzing. Our goal over the course of this first phase of the project is to survey as many food program and funding sources as we can that are working in Inuit Nunangat. We will therefore continue to add to our database of initiatives. Our scoping analysis of the initiatives in our database, in turn, will provide us with a broad overview of the focus areas of these initiatives, their funding source, and

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.nunavutnews.com/news/qajuqturviks-new-country-food-box-has-iqalummiut-excited/>

<sup>15</sup> [Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre 2022-2023 Annual Report](#)

importantly, their support for country food harvesting and the involvement of Inuit in their management. We also that our dataset is expansive enough to be able to make meaningful comparisons between different regions of Inuit Nunangat (Nunavut, Nunavik, Inuvialuit, and Nunatsiavut). Currently, we do not have enough data to conduct a comparative analysis.

In addition to updating the database of initiatives, we plan to evaluate their alignment with priorities laid out in ITK's Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy (INFSS), as well as analyze the discourse or language used to frame these programs and initiatives with the goal of comparing the discourses used by different institutional actors. We hope to complete the scoping analysis (Phase I of our research project) in Spring 2024.

If Phase I of the project involves the 'scoping' programs in Inuit Nunangat, Phase II involves the 'storying' of these programs. Beginning in Winter 2024, we plan to interview managers and participants of several of these projects operating in Nunavik, with the goal of understanding how these various programs are received, interpreted, adopted, adapted, ignored, and/or refused by Inuit and community-based organizations. We also hope to identify the everyday food practices that may or may not be supported by these programs. Overall, via the two phases of the project, we hope to understand the extent to which these food programs and the everyday practices of Inuit participants contribute to Inuit food sovereignty, or in the words of the INFSS, "a self-determined and sustainable food system in Inuit Nunangat that reflects Inuit societal values, supports Inuit well-being, and ensures Inuit access to affordable, nutritious, safe, and culturally preferred foods."

## Acknowledgments

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