

Canadian Association for Food Studies



Spring 2010, Issue 9

Message from the President

I am wrapping up a 2-year term as CAFS President and it's been a great place from which to watch food studies take off. I'm astonished by the increased interest and activity. We appear to have crossed a positive threshold, and now can look forward to even more attention to our themes, issues and analyses.

I want to especially thank all the people who have served on the executive and conference programme committees. Our association relies primarily on volunteer effort and we've been blessed with a tremendous amount of it. Irena Knezevic deserves special accolades for her dedication to the Secretary / Treasurer post. Without her, many things would not have happened.

I look forward to seeing you in Montreal!

Sincerely,

Rod MacRae

CAFS conference news

The 2010 conference runs from May 28-31 in Montreal at Concordia University.

With over 25 concurrent sessions, keynote speaker John Coveney's (Flinders University, Australia) talk 'The pleasure and anxiety of eating: problems of the body and appetite' on Saturday followed by our evening banquet, field trips, movie screenings, and lots of time for networking this promises to be one of our best conferences ever! More details are available at:

CAFS web site: <http://www.foodstudies.ca/meetings.html>

Conference programme: <http://www.foodstudies.ca/Documents/CAFS2010.pdf>

HungerCount 2009 Executive Summary

In the month of March 2009, 794,738 people were assisted by a food bank in Canada. This is an 18% increase compared to the same period in 2008 – the largest year-over-year increase on record.

The need for food banks has grown across the country. Alberta (61% increase), Nova Scotia (20% increase) and Ontario (19% increase) have been hit the hardest, and no region has gone unscathed. Even Saskatchewan and Manitoba, two provinces that escaped the worst effects of the recession, saw increases in food bank use of 6% and 18%, respectively.

Because of the recession, many Canadians stepped through the front door of a food bank this year for the first time. In the month of March alone, it was a new and unwelcome experience for 9.1% of those helped – more than 72,000 people – across the country.

Through a period of upheaval, one thing has not changed inside Canada's food banks: the need for food assistance exists across the social spectrum. Thirty-seven percent of those helped are children, and half of assisted households are families with children. Though the majority of households turning to food banks count pensions, disability-related income supports, and social assistance as their primary source of income, one-fifth are in the labour force and still unable to make ends meet.

¹ Statistics Canada (2008). *Earnings and incomes of Canadians over the past quarter century, 2006 Census*. (All figures in 2005 constant dollars.)

² A. Yalnizyan (2009). *Exposed: Revealing truths about Canada's recession*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

³ R. Morissette, X. Zhang & M. Frenette (2007). *Earnings losses of displaced workers: Canadian evidence from a large administrative database on firm closures and mass layoffs*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

A changing economic reality

The recession has brought wider attention to a number of underlying problems in the Canadian economy. Those who have been knocked out of work in the past year are facing a job market that has changed drastically over the last decade and a half. Well-paying jobs in the manufacturing and forestry sectors are becoming more scarce, replaced by those in other sectors – particularly retail and accommodation/food services – that pay significantly less and offer few extra-wage benefits such as dental, prescription drug, and pension coverage.

For Canada's unemployed, and for those unable to work, the situation is no better. A large percentage of those assisted by food banks are forced to ask for help because their pension, disability-related income supports, or social assistance benefits provide too little to afford even the bare essentials.

In the past three decades, the majority of Canadians have seen their incomes stagnate or decline,¹ and we can expect more of the same in the coming years. Based on knowledge gained from recessions in 1981-82 and 1990-91, it is likely that the current period of job losses is not over.² For the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who have already lost their jobs, there will be a difficult struggle to climb back to pre-recession income levels.³

Canadian federal and provincial governments have done a great deal to counter the effects of the recession. As they turn their focus to the years ahead, and to what it will take to get industries back to health and Canadians back to work, it is crucial that the realities of those most vulnerable to hunger and low income are incorporated into larger economic plans. We must take this opportunity to address the fact that too many Canadians have faced hunger for too long.

We can reduce hunger in Canada

We all – individuals, the non-profit sector, business, governments at all levels – have a role to play in reducing hunger and enabling economic inclusion in Canada. The Recommendations section of this report lays out a number of ways that different sectors of society can become involved. In the larger picture, governments have the ultimate responsibility to ensure that all Canadians are able to take advantage of the nation's economic wealth and potential. With specific reference to the federal government, Food Banks Canada recommends the following:

1. Maintain planned levels of federal transfers, including the Canadian Social Transfer, to provincial, territorial, and First Nations governments.
2. Implement a federal poverty prevention and reduction strategy, with measureable targets and timelines.
3. Ensure that post-recession economic development takes account of the needs of low income Canadians. Only by accounting for those most vulnerable to hunger and poverty from the beginning can we arrive at an improved, inclusive social and economic reality.
4. Continue to work to make the Employment Insurance system more fair and inclusive, through changes to qualifying hours, benefit levels, and benefit length.
5. Increase the Canada Child Tax Benefit to a maximum of \$5,000 per child, per year (up from about \$3,300), to help ensure that parents are adequately supported in raising their children.
6. Invest in a system of good-quality, affordable, accessible child care – an absolute necessity for the economic health of families, and for healthy child development.
7. Continue to increase uptake of the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) among low income seniors. There remains a small but significant number of seniors who face hunger and poverty. Attention to GIS uptake would go a long way towards addressing this issue.
8. Increase Guaranteed Income Supplement benefit levels. Though Old Age Security (OAS) and the GIS bring the majority of low income seniors above the after-tax low income cut-off, the maximum annual benefit of about \$14,000 is still quite meagre.
9. Invest in the improvement of housing in rural areas by (a) increasing federal funding for housing repair and improvement in rural areas, and (b) initiating a review of rural housing programs to ensure they are effectively meeting objectives.
10. Continue to invest in affordable housing in Canada's urban areas.

For too long, supports to vulnerable Canadians have been interpreted by Canadian governments as simple expenditures, and the dominant concern has been, “How much will it cost?” A more accurate, healthy, and hopeful interpretation is to understand these supports as investments with long-term returns. The findings of *HungerCount 2009* provide a compelling answer to a slightly different question: “How much is the status quo costing us?”

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News from the Centre for Studies in Food Security Ryerson University

Submitted by Jasmine Kwong, Research Assistant

In mid-March, the CSFS hosted a consultation session for the Toronto Food Strategy, as part of the Food for Talk series. The aim of this gathering was for Toronto's graduate students to provide feedback for the Strategy. Students shared concrete recommendations for the report and several innovative ideas for "what Toronto can do" with staff from Toronto Public Health. These comments will be part of an upcoming document titled "What we heard"- a report highlighting the main themes and key issues raised during the civic engagement period. The final Food Strategy report will be submitted to City Council in June 2010. More details: <http://wx.toronto.ca/inter/health/food.nsf>

Most recently, the CSFS hosted a Food for Talk seminar with two researchers from Cardiff University on April 7, 2010. With an introduction to the BRASS research centre and food group at Cardiff, Alex Franklin and Julie Newton, aimed to open the dialogue and to seek out potential points of collaboration with Canadian food researchers during their visit to Canada. Their update on the Wales Food Strategy was timely as this Strategy was just recently submitted to the local Wales government.

Back in November, CSFS Director Cecilia Rocha participated in a panel discussion at the Inter-Parliamentary Meeting on the Occasion of the World Summit on Food Security in Rome, Italy. The focus of Cecilia's presentation was on Brazil's positive experience in combating hunger and increasing food security for millions of its citizens. In February, Brazil became only the second country in the world (the other is South Africa) to recognize the Right to Food in its constitution.

The CSFS has been one of the advocates for funding for new research in the area of food security and food policy since its foundation in 1994. Recently announced Canadian International Food Security Re-

search Fund (CIFSRF) was one of the good news stories in this front. Managed by the IDRC and CIDA, the CIFSRF is a 5-year program that funds a wide variety of applied research projects that aims to solve immediate and concrete food security challenges on the ground in the developing world. The goal of the CIFSRF is identified as promoting more productive and sustainable agricultural systems that make food more secure and nutritious. The CIFSRF funds partnerships between research organizations in Canada and in the developing world. As we expect announcements for research to be funded in this area, we will have a clearer idea how the emphasis on applied research for agricultural development and nutrition science and technology is interpreted by funders.

At the national level a preliminary look at this year's tri-council results show an impressive number of food studies research being funded. It is also heartening to see many CAFS members were involved in successful university-community research alliances (CURA). For most of us, who have been thinking about the need for national collaboration and networking to promote research in food studies these accomplishments are welcome news. This may be the time for us to explore institutionalizing such collaborations through regional research hubs connected as a national network. We look forward to the CAFS workshop with successful CURA leaders to explore this further.

The CSFS continues to offer courses for the Certificate in Food Security.

To find out more information about the certificate program, please visit:

<http://www.ryerson.ca/ce/foodsecurity> .

For questions about eligibility or course availability, contact the Academic Coordinator, Reg Noble:

food@ryerson.ca

Food News

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in Downtown Toronto

The Cutting Veg Organic Farm, in partnership with Park Road Healing Arts, is thrilled to present the 2010 Park Road Organic Harvest Program! The Park Road Organic Harvest is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program.

A CSA is a mutually beneficial partnership in which individuals or families receive fresh, local, organically grown produce weekly, while supporting local farmers and sustainable growing practices. The Cutting Veg Organic Farm grows and sources local, organic produce, and community members will come to the Park Road Healing Arts Clinic, near Bloor and Yonge, on Wednesday afternoons, from June to October, to pick up their weekly share.

Joining a CSA means you and your family will enjoy the health, community, and environmental benefits of eating fresh, local, organically grown produce! Join the thousands of communities across North America that have already committed to putting their purchasing power behind our local farmers. Become a part of the food movement today!

For more information, visit <http://www.thecuttingveg.com/organic-produce/community-supported-agriculture.html>, or contact Daniel Hoffmann at daniel@thecuttingveg.com, or 647-388-7444. Keep Livin' on the Veg!

Book Review

Some comments on Brewster Kneen's *The Tyranny of the Rights* by Pablo Prado YMCA of Guatemala

Kneen argues that the Right to food transforms a human necessity into a legal claim to be granted by some authority. But isn't the right to food inspired by the widespread reality of hunger in the first place? I reckon that the logic behind it is to push those with power into not hindering food access to all. After all, a very unjust distribution system is to be blamed by hunger and not its legal framework, let alone the right to food.

Humans, unlike other organisms, are fully aware of their human condition, but the dehumanising nature of capitalism introduces the commoditisation of food, hence its utility maximizing function in contrast to its nurturing essence. Any legal framework may well be an empty bowl, but for those suffering from hunger it brings the hope to fill it with content. Who oversees this 'responsibility to care for others'? I deem this contestation to be valid on ethical grounds, but it fails to account for the ethics-free way in which capitalism is based – at least for those living in the periphery under chronic exploitation. I agree however with the notion of a legal 'superstructure' that has been historically tailored to meet the needs of the wealthy, that is to say, a social consensus on the values of privileging individual accumulation of wealth even at the expense of others being brutally exploited. The never ending dichotomy of recognition versus implementation seems to yield a clear output, co-optation.

Mainstream discourse co-opts social struggles by capturing widely spread concerns such as access to land, packing them in politically correctness and delivering them back to masses as market-led reforms. In this sense Brewster is right about challenging the positivist approach to the rights discourse. A distinction must be made however between positivist rights and natural ones. When we advocate for the right to food we are implicitly taking side with its natural meaning, that is to say that every human being is inherently entitled to be fed on the grounds of its human condition and not because of a governing body granting such a privilege. I couldn't agree more with Brewster in regard to his definition of tyranny.

I'd even add that for us, halfbreeds in Latin America, even spirituality was imposed upon half of our ancestors. Have you ever wondered why Jesus is always depicted with notably distinctive European features? Even for someone like me, who celebrates diversity and calls himself Catholic, this imposition still means that the oppressors brought their own God, demonized native beliefs and carried out a number of atrocities of inquisitorial nature. It is true that the language of rights masks reality. After all, rights are social institutions meant to preserve the status quo, consequently their enforcement is not supposed to bring about any structural change. In that sense Brewster is right from my point of view.

The Tyranny of Rights is published by *The Ram's Horn*
2746 Cassels St. Ottawa, ON, K2B 6N7, Canada

It is available for \$20 including postage from www.ramshorn.ca. Or by cheque to address above. It is also posted in PDF at www.ramshorn.ca

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Conference news

Innovations in Qualitative Research conference
June 8 and 9, 2010
University of Saskatchewan

Registration and additional information about the conference is now available at....

Registration:
<https://ocs.usask.ca/ocs/index.php/iqrc/iqrc2010/login>

Information:
<http://drc.usask.ca/projects/iqrc2010>

For other questions, please contact:
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Research and publication news

Cuizine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures / Revue des cultures culinaires au Canada is the new peer-reviewed journal hosted by McGill University

CuiZine 2.1

We are delighted to announce the launch of the latest installment of *CuiZine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures/Revue des cultures culinaires au Canada*. To celebrate the release of this exciting and groundbreaking issue, the staff at *CuiZine* would like to extend a warm invitation to all CAFS members to join us for a launch party on Friday, May 28th, 2010, at 5:30 pm. Festivities will take place at McGill University's Cyberthèque, Redpath Library Building, 3459 McTavish Street. Please RSVP to cuisine.info@mcgill.ca by May 15th.

Research in this issue includes Hersch Jacobs' study of the structural elements of Canadian cuisine and Gwendolyn Owens' exploration of the history of kitchen wallpaper, as well as Pierre Sercia and Alain Girard's study of the food practices of recent immigrants to Canada, Alexia Moyer's work on discourses of dirt and cleanliness in the supermarket,

and Kristen Lowitt's study of reciprocal social ties in Nova Scotia farmers' markets. Featuring artwork by Lisa Ng, poetry by Rhona McAdam, and book reviews by Victoria Dickenson, Lana Povitz, David Szanto, and Ariel Buckley. With works by Anna Rumin and Lois Manton, we also introduce a new regular feature to *CuiZine*, a section devoted to creative non-fiction and food reminiscences, which we call "Petites Madeleines."

And hold on to those forks—coming this summer is a special *terroir* issue, guest edited by Amy B. Trubek and Jean-Pierre Lemasson. Featuring comparative pieces on Vermont and Quebec and an interview with chef Normand Laprise, this special edition is shaping up to be an informative and engaging read.

A new publication on Food Sovereignty to be released in September 2010

Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food Nature and Community

Edited by Hannah Wittman, Annette Aurelie Desmarais and Nettie Wiebe, Fernwood Publishing: Winnipeg and Halifax

This book is about Food Sovereignty, advocating a practical, radical change to the way much of our food system currently operates. Food sovereignty, it argues, is the means to achieving a system that will provide for the food needs of all people while respecting the principles of environmental sustainability, local empowerment and agrarian citizenship. The current high input, industrialized, market-driven food system fails on all these counts. The UN-endorsed goal of food security is becoming increasingly distant as indicated by the growing levels of hunger in the world, especially among marginalized populations in both the

North and South. Dependence on the market and the corporate model of food production and distribution, along with the diversion of food stocks into fuel production, is aggravating food shortages and causing ecological destruction.

The authors of this book describe the recent emergence and the parameters of an alternative system, food sovereignty, that puts the levers of food control in the hands of those who are both hungry and produce the world's food -- peasants and family farmers, not corporate executives. As the authors show in both conceptual and case study terms, food sovereignty promises not only increased production of food, but also food that is safe, food that reaches those who are in the most need, and agricultural practices that respect the earth.

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The practice and significance of domestic cooking: insight from families in British Columbia

Dean Simmons, MSc., INtegrated Studies in Land and Food Systems, UBC

Does domestic cooking still matter in an era where pre-prepared meals and convenience foods are readily available and relatively affordable for the majority of the population? Should we be concerned by alarms of culinary deskilling raised in the media? This thesis addresses these questions

by investigating the practice and significance of domestic cooking and cooking skills for participant families in the province of British Columbia in Canada. The study design was qualitative. A small sample of 22 families was recruited, where at least one adult and one teen were interviewed in each family. A maximum of diversity was sought within the sample, and families were selected from across the income gradient, with half living in an urban community (northeast Vancouver) and the other half living in a rural area (District of Kent). Each participant was involved in two semi-structured interviews including two photo elicitation activities. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then coded using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. The research findings provide insight into how much cooking was happening in participants' homes, who was doing the cooking, and how cooking skills were learned and taught. A significant and novel finding was the insight gained on the subjective meaning or significance of being able to cook within families. Participants spoke of home cooking as significant for reasons beyond just nourishing bodies, and in ways that challenge popular concerns about culinary deskilling. The findings support the argument that domestic cooking may be transitioning from a state of 'having to cook' to 'wanting to cook'. As well, the analysis of the findings suggests that the relationship between cooking skills and food practices is indirect. From a public health perspective an argument is made for the significance of basic cooking skills as enabling citizens to follow the dietary guidance in Canada's Food Guide. These basic cooking skills may best be taught, as part of a multimodal health promotion strategy, at periods of life transition when people

are most interested in acquiring and applying cooking skills.

Food desert responses: Policy innovation and transfer from American to Canadian cities

SSHRC postdoctoral research project, Melanie Bedore

This two-year post-doctoral fellowship is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and will be supervised by Dr. Caroline Andrew in the Political Science Department at the University of Ottawa. This comparative research project that will look at American cities' policy responses to the food desert problem, and assess their transferability to Ontario cities. American case study cities will be Oakland, New York City and Philadelphia for their innovation policy responses to communities with poor retail food access.

For more information, please contact Melanie Bedore at:
bedorem@hotmail.com

From the newsletter desk...

We are happy to hear from you with questions or contributions for the next newsletter. If you would like to get in touch, please send an email to:

cafsadmin@foodstudies.ca

This newsletter was produced by
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Irena Knezevic